



Identity, discourse and practice : a qualitative case study of young people and their sexuality

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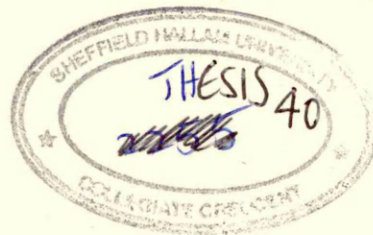
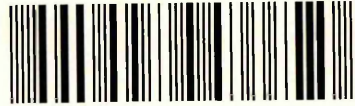
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**IDENTITY, DISCOURSE AND
PRACTICE: A QUALITATIVE CASE
STUDY OF YOUNG PEOPLE AND
THEIR SEXUALITY**

Julia Hirst

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements
of Sheffield Hallam University
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Abstract

This research is based on a case study of young people's identities, practices and discourses, and takes sexuality as a focus for interrogation. It aims to reveal the issues and processes that impact on young people's conceptions of self (both current and future) by looking at private and public realms of experience. In so doing, social lives, home lives and schooling (particularly sex education), are explored to reveal how far they operate in young people's interest. Lack of acknowledgement of young people's authentic lives in mainstream debates and practice forms a main focus of my critique.

I adopt a qualitative methodology that is congruent with feminist principles for research, and am committed to exposing the knowledge creation process. Data are deployed from observations and interviews with 15 - 16 year old, African-Caribbean, Pakistani, Somali and white, secondary school students. Data from other sites provides corroboration and comparison.

The thesis challenges the various critiques and representations of youth and argues for a dynamic model of understanding based on appreciating the connectedness between 'concrete' and 'generalised' constructs of identity and practice. The theoretical base is provided through a reading of Foucault, Giddens, Smith, Habermas, and Benhabib. Concepts of 'expert systems', 'colonisation' (Habermas 1986, 1987), 'fabrication' (Ball 1997), and 'fateful episodes' (Giddens 1991) have been given specific scrutiny.

The resulting analysis is used to make recommendations for practice, policy and research in sex education.

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As always, I accept sole responsibility for the contents.

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Introducing the Thesis

Focus

Emanating from an original interest in teenage sexuality and sex education, this thesis explores young people's sexuality on two levels. The first is based on young people's 'voices' and a holistic appreciation of their everyday lives (Smith 1988); and the second is based on a critical reading of constructs of teen identity as represented in existing literature (Aggleton 1987). By synthesising the two a more complex and dynamic model for understanding sexuality is achieved.

Specifically, my interest lies in deconstructing young people's *expressions* of their experience - how they understand it and the meanings ascribed, rather than on the 'facts' of their behaviour. I sought to uncover *how* and *what* they learnt about sex, and the connections between this and mediations of identity and practice. Necessarily, this also involved investigation of 'other', more official discourses, and ideologies and processes, that regulate constructions of identity and practice. For this reason, in a case study setting, I explored the influence of factors that operate in the micro domains of schooling and the home, and the broader influences of factors that operate from a macro level. This revealed a range of social and educational discourses replete with ambiguity and

contradiction. Appreciating the complexity of these discourses and deciphering meaning yields qualitatively and politically different access to how and why young people partake in certain behaviours and risks (Holland et al 1999), and provides data that respond to Amuchastegui's assertion of a pressing need

‘...for research which helps us understand sexuality and sexual behaviour on actors’ own terms, rather than those imposed by the state, epidemiological science, and dominant ideologies of moral worth.’
(Amuchastegui 1999:80)

The resultant qualitative data are of such depth they can be read in two ways. First, as personal biography, and second, as narrative commentary on young people's experience of school, home, and socialising, and the place of sexuality within and across these domains.

Now, I chart, in brief, the origins of my research, as a preliminary step to making transparent the relationship between the process and product of my enquiry (Rappert 1999), and how my theoretical sensitivity (Glaser 1978) was developed in the pathway to refining the research focus.

Origins of the research focus

The impetus for this research arose during my experiences as a secondary school teacher, LEA advisory teacher, and researcher, and the concomitant debates on teenagers in the media and other literature. This yielded two related questions: why were teenagers' voices largely inaudible in contemporary discourse on youth?; and when they were audible, specifically in relation to sexuality and sexual behaviour, why were reports that sex education was inadequate not taken seriously, through attempts to meet real needs? Over two decades, Farrell and Kellaher (1978), Lee (1983), Lees (1986), Allen (1987), Fine (1988), Holly (1989), Measor (1989), Holland et al (1990b), Abrams et al (1990), Mac an Ghaill (1994), Altman (1994), to name but a few, have documented the same conclusion - that sex education in schools invisibilises authentic experience and instead prescribes ways of being for young people's sexuality.

Since previous studies seemed to have had little impact in influencing *what* is taught in sex education, it felt imperative to also seek epistemological understanding of *why* traditional methods and content of teaching were not being revised. This could not be

satisfied by reliance on young people's disclosures alone because experiences 'remain insufficient in themselves' (Luff 1999:690) and 'individuals do not necessarily possess sufficient knowledge to explain everything about their lives' (Maynard and Purvis 1994:6). But, to legitimate any conclusions that might problematise sex education it was necessary to begin by hearing the subjects' version of their lives as they experienced it (Smith 1988) and moreover to expose areas of life previously silenced or hidden (Ramazanoglu 1989) and then make any connections to sex education or other macro influences. Thus, the young persons' view became the central focus of the enquiry to answer the first strand of my research agenda (i.e. the 'what' and 'how' of learning about sexuality), with my interpretation of data going some way to explicating answers to the second strand of *why*. It remains the task of subsequent research to further test some of the conclusions I draw on the *whys* of educational policy and practice.

Decisions on appropriate methodology and the specific issues for interrogation were made during a process of mapping that involved a review of literature and an assessment of learning derived from previous professional and research experience (Hammersley and Atkinson 1996).

Reviewing the literature

Much of the literature that I reviewed does not appear in this document. Rather, it is drawn upon 'selectively and appropriately as needed in the telling of [the] story' (Wolcott 1990:17) so that the final literature review benefits from insights contained in the data that demanded more critical and alternative readings of the phenomena exposed (Silverman 2000). But here I summarise the stages I went through as testament to how research sensitivity was achieved.

Stage 1: Exploration of the literature began with that on representations of teenagers' sex and sexuality as depicted in more scientifically oriented works in biomedical and HIV/AIDS publications. This is explained by my biographic positioning at the time as recently exiting science teaching, and immersal in the new literature emerging from the medical communities in the late 1980s and early 1990s in response to the 'AIDS crisis' (Weeks 1989b, Wilton 1992). Most illuminating was the critique of methodologies inherent to many of these studies that adopted scientific methods (often large scale

surveys) in the search for cause and effect (Aggleton 1999). These approaches also emphasised the negative aspects of young people's behaviour (statistics on unsafe sexual activity, conceptions and STDs) and positive aspects (such as strategies for safer sex, notions of choice, and enjoyment) were invisibilised (Aggleton and Kapila 1992). Marshall and Stenner (1997) suggest these data and accordant scientific methods were given credence and the status of factuality because of the moral vanguard enshrined in conservative policies of the day which sought evidence to highlight the health and social care costs of single motherhood (Phoenix 1990, Doherty 1995) and the implications of youthful sexuality to problematising traditional notions of the 'family' (MacDonald et al 1993). On similar lines, Weeks (1985) argues that sexuality is an ideal vehicle for ideological manipulation and data are easily utilised to support dominant political and moral agendas. Given the hyperbolic media interest in young people (Davis 1990) that oft takes a minority to be representative of the majority (Bloor 1995), and leaves little space for understanding of meanings (Watney 1991), identity (Jenkins 1996), context (Boulton 1994) and the relationship between each of these, it was important that my research methodology did not obfuscate these elements, nor fuel moral and political fires by misrepresentation or over-generalisation (Shiner and Newburn 1997).

Stage 2: Critique of the literature above led to a questioning of constructions of sexuality and youth and the practices by which these were typified, and introduced me to more sociologically oriented work. Chapter 2 overviews key aspects of this literature and concludes that understanding of young people will remain partial if we do not move beyond the 'passing phase' thesis of adolescence for explanation (Griffin 1993); if we continue (as we have since the early twentieth century) to represent 'youth' as problematic - in trouble or as source of trouble (Roche and Tucker 1997); and if we do not fully acknowledge the structural and external mediators of experience. The latter includes recognition (in research and theorising) of 'others', whether parent, professional or politician, for their role in influencing young people's passage to adulthood. In addition, the methodologies embraced by some sociological studies of youth yielded constructions that were blind to gender and ethnicity (Bannerji 1999). The principles enshrined in my resultant methodology (see chapter 4) sought to avoid such tendencies by making explicit the role of gender and/or ethnicity on participants' experience and subjectivity.

By this stage my fieldwork was well under way, and the data were demanding broader theoretical insights. This took me to social theory¹ and feminist moral theory.

Stage 3: This element of the literature shapes the more unique aspects of my interpretation of data, and for this reason forms the majority of the literature review (chapter 3). Stepping outside specific literature on youth to broader social theory facilitated an appreciation of my data that encapsulated the significance of historical discourses, the inter-relatedness of the macro and micro, the public and private, and the balances of power that mediate experience in different locales. Furthermore, to avoid generalist or partial readings of identity and practice, this literature was crucial to persuading me of the necessity to see the world from where individuals and groups are situated. Methodologically this justified techniques that expose depth narratives on the microscopics of everyday lives (Smith 1988), and a synthesis with context and macroscopic mediators of identity and experience.

In sum, I wanted my research to problematise fixed or essentialising notions of identities and practices and show how they are mutable, both enacted and contested in discourse as part of an ongoing process that is subject to change, and contingent on individual, social, cultural, political and historical settings (Weeks 1995, Sampson 1989). This embraces a multitude a factors that are not predictable with any certainty and which impact in different ways on the minutiae of lives, understanding of which requires a closeness between researcher and the researched² (Smith 1988). My previous professional experience taught me that methods allowing me to hear young people's talk and dialogue were a productive way forward.

Previous professional and research experience

Previous employment yielded other insights that informed my substantive and methodological direction:

¹ Teaching a social theory undergraduate unit contributed to this shift in emphasis and credit is due to Layder (1994) for giving some structure to my initial thoughts.

² A distanced, structured survey with little latitude for response would not facilitate the requirement for closeness, variability or multiplicity of response, nor for appreciating the saliency of the language to expressions of identity and communication.

My concern with weaknesses in school based responses to meeting student needs on matters sexual developed during my nine years of teaching¹ sex education (in general science, biology, and personal and social education) and supporting students as a pastoral year tutor. Formal² and informal³ evaluation of different approaches to school sex education, at this local level, concluded that it was outdated, morally prescriptive and as having minimum impact on sexual experience. Preferences for informal methods, emphasis on emotional and relationship aspects of sexuality, and opportunity for confidential discussion without fear of judgement by teachers, were articulated.

More systematic evaluation of programmes of sex education followed during a two year stint as a peripatetic LEA advisory teacher, and confirmed the impressions above. This involved overt observation of sex education lessons in secondary and primary schools (54 schools in total); student and teachers needs' assessments (Payne 1999); and as a result of these two, the operationalisation of alternative programmes of sex education, for which I adopted lead role⁴. Throughout this initiative⁵ data were collected from reflective notes (research diary), observational notes, and evaluations from students, school staff and other key stakeholders such as parents, school nurses, LEA representatives and governing bodies.

All in all, this mapping exercise established some firmer leads for depth enquiry and informed my decisions about the research design. The literature review countered more subjective judgements emanating from previous professional experience; and research with young people and practitioners identified issues most relevant to them. As Bell and Roberts (1984) observe such a strategy positions researchers more confidently to select which issues are most current and interesting, and I would add, which issues might result in research findings that have usefulness beyond university settings. On this basis, the objectives for my research emerged. These broad areas for enquiry were informed by

¹ In three different schools.

² E.g. Written feedback on completion of units; more systematic evaluation through a semi-structured survey conducted with year 10 students (aged 14-15 years).

³ E.g. *Ad hoc* verbal feedback; comments during one-to-one, small group discussions; and those arising during extra-curricular 'Girls Group' work and sports clubs.

⁴ This satisfied the remit of the advisory post (to offer support for innovative ways of teaching sex and HIV/AIDS education) but I ended up with a more significant teaching (rather than advisory) role because of teachers' reticence to tackle sex education (at all) because of a lack of clarity on permissible content stemming from Section 28 of the Government Act (DES 1988b).

⁵ The initiative incorporated inservice training for teachers, headteachers and school governors, and meetings with parents to seek consent for proposed initiatives.

more specific (albeit provisional) markers for questioning that I had devised at an earlier stage in the process. As Fielding (1993) argues, out of practical necessity, provisional questions need establishing before finalising the research design since they guide the methods adopted. These markers for enquiry can be found in **Appendix 1**.

Study objectives

1. To explore young people's identity, discourse and practices in the context of social lives and individual biographies, with an emphasis on sexuality and sexual behaviour;
To explore perceptions of current sense of self for their influence on future identities and subjectivities;
To make a contribution to knowledge by up-dating and developing empirical knowledge of young people's identity and practice, and locating the findings within a framework and critique of earlier studies.
2. To identify factors and processes that influence constructs of identity, social practices, and learning about sexuality;
To develop a way of understanding young people's experience and discourse that transcends current debates, through adopting a methodological approach that is inclusive of macro and micro factors, that operate in public and private domains.
3. To synthesise the various conceptualisations of young people's experience and discourse and suggest a new way of theoretical understanding through developing the explanatory potential of existing theory;
To suggest ways of attending to the salient issues in young people's narratives, through recommendations for working with, and researching young people.

Research sample

Data were collected from fieldwork with fifty six young people in 6 different locations (sites) within the same town. Ages ranged from 14 to 19 years with the majority being 15

to 17 years old¹. My final analysis focuses in the main on data collected from a group of fifteen, year 11 students at 'Horton' School (site 1), which formed the first stage of my fieldwork. Fieldwork in this site was highly productive in yielding data that are extensive, in-depth and very rich. Analysis of data collected subsequently from the other five sites provided insights that suggested the analytic categories emergent from the Horton Site data were representative and valid. This prompted the decision to focus my thesis on the Horton data, with data from the other groups included to enhance the density of categories (Strauss and Corbin 1998) and satisfy the requirement for theoretical saturation (Glaser and Strauss 1967). While all the data from sites 2 - 6 corroborate the typicality of my analytic themes, they also highlight differences between young people across the sites, hence, where appropriate these data have been included to stress the diversities of identities, practices and beliefs. This does not detract from my claim to the conceptual generalisability of my findings (Mason 1996).

Any information that might identify individuals or places has been anonymised, and pseudonyms have been used throughout (Rosie 1990).

Contribution to knowledge

The thesis makes an empirical and theoretical contribution to knowledge. My data support some existing empirical knowledge but also contribute new insights on the experiences of specific groups of young people. The information is of a breadth and depth that allows the less evident, nuanced aspects to be detailed and makes conspicuous the variations that exist between young people. The uniqueness of the data lies in 3 areas. First, it positions the sexuality and sexual experiences of young people in the broad contexts of social lives, home lives, and processes of schooling. This renders a synthesised model of the private and public influences on young people's identity and practices, and moreover constructs macro and micro factors as inter-related sides of the same coin. Second, the perspectives of Pakistani and Somali young people are positioned alongside those of African Caribbean and white peers, rather than as an adjunct to the perspectives of the dominant group. Within this, the sexual experiences of Pakistani young men problematise normative constructs of the white, sexually active teenager.

¹ All participants perceived themselves as 'young people' and consistently referred to anyone above their age group as 'adults'. Based on this notion, the thesis does make a distinction between young people and adults, but acknowledges the young adult status of participants.

Third, the data offer insights on future perceptions of subjectivities and practices, which usefully adds to the literature on current identities and practices.

Theoretically, the strength of the thesis lies in the way that existing theory has been re-evaluated for its capacity to explain young people's experience, identity, discourse and practice. Much of the theory that I have used has previously not been applied to youth research, or, has remained at the level of ideas, with its explanatory ability limited or questioned because of the absence of empirical substantiation. My analysis provides this empirical substantiation. Also, my analysis is inclusive of issues or identities, that have, in the past, been obscured, in or by, these theories.

Methodologically the thesis provides a model for qualitative research with young people. The feminist principles for research that I deploy are not new, but the ways I have operationalised them make a new contribution to methodological literature. My approach suggests that strategies can be more effective if they are devised with a view to bringing gains, not just for the researcher, but for all parties involved in the project¹.

Ordering of thesis

The thesis is divided into four parts. **Part 1** is an exploration and critique of literature. Chapter 2 provides a summarising overview of literature on the origins of 'adolescence' and then focuses on sexuality as a typifying element in constructions of young people. In general terms it lays out the broad maxims, and critique of, the essentialist perspective. Chapter 3 concentrates on social constructionist articulations of identity, discourse and practice. The latter focuses predominantly on four authors' work and their primary texts which have been selected for the potential to explain aspects of young peoples' experience not fully elucidated in the past.

Part II (chapter 4) describes my methodological approach and methods. It documents the dilemmas and decisions that I made concerning access to participants, fieldwork methods, and interpretation of data. It intends to clarify my role and responsibilities as a

¹ I committed to a strategy that had positive gains for the research participants through their participation, and for the agency stakeholders through information they derived from dissemination of the findings.

researcher, together with methodological justifications based on consideration of reflexivity, objectivity, validity and reliability.

Data from the fieldwork are referred to at various points in the literature review (Part I) and methodology (Part II), in order to establish early links between theory, research practice and analysis.

Part III documents the findings and analysis. Chapter 5 begins with a reflexive account of the analytic framework adopted and considers alternative ways of analysing the data. Character profiles of the participants from 'Horton' School are then introduced. Chapter 6 takes the reader through each of these analytic themes. Verbatim quotations from the findings are used to substantiate the interpretative claims. Specific aspects of the analysis are brought together in Chapter 7 as a means to depict the particularly processes that had saliency for how participants understood and organised their lives.

Part IV is the final chapter (8). It draws out the main conclusions and contributions to knowledge by returning to the research objectives and reflecting on the research process and its limitations. The implications of the research are summarised in recommendations for policy, practice and research.

PART I

Literature Review

Introducing the literature

The findings are situated in relation to a wide body of literature, selected to allow for a critical exploration of the diverse knowledges that explicate representations of young people, identities, discourses and practices. Some of the literature focuses specifically on youth, while others come from a broader perspective. The social sciences drawn on (sociology, social psychology, anthropology) provided an essential backdrop to the critical theories of philosophy, psychology, social history, sociology of education and policy, and cultural studies.

Adolescence and sexuality

Charting adolescence

This chapter summarises the origins and key features of the history of adolescence, and positions sexuality within representations of youth. The two aspects are relevant because of their impact on contemporary representations of young people in the spheres of academia, politics, medicine, education and lay beliefs.

Psychology and psycho-analytic thinking

The concept of 'adolescence', as a distinct stage between childhood and adulthood, did not exist in pre-industrial European societies (Aries 1962). The psychologist Stanley Hall is credited with the 'discovery' of adolescence though his ideas were symbolic of late nineteenth debates on education, the family, sexuality and employment (Springhall 1986). Hall (1904) typified 'adolescence' as a biologically determined age category, driven and shaped by sexual physiology around the onset of puberty (Griffin 1993). Through synthesising positivistic psychology with biological science, Hall made the first connections between young people's identity and sex and characterised the time as a period of *storm and stress*. Hall's ideas provided support for middle class, social and religious reformers, by creating categories of 'normal' (ideal, conformist, confident and unspontaneous) and 'abnormal' (unconformist, undesirable) behaviours. Griffin (1993) notes that the former was likened to young white middle class males but seen as desirable for all young people. Hence, these typifications justified measures for regulating and 'civilising' urban working class young people. A degree of freedom was advocated to enhance full potential, but external control (by religious, educational and moral teaching), and internal control, was necessary for the maintenance of order and self-discipline (Ross

1972). The primacy of males in these agendas is particularly acute, albeit negative, in Hall's reference to the need for self-control in suppressing young men's sexual drives, and their so-called, universal masturbatory insanity¹.

This set an agenda which gave prominence to studying young people's identity and behaviours on the basis of, first, biological (particularly sexual) imperatives; second, the active nature of male sex drives; third, the characteristics of 'normal' (and by default 'abnormal') development; and fourth, the importance of self-control in preventing the expression of deviant sexual impulses (such as masturbation). The emergent ideology of adolescent behaviour centred on a norm of the white, middle class, heterosexual male, with associated notions of virility and masculinity in men and passivity and fragility in women and girls (Fine 1988). Homosexuality however, was associated with sickness and deviance (Weeks 1989b).

The basic tenets of Hall's ideas on 'adolescence' were perpetuated in the work of Benedict (1934), Sigmund Freud (1924, 1935, 1950), Root (1957), Anna Freud (1969), and Blos (1962, 1967). These authors enhanced perceptions of 'adolescence' as marked by emotional turbulence, rebellion and troublesome (to themselves and others) behaviours. Explanation rested within the individual with scant acknowledgement of social and economic influences, or the role of adults in adapting to their relationships with maturing teenagers. Thus, the supposedly universal conflict between young people, parents and other adults remained as the fault of the ambivalent, non-conformist adolescent. As Coleman and Hendry (1993) observe,

'....[the] theme of nonconformity and rebellion [is] believed by psychoanalysts to be an almost universal feature of adolescence'. (p.5).

While acknowledging that these conceptualisations were contaminated by the cultural mores of the day, numerous authors maintain that the evidence is nonetheless questionable (see for example, Gilligan 1982, Lips 1988, Chodorow 1989, and Thomson and Scott 1991). The main criticisms are that this theorising is underpinned by a male model of development; where women are included, evidence is deployed primarily from clinical samples of middle class women; and the influence of social class, ethnicity, and

¹ Even at this early stage of theorising on young people, females are subordinated to a less visible position than males.

the economic patterning of identity and experience is negated. Overall, there is a tendency to reductionism and generalisation.

Generalisations are also evident in Erikson's (1968) theorising on the role of identity crisis in mediating rebellious behaviour and adolescent turmoil. He argued that changes in biology, ego defences, family, and social life during puberty precipitate the need for individuals to make major decisions about their roles and identity. Because he saw such crises as 'normative' of 'everyday adolescent' development, Coffield et al (1986) credit Erikson with much of the responsibility for the

'... widespread acceptance of adolescence as a deviant category' (p.211).

The normal/abnormal binary justified constructions of homosexuality as deviant aberrations from 'normal' development. For example, Erikson (1968) dismissed homosexuality by promoting heterosexuality as the universal goal of mature sexuality. Empirical investigation of Erikson's work provides limited support for his generalisations (Offer and Sabshin 1984). Coleman and Hendry (1993) also noted the neglect of empirical evidence in calling for some quantitative measurement of his ideas. It is ironic that these same authors were criticised previously on the same accusation. Coffield et al (1986) for instance, acknowledged the value in some of Erikson's work (e.g. the difficulties inherent in settling on occupational identity), but Coleman (1980) and Hendry (1983) are accused of unsophisticated triviality because of their continuing tendency to generalise findings and claims to be exploring the nature of adolescence in contemporary Britain, while utilising tiny samples and without making reference to

'.. class, culture, community, power, poverty or inequality.
Excluding both employed and unemployed young people ...'
(Coffield et al 1986:212).

Nearly a decade later, Brannen et al (1994) raise a similar point that this now huge body of literature on 'adolescence' largely ignores the social and economic elements of young people's passage to adulthood, hence the thesis will explore the influence of macro factors on mediations of identity and practice.

The work of Baitle and Offer (1971), Marcia (1966, 1980), R M Lerner and Spanier (1980), Blos (1988), Muuss (1988), and Harriet Lerner (1987) adheres to Freud's, Blos's and Erikson's earlier themes of non-conformity and adolescent rebellion. Despite

much of the empirical work occurring in clinical and therefore unusual settings, the central tenets of these generalising arguments are retained. Furthermore, they are rehearsed in numerous contemporary psychological texts on young people's identity. Notable examples are John Coleman's 'Adolescence and Society' series which now includes eleven edited texts, and Jane Kroger's (1989) overview and update (1996) of the major psychological theorists.

Sociological perspectives

Like psychological and psychoanalytic theory, early sociological studies of youth emphasised the coding of adolescence on the basis of the 'storm and stress' thesis, while applying different methodologies and research foci, for example, Margaret Mead's (1928) 'Coming of Age in Samoa' and Frederick Thrasher's (1927) 'The Gang'¹. Biological/hormonal explanations obfuscated the impact of structural factors until Hollinghead's (1949) study of 'Elmtown's Youth'. His recognition of social class as a significant determinant in young people's behaviour emphasised the importance of the social over the biological. However, explanations based on the social structuring of experience were not developed further for another two decades because of the 1950s and 1960s preoccupation with theorising on socialisation and role identity in sociology (Parsons 1964) and clinical psychology (e.g. Thomas 1968, and Brim 1965²).

James Coleman (1961), like Parsons depicted a distinctive 'youth culture' which separated 'youth' from the rest of society. Where Parsons noted the hedonism in youth relations (particularly between the sexes), Coleman pointed out the relevance of popular music and the consumptive element to young people's identity and practice. Coleman used the term 'subculture', a concept that predominated in studies on deviance (Becker 1963) and delinquency (A K Cohen 1955). Within this field essentialising tendencies arguably took on a new identity which centred on 'youth' that committed crime, e.g. Stan Cohen's (1967) work on gangs of 'mods' and 'rockers', Barker's (1964) survey on young male offenders, and Scott's (1961) study of boys on probation. These foregrounded studies by Patrick (1973) and those associated with the 'Birmingham School' or Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS). Notable among these are

¹ Griffin (1988) cites this study as the birth of the 'gang of lads' approach to studying young people.

² Thomas (1968) looked at different expectations ascribed on 'roles' and the tensions created by 'role conflict' and 'role incongruence'; Baumrind (1975) developed Brim's (1965) work but called for recognition of the effects of imposing roles on young people.

studies by Hall and Jefferson (1976), Mungham and Pearson (1976) and Willis (1977). The 'social' emphasis in these works raised contradictions for 'biological' determinism, but the predictability of the phenomena described supported proponents of adolescence as a 'passing phase'. For example, Willis's work (1977) on 'resistance' and young unemployed people, is held up by psychologists such as Coleman and Hendry (1993) as an illustration of the problems encountered by young people in trying to achieve the transition to 'normal' adulthood. We find a similar emphasis in a number of sociological studies from the 1980s. For example, Covington (1982) Marsland (1987), and Brake (1985) look to conflicting external pressures (e.g. peer group) rather than internal instability, but maintain the predictability of the turbulent transition to adulthood.

Feminists, such as McRobbie and Garber (1976) instigated correctives to the 'resistance' and 'gang of lads' discourse on young people. Clearer departures from essentialist overdeterminism, blindness to gender, and cultural and ethnic diversity followed in the 1980s and 1990s. For notable examples, see Anyon (1983), Heidensohn (1985), Leonard (1985), Measor (1989), Holly (1989), Weiner and Arnot (1987), Henshall and McGuire (1986), Phoenix (1987), Wulff (1988), Mac an Ghaill (1988), Mirza (1992), Tizard and Phoenix (1993). These works heralded transformations in representations of young people by including the impact of culture, ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation alongside class based structural theories. They also signalled a more inclusive version of the social constructionist¹ perspective that underpins my conceptual and methodological framework. However, traditional and conservative perspectives still persist in some contemporary thinking, texts, and policies on working with young people (Banks 1994). As Griffin (1993) contends,

'... youth is/are continually being represented as different,
other, strange, exotic and transitory - by and for adults.'
(Griffin 1993:25).

Attention now turns to more detailed consideration of essentialist approaches to sexuality, and the contribution of sexology research to reinforcing the essentialist view.

¹ There is no easy or short definition of social constructionism. In broad terms I take it to mean an approach that gives primacy to the social, to discourses and meanings, and processes of power (and recognises historical and cultural specificity). It also takes a critical stance towards taken-for-granted knowledge, particularly that derived from scientific positivism. Vivien Burr (1995) offers a detailed and useful definition of social constructionism, and compares it with traditional scientific approaches.

Essentialism & sexuality

Essentialist perspectives on sexuality have a long history, and, according to Segal (1994), the sexual as axiomatic to the biological was borne out of the post-enlightenment period and the concomitant primacy of scientific and medical thinking to define sexual normality and its corollary, sexual deviance. Previously, the pre-industrial era in European societies had regulated sexuality on the basis of religious and spiritual doctrine but these were eclipsed by the more powerful and enduring scientific explanations that have heavily influenced perceptions throughout the twentieth century (Harding 1998).

McFadden (1995) notes how biologically-based scientific explanations for sexuality rarely define what it is they are explaining. She cites Padgug's (1979) observation of sexuality presented as,

‘A thing, a universal given, an essence - implicitly
understood, assumed by all, not requiring definition’
(McFadden, p2).

This treatment of sexuality in the Western world as rarely defined but nevertheless assumed as a static entity, waiting to be expressed in a uniform and predictable way (Segal 1994) derives from an unquestioning of the biological origins which are presented as shaping identity and practice (McFadden 1995). This essentialist premise informed much of the work of sexology authors between the period 1890 - 1980 who wanted to bring sexuality under the control of science (Gagnon and Parker 1995). Sexology, under the auspices of science, made claims to objectivity and impartiality that made the study of sex respectable (Bland 1998). Despite varied methodological approaches, sexologists were united in believing that ‘sex’ has a natural essence (driving force), and that it is ‘discoverable’ through the collection of empirical evidence. Weeks (1989b) argues that most sexologists adopt a ‘naturalistic’ approach which aims to describe and classify sexual practices and preferences, that is, sexual forms as they exist in nature. From this, sexologists deduced that different biological functioning could explain, and hence be used to define, female and male sexuality differently. For example, Ellis (1913) spoke of the powerful male sex drive, and women’s pleasure was taken as derived from men; and the Kinsey reports (Kinsey et al 1948, 1953) were consistent with medical discourse in focusing on the ‘naturalness’ (ie biological imperative) of sexual outlets. Within this, men are depicted as experiencing uncontrollable urges which should not be repressed, and,

women are seen in relation to men, as passive, reactively gaining pleasure from satisfying men, and, ultimately reproducing. Irrespective of how 'drives' are explained, the individual is the focus of research because the drive is accepted as embedded in the individual (Harding 1998). These approaches are evident in the work of other sexologists, such as, Hite (1976, 1981, 1987), Hutt (1972), and Masters and Johnson (1966, 1970, 1975), and in large scale surveys of sexual attitudes and behaviour conducted since then (eg Wellings et al 1994). Sheer Hite (1987) was critical of the previous stances on female sexuality but appeared still to be concerned with describing and categorising sexual behaviour (Thomson and Scott 1990) rather than offering explanation for diversity or changes in attitudes to sexuality. In this way Hite's work reflects the naturalistic approach of sexology researchers entrenched in the essentialist perspective (Weeks 1989b, Segal 1994).

Deconstructing sexology and essentialism

As sexology developed, so did feminism. Since the early twentieth century, feminists have questioned essentialist constructs of female sexuality (Segal 1994). Jackson (1984) argues that the emphasis on heterosexual identity and expression as both natural and fulfilling, with penetration defined as the essential sexual act, subordinates the position of women to the necessity of male penetration and leaves the power of men over women unrecognised in sexology research. For this reason Vance (1984), Harding (1998) and Segal (1994) insist that sexuality has to be seen through the lens of gender, because the patriarchal nature of sex research undermines its claims to truth in failing to recognise the different discourses that frame women and men's sexuality, and in obfuscating the inequalities in power between the sexes. The objectivity and lack of bias claimed through allegiance to scientific methods is also questioned by feminists (see methodology for further discussion). Furthermore, and, to reiterate a point made previously, it does not accommodate homosexuality because of its heterosexist emphasis (Watney 1987, Patton 1994).

Thomson and Scott (1990), like Weeks (1985), have noted that studies of sexual behaviour provide access to current forms of knowledge and ideologies which exist in particular cultures. This is evident in some contemporary research on young people that prioritises quantification of heterosexual behaviours, uses uncontested categories of 'sex'

to mean vaginal penetration and ignores non-penetrative acts (for examples see Ford 1987, 1988, 1991 and Mellanby et al 1995). This suggests a heteropolar bias which highlights sexual acts with the potential for reproduction over other forms of sexual expression. While many of these accounts raise anxiety at the extent of vaginal penetration, this 'extensiveness' (or 'majority' experience) also legitimises it as the *norm* and reproduces conservative notions of 'real' sex which are consistent with 'family' values.

In sum, despite a questioning of the essentialist view, constructs of sexuality based on a biological given have prevailed in underpinning much research in biomedically oriented studies. Definitions of sexuality are usually absent in these accounts but this non-definition lends further support to accusations of essentialist assumptions. If within this, sexual identity and practice are considered as immune to social context, it may account for the failure to acknowledge the specific impact of social, political and historical mores on expressions of identity and negotiation of sexual practice. The thesis will explore these elements with particular scrutiny of the discourses that pervade institutional responses to sexuality, and the significance of gender, social class and ethnicity. This supports the case for an explicit reflexivity in my theoretical and methodological approach (see chapter 4) to ensure that explanations for behaviour and identity are not reductive.

Reconstruction - positioning the biological body

Chapter 3 will argue that a more useful understanding of sexuality as it relates to identity and practice, emerges not from categorising behaviours, but from enquiry of the meanings that construct sexuality, and the effects of these meanings on the ways that individuals construct and organise their lives (Weeks 1995). However, this does not mean that biology is unimportant, or that individuals are blank sheets on which society writes its cultural messages with physiology completely disregarded. Neither does it imply that biology predicates universal responses. For instance, compared to previous generations, the average age of puberty begins at a younger age for females and males¹

¹ This is attributed to changes in general health, diet, oestrogen in water supplies, and increased body fat (oestrogen deposits in fat precipitate the earlier onset of menstruation).

(Hill 2000), hence rendering the enhanced potential for earlier sexual activity among young people. Also, the place of biology in facilitating expressions of desire is not easily separated from the influence of hormones. This does not imply that I accept the deterministic tendencies of essentialist explanations for young people's behaviour or identity, but rather that *some* aspects of sexual behaviour have explanation in biology, as they do for all people *irrespective of age*. Schwartz and Rutter offer an 'integrative model' (1998:21) of sexuality. They argue that focusing on biological imperatives without acknowledgement of social processes, or, focusing on the social constructionist view without regard for hormonally influenced desire and pleasure, is equally reductionist. Hence, they regard the social constructionist view as more persuasive if biological influences are considered alongside.

To summarise, while there are some broad assumptions that foreground the two approaches, it is most useful to view essentialism and constructionism not as exclusive and unitary positionings on how each views the sexual (and its relationship to identity, discourse and practice), but rather, as umbrella terms spanning a plethora of ideas, research methodologies and political and theoretical perspectives. Ultimately, empirical data contextualised in the social world of actors provides the support for legitimising which aspects of theory hold the most reliable theoretical explanations. On this basis, the thesis supports the position that explaining the biological imperative of sex as in a majority of essentialist sexology research (Weeks 1989b) is less significant to the ways individuals define and run their lives, than understanding the cultural meanings which construct it (Weeks 1995).

I will now address literature that makes further contributions to the 'sexualisation' of 'adolescence', and maintains a heterosexist bias.

Sexualising adolescence

Unlike any other age range, constructs of adolescence are inseparable from those on sexual proclivity. Indeed, Griffin (1993) argues, that in the same way as the concept of 'adolescence' has been criminalised, it has been sexualised. However, the manner in which this occurred has varied. Previously I described the social reformists' attempts to regulate male sexuality, with the consequent invisibilisation of female sexuality or

subordination to male desires. This trend continued more or less unchallenged for several decades leading up to the 'gang of lads' model. But the latter provided only scant opposition to original constructs in maintaining antiseptic, stereotypic and patriarchal constructs of heterosexual identity and sexual relations, with sexuality (in the broadest sense¹) never considered. Where sexual behaviour is mentioned in these accounts, it is invariably brief, limited to over-simplistic essentialising explanations, and lacking in critical analysis. For example, in James Patrick's (1973) *A Glasgow Gang Observed* the sexuality of gang members is alluded to in only two (separate) paragraphs, and relates entirely to, 'sex [as a] commodity valued by the gang' (p191) wherein girls are perceived as 'sexual objects' with whom 'boys were unable to enter into deep relationships' (p151). Analysis remains at the level of sexual liaison conferring status and satisfying male 'adolescent' need or curiosity. This is made transparent by Patrick's use of Yablonsky's (1967) words:

'... sex for the violent gang boy 'is an itch that is scratched when the opportunity arises''.' (Patrick 1973:191).

While feminist responses to the 'gang of lads' model (see above) countered the privileging of young males in academic agendas, a heterosexist norm prevailed that obscured young lesbians, gay men and bisexuals. Brake (1976, 1978) situated 'queer' and 'bent'² identity in the masculine model of 'deviancy' sociology of the time, but, with the exception of Plummer (1989), gay, lesbian and bisexual experience outside this realm remained marginal in mainstream UK sociology. It took the HIV/AIDS pandemic to warrant further writing on the lives of non-heterosexual young people. Initially this was within more biomedically oriented literature wherein gay young people were often viewed as exhibiting pathological risky tendencies (see Aggleton et al 1989 for critique). This has been countered by extensive sociological enquiries, with notable examples in the work of Dowsett (1996), Aggleton (1996) Wilton (1992) and Patton (1990).

- However these analyses reside in the HIV/AIDS paradigm and therefore do not attract the same attention as mainstream research on heterosexual contemporaries.

There are exceptions to the heteropolar norm in literature that documents the experiences of gay pupils and/or teachers in the UK heterosexist school system (see

¹Theoretical definitions of sexuality are critiqued further in relation to my data in chapter 6, theme 3.

² At the time such terms signified heterosexist ideology and had yet to be reclaimed by gay activism in efforts to diminish the impact of their use in homophobic discourse.

Mac an Ghaill, 1994; Trenchard and Warren, 1984, 1987; London Gay Teachers' Group, 1983, and Leicester NUT, 1987). These accounts refute the 'passing phase' thesis of same sex relationships used by proponents of the traditional adolescent development approach. Similarly, in the USA, Gonsiorek (1988) argues that it is not homosexual identity in *itself* which is the problem (to be suppressed, marginalised or legislated against) but rather the homophobic working of modern societies that create problems of living for young gay women and men. In locating sexuality in broader contexts of the social body, mental health, structural influences, and a detailed critique of clinical/psychological discourse, Gonsiorek provides convincing arguments against the 'passing-phase' thesis and the futility of searching for the causes of homosexuality. Following this, I am not concerned to research *why* one is gay but rather *how* one experiences gay sexual identity within the confines and practices of schooling. This provides another reason to look to literature that could accommodate the social meanings of identity and discourse, and the inter-relatedness of macro and micro determinants of experience and identity, and hence I found explanatory potential in the work of Foucault, Smith, Giddens and Habermas (see chapter 3).

Social constructionist responses to essentialising sexuality

In the same way as the 'social constructionist' perspective challenged constructs of adolescence, it problematised sexual essentialism by regarding sexuality not as inevitable and unchanging but as the outcome of various social, political and economic phenomena and circumstances. But, the various criticisms of the essentialist view adopt different theoretical approaches and as Bristow (1997) suggests make clear a series of contradictions to theorising constructionism. The interactionist work associated with Ken Plummer (1975, 1995) and Gagnon and Simon (1973) situate the social construction of sexuality at the level of the individual learning of sexual roles and identities (Plummer) and in the 'scripts' that mediate ideological constructs (Gagnon and Simon). Staying at the level of the individual but positioned within the Freudian psychoanalytic tradition Jacques Lacan (1977) is concerned with how the subject emerges within the linguistic order (Bristow 1997) and Juliet Mitchell¹ (1974) gives greater credence to Freudian psychoanalysis with the thematisation of gender difference.

¹ Mitchell was central to the rehabilitation of psychoanalysis after many feminists had rejected Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis. See Joseph Bristow (1997) for review.

For historical social constructionists like Weeks (1989) who developed aspects of Foucault's work (see chapter 3), the solutions to constructionist theory lie in the processes of history and wider society.

Foucault's view spans continents and centuries and provides a sharp contrast with Plummer's micro perspective. The emphasis on language and scripts in Lacan's psychoanalytic perspective has some similarities with Foucault's and Weeks' discursive project; and Mitchell draws on Foucault's notion of power but points up the absence of a gendered sense of power¹. Despite the differences and convergences, these approaches ultimately agree in their rejection of the autonomous 'naturalness' of the sexual and give some (if differing) recognition to the social, linguistic, historical and political sources of sexual definition. As Rubin notes:

'Once sex is understood in terms of social analysis and historical understanding, a more realistic politics of sex becomes possible.'
(1999:150)

Put simply, depth understanding of the factors that mediate everyday experience is arguably unachievable by reliance on typifications that compartmentalise and separate sexuality from the social, historical and political body.

Contesting contemporary sexuality

In conclusion, there is wide ranging opinion and belief on how sexuality and sexual activity might be defined, explained and regulated. In analysing these contestations, Jennifer Harding defines contemporary sexuality as 'highly plastic' (1998:1). Here she utilises Anthony Giddens term to mean

'.. decentered sexuality, freed from the needs of reproduction.'
(Giddens 1993:2).

She uses the term loosely as a means to stress the variable ways in which sexuality manifests and the many different meanings it holds. But it is arguable that constructing young people's sexuality as 'plastic' is useful only in so far as it captures the variable potentialities for sexual expression; taking the definition more literally negates the influence of dominant discourses to restrict sexual identity and practice. To illustrate, young people may be involved in sexual behaviour without motivations for procreation

¹ The importance of gender to constructs of identity and practice is discussed further in chapter 3 and at several points throughout the findings.

but this does not imply that they are freed from the normative cultural expectations that control whether sexual behaviour of this kind will be legitimated. It follows that the meanings that teenagers give to their behaviour should not be separated from the knowledge of how 'others' (Gilroy 1999), that is, adults in the main, construct adolescent sexuality. The thesis explores the meanings and social reality that result from the complex system of languages, symbols and interactions that juxtapose at the private/public interface.

The potential for the social control of identity and practice, the centrality of power to achieving authentic identities and the importance of intersubjective relations in the regulation of behaviour and identity prompted exploration of the theoretical ideas of Michel Foucault, Anthony Giddens, Dorothy Smith and Jurgen Habermas. These and other relevant works assisted my understanding of the ways in which young people conceptualise their identity and practice and give it meaning, and explicate the reasons for the minimal recognition of young people's narratives in representations of youth, and the practices and content of schooling and educational policy.

These theoretical considerations and those that follow were of considerable influence in analysing the findings from my study; where there are criticisms of the social constructionist perspective they are not intended to diminish the merits of the different approaches but rather to suggest that the theories have not been extrapolated to their full potential. It is only with the impetus demanded by the data that a more sophisticated interpretation has been possible. This underscores the explanatory limitations of abstract theories that are not illustrated by empirical primary evidence, as in some of the perspectives highlighted.

Discourse, power, and identity

Introduction

In this chapter I lay out key aspects of work by Michel Foucault, Dorothy Smith, Anthony Giddens, Jurgen Habermas, and Seyla Benhabib that have contributed to my interpretation of how young people's identity and practice are shaped in the contemporary context. In broad terms, the concepts I focus on are:

- discourse
- the processes and uses of power
- reflexivity
- the interconnectdness between the macro and the micro.

Foucault, Smith, Giddens, Habermas and Benhabib have not positioned young people in their theorising. My critique facilitates both an *application* of their ideas to young people, and a *synthesis* that brings together the relevant aspects of each authors' theoretical formulations. This renders a more rounded model for understanding the experiences of young people, and crucially marries theorising with empirical evidence. Measor et al (2000), and Aggleton (1998) have argued this is essential to achieving a fuller understanding of the issues, and to devising effective policy and practice responses.

The significant aspects of each of the author's ideas are laid out in turn, with a critique of each laying foundations for, and justifying the inclusion of those that follow. The chapter begins with Foucault.

Michel Foucault

Foucault's work is central to much recent work on the dynamic between discourse, power, knowledge and subjectivity. Foucauldian (Foucault 1979a, 1980) and neo-Foucauldian theorising (Weeks 1995b, 1989b, Poster 1984, Layder 1994) draws attention to the significance of historical discourses on contemporary constructions of sexuality, and explores how power operates through the construction of particular knowledges to define and regulate sexual identities and practices.

Foucault (1979a) rejected biological essentialism in proposing that there is no innate form of sexuality to be expressed, repressed or emancipated. Rather, there are '.. ideas about sexuality which are put into words - discourses' (Harding 1998:18). These discourses are multiple and produced by 'a whole series of mechanisms operating in different institutions' (Foucault 1979a: 33). Foucault argued that power has different mechanistic forms which have varied over centuries. He identified three forms of power, sovereign power¹ (1980), disciplinary power² (1979b), and biopower (1979a).

Biopower is the most relevant to sexuality. Biopower works through the administration of dominant ideologies, interventions and regulatory controls. These serve to define the 'norms' and limits of identity, and hence affect how individuals construct their identity and give it meaning (Weeks 1991).

¹ This was as an absolute form of power that dominated through the appropriation of goods and wealth, from the feudal monarchies of the Middle Ages, the religious wars between Catholic monarchists and Protestant anti-monarchists of the sixteenth and seventeenth century, to the parliamentary democracy of the French Revolution in the eighteenth century.

² This developed during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and was the antithesis of sovereign power in exercising power, 'not over the earth and its products ... but over human bodies and their operations.' (Foucault 1980: 104). It involved not specific physical punishments (as in sovereign power) but by placing bodies under constant surveillance they were rendered visible at all times. This form of power worked through psychological rather than physical constraint. The strategies formally used in monasteries, prisons and asylums were applied in institutions of the military, medicine and schooling with the architecture and regimes designed to make so obvious the surveillance that individuals knew they could not escape the 'gaze' and so developed a mechanism of self-regulation (Foucault 1979b).

There are a range of political ideologies and social discourses about sexual behaviour and sexual relations that influence how people locate themselves (or 'be located', Ingham and Kirkland 1997:153). A number of theorists contend that these discourses are complex and fragmented, and position individuals differently at different times and in different contexts. For example, Hollway (1998) looks at gender and identifies three culturally salient discourses which offer men and women different subject positionings; and Rubin (1999) and Butler (1990), in different analytic modes, explore the influence of the bipolarity of heterosexuality and homosexuality. While individuals are positioned variably in relation to these discourses, and there are choices involved (Weeks 1985), some discourses hold greater power. For instance, Weeks (1989b) suggests that discourses in the media, medicine and education have been particular instrumental in 'normalising' some identities and practices and 'ab-normalising' others. So, procreative, heterosexual sexual practice within the confines of marriage is legitimated by some dominant discourses (ibid.), whereas sexual behaviour between other groups such as teenagers and gay people is condemned (Wilton 1997).

Professionals and the discourses used (in education and health particularly) can be crucial to maintaining norms for identity and practice¹. Moreover, discourses re-enforcing specific ideologies can become internalised through 'capillary action' (Grbich 1999:39) which contributes to individuals self-regulating themselves and others. Thus, biopower becomes operationalised through an unconscious process of permeation, exercised not through edicts from above but *within* and through society. As Layder (1994) contends, it is this element of the *affects of power relations* in specific contexts that Foucault was more interested in (rather than the substance of power) for its influence on how subjects are constituted in terms of self-identity, psychological predisposition, and attitudes and beliefs.

Young people in Foucault's lens

I will now consider young people in relation to Foucault's theorising. The methods and discourses used in the teaching of sex education and in sexual health clinics can be used to illustrate Foucault's analysis (1979a, 1980) of power, knowledge and discourse.

¹ This does not imply there is only one discourse used in sex education; of late there have been moves towards more radical and effective practice that acknowledge a range of different discourses (see SEU 1999).

The power of language is particularly significant in these contexts. The knowledge and resources that young people have access to can be limited by the language and wider discourse of the cultural context in which sex education and communication on sexual issues occurs (Wilton 1997). This can constrain views of sex and sexuality to a particularly scientific and impersonal framework (Watney 1991). For instance, technical and medical terms can alienate young people both because of stylistic inaccessibility, and in emphasising the chasm between formal (that is, acceptable) language and that used informally between peers or sexual partners (Aggleton and Kapila 1992). There is no evidence to suggest that young people use a formal discourse in their everyday lives, and whether this is due to unwillingness or inability is not the issue. Rather it is the *effect* of internalising a discourse that is not theirs that is significant.

Foucault (1979a) points out the multiple effects of biopower in part 5 of *Volume One of The History of Sexuality* but he concentrates on the macro, that is, consequences for the regulation of populations. Feminist criticisms of Foucault's work (Ramazanoglu 1993, McHoul and Grace 1995) argue there are also several observable effects at the micro level of individual and inter-subjective relations. This is the aspect I wanted to explore in my research: was there any evidence of regulation through the discourses and strategies used in education and sexual health services? If so, what were the effects on young people's sense of self?

Foucault (1979a) argues that the internalisation of norms for identity and practice leads to people self-regulating through concealing or fabricating¹ (Ball 1997) their authentic identities, practices and discourses. This self-regulation can be analysed as a regulative agent in maintaining the *status quo* of the normative discourse. Because actual behaviours and discourses are concealed, they are not acknowledged in official/ public discourses, so the dominant framework is not challenged and hence has potential for reproduction.

In sum, I wanted to establish whether the discourses used by teachers and clinicians created definitions of 'normality' and deviance that contributed to 'norms' for action and behaviour (Foucault 1973). If this is the case, the social construction of sexuality by

¹ This phenomenon is developed below, see 'Fabrication: reactions to the dominant discourse and practice'

professionals stands alongside essentialist constructions (see chapter 2) in replacing one reductionism with another. For those who are aware that they do not meet the criteria for 'normality' laid out in 'official' discourse, there is the potential for feelings of alienation to be enhanced (Rubin 1999¹).

Positive power

Foucault's concept of power tends to construct subjectivities rather negatively, as not only shaped by disciplinary power or the 'force relations' (Poster 1994:139) in society, but also dominated by the technologies of powerful discourses and practices that operate within institutions (whether they be schools, asylums, prisons etc.). But as Heaphy (1996) points out, because Foucault (1979b) conceptualises power not as something that is *possessed* but *exercised* it can also be construed more positively as being productive of knowledge and subjectivity:

'We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms ... power produces ... reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production.' (Foucault 1979b: 194).

In other words, knowledge is not produced through the activity of the subject of knowledge; rather, the corpus and forms of knowledge are determined by 'power-knowledge'. Foucault emphasises how disciplinary strategies support power-knowledge relations, and through normalisation processes can be used to subjugate bodies thus rendering them objects of knowledge. The pre-given and unchanging nature of identity (or subject) is directly challenged here and replaced by the individual as discursive construct through a gradual process of the actor being erased, '.. like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea' (Foucault 1970:387). This decentering of the subject by power mechanisms that operate independently of people is commensurate with Foucault's insistence that the subject is 'dead' (Layder 1994:102). This contrasts with feminist thought (see Butler 1990, Chodorow 1994) that insists the subject is capable of resisting mechanistic determinism and this invests a potential for agency than Foucault appears reticent to engage with.

Despite this, in his later work, Foucault (1987, 1988) does acknowledge that micrological strategies of power (i.e. not the individual as possessed of power) can resist

¹ See chapter 7 for further discussion.

hegemonic and normalising discourse and counter the imposition of decreed identities. It is only in societies that adopt a repressive relationship between sex and power, Foucault (1979a) argues, that emancipation¹ from silence and/or condemnation is necessary. Merely speaking about sex can appear as deliberate defiance of the prevailing power. This is particularly relevant to analysing contemporary representations of sexual identity which appear as deliberately transgressive in naming and describing an alternative discourse and form of the sexual. For example, social movements such as Gay Liberation, Feminism, and Black Activism have consciously challenged dominant morality and definitions of norms and conventions relating to sex, gender, and family relations (Clark and Hirst 1996).

However it is relevant to note that the impact of any challenge to dominant discourses can have both positive and negative repercussions, as Harding argues:

‘They may ... help to constitute and reinforce a boundary between public and private domains, even as they appear to erase it’. (Harding 1998:19).

This is relevant to my research questions particularly if we add the dimension of *context*. The situational specificity of *where* one *speaks out* in ways oppositional to the dominant position may influence the outcome. It may be that counter discourses are not declared in public realms (of the classroom or home environment for example) for fear of reinforcing negative perceptions of youth and/or incurring punitive sanctions. I wanted to create contexts for research interviews wherein young people felt safe to share the alternative ‘story’ (of what takes place in the private domain of youth) and hence challenge the normative framework via a third party (i.e. documentation from the study).

‘Coding’ the body

Foucault (1979a) insists that bodies are inherently meaningless without the inscriptions of cultural and historical mediations. So in addition to constructing identity via discourses of the sexual, meaning is also given to bodies through categories/codes of race, gender and able-bodiedness etc. that also operate through the power-knowledge process. Constructions of dichotomised gendered bodies as male/female are enforced by norms of appropriate male and female behaviour (Butler 1990). For instance, sexual

¹ According to Weeks (1989) Foucault rejects the concept of liberation. ‘It is not the release of a hidden or blocked essence that should be the target of sexual radicalism... but conscious intervention at the *level of the definition* of appropriate sexual behaviour’ (p10, my emphasis).

freedom is oft regarded as demeaning for women but enhances masculinity, with sexual experimentation and pleasure seen as male but not female privilege (Schwartz and Rutter 1998). Pini (1997) develops Foucault's ideas in suggesting this constitutes the self as always embodied, and with different inscriptions yielding different selves or subjectivities. Just as Foucault observed the female body coded as 'hysterical', or the coding of the 'mad', 'deviant' or 'criminal', Pini suggests that power has also been employed to code the black body as 'deviant', the disabled body as 'invalid', and the teenage body as 'rebellious'. This supports assertions I made in chapter 2 on the power of essentialist constructs of youth.

There are subjective as well as objective dimensions to systemic classifications. While power-knowledge operates in yielding 'objects of truth' (Foucault 1979b:194) subjects also play a part in imbibing and resisting classifications. People 'know' themselves through mechanisms of disciplining and naming but also construct alternatives that resist the normative expectations of dominant morality. However, individual and subcultural codes are still bound up with a historical discourse that gives them meaning and indeed potency if they contradict the expected or permissible features of a particular identity (such as adolescence). While subjective classifications may be censored in the public domain, they can represent a resistance to regulation in the private realm. Resistance in the private sphere of young people's lifeworlds cannot be readily constituted as a 'reverse discourse' as in Foucault's (1979a) example of the gay liberation movement 'speaking out' to legitimise itself, since no such legitimisation occurs among those who would benefit from hearing it (e.g. teachers). Nevertheless, for young people these oppositional discourses may be one way of appropriating some power, and this will be pursued in my analysis.

While power may invest some agency in the private realm, Mary Douglas (1966) reminds us that tensions can arise from the contradictions posed by knowledge of 'good' and 'bad' or 'clean' and 'dirty' sexual morality¹. The symbolism conveyed by these oppositional classifications can affect individual and collective confidence in the authentic self. Another issue that is salient here is *who* is using the discourse, for *what* purpose and in *which* context. As Pini (1997) suggests, this has been significant in queer and black

¹ See chapter 7 for further discussion on the symbolic classification of identity.

activism which set out to reclaim the same appropriations (e.g. 'faggot', 'queer', 'nigger') that had been used to problematise the identity. It will be interesting to explore young people's perceptions of ascriptions that create tensions for sense of self.

Evaluating Foucault

The preceding discussion demonstrates that aspects of Foucault's ideas are useful to understanding identity and practice, but there are ambiguities and omissions in his work. The following section attends to some of these weaknesses and signals why the work of other theorists has been utilised.

Micro-macro dualism

Many authors have argued (Giddens 1984, Smith 1988, Habermas 1986, and others) that there is a complex and variable relationship between the micro (as in personal and social interactions of daily life) and the macro (as in larger scale features of society, institutions, organisations and culture) and the related dualisms of agency and structure. Theoretical appreciation of this is restricted using Foucault's ideas alone because he does not satisfactorily explore the synthesis between the micro and macro. The overall impression from evaluation of Foucault's writing is that he remains enmeshed within the structural level though he vigorously repudiated this and attempted to dismantle structuralism (Poster 1984). Derek Layder (1994) provides a thorough critique of this dismantling and concludes that Foucault remained unwilling to position himself or his notions of power within the micro. As a consequence, he does not offer a convincing analysis of the microscopics of everyday life, nor the pertinent aspects of agency and meaning (McHoul and Grace 1995).

This said, in his later work on 'technologies of the self' and power (Foucault 1986, 1988) there is a switch in emphasis to individualism and notions of psychological self-constitution (Best and Kellner 1991). However this did not extend to considering actual or situated intersubjective behaviour in or between intimately connected individuals. This is a key omission because of the importance of intra-subjective relations and collective identity to individuals' narratives of self (Smith 1988, Benhabib 1992).

Possession of power

Foucault's ubiquitous notion of power as never 'possessed' by individuals or groups suggests that power is exercised separately from the actions of individual subjects. Thus we have little sense of *who* or *what* the substance of power is, and only the effect of the processes of power (Layder 1994). Hence, the limits and control of power are difficult to define. This is in sharp contrast to feminists who have a clearer sense of who *owns* the dominant power and moreover the power of the *owned* discourse to decide what constitutes dominant identity, discourse and practice (see McNay 1992, Ramazanoglu 1989, Smith 1988, Warnke 1995). The significance of the relational between macro and micro contexts is relevant here. That which counts as legitimate rests on the qualities that are valued by a given culture and society and their operationalisation by those *with* power at the interface of public and private domains. Seen in these terms it is necessary to address power as an *entity* if we are to fully understand the implications for identity and experience.

Related to this is that within Foucault's discursive frame of analysis there is also the capacity to lose sight of the subject and the specific, individual, inter-subjective, cultural and local factors that influence identity. More definitive notions of *what* power is and the variable modes in which it operates (and not just what it yields) are relevant to appreciating differences and inequalities between classes, ethnicities, sexes and sexual orientations. Different social groups are constituted, as Foucault (1979a) would agree, on the basis of ethnicity, culture, gender, sexual orientation and social class, but identities cannot be fully explained on the basis of discourse, other resources and factors come into play.

Indeed, Poster (1984) argues that Foucault's emphasis on knowledge/power discourse leads him 'against himself to a totalising view of the history of sexuality' (p136) that does not allow comprehension of sexuality in ways other than collectively. Specifically regarding social class, he argues classes differ more than they are alike and their sexuality cannot be explained on the basis of one unifying discourse. Thus he calls for a more adequate theory of class sexuality. Similarly, some feminist critiques of Foucault (see below) call for a more explicit appreciation of the influence of gender inequalities on identity. Foucault is also accused of inattentiveness to issues of racial difference because

his discursive formations make it difficult to give priority to the influence of ethnicity, race and racism (Stoler 1995). I would add that nuanced understanding of sexuality and identity needs to be linked to regional and/or local particularities and the specifics of familial and cultural/religious influences.

Gender and Foucault

Foucault's work has contributed to understanding on the social construction of female sexuality, and hence lent more fuel to the feminist project than that of essentialising constructs that render women passively and immutably repressed (Jackson and Scott 1996). However, there is considerable scope for a more sophisticated reading of gendered power and its regulation of female sexuality, with a feminist critique now well established which debates the various interpretations of Foucault's reading of gender (see Ramazanoglu 1993, McNay 1992, 1994, O'Farrell 1989, McHoul and Grace 1995, Bordo 1999).

A significant element of this critique rests on Foucault's minimal recognition of the subject. As mentioned previously, this connotes notions that are amorphous and unspecific, and in doing so fails to give due prominence to gendered subjectivities, and female agency. Connected to this is Foucault's resistance to naming *who* holds the dominant power as discussed above. Inevitably, as feminist critiques (referred to above) have highlighted, the uncovering of these machinations of power, and the significance of gender within them, will rest on *who* and *what* is being researched; by *whom* it is carried out; and the pre-suppositions and analytic frameworks that are brought to practice. Similarly, Cuff et al conclude in their commentary on Foucault's ideas, particular epochs and structures of thought create

'.... an underlying matrix of presuppositions which confines the mind in a given period and makes only certain kinds of thought *thinkable*.'
(Cuff et al 1998:259; my emphasis).

It is within this notion of what becomes *thinkable*, by whom and in what context, and with implications for the scope of knowledge, which prompted exploration of the work of Dorothy Smith (1988), to which attention now turns. Additionally, Smith's ideas offer responses to other ambiguities and omissions raised by my evaluation of Foucault's work.

Dorothy Smith

This section begins by locating Dorothy Smith's work in relation to that of Foucault, then takes up specific aspects, namely, the workings of power, the impact of the macro on the micro, and finally, methodological considerations necessary to privileging the subject in theorising and researching.

If, as Foucault contends, specific epistemes are created by discourses that are historically and politically situational (under specific historical conditions, rules regulate vocabularies, ways of speaking, who can say what and with what consequences) then it follows that there is a fluidity to what constitutes as dominant in different times and places. While this is no doubt valuable to appreciating how certain institutions and practices come into being, it cannot be separated from his own insistence that discourses create their objects and by implication *bring things* into *being* (Foucault 1970). I agree with Smith (1988, 1978) that this is problematic if we do not consider the methodological and theoretical implications for how we come to create certain epistemes and act on what they signify since, as intimated previously, that which emerges as salient to the debate is dependant on the presuppositions of the researcher and her/his relationship to what is studied. But, Foucault was not particularly concerned with subjective evidence or with clarifying the influence of his own centredness in what becomes *thinkable*. This omission of an explicit reflexivity and data on subjective experience in Foucault's work runs parallel with other contentions. For instance, the evaluation of Foucault's work (above) points up the absence of a convincing acknowledgement of intersubjectivity, the lack of synthesis between macro and micro influences and minor emphasis on the significance of the microscopics of everyday life. Lifeworlds cannot be satisfactorily explained without closer analysis of these aspects. The next section therefore considers some elements of Smith's work for she draws attention to the micro, to everyday experience and the pertinent aspects of agency and meaning, and in contrast to Foucault, makes visible the perspectives of women.

Smith on power

The next section elucidates, in greater depth, the divergences between Smith's and Foucault's thinking. In striving for a feminist sociology Smith (1988) makes clear that her notion of power is less ubiquitous than Foucault suggests (1979a) in that it is

tangible and identifiable. There are two discernible but interconnected elements to this thesis. The first evolves from her position as a woman in sociology in that she believes the 'gender subtext' (1988:4) has been invisibilised by those in possession of power and influence, in the traditional institution of academic sociology; and the second tries to understand this observation in wider terms of 'relations of ruling' or 'ruling apparatus' (p3).

Smith (1988), like other feminists (see Ramazanoglu 1992, and Stanley and Wise 1990, 1993) argues that what is studied and given primacy has until recently, been influenced by a discourse devised and controlled by men, especially within sociology. In effect, this has obscured the female standpoint. Thus, she attempts to thematise gender in sociological study and moreover argues this can only occur by problematising universalising forms of theorising and aspects of discourse and methodology that rely on impersonal and so-called objective social enquiry:

'The "established" sociology gives us a consciousness that looks at society, social relations, and people's lives as if we could stand outside them, ignoring the particular local places in the everyday in which we live our lives. It claims objectivity not on the basis of its capacity to speak truthfully, but in terms of its specific capacity to exclude the presence and experience of particular subjectivities. Nonetheless, ...they are there and must be.' (Smith 1988: 2).

Smith argues that the ways in which sociology claims to know society 'constantly leaks into the general currency of thinking about society' (p2) thus establishing itself in the dominant 'relations of ruling' that systematically privilege the interests and perspectives of men. So insidious is this patriarchal form of power that it permeates social consciousness and controls how we come to know ourselves, which is particularly acute in its effects on constructions of women. In contrast to Foucault, Smith 'names' or identifies power in various agencies, institutions, and legislative decrees (Smith 1988).

In this system of what she terms 'extralocal' (1988:3) modes of ruling, the actualities of everyday lives become abstracted and generalised to yield impersonal and objectified representation. Texts and documents are significant to this thesis on the social organisation of knowledge: the local actualities of everyday life, Smith argues, become constructed and mediated by texts and documents (medical, health, tax, and police records, financial profiles, academic certificates, employment contracts) that are

constituted externally to individuals, kinship ties, familial relationships and localised practices. A standardisation of consciousness and experience results that is not the property of individual subjects but the property of organisation and discourse, rendering the 'knowledge' as partial and unrepresentative. As Smith applied this to explain the subordinate position of women, the working classes and ethnic minorities, it can be appropriated to explain the experiences of young people controlled by the exigencies of educational bureaucracy and ideology. Brown (1999) has argued that the everyday lived experiences and relationships of many young people often do not figure in the making of forms of thought and images that abound, rather they are manufactured as a product of ideological mechanisms that operate in educational and political systems and modes of communication prescribed by professionals occupying positions of power.

If young people have little or no power in the relations of ruling it will mean their experiences and perspectives are rarely involved in producing or developing the debate on young people and youth culture. The following extract captures the essence of this if Smith's reference to women is substituted by 'young people':

'The means women have had available to them to think, image, and make actionable their experience have been made for us and not by us. It means that our experience has not been represented in the making of our culture. There is a gap between where we are and the means we have to express and act. It means that the concerns, interests, and experiences forming "our" culture are those of men in positions of dominance whose perspectives are built on the silence of women (and of others).' (Smith 1988:19-20).

Whether or not young people's authentic experiences are acknowledged in the making of representations of culture, and more specifically, in the devising of sex education doctrine and practice, is an area for research exploration. But, my experience to date suggests that mechanisms exist that can contribute to a way of knowing the world which excludes young people's perspective. Hence my research questioning will scrutinise 'images, vocabulary, concepts, abstract terms of knowledge [that] are integral to the practice of power, to getting things done' (Smith 1988:17).

Smith provides detailed examples to illustrate and it is this aspect of her work that is particularly useful in satisfying a tangible grasping of what power *is* that is unclear in Foucault's more abstract concept of power. Further, Smith develops notions of exclusion to include not just the invisibilisation of certain groups and the role this plays in

structuring society and creating certain 'knowledges', she also acknowledges the broader effects on the individual of internalising (c.f. Foucault's capillary form of power) these relations of ruling, that is, the relation between the macro and the micro:

'... the ways in which we think about ourselves and one another and about our society - our images of how we should look, our homes, our lives, even our inner worlds - are given shape and distributed by the specialised work of people in universities and schools, in television, radio and newspapers ... forming the "ideological apparatuses" of the society¹.' (p17).

My intention is to explore both young people's awareness of the agents and agencies of power and any linkages to normative conceptions of identity and practice, self-concept, aspirations and future subjectivities.

This account has summarised Smith's identification of (some of) the exclusionary mechanisms and their effects on individuals and groups. She takes this a step further than Foucault by considering the methodological implications for correcting the bias in constructions of thought and ways of seeing and knowing. Before discussion of this aspect and by way of repositioning Smith in relation to Foucault, the next section presents a brief overview of Smith's line of thinking vis-à-vis the macro-micro debate.

Smith on dualism

Smith's position on the macro-micro linkage is clearer than Foucault's more ambiguous stance. Where Foucault rejects dualism, Smith accepts a version of dualisms (1978, 1988) that sees the two sides as closely interwoven. Her work also differs from Foucault and supports my methodological approach (and that of several feminist authors, see methodology, chapter 4) in asserting that analysis of macro-micro linkage can be usefully approached from the direction of the micro, hence her emphasis on the everyday experience of actual people (Smith 1988). The emphasis on capitalist systems evidences her Marxist political leaning, but her prioritisation of feminist ideology in approaches to understanding provide an important corrective to work emanating from the male 'gaze' of Foucault.

Hence, her engagement with the macro/structure debate centres on the influence of patriarchal societies in situating female subjectivities in general, but specifically she

¹ Smith acknowledges the taking of the term from Althusser's concept of 'ideological state apparatus', though has not applied it with the same theoretical rigour.

challenges the ways in which 'knowledge' is created by the universalising concepts evolved out of male standpoint sociology that then permeate and become instructive in mainstream society. In this way the macro and micro are regarded as inseparable, thus Smith does not conform to dualistic thinking that analyses the macro and micro as oppositional or mutually exclusive. Her dualism is apparent here in that she discerns social reality on two levels but they are intertwined as opposed to being mutually exclusive: the first order addresses the minutiae of everyday lives (the standpoint of the subject) and the lived experience of localised practices (i.e. micro view). This must be appreciated first, and then contextualised with the second order or macro level, with an exploration of how '... [experience] is shaped in the extended relations of larger social and political relations.' (Smith 1988:10).

So it can be seen that Smith does not reject the macro but instead regards its influence as more effectively understood from the position of the actor rather than the external observer or macrosociological perspective. As the next section illustrates, this leads to particular methodological preferences.

Methodology - 'Subjects as knowers and actors'

Smith's primary motive to establish a standpoint sociology for women inheres in particular research methods and analytic procedures that 'preserve the presence of active and experiencing subjects' and 'values subjects as knowers and actors' (Smith 1988:105). Acknowledging the *everyday world as problematic* (Smith 1988) means to look for the inner organisation and practices, contingencies, and internal and external influences that generate the ordinary features of people's lives. It is to gain a grasp of the world from 'where she stands' (p106). Smith's concern to provide such accounts that privilege empirical evidence and the microscopics of everyday existence contrast markedly with Foucault's unwillingness to position himself alongside the actors in the micro. This is well illustrated by Smith's preference for the ethnographic approach wherein she rejects research practices that begin with the generalised; rather, she stresses that one must begin with and be faithful to the actualities of particular experiences and settings, and discover *how things work* and *how they are actually put together*. Then and only then should this be related to the generalised and generalising relations of ruling. This practice is supported by much feminist research especially in education (see for

instance, Measor 1989, Mirza 1992, Griffin 1986, Bannerji 1999). It can mean asking questions more than once, rephrasing questions, or asking questions that participants might construe as naive, but which are necessary to gain reliable data on seeing the world from the nuanced perspective of interviewees.

As Smith argues, this is a type of inquiry that from the outset creates a space for the absent subject wherein external pre-givens and presuppositions have no place - it is the actualities of everyday worlds and spoken words that matters. Centring primarily on the subject diminishes the tendency towards the universalising of experience and in turn problematises representations that have dominated normative or popular conceptions. Regarding contemporary young people, this would mean problematising representations that are based almost entirely on sexual and/or drug using behaviour (Aggleton 1998, Griffin 1993).

However hearing the subjects' perspective does not automatically translate into producing authentic accounts of reality. As Smith points out, to preserve the presence of the subject, it is imperative that the subject is understood as a second-order subject shaped by history and experience and that the researcher/reader of such accounts is also situated in a particular context with an individual history:

'The constructs of the social scientist are, as Schutz (1962) has pointed out second-order constructs. The phenomena which she studies and seeks to explain are already structured by the interpretations and characterizations of those she studies. That structure is an essential feature of the phenomena, not something added to it which she must strip away to get at "how things really are".' (Smith 1978:23).

This indexicality between subject and researcher/reader, both as second-order constructs, must be consciously acknowledged for it shapes the resultant meanings. Such a consciousness is arguably more achievable with methods that endeavour to gain depth insight of subjects' histories and experiences and then analysing these alongside the researcher's presuppositions and history. Reflexivity then, becomes a salient aspect of this type of research enquiry.

In looking for research methods that do not transform the subject to an object, Smith has understandably been influenced by qualitatively oriented traditions, such as the aforementioned phenomenological approach of Alfred Shutz (1972) and the work of

Harold Garfinkel (1967) on ethnomethodology. This distinguishes her from Foucault. However, Smith did not embrace phenomenological sociology wholesale, for it did not satisfy her combined interest in the micro and macro (or 'relations of ruling' in her terms). Phenomenological inquiry might satisfy the requirement for beginning with the subject, but this is not the same as feminist sociological inquiry because it does not provide for examination of the 'relations of ruling', so essential to visibilising the feminist standpoint:

'It has been suggested to me that a phenomenological sociology is a feminist sociology merely because it begins with the consciousness of the knower and is hence "subjective", but the phenomenological perspective remains within the conceptual abstracted world and begins from there, taking for granted the material and social organisation of the bifurcated consciousness, and does not render its organisation and conditions examinable.' (Smith 1988:86).

The contention is that while we need to understand everyday life and practices of local worlds, these cannot be understood entirely within their own terms; the relations of ruling organise these local worlds and therefore, must be accounted for:

'.. it is a commitment to an investigation and explication of how "it" actually is, of how "it" actually works, of actual practices and relations.'
(Smith 1988: 160).

As previously mentioned, to get at 'how it is' requires that which is reported in the scope of everyday practice to be understood in relation to external determinants of experience. While Smith is clear that individuals are the experts on their everyday worlds, and accepts that extralocal factors determine experience, it does not mean that subjects can explain the relation between the local and nonlocal (or organisation of the ruling apparatus). Analysing and explaining this connectedness becomes the responsibility of the researcher and hence signals Smith's dissent from the more purist phenomenological project. Here the researcher's principles, research tools, histories and social relations become part of the ethnographic way of seeing, because they constrain methods if they are not accounted for¹. Hence, reflexivity pervades rigorous ethnographic researching, alongside others tools, such as, observation, interviewing, personal recollection, and textual analysis - the researcher is never anything other than situated and always part of the anatomy of the final account.

¹ The idea that emotional selves, personal identities and relationships are implicated, constructed and reproduced in and by research practice and ethnographic writing, has been developed by other writers (e.g. see Measor and Sikes 1992, and Coffey 1999).

Summary

In critiquing Smith's work alongside that of Foucault, they offer different, but not irreconcilable insights to understanding which I will now summarise:

1. Foucault recognises multiple powers and discourses that operate from the macrological level; Smith's analysis permits a naming of some of these powers (or 'extralocal' (1988:3) modes of ruling) and their influence in the world of the subjective everyday, and at particular moments in time. But, Smith concentrates on class and patriarchal domination, and in rather a conventional sense, by seeing them only in a constraining and prohibitive role. Whereas, Foucault's conception of power may be less graspable, but it does acknowledge multiple forms (other than patriarchy and class) and allows for the enabling or productive aspects of power to be considered (see 'Positive Power'). As a feminist I am persuaded by Smith's and others' standpoint (notably Ramazanoglu 1992; and Stanley and Wise 1983, 1990, 1993) for visiblising female subjectivity in theorising and research, but Smith's analytic reliance on class and patriarchy leaves other structural mediators unacknowledged. For instance, the influence of spatial and geographic location, familial norms, schooling, cultural and ethnic affiliations, and the ramifications of the dominant discourse on youth, may all ultimately relate back to patriarchy and the organised workings of the capitalist system, but their specific influence needs teasing out, if we are to avoid reductionism in the search for explanation and nuanced understanding¹.

2. While Smith offers useful insights in her critique of external macro structuring agents and their influence on social relations, she, like Foucault, resists thorough debate with the macro-micro question, or indeed using the term dualism. Perhaps this is because of her insistence that such debates stem from the universalist premises of the male gaze (Marx excluded) - a position she will not affiliate with despite the more sophisticated analyses of latter day social theorists.

¹ In addition, restricting analytic frameworks to class and/or patriarchy repeats earlier studies of youth, such as that of Patrick (1973), Willis (1977), Corrigan (1979), Jefferson (1976), Clarke (1976) and Jenkins (1983). Gender was introduced to these studies of 'lads' by the work of McRobbie (1980) and Griffin (1985b, 1986). While this writing is significant and indeed, taken together, reflects Smith's Marxist and feminist premise, it is difficult to abstract a sense of the complexities of the wider interaction order and how these connect, complement or contradict at the level of the public and private domain.

3. Smith's theorising is useful in her engagement with issues of methodology and reflexivity, and her call for transparency in the process and product of research. This renders a different way of seeing from that of Foucault who relied on historic archives and other secondary source documentation, and rarely justified his preferred method. Smith's humanist orientation counters some of the weaknesses inherent in relying on secondary source evidence, and eliminates the possibility of obfuscating active subjects by reducing them to objects of social systems.

In conclusion, for a less restrictive analysis of power, a synthesis of Foucault's and Smith's ideas is more useful. But, the concepts used remain too abstract to enable a firmer conception of how power works in micro and macro domains, and its implications for subjectivity (its reproduction and production) and agency. For these reasons, I have added to my synthesis ideas proposed by Giddens, Habermas, Benhabib, Ball, and Furlong and Cartmel, which are considered in the ensuing discussion. These authors contribute complementary tools for seeing the world (Foucault 1980) of young people through increasingly cumulative and complex knowledges. The ideas of Anthony Giddens are explored first.

Anthony Giddens

Giddens's ideas on identity in contemporary contexts permit an analysis that necessarily recognises the complexity and multitude of influences that operate in individual's lifeworlds. The ensuing discussion focuses on this aspect of Giddens's work but I begin with a brief overview of ideas from his earlier work (1971-1984) that are relevant in attending to questions of how the macro-structural intersects with the micro-subjective world of social life.

Convergences between the macro and micro

Where Smith concentrates on the micro and subjective realm of experience and Foucault dwells on the exogenous processes that operate through discourses and power-knowledges, Giddens bridges the two by breaking down the oppositions and exploring the overlaps between them. He moves beyond 'traditional' dualistic thinking by placing his *Theory of Structuration* (Giddens 1976, 1984) between the two positions of theories

of collectivities and theories of the individual (Giddens 1977). In effect he regards constructs of the macro-micro, structure-agency, or society-individual, as two sides of the same coin, with the relationship between them being messy and complex. The complexity of his ideas forms the main contention of debates on the practical utility of Giddens's structuration theory. This is extensive and involves varied opinions (Archer 1995, 1996; Held and Thompson 1989, Clarke et al 1990, Craib 1992, Cassel 1993) but most are agreed there are unnecessary obscurities that impede useful application. Despite these obscurities, Giddens's structuration theory is useful for looking at and synthesising the various possibilities, potentials and mediators of social life. Methodologically he opens up the debate on *what to look for* in society rather than suggesting a clear hypothesis of *what actually* happens.

The two fold themes in Giddens's work, modernity, identity and everyday lives (see 'Identity in high modernity' below), and the constitution of social life as conceptualised in structuration theory, rest on the central premise of social *praxis* (or the transformative nature of human action and interaction) 'to the production and reproduction of society' (Giddens 1982:115). While Giddens recognises the influence of institutions, social structures and systems (Giddens 1984), he argues they do not operate independently of the reflexivity and motivations of human beings. Thus Giddens problematises objectivism (1982) and 'universal laws' for explaining social life, in similar ways to Smith (1978, 1988) because impersonal and external observations do not provide full answers to understanding the subjective motivations of individuals and groups. The logic deployed in causal laws of natural sciences and positivism cannot be applied to understanding varying motivations, meanings and consequences that arise from different contexts of time and space. This problematises a deterministic relationship between cause and effect because illogicality and irrationality are observable components of praxis and individual agency.

Giddens is committed to believing that social theory has concentrated on epistemological issues (how we know what we know as the foundation for knowledge) at the expense of ontological issues (the nature of being and the things we know). He claims the priority should be 'with reworking conceptions of human being and human doing' (1984:xx) in

order to produce realistic accounts of actual experience, behaviour and social situations¹. However, while the reality or ontology of human social life is no doubt important, theoretical conclusions are more robust if they have embraced epistemological questions of how we come to make these claims. In dissenting from concern with epistemological issues, Giddens undermines his own stance on the centrality of the reflexive self to human practice, and the epistemological potential of human beings to ask questions of themselves of how they come to believe certain things as important to their ontological security or insecurity. In this way Giddens shows some reductionist tendencies with his excessive reliance on ontological security as the basis of consciousness (Stones 1998).

Overall, Giddens refuses to accept a view of social phenomena that is independent of individuals. If actors are 'objectified' and constructed only as a product (and reproduction) of the constraining influences of social structure, it leaves no scope for appreciating the potential for production.

This chapter goes on to look at some specific concepts in Giddens's later work on identity. These are subjectivity and the reflexive self, the saliency of time and space to articulations of identity, 'fateful moments', and fragile identities and personal meaninglessness.

Identity in 'high' modernity

While Foucault's work is useful in focusing on the domination of individuals through discourses and practices and social institutions, and Smith positions the perspective of the subject and everyday experience in this debate, neither author satisfactorily explores the role of the active subject and their negotiation of the macro-micro interface in shaping and defining identity. Giddens offers useful insights here.

In recent writings Giddens has been primarily concerned with agency, concepts of identity, and their relationship to 'high' or 'radical' modernity (Clark and Hirst 1996). Where Foucault's work has been criticised for limited accounts of agency and for an overemphasis on the repressive workings of modernity (Best and Kellner 1991), Giddens (1991) not only attends to these issues but takes them a step further in considering the influence of present day political issues and the changing nature of institutional forms and

¹ This position is somewhat weakened by Giddens's lack of empirical evidence to support his theorising.

social orders. He believes that the differences between 'old' and 'high' (or contemporary) modernity must be recognised because they radically alter the nature of everyday social life and personal experience. His argument is that in late modernity, globalization, increasing secularisation and the diminishing significance of traditional beliefs and customs, renders more dynamic forms of social order and institutions, which in turn create increasingly complex and problematic connections with individual life and the self. It is these changes in post-traditional settings and their influence in shaping the differing nature of present political issues that Foucault is accused of neglecting (Best and Kellner 1991). Giddens, like Smith but unlike Foucault, does not minimise the influence of capitalism but provides a more robust analysis than Smith (1988) of its connectedness to the self and the implications for individual agency. Where Smith sees capitalism (and patriarchy) as almost entirely constraining, Giddens considers too, some of the progressive aspects of this and other institutions.

Subjectivity and the reflexive self

Giddens argues that the complexity of multiple systems of thought, power and expertise in late modernity create a 'puzzling diversity of options and possibilities' (1991:3). For ontological security, the way in which individuals negotiate the chances and uncertainties inhered by such contexts, is linked to identity, subjectivity and a *reflexive self*:

'- the self, like the broader institutional contexts in which it exists, has to be reflexively made.' (op. cit.).

This positioning of active subjects contrasts with Foucault's notion of subjectivity and identity conceptualised in relation to *strategies* of normalising capillary action and resistance. In Giddens's conceptualisation, *strategy* is linked to subjectivity and the reflexive self, but *risk* is also fundamental to the way the social world is organised. He suggests that a notion of the self as a reflexive project means a constant reflexive ordering and re-ordering of social relations (1990) by both the 'lay actors and technical specialists' (1991:3) involving the trading of rewards and satisfactions against a shifting array of risks and insecurities (1991, 1992).

A key determinant of the reflexive self in this analysis (as emerging from Giddens's project on modernity) is the growth of 'abstract systems' that contribute to the plurality of choices that individuals have to negotiate. By 'abstract systems' Giddens means

systems of expertise and symbolism (1991) that can de-skill, alienate and fragment the self (Clark and Hirst 1996) from day-to-day life by appropriating local skills and knowledge and reorganising them in the light of technical knowledge:

‘The reflexive project of the self, which consists in the sustaining of coherent, yet continuously revised, biographical narratives, takes place in the context of multiple choices as filtered through abstract systems.’
(Giddens 1991:5).

Thus in their search for ontological security, individuals routinely have to recreate themselves in order to sustain any sense of who to be, how to be or how to act¹. This can be problematic because while modernity may present choices, as Giddens suggests, it might not offer appropriate guidance on which options to take, hence the potential for alienation and de-skilling. He contends that *lifestyle*² is particularly significant here. The more that tradition loses its hold in shaping a sense of identity, and the more controversial the abstract system and diversity of authorities, then the more the individual has to negotiate lifestyle choices. Individuals attach importance to these choices and thus they become increasingly important in mediating self identity and behaviour. Risk assessment, couched within the imponderables of the abstract system, is vital here:

‘Reflexively organised life-planning, which normally presumes consideration of risks as filtered through contact with expert knowledge, becomes a central feature of the structuring of self-identity.’ (Giddens 1991:5).

Existential dilemmas may arise if the reflexive sense of ‘who to be’ is constantly unsettled by contact with abstract systems.

The influence of ‘expert knowledge’ (Giddens op. cit.) on self-identity has some parallels with Foucault’s (1979a) notion of capillary action and the permeation of power that renders self-regulation, and also ties in with Smith’s ‘extralocal’ mode of ruling (1988:3) and the influence on the everyday. However, neither Smith nor Foucault adequately envisage the capacity of the reflexive self to resist internalisation of the expert view, or

¹ The introduction to chapter 5 reviews the work of theorists on gender and sexuality who argue that identity is performative and involves selection from a range of different discourses. This has different implications for masculine and feminine subjectivity.

² Where Giddens uses the term ‘lifestyle’ he does not mean in the restricted sense, as used by the media and advertising, to promote certain ‘lifestyle’ commodities as consumed by the more affluent classes. Poorer members of society are more or less excluded from making ‘lifestyle choices’ in this sense. His use of ‘lifestyle’ and ‘lifestyle choices’ refers to decisions and actions taken on a day-to-day basis under conditions that recognise structural inequalities and material constraint.

moreover, that even if the expert view is sub-consciously internalised, individual agency may disregard it and consciously act oppositionally to the prescribed way of being. Therefore, Foucault's and Smith's ideas on the effects of power are more useful if contended as potential effects, rather than universal or absolutely repressive in their influence.

In sum, the reflexive self-potential of human beings is the crucial factor that problematises Foucault's universalising notion of self-regulation. Furthermore it addresses the potential for production as well as reproduction of norms and behaviours. Having said this, the intention is not to underplay the capacity for reproduction since abstract systems are likely to have a cumulative impact and therefore greater potential for reproduction, if considered over time and in specific contexts. The next section considers the mutualistic dynamic between time, space and identity.

Futures, time, space and 'fateful moments'

Giddens analyses the relationship between the self, social context and the temporal. He regards three characteristics as significant. These are (i) the reflexive ordering and reordering of social relations; (ii) the disembedding of social systems; and (iii) the separation of time and space (Giddens 1990). For Giddens, self identity results from the interplay between reflexivity and the situations in which it takes place, in other words, it is embedded in social relations in particular contexts. But, the 'symbolic tokens' and 'expert' knowledge of abstract systems create disembedding mechanisms which separate interaction from the particularities of these situations or what Giddens terms 'locales' (1991:20). Differing aspects of time and space add another important dimension to articulations of self-identity and social relations. The spatial features of social lives in specific locales mingle with different conceptions of time: patterns of biographical time (related to individual lifespan) intersect with the more routinised encounters of daily activity, and these intersect with institutional or organisational time, that is, for instance, the demands of government institutions, educational establishments and industry. These latter aspects of time influence the intrinsic day to day interactions of social relations. But these then become diffused by a separated and more extrinsic notion of time and space that has emerged in the late modern age. The here and now of time and space interaction is displaced by the effects of globalization and electronic techniques of surveillance and

communication; together with the more abstract social relations of class, gender, ethnicity, employment and economic standing that stretch away over wide spans of time and space.

This is salient to appreciating the impact on identity of transitions, say from school to college or work. Such transitions present a host of new and different (and often distanced) domains of abstract systems. In formal contexts individuals will inevitably meet new and unfamiliar systems of institutional thought and expertise; and in the informal context, old and familiar social/friendship networks might become fragmented and replaced by new relationships. This poses challenges for the connectedness between current social milieu, practices and self identity because mediations of experience are no longer restricted to the specifics of knowable locales and abstract systems. Rather, self-identity must acknowledge the added dimension of new time-space transformations on social existence.

But, conceptions of self in the present are not separated from perceptions of self in the past and the future. As Giddens suggests:

‘There is no society in which individuals do not have a sense of future, present and past.’ (1991:16).

One of my research objectives is to explore perceptions of self in relation to current social milieu and those anticipated for the future.

Giddens contends that it was in pre-modern settings that ‘time and space were connected through the situatedness of place’ (1991:16) but it is arguable that this still occurs in modern times but the degree of connectedness depends on the point in the lifecourse that is under study. Thus ‘situatedness’ is best understood as relative to the positioning of the subjects (with age and autonomy being salient) and the degree to which this is influenced by the separation of time and space. Hence as time and space become stretched out, there is the potential for more insecurities to be introduced and tensions created because, as indicated earlier, there may be more options to be negotiated, but not necessarily the guidance on choices to be made. This process holds the potential for alienation and deskilling. These concepts are developed later (see ‘Fragile identities and personal

meaninglessness') in looking at the relationship to 'existential separation' (Giddens 1991).

Understanding people's abilities to create a meaningful sense of self in new contexts is helped by Giddens's concept of 'fateful moments'¹. These are episodes in the lifecourse where lifestyle is thrown into question:

'They are phases at which things are wrenched out of joint, where a given state of affairs is suddenly altered by a few key events.'
(Giddens 1991:113).

Some fateful moments include elements of choice and therefore risk and this responsibility for self-destiny can create anxiety:

'Fateful moments are those when individuals are called on to take decisions that are particularly consequential for their ambitions, or more generally for their future lives. Fateful moments are highly consequential for a person's destiny'. (Giddens 1991:112).

Giddens offers examples of fateful moments, such as, decisions to marry, seek employment, or more generally, putting 'time to good use' (1991:113). Notions of fateful moments from the perspective of those entering the transition to leaving school are particularly interesting and likely to add different examples to those Giddens provides that refer only to adults.

The role of abstract systems and the degree of separation of time and space is variable. In some situations the 'extralocal' (Smith 1988) expert-knowledge-system is what creates the fateful moment, and decisions have to be made on this basis. For instance, decisions whether to accept a form of employment might be judged not on the basis of suitability but on the option to have some or no money. The distant and centralised expert system is primarily concerned to reduce unemployment rates, rather than matching job to individual needs and desires. But quite often the decision is not clear cut and information derived from the expert system may influence the risk assessment but it is the individual who has to run the risk and by definition take responsibility for the fateful decision.

¹ Aspects of Giddens's 'fateful moments' have some commonalities with Norman Denzin's (1989) notion of 'epiphanies' as episodes in the lifecourse that have the potential for turning- point consequences and/or transformational experiences.

Given different structural positionings some individual's fateful decisions will involve not choice but rather a pragmatic acceptance of 'what life throws at you'. Giddens (1991) refers to this as an approach to life of generalised coping. This acknowledges the possibility of reaching a crossroads in existence and self-identity where self-reflexivity might suggest several options but these become limited by an awareness of a macro-embeddedness and material and/or socio-cultural constraints. Feeling poorly resourced on economic and material grounds renders the greater possibility of taking the option that holds best guarantees of security, even if this undermines other aspirations, of say independence or emotional well-being. Reflexivity is still present in these fateful moments but limitations are evident. This is consistent with Scott Lash's (1993) critique of the limits of reflexivity. In contrast to Giddens, Lash suggests that reflexivity has limited impact on agency and that late modern subjectivity is marked by contingency and contradiction.

The embodiedness of embeddedness

Another strand in the embeddedness of self identity is how one element of self connects to others. Giddens's ideas and literature on the sociology of the body are useful to appreciating the significance of this.

Constructs of the 'self' cannot be separated from discourses on gender and sexuality that present different implications for identity and subjectivity (Hollway 1998). Linked to this are other mediations of the body and identity such as physical appearance and fashion. This can lead to perceptions of 'fragile' self identities.

The concept of 'self' as fragile project is not new (see Berger and Luckmann 1971, Lasch 1980) but ties in with more recent interest in the sociology of the body (Frank 1990, Turner 1992, Scott and Morgan 1993, Shilling 1993) that recognises the important role which the body has in the reflexive ordering of self and social identity. The body as possessing value in certain social fields is important here and Shilling cites Bourdieu's (1984) contribution with his notion of the body as physical capital. Like Shilling, Giddens bridges the gap between sociologies of the 'self' and the 'body', because crucially for Giddens, the reflexive self is also an *embodied* self. In late modernity, the surfaces, experiences and images of the body become central to conceptions of the self (Clark and

Hirst 1996). This is most obvious in areas such as fashion, body size/shape and dieting, but most crucially (especially for teenagers) in fateful moments relating to sexuality and gender when the smooth workings of abstract systems are called into question. Giddens argues that because of modernity's overriding emphasis on control, moral principles endowed by abstract systems often run counter to concepts of risk. This can have implications for young people if they experience reflexive tensions between trying to structure a sense of their own self identity (and the risks intrinsic to this) and the power of socially organised knowledge and claims on 'who to be' and 'how to act'. This is what Giddens terms an 'internally referential system of knowledge and power' (1991:144).

Within this the individual is inseparable from wider contexts of social events:

'....the self establishes a trajectory which can only become coherent through the reflexive use of the broader social environment' (p148).

But, as a consequence of the centralising aspects of modernity, Giddens suggests that certain aspects of day to day life, such as sexuality (among others¹), become *sequestered* by modern constitutional forms of control, thus removing them from everyday experience. In effect this means that sexual experience becomes routinely hidden from view.

However, at the same time as modern societies remove sex 'behind the scenes', running in parallel is the hypersexualised society of the media and commodification of sexuality to promote consumerism (Bordo 1993). In this way the 'sexual' and sexual satisfaction become reconstituted and inseparable from the reflexive project of the self, and are in turn both present and absent from social relations. Both aspects influence internally referential systems of reflexivity². It is arguable (and this is pursued in my research questioning) that the 'hidden' and the 'reconstituted' serve different purposes: they may be present at discrete moments in public spheres (of say schooling and government ideology) when they serve a pedagogic or political purpose (eg sex education as stipulated by the National Curriculum; government targets for reducing teen conceptions;

¹ Giddens (1991:168) points up other aspects of life that become sequestered e.g. madness, criminality, sickness, death and nature.

² As Giddens reminds us, this relates to Foucault's (1979a) various 'discourses of sexuality' and self-regulation but I contend that Foucault was less keen than Giddens to acknowledge the power of individual agency and the potential of the reflexive self to resist or reconcile contradictory mechanisms of control.

or for party political point scoring), but, remain absent or segregated from wider discourses of routine day to day activity. The latter concealment or denial of sexuality to everyday identities and experiences, or, the visiblising of sexual behaviour to suit certain ends, contributes to conceptions of how 'experts' view sexuality in the moral order of things. It is all too easy to apply Foucault's thoughts on earlier modernity to summing up the state of affairs in contemporary settings:

'What is peculiar to modern societies, in fact, is not that they consigned sex to a shadow existence, but that they dedicated themselves to speaking of it *ad infinitum* while explaining it as the secret.' (1979a: 35).

On government strategy that condemns teenage sexuality or lone parenting to reduce the costs to welfare budgets and losses to economic labour allegedly created by early motherhood (MacDonald 1997), Foucault is similarly erudite in his observations:

'All this garrulous attention which has us in a stew over sexuality, is it not motivated by one basic concern: ...in short, to constitute a sexuality that is economically useful and politically conservative.' (1979a: 36-7).

The institutional processes that take knowledge and information and reorganise and reconstitute it before placing it back in the public sphere, is what Giddens refers to as 'institutional reflexivity' (1991: 20). My research explores whether young people experienced any intimations of morality that derive from institutional reflexivity, whether this contributes to the reflexive ordering of identity, and whether this necessarily leads to repressive consequences.

The capacity for contradiction and contingency as characteristic of subjectivity (Lash 1993) requires recognition here. While Lash proposes that these characteristics limit the extent of reflexivity, I suggest that they are best viewed as another element in the reflexive equation that creates more possibilities. This is related to the embeddedness of reflexive identity and returns me to Giddens's notion of time and space. It is important to encourage research participants to discuss their identity in relation to the immediacy of temporal and spatial 'locales' and their previous experience, but also to project to different times and places in the future. Future lifeworlds will be indefinite and it will be interesting to gain a sense of any contradictions or contingencies that participants envisage.

In looking to their futures, it can be predicted that 15 and 16 year old young people will be aware of the imminent crossroads in their existence, that is, fateful moments,

‘... when the individual must launch into something new, knowing that a decision made, or a specific action followed, has an irreversible quality, or at least that it will be difficult thereafter to revert to the old paths.’
(Giddens 1991:114).

However, and this is the crux of my argument that ‘experts’ have a duty to provide appropriate guidance to teenagers, these fateful moments do not necessarily mean that things will go awry or that individuals must necessarily lose out. With meaningful support, young people can be helped to believe in and develop the skills and abilities of ‘authentic’ (Giddens 1991:9) selves, and henceforth more confident and able to confront risk environments without the consequences of getting it wrong. This will not be possible for all young people, but more guidance would help in turning fateful moments into opportunities for reskilling and empowerment:

‘In any given situation, provided that the resources of time and other requisites are available, the individual has the possibility of a partial or more full-blown reskilling in respect of specific decisions or contemplated courses of action’. (Giddens 1991:139).

There is specific significance here regarding the imposition of notions of ‘bad’ sexuality or sexual behaviour by extrinsic agents/processes, as mentioned above. This can obfuscate other aspects of bodily identity and subjectivity and trigger processes of self-doubting and personal meaninglessness. Giddens suggests this can lead to a biographic fragility and struggle ‘to keep a particular narrative going’ (1991:54). Attention now turns to notions of fragile biographies and the relationship to the future.

Fragile identities and personal meaninglessness

Giddens (1991) asserts that existential questions of self identity are bound up with the fragile nature of biographies that individuals supply about themselves. For ontological security, the nature of being presumes a continuity of self identity or a ‘persistence of feelings of personhood in a continuous self and body’ (Giddens 1991:55). Insecurities creep in when both previousness and futures feel under threat. Giddens’s reference to Charles Taylor (1989) illustrates this:

‘In order to have a sense of who we are, we have to have a notion of how we have become, and of where we are going’. (Giddens 1991:54).

My research explores factors which influence feelings of personhood both now and in the future, with particular attention to familial biography, wider community culture and religious and ethnic upbringing. Giddens argues that some factors are more effective in establishing the protective cocoon 'which filters out ... many of the dangers which threaten the integrity of the self' (1991:54). Those who are more certain of what futures look like are likely to be less fearful that fateful moments might lead to them 'losing out'. This leads to an acceptance of

'integrity as worthwhile ... [and] .. sufficient self-regard to sustain a sense of the self as "alive" - within the scope of reflexive control ...' (op. cit.).

Recognition of the effects of differences in personal biographies adds another dimension to the limits of reflexivity. Heaphy (1996) points out that overemphasising reflexivity risks underplaying the extent to which identities are marked by difference and complexity, and any questioning of identity must recognise variability in terms of personal experience and histories, and differing social and cultural positionings in terms of gender, ethnicity and sexual orientation. Because local and distanced abstract systems intermingle with the influence of cultural and ethnic mores, it renders a variability in the degree to which any is influential. So 'expert' systems on sexuality (schooling and the media for instance) may be less powerful than familial/cultural norms and religious social orders, with the latter providing greater (present and future) ontological security for some young people. Whereas those with less familial support, shorter term sense of the future, and less coherent cultural boundaries may experience the 'expert' system as more dominant in its influence on the reflexive ordering of self and the creation and moulding of identity.

The greater the influence of present and future abstract systems, the greater is the potential for influencing some reconstruction of identity. The individual's potential to maintain processes of 'self-actualisation' (Berger and Luckmann 1967) within 'new' worlds will vary. Those with the most genuine acceptance of self, and ability 'to keep the narrative going', are likely to have the greatest potential and confidence in their future and reconstituted self.

Sexuality, as a key aspect of the embodied and embedded self, and as one of the areas of life that risks sequestration, poses particular existential questions for young people. The

form of these questions is not universal and varies between individuals, and time and place. As Giddens notes, the 'reflexive project of the self generates programmes of actualisation and mastery' (1991:9), but faith in an 'authenticity' of self is of pre-eminent value in creating a framework for 'self-actualisation'. Giddens is clear that some choices lead to self-actualisation (and thus recognises the progressive aspects of strategies of power) while others lead to marginalisation and exclusion. If the authentic self is denied or questioned, feelings of personal meaninglessness arise and are rife with unanswered moral questions. Giddens uses the term 'existential separation' (p9) to describe this:

'Existential separation is not so much a separation of individuals from others as a separation from the moral resources necessary to live a full and satisfying existence.' (op. cit.).

If young people are denied support for reskilling and developing the necessary resources for life, there is greater potential to develop existential isolation and the 'the feeling that life has nothing to offer' (op. cit.). However, Furlong and Cartmell (1997) suggest that young people often take personal responsibility for perceived shortfalls in resources. The significant difference is that it is not 'life' that is the problem, but *them* in that life - in other words, young people see themselves as responsible for the position they find themselves in. Rather than seeing society, with its structural inequalities and over stretched institutional resources, as excluding them, they take personal responsibility for their lack of resources to make them worthy of inclusion. This idea will be explored in the thesis.

Strategies that can contribute to a sense of isolation and alienation are developed in relation to Habermas's theoretical formulations in the next section.

Jurgen Habermas

The intention here is not to provide a comprehensive review or critique of Habermas's work for its contribution to modern sociological theory. Rather, it is to depict those aspects of Habermas's voluminous writings that first, offer an alternative way of seeing, or counter the omissions or ambiguities in the authors' work discussed previously; and second, are considered particularly significant for their explanatory power in revealing

the systematic mechanisms that can operate to influence the experience, behaviour and identity of young people.

While the scope and stylistic complexity of Habermas's work defies easy summary, the broad themes presupposing the relevant ideas are sketched out first, followed by a more detailed consideration of some specific elements.

Habermas's work draws on three broad domains of thought: the neo-Marxist tradition of the 'Frankfurt School' of critical theory; phenomenology; and hermeneutics (or interpretive sociology). Following a similar trajectory to Giddens, but unlike Foucault, Habermas grounds his original theoretical formulations in the work of grand theorists. His ideas were synthesised though critiquing the work of Mead, Marx, Weber, Durkheim and Parsons, but in contrast to Giddens (and Foucauldian thought) Habermas does not reject structuralism outright, and incorporates both system and action theory in his work. Like Giddens's 'structuration theory' (1984) Habermas attempts to marry false oppositions but where Giddens rejects the validity of the 'objective' or independent stance of systems, Habermas regards systems as distinct (and objective) entities that operate through the partly independent operations of power and money. Moreover, Habermas sees systems as having increasingly greater impact in late modernity.

Phenomenology and hermeneutics become salient in his proposition that social life can not be understood entirely in terms of the 'system' (or economic power) and must embrace the interpretations and meanings of active subjects and their everyday interactions. Smith's ideas are reminiscent of this notion (1988) but Habermas problematises Marx (and the traditional Frankfurt School thinkers) for excluding the world of the everyday in a more systematic and engaged manner than Smith. However, Habermas reproduces the malestream perspective of his critical theory predecessors in failing to thematise gender in his theorising (see below, 'Absence of gender in Habermasian theory', for further discussion).

Habermas's concern with the importance of the everyday naturally leads to a specific methodological stance. Here he reflects Giddens and Smith in rejecting positivism and objectivism because of the reductionist tendency to understandings of social life. Hence

his leaning towards phenomenology (particularly the work of Schutz and Winch) in the search for more meaningful answers. However, Habermas still maintains the importance of the external observer's perspective to yielding more complete answers.

Hermeneutics (or interpretation) is regarded by Habermas as particularly significant to communication in the public sphere (Habermas 1962). Later, these thoughts are developed in the *Theory of Communicative Action* (1986), wherein Habermas addresses what he regards as crises in contemporary society, characterised by loss of individual motivation and personal meaninglessness. The ideas espoused in this theory give some legitimacy to the 'truth' of what people disclose about their worlds and the importance of appreciating how people communicate. It also facilitates analysis of the power of professionals and Giddens's (1991) notion of the rise of 'experts' and expert systems' to decide that which is not allowed to be said or construed as illegitimate, within public settings or *abstract systems* (Giddens 1991) of schooling and sex education in particular.

Habermas's model of social life

Like Dorothy Smith, Habermas sees logic in Marx's ideas but problematises the failure to integrate notions of communicative interaction (1986). For Habermas, society consists of 'networks of communication' that are geared towards establishing mutual understanding with a shared sense of norms and assumptions that people draw on and which order their everyday interactions (Habermas 1989). Discourse and speaking, and meaning, in the cultural context, are key to this type of action and agency.

Communicative Action

In Habermas's model of action (1986), there are three aspects to communicative action which individuals draw on in seeking to validate the claims they or others make: (i) the objective, external and factual worlds; (ii) the social world of interpersonal relationships that are regulated by the stock of norms and assumptions that people utilise; and (iii) the world of subjective experience, to which the speaker has privileged access (1986:84).

Habermas emphasises that 'the communicative model of action does not equate action with communication' (Habermas in Outhwaite 1996:148). Language is just one of many devices that individuals use to achieve specific ends. In this respect, actions are also influenced by non-verbal means, such as body language; the use of space; personal motivations; manipulative strategies or 'egocentric calculations of utility' (op. cit.).

The thesis will explore the relevance of Habermas's ideas to analysis of interactions between young people and teachers/health professionals in the domains of sex education and sexual health provision. Particular scrutiny will be given to Habermas's breakdown of action into different components and the relationship to different worlds of validity claims. This underscores that it is not just what is said, but how and where it is said, and the stock of values and ideologies that individuals call on to evidence or authenticate their own or others' (e.g. teachers, clinicians, parents) claims.

Key to social interaction then is language and communication, but this is heavily dependent on a background world of values, assumptions and stocks of knowledge, derived from what Habermas calls the *lebenswelt* or 'lifeworld' (1986).

The 'Lifeworld' and the 'System'

Habermas sees society as determined by the two concepts of the 'lifeworld' and the 'system'. Appropriating Schutz's term (1972) the 'lifeworld' refers to the milieu of individual actors which, through communicative action, brings together the various aspects of social life concerned with trying to understand one another. These include the stock of knowledge, regulative norms and assumptions, and mechanisms for the maintenance of identity, that inform shared understanding. The 'system' refers to things not linked by this 'communicative action' such as capitalist economics and bureaucratic state rule. Money and power function through actions that are intended to ensure the system realises its goals of efficiency and profit. In contrast to communicative action which engages actors in open dialogue and is integrated by consensus, the system has no regard for the quality of life, is not 'subjectively coordinated' (Habermas 1987:150) and imposes norms and regulates discourses and individual decisions to achieve its ends.

Thus Habermas adopts a dualized conception of society:

'... society is conceived from the perspective of acting subjects as the *lifeworld of a social group* from the observer's perspective ... as a *system of actions* such that each action has a functional significance according to its contribution to the maintenance of the system.' (Habermas 1987:117, his emphasis).

For its functioning, Habermas regards the systemic mechanisms as necessarily anchored in the lifeworld. But in late modernity and a context of increasing rationalisation of systems, beliefs and practices (e.g. scientific and technologically based knowledges and

skills, and virtual systems) and globalization and media technologies, that contribute new and invasive expert systems, the lifeworld becomes overloaded by the plethora of competing expert systems. The imperative of expert systems is not communicative action. Hence, it becomes less possible to reach shared understanding or allow the perspective of active subjects and their lifeworlds to contribute to the dominant norms and constructions of society.

Such is the power of expert systems, that knowledge of the everyday both becomes sequestered by the system, and is diminished in its power to endorse lifeworld validity claims for actual discourse and behaviour. Eventually, the systemic mechanisms of economics, politics and various institutions, become independent of the lifeworld and in effect *un-coupled* (Habermas 1987) from it. Hence, lifeworld validity claims compete with expert system validity claims and their cumulative de-ciphering becomes more complicated. Individuals become increasingly removed from the control of validity claims and lose a tangible grasp of the social processes that are operating to affect their day to day lives and events. In seeking to regulate normative ways of being and doing, the expert system overrides the alternative linguistic communication of the everyday, and the status of shared understanding is ameliorated in its contribution to the system.

Effectively the two orbits of the lifeworld and the system become separated with the lifeworld losing any notion of control. To avoid the repercussions of such an unequal and ill informed knowledge of society, Habermas (1987) insists that the perspective of individual actors must be appreciated but not just restricted to 'trivial' everyday knowledge (as in the phenomenological perspective) but conceptualised alongside the external observer's perspective on how the everyday functions in the operation and integration of society.

Colonisation of the lifeworld

In modern societies, Habermas regards the lifeworld and system as distinct but tensions (or crises) arise when they intersect at the point where the system's imperatives of money and power colonise (1987) the lifeworld, with a lack of concern for the integrative goal of mutual understanding. The system organises institutions, like education and commerce, in ways that commodify them, not for the promotion of interaction,

communication or mutual understanding, but for profit, social and political power and other ideological ends:

‘In the end, systemic mechanisms suppress forms of social integration even in those areas where a consensus-dependent coordination of action cannot be replaced, that is, where the symbolic reproduction of the lifeworld is at stake. In these areas the mediatization of the lifeworld assumes the form of a colonization.’ (Habermas 1987:196).

In other words, the system’s dominance allows it to penetrate the lifeworld, manipulate certain aspects and reproduce it ‘in the image of the system’ (Waters 1994:165). This threatens everyday life and practices that depend on communicative action, in areas which Habermas (1987) regards as particularly necessary such as education, socialisation and cultural activities. The moral and practical concerns of communicative action become secondary to the technical and utilitarian values of the expert system, especially in systems like that in the UK which are oriented by consumerism, materialism and economic gain.

However, unlike his predecessors in the Frankfurt School, Habermas is not as pessimistic, and sees scope for production as well as reproduction of social life. He argues that it is possible for the system to be forced out of the lifeworld and hence the potential for more egalitarian forms of society. He envisages that political and social movements, such as environmentalism and minority group activism, can reclaim some aspects of the lifeworld from the colonisation of the system (Habermas 1987). This contrasts with Foucault who saw little scope for emancipation or liberation (1979a) and regarded Habermas’s work as naive and utopian (Stones 1998). Habermas’s work presents an optimism similar to Giddens (1991) with an emphasis on the subjective and collective potential to resist hegemonic and normalising strategies. For Giddens, and to reiterate points made earlier, this stems from the importance of praxis and the reflexive self in maintaining ontological security; whereas for Habermas there is scope for production through rational communicative action and its goal of understanding and agreement. Both of these perspectives emphasise the significance of the conscious, active subject, and their lifeworld, to conceptions of society. This is in marked contrast to Foucault and his consistent decentering of the subject that renders people as subjugated objects of knowledge (Foucault 1970). To position Smith in this frame, she reifies the importance of the subject and the everyday but remains focused on the repressive

workings of capitalism and patriarchy to exploit subjective identity and experience, and thus does not position the role of agency in the systems debate.

In sum, while there are criticisms of Habermas's work (see 'Habermas appraised' below), his work is useful in advancing Giddens's synthesis of self and identity because he moves beyond ontological questions alone and engages with the epistemological bases of knowledge. He is also more effective in dealing with how the dual domains of the lifeworld and system intersect through a complex web of relations, rulings and actions. Habermas's model counterbalances Giddens's structuration theory in providing a clearer, more intricate view of society that marries the influences of capitalist exploitation and bureaucratic state rule with the implications for the meanings and interpretations that actors give to actions and behaviour; and, as mentioned above, recognises the significance of discourse, culture, and communication, in contemporary contexts.

Habermas appraised

Habermas's emphasis on rational communicative action for the goal of understanding is undoubtedly feasible, but he idealises the capacity of human beings to share the desire for *consensus* (Habermas 1987). Moreover he assumes that *agreement* also derives from communicative action. Communication is not always as logical and clear cut as this - contradiction, ambiguity and irrationality infuse many aspects of communication. As Turner (1988) comments, Habermas ignores that communication is inherently distorted. Distortions might not be conspicuous to the speaker but the capacity for misrepresentation is enhanced when translated into verbal communication for the hearer, hence a greater potential for distortion in interaction. Habermas's notion of communication for agreement also negates the reflexive aspects of subjectivity and interaction that create resistances to agreement and do not necessarily yield understanding. Arguably, it is this potential for dissent that distinguishes the active subject from a more passive and utilitarian construct of humanity.

In part Habermas's sometimes over optimistic and utopian view may be due to his particular way of conceptualising subjectivity. Though he stresses the importance of the subject theoretically, he focuses methodologically on the linguistic nature of the self and social activity. A rounded and depth sense of the person cannot be fully grasped entirely

in terms of conscious expressions of language since this excludes the influence of the unconscious, of bodily drives, and emotionality, which may have just as great an influence on actions (Hollway 1998). Such a 'rounded' conception of human beings seems to evade social theorists in general with each attaching varying degrees of importance to different components of identity and behaviour. This does not invalidate Habermas's ideas or those of other theorists reviewed so far. Rather, it means that it is left to those engaged in research to synthesise the various strengths of different theoretical accounts and yield more composite representations of reality.

Absence of gender in Habermasian theory

Habermas and Dorothy Smith are similar in conceptualising society from the neo-Marxist frame, and neither offer a systematic way of incorporating gender into theorising.

Habermas appears gender blind¹; in contrast, Smith emphasises the importance of gender to understanding social life but does not develop her ideas sufficiently clearly on how gender might be thematised in theorising on capitalism. Rather she remains at the level of defending Marx's lack of real engagement with stratification on grounds of gender, but does not offer solutions. More recent feminist writers (see Meehan 1995, Fraser 1995) recognise strengths in both authors' work, and have developed, in particular, Habermas's reconceptualisation of Marx to integrate gender into routinised thinking on capitalist society.

The part played by the subtext of masculine and feminine roles and identities in communicative action and dialogue is salient to interaction in the private and the public, and at the point where the system meets the lifeworld (Fleming 1995). The thesis explores the relevance of this to situations where young people's lifeworlds are open to public scrutiny in contexts of sex education and sexual health advice-giving.

The significance of gender to lifeworlds raises the question of why some professionals and indeed some academic theorists have been so slow to take on its relevance. The answer might lie in that theorising and research has not effectively stepped over the dividing line from the public to the private; and that the thematisation of gender is much more well developed in the realm of the public than is its implications in the realm of the

¹ This is perhaps because Habermas is a product of patriarchal ideology and the malestream sociology that Smith (1988) criticises.

private. For instance, equal opportunities policies and practices might be increasingly more commonplace in the public sphere with implications for identity and life chances, but their relevance for the private sphere are far from transparent. Seyla Benhabib (1992) suggests that social theorists who have dwelt on the public - private debate in the past actually know very little about what happens in the private:

‘... the “privacy” of the private sphere .. [is] .. an opaque glass rendering women and ... their activity invisible and inaudible’ (1992:12).

This, she argues, creates a systematic skewing of theories and therefore epistemological deficits. Encompassing gender in a non-universalising way (Cohen 1995) requires an interpretive-pluralistic approach (Warnke 1995) that does not just recognise tokenistic difference in identity, values, beliefs, and experiences, of women and men, but hears and endorses ‘... the legitimacy of many different voices’ (Warnke 1995:258).

Benhabib takes this further in contending that because of the ‘dichotomous characterisation’ (1992:158) of structure-agency, society-individual, and public-private, inherited from the modernist tradition, two standpoints have developed: that of the ‘generalised’ and ‘concrete’ other. A weakness in universalist theory is the view that the two perspectives are incompatible, even antagonistic.

According to Benhabib, the ‘generalised other’ is an *external* view of individuals as rational beings, in whom we ascribe the rights and duties we want for ourselves. She argues this perspective is infused with assumptions: we assume the ‘other’ shares the same concrete needs, desires and behaviours as ourselves, with interaction governed primarily by the norms of the institution and public sphere (op. cit.).

The standpoint of the ‘concrete other’ demands acknowledgement of every rational being and action as an individual with a concrete identity, emotional constitution and history. In this way the individual is recognised as having concrete (rather than assumed) needs and capacities. The norms of interactions are usually, though not exclusively, private and non-institutional. Though this will vary between individuals and genders, friendship, love, care and intimacy will be of importance. In contrast to the ‘generalised’ other, Benhabib argues these norms respect humanity and individuality. Identity in this frame is more concrete and true to the embedded and embodied individual; it allows for

coherent narratives of people's life stories, the impact of birth origins and family, and linguistic, cultural and gender identity.

To create a mutual and reciprocal understanding of 'otherness' requires a dialogue that is truly open and reflexive:

'Neither the concreteness nor the otherness of the "concrete other" can be known in the absence of the *voice* of the other.... one needs principles, institutions and procedures to enable articulation of the voice of the "others".'

(Benhabib 1992:168; her emphasis).

From this Benhabib postulates a revision of Habermas's model of discourse ethics that integrates the private and marginalised groups and renders the relationship of the generalised to the concrete other, not as distinct, but as relative positions along a continuum.

Envisaging this in my analysis, the thesis is that it holds potential to advance theory and practice as it relates to young people, with the delineation between the 'generalised' and 'concrete' other recognised as artificial and obstructive to understanding. Visions of society are arguably more robust if they include a representative version of the 'concrete' young person in perceptions of the 'generalised' young person. In these terms the norms and values of the public/institution (that is education, the state, media and the family in my study) and the private/intimate (authentic worlds of young people) become more easily reconcilable and moral judgements less confused and oppositional.

The next section progresses the application of Habermas's ideas, together with the reformulations suggested above, and some ideas in the work of Ball, and Furlong and Cartmel, which extend Habermasian theories.

Young people in the Habermasian frame

Habermas orients his thinking towards a materialist conception of society in which the system exerts a domination over action. As already mentioned, Habermas draws attention to the importance of education and socialisation for the *effective* functioning of society, and his notion of colonisation will be used to explore whether sex education and sexual health programmes do or have the potential to undermine young people's productive (rather than, just reproductive) contribution to this functioning.

Dominance of the expert discourse

Habermas's discourse ethic (1987) focuses on the importance of *practical* discourse, rather than wider ethical prescriptions that are more diverse and less easily generalisable in their effects. The thesis utilises Habermas's idea to look specifically at what happens *in situ* and the practical resources that young people and professionals have access to, and discourses in sex education and sexual health provision that can be considered in Habermasian terms as potentially colonising young people's realities by imposing unnecessary forms of social control. The question is, do those with power within the expert system colonise young people's lifeworlds by attempting to replace 'lifeworld' (Habermas 1970, 1986) communication with other discourses that non-experts cannot utilise? These discourses and their potential effects can be understood not only in Habermasian terms, but also through the analytic frameworks of Giddens, Smith and Benhabib. Habermas's ideas also depart from Foucauldian analysis in that Habermas permits analysis of power as an entity that is actively and consciously possessed and used.

Using Habermas's analysis in this way tends to concentrate on the mechanisms of control utilised by professionals. However, as the next section illustrates, this is only one aspect of the interaction equation because lay individuals can also influence the outcome of interaction between themselves and professionals by enhancing the colonising potential of 'expert' discourses. My thesis explores this by appropriating the ideas of Stephen Ball (1997) and Andy Furlong and Fred Cartmel (1997) and applying them to teenagers' experiences as subjects in the classroom (students) and as 'clients' in sexual health clinics.

Fabrication: reactions to the dominant discourse and practice

The contribution of self-regulation to maintaining 'official' and dominant discourses and practices was discussed previously (see 'Young people in Foucault's lens'). Taking Foucault's broad ideas a step further, and in trying to understand more precisely how and why this might occur, my analysis was spurred by Ball's (1997) article on the manipulation of school development planning in preparation for OFSTED inspection. He argues that school inspections submit teachers to the 'gaze' of policy and serve as 'disciplinary technologies of surveillance' (p.317) that encourage teachers to manipulate

or 'fabricate' representations of themselves and their work as a response to the quest for 'success' in evaluation and comparison. This process yields disparities between the 'real' and the 'manipulated' practices they are meant to represent. My fieldwork explores whether young people 'fabricate' their identity and practices similarly when subject to the surveying gaze and disciplinary technologies of sex education and sexual health professionals.

Understanding 'how' and 'why' this might occur is helped by Gayle Rubin's (1989) concept of the 'charmed circle'. This positions the sexuality discourses and practices of marginalised groups (such as gay, bisexual and transsexual people) against those of 'charmed' groups by which she means married heterosexuals. Though these representations are over simplistic they draw attention to the stark contrasts between how each is often represented. My thesis applies this idea to comparing the sexual identities and practices of the private 'youth' domain with those promoted by the discourses of the 'official' or professional domain.

It is arguable that knowledge of differences between lifeworld realities (Habermas 1987) and that presented as the acceptable way of being in 'official' discourses can render individuals more likely to conceal authentic selves or 'manufacture representations' (Ball 1997:318) in order to minimise the effects of surveillance or the gaze of those with powers to oppress.

'Fabrication' does not necessarily occur in the active sense of people deliberately and consciously creating synthetic representations. Rather, regulative processes and discourses implicitly and explicitly indicate that some identities and practices are more legitimate than others (Weeks 1995b). In effect this can generate a 'calculative compliance' (Ball 1997: 327) or distancing of self from that which is regarded as expected in normative and essentialising constructs of permissible sexual identity, behaviour and discourse. This renders a mismatch between what is assumed (in generalised conceptions of the 'other') and the 'reality' and therefore creates deficits in epistemic understanding. In the absence of the voice of the 'other', to reiterate Benhabib, this maintains the 'veil of ignorance' (1992:167) wherein 'neither the concreteness nor the otherness of the "concrete other" can be known' (p. 168). Even if different gender

identities and practices of the 'other' are recognised, such acknowledgement often remains at the level of essentialist thinking that positions young men as active agents fulfilling natural urges, and young women as passive recipients of male desire (see chapter 2).

Teachers' self-regulation

Teachers may also self-regulate by submitting to traditional and unquestioned representations of young people that fail to acknowledge the reality. Strict compliance to state enforced ideology¹ (particularly the requirements of the National Curriculum, DES 1989) is one strategy that renders prescriptive and unrealistic constructs for sexual behaviour and identity. If these are not problematised by teachers the power of the expert system is maintained.

The methods and content used in teaching sex education are also salient to examining whether teachers are complicit in maintaining outdated constructs of young people and sexuality. The use of hypothetical scenarios and oblique references to the 'generalised other' (such as 'they', 'people' or 'one', and never, 'I', 'we' or 'us') give clues that suggest a reticence to engage with 'the body as lived in by the subject' (Beauvoir 1953:69) preferring the 'body-object' (op. cit.) as inscribed by (some) processes of sex education.

Regulation and transformation

These practices are not only regulational, they have transformative potential too. They are *not* transformational in the sense of producing constructions of more realistic and positive youth identities, they are only transformational in as much as the process transforms young people's discourses and practices into an invisible and illegitimate discourse.

Through the conscious use of a prescriptive discourse or 'biopower' (Foucault 1979a:143) professionals can effectively silence the youth discourse which serves to advantage the hegemonic position of teachers/medics/clinicians and disadvantage young people. As far as Habermas's notion of 'colonisation' is concerned, the perspective of

¹ As opposed to the more liberal approaches as advocated by Massey (1990), Whately (1992), Trudell (1993), and the Sex education Forum (1995, 1996).

young people become obfuscated and transformed as secondary to the values and requirements of the regulatory expert system.

Structural and psychological implications of colonisation: future subjectivities

The regulational and transformational effects of colonisation can have structural and emotional implications. The demotion of authentic lifeworlds to positions of obscurity can reinforce young people's perception as occupying positions of exclusion, in the psychological and material sense. Through internalising these notions (Grbich 1999) and taking responsibility for shortfalls in 'life' resources (Furlong and Cartmell 1997) young people may begin to doubt they have any significant meaning or validity. As Furlong and Cartmel conclude in conceptualising the place of young people in late modernity:

'Blind to the existence of powerful chains of interdependency, young people frequently attempt to resolve collective problems through individual action and hold themselves responsible for their inevitable failure' (1997: 114).

Furlong and Cartmel argue this is the result of life in late modernity revolving around an 'epistemological fallacy' (1997:5) wherein the process of diversification within the labour market and the influence of the expert system in schooling, obscures underlying class relations. Specifically, the experience of schooling in sex education can maintain the silencing of the collective experience and reinforce young people's subjective perception of uncertainty and separation from the 'inclusive' collectivity. This is also symptomatic of the uncoupling of systemic elements from the lifeworld, and processes of regulation that the individual is unaware of because they no longer have a grasp of dominant social processes nor feel they can affect the situations or events around them.

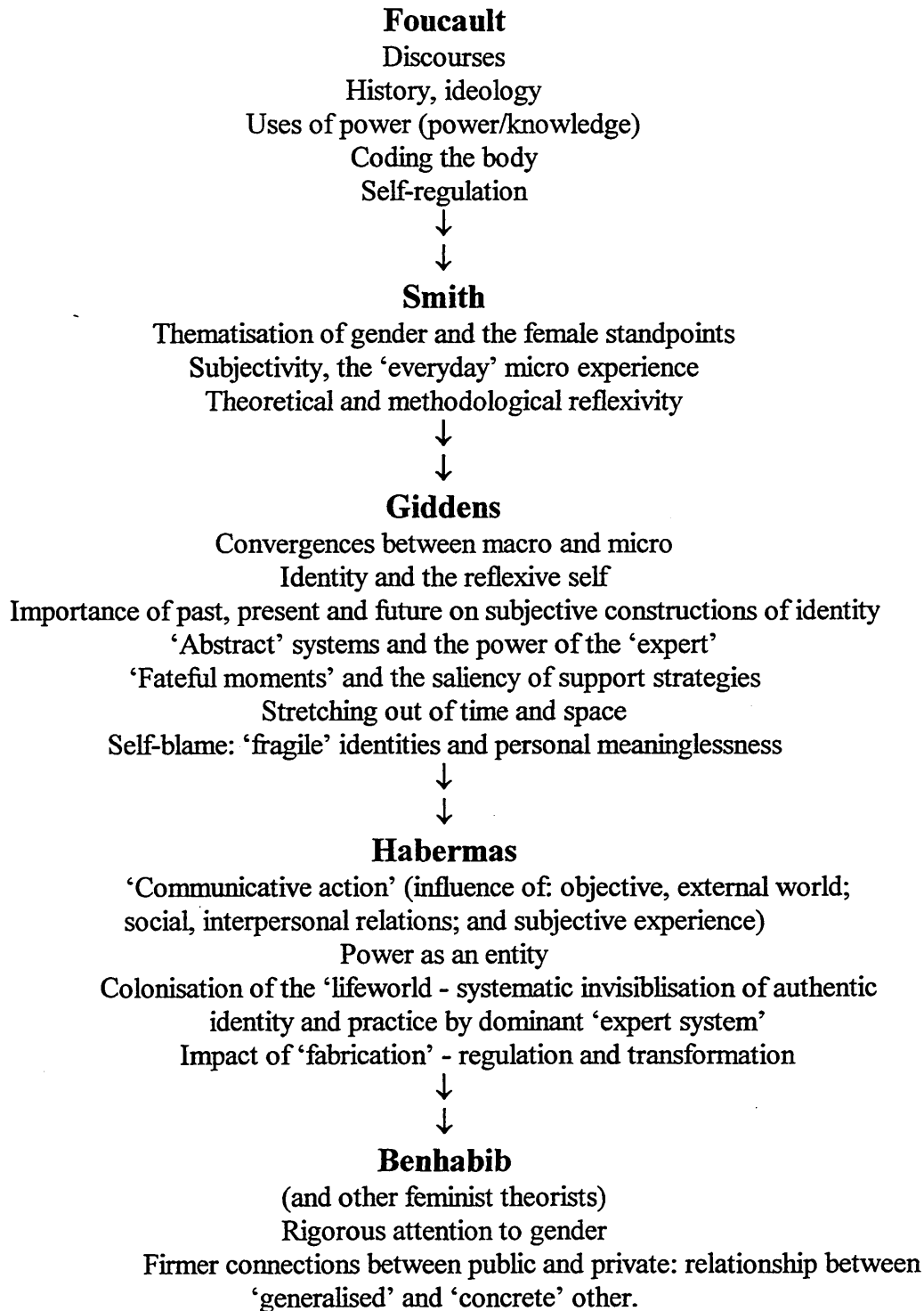
In sum, the transformative power of schooling and state institutions can deskill to such an extent that any potential to move beyond (less appealing) working class subjectivities is quashed in young people's formative years. If this significant stage in development is invested in, young people have greater opportunity for self-actualisation. As Benhabib asserts, these are moral issues and, as such, should be addressed as political priorities, for they yield iniquitous class, gender, ethnicity and sexuality positions, and deny entitlements, because of their structural and emotionally regulative power.

Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed literature and theoretical concepts that contribute to understanding how the identities, discourses and practices of young people can be influenced by certain ideological standpoints and discourses that operate from the macro structural level but have tangible repercussions at the micro level of experience. The selectivity inherent in the choice of my theoretical foci does not suggest other formulations are not useful, but the intention has been to offer new and broader ways of seeing young people's position and experience that synthesises the influence of the macro and the micro, the generalised and the concrete other, and as such does not repeat that which has already been documented in other studies of youth.

The diagram below summarises the key aspects of each authors' ideas, that have been synthesised to provide a theoretical model for understanding. In turn, the aspects signal those that my methodology sought to encapsulate in yielding a more rounded analysis of participants' lives.

Summary of key theoretical concepts that informed the methodology



PART II

Methodological Approach

Research Design and Methodology

Introduction

This chapter charts how my research strategy was arrived at through a self-conscious, reflexive, and critical reading of the options available. I begin with the methodological and conceptual issues that were important to ensuring my situatedness as the researcher was not privileged (Stanley and Wise 1993). I then justify my methodology by reviewing the debate on quantitative versus qualitative approaches, followed by discussion of the feminist qualitative research principles that I adopted in the collection of data. The issue of reflexivity is included here. Next, the method and sampling strategy are detailed, followed by my justification for the method and interpretations. The section on fieldwork documents my path to accessing participants and the issues and dilemmas that were presented. Issues involved in developing relationships with participants in the field are then considered. The chapter then summarises how data collection was managed and the process of data analysis.

Methodological and conceptual considerations

The provisional markers for enquiry¹ (see Appendix 1) were recognised as potential clues

¹ The term 'markers' refers to provisional areas or guides for research questioning. At the outset of research they are necessary to indicate what the research is 'about'; without them the interview would be 'directionless' (Ashworth 1999:719). Because they are 'tentative, precursory assumptions' (op. cit.) they are continually questioned and guided by the direction of the interviewees as to their relevance to the lifeworlds under study.

that *might* answer the broader question of influences on young people's sex and sexuality. To ensure the markers and the place of my pre-suppositions within them did not bias the research process, the methodology needed to encapsulate the following broader methodological and conceptual issues that arose in my reading of the literature.

Power, language and discourse

I argued in chapter 3 that language and discourse are key elements in the dynamics of power and the privileging of certain ideas over others (Foucault 1979a). Young people's containment in representations of the 'generalised other' (Benhabib 1992) stems in part from the ways in which adult discourse silences them. Since young people experience much of their contact with adults vis-à-vis subordinate positions of power (Caputo 1995), interviewees might naturally assume that their language and vernacular, and the experiences it describes, would not be permissible in 'talk' with myself. But if I was to access their lifeworld (Habermas 1987) and the communicative processes through which it is constituted, I had to ensure methods that would visibilise authentic language and minimise power differentials as far as possible. Neither of these would be satisfied easily via a distanced, structured survey approach (Cresswell 1994). Unstructured qualitative methods represent greater opportunities to explicitly minimise power differences and hence encourage and capture authentic language and scripts (Usher 1997). Details of how this was achieved are discussed in 'Principles for feminist enquiry'.

Meanings

Understanding young people's lifeworlds means to display their voices and expose their multiple realities through thoughts, perceptions and feelings (Minichiello et al 1995) but I was also concerned with not just *what* they experienced, but how they understand or make sense of their experience, or the *whys* and meanings they attach to experience and the actions they or others take. Aspects of ethnographic and phenomenological approaches (Ashworth 1993) were useful here, particularly in coaching me on strategies to minimise pre-suppositions.

Interpretation: synthesising micro and macro

At various points throughout the literature review I raised justifications for synthesising the personal, subjective world with factors emanating from the public realm of

experience. Since neither naturally offers explanation for its relationship to the other, it is left to researchers to explicate the inter-relatedness from the vantage point of the external observer (Habermas 1987). This does not imply that I could operate from a pre-ordained position of gaining evidence from what is already assumed to be known (for instance by relying entirely on my markers for exploration) but rather accepts that meanings and the relationship between the macro and micro are mutable and hence not regarded as fully predictable (Giddens 1984). This calls for an interpretative framework (Denzin 1997) that permits the interpreter a flexibility to explore new themes, ambiguities, contradictions, and possibilities for explanation. In practice, this means that the markers for enquiry may or may not be used to direct questions since it depends on the participants and the actualities of the situations and issues that arise in the fieldwork context. However, and more likely, is that these pointers are returned to at the analytic stage to assess whether findings shed any insight on original postulates. The potential for selective or skewed interpretation that does not accurately reflect findings is picked up the section entitled 'Justifying methods and interpretation' below.

Sex and sensitivity

It is already clear that I did not want sex and sexuality to be separated from young people's broader lives, and this had to be achieved in parallel with recognising the sensitive nature of the research, not just on sex, but on teenagers; and ensuring the research was not threatening to the researched or the researcher. Feeling scrutinised on matters sexual could be problematic for both parties (Lee and Renzetti 1993) and the research design needed to address ways of minimising discomfort, pressurised disclosure, judgements, and breaches of confidentiality¹. It also needed to build in checks on authenticity of disclosure, allow for different levels of sexual experience, and consider support strategies for issues evolving as a product of participation in the research.

Methodologically there are different ways to approach this. Wight and West (1999), in recognising the long established difficulties of collecting reliable information on sexuality and sexual behaviour, reviewed various methods utilised in the past. These include self-

¹ Critical reflection on embarrassing incidents from my own youth and formative teaching years concerning sexual knowledge and experience offered insight here. The issue of self-disclosure is discussed below, see 'Principles for feminist enquiry', point 6.

completion questionnaires, computer assisted self-interviewing, telephone interviews, face to face structured interviews, and in-depth unstructured interviews. Utilising various evaluative measures they concluded that in depth interviews were the best way to elicit reliable data on people's contextualised understanding of their own sexuality and sexual behaviour. Catania et al (1990) corroborate my experience in noting that an explicit sex focus can result in participation bias towards those who are more sexually experienced - hence my decision to focus on social lives first. This would hopefully provide for more contextualised understandings of subsequent narratives of sexuality and sexual behaviour, and prevent alienating those less confident on matters sexual or with less experience. Since I could not predict the point at which a sexual focus would be established, it was necessary to build in contingent methods which allowed greater and more comfortable latitude of response, so that the responses of those with less experience were not diminished. This motivated decisions to include large group, small group and individual interviews in the research schedule. Serial participation in each stage (beginning with the larger group, then smaller group and individual interviews) also maximises opportunities to check the authenticity of disclosure, and allows participants to corroborate or dissent from opinions and experiences expressed in larger group contexts.

My track record of working with young people endowed confidence that I could facilitate comfortable research situations, conduct questioning sensitively, and devise appropriate strategies for support. However I could not assume that gatekeepers to accessing samples would share confidence in my abilities, and was aware that 'sensitive' topics such as sex can be synonymised with 'controversial'. The saliency of this issue is discussed further below (see 'Politics, sexuality and sensitive research').

The conundrum of quantitative approaches

Before detailing the methods used, the following outlines other methodological considerations involved in justifying the eventual approach.

Previous discussion signals my leaning towards qualitative approaches, but quantitative paradigms are recognised as having potential to be equally instructive. This reflects the stance adopted by Mays and Pope (1995),

'All research depends on collecting particular sorts of evidence

through the prism of particular methods, each of which has its strengths and weaknesses.' (p.109).

Perceptions of these strengths and weaknesses can derive from assumptions that quantitative and qualitative approaches are fundamentally different in their ability to yield reliable and valid findings. Mays and Pope (op. cit.) argue this distinction is more one of degree than type since all research is selective and no researcher or methodological approach can capture the literal truth of experience or events. A way forward though (as I have done) is to adopt a reflexive 'state of mind' (Dingwall 1992:162) that facilitates balanced judgement of the various approaches based on the research question, the research participants, the organisational context, and the competencies of the researcher, so that the most reliable representations of the area under scrutiny can be expressed.

Quantitative approaches are no doubt useful where the aim is to research large samples, compare populations, sometimes (though not exclusively) test particular hypotheses, and allow for trends and generalisations to be made conspicuous (Irvine et al 1979). Representation of phenomena through quantification also draw attention to the previously unknown and/or the size of a phenomena. Among earlier notable examples are Betty Frieden's (1973) research which drew attention to the scale of domestic dissatisfaction among American women; more recently, statistical analysis of HIV and AIDS prevalence has highlighted the health threat to particular communities of gay men and those living with poverty (Boulton 1994); and gender-based statistics have been used to disseminate information on the position of women in politics (Stark 1977). These are just a few examples of the use of surveys for consciousness-raising.

The aura of scientific respectability bestowed on quantitative analyses also carries appeal. Denscombe (1998) suggests this emanates in part from the ability to present findings clearly (for instance through diagrams, graphs or tables) which in turn conveys a sense of solid, objective research. But perhaps more significant is that quantitative approaches emerged from positivism which makes them natural allies of scientific and medical communities (Bryant 1985). These professions in themselves have status, albeit problematised by some (Samson 1999, Illich 1976, Foucault 1980), that endows credibility on the methodologies it preferences, and on its findings, that consequently attract wider readership and media coverage (Marshall and Stenner 1997). Where social

and health related research (including sexuality) is concerned, these issues become particularly salient. Because of links between biomedicine and the state (Turner 1992, Sontag 1988) and the accusation that quantitative research is not treated with the same scepticism as qualitative research (Pope and Mays 1993), scientific studies are more likely to attract funding and have greater potential to influence government policy making (Boulton and Fitzpatrick 1994). These considerations cannot be discounted in decisions over research design.

Of course quantitative research does not decree a positivistic method as in the search for social 'facts' and laws that predict behaviour (Kolakowski 1972). Similarly it is naive to assume that quantitative surveys cannot yield meaningful insights, as the examples above suggest, together with others on young people's experience (e.g., see Wight et al 1996, and Donald et al 1994). To paraphrase Oakley (1998), outright rejection of quantitative approaches, can result in 'throwing the baby out with the bathwater', and moreover sabotage opportunities to utilise the potential of the techniques they embrace for giving status and respect to social research enquiry.

However other factors were more persuasive in justifying my approach. Quantitative research has been problematised most routinely by those who question what it does not see (Bryman 1988, Glaser and Strauss 1967, Lofland 1971) because of the ideological standpoint adopted that can dictate priorities for who and what gets researched both through its allocation of research funding and in the methodologies adopted (Reinharz 1984, Smith 1988). In particular, feminist scholars argue that knowledge derived from positivistic, quantitative research renders invisible the experience of women and marginalised groups because of its emphasis on causal relations and the search for objective non-contestable truth (Mies 1994). Much of this debate is underlain by criticisms of the patriarchal and malestream bias in theorising and researching (in foci of enquiry, methodologies employed and in interpretation of data) and as such while the main target of critique is positivism there is a tendency to collapse positivism and androcentrism together. For example, Stanley and Wise (1993), in their criticism of objectivism in positivist research, insist that 'objectivity is the term that men have given to their own subjectivity.'(p.59).

Since a substantial amount of early positivist oriented research was dominated by a male agenda (Smith 1988) this converging of the two issues is understandable, but androcentricism can permeate all forms of research and feminist critiques are not optimised to full potential if they are restricted to positivism. Other feminist researchers widen the criticisms beyond positivism to any approach that privileges the male view through deriving from male scholarship. They are considered inadequate in explaining the experiences of women but also in reflecting the reality of their social lives and its complexities (see Harding 1987, Moore and Rosenthal 1993, Phoenix 1994, Mies 1994, Ramazanoglu 1992, and Stanley 1990).

Emanating from the latter were calls for the recognition of other issues inextricably linked to the quantitative/qualitative, and masculine/feminine debate. These were the dualisms of macro/micro, public/private, subject/object, and control/understanding. These themes appear throughout chapter 3, and have been acknowledged for their methodological implications, because of their relevance to understanding the aspects of young people's identity and experience that I sought to explore. I concur with methodologies that acknowledge hierarchies of power, reflexivity and meaning for their significance to the subjective experience. These are heralded by many (Reinharz 1984, Stanley and Wise 1983, 1993, Roberts 1981, Oakley, 1981) as the corrective to those that research or theorise from a distance, rely on patriarchal and/or artificially constructed measures, or do not effectively synthesise the macro with the micro or the private with the public.

In conclusion, while not refuting some of the criticisms of quantitative approaches, generalisation to include all the forms and techniques embraced is now recognised as equally essentialist as those it criticised (Oakley 1998). More recent theorists such as Benhabib (1992), Meehan (1995) and others cited in chapter 3, are developing the potential of theories emanating from the positivistic and quantitative tradition to ensure they encapsulate those elements previously excluded, and at least have a credible 'foot in the door' of the epistemological and methodological standpoints that construct our understanding of ways of knowing. It is possible to respect the subjects of research, minimise the pre-suppositions engendered in particular research traditions, and maximise reliability and validity, whatever the research orientation chosen. This returns us to the

original assertion that quantitative knowledge should not be seen as oppositional to qualitative, rather as operating on a continuum with different contributions to how we see the world. But it is the complexity of insights and the techniques appropriate to eliciting them that positioned me more firmly in a feminist, qualitative approach, to which attention now turns.

Feminist qualitative approaches

Having established the broad framework for the overall conception of the research process, a further set of questions now need addressing regarding the specific uses of qualitative approaches. The ensuing discussion draws out the aspects that signify a particularly feminist qualitative approach.

Feminist research enjoys considerable diversity, interpretation and contestations.

Reinharz (1992) argues there is nothing intrinsically ‘feminist’ about the methods preferred as feminists draw on diverse theoretical and methodological considerations to underpin methods adopted¹. Others (notably Ramazanoglu 1992; Stanley and Wise, 1983, 1990) insist that a distinctiveness derives from the way ideas are appropriated and developed so that they are more sympathetic to feminist values, to empowering women, and to recognising the power of the male standpoint. In turn, this reflects more genuine and rounded versions of the social world (Stanley and Wise 1990). Gender though, is fundamental to understanding ‘the constitution of social life’ (Acker 1989:238) and Ramazanoglu (1992) is adamant that any approach which positions gender as an ‘extraneous variable’ (p.211) is inadequate and should be resisted.

Despite these differences, there are some enduring principles attached to *doing* feminist research which define its characteristics (Malpas 1997²). The next section summarises the principles that I assent to and regard as useful to researching and understanding young people’s lives.

¹ These include semi structured surveys, unstructured interviews, life-stories, group discussions, focus groups, participant observation, and the use of documents, diaries and letters.

² Malpas’s (1997) thesis prompted the idea to present my thoughts in this way.

Principles for feminist enquiry

1. Exploration not prediction

My methods needed to recognise the exploratory nature of the research task if I was to avoid essentialising young people's experience through any prior commitment to a theory or set of assumptions (Griffin 1993, see also chapter 2). 'Close up' qualitative interviews are a first step to achieving this (Harding 1987). This method also offers more fruitful ways of accessing the female everyday experience (Rose 1982, Mies 1994, and Harding 1987). 'Hearing' narratives in participants own terms and reporting them faithfully is fundamental to privileging their standpoints (Maykut and Morehouse 1994), and is more likely to avenge the tendency to homocentric research (Stanley 1990, Ramazanoglu 1989, 1992) particularly that which relies on generalisation and decontextualised assumptions (Benhabib 1992).

2. Questioning normative constructions

My focus on sex and sexuality acknowledges the sexism in research on this issue that contributes to reductionist constructs of young people's identity and practice. The sexist norms and biases in scientific and sexological research have been criticised for their role in maintaining women's subordinate status and practices (see Thomson and Scott 1990). Within sociology too, Ramazanoglu (1992) argues that constructions of androcentric and partial social realities resulted from research dominated by men which privileges male interests. The radical sub-cultural theorists of the 1970s espoused ethnography as an alternative research paradigm to discover the subjective meanings attached to social behaviour but this still largely entailed research by men *on* young men (see Griffin 1993 for review). McRobbie and Garber (1976) called for explanation of 'the absence of girls from the whole of the literature in this area' (p209). Even when girls did feature sexist bias was apparent, as girls were 'perceived and portrayed through the eyes of "lads"' (Heidensohn 1985:139) as in Patrick's (1973) fleeting reference to the 'gang' members' girlfriends. Heidensohn cites Oakley in describing this as 'a way of seeing which is a way of not seeing' (1985:142).

Though work since the 1970s, particularly that of feminists and Black scholars, has provided a substantial corrective to this male dominated agenda (see for example Measor 1989, Mirza 1992, Phoenix 1994, Holly 1989, Epstein and Johnson 1998, Fine 1988,

McRobbie 1982, and Thompson 1990), the 1990s obsession with pathologising young women's sexual practices and related phenomena such as teenage pregnancy while ignoring the sexual behaviour of young males, reminds us that the biases persist (Holland et al 1998).

The aim then was to offer a methodology that ameliorated male bias; legitimised female perspectives by bringing young women and their experiences to the fore; and allowed for a questioning of *previous* and taken for granted conceptions of truth, knowledge, power, and gender relations, and the macro and micro processes through which they operate.

3. Researching women and men

Since the social world of females was envisioned as including males, it infers a methodological framework that can encapsulate gender perspectives *on* females and males, *by* females *and* males. While feminist research is clearly concerned to centralise women, there is an argument, as Morgan (1981) suggests for including men in the frame, and researching assumptions about men and masculinity, through the feminist lens. This inclusivity holds better guarantees for feminist research to attend to 'all aspects of social reality and all participants in it' (Stanley and Wise 1993:31). To do this need not necessarily entail 'conceding the whole terrain' (Gelsthorpe and Morris 1988), rather it means that research can include men as well as women if it is underpinned by theoretical concerns arising from analysis of women's oppression; and if it acknowledges the varying ways in which gender is acted out (Morgan 1992). Moreover, this approach also assents to believing that involving men in research with a feminist orientation can contribute to consciousness-raising and social change. So while male perspectives would be included, it was with a commitment to avoiding privileging the male viewpoint.

This could not be satisfied by some 'off-the-peg' model of feminist research but as Maria Mies (1994) proffers in introducing her thoughts on a methodology for feminist research:

'They are not to be understood as prescriptions to be followed dogmatically, but as an invitation for methodological experimentation and innovation'. (p66).

4. Avoiding universalising tendencies

While the last quotation invites the incorporation of wide ranging subject matter and flexibility of method, and as such makes me a willing acolyte of feminist research, I had

to ensure that I eschewed any universalising tendencies, following the debate on the various feminist epistemologies set by authors such as Harding (1987) and Stanley (1990). Diversity and difference among young people could be predicted as relating to a plethora of factors (more obvious ones being social class, ethnicity, culture, age, and sexuality), understanding of which is not helped by attributing experience solely to the unitary category of sexism, or shared experience of gender oppression. Halberg (1989) argues that the diversity of experience generated by differences between women makes the explanation of common oppression in the struggles against male dominance decidedly problematic. Thus the feminist epistemological argument of shared experience as a basis for knowledge is distinctly undermined.

Given the differences between young people in my sample, both those apparent at the outset (age, gender, ethnicity) and those less obvious which did not emerge until relationships were established (e.g. sexuality, class, culture, history, experience, desires), Stanley's (1990) recognition of a plurality of standpoints in feminist epistemology is particularly relevant. For instance, Bonney (1998) argues that social class has enduring relevance for understanding life chances, and Gottfried (1998) asserts that too great an emphasis on the external workings of patriarchy can impoverish the effects of gender inequality in practice. The diversity and inter-connectedness of structuring agents, as they affected participants in my research, is discussed more thoroughly in the analysis of findings (in particular see theme 2).

The commitment of postmodern feminists to plurality and greater acknowledgement of difference (Allen and Baber 1992) is paralleled by caution (Hawkesworth 1989, Bordo 1990) that the structural common ground on which feminist principles were borne in the quest for equality and political change should not be lost. So while differences in my research participants would be legitimated the methodologist should be diligent in not undermining the basic tenets of feminist politics. In practice this means that any oppressive practices could be questioned, whether occurring *in situ* between individuals in groups during the research or in participant's recollections of experiences and past events. This serves as a consciousness raising exercise (Oakley 1998), acknowledges power differentials, and might encourage the less confident to voice their experiences and desires in richer detail.

5. Privileging respondents' voices

I was also concerned to present a view of experiences and social lives as seen by respondents in *their own terms*. This accommodates a 'view from below' (Mies 1994:68) that is a necessary element to feminist qualitative researching, and contributes to developing what Mies refers to as 'conscious partiality'. It replaces the more objectifying *view from above*, often associated with quantitative methods (Oakley 1981).

'Conscious partiality ... enables correction of distortions of perception on both sides and widens the consciousness of both, the researcher and the researched.' (Mies 1994:68).

Reflexivity is key to developing conscious partiality in conceiving both the researched and the researcher, as part of a bigger social world¹ and was therefore intrinsic to my fieldwork and checks on the validity of my interpretations.

6. Researched/researcher relationships

Feminist research accepts that the view from below does not emerge naturally, but is more likely, as alluded to previously (see 'Power, language and discourse'), if the power differentials between researcher and participants are not just acknowledged but equalised as far as possible. Establishing non-hierarchical relationships is a distinguishing feature of feminist research (Ramazanoglu 1992, Reinharz 1992, Tong 1989) and entails the sharing of information rather than a one-way process of extracting or soliciting information with the researcher firmly in control².

For me, specific strategies to achieve this included:

- Stressing the limits of my knowledge to participants and desires to learn from them as the 'experts' on their experiences³ This is helped by cultivating an 'air of acceptable incompetence' (Aggleton 1987:20). As findings will demonstrate, this might mean asking questions that at best make one appear naive and at worst stupid, but necessary if young people are to be represented from theirs and not my frame of reference.

¹ Smith (1978) refers to this as secondary order constructs.

² Having said this, I am not under the illusion that research in itself is easily capable of achieving the feminist principles of equalising relationships and minimising difference. Reinharz (1992) argues these are perspectives that are particularly difficult to satisfy.

³ This conveys respect and helps participants develop a sense of positive status. As Maisie articulated, 'I never thought of myself as an expert on anything before now.'

- Responding to questions and sharing aspects of personal biography can also diminish the adult/teenager power imbalance¹. Measor and Sikes (1992) regard self disclosure as an important strategy in interviewing and offer a succinct review of the arguments and counter arguments. One advantage is efficiency. Self disclosure is an excellent means of gathering data through allowing one to 'tune in', build alliances, and develop reciprocity². Measor and Sikes add that self-disclosure brings ethical safeguards and cite Oakley's (1981) argument that there should be 'no intimacy without self-disclosure' (p.49) which diminishes distance and power differentials between the two parties. Tactics for developing empathy with participants also included acknowledging my teenagehood and the tensions that brought. In this frame, I did not want to set myself up as appearing 'sorted' as this could deter participants from contributing to the discussion. This does not assume a oneness or commonality of experience, rather it is an act of mutual respect displayed through a willingness to disclose vulnerabilities. At the same time, self-disclosure should enhance confidence to articulate differences and diversity. As Measor and Sikes point out, one of the disadvantages of self-disclosure is that it can constitute a barrier to relationship building. Therefore, the type and depth of researcher self-disclosure has to be carefully monitored for its impact on *what* knowledge is being produced (see Reinharz 1993, and edited works in Wolf 1996).
- Other practical factors help minimise power differentials. I did not want my style of dress to suggest a formality or superior power (for instance through 'power-dressing'), yet it needed to convey respect and status for those involved in the research. How this was achieved is discussed further in 'Developing relationships' (see below). Other strategies included organising furniture for interviews so there was close proximity between us (chairs in a close circle); asking participants to decide where I should sit; requesting that someone volunteer to operate the tape recorder (which also relinquishes power to participants for them to decide if disclosures should be recorded or not); and careful use of language, terminology, and accent, for the

¹ For example, in the first meeting with 'Horton' participants I demonstrated this willingness by asking if they 'wanted to know a bit about me?'. Once given the go ahead, no sooner had I divulged that I had a daughter, they observed I was not wearing a wedding ring. Hence followed an interrogation of my views on unmarried motherhood. By displaying my personal experience, my 'professional' status was beginning to be demystified; and I could see I was beginning to tap into some of their own experiences.

² As one might predict, the different cultural backgrounds of myself and Muslim participants made it less easy to 'tune in' and rendered data of less depth than that from non-Muslim young people.

reasons mentioned above, and so that it was not too 'posh', jargonistic, sycophantic or patronising¹.

- Involving young people in decision-making in the research project can also demonstrate commitment to relinquishing power, and contribute to a sense of empowerment. Thus young people were asked for their views on the methods preferred and the most appropriate times for carrying them out; and asked for uncensored feedback on their involvement and on my way of working with them

7. Consciousness-raising and empowerment.

If participants feel they are empowered by the research and it raises their awareness, they are also less likely to feel exploited (Oakley 1998, Opie 1992). This can derive from de-individualising and re-framing some of the problems that people experience. For young people, this might involve problematising constructions that rely on biological or psychopathological explanation (see chapter 2), and instead encouraging exploration of social structuring agents and the power of adults to define and regulate them. Normative constructions of sexuality and victim blaming explanations (Aggleton 1995) can also be called into question here too. This is facilitated by seeking perceptions on the experience of schooling and home life, and on the relationships with adults within these spheres. Focusing on strengths rather than weaknesses and recognising the multi-dimensional sources of problems also raises self-esteem and can be empowering in helping decisions on achieving self-hood (Giddens 1991). Further, I continually expressed my gratitude for their involvement, and delight and relief each time they consented to the next stage of the research process.

All in all, serial (rather than one-off) interviews were felt more likely to facilitate the time for putting these principles into practice. This is endorsed by Holland et al, in an evaluation of their work with the WRAP team, when they say

'.. we could see no realistic way of empowering young people directly through the research process when our contact was in most cases, a single interview.' (1999:463).

¹ Transcripts revealed that my Yorkshire accent became unconsciously more pronounced to match that of participants. But, I was careful to use slang language only after participants had used it first. Unexpectedly our shared accents aided communication but also made visible some shared aspects of working class upbringing. Examples here are colloquialisms and terms of endearment (and abuse) which were clarified as having shared understanding.

8. Commitment to change

The ethos of feminist practice enshrines a commitment to social transformation through problematising the power of dominant ideologies and standpoints. But this work must not remain within the confines of academia (Wolf 1996). Hence, my commitment to widespread dissemination of findings to teachers, LEA advisors and other interested parties¹. However I cannot claim that my research brought about any social transformations, despite explicit reference to my findings in a parliamentary debate on the teaching of sex education in schools (Hansard 1994) and widespread publicity for the findings through national and local media coverage². Nevertheless, there may have been changes at local and incremental levels³. As Maynard (1994) suggests, the extent or direction of change may not be under the control of the researcher. This is especially true for my work, given the legislative controls that decree so much of what is taught in schools. The enduring hope, as Holland et al (1999) contend is that young people will eventually derive longer term benefits from this type of research through publicity for the findings (and in my case related training events for practitioners) that might result in more appropriate information and provision for young people on sexuality and sex education.

These principles were set out as ideals to work towards; their operationalisation becomes more evident in the findings.

I now go on to discuss reflexivity. This issue is not exclusive to the principles of feminist research as its origins lie in broader aspects of sociological and qualitative research thinking.

¹ This dissemination involved considerable time and affected progress on completing the thesis. It taught me that the commitment cannot be entered into lightly.

² The research findings were reviewed in the following media: The Guardian, 5 July 1994; Daily Mirror, 7 July 1994; Sunday Mirror, 9 July 1994; Sheffield Star, 7 July 1994; Sheffield Telegraph 8 July 1994; Radio 4 PM programme (interviewed by Hugh Sykes) 13 July 1994; Radio 4 Women's Hour (feature and interviewed by Jenny Murray) 22 July 1994; BBC Radio Wales, 13 July 1994; BBC Radio Nottingham, 11 July 1994; BBC Radio Sheffield, 8 July 1994; ITV 'Calendar News' (interviewed by Richard Madeley) 6 July 1994. Academic reviews appeared in Health Education Journal (1994); Youth and Society (1994); Royal Society of Medicine 'AIDS letter' (1994); AIDSCARE (1994).

³ Representatives from numerous agencies (schools, youth groups, universities, medical schools, voluntary agencies) requested details on the findings with a view to them informing their local practices on working with teenagers on sex education.

Reflexivity

Though reflexivity is an enduring theme in feminist researching, it has been debated more broadly by those adopting a reconstructive approach (May 1999) within the qualitative paradigm. At the most basic level, it involves a process of self-awareness and self-critique that seeks to expose the values and assumptions of social scientists, and understand how one's beliefs are socially constructed through the machinations of micro and macro factors (Smith 1988). In research settings, the process of reflexivity helps to clarify how the values of the subjects and the researcher impact on interactions and interpretations; and should help to transcend differences of power and culture (Grbich 1999) so that diversity can be expressed. Feminist reflexivity emerges from feminist epistemology and as such emphasises the subjective (rather than objective) positioning of the researcher and the researched which in turn aims to overcome the potential for exploitation (Stanley 1990). However, Wasserfall (1993) cautions that there is greater potential to enhance awareness, than its more limited impact on participants' empowerment.

In practice reflexivity makes one more vigilant to producing data that accurately reflect the participants' experience, and not the pre-suppositions of the researcher (Ashworth 1987). It involves observation and introspection, and constantly submitting one's interpretation to questioning. Jenkins (1996) argues that projection should be included in the 'repertoire of reflexivity' (p.35) so that researchers can look beyond the here and now of the research interaction, and locate themselves as the link between participants' experiences (the past) and that which emerges from the researcher's experience and the theoretical reasoning she applies (the future).

Tim May (1999) divides reflexivity into the two dimensions of the endogenous and the referential, as a useful way to address how reflexivity translates from theory to method and interpretation. Endogenous reflexivity refers to looking at the ways in which the 'actions of members of a given community contribute to the constitution of social reality itself' (p.1). This includes studying the methods participants use within their own lifeworlds, and those of researchers who are part of social scientific communities. In practice, this means that I should endeavour to use methods critically that would uncover

both my pre-suppositions, and not just descriptions of what young people did or felt, but also how they think about themselves within and in relation to the discourses and actions of ‘others’ be they peers, parents, teachers, whoever. It also means to try and make visible the aspects (especially practices) that may have been reconstituted because of the relationship to the researcher and the impact of the research context. This demanded methods that allow for checking the validity of accounts, and encourage participants to reflect on the macro processes that influence experience and transformations.

May (1999) suggests that where endogenous reflexivity refers to reflexivity *within* actions, referential reflexivity refers to the impact of reflexivity *upon* actions. Referential reflexivity is that knowledge which is potentially or actually derived from meeting challenges that disrupt routines, actions or ways of conceiving what we know or do¹. The production of accounts that render these experiences understandable (i.e. my interpretation) must also acknowledge the consequences arising from the meeting between the reflexivity of the actors in their social world and that exhibited by the researcher as part of an academic community. Necessarily then, my interpretation sees itself as only one of the many that are possible, particularly the aspects that position young people’s disclosures more tightly to educational and economic factors, and sociological explanations, than did young people’s reflections.

By positioning participants’, and my own self-identity, agency and power, using a framework of referential reflexivity, it allows one to move reflexivity beyond the contingencies of subjectivity and intersubjectivity, to looking at mechanisms of domination and exploitation, which May regards as a limitation in some readings of reflexivity (ibid.).

Methods: interviews and focus groups

While my research strategy necessarily reflects epistemological and methodological

¹ This resonates with Giddens’s definition of praxis that acknowledges the transformative potential of events or ‘fateful moments’ by questioning ontological security (see chapter 3).

considerations (Harding 1987) as discussed above, an element of choice pervades the method ultimately decided upon (Mason 1996). Decisions on which methods were the most appropriate in practice do not suggest a conviction that these are more superior *per se*; rather, my final choices, as Denscombe (1998) observes, were influenced by preferences and practical considerations:

- *preferences* about the *kinds* of data I wished to obtain;
- *practical* considerations related to the amount of *time* available, *competencies* with the research tool, and *access* to potential samples.

Dealing first with the *kinds* of data. I sought depth data that reflected the complexity of young people's lifeworlds, and which revealed perspectives on sexuality, and the processes through which experiences are mediated. Smith et al (1995) suggest that interviewing and qualitative analysis are

‘.. especially suitable where one is particularly interested in complexity or process, or where an issue is controversial or personal.’ (p.10).

Wight and West (1999), Kvale (1996), Arksey and Knight (1999), Maykut and Morehouse (1994), Marshall and Rossman (1995) similarly endorse interviews as a reliable means of gathering depth data. Interviews were also favoured because of wanting to get at the *everydayness* of their lives, its banality and routines. Hagan (1986) argues that a nuanced understanding of this normality can come only from disclosures in participants own words, and is therefore not easily achievable through questionnaires or ‘pre-categorised stimuli’ (p.338).

Interviewing also reflected *practical* considerations. I had the skills and sufficient positive evaluation of my approach to believe I could carry them out with the sensitivity that Wight and West (1999) argue is salient to successful interviewing. They found that variables such as age, gender, ethnicity, and social class, are less important than the interviewer's personality, non-judgmental approach, professional manner and confidence in asking sensitive questions.

Since interviewing creates copious data my samples need not be huge (Brenner et al 1985), and could be accessed directly or indirectly through existing networks. Methods requiring larger samples would stretch my time allocation in persuading enough

gatekeepers to consent to involvement; and stretch my capacity to persuade them of the usefulness of the method with any credibility. To reiterate Denscombe, ease of access and competence with the tool are necessarily influential in the option chosen.

Whatever my preferences however, I was committed to allowing participants choice over the methods they preferred, as a means to convey respect and develop empowerment. Overwhelmingly, participants favoured unstructured tape-recorded interviews. Jo summed up this view:

‘If you want to understand what we’re about, we need to do it by chatting about it, not writing owt down’.

Thus options to be involved in a questionnaire, or even semi-structured interviews with me taking written note of responses, were not welcomed. All groups supported interviewing with tape recording of responses. As Hanif offered in support of this method:

‘You’ll be able to listen to us better if ya aren’t writing’.

Hence interviewing became the primary method of data collection and discussion of the process follows in ‘Fieldwork’ below. Data were also contributed through other methods, of observation, and interviews more akin to ‘focus groups’, in efforts to add depth to particular themes and triangulate findings. Triangulation was also enhanced through data collected in other sites (see next section). This is discussed further in ‘Justifying methods and interpretation’ below.

Although unstructured interviewing (group and individual) was the explicit method adopted, and that used in the early stages of the research process, as a means of maintaining the exploratory nature of the task, and letting participants determine the direction of the interview (Spradley 1979), discussions very often became more naturally focused. Where this occurred, and groups began to debate an issue in more detail, say for example in discussion of sexual behaviour, sex education, family life, or relationships with adults, my role involved more specific questioning in order to visiblise the variability and depth of opinions on a particular issue, and to ensure quieter or less confident members had a voice. This has the hallmarks of ‘focus group interviewing’ that use,

‘... group interaction to produce data and insight that would be less accessible without the interaction found in a group.’ (Morgan 1997:2).

Looking at particular issues in a group context also allowed observation of social processes in action: the dynamics within the group, hierarchies of importance, and the more or least persuasive tactics used to stress a particular point of view. These again are typical aspects of focus groups (Kitzinger 1994).

While interviewing was the *explicit* method adopted, in practice discussions organically became more focused on particular issues, and hence akin to focus groups. I acknowledge that focus groups usually have their purpose explicitly stated (Morgan 1997), but this does not imply that my facilitation of focused discussions had covert intentions, or in any way introduced themes that participants might not want to discuss, because in all cases, focused discussions occurred after the theme had been introduced by participants. Moreover, if it felt appropriate to follow discussion down a particular route, explicit requests to follow the trajectory or momentum generated were always made. Respondents regarded this an obvious step forward, as this extract from one discussion illustrates:

‘Since you’ve got on to talking about sexual experience, can we talk about it in more detail?’ JH
‘Well course you can, you wanna get some meat on t’bones don’t you’ Maisie
‘You won’t get to know us if you don’t get on wi’ detail’ Jo.

Issues emerging from focus groups and group interviews provided ample material for discussion in individual or smaller group interviews (Millward 1995). The latter allowed individuals to dissent from dominant group opinions, as well as providing the opportunity to corroborate, add detail, and express more intimate disclosures.

A flexible approach to using focus groups in combination with other methods offers the means of not just triangulating data (Krueger 1994), but also reflecting a model that is clearly ethnographic through blending interviewing with observation and respecting the centrality of the participants view (Hammersley and Atkinson 1996).

Contextual investigation: purposive sampling and case studies

Because interviewing can lead to extensive and diverse data, the sample size was restricted to ensure that the task of analysis was manageable and conducted effectively (Boulton and Fitzpatrick 1994). But the sample also needed to be representative if it was

to make any claims to generalisability. Data from small samples cannot be representative of whole populations but, as Gilbert (1993) argues, the conceptual themes generated can be representative of a range of possible observations that have relevance for wider populations.

Representativeness is more likely to emerge where variability is maximised. To achieve this I purposively selected a sample (Maykut and Morehouse 1994) that was mixed according to age, gender, ethnicity, culture, social class, and given the research focus, variability in relation to sexual attitudes and experience. As a result, data were collected from 6 groups on 6 different sites:

Site 1. Horton Secondary School

Site 2. Burton Secondary School

Site 3. Wingate Secondary School

Site 4. Spring Centre (LEA youth group)

Site 5. The Station (LEA youth group)

Site 6. Friendship group (self-selecting).

All groups satisfied variability on grounds of gender, ethnicity, culture and sexual experience. Participants from sites 1, 3, 4 and 5 were working class apart from one male (site 1), but the majority in sites 2 and 6 had middle class backgrounds and hence introduced social class variations. Sites 4 and 6 extended the age range to 19 years, as those in sites 1, 2, 3 and 4 were all in the 15-16 years age range. Overall, all my pre-requisites for representativeness on grounds of variability were satisfied. In addition, each site was located in a different postal district. This enhanced the possibilities for comparisons across different geographic contexts and the variable cultural, educational and social experiences this might bring (for home life, schooling and peer socialising).

The decision to focus my analysis (and the thesis) on site 1 (Horton) emerged after analysing the total data set, and comparing findings across the sites. It transpired that the broad categories of interpretation from site 1 were typical and hence representative of those from other sites (Mason 1996). Analytic themes were also found to be almost saturated (Strauss and Corbin 1998) by data from site 1. Saturation was enhanced, and

validity of analytic categories tested, through comparison with data from the other sites (Boulton and Fitzpatrick 1994). While data from other sites corroborate the *broad* analytic categories devised from site 1 data, differences and contradictions in relation to *specific* elements within the themes (but across the sites) are highlighted in the findings. Notable examples are social class variations introduced by comparing disclosures from teenagers with working class subjectivities with those from middle class backgrounds. These comparisons ameliorated any tendencies to subjective or impressionistic interpretation (Burgess 1995) that might emerge from my closer association with the Horton group.

Desires to develop a detailed appreciation of young people's experience as it relates to context, motivated decisions to use a case study approach (Stake 1995). This approach allows thick ethnographic description of individuals and groups, their socio-contextual biographies, rules, routines, experiences and histories (Feagin et al 1991). In qualitative research, Grbich (1999) suggests case studies generally refer to 'a bounded unit with some established identity' (p.188). This should not obscure diversity of identity, since the only aspect of 'established identity' I sought to satisfy was that the 'case' participants were teenagers with meaningful and unique insights on sex and sexuality. But this still creates a boundedness, together with a boundedness emanating from stories illustrative of particular social contexts. In addition, comparing the primary case study (Horton) with others in different sites permits comparison and contrast of the impact of different locations.

As it turned out, a more accurate term for my 'cases' is 'sites', which I define as an existing grouping of young people who are part of a socially organised setting, though not necessarily a natural grouping. For instance, in accessing groups in collectivising locations of schools and youth clubs, the participants have commonalities in relation to age, purpose of being there, and some shared geographic horizons, but they are not natural groups in the same sense as groups sharing a family unit or typifying condition (e.g. illness), as in some case studies of particular phenomena (see Ragins 1995, for example). Rather, the sites and groupings thereof were selected to allow for the possibility that each setting would expand the variability of the sample. This is why purposive, rather than random sampling, was used because variability within each site

(and depth enquiry of) was more crucial than achieving variation through the use of random selection and/or larger sample sizes (Fife-Schaw 1995).

Whatever the definition of case studies, they are agreed as having potential to generate theory that is generalisable both naturalistically (Hammersley 1992) and analytically (Yin 1984). My approach satisfies aspects of all Robert Stakes (1995) three types of case study. Emphasis on the Horton group satisfies the aim of *intrinsic* studies, to yield depth understanding of a particular case or people; the thematisation of sexuality and its relation to context in interviews with all groups satisfies the impetus for *instrumental* case studies that seek greater understanding of a specific issue and development of theory; and enlarging the sample to include data from other sites, makes it a *collective* study that develops the instrumental aspects. However, since I decided to focus on the Horton group, the analysis is not representative of collective case studies that compare each case in detail (for example, see Burgess et al 1996).

Table 1 (see appendix 2) summarises the sites and routes of access to participants.

Justifying methods and interpretation

Of fundamental importance in supporting claims to rigorous researching and the reliability of findings, is the demonstration of reasoning behind methodological decision-making and how the research was undertaken (Kirk and Miller 1986). The preceding discussion has attempted to do this, as well as pointing out strategies for the avoidance of bias and impressionism, and the nature of the generalisability of findings.

Here I will develop this through discussion of three aspects that, from my reading of the literature, frame debate on rigour in qualitative research. These are objectivity, reliability and validity. As previously intimated (see 'The conundrum of quantitative approaches' above) objectivity is a long contested issue, particularly by feminists who associate objectivism with masculinist and positivist (especially survey and questionnaire) research, and where the emphasis is on the detachment of the researcher and the collection of 'objective', value-free social facts. In similar ways, I do not make any claims to my research being value free or 'objective', but Miles and Huberman (1994) argue that research can still be objective, as long as it makes transparent the biases that exist and

minimises the power of the researcher's pre-suppositions. Including reflexivity in the process, and the account, is a necessary pre-requisite here.

Another strategy for objectivity implied by reflexivity, is that it should be rigorously critical and refute assumed relations between phenomena (Popper 1959). For me this involved both a critical reading of literature and existing theory and the repeated testing of participants' disclosures through asking questions in different ways, and in different contexts (e.g. in group, small and individual interviews), and through comparing evidence across different sites. In other words, triangulating methods and findings.

Objectivity in researching should also render reliability and validity. Reliability conventionally refers to whether the research instruments are neutral in their effects, and whether the findings are reproducible (Denscombe 1998). But since it has been argued that the researcher's subjectivity has to be acknowledged as part of the tool in qualitative research, this neutrality is undermined. It is more appropriate in qualitative research for reliability to be expressed through ensuring and demonstrating that the data collection and analysis has been honest, appropriate, thorough and accurate (Mason 1996).

Spradley (1979) also suggests reliability can be assessed more realistically, and make it more likely that another researcher could explore the same issue with the same tools, if, as I have endeavoured to do, the research aims, process and reasoning behind decisions are systematically detailed. Implicit to this, Silverman (1993) argues, is the need to distinguish between 'emic' analysis (that based on the research subjects' concepts) and 'etic' analysis (based on the researcher's interpretation). Throughout this document, I have made clear the etic and emic distinctions, through adopting certain conventions (of using font size 10 and quotation marks for verbatim quotes, i.e. emic analyses) and making clear the origins of etic concepts and interpretations. This mapping of the conceptions and process of the research, and justifying procedural and analytic decisions, is what Lincoln and Guba (1985) refer to as an 'audit trail'. Reliability is also enhanced if the audit trail convinces the audience that the researcher has provided a meticulous record that is adequately substantiated and offers a depth exploration of the social world under study (Silverman 2000).

Substantiated and depth accounts do not necessarily imply that the conclusions are valid. Validity comes from ensuring reflections accurately represent the people and issues one is claiming to measure or explain (Grbich 1999). This means I avoided any spurious correlations, or making definitive claims to cause and effect, and avoiding oversimplification or minimising the complexity of issues affecting the phenomena under study (Silverman 1990). Confidence in the validity of findings is also bolstered if findings have been triangulated; if analyses have considered alternative or rival theories; if they have external validity through fitting with comparable studies and existing knowledge; and finally if they have been endorsed by participants (Denscombe 1998) or those with a first hand experience of working with young people. In my study, dissemination of findings showed that both research participants and key professionals working with young people have judged this to be the case.

Fieldwork

This section considers issues relevant to accessing participants via gatekeepers; building relationships with participants; then details the process of collecting data from participants.

The circuitous path to access

While the great majority of this document focuses on data collected from the 'Horton' site, reflections on access negotiations to all sites are relevant to chronicling my reflexive journey from research novice to more sensitised researcher. Details on the final pathways that transpired are summarised in appendix 2, together with that in appendix 3 on the strategic preparation for approaching gatekeepers, and reflections on the access process.

Gaining consent for involvement in the study from the most senior figure in the hierarchy did not provide the *carte blanche* to carrying out fieldwork. As Burgess (1984, 1995) cautions, negotiating access is more than a single step strategy. Access had to be constantly re-negotiated with a series of gatekeepers lower down the hierarchy - all involving different sets of relationships. Unquestionably, my access to participants in schools was facilitated by my previous professional relationships in educational settings which positively influenced gatekeepers' faith in my abilities to carry out the research ethically. But, in settings with no prior relationship (such as youth groups) the process

was less straightforward and involved more tensions. These variable relationships, and the variable and often unclear roles, hold different implications for the conditions attached to access and the subsequent research outcomes.

In general there was a direct relationship between length of negotiation and the number of bureaucratic tiers in the organisation. Negotiations were also extended in situations where roles and responsibilities in multi-tiered organisations were unclear (sites 4 and 5). The significant point here is that access may be approved formally through bureaucratic consent to proceed to the next stage but this does not automatically provide the consent to proceed to the specific target locality. In other words there proved to be a distinct difference between achieving formal *bureaucratic* (or *administrative*) consent and *sitè* consent. Unexpected set-backs resulted from my naive assumption that negotiations with senior bureaucrats (such as the Director of the LEA, Head of Youth Service, and Headteachers) would represent the hardest and more delicate aspects of the process - gatekeepers lower down the hierarchy exercised immense influence over whether access was achieved, and rendered lengthier processes of negotiation than had been anticipated. Each gatekeeper had a unique investment in participating (or not) in the research - each with different stakeholder rights, motivations, concerns and personal and political agendas (see appendix 3 for detailed discussion).

This meant that reflexivity was just as important at this stage in maximising my sensitivity and skills to answering questions of how relationships could be developed (Mason 1996), particularly in unfamiliar settings. How could I gain acceptance? And, how would I know whether I had genuinely been accepted so that the research would not be interrupted because of unforeseen problems? This first stage of my research and a review of other author's experiences (Delamont 1992, Atkinson 1981, and Burgess 1984a) demonstrated clearly that access is not as unproblematic as the novice may anticipate. The length of time needed was underestimated and the insights gained would have been lost without written records (detailed research diary notes) of the machinations involved. In retrospect, it is ironic that these reflections and plans were recorded at all, because at the time of writing they were logged as a form of therapeutic catharsis; and as evidence of my desperation to record *some* progress during the initial frustrating stages of the research project, where nothing appeared to progress at the rate I wanted. Access

negotiations did not feel like 'real' research, primarily because I had not recognised the observations as sources of data, as other researchers similarly testify (Delamont 1992). Extracts from my research diary illustrate not only my frustrations, but also the influence of access negotiations on the direction and outcomes of the research:

Negotiations with him Mr Smith [Headteacher] are frustrating and demeaning. Two months have elapsed since our first discussion and no progress has ensued. My original respect for his caution and need for clarity has been eroded by his patronising manner and failure to keep to our mutual agreements. I was willing to jump through some of his hoops and resort to the role of champion sycophant to win his approval but I've had enough. He's creating barriers which I can't cross, such as asking me to breach confidentiality (providing information on those involved in sexual behaviour) which he euphemistically describes as his 'responsibility to protect his kids'. Diana [PSHE teacher] is on indefinite sick leave, thus I have no allies in the site and therefore feel I have little option other than to follow up plan B and approach another site. I've realised I won't be able to yield any data from young people in sites with over-bearing, sexist, controlling individuals who are unwilling to permit me some autonomy or trust their staff to liaise with me'

(Diary notes, 1.10.94)

This and other diary entries verify how the gatekeepers had more power than I anticipated in determining the research outcomes with regard to who (research participants), how (methods), where (interview location) and what (resultant data collected). Perhaps most significant of these is the impact of the mode of access and outcome of negotiations in determining the permissibility of the methods involved. For example, at site 4, time constraints were imposed by the gatekeepers, which restricted some participants to one group interview rather than the preferred option of group interviews followed by individual interviews later on. On more than one occasion, the room allocated for interview was inappropriate and not conducive to confidential questioning and disclosure (e.g. site 4 and 5), hence data were not of the depth and authenticity that were provided in other sites (e.g. sites 1, 2, 3 and 6). Additionally, I relied on some key supportive staff to arrange access and/or venues (at their request) but there were emotional costs when their commitment appeared to wane:

At the moment I'm really demoralised. Can't get hold of anyone to organise the practical arrangements. There's other priorities for them, but I can't help taking it personally. Am I too bolshy or downright unassertive?.

(Diary entry 15.10.94).

Learning is fast. With the knowledge of hindsight, I developed a more flexible plan (see below) with a series of options, contingencies and amended (more realistic) time-scales that would allow for the possibility of the first approach not working and diminish the sense of failure should the original plan not become operational (Delamont 1992). Other diary entries illustrate this:

A mixed day. Thought I'd got the go-ahead but it seems I've ended up in another cul-de-sac/dead end. I hate being at yet another impasse. I feel disheartened and worry whether I'm perceived as a nuisance by some of the agencies. The worry is whether or how much of this I project in my dealings with gatekeepers ?!' (Diary entry 10.10.94).

Such disconsolate diary entries became rarer due more to better planning than a reverse of fortune. Another entry illustrates my relief and over-demonstrative reaction to gaining consent from one particularly challenging gatekeeper:

Derek [youth worker] finally agreed to let me talk to the kids. I was so surprised - after all this time! Stupidly I responded, 'Oooh I could kiss you'. He turned deep crimson and his tie appeared to be strangling him even more than usual. I made it worse by openly acknowledging his discomfort and saying 'Only kidding, I'm just so happy'. Then he warned, 'Don't get so excited, there's a long way to go'. Felt like I'd lost any iota of credibility. But I'm in. I'm in!! (Diary entry, 22.10.94).

My strategy for access can be summarised as follows:

Step 1 - Identify the end-point (target sample) for each action. Then working back from this, establish the chain of gatekeepers from the most to least powerful, with respect to status or position in the hierarchy. This stage included a number of possible routes (gatekeepers) to access: A-roads (preferential pathway), B-roads (second choice), C-roads (if all else fails).

Step 2 - In the contact diagram, insert gatekeepers with whom one already has some personal contact and/or previous working experience. This includes:

- those individuals who have already registered some interest in the research project,
- colleagues in the sector with involvement in previous research projects,
- key agents and agencies who may not be directly involved as gatekeepers but have experience of the area of research and may have valuable insights on access negotiations from their own initiatives,
- last but not least, associates working in the field, with whom relationships are well established.

Step 3 - Add character profiles i.e. any background information which may aid or hinder access. This required a searching of mental archives to retrieve all possible past associates and connections (however virtual) who might turn out to be useful allies in aiding entry to the research participants. It also proved useful to recollect (or seek out) any background knowledge on allies with whom relationships had not been tested, since such associations have the power to deter as well as facilitate agency involvement. The

next diary extract illustrates how my research on potential access contact's biographies almost let me down:

Fortunately, my attempts to contact Daz (youth worker) failed as I found out from an ex-colleague at the Youth Service that he's got a history of not getting on with his managers and any recommendations from him are likely to do more harm than good. (Diary entry 2.12.94)

In all honesty this stage of access negotiations felt the least ethical of all because years of resisting professional tribalism, cliques, and third hand rumour were replaced by not uncommon conversations (with reliable and trusted sources), which requested the gossip - the 'off the record information', and 'would you recommend him?' assurances.

Finally, with this information in place, a flow diagram was completed with each of the key stages in place. The practical benefit of this visual map is matched by its role in realistically indicating the time that might be required before meeting the target research participants.

Politics, sexuality and sensitive research

Previously I discussed the need to consider the implications of doing research on a sensitive topic (sex and sexuality), and with young people. It becomes even more sensitive for people in organisations whose practices routinely invisibilise sexuality or deny its relevance¹. (Martin and Collinson 1999, Hearn and Parkin 1987). Hence, when sexuality is presented to individuals as an explicit issue for their consideration, it can render discomfort and resistance, since it challenges their usual 'asexualised' way of working. This was most acutely demonstrated during my experience of negotiating access to youth group settings via senior Social Services' bureaucrats. Professionals working with young people on a day-to-day basis did not display the same level of reticence. Different reasons account for these variations in response and are discussed further in appendix 3. The essential point here is that access is influenced both positively and negatively by researcher:gatekeeper relationships and the micro and macro politics that come with researching a sensitive issue (Lee and Renzetti 1993).

Aside from the methodological, political and ethical (discussed below) issues raised by

¹ While at the same time working within structures and social relations that are pervasively organised by gender and heterosexuality (Gutek 1989).

research on sex and sexuality, that demand a sensitivity with regard to access, consent, fieldwork and confidentiality (O'Connell Davidson and Layder 1994) there were also problems which related to the contingent (Goffman 1968) meanings of 'sex' and its relationship to 'drugs', that emanate from their contemporary association with the HIV and AIDS epidemic. I had not anticipated the degree to which the social construction of these terms and associated activities could be overshadowed by notions of, among many things, fear, morality, denial, and judgement (Wilton 1997). While such perspectives were representative of only a few, it became clear that for some the issue in itself was not as important as,

'... the relationship between the topic and the social context within which the research is conducted' (Lee & Renzetti 1993:5).

Fourfold implications follow in relation to the context of my research. First, the topic itself is inarguably sensitive and shrouded in a plethora of opinions, taboos and judgements. Second, this topic when researched with a target sample of young people raises another host of variable constructs of meaning, association and moral values (see chapter 2). Third, the timing of my research occurred during the aftermath of immense social and political reaction to the perceived threat from HIV and AIDS (Wilton 1997). Sex education in schools was seized upon as an area for reform. Government responses included cautionary measures intended to prevent the promotion of homosexuality (DES 1988b), giving parents the right to withdraw their children from sex education (DES 1988c) and investing school governors with control over sex education curricula (DES 1988a). My teaching experience showed that these measures restricted young people's exposure to more empowering sex education. Whether or not they were supported by the specific gate-keepers, with whom I became involved, remains unknown, but the caution some demonstrated is pertinent to my fourth point. Conducting research in statutory settings with young people for whom the gatekeepers are ultimately responsible, invoked uncertainties in relation to how participation in the research process and moreover the outcomes, might prove problematic in attracting condemnation and negative publicity from parents, professionals and politicians. This is reflected in the response of some stakeholders, particularly those working in 'asexual' administrative positions (as mentioned above) who disclosed fears of untoward, awkward outcomes, and used these to justify not becoming involved in the project (for details, see appendix

3). Here we see how the social and political topicality of this research rendered it not only sensitive but potentially contentious (Lee and Renzetti 1993).

This raised the need to develop trust and confidence between myself and the consenting collaborating agency, that no research would be conducted that posed a threat to the organisation or the research participants for whom they were responsible. Informed consent to participation, data collection and dissemination were therefore intrinsic to the early stages of negotiations with gatekeepers and young people who participated. In most cases this proved unproblematic, but reflections on the process of negotiating this informed commitment (see appendix 3) suggest my dealings with some gatekeepers could have been improved through more systematic preparation for discussion of this issue.

In the field with participants

Developing relationships

Previously I raised the importance of issues pertinent to developing relationships with participants. Here I will develop these ideas. First, is the importance of perceptions of the role of the researcher. Decisions on which role to adopt depend on the focus and purpose of the research (Delamont 1992), and as I have indicated above, I played down the ex-teacher status with students, in contrast to playing it up with teachers (see Beynon 1983). In non-school sites the teacher status was less relevant, yet the academic (university) status rendered varying responses, being either unimportant, suggestive of credibility, or as subject for ridicule with some site staff (see appendix 3).

Second, key to relationship building was the establishment of dialogue and ‘tuning in’ to participants. Other authors have noted style of dress as important here (Patrick 1973, Hammersley and Atkinson 1996, Delamont 1984). My attire attracted comment and was useful for ‘breaking the ice’ on several occasions. Numerous factors were involved in decisions on what to wear (for comparable examples, see Lees 1986, Atkinson 1981a, Measor 1985), and in most cases I dressed for ‘multiple audiences’ (Delamont 1984:84), adopting styles that were consistent with images of respectability (smartness) as far as staff were concerned, but which did not appear contrived from the young people’s view, since teenagers are often so adept at recognising ingenuity. So I did not wear ‘gimmicky’ clothes (emblazoned with labels or logos) as this was likely to be regarded as both

ostentatious and ridiculous for a woman of my age; instead wearing clothes that were acceptable through being 'in' at the time, such as tops with hoods, long skirts, and flat heeled boots with laces. A group of girls at Horton School commented that they 'loved' what I wore and looked forward to our meetings 'to see what you're wearing'. Training shoes were not considered acceptable since these could not be hidden from staff, but this in itself helped create linkages with young people when during an interview on 'style' (see theme 2 in findings) girls at Horton asked about my preferences:

Do you ever wear trainers?' Jo
'Yeah but I don't wear 'em when I come into school' JH
'Why not' Josie
'Well teachers might not like it' JH
'Do you care what they think?' Josie
'Well in some ways. 'Cos they might judge me on that basis and I don't want that to influence whether I can continue to work with you' JH
'Do you really have to do that - even though you're an adult?' Jo
'Yeah you have to think of tactics to get round people's prejudices' JH
'She's like us, we do that all the time. Wicked.' Maisie

These inferences of subversiveness to circumvent teacher's surveillance or judgement also contribute positively to another aspect of relationship building, that is, participants' perceptions of whose side one appears to be on (Mac an Ghaill 1991, Measor and Woods 1991). As in studies conducted and others reviewed by these authors, this third aspect was tested by incidents that allowed students to see whether I would 'tell on them'. It is likely (though not proven) that Hanif's and Javed's trust in me was enhanced when, on their request, I confirmed that I had not 'blagged' (informed teachers) on them after witnessing them truanting from CDT lessons. In other incidents, Maisie's entry to a group interview was delayed because of an altercation with a teacher about chewing gum; and Ruby's swearing at a teacher following a row in the corridor. In both situations I did not judge the behaviour, instead asked if they were 'okay' but without undermining the teacher's actions, and offered neutral explanations, such as 'maybe your teacher's having a bad day, don't take it too hard.' I also allowed students to break school rules through permitting the eating of sweets and chewing gum (and sharing of), and non-acknowledgement of swearing in discussions between us. This again signifies a defiance of normative practices and fuelled my acceptance. The findings provide other illustrations of this issue.

Establishing some 'common ground' (Delamont 1992) with young people was also helped by disclosure of some of my biography both current and past (teenagehood for

instance). Like James Patrick (1973) I shared aspects that intended to convey an understanding of youth culture. For instance, I deliberately got them to talk about pop music so that I could demonstrate my knowledge; 'let on' that I lived with a disc jockey, and had two friends involved in a pirate radio station - to which all subsequently tuned in and proclaimed the music as 'rated' (good). These were the 'known about' aspects (ibid.) I could disclose early on; more contentious aspects (such as my negative feelings towards sex education) would be revealed later on, once relationships were more firmly established. Another factor that enhanced my credibility and perceptions of shared identity, as mentioned previously, was my northern accent and shared colloquialisms.

Finally to reiterate an earlier point, none of this commonality was sought at the expense of assuming a universality of experience - a factor which I stressed in persuading young people of my naiveté to their authentic experience, together with their right to divulge only those aspects that they felt comfortable disclosing. This has empowering influences and reinforces the principle of seeing participants as 'experts'.

Ethical issues

Preceding discussion has attempted to make visible my ethical research practice through processes of minimising my pre-suppositions; use of accessible language to ensure goals, information and procedures are fully understood; and ensuring consent to participation is voluntary, and genuinely informed (Silverman 2000, Punch 1994). But, while participants may give their consent at the outset, neither they nor the researcher can fully predict the nature of what it is they are consenting to. Neither party knows how far the relationships between them will develop or the degree to which intimate aspects of lives might be revealed; nor how the direction of the research might change (Mason 1996) because of its exploratory nature. In this sense, I had the responsibility both to point this out at the outset, and repeatedly check that participants wanted to continue their involvement, throughout all stages of the process. Specifically, this involved checking consent to, and comfort with, my methods; and whether individuals wanted to continue with a disclosure particularly if it aroused upset or confided illegal behaviours¹. Individuals were also reminded of their right to switch off the tape recorder and to remove extracts from transcripts. In practice, such measures empowered participants, as this example illustrates:

¹ And, of course, stressing that confidences would not be breached.

'It's good when you ask us if it's okay to go on, 'cos it makes you feel, like you're in control' Jo
'Yeah it's like you (JH) said at t'beginning, it's our life and it's up to us what we tell you about it. And you've stuck to that' Josie.

Other issues also needed recognition. The nature of the project was likely to lead to disclosure of illegal practices (sexual and drug related), and possibly disclosures of sexual abuse. Regarding sexual and/or drug taking behaviours between consenting individuals, I stated explicitly that my documentation would anonymise individuals and no information would be passed on to third parties that might allow identification. Furthermore, I would be available for 'off the record' discussions outside the interview context¹. Regarding admissions of abuse, I emphasised (as non-dramatically as possible) that I would support individuals but felt bound to involve the expertise of professionals concerned to protect their rights². In all sites I negotiated the process for dealing with such events with the appropriate individual professional. In practice no such revelations occurred.

In all meetings with participants, contingencies were built in that would attend to unforeseen developments, such as anger or upset, that could not be handled within the interview situation. This meant ensuring that I was aware of the whereabouts of an identified professional who could supervise the rest of the group (whilst I attended to the anxious participant(s)) or support a participant who wished to leave the group. In either case, it was agreed that I would negotiate with the participant as to their preference.

Reflexivity: participant and researcher responses to my involvement

Reflexivity extends beyond the commitment to rigorous methods and participant-centred practices. Axiomatically this commitment leads to effects on participants and researchers that have implications for the outcomes, but some effects are more tangible than others. The data, for instance, are an explicit product of the close relations I formed with participants, which in turn resulted from the sensitive wording of questions and research climates that encouraged honest and depth disclosure. Less tangible are the effects on outcomes of my emotional responses to working with participants and their responses to me.

¹ Participants were given a telephone number that could be used to contact me at any time.

² I explained that in the first instance this would involve confiding the information to a teacher they trusted, and this might lead to the involvement of child protection agencies.

During the research I heard many depressing and humbling disclosures. At times it was difficult to see how young people could take control of their lives (their health, sexuality, opportunities etc.) in the face of what felt like universally hostile forces. Many seemed to have so little room for manoeuvre. This emotional involvement had to be reconciled with maintaining a healthy capacity for analytic scrutiny (Grbich 1999). Hence I enrolled the help of a trusted colleague, as recommended by Schatzman and Strauss (1973), with whom I had regular discussions on strategies for ensuring my feelings did not bias participant responses. This was operationalised as follows. Though I was sympathetic to what interviewees described, I ensured that my responses did not compound their disconsolate feelings by endorsing the disclosure as depressing and pessimistic. Instead I sought to empower by stressing their strengths and possibilities for bringing about change. This was often exhausting in trying to serve as both up-lifting confidante and diligent researcher. In addition I documented my thoughts in a diary immediately after the interview. These were used for three purposes. First, prior to the next interview I assessed whether any issues or my responses to them needed clarification or verification with the participant(s) concerned. I often asked whether my interpretation had been correct and participants sometimes endorsed it or suggested amendments or additions. Second, I discussed each of these entries with my colleague and asked him to listen to the accordant tape recording of the interview alongside my reflections, to assess any biases or influences that may have been introduced. Again, these could be followed up in interviews. Third, data analysis was conducted alongside these reflections, and any queries or possible researcher-influenced responses either made explicit in the report or removed from the findings.

While these strategies make allowances for the immediate consequences arising from the meeting of participants and researchers (May 1999, see discussion above), the specific impact of my greater capacity to empathise with the white and African Caribbean girls was not given full recognition until I had completed the fieldwork¹. I realised that this sharing of (some) experiences probably led to an unintended, but nevertheless greater attention to, these young women's perspectives, as demonstrated by more copious resultant data. Together with other cultural variations, it follows that this contributed to

¹ For instance, I could relate to aspects of their working class upbringing, their feelings at being labelled 'troublesome', and the tensions created in trying to negotiate greater freedom in relationships between parent and daughter.

data of less depth from Pakistani and Somali females and all males. Participants are likely to have recognised my variable ability to 'tune in' to what they described, and hence affected their responses. In most cases it is impossible to pinpoint if or where this

occurred, apart from in explicit displays of participants' reflexivity, such as Hanif's and Javed's challenge to my assumptions about their sexual experience (see findings, theme 3, 'Problematising normative conceptions of sexual identity and practice'). However, I am fully aware that more research is needed on the perspectives of those whose lives are not represented fully in my account, and on this basis make appropriate recommendations (see chapter 8).

Data management

Data collection

Just as the analysis has focused on the 'Horton' data, the ensuing record of data collection methods provides details of those used with 'Horton' participants, and only summarising information for the other sites.

Group sizes

Each site included groups of different sizes, ranging from 15 - 6 participants. In sites 1, 2, 3 and 5, additional individuals requested entry to the group after the original or 'core' membership had been established (in the initial meeting and first group discussion). I asked the 'core' members to decide whether to permit the entry of these late-comers to minimise perception of my greater power, particularly at this initial stage of rapport building. This strategy involved risks; if newcomers were excluded I might miss out on exciting data, whereas if newcomers were welcomed there was potential to disrupt proceedings and the sense of identity already beginning to be established by the core group. As it turned out, core members chose to close off membership to anyone wishing to join at later stages in the process. Explanations illustrated a sense of group solidarity and ownership over the study:

'Don't let them in, it's our project' Jo
'They've only come 'cos they've heard it's good and we have a laugh' Maisie
'And they want tea and biscuits' Sean
'We know what we're doing now, they could like mess it up' Maisie
'What do you mean?' JH
Well we like have got, ... er, er, started to be like more comfortable with
each other and ..' Maisie (interrupted by Josie)

Data collection strategy

The data collection strategy was identical for all sites with the exception of participants in site 6 who elected to collect other data through video recorded interviews with two significant adults. Though this method is extremely interesting particularly because of the gains for participants in terms of empowerment, the data that resulted are worthy of another thesis and cannot be accommodated (with any depth) within the limits of this document.

To provide varying opportunities for making disclosures and to allow for triangulation of data, in all sites a tiered system of methods was offered (see diagram below) with the option to participate in all if desired. The diagram indicates the focus for discussion and the constitution of groups that resulted with the Horton group.

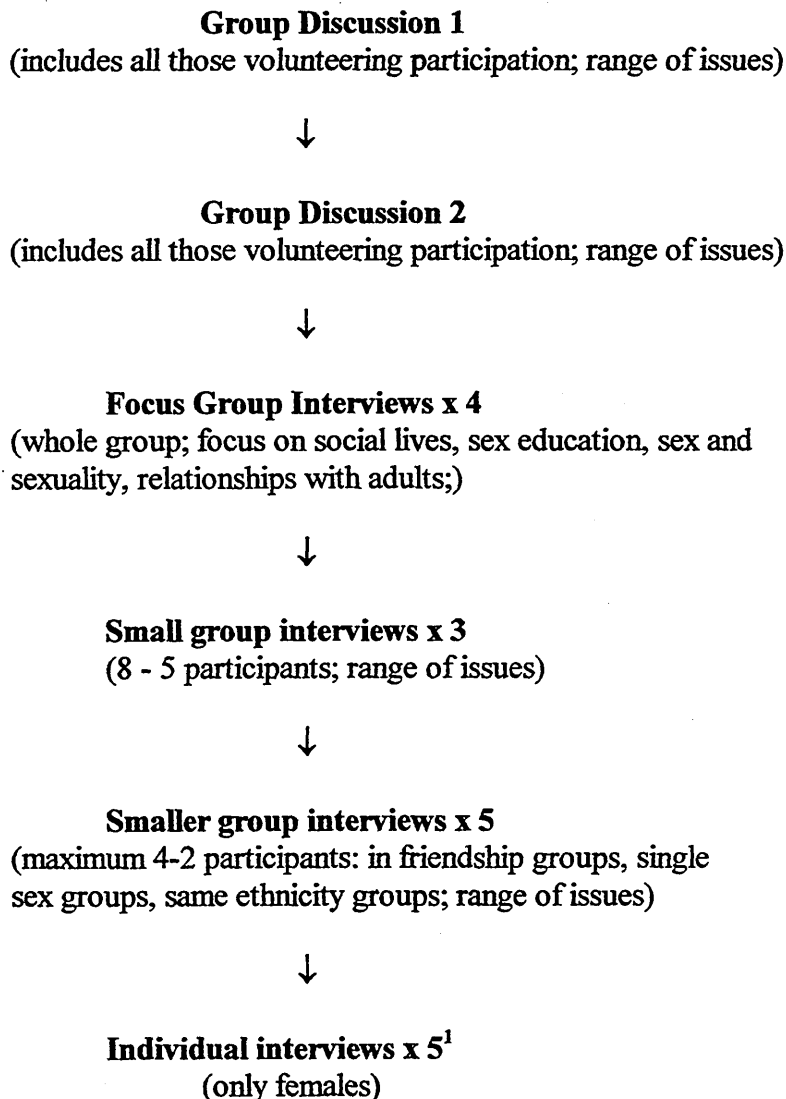
The whole group discussions and focus group interviews lasted 60 minutes since this was the period of time allocated during their lunch break. Small group and individual interviews took place after school or during lesson time and ranged from 50 to 70 minutes. All group discussions and interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed as soon as possible after the event (with participant’s consent). Tape recording and transcription intended to provide a more thorough record of the interaction, in contrast to note taking, where phrases used, dialect, hesitation, false starts, what is not said, would be more difficult to record, with the risk that their significance remained unacknowledged. Equally important was the desire to convey respect for participants’ views through undivided attention that was not distracted by note taking. As Burgess (1984a) suggests,

‘... an interviewer who takes notes cannot give full attention to the informant’ (p. 118).

Furthermore, no notes or written cues were used during the interviews in efforts to lessen the formality of the interaction, with broad themes for discussion memorised prior to meeting the interviewee(s). However I was aware that fatigue from the intensity of the interviews (and sometimes the serial scheduling of interviews) might prevent recall of some specific issues (emerging from previous larger group interviews) that I wanted to

address with individuals and therefore these were noted, but kept hidden, until the interview appeared to be reaching a natural conclusion, at which point I asked for permission to check my notes. In all cases interviewees were flattered that earlier disclosures had been of notable significance.

Diagram showing process of data collection for Horton School



¹ Male participants declined the offer of individual interviews, preferring to be interviewed with friends in groups of 2-4.

Individual and small group interviews were instrumental in constructing more composite pictures of individual's biographies which facilitated comparison between individuals within and across different groups. In addition they provided participants with the opportunity for correction and/or elaboration of my interpretation of their statements (Kvale 1983) and an arena to revisit issues raised in the larger group situation. This proved invaluable to revealing discrepancies between public recollections of 'events', opinions and feelings, expressed amongst friends, and those disclosed privately with me. Tensions arising from these apparent contradictions require exploration in order to elucidate the multiple perspectives underlying individuals' social action. Aggleton (1987) emphasised the ethnographic importance of this line of enquiry in research practice:

'... to do justice to the complexity of patterns of subjectivity and practice.' (p.34).

As mentioned previously, prior to entering the field, individual interviews were envisaged as a method to support methodological rigour and validity of findings but their greater importance to respondents of providing the opportunity to share their version of events, and accommodate their reflexivity, was unanticipated. In general they tended to agree with the main aspects of the 'story' as told by the dominant actors in the group situation but often offered alternative explanations and attributed different meanings to the activities described. In particular, individual perceptions of the relationship between social activities (described collectively) and other interactional contexts, such as home life and school life, revealed significant contradictions. The awareness raising that I sought to enshrine in the data collection techniques and the reflexivity accompanying the passing of time seemed to account for some of this. It is notable that in the group situation, events and explanations appeared to be recollected as they were experienced at the time, whereas in the individual situation, more contemplative thoughts and feelings were legitimated, particularly in dissenting from the group opinion. Consequently several participants stated openly that they were relieved to hear they had the chance to talk privately in individual or smaller group interviews. Additionally, individual interviews provided the forum for more reticent individuals to share their perceptions.

To honour the commitment to the feminist principles of empowerment and minimising the power of the researcher, transcripts were returned to interviewees for comment, amendment or deletion. Although anonymity was guaranteed, the transcripts

contained references to illegal behaviours and I felt respondents should have the opportunity to reconsider their disclosures. On reading the transcripts, no one wanted to change the content but because this was transcribed verbatim (i.e. in regional dialect) several individuals felt that their accent made them 'sound thick'. I explained that accurate transcription was not intended to be patronising rather to ensure that meaning was not lost through substitution of alternative terms and phrases, but that I was happy to substitute their parlance with 'Queen's English'. At this point a regional pride emerged with all deciding to leave the transcripts unadulterated, with a collective attitude of 'they can take us as they find us'.

Initially the majority also declined the offer to choose a pseudonym, stating they were happy with their own name appearing in the findings. However pseudonyms were advised and agreed by interviewees.

The data were supplemented by notes kept in a fieldwork diary. These recorded observations and non-tape-recorded discussions, summarised by Schatzman and Strauss as notes which record

'events experienced principally through watching and listening. They contain as little interpretation as possible and are as reliable as the observer can construct them.' (1973:110).

These were written as soon as possible after the event, often at bus stops and the journey home. These provided insights on group dynamics and helped construct areas for further enquiry in individual and small group interviews. I also kept reflexive notes (as mentioned above) and theoretical notes, which are 'self-conscious, controlled attempts to derive meaning from any one of several observation notes' (Schatzman and Strauss 1973:101). These represent the start to developing analytic concepts by considering more abstract meaning in the data. They also provided a mechanism to help me recognise and reflect on my presuppositions during the fieldwork. Observations and reflective comments were used to improve my interview technique and direct my collection of documentary and other literature based sources. They were also of immense use in producing a better reading of analytic themes during the data analysis stage.

Data analysis

The basic stages in qualitative data analysis of noticing, collecting and thinking about interesting things are not linear, they are contained within the entire process (Spiegelberg 1980). From the outset to the final stages (and beyond) of ordering evidence and analytic concepts, new ideas infused the framework progressively. Conclusions eventually emerged through reading the data within a process that is repetitive, progressive, reflexive and reiterative. This typifies the meaning unit analysis that I adopted (see below).

This process in itself was lengthy but the sense of discovery made it exciting and rewarding. Less positive feelings accompanied the process of writing the narrative that accurately reflected the participants' 'story', which filled me with immense foreboding, as Ely et al (1991) testify similarly. It had to be true to their meanings and hopefully bring the participants to life, but it also needed to be credible, compelling and interesting. Furthermore, I could not envisage how the painstaking process of analysing data, cross referencing themes, incorporating observational and theoretical notes, could ever be reduced to an all encompassing and representative 'story'. Christina Hughes (1996) notes that in this sense, Strauss's recommendation of adopting the motto in qualitative fieldwork analysis, of 'what's the main story here?' (p.45), suggests a more reductionist version of analysis than is usually the case, and runs the risk of underplaying the epistemological requirements for accounts that go beyond story-telling. The following account summarises the pathway I took to creating an accurate and holistic account, grounded in the data and wider literature, and one which was more than a descriptive tale.

Sequential analysis occurred as follows with data from each of the sites first analysed as discrete case studies to preserve their distinctiveness:

- Observation and theoretical notes documented with as much detail as possible following more experienced researchers' recommendations (e.g. edited works of Bryman and Burgess 1996, and Silverman 1993);

- Provisional analysis began ideally on the day of the interviews through listening to the audio-tapes at least twice and noting any emergent themes. My reactions and thoughts on hearing the tape recording were also recorded;
- The audio-tapes were then transcribed to produce a verbatim transcript of the interview, and included the documenting of emotional reactions (anger, laughter, upset), pauses, difficulty in expressing a point, and changes in volume or intonation of speech. Interruptions were also noted at the specific point within the dialogue, e.g. interruptions by outside parties, telephone ringing, late arrivals;
- Copies of the transcript made and returned to participants for their comments¹;
- Additional demographic details from observation notes attached to the interview event transcript from which they were elicited;
- Then came the first reading of the transcripts² at which point any reflections were noted in the margins of the transcript at the point where they applied, or as a summarising comment at the beginning or end. Marked as 'RC', reflective comments often referred to aspects that could not be captured in transcription, such as 'Ruby fidgeting, ill at ease?', or 'Josie unusually distracted'. Other RCs recorded things happening prior to or after the interview with a reminder to correlate the interview data with observation notes, for example, 'Maisie in row with teacher before entering our room - see ON'. Events or feelings from my private world were also recorded on the transcript because of the potential impact on the quality of my interviewing technique and the resultant data. Examples include, 'Felt distracted during this interview, X (daughter) didn't want to go to nursery'; 'knackered - did n't get home until 10pm, teaching all day';
- Begin meaning unit analysis (Bogdan and Biklen 1982). The text from the interviews was broken down into passages each containing a broad idea or a discrete meaning (Silverman 1993). Meaning units were then grouped into descriptive categories (with colour codes) and assigned heading that seemed to capture the essence of the meaning(s) conveyed. In many cases meaning units were relevant to more than one descriptive category. New categories were added when the data revealed a repeated unit that the existing themes did not reflect. As Agar (1996) points out, these

¹ These were returned to participants on my next meeting with them. Reading and discussion took place after the interview planned for that meeting, then returned for my safe keeping. To hand them out before the interview might use up too much time and influence the ensuing interview. Handing transcripts back by hand (rather than posting them) also avoided transcripts going astray or being seen by parties not involved in the project, thus avoiding breaches of confidentiality.

² Any amendments resulting from respondents' comments were incorporated in the transcripts as soon as they became available.

descriptive categories are like features on a topographical map which facilitate the discovery of new patterns in the data. Meaning units, both individual and grouped are used to trace associations between categories, first within each transcript (and later across the entirety of the data);

- Note was taken of areas for substantiation, unanswered questions, and queries to be checked out in future interviews;
- The meaning units within each of the categories were then rewritten in my own words to assess whether I fully grasped what was being communicated. This summary of the dominant categories was then compared to those made in observational notes immediately after the interview, and considered alongside another reading of the whole transcript. This builds in checks to ensure the meaning unit analysis has not become separated from the original representations because collecting meaning units into smaller categories can distort and destroy endeavours to arrive at holistic conclusions. As Holsti comments:

‘A serious problem is sometimes caused by the very fact of organising the material through coding or breaking it up into segments, in that it destroys the totality of the philosophy as expressed by the interviewee - which is closely related to the major goal of the study.’ (1969:278).

- Subsequent interview transcripts were analysed likewise, allowing both new and already established descriptive categories to be logged. More complex but rather ad hoc maps, drawing together only relevant features (similar themes, common sequences and differences), begin to construct a route to broader themes and firmer conclusions. But like Holsti I attempted to protect my analysis from distortions by working back and forth both within parts and the whole transcript, and between transcripts in the whole data set. This involves a continual process of assembling, disassembling and reassembling data so that interpretations remain grounded in the data, and as such is reminiscent of Glaser and Strauss’s (1967) ‘grounded theory’ approach;
- This process was repeated for each of the sites and then on completion of all the fieldwork the data were then analysed as a whole to identify homogenous categories of meaning and dominant themes (Wertz, 1983). In contrast to the very detailed analysis for the ‘Horton’ site, this cross-site analysis described a more generalised orientation but individual differences and inconsistencies were kept in view to avoid generalisation. Where possible variations were presented as a partial view of the

different ways in which individuals perceive or react to the issue embodied in the theme;

- The validity of my interpretation (in my own words) was repeatedly checked alongside the stack of verbatim quotes used to substantiate the analysis;
- The outcomes of the analysis were then considered more closely in relation to the specific interests of the research project. The strengths, weaknesses and presuppositions of the original research questions were reflected on and provided a critique of the original theoretical framework, as well as being used to ensure I built in narrative that made clear the origins of an assertion or concept;
- The findings were then related to the formal body of knowledge, theories and constructs.

Reporting the findings and analysis

The findings are reported using description and verbatim quotes for substantiation of the meanings I derived (Wolcott 1990); and interpretation which intended to be both analytic and empathic (Ashworth 1987) in attempting to draw out possible explanations that did not stray from the young people's world as they experienced it.

The data are presented in ten separate but broad themes (see next chapter) though their relatedness is constantly pointed out. Chapter 7 synthesises these themes and offers an integrated model for appreciating the findings.

PART III

Findings & Analysis

Introduction to the analysis: a reflexive account

The ensuing chapter aims to render transparent my decision to focus on some aspects of the findings, particular participants, and certain theoretical concepts. The selectivity inherent in these decisions inevitably leads to omissions and weaknesses. These will be addressed through a reflexive discussion of the analysis I deployed, followed by suggestions for alternative ways of analysing the data.

Notwithstanding the extensive and compelling insights that result from my decision to centralise the analysis on making prominent the voices of young people and the place of sexuality in their lifeworlds, their disclosures revealed a range of relevant factors and significant ‘others’ that impacted on participants’ experiences and viewpoints. Not all could be addressed with an ideal theoretical and methodological exactitude.

First I will address the emphasis on young people. The thesis set out to research this group only because of the empirical and methodological need to gain new and original insights on this population. Furthermore, the exploratory (as opposed to predictive) and phenomenologically inclined qualitative methodology results in data of sufficient breadth and depth to justify limiting the size of the sample so that sufficient space is permitted for adequate description of participants’ lifeworlds (Ashworth 1987). However, in retrospect findings would be more convincing had they been interrogated in relation to the perspectives of their parents and teachers. Ideally, these adults would have been interviewed both to offer comparison with young people’s views and to contribute to the

growing body of research on the role of parents and intergenerational relations on young people's learning about sexuality. Some of this work is cited in themes 4, 7 and 9 (e.g. Brannen et al 1994, West et al 1995, Moore and Rosenthal 1993, Allen 1992, Carrera and Ingham 1997, Farrell and Kellaher 1978), but additional empirical data would have facilitated closer synthesis with this and other relevant literature (see for instance, Ingham and Kirkland 1997, Frankham 1992, 1993, HEA 1997, Measor et al 2000, and cited studies in SEU 1999). Also, literature on the social construction of childhood (James et al, 1998; Gittins, 1998) that explores the wish to protect the 'innocence' of children would have strengthened analysis of reported tensions between generations and the place of adult denial of young people's sexuality (see themes 4 and 9).

Regarding the perspectives of teachers, none questioned the authenticity of student's accounts when the findings were fed back, but my conclusions would be more credible had they included more rigorously researched insights from individual practitioners¹. I could also have made more explicit use of the data collected from observations, none-tape recorded discussions with teachers, and verbal feedback from dissemination events.

Overall I retain the view that including these additional perspectives would have diluted the graphical picture of young people's lifeworlds that I provide. But I acknowledge reflexively that my decisions were less informed by methodological rigour than my desire to privilege young people's voices in an attempt to challenge the power asymmetries that I perceived as influencing young people's subordinated claims to narratives on youth (Mac an Ghaill 1994). In highlighting the injustices and resistance to the *status quo* (Lather 1986) that young people disclosed, I inadvertently enshrined a partisanship that influenced my objectivity (Troyna and Carrington 1989, Burgess 1985) through affiliating with the 'underdogs' in similar ways to Howard Becker (1967). This was at the expense of giving greater recognition to the relevance of other perspectives that might have reconciled my partisanship with objectivity (Gouldner 1975) by widening and balancing the final product. Ultimately this would make for a more robust and convincing

¹ Areas I would pursue include: responses to and explanations for the state of affairs that respondents describe; perceptions on the types and impact of discourses used in sex education; the influence of the National Curriculum and other developments in educational policy; perceptions of the parameters of their responsibilities and power; awareness of (and support for) new innovations; views on skills and resources to support critical moments (see work in progress by Thomson et al, 2000) and the longer term futures of young people.

analysis and enhance the transformative potential of my findings through making a contribution to policy and practice.

Now I turn to my emphasis on the Horton site as opposed to equal emphasis on all six sites. This decision entailed dilemmas and prolonged debate (with my supervisor) on the most appropriate strategy. Initially, the analysis focused only on the Horton data but my concern was that this might not justify claims to the relevance of analytic themes to wider populations. Hence I followed a second strategy, which was a comparative analysis across all the six sites. While these comparative data revealed similarities, contrasts, and contradictions, they were not sufficient to make bolder or additional claims to generalisability than could be made from the Horton data set alone. Giving equivalent analytic attention to each of the sites necessarily entailed diluting the findings from the Horton site to stay within the scope of a thesis. This meant that descriptions of lifeworlds were not as enriched and did not contribute knowledge that was as original and evocative as that resulting from the first strategy.

The third and final strategy (as in this document) therefore attempted to marry the previous two with a primary emphasis on the Horton data with (some) contrast and comparison provided by data from the other five sets. I considered the data from the Horton group to be representative and sufficiently meaningful to be of relevance to the wider academic community, practitioners and policy makers, but rather than devoting greater attention (and confidence) to justifying this decision methodologically, I included comparisons with the other groups surmising that this would strengthen the claims to the representativeness of the analysis. This was a hostage to fortune, as the data from participants in other groups might appear as adjuncts to the Horton data in providing little more than corroboration or opportunistic comparison with the Horton data. While space did not facilitate more depth analysis, this nevertheless leaves wanting a need for a more subtle and critical analysis of some concepts, notably social class and ethnicity, that I signal as important features of the comparisons between groups. The latter will form the basis of subsequent writing and usefully include fuller consideration of work by Bhavnani (2001), Hall (1997), McLean Taylor (1994), Phoenix (1994), Small (1994), Smith (1994), Ward and McClean Taylor (1994), Weekes et al (1996), Wight (1996),

and Parry (1996), and the significance of social exclusion to young people's sexuality and life chances (SEU 1999¹, Johnston et al 2000).

Another decision open to criticism is that which led to a privileging of the female experience. Methodologically I have signalled my desire to ensure that the perspectives of young females were not subordinated by those of male participants (see Chapter 4). While the findings accurately represent the degree to which both females and males contributed to the interviews, the analysis is skewed in favour of interpreting the female experience; and had I had more time I would have endeavoured to understand the male perspective more fully through additional interviews. My data make clear that gender is fundamental in the different responses to sex education and sexual practice. On the whole, and echoing Sharon Thompson's findings (1989), female participants were more able to engage with the emotionality of sexual experience and reflexive consideration of intentions and outcomes. By contrast males were less concerned or less confident to explain their actions than merely report their occurrence. While both sexes were aware of being socialised within constructs of dominant male power, females' knowledge of ascriptions of femininity provided a clearer framework for resistance than that provided for boys by less tangible concepts of masculinity. In this sense, boys seemed less clear about which version of masculinity they were trying to achieve or defend (Chodorow 1971) and this may go some way to accounting for them being less inclined or able to contribute to discussion of the issue in interviews.

This deficit demands further research and analysis because of the implications for understanding young men's emotional competencies and developing educational strategies that facilitate responsible and non-sexist attitudes to sexuality and sexual practice. This said, my data on male participants could have been analysed more thoroughly in relation to debates on maximising the opportunities for boys as well as girls to deal with the tensions posed by the various constructions of masculinity and femininity and the discourses that create them, and related commentary on programmes designed to enable boys to articulate their needs and emotions with greater openness (see Measor et

¹ Annex 9 of this publication references several relevant studies.

al 2000, and SEU 1999)¹.

In addition to the literature I draw on, that by Hollway (1998), Butler (1990), Connell (1987, 1996), Morgan (1992), Chodorow (1971), Arnot (1984), Parry (1996), Weekes et al (1996), Jewitt (1997) and others, is particularly useful. Some of this is considered in more detail in the example that follows.

Example of an alternative analytic framework: ‘gearing’ up between the micro and the macro

Here I offer an example of an alternative analytic framework taking (some of) the data on sexual and gender identity to illustrate.

The findings enshrined in the ten analytic themes that follow illustrate that constructions of gender, sexuality and sexual practice are culturally informed and regulated by factors and discourses in (a) informal, micro cultures and (b) wider relationships to micro sociocultural institutions (Foucault 1979a). It is precisely because of the interplay between the two that makes study at both levels essential for a comprehensive account of sexual culture and identity (Parker et al 1999).

However, my analysis focuses perhaps too distinctly on linking data on the micro world of participants with that on theories concerned with the impact of the macro structural world. This arises from my desire to understand the macro processes and discourses that participants identified as affecting their experience and why the lifeworlds they described appeared unacknowledged in policy and strategies for working with young people. These are important considerations because the representations and discourses participants were subject to (in sex education) did not reflect their lifeworld. Rather they were a representation of absences, omissions and contrasts. This has implications for young people since these representations operate alongside other material and social factors in communicating negative and disempowering messages about the self (Duveen and Lloyd

¹ The topicality of this issue was evidenced in a recent edition of ‘You And Yours’ (BBC Radio 4, 20 June 2001). This debated the various viewpoints and referred to initiatives which aim to work more openly with teenagers, such as the ‘A PAUSE Project’ running in Exeter, and the Lothian ‘Healthy Sexuality Project’.

1990). In effect, these can serve as antecedents to material practices, subjectivities and life chances.

But there are factors that operate in and between the individual level (informal cultures or 'private' micro worlds) and collective, macro level, that my analytic framework does not engage with in an explicit fashion. I refer specifically to concepts of sexuality and gender that influence identity construction, practices and discourses in both private and public worlds. There is an extensive literature on the 'doing' or enacting of gender and sexuality and the implications of complex and multiple discourses for the production of subjectivity. Because the literature and debates in this 'middle ground' theory are well established my analysis does not rehearse them in detail¹, but they are implicit to my thinking as it is impossible to appreciate the significance of the macro theories that I dwell on without understanding the relationship to the middle ground theory. In this example, I will demonstrate the explicit relevance of these ideas.

Gender and sexuality are salient throughout my findings, therefore the concepts and literature I will draw on in this example have relevance to a greater or lesser degree for all 10 themes. Rather than restrict the application to one theme, I will refer to several extracts from the data that are usefully understood in relation to theories that inform academic understanding of sexuality and gender identity. However, analysis is restricted mainly to gender theory, though I acknowledge that this intersects with theorising on sexuality. Preceding chapters have critiqued the latter and should not be seen as disconnected from the ideas I present here which take gender as the prime site for expressions of sexuality.

Female and male participants presented their identities and experiences in ways that both reflected and contradicted fixed notions of femininity and masculinity, and normative constructs of sexual practice. Dorothy Smith and Michel Foucault agree (albeit in different ways) on the prevailing power of the male gaze and heterosexual, patriarchal relations of ruling to create dominant constructs for identity, discourse and practice. While both emphasise the broad reproductive and regulatory effects, Foucault

¹ Initially, my analysis included this element but space did not permit a full consideration. Furthermore, I was concerned that an analysis focusing on this body of work would not contribute to new or original ways of conceptualising and theorising the data.

acknowledges the potential for production of 'resistant' identities and various forms of agency. But as I argued in chapter 3, neither effectively explained how this operationalises in practice at the level of the individual, being rather more concerned to dwell on outcomes that maintain the *status quo* which privileges certain identities and practices over others. Anthony Giddens also allows scope for the development of individual agency and various forms of subjectivity based on the reflexive project of the self. But, he too, like Smith and Foucault, does not stray into seeking a less universalised and more nuanced appreciation of how the multiplicity of discourses, processes and structures of power introduce different positionings for females and males, as well as variant positionings between individuals and groups of the same sex. At no point did my analysis assume that participants would act in accordance with an immutable notion of gender or sexual identity but perhaps this was underplayed at the expense of pointing out the different and variable ways in which gender and sexual identity is played out. This is where the literature on sexuality, gender, and socialisation is useful because taken together it helps avoid over-deterministic readings which see identity as imposed upon passive individuals. It also connects or 'gears up' between my empirical data and the literature on macro theory.

Throughout my data collection, individuals were actively discerning in selecting aspects of identity and experience that conveyed the impression they sought to communicate to their peers and myself. Among numerous examples are Hanif's and Javed's disclosures on experience of sex with white young women and their unwillingness to elaborate on detail (see theme 1); and girls from the 'park group' who justified their emotional maturity and assertive identities (and desires to appear in control of destinies) through reference to their domineering tendencies with male peers (referred to as 'naff lads') in both social and sexual interactions. Here, these young women were selecting for display, their form of feminist agency. As research relationships developed, disclosures became less guarded and contradictory, and explanations for this are offered by psychoanalytic thinking (see below). But, the point here is that identity was articulated (in relation to sexuality, gender, social class and ethnicity) as performance.

The notion of performance is useful in trying to make sense of the plethora of influences that impact on young people. It is also an intermediate or 'gearing-up' concept that can

be used to analyse the micro subjective realm of experience and make links to macro influences. Drawing on the work of Foucault, Wendy Hollway (1998) argues that sexual and gender subjectivities derive, in part, from the ways we position ourselves in relation to the cultural and historical discourses available to us. Similarly, Gagnon and Simon (1973) speak of the social scripts¹ that we learn in primary and secondary socialisation and draw on in discourse and practices regarding sexuality and gender. This does not imply that all or the same scripts are available to each individual, cultural ascriptions of gender have different signifiers for the variation in scripts and discourses available to women and men. Hence, in looking to the future (see theme 10), young women wanted independence, but unlike male peers, acknowledged the likelihood of 'settling down' with the 'wrong person' as a means to security and escaping their current home life. Impending domestic responsibilities were seen as axiomatic to future subjectivities:

'...they [men] don't have the same housely (sic) and wifely (sic) jobs to do as women' Jo

By contrast, male participants had not considered these issues.

The suggestion is not that individuals are 'mechanistically positioned by this traditional gender script' (Measor et al 2000:61) but that dominant social norms, values and traditions, and material factors, place additional and different constraints on an individual's choices (Simon 1996, Evans 1993²), and at this stage in the life cycle some factors are more pertinent to young women than men in their reflexive consideration of the options available to them in the future.

Notwithstanding these social constraints, the observation that female respondents selected different culturally available themes and constructs to male contemporaries in efforts to legitimise their experience and aspirations raises the issue of whether gender is something that we 'have' or 'are', or whether it is something that we 'do'. Adopting the view that gender is socially constructed (and not based purely on biological differences between sexes), theorists (notably Davies 1997, Connell 1996, 1987, Butler 1990, and Morgan 1992) contend, albeit in different analytic modes, that gender does not provide

¹ 'Social scripts' are another example of a 'gearing -up' concept.

² In a Marxian vein influenced by both Foucauldian and interactionist perspectives, Evans (1993) views women as being commodified by the interests of capital. Women need to attract men because of their economic and social dependence on them. He cites Thatcherist preservation and reification of particular constellations of marriage and the family as exemplars of how capitalism constructs and commodifies sexual and gender identity.

a template for how to 'be'. Individuals perform or 'do' gender by employing symbolising discourses and actions in making claims to femininity or masculinity¹. These authors see gender in relation to a system that delineates the masculine from the feminine, a 'two-sex model' (Davies 1997:11) of binary opposites that define males and females differently as opposite and distinct (Butler 1990). The concept of gender is inherently relational, as Connell (1996:68) argues, ' "[M]asculinity" does not exist except in contrast with "femininity" '. Hence one of the ways in which female participants articulated their current and future identity was via constructs of gender that differentiate them from male counterparts (see themes 2, 3, 7 and 8). Relatedly, sex education (theme 4) positioned male and female behaviour and roles differently and in relation to each other².

Another aspect salient here is that gender differences have to be seen in relation to a matrix of heterosexuality, and the characteristics of heterosexual desire which provide scripts for appropriate sexual and gender practices (Butler, 1990; Rubin 1999). Themes 3 and 4 evidence participants' knowledge of dominant heterosexual ideology that informs both their own practices and that of sex education.

Bob Connell's work on masculinities introduces another dimension to the 'doing' of sexual and gender identity. He argues that masculinity exists in multiple forms and the attributes that define it are not fixed (Connell 1987). On similar lines, Hollway (1998) highlights that multiple and fragmented identities emerge for men and women from the various discourses, roles and social regulators that position us differently. This helps explain the different forms of identity that participants' communicated that could be taken as contradictions but more accurately reflect the different versions of the masculine and feminine self that individuals select from, in different contexts and under different pressures. This performative selection and shifts in identity reflect what Morgan refers to as a 'Goffmanesque presentation of self' (1992:47) wherein individuals pick and choose from the ascriptions available to them.

But, as several themes evidence (number 10 in particular), experiencing oneself in contradictory ways can be problematic (Hollway 1998). Psychoanalytic theory,

¹ Butler (1990) suggests that the performance of gender is also reiterative in that the forms displayed are not innate or original but are copies of copies available from a plurality of scripts and discourses emanating from education, culture, literature, medicine, media etc.

² Odette Parry's (1996) observations of African Caribbean classrooms draw similar conclusions.

as Weeks (1985) reminds us, recognises the impact of the subconscious and experiences more routinely hidden from view. As Hollway (1998) suggests, discourses stemming from the historical, cultural and biographical, can have an impact at an emotional and psychological level that influence actions more than rational choices or conscious knowledge of the choices available¹ (Morgan 1992). Perhaps it is these psycho-emotional elements which were surfacing when female respondents reticently anticipated slipping into more traditional gendered roles² (see theme 10). These provided the most explicit contradictions to the identity participants sought to portray, and female participants were unhappy in their recognition of this. This was largely due to their awareness that this symbolised the circle of reproduction of gendered subjectivities, which they felt undermined previous claims to resistance. But, Hollway (1998) suggests contradictions offer potential for consciousness-change and the production of new subjectivities:

‘Consciousness-changing ... is accomplished as a result of the contradictions in our positionings, desires and practices - and thus in our subjectivities – result from the coexistence of the old and the new. Every relation and every practice to some extent articulates such contradictions and therefore is a site of potential change as much as it is a site of reproduction.’ (p. 99).

Regarding my data, the issue is whether young women will be provided with sufficient support to recognise and act on the potential for change that these contradictions provide. Support for development of the reflexive project of self and ‘fateful moments’ is crucial here (Giddens 1991).

There are problems for boys too. My data evidence that some boys (notably Dale and Sean) uncomfortably recognised the power and privilege bestowed on them by patriarchal socialisation processes (Arnot 1984), but were unable (or unwilling) to discuss the implications for their masculinised identity and practices. Nancy Chodorow

¹ This idea adds another dimension to Habermas’s Theory of Communicative Action (1986) in that the impact of the subconscious must be seen in addition to rational ‘egocentric calculations of utility’ (ibid. :84).

² There are other instances in the data where females seemed happier to take on the feminine mantle of ‘caring’. See for example, in theme 3 ‘Pakistani and Somali families’, Ruby’s affirmation of identity through caring for friends; and in theme 8, females in the ‘park group’ spoke of the emotion work (Hochschild 1979) involved in facilitating relationships with male peers. Jennifer Mason (1996b) suggests that acting in the feminine role can be enjoyable for women as it endorses their subjectivity and inheres a sense of ‘safe’ femininity.

(1994) offers insight here. She argues that while women face conflicts concerning 'feminine' identity and the choices created by being socialised in the context of male power, there at least exists a clarity regarding the constructs and constraints they are operating within. 'Femininity' is ascribed, whereas 'masculinity' has to be achieved, so on a day-to-day basis, there is a less firm sense of what it is boys want to be or how to act. This is increasingly so in an age which routinely points to men as 'possessing a problematic masculinity' (Giddens 1994b:247). In practice, Chodorow suggests this manifests in males fearing anything feminine, for this is the point at which male subjectivity is defined, that is, in the bipolar and oppositional relationship to feminine identity and practice. This might account for the observation in the data (see themes 1, 3 and 7) that males were more eager to state their actions than to explaining them. Where girls' experiences were retold as stories, boys' talk on sex was not in narrative form and rarely connected to an envisaged future. To do this would mean entering the realm of constructs of gendered identity, intimacy and emotionality that females so readily engaged with. In the context of research interviews, males shied away from this because they were unequipped to justify their own actions without responding to the version that young women disclosed from the female perspective. This non-contributory stance, that gives little away, is a means by which young men do not threaten their ontological security, but neither do they actively defend it. This might stem as much from the fear of femininity as insecurity regarding what it is they are trying to defend.

Chodorow (1994) reminds us that another way to assert masculinity is to attack or devalue things 'feminine' - a strategy which males in this sample did not employ. It could be argued that these young men possessed a hegemonic construction of masculinity (Connell 1996) that ameliorated the necessity to defend it by attacking the female view. It is unclear whether this is the case for white male participants, whereas Pakistani males appeared comparatively more empowered by their masculinity, perhaps due to the endorsements of their identity and practices bestowed by their fathers and other male elders (see theme 1). This reflects Connell's (1996) assertion that masculinities do not just result from contestations of gender relations, but also from the interplay between gender, ethnicity and social class, that positions men differently in relation to each other.

My data evidence that these various forms of masculinity derive different forms of power in private or intimate encounters with young women, but, as mentioned above, do not empower them to speak openly and reflect on their 'performance stories' (Holland et al 1998:161) with the same confidence as young women. Moreover, because young men were aware that their stories would be seen in relation to those of female peers, their fear of this feminized association (Chodorow 1994) was enhanced by the jocular teasing (and at times ridicule) from female peers. Overall, my impression is not just that they were unconfident of what to speak of, but how to speak it.

In addition, Thompson (1989) argues that female teenagers' narratives of self are more fluent than males because they have been rehearsed in numerous conversations in subcultures and as part of the female socialisation process. My data also suggest that feminist thinking has permeated young women's discourse and this facilitates an articulation of the female standpoint. An equivalent has not been provided for young men.

This has implications for sex education if we are to support young men in expressing themselves more openly with the longer term goal of assisting more egalitarian and non-sexist relations. In this vein, Measor et al (2000) critique the work of those striving for a more radical sex education agenda for work with boys, and the SEU's (1999) report on 'Teenage Pregnancy' documents examples of good practice. The future for young men appears more optimistic if such initiatives were to be funded more routinely for a greater majority of young men.

In conclusion, in taking gender as the key site for the performance of identity, I have offered some ideas to account for the various forms in which identity is enacted. The literature I have referenced provides an example of a methodological approach that 'gears-up' between my empirical data and the macro theory that I privilege. Over-deterministic readings of the data are avoided by acknowledging the multiplicity of discourses and constructs that come into play. These factors position females and males in manifold ways, together with creating differences between groups of the same sex. Ethnicity, social class, family biography and other social divisions also create different opportunities for the constructions of identity that young people have available to them.

Within this there are different degrees of passivity and resistance to normative constructs of gender, differences stemming from the psychological and emotional impact of discourses and socialisation processes, and different abilities to articulate a sense of the reflexive project of self and emotional reconstruction of the past in order to project a coherent narrative of the future. All in all, these have varying implications for individual agency and subjectivity. As I stated above, my use of macro theory intended to understand how these connected with the discourses, ideologies and practices of broader institutions that operate from the macro worlds of participants' schooling, family life and cultural biographies. My arguments are not intended to be definitive, rather, they lay out some of the arguments on a broad canvas that contribute insight to the issues we are seeking to understand.

Introducing ‘Horton School’ participants

The following account introduces the research participants from ‘Horton School’. It provides a provisional sense of the characters behind the disclosures, and the contexts that organise their lives. The profiles presented here arise from disclosures made over the duration of the research process.

The sample

The research sample comprised volunteers from one year 11 form group. The sample was random in as much as it was selected by the Year Tutor on my request for a year 10 or 11 form group that was representative of the school cohort in relation to a mix of gender, race/ethnicity and academic ability. The form group comprised 18 members in total; those featuring in the study are all those who turned up to the first meeting that introduced the research to potential participants. With the exception of one female (Jo), all participants lived within 2km of Horton School. Participants are described below in accordance with the order in which they introduced themselves during our first meeting.

Maisie was a sixteen year old white female who became the self-appointed leader in group sessions, being confident as an organiser, spokesperson and facilitator in discussions. Her public persona was that of a loud, humorous and self-confessed ‘bossy’ hedonist. As she said ‘I’m up for anything, if there’s a laugh involved’. Privately she was extremely sensitive, thoughtful and at times appeared rather sad. Living with her mother and mother’s current boyfriend, home life didn’t appear easy. Maisie missed her elder sister who had ‘been thrown out’ of the family home some three years previously. Both her mother and boyfriend were employed but there was little money ‘to spare’. Maisie described spending a lot of time looking after her younger brother and sister and ‘cooking meals’. She had little positive to say about her relationship with her parents, accusing them of treating her ‘like a kid’ while delegating domestic responsibilities ‘without please or thank you’. Maisie experienced school as difficult - she was unmotivated, often in trouble and ‘picked on by teachers’. She did not expect to do well in her GCSEs but hoped she would ‘settle down’ to ‘proper studying at (tertiary) college’. She had considerable sexual experience with different partners, and was particularly keen to have an ‘older, maturer boyfriend’. She had some drug experience and smoked her ‘head off’.

Jo, at 'nearly sixteen' was an African Caribbean female, who appeared older than her years. She acted as arbiter in discussions, gently persuading quieter members to join in conversations or chastising those making rude or 'unfair' comments. She lived with her grandmother whom she described as her 'closest friend', and the only person she 'trusted and confided' in. She had infrequent contact with her father who lived in Jamaica with his 'new family and kids', and no contact with her Jamaican mother who lived locally. Jo's grandmother relied on state benefit and 'family allowance' kept them 'going'. Jo had been 'going out' with Cal for two years and was the only member of the group in a 'steady' relationship. She spent most of her free time with Cal, with whom she had a sexual relationship. Though close friends with other females and males in the group, she socialised with them less often than previously (outside school) because she lived 'miles away from the others' and preferred to stay in at her Gran's house with Cal. Jo anticipated 'failing badly' in her GCSEs, but might go on to tertiary college if employment was not secured.

Hanif was a 16 year old Pakistani male, the eldest of five children with parents who settled in England from Selet, Pakistan in the 1970s. He had a strong presence, always alert, observing without saying much; when he did speak, others listened and he was rarely interrupted. His friends called him 'honey monster', an amicable and apt description of his enormous frame (height of over six feet, 'over 12 stone') and slow swaying walk. He was cautious in his contributions to group interviews but commented privately in Punjabi to his close friend Javed, sometimes cannily offering an abridged translation for those accusing him of teasing by speaking in Punjabi. Describing himself as 'a good Muslim lad', he spoke warmly about his family and admitted getting his own way 'cos I'm the eldest and I get (the) respect I deserve'. Academically, he did not expect to do well and was considering tertiary college as a last resort if he did not secure a full time job at the 'take-away' food outlet where he currently worked part time. As the eldest son of unemployed parents, Hanif felt obliged to seek work, 'to help out and that, 'cos I'm the first one who can earn money'. In small group interviews Hanif confided his sexual experience.

Javed was also a 16 year old first generation British Pakistani with parents from Selet. On being asked to describe himself, he proudly declared, 'I'm Javed and I'm best mates with Hanif'. The comment 'we do everything together' was endorsed by other group members, 'you

don't never see Javed without Hanif'. In discussions, Javed often deferred to Hanif. Javed hoped to secure a job at the same 'take-away' as Hanif, but his parents were keen for him to gain qualifications and enter tertiary college (or university like his older brother and only sibling). Both his parents were employed. Javed 'hated' school and wasn't 'geeky' like his brother, described by Hanif as 'so brainy man you wouldn't believe it'. Like Hanif, Javed had sexual experience and condemned the use of drugs, particularly alcohol.

Ruby was a feisty 'fifteen and ten months old, Pakistani girl'. Ruby spoke affectionately and humorously about her family; she was a second generation Muslim whose father worked in a factory and whose mum was fully occupied 'looking after my naughty little brothers and sisters'. She described herself as 'very westernised' without 'going off the rails', in as much as she 'liked the same things as white mates' but was 'proud to be a Muslim' and firmly committed to her faith. Generally high spirited and thoughtful, she contributed a great deal to group interviews and with greater confidence than other Muslim females; in one-to-one interviews she adopted a more demure persona, affiliated with her Muslim female friends, stressing the expectations of her traditional Muslim upbringing while offering explanations for some of the behaviours she considered less acceptable among white and African Caribbean mates. Ruby had no sexual or drug experience.

Dale was a white sixteen years old male, with English parents. He described himself somewhat reluctantly as 'different from others in the group' because 'I suppose I'm quite middle class 'cos my mum's a social worker and my dad's a teacher'. Relatively quiet and articulate, he was bossed around incessantly by female group members who urged him to 'speak up' or give his opinion. He appeared solitary in his home life, spending a lot of time in the privacy of his bedroom, to 'escape' his 'nagging mother' and 'bossy older sister'. He was not motivated academically which caused tensions at home since his parents were keen for him to embark on further education. He was politically aware particularly regarding gender inequalities and debates in education. Dale appeared more at ease discussing general issues or group activities than his personal or family life. He only divulged his own history as quite experienced sexually and drug-wise when prompted by his friend Sean and female members in the group.

Sean was a white male, 'nearly sixteen', and the only child of an English mother and Irish father. He said he felt 'very English' and knew little about Ireland or his dad's ancestry - 'the only Irish thing is how he talks, that accent'. Sean's mother was employed as a cook and his father had recently lost his job in an engineering firm. Sean appeared mature and thoughtful, often pausing before speaking to an extent that his contemplations were interpreted by friends as 'doziness'. He offered snippets of a loving and close family life, joking about his father's idiosyncrasies, humour and 'crap jokes'. Sean was proud of his working class up-bringing, saying that this accounted for 'knowing what's what, what's important', such as 'knowing how to enjoy yourself, looking after your mates'. Sean had sexual and drug using experience.

Millie, a black sixteen year old female, was the only child of African Caribbean parents. She described home life as 'okay but busy. Mum and dad are nearly always out working'. She felt under pressure to succeed and anticipated 'being grounded' if she failed her GCSEs, because her parents would be 'shamed up'. Tertiary college had 'been decided' for her by her parents. Millie socialised with friends in the 'park group' (see later) but unlike most did not drink alcohol being prohibited by medication prescribed for asthma. She was keen to present a public face of not condemning friends (through actively participating in arrangements to purchase alcohol for instance) and stressed that she never felt under pressure to consume alcohol. In small group single sex and one to one interviews Millie confided anxieties about her sexual identity. She was less sexually experienced than some of her friends. Dishonesty in her relationship with her parents concerning her 'secret' social life also troubled her.

Josie was a white sixteen year old female who lived with her Mum, Dad and younger brother. Initially appearing uncomfortable and shy, blushing when she spoke, Josie gradually became more at ease and eventually contributed a great deal in group and individual interviews. She had a quiet reassuring presence, notably assisting in interviewing, by, for instance, clarifying questions or providing important background information to contextualise disclosures. A close friend of Maisie, Jo, Millie, Angela and Julie, she was at her liveliest when contributing to stories about their group activities, but rarely opened up discussions, preferring instead to let more confident friends (like Maisie) set the agenda. To her embarrassment during a group interview, others disclosed

her sexual experience, though it subsequently emerged this was less extensive than some peers. In one to one sessions she elaborated but talked more about her self-image, feeling 'ugly' and at times lonely. She longed for a boyfriend she could 'talk to', who saw her 'personality' and not her 'glasses'. Speaking affectionately about her family, she described a closeness to her mother though wished she could confide in her without worrying her. Josie held strong opinions on her teacher's perceived inability 'to listen' to students' points of view.

Angela was a white female, nearly sixteen years old, who lived with her mother and father. Concealed behind a long black fringe, initially she appeared shy and rarely made eye contact. Angela mixed socially with Maisie, Josie, Jo, Julie and Millie and was identified collectively as sexually active by Maisie's outstretched arms around her friends. Angela contributed more willingly in single sex discussions particularly those focused on relationships with adults. There was strong sense that she had difficult relations with her mother in particular.

Julie was also white, aged sixteen years, often appearing melancholic but becoming brighter and more articulate as discussions progressed. Living at home with her (unemployed) father, mother (employed as a cleaner) and younger sister, Julie described 'getting on' with her mother but not her father. She described having little freedom to socialise and went to great lengths to conceal details from her father in particular. She referred to him as 'piss artist', and feared his violence, having been beaten by him on several occasions for what she regarded as minor misdemeanours, such as not keeping her bedroom tidy or getting home later than agreed. She predicted, 'he would kill me', if he discovered her sexual activity, alcohol or cigarette use.

Effi was a black sixteen year old female who had settled in the city two years previously as a political refugee from Somalia. Like her friends Soraya, Latifa, and Sarah, she was rather quiet and contributed only when asked direct questions. She lived with her unemployed parents and five siblings in rented accommodation. Ruby disclosed that all the Somali females were practising Muslims and doubted they had any sexual experience. Subsequently Effi confirmed this but did not elaborate.

Soraya, a fifteen year old female Muslim, settled from Somalia eighteen months previously. Living with her unemployed parents, grandparents and two sisters in a rented flat, she disclosed 'hating' the city but did not expect to return to Somalia. Soraya was reticent in discussion of her personal life but commented occasionally on the behaviours of peers.

Latifa was a sixteen year old Somali female, living with her unemployed parents, older sister and younger brother, having arrived in the city two years ago. Smiling constantly throughout the group sessions, laughing at others' humorous disclosures, she appeared more at ease than her friends but spoke infrequently.

Sarah was the eldest in the group at nearly seventeen years of age. As a recent refugee from Somalia, Sarah was just beginning to learn English but despite communication barriers she was keen to remain in the research study. My inability to communicate in her first language and her declining the offer of an interpreter prevented any detailed interviewing. With Ruby's assistance, Sarah described living in rented accommodation with unemployed parents and siblings.

Amount and depth of disclosure

All participants were offered the same opportunities for involvement in the data collection process but substantially less data resulted from Somali females than other participants. This is because these females participated in fewer interviews (due to availability of volunteers), interviews were shorter and of less depth (due to participants having nothing more to say), and disclosures tended to focus on the behaviours of others rather than their own activities. Efforts to remedy this were thwarted by careers interviews (that I was not informed of) that clashed with research interview appointments, and non-attendance at school (for unknown reasons) for the remaining two months of the school term during which interviews were scheduled. Even without these organisational obstacles, it is doubtful whether resultant data would have been of the same depth as that from other participants because of the cultural and language differences that existed between myself and Somali females¹.

¹ These respondents categorically refused my repeated offers of an interpreter.

Thus, this record of findings is less representative of Somali females than other individuals and reflects the need to conduct further research and use alternative methodological approaches to access more depth understanding of these perspectives. These issues are picked up in the recommendations for future research in the final chapter.

Synthesis of findings - analytic themes

As mentioned previously, my analysis focuses on Horton participants but disclosures from other sites are included to corroborate or illustrate contrasts.

The following analytic categories were eventually arrived at:

Theme 1: Social lives: identity in context

Theme 2: Individual and collective identity

Theme 3: Sexuality and sexual activity

Theme 4: Sex education

Theme 5: Sexual health services

Theme 6: HIV/AIDS

Theme 7: Discourses of sex & sexuality

Theme 8: Desires and discontents

Theme 9: Relationships with adults

Theme 10: Futures: hopes and fears.

Analytic themes

Theme 1: Social lives: identity in context

Introduction

This theme makes a new contribution to knowledge, both in the empirical sense of providing new data, and in the way the data have been interpreted through the application of particular theoretical concepts. The explanatory potential of these theoretical ideas has been enhanced by my provision of empirical substantiation.

Within the broad theme of ‘social lives’, the following inter-related sub-themes were identified. These are developed at specific points within the ensuing analysis.

- Participants’ reflexive awareness of normative assumptions regarding teenagers
- Notions of the situated and socially constructed self and the relevance of context to identity (space, place and temporality);
- The importance of friendship groups to legitimising identity and practices;

- The relevance of actors' 'voices' and storytelling to conceptualisations of identity and practice; and to appreciating the connectedness between the generalised and concrete other;
- The discourses, rules, regulations, stocks of knowledge and reflexivity that participants deploy within the research context, to give meaning to identity and practice;
- The implications of boundaried social lives and identities for subjectivities and the mastery of new terrains;
- The delineation of sociality between categories of friendship groups and the family.

'Shall we tell you what we do then?'

The following discussion takes 'social lives' as the starting point for three reasons. First, this was the issue discussed at length during the first meeting with Horton participants:

'Shall we tell you what we do then?' Maisie
'Yeah. What is it like being a teenager what's it all about?' JH.

This question proved unexpectedly instrumental in exposing detailed data on individual and collective identities, friendship groupings, and the discourses and behaviours linked to particular locales (Giddens 1991). As such it builds on the character profiles laid out above. The natural composition of friendship groups also emerged during this initial meeting, and signalled respondent preferences regarding the make-up of subsequent small group interviews.

Second, answers to the question of 'what it is like to be a teenager?' provided early indications of respondents' desires to distance their authentic identity (Giddens 1991) and practices from that of normative constructions of adolescence (see chapter 2):

'Well, it's not what everyone seems to think it's like' Maisie
'What's that then ?' JH

The group readily offered a stream of labels they felt were ascribed to them:

'...druggies, lazy, truants, cheeky, having babies, scruffy, shoplifters, joy-riders, muggers'¹

These constructs reflect Davis's (1990) observation of hyperbolic media representations of young people as unruly and conflictual, the antithesis of responsibility and mature

¹ Notably, all answered 'no' when asked if there were any associations between young people and HIV or AIDS.

adulthood. Parents and professionals from the institutions of education, media, medicine and the legal system were collectively identified as proponents of this view :

‘Everyone ... parents, teachers ’ Maisie

‘Doctors ... police ... telly ... prime ministers’ Sean.

The anger during this group discussion of representations was palpable:

‘I think you should do this (research) with us. Grown-ups think they know everything about us. They know nothing - only what they want to hear and their ears prick up if there’s something bad they can do (punish) us for’ Maisie.

‘If ever there’s anything in the papers about young ‘uns, it’s about drugs or joy-riding or having sex or sometimes about murders. So my mum thinks that’s what I do, or it’s what I’ll do if I don’t pass my exams’ Dale.

This sense of over-ridingly negative expectations from teachers and parents was lamented as commonplace:

‘Our teachers expect us to be bad. They don’t say nice things about us. Then they act shocked if we do anything wrong, as if they weren’t expecting it. I don’t understand it’ Dale

‘Maybe they want to give you the benefit of doubt?’ JH

‘No, it’s just to make you feel worse if they act shocked’ Sean

‘We’re all different and they shouldn’t think everyone’s the same’ Jo.

Respondents recognised an irony in these portrayals, or discursive constructions of identity (Foucault 1979a) - on the one hand ‘youth’ behaviour attracts much attention, but on the other, the reality is that lives were so un-extraordinary that they did not merit this interest, and might not seem credible:

‘Our lives are quite boring really, are you sure you want to do this (research)? We’re just normal uninteresting and quite boring really. I don’t think many people will buy (believe) it’ Sean.

Here, we see poststructuralist notions of identity being played out, in the sense that the certainty and universalistic characterisations associated with structuralism are being replaced by an awareness of ironies, and the ‘contingent, constructed character of our beliefs and understandings’ (Barker 2000: 21). Identity and practice as related to the contingencies of context bring me to my third point.

Positioning ‘social lives’ at the outset of findings reflects and emphasises the saliency of social context to these young people’s stories of self. Aggleton (1998, 1999) and Dowsett (1999) point out the significance of situational specificity to social enquiry of young people’s identity and behaviour, and a special edition of the *Journal of Adolescence* (1996) highlighted this as an epistemological weakness,

‘.... recent interest in contextual factors seems to have gone unnoticed by traditional scholars of adolescent identity. Suprisingly, little attention has

been devoted to contextual influences on identity formation in adolescence'.
(Phinney and Goossens, 1996:401).

As I suggested in the literature review (see chapter 2), social constructionist explorations of identity and behaviour demand acknowledgement of the 'social body' (Foucault 1980:104), and its embeddedness in cultural, spatial and temporal mediations of identity - an endeavour which is limited without study of the specific situations that frame particular practices and discourses. My data demonstrate that different beliefs, expectations, desires and social vulnerabilities are crucial to understanding identity and sociality, particularly that related to sex and drug (particularly alcohol) related risk. These factors cannot be bracketed off as extraneous to how individuals understand themselves or the meanings for behaviours disclosed. Such a pursuit can render essentialising constructs of young people. As Watney (1991) comments, the behaviour and meanings associated with risk, 'sex', and drug use are not immutable, nor fixed in relation to specific social groups. Rather a dynamic and unfixed social capital is generated that is highly dependent on the context in which it is played out.

The ensuing sections develop notions of the importance of sociality and context to identity and practice. Where it applies, the place of sex, sexuality and drug use are positioned within the frame. Young people's narratives challenge prevailing discourses of *what* occurs, *where* it occurs and *who* is involved. Subsequent themes elaborate details of this preliminary overview.

Socialising and friendship groupings

Three groups for socialising were apparent:

Group 1 comprised Pakistani and Somali females

Group 2 comprised Pakistani males

Group 3 comprised African Caribbean females and white females and males.

Each group was distinguished by a specific micro-culture of knowledges and localities that emphasised discursive and spatial aspects of identity and practice, as predicted by the literature mentioned above (see Aggleton 1998, and Dowsett 1999). This also reflects Giddens's (1991) notion of the embeddedness of identity and discourse in social relations and specific locales (see chapter 3, 'Identity in high modernity').

The constituency of groups was delineated primarily by gender and ethnicity. While groups 1 and 2 formed an obvious collective grouping based on ethnicity and religion (all Muslims), members of these groups separated themselves on the basis of close friendship networks and related socialising activity. Segregation of the Muslim young people into two groups was also useful in reflecting the range of contrasts and diversities between male and female experiences. For all three groups, it emerged subsequently that composition was also influenced by values and preferences relating to familial and cultural norms, sexual behaviour and alcohol use. Group 2 and 3 were also distinguished by the fact that the majority of disclosures on social lives refer to activities that did not involve the family and in most cases perceived as unknown to parents/guardians.

A variability in the extent to which aspects of the private were disclosed was evident, with the majority being very discerning about what they revealed and in whose company. For instance groups 1 and 2 (in contrast to group 3) were most reticent in whole group discussions and postponed more intimate revelations for small group interviews. As data will illustrate, interviewees as 'actors' in the research interaction, displayed considerable agency in utilising their own 'rules and resources' (Giddens 1982:35) regarding what they were willing to disclose and whether or not interviewer encouragement was necessary to elicit greater detail.

Group 1 comprised Pakistani (Ruby) and Somali females (Effi, Soraya, Latifa and Sarah) whose primary socialising involved members of the Muslim community exclusively, usually with other females in the extended family and activities within the home. They said they had no desire to meet non-Muslim peers outside school, but would welcome a widening of the social circle to include more young Muslim women outside school. Forcefully they asserted the intention not to have sexual relationships before marriage, and were proud that they had no experience of or desire to drink alcohol or smoke cigarettes. To reiterate an earlier point, substantial amounts of dialogue focused less on their own lives (the micro) than on the practices of others in their form group, particularly those in the park group (see group 3). These opinions on the activities of other group members are discussed in ensuing themes.

Remaining at the level of the macro, they held an insightful critique of formal programmes of sex education and sexual health provision, which reduced sexuality and sexual identity to sexual acts. Notably they pointed out the emphasis on white people and the disregard for their identity in institutional (i.e. educational) imagery and discourse (see theme 3 'Sexuality and sex education' for further discussion of this issue).

The reticence to disclose more personal perspectives evidences the rules and resources (Giddens 1977) and reflexivity (Giddens 1991) that individuals bring to a situation. For instance, Ruby justified her reticence to discuss more intimate aspects on the basis of her cultural situatedness, its norms and expectations:

'We don't discuss private things like the others do. You keep it to yourself'
'Who is we?' JH
'Well in my family and being a Muslim and that. It's just summat you don't do. I don't discuss my private things with anybody, ever ' Ruby.

Here it seems that Ruby's rules, resources and stocks of knowledge (Habermas 1986) generate a way of being that regulates what she is and is not willing to disclose, together with a reflexivity that influences the decision making necessary to protect her ontological security (Giddens 1991). Furthermore, these decisions are both enabling and constraining (Giddens 1977:122) - Ruby is enabled by her power to protect her ontological security but the resultant data are constrained by her productive agency. Thus from an analytic perspective, data are wanting on beginning to remove the 'veil of ignorance' from the private and 'concrete' other (Benhabib 1992; see chapter 3 'Absence of gender in Habermasian theory') and Ruby's identity as mediated by her culture, family and history (her embodied and embedded, concrete self) remains relatively opaque.

Group 2 consisted of Pakistani males, Hanif and Javed, whose primary socialising 'events' took place outside the family home. This involved two localities with different practices:

(i) A local snooker hall: Hanif and Javed played snooker as often as possible, only missing a night if Hanif was working (see below) or if they were short of money. This was an exclusively male pastime and women were not welcome:

'It's only for men. Some lasses are there but we don't know them and we just go to play snooker. Don't want lasses there, it's not that sort of place' Hanif.

(ii) A flat above a 'take-away' food outlet where Hanif worked part-time: Hanif initially gave the impression that aside from playing snooker, he had little time for

sociality because of his work commitments outside school:

‘My social life is my part time job’.

Initially reluctant to elucidate, the significance of this only became apparent in a second interview. Javed often met Hanif after a late shift and slept at the flat, ostensibly to avoid the cost of paying for taxis and accounting to parents on arrival home in the early hours of the morning. But the flat also provided a venue to socialise with white females (not school peers) and this involved sexual activity. They were unwilling to disclose how this was set up other than -

‘...they’re just girls we know outside of school. They know when we’re working and they come round when the take-away’s shut’. Hanif.

Bemused at my pressing for more information, they eventually conceded but only insofar as offering up their code of practice on sexual activity:

‘Only have sex with white girls, never with a Muslim girl’ Hanif
‘Never have sex with someone who drinks alcohol or smokes’ Javed
‘Never have sex with someone who’s been with (had sex with) lots of other people’ Hanif.

On questioning the reliability of these guarantees, they confidently assured:

‘You can tell by looking at a girl if she’s a virgin or got AIDS¹’ Hanif
‘Or you’d ask them if you weren’t sure.’ Javed

Hanif and Javed’s conscious selectivity regarding what was disclosed, again evidences the deployment of rules and resources (Giddens 1977). They were less concerned to facilitate understanding (for my benefit) in the Habermasian (1986) sense of communicative action, than to exert control over their identity management (Goffman 1969, Morgan 1992). Their increasing awareness of my naiveté and curiosity regarding their liaisons at the flat made visible the differences between our currencies (or resources) of cultural capital. Hanif and Javed knew I was keen to hear their previously ‘unheard’ and unfamiliar stories (as yet unrepresented in literature), and the more they capitalised on this, the more confident they became in justifying their experience with the minimum of detail. For example, the exclusivity of sexual relations involving only white females was explained on the grounds of respecting cultural expectations which forbade sex before marriage with Muslim females, and more important still (in their consideration), was that a Muslim girl caught having sex outside marriage would be

¹See theme 6 ‘HIV/AIDS’ for further discussion of this point.

'killed or burnt by her family'. In contrast, having sexual relations with white girls was not condoned but culturally excusable:

'My dad would be upset but probably okay if he knew I'd had sex, as long as it wasn't with someone from my community' Hanif.

'They know we do it but don't say owt' Javed.

Nether individual would be drawn in discussing this further and continued to deflect questions with non-specific comments, such as,

'It's just what we do' Hanif¹.

In an individual interview Ruby corroborated Hanif and Javed's experience. She argued that this was a routine phenomenon which some adults regarded as a rite of passage:

'We, in our community know all about this. Javed and Hanif think they're really clever but they're no different to other Muslim lads. They all do it, I bet some older ones got them into it. The elders, and dads and that, know about it and don't stop them, they think it's good experience for you, makes you a good husband for your wife, for babies and that.' Ruby.

Refusing to acknowledge the parallels with their own sexual behaviour, Hanif and Javed were emphatically disdainful of non-Muslim peers' sexual activities in the park (see group 3). They distanced others' behaviours from their own because of perceived associations between 'sex', smoking, and drinking alcohol. They had strong anti-alcohol feelings and emphatically stressed it had no part in their lives, though this was subsequently contradicted. On several occasions, they had been invited to socialise with classmates (see group 3) but were demotivated by the illicit use of alcohol

'... alcohol is stupid. I'm shocked at how much they drink' Hanif

'You don't need it, we just don't like it. Not at all' Hanif.

This assertion was confusing because Javed had previously said that the girls at the flat sometimes drank alcohol and smoked 'ganja'. They defended this in arguing that the girls used drugs before arriving or 'in the toilet' at the flat:

'They know we don't like it' Hanif

'They don't never do it in front of us' Javed.

This echoes data from Aggleton's study (1987) on young people who differentiated the culturally acceptable from the culturally un-acceptable and used this knowledge to their advantage in justifying their position.

¹ This reticence to engage in discussion on sexual experience reflects Chodorow's (1994) and Thompson's (1989) observation that males are less willing than females to engage in matters sexual. See the introduction to chapter 5 for discussion.

Group 3 comprised African Caribbean females (Millie and Jo) and white females and males (Maisie, Josie, Angela, Julie, Sean and Dale) henceforth referred to as the 'park group'. The majority of dialogue related to the weekly event of Friday evenings at a local park, summarised in their words:

'We spend the time chatting, getting pissed, smoking, having a laugh' Maisie
'Sometimes have other drugs, dope¹ (cannabis) and that' Dale
'Getting off with each other' Julie.

There was an open invitation to the 'venue' which usually involved fourteen or fifteen school friends with a core of between six and eight regular attendees from this group. They said they turned up on a weekly basis at the park because it was perceived as better than staying in, and it was habitual:

'There's nowt else to do' Josie
'We just go there every week' Maisie.

They met up at the park whatever the season or weather conditions. The events described here occurred in the winter months. Getting drunk was an equally ritualistic part of their socialising. The older-looking members bought cheap alcohol (cider, 'Thunderbird' wine or '20:20') from a local supermarket or off-licence least likely to ask for proof of age:

'We meet up about six o'clock, decide who's gonna buy it (alcohol) you know, and get drunk. Someone goes to get the drink and we'll just sit there, messing about' Maisie.

The taste of the alcohol was not viewed as particularly relevant, value for money and potent effects being more important. They drank to get drunk and enjoy the resultant effects:

'I like the feeling, makes me feel happy, you don't care about anything, you're not bothered, you just have a good time' Julie
'I don't know why we do it you just do it, just get drunk' Angela.

In contrast to the early discussions with groups 1 and 2, this group relished the opportunity for storytelling (Smith 1978) and this rendered rapid and depth insight into their lifeworlds (Schutz 1972, Habermas 1987) and the features of their private and concrete lives (Benhabib 1992). They enjoyed telling stories about the humorous and memorable effects of alcohol on their behaviour in preference to talking about how they made decisions to take part. Thus it seemed they applied a logic that concentrated on *actions* which stressed an immediacy and the importance of the *doing*. Remembering and

¹ Maisie, Jo, Sean and Dale disclosed experience of drugs other than cigarettes and alcohol, e.g. cannabis was used, but rarely, and only Sean and Dale had ever purchased it. Sean and Dale had used 'speed' (amphetamines) twice, and Sean had used Valium twice having stolen two pills from his father.

re-telling these events i.e. the *doing*, produced the most collective and animated discussion. Methodologically, this had relevance for the trajectory of research questions. While the imperatives of my research interests were maintained (such as understanding motivations for drinking large amounts of alcohol), it was important not to privilege these over research participants' priorities. To do otherwise would fail, as Smith (1988) contends, to value the subjects as 'knowers and actors' (p.105) in generating the features of everyday lives, and 'grasping the world from where [the subject] stands' (p106). As I argued in chapter 4, positioning oneself (as the observer) alongside the actors in the micro is a necessary step to discovering how things work and how they are put together. Then and only then, should this be related to the generalised and generalising relations of the macro and the perspective of the observer. However, during interviews, concealing reactions to what is heard is not easy and can arguably be balanced against the need for researcher honesty in the quest for generating empathy, and as importantly, procuring better understanding. This was illustrated as the discussion on alcohol continued:

'This lad was so drunk, he didn't know what he was doing, falling over and everything. I told him at school that he'd made me pregnant. He was shocked. He hadn't really but he didn't know what he'd done' Maisie
'She was so drunk, her [Maisie] and Julie, they got knocked over by a car and she didn't know. That's what that bruise is on her face' Jo.
'You're making me feel anxious now. Are you having me on?' JH
'It's nice that you're worried but don't get us wrong, we don't do this all t'time, it's not often, it's just that we're telling you 'cos we all remember it. It was a really good night, even if it sounds a bit shocking now' Maisie.

Here we see interviewees translate my concern into an opportunity, not for bravado, but for situating these episodes more accurately as rare and untypical. This highlights their desire to emphasise the 'good times', and prevent exaggeration of behaviours used to typify teenagers.

The methodological importance of hearing these narratives in the order that the respondents (rather than the interviewer) controlled was again vindicated subsequently. As mentioned above, direct (interviewer-led) questioning at the beginning of our discussions, did not yield explanations for drinking alcohol. But, later on, as interviewees became more relaxed, and once they had disclosed the spatial, temporal and emotional context for their experiences, the reasoning behind drinking alcohol began to emerge more naturally. Justifications included the mediating influences of alcohol in creating the desired pre-requisites for a 'good time':

'It relaxes you sort of. You drink 'cos you do things maybe you

wouldn't do without it' Julie
'Yeah, you're not bothered, just have a good time' Maisie
'You don't feel the cold as much when you're drunk and you know
this, so you'll do it more often, especially if it's freezing' Angela.

They were clear that it was possible to have a good time without alcohol but a 'really good night' was more likely when there was plenty to drink, whereas it was more likely to be 'boring' if they had no drink. This significance of alcohol as a social relaxant for participation in the park events was evidenced again by Jo and Millie. They sometimes joined their friends in the park, but did not attend on a regular basis. Jo did not like alcohol, and Millie's use of prescribed drugs for asthma forbade alcohol intake:

'Not much point me going if everyone else is drunk and I'm not.
I go sometimes but I've got to be in a really good mood' Millie.

In small group interviews, females disclosed recognition of the positive and negative effects of alcohol:

'If you've had a drink, it's like not as bad if a boyfriend finishes with you' Josie
'But if you're already depressed, it makes you feel worse if you get drunk' Angela.

But the depressive effects did not deter them:

'... someone always ends up crying, drink does that to you, but it's okay if your mates are there, we sort it out' Jo.

The importance of friendship groups as sources of support, and legitimisation for identity and practice, was an enduring theme in female narratives, as in work by Lees (1993) and other researchers on female lives (see Holland et al 1998, and Holly 1989). Jo, for instance, saw meeting up in the park as a means of maintaining relationships that were necessary to her collective identity with school friends:

'I sometimes go if it's someone's birthday or if they all persuade me 'cos I haven't been out for ages or seen much of them. I like to keep up'.

Collective identity is discussed further in theme 2. But, Jo also construed the park 'scene' as something she was growing out of:

'But I prefer to stay in with Cal (boyfriend) and he's done all that stuff before'.

So while these narratives demonstrate the importance of particular friendship groups and locales to the construction and legitimising of identity, a progression from identities of authenticity with school mates to other identities beyond this context was emerging. Jo, unlike other members of the park group, had an identity as that of an intimate partner in a long term relationship, together with that of her membership to the park group. She did not wish to relinquish the park identity, or more importantly, the friendships it provided,

but tensions were evident. Later on, it transpired that other females were beginning to experience a problematic regarding the association between socialising in the park and future subjectivities. This issue is picked up below (see 'Tensions and implications for future subjectivities').

'Secret' lives: private and public domains

According to group 3 members, events in the park were unknown to their parents or guardians:

'....for most of the time our parents don't know our whereabouts
or what we're doing in or out of school' Josie.

The effects of alcohol on behaviour (drunkenness, hangovers) were concealed from adults by going straight to bed on arrival home, and getting out of bed after parents had left the house on the following morning. It was impossible to verify this from the adults' perspective, but it is significant that teenagers reported that their parents/guardians rarely questioned them regarding suspicions of drunkenness or other illicit activity (see theme 9 'Relationships with adults' for further discussion and explanation).

The park group defined 'real' socialising as exclusive of home/family activities and as situated exclusively outside the home. While the actual 'event' might exclude the family locale, the considerable planning involved in getting out of the house and negotiating a way back in (to minimise scrutiny) highlights a consideration (and manipulation) of parental expectations/rules

My questioning in interviews deliberately sought to avoid compartmentalising disclosures on the 'private' from those on the 'public' in efforts to expose the interconnectedness between the two realms. Benhabib (1992) and Smith (1988) regard this as an essential element in yielding more complete understanding. But rarely were prompts necessary as respondents naturally meshed discourses and practices of the private and the public spheres in retelling stories. This diminishing of the divide between private and public is more in line with postmodern articulations (see Redhead 1991, 1997, Thornton 1995, Merchant and MacDonald 1994) that blur the boundaries between private and public spheres and contrast with some studies on youth from the 1970s and

However while respondents constructed the private and public as interlinked, they also typified some practices and discourses as private and others as public. 'Private' referred to those that are not for disclosure to adults and constituted an intimate ownership i.e. 'our time', and privacy of space i.e. 'on our own without them (adults)'. 'Public' referred to those practices shared with adults, or 'bits of our life they see, bits we don't mind them knowing about'. So, events as they occurred *in situ* separated the public from the private, despite occurring in very public arenas such as the park, but *post hoc* retelling of these same events to a third party (i.e. myself) diminished the delineation considerably. Stories regarding private lives (relationships with friends, family, sexuality etc.) were narrated in relation to public spheres (of, for example, leisure, school experience, employment potential, media/politics, and normative constructions of youth), with agency and structure ostensibly enmeshed. They also gave due consideration to individual differences, such as gender, race, class, sexuality, geography. But these same stories revealed complex strategies for ensuring 'private' events and 'private' time were not threatened by adults gaining knowledge of it, in other words, a leaking of the private into the public.

This phenomenon of young people leading secret social lives (with specific spatial and temporal mediations) to provide arenas for authenticity of self (Giddens 1991), and for freedom uncontaminated by adults was corroborated by findings from the other sites with one exception. The self-selectors (site 6) were the only group whose social lives were less concealed, and whom had more honest relationships with parents - an observation borne out by video recorded interviews with parents. Though some of this group were older than individuals in other groups, and thus had more freedom imparted

¹ Research from the 1970s and early 1980s tended to focus on either the 'public' or the 'private' sphere, and prioritised either the male or female perspective. Literature on the 'public' sphere broadly refers to that on the transition from school to work, education, unemployment and leisure, and emphasised male groups, eg. Willis (1977), Corrigan (1979). Work on the 'private' sphere was less common and refers to that on sexuality and family life that began to include young women (e.g. Kitwood 1980, see Griffin 1993 and Aggleton 1987 for review). Feminist accounts subsequently problematised the malestream agenda set by the TSW and CCCS agenda (see McRobbie 1978; Anyon 1983; Griffin 1985a, 1985b; Bright 1987; Heidensohn 1985; Leonard 1985) and heralded a new methodological approach that began to reconcile divisions between the private and the public, particularly in later studies of schooling that utilised autobiographical accounts (see Holly 1989, Weiner and Arnot 1987) and began to position female subjectivities and the significance of ethnicity to identity (see Phoenix 1987, Mac an Ghaill 1988, Mirza 1992).

by the legal status of adulthood, the honesty was accounted for by the attitudes and past experiences of their parents. This is discussed further in theme 9 'Relationships with adults'.

With the exception of the Somali and Pakistani interviewees, for whom data are inconclusive, the readiness to discuss 'secret' aspects of lives contrasts with some earlier (pre 1990s) literature on young people which tended to invisibilise these aspects through its emphasis on the 'public' aspects of everyday lives (as in the TSW, leisure, education and (un)employment literature mentioned above). It is impossible to know whether this indicates that questions were not asked or whether respondents were reticent to disclose private worlds. Either way, it is hard to believe that private lives were not important and constructions of young people's worlds as represented in this literature remain partial without this element. The willingness of most respondents in my study to share aspects of their intimate lives that renders a synthesis between the private and the public is significant, first, in reflecting the success of the methodology, and second, in exposing the gap in some young people's support mechanisms, hence resulting in a grasping of a rare opportunity of someone to confide in. This issue is explicated further in the discussions that follow on home-life and family relationships.

Tensions and implications for future subjectivities

Disclosures analysed in this section make visible the tensions some young people experienced in the relationship between identity and the context and practices of social lives. Feelings of foreboding related to a sense of losing a grasp of what future identities and practices might look like, that is, lifeworlds (Habermas 1987), were apparent for females in particular. Here, participants display their reflexive selves (Giddens 1991), first, in their awareness of the security provided by identity as embedded in social relations in particular locales, and second, in the unsettling potential of future transformations and the stretching out of time and space (Giddens 1990) and fateful moments (Giddens 1991:112) to disembed and threaten self-identity.

Somali and Pakistani peers in groups 1 and 2 described being 'very happy' with their current situation and did not anticipate substantial changes to their social scene in the future; it appeared both more predictable and more secure than that of the white and African-Caribbean teenagers who were less convincingly happy and seemed anxious

about their futures. While Friday nights at the park provided enjoyment and a place for 'having a laugh', this was tempered with a sense of short termism, and an overshadowing feeling that it had to be enjoyed now before the freedom it granted was taken away:

'I just want the park thing to last forever' Josie

'What might prevent that?' JH

'Well we can't be going there for ever ... when we leave school and are meant to be grown up and that, we can't be going to the park then' Julie.

Of course, current social lives should not be read off as wholesale indicators of the future life script, but for the park group, perceptions of the temporariness of current socialising practices were significant and borne out in perceptions of social lives in the future, where the uncertainty and discomfort was palpable. Yes, socialising in the park was associated with having a 'great time', but, it was also constructed as filling a gap in an otherwise 'boring' existence within everyday lives they considered rather mundane. As research relationships developed they more readily disclosed dissatisfactions that social identities as maturing adults were becoming more difficult to reconcile with the context that configured their primary socialising event. Specifically, socialising in the park with its outdoor location gave little status to their identity as young adults and created tensions about representations of self in future contexts:

'You get sick of being outside in cold, getting wet in t'park' Maisie

'We'll be leaving school soon, are we gonna be going to the park when we're at college or whatever? Can you imagine it, we're all twenty and still going down to t'park?' Josie

'God we sound so sad when you say it like that' Julie

'Yeah you can imagine saying to someone at college "do you wanna come out with us?" and they say "where to?" and we say "to get pissed at the park"'. Sounds really great doesn't it?' Maisie (amidst group laughter).

Self reflections on spatial and temporal identity went on to reveal emergent tensions about the place of alcohol, particularly a sense of unease that drunkenness was necessary for enjoyment in the park context:

'More and more, it's like, you have to be pissed to have a good time at the park' Maisie.

Frustrated at the limitations imposed by the outside venue and the increasingly necessary pre-requisite of getting drunk to achieve enjoyment, they discussed other options, such as, they would like to be able to go to friends' houses, have parties or go to night-clubs, but none of these felt appropriate if they were scrutinised by adults or if freedom was restricted:

'If we could just be ourselves anywhere else I don't think we'd be going to the park. Suppose it's 'cos we're bored really' Josie.

Whereas, going to the park allowed an 'affordable good time', and 'it's better than staying in'. It was reassuringly predictable (venue and times set), there were no pre-requisites for entry (dress code or invitation) and they experienced a sense of freedom:

'We can drink and smoke and just be ourselves' Maisie.

For the park group, the place of pragmatism in making the best of limited options and resources was no doubt significant in their explanations for achieving authenticity of self, but the place of boredom and the quest for its alleviation were also important particularly in affecting the outcomes of current activities. For example, excesses of alcohol and even related sexual behaviours in facilitating greater enjoyment (see below, 'Sexuality and sexual activity') appeared encouraged by the particular venue (and the lack of alternatives to occupy their time) or other stimuli to evoke enjoyable sensations.

Working class backgrounds mediated against alternative socialising in a number of ways. Potential surveillance by adults was enhanced by living in homes without the physical and virtual space to socialise with friends, unlike better-off peers:

'We don't come from houses like Lucy and her lot where there's enough rooms to have your mates round. We're not gonna sit in t'front room with our mams and dads watching telly are we?' Maisie
'You can't even phone your mates in my house 'cos someone's always nebbing (prying), so I've got to go out to even (be able to) talk to them' Sean.

There were other restrictions on alternative socialising, such as looking too young (particularly as some pubs have an over-21 ruling) and lacking the resources of money and confidence to travel, gain entry to and buy drinks in inner city venues. The fear of violence from other young people, based on past experience, also served as a major deterrent in 'staying away' from the town centre.

This caution regarding unfamiliar territories and unknown 'others' contrasted with some middle class respondents (sites 2 and 6) who welcomed the potential to frequent new sites and meet new people. This supports Lucey and Reay's (1999) observations that middle class children (in their study) had broader geographic horizons than working class contemporaries, through an ability to apply a rationality to emotions of fear, violence, and the unknown. Working class young people were not as skilled in rationalising emotions and were less likely to 'master' new terrains, people or opportunities. For individuals in my study, such fears of the unknown served as a form of self-regulation

that had the potential to influence the reproduction of working class subjectivities, and limit horizons and opportunities. This is developed further in theme 10 'Futures, hopes and fears'.

The park group applied their knowledge of working class identity distinctiveness and territorialism to other young people in the city, whose social lives were seen as constrained for similar reasons:

'Other poorer kids go to other parks in their area, it's sort of like, different kids go to different parks, but they do the same things 'cos really you can't go safely anywhere else' Dale
'Yeah we sometimes go to others, but you don't feel as safe' Sean.

This evidences that identities based on spatial and class commodities may create specific and insulated micro-cultures of activity but they are transcultural (Thrift 1997) in being replicated in other sites with different groups of young people¹.

For the park group, anxieties about abilities to reproduce these identities in the future and in new contexts were a significant dimension in understanding current perceptions of selves. It is important to appreciate the significance of young people's perceptions of the positive aspects of behaviours such as 'having a laugh', living for the moment (i.e. the importance of the 'doing' in the here and now) and sexuality as 'source of joy' rather than 'trouble', as in the work of Selverstone (cited in Moore and Rosenthal 1993) and Aggleton (1987), because these provide a balancing corrective to more negative 'problematic' representations which do not acknowledge the importance, albeit temporary, of these practices in achieving freedom and authenticity of self. But the analytic relevance here is that, while current socialising in the park was significant, it is unwise to over-romanticise the youthful hedonism or deny the temporal nature of the phenomena, but rather to emphasise the links with the wider aspects of their lives. Herein the interconnectedness of the micro-macro (Giddens 1977) and public-private (Benhabib 1992) is rendered visible, particularly in the despondency they displayed when talking about social lives in the family (see below), lack of support, and the relationship to their longer term sense of indefinite futures. It is clear that several respondents were

¹ This does not infer that these young people's behaviours are wholly generalisable to wider populations as this abets a lack of specificity that can obscure diversity and difference (Dowsett 1999). Rather it suggests that exploration of micro-social and localised factors are just as important to understanding as the broader (macro) factors that influence behaviour and identity. In essence, without inquiry into the intimate realm of the generalised other (Benhabib 1992) we truncate the possibilities for appreciating how far the 'generalised other' influences the 'concrete other' and how far they can be generalised to other groups and localities.

recognising that lives would soon be transformed by new and unfamiliar 'extralocal' modes of ruling (Smith 1988) but, as Giddens (1991) argues, these passages into new terrains could be made less threatening if greater support was available to assist the reflexivity and confidence necessary for ontological security. Lucey and Reay (1999) contend that middle class parents are more likely to be skilled in providing guidance towards achieving authenticity of self in new territories. For these working class individuals, such omissions in support networks did seem to have contributed to limits on reflexivity (see Lash 1993) that have repercussions for reproducing subjectivities and practices.

In sum, they recognised that reproducing legitimate selves (with specific and well tried competencies) in other contexts and times might be problematic. Conflicts arose in enjoying the insulation for illicit activities provided by the park scene while also invoking a sense of marginalisation from and unpreparedness for everyday worlds. This issue is developed further in theme 4 'Sex education'.

As mentioned previously, these tensions in identity contrast with the perspectives of groups 1 and 2 (Pakistani males and female, and Somali females) whose current identities and practices were construed as consistent with those of the future, with a predictability that inhered safety in the knowledge of the definite. There are two possible explanations for this. First, it might simply be an illustration of the limited impact of reflexivity on agency that Lash (1993) contends is a feature of late modern subjectivity that is more readily marked by contradiction and contingency. Perhaps the Somali and Pakistani young people displayed more confidence about futures than African Caribbean and white contemporaries because they relied less on reflexivity, and more on contingencies (such as constructs of married life, employment status in the future, and their Islamic faith) to ward off insecurities. Second, and not incompatible with the first, the Somali and Pakistani young people might be more well equipped to deal with the challenges of fateful moments through support from adults in the family and wider community and the teachings of their religious faith. Provisionally (given the absence of depth data on Pakistani and Somali young people's support networks), the answer probably lies in a combination of the two, but what is more definite is that allegiance to the Muslim faith seemed to create some constraints on practices (such as drinking alcohol, restricted

socialising outside the family for females) but also pre-dictated expectations which assisted in a firmer sense of the future, where inclusivity was assured.

Defending identity

The self-view of all the research participants (individually and collectively) was one of non participation in clearly defined or mass consumptive sub-groups of style. Thus disclosures are not easily analysable on the basis of youth cultural studies of 'style', as in research from the 1970s (Cohen 1972, Wieder and Zimmerman 1974, Jefferson 1976, Hebdidge 1976, Clarke 1976) wherein the signifiers of group identity depend on allegiance to a specific coding (Foucault 1979a) by clothes, makeup, hairstyle (e.g. as in skinheads, mods, goths etc.). However, all participants defined their identity style as 'casual', but this was not seen as a specific pre-requisite to membership of their friendship sub-group (such as the 'park' or 'flat' group). This was irrespective of cultural/ethnic identity, though Muslim females integrated 'casual' with dress and adornments consistent with their faith:

'We cover our legs and that but wear casual stuff on the rest of our body' Ruby.

Labelling selves as 'casual' related more to their economic inability to acquire distinctive stylistic identities, and was articulated not in terms of who they were but who they were not. Thus typifications of 'casual' emerged from comparison with others not in their friendship group, referred to variously as 'others not in our group', 'them not like us' and 'posh kids'. For the park group in particular, distancing selves from those who could afford other forms of style distinguished an identity and conferred a status - something to be proud of - but which also incorporated elements of defensive identity management (Goffman 1969). The majority were not able to enter other sub-groups of style or sites for its endorsement because of the requirement for other forms of capital, e.g. specific attire/dress style, sufficient money for clubbing and/or other drugs less familiar and more expensive than alcohol. This contrasted with more middle class respondents (site 2), and older respondents (site 6) who were just as keen to defend their identity, but had options to access other groups/sites because of the greater availability of money.

Admissions of lacking economic and cultural capital were never constructed as envy but to reaffirm their own distinctiveness. For example, in describing peers with more money for venues requiring specific dress codes (e.g. 'less casual, no trainers') they were more

concerned to distance and distinguish their identity and venues than dwell on that of their peers:

‘We’re not posh enough to go to some of the places they go to and we’re proud of that, we’re happier on our own patch’ Maisie.

Similarly, territorial socialising coded as ‘our patch’, explicitly referred to a place where they felt safer and more confident, but implicitly related to desires to remain within established friendship networks. ‘Safe’ places included consideration of threats of violence but for all respondents were configured by other factors, such as people of similar cultural and class norms, with a commonality of language, availability of money, family histories, religious norms, even similar academic and employment futures. Here again the notion of identities linked to micro-cultures of knowledge and practices that cross (trans-cultural) physical divides is evidenced. For example, younger interviewees from site 4 constructed their identity and activities in relation to the boundaried context of the deprived locale (large council estate) where they lived, schooled and socialised, and older members positioned an inclusive subjectivity in relation to the local Working Men’s Club. In contrast, middle class respondents in sites 2 and 6 had more disparate boundaries and were less concerned to defend an identity based on spatial, economic and cultural capital.

These disclosures on identity evidence the social construction (Foucault 1979a) and situatedness of identity, through inscriptions (Pini 1997) of boundaried space, place and temporality (Aggleton 1999) and biographical narratives (Giddens 1991) that embody and/or create particular subjectivities. These boundaried identities connect with social lives and are endorsed as authentic and legitimate by the friendship grouping, and mediate varying capacities/resources to negotiate new terrains. In this sense, the lifestyle, identity and choices available to respondents are consistent with Giddens’s (1991) notion of ‘lifestyle’ as determined by the conditions of structural inequality and material constraint (see ‘subjectivity and the reflexive self’ in chapter 3).

Family socialising

In this section we see how some group members differentiate between sociality within friendship groups and that in the family. As previously mentioned, for the park group the alleviation of boredom figured centrally in giving meaning to the necessity of social lives

outside the home. White and African Caribbean, in contrast to Pakistani and Somali young people, were categorical in not equating routine family activities with 'socialising':

'When you've been talking about socialising, no one's mentioned their family' JH
'Well that's not socialising' Dale
'Why not?' JH
'Well socialising is about having a good time with your mates' Dale
'Can't you have a good time without your mates?' JH
'Not when you're stuck at home being bored' Dale
'You can sometimes but it's not socialising where you talk and have a laugh' Josie
'Don't you talk and have a laugh at home?' JH
'Everything is too busy' Josie
'Too busy?' JH
'Yeah, just doing stuff so that there's no time to talk properly' Josie
'Like what?' JH
'Well in our house, you're either charging out the house for school or having your tea or ...' Josie interrupted by Maisie
'Watching telly' Maisie
'Yeah just other stuff' Josie
'What about watching telly with your mum and dad or who ever, do you talk or have a laugh then?' JH
'No not really' Josie
'Are there things you do outside the routine stuff with your family, which you think of as socialising?' JH
No don't do owt with them' Angela
'What do the rest of you think?' JH
'Same' Sean.

Subsequent individual interviews provided examples of enjoyable socialising such as family holidays, but these were described as untypical (as in not regular) and therefore not regarded as representatives of family mores. Admissions to the possibility of enjoyable socialising with the family were not seen as contradictions but rather as evidence to lament factors that operated against routine enjoyment, as Josie articulates:

'You can have a good time on holidays with them (family) but that's not normal, it's just 'cos things aren't as mad as at home and you've got more time. They (parents) show a bit more interest, but back at home it goes back to normal, busy busy'.

It is notable that most references to family life by the park group rendered a change in mood to being more sombre and uncharacteristically downcast. This is perhaps because, in the starkest sense, home was perceived as no more than a place for maintaining the functions of working and eating; an arena deprived of stimulation, conversation, or, anything that might diminish their sense of boredom. Since this appeared related to scarce availability of money, time, and social class in some cases, it can be analysed on the basis of boredom that stems from social exclusion, in the psychological, social, familial and economic sense (see MacDonald 1997, for review of the debate). This is illustrated in the contrast provided by more affluent, middle class young people in other

sites who did not experience the same sense of marginalisation within and outside the family, in as much as family activities were inclusive to descriptions of enjoyable socialising. For example, young people from site 2 cited sporting hobbies and shopping as activities enjoyed with parents or siblings. These activities were again explained initially as ways of alleviating boredom, but with additional incentives:

‘When you’re there (playing golf) with my brother or Dad you get to talk about things in a relaxed way’ Jason

‘You just spend time going round town shopping and you can talk in a better way than when you’re at home and there’s other stuff going on’ Susan.

Thus, unlike contemporaries from Horton School, these individuals were provided with opportunities for stimulation by family members - attention that was welcomed and not construed as threatening to maintaining the exclusivity of more private (or secret) socialising with friends. Surprisingly, the Burton School (site 2) participants did not perceive conversations within socialising (such as playing golf or shopping) as opportunities for parents to scrutinise their lives, though undivided attention from parents surely creates the space and opportunity for surveillance through observation and questioning. The context for socialising is all important here. Because members of the park group were denied domains for family socialising outside the home (and its pressurised domestic routines), they did not experience many interactions or conversations with parents/guardians that were construed as genuine displays of parental interest. Rather, because there was not the luxury of time, space, money (or even familial norm) for parent/child sociality, conversations were snatched and oft reduced to opportunities for minimising surveillance on the young persons part, or from the parents’ perspective, enforcing the rules for socialising outside the home, such as times for getting home in the evening. This does not infer that those who socialised with parents were any less reflexive in acknowledging the surveillance potential of parents, but that they welcomed the contingencies such activities provided to justify their agency and sense of self:

‘If you do stuff with your Mum or Dad, you can talk in a more relaxed way, and sort of bring stuff up about what you’re doing, and why you want to do it, that doesn’t lead to an argument about how late you’ve been getting in’ Amy
‘Can you give me an example?’ JH

‘Well, like, if we’re shopping, I talk to my Mum about going to clubs and that and try to explain about wanting to go cos that’s where my friends go and that it’s not full of horrible people that are gonna kidnap me or get me into heroin. Just that it is safe and **actually** that I am sensible and know my limits. I’m **not** a little girl anymore’ Amy (her emphasis).

‘And another thing is that they [parents] can talk to you about their feelings and worries and you can sort of try and understand each other a bit more’ Susan.

The park group, in contrast, had no such opportunities for relaxed and reciprocal awareness-raising conversations.

Finally, for all groups, irrespective of class, ethnicity, culture or material resources, extra-curricular socialising activities, such as 'drama', 'scouts', 'athletics' were construed as activities that typify unappealing identities, such as 'swots', 'geeks' or 'stiffs'. Thus non-participation becomes a cultural commodity to signify a particular distinctiveness.

Additionally, when I sought confirmation that they had no hobbies, I was corrected:

'Yeah, making my own beer and drinking it and smoking spliff' Jason

'Yeah (laughs) that's my favourite hobby' Neil.

'Even when I play golf I still have a spliff, it can be boring otherwise' Jason.

While this answer was intended as an amusing illustration of the distinctiveness of 'hobbies' between different groups, it is significant of a new age - one that includes illicit drug consumption as a hobby alongside more traditional pastimes. Also the perception of the role of such activities has shifted from one of citizenship, camaraderie/group membership, and practical skills, to that of alleviating boredom. I return to the issue of relationships with parents in themes 9 and 10.

Synthesis

The above discussion makes visible the relationship between identity, practice and context. It illustrates the importance of actors' voices and storytelling to conceptualisations of identity and practice, and to providing access to, and understanding of, micro relations and the standpoint of the 'concrete other' (Benhabib 1992). Sameness and differentiation are embodied in young people's narratives and in this way provide recognition of 'the legitimacy of many different voices' (Warnke 1995:258). Disclosures not only assist in unpacking ignorance regarding their micro cultural ways of being, but also go some way to answering Smith's (1988) problematic of the everyday, when they embrace links to the macro. The research methods employed deliberately sought to facilitate access to the private, and to try and understand the connectedness between the public and the private worlds of young people. However while the analysis recognises a connectedness, and hence a duality in the macro-micro, structure-agency relationship, it does not as Archer cautions (1995) in her response to Giddens's structuration theory (1982) conflate social organisation with cultural organisation. Social structure certainly

has influence but so too do the cultural and micro imperatives of day to day lives, routines and practices. Without knowledge of the latter, pragmatic social enquiry on the influence of the former is severely limited. For example, the sense of lack of status derived from socialising in the park can be analysed from the broad and macro perspective of the capital commodities of class (money, space) which no doubt influence subjectivities based on exclusion/inclusion, but more sophisticated understanding emerges when positioned alongside the specific micro and cultural commodities that mediate and differentiate inclusivity and sameness, on the basis of shared language, family and religious norms and expectations, academic and employment potential, and sense of futures.

Theme 2: Individual and collective identity

Introduction

This section builds on the mediations of identity, I have introduced in theme 1. A number of specific though related propositions permeate the analysis. Firstly, some aspects of identity can be understood in relation to Giddens's (1991) notion of reflexive selves and particular biographic journeys. However, this does not suggest that one can arrive at conclusions over what identity *is*, or that it can be wholly self-determined through a reflexive self-recognition of the external mediators of identity. To reiterate Lash (1993), contingencies and contradictions also play a part. This leads to the second proposition that, although agency plays a part, individuals as social beings, have a social identity that is individually and collectively mediated and negotiated, and that agency does not operate in isolation from either of these. As Jenkins asserts,

‘Social identity is our understanding of who we are and of who other people are, and reciprocally, other people’s understanding of themselves and of others (which includes us)’. (Jenkins 1996:5).

Bringing my analysis and observations into the equation blurs (even further) any definitive (or essentialising) conceptions of what young people’s identity *is* because we are all second order constructs (Smith 1978) and given the variable influence of different actors, time and space (Giddens 1991) and methodological approaches, it is inadvisable to claim any ‘truth’ (Foucault 1979b) over knowledge of what identity *is*. Discourses emanating from different contexts (historical epochs, locations, institutions, cultures etc.), as Foucault argues (1979a), claim different truths and generalisations. For this reason, my third proposition is that while other positions (or truths) can (and will) be contested on the basis of my data, the analytic emphasis is on how identity *works*, rather than what it *is*.

This said, identity is seen to be a product of both internal self-definitions and external definitions of selfhood mediated by others, but neither is meaningful without reference to the other - social life mediates identity, and identity informs social life (Berger and Luckmann 1967). As data will evidence, while selfhood is embodied (as unique, complex and contradictory), it is also an ongoing process (G H Mead 1934) that is embedded through the synthesis of the dialectic between internal and external processes of identification (Jenkins 1996), and social identity becomes just as embodied as individual

selfhood. This is reflected in the data as one begins to appreciate young people's reflexivity and their desire to control impression management (Goffman 1969). They are keen both to stress their knowledge of the influence of the external dialect, and show how this interacts at the interface with the internal dialect or self-image. This is particularly relevant in making a firmer case for appreciating identity in relation to available cultural capital; and to problematising public (as in widely held views) conceptions of 'youth' and adolescence and to appreciating their potential for regulation and control (Foucault 1979a).

Consistent with Bourdieu's ideas (1977) the data evidence that young people use specific forms of capital to explain their identity and the influences thereof. At the structural level, where Bourdieu speaks of capital, Giddens refers to structure (1977) or rules and resources (1984), Smith (1988) cites extra-local modes of ruling, Habermas emphasises stocks of knowledge (1986) and Foucault (1979a) draws less tangibly on the all pervasive effects of discourse on how identity is shaped and organised in the contemporary context. All these facets are alluded to in the data, but the analytic categories as depicted below honour those raised by participants as most significant in giving meaning to their identity. Comparison of the varied meanings and categories facilitates analysis of the degree, forms and balance of power (Foucault 1979b) both within and between different friendship groups, sexual partners and in relation to the mainstream (adult) culture. Meanings were conferred from different types of resources and my analysis begins by deploying Van Campenhoudt's (1997) interpretation of Bourdieu's theory of capital.

Types of capital

Throughout the interviews, Bourdieu's four types of capital were alluded to. These are economic resources, cultural resources, symbolic resources and social resources.

Economic resources

As I have suggested already, young people's varying access to material resources was significant in explanations for identity. For instance, several references have been made to identity and social choices that were mediated by lack of money (for alternative identity styles, access to alternative venues) and lack of private space in the home to socialise with friends. A Marxist (Smith 1988) analysis could be applied here, with

identity configured in relation to class, the family's economic situation and the modes of production stemming from this. Consistent with some respondents in Aggleton's study (1987), the commodities stemming from class were articulated not as something that was possessed but rather as something they lacked:

'Like I'm working class and that means I'm not posh and I haven't got enough money to be anything else' Sean.
'It's like I'm not a snob like them that live in big houses and I won't ever be. But ya can never be like proud of where ya live or bring people round. There isn't enough space for one thing' Maisie.

Individuals were aware of the potential for reproduction of working class norms:

'Yeah it's like where we live, well our house is small and we're skint, we'll always have nowt 'cos you don't get same chances to move on in the world' Jo.

My interpretation based on class and material capital is justified by corroborating data from middle class respondents in other sites. Their identity was very much related to the opportunities provided by access to 'allowances' and part time work in family businesses:

'I know I couldn't do the things I do or have the clothes and stuff I've got if it weren't for my allowance and holiday work at my Dad's firm' Susan
'Yeah, playing golf and stuff costs money, it's a middle class thing' Jason.

Mediations of identity linked to specific biographic journeys (Giddens 1991), social class and economic resources naturally intersected with cultural, social and symbolic capital, but the significance of social class as a source of social cleavage in young people's biographic identity supports Bonney's (1998) assertion that social class has enduring relevance for understanding differences in opportunities for upward social mobility. This said, gender, ethnicity and lifestyle (as sources of social, cultural and symbolic capital) are not eclipsed by social class, rather they contribute additional factors to the dynamic and complexity of how identity is socially constructed (Burr 1995).

Cultural capital

Cultural capital is used here to refer to resources acquired through the experience of day to day living. It is the learning of norms, values and expectations that derive from particular cultures and institutions, of, for example ethnicity, education, the family, and the media (Van Campenhoudt 1997). The values derived from these specific lifeworlds (Habermas 1987) were very influential in young people's constructions of self and in the behaviours they endorsed or rejected. In this sense Giddens's (1984) rules and resources

for everyday life are made visible. For instance, Ruby and Effi assumed that identifying themselves as Muslim females self-evidently explained their own socialising practices and their opinions of class mates' behaviour:

'Those girls behaviour is shocking, so cheeky to teachers, they should show more respect' Ruby
'Effi, Soraya what do you think ?' JH
'Same, we wouldn't do it' Effi
'Who's we?' JH
'Us lot, Muslims. In our religion you just don't, especially not girls ' Effi
(nods of agreement from other Muslim females).
'Would boys do it?' JH
'Can't say, suppose some would to teachers but not to parents' Ruby.

The distinguishing of female and male identity through the cultural codes (Foucault 1979a) of ethnicity and gender was supported in a separate interview with Hanif and Javed, where they made reference to the activities of the park group (as disclosed in the whole group first meeting):

'It shouldn't be allowed, it's not good' Hanif
'It's so shocking to the parents if they knew' Javed
'Girls in our culture just wouldn't do that. It's a white girls thing' Hanif
'Jo and Millie aren't white' JH
'Well I mean Muslim. We obey the rules' Hanif.

The cultural capital bestowed by allegiance to the expectations of family and religious faith endowed sufficient confidence to reject outright any alternative way of being. Hanif's and Javed's sexual practices were justified on the grounds of a cultural rite of passage in the journey to future commitments with a Muslim partner. However, it was clear that some rules and resources (Giddens 1984) were more important than others and constructs of self as derived from cultural capital had to be balanced alongside the production of agency and desires to control impression management (Goffman 1969). The more vocal Muslim participants were keen to promote a specific identity that was, first, consistent with the expectations of their faith, particularly norms of passivity and obedience in females, and second, distanced them from roguish peers. Bringing out the similarities and differences (hence the distancing observed) in social identity is a long established theme in theorising identity, particularly as it relates to anthropological studies of ethnic identity (see for instance Barth 1966). But as for all identities, the boundaries of identity classifications are not fixed and participants select certain identifications to suit the situation (Jenkins 1996). Pragmatic revisions of identity that reflect the dialectic between internal and external referents of identity were witnessed in observations and interactions with Muslim students in episodes following the

aforementioned interviews. On leaving the room after her interview with me, Ruby became involved in an altercation with a female teacher which involved shouting from both parties and Ruby swearing at the teacher as she walked off. Similarly, Hanif's declaration as an 'obeyer' of rules was somewhat undermined by an incident occurring shortly after our interview. While standing at a bus stop, I was surprised to see Hanif and Javed running out of school at 2pm (i.e. before the end of the school day) via the unofficial route of the basketball pitch and perimeter school wall. On seeing me, they began laughing, walked towards me and said:

'Don't tell miss, we'll get done' Javed

'Why's that?' JH

'We're bunking off, we can't stand CDT' Hanif.

Those familiar with Muslim students (e.g. teachers) will appreciate that these behaviours are not inconsistent with being a Muslim, but the significance is that in constructing identities in interviews, Muslim students ascribed great importance to being construed as law abiding and saw no gains in disclosing practices which might contradict this¹. This reflects Jenkins (1996) point (citing Barth 1969) that in the management of identity, shared value orientations as the signifier of ethnic identity are all important; they are

'...the standards of morality and excellence with which behaviour is evaluated' (p94).

Significant others validate this identity but patterns for routinising these constructs can easily be disrupted by the simultaneity and unpredictability of the interactional social order, as in Ruby's inability to maintain her managed social identity in her unplanned altercation with the teacher, and in my encounter with Javed and Hanif at the bus stop. While this undermined the particular constructs that participants selected to support their identity management, it does not diminish the persistent importance of ethnicity to these young people's sense of self. Contradictions permeate all identity narratives but here it is significant because the multiplicity and complexity of factors that constituted and moulded Muslim identities were not easily (through my research) made obvious. As a result, full understanding was jeopardised, and in some aspects remains, more or less, at the level of the 'generalised other' (Benhabib 1992). Despite these shortfalls, the data do provide some evidence to problematise unquestioned constructions of minority ethnic youths' identity, particularly in relation to sexuality and sexual activities wherein

¹ This contrasts markedly with the practices disclosed by non-Muslim peers whose identities were configured by elaborate storytelling about illicit activities.

representations of young people (in literature and media) remain confined to those of white and African Caribbeans, and invisibilise the activities of a majority of ethnic minorities (Griffin 1993). Ensuing themes provide more data to question dominant (common) conceptions.

As theme 3 'Sexuality and sexual activity' will illustrate, all respondents had clearly been brought up with a set of cultural inscriptions that led them to believe that 'friendship' provided guarantees of integrity. For example, they assumed that knowing someone socially inherited a health guarantee against risks such as HIV and other STDs. On the other hand, less familiar identities (i.e. strangers) presented greater risks. By contrast to Muslim young people, white and African Caribbean respondents tended to see their cultural heritage as providing less by way of currency (knowledge and resources) that was useful to supporting positive constructions of identity. Acknowledging the potential for reproduction of family norms, females in particular hoped not to 'repeat parents' mistakes', such as 'settling down with the wrong person'; or having children at a young age (detailed in theme 10 'Futures, hopes and fears'). Here again, Giddens's (1991) notion of reflexivity in recognising the potential influence of biographic histories on identity is illustrated.

Symbolic capital

This refers to the attributes and abilities possessed by individuals and collectivities that provide symbols of identity (Van Campenhoudt 1997). Since they derive from the other categories, how far they are exploited depends on how far individuals want to own the currency it provides. Seen in these terms, the symbolism conveyed by working class backgrounds yields contradictions for white and African Caribbean young people. For example, while they are proud of working class identities (notably their accents) and do not want to be 'snobs', they reject less appealing aspects of their cultural background, such as tense family relationships and the poor status related to where they live. However, the symbolism provided by membership to certain friendship groups (with material and cultural commonalities) and shared practices has higher status. Because different social groups derive different symbolic capital, they are discussed in greater detail in 'social capital' below.

Social capital

Social capital embraces social resources that can be mobilised to achieve particular ends (Van Campenhoudt 1997). For example, kinship networks provided Javed and Hanif with access to the flat; and membership of the park group yielded much capital in constructions of collective social identity. Solidarity of peer group identity (and the delineation in to separate friendship groups) was mediated further by common social and cultural backgrounds, academic and employment potential, and perceptions of similar futures. Comparison of the different types of social capital sheds light on the various balances of power and yields different access to freedom and choice. For instance, the capital provided by access to the flat enhanced Javed and Hanif's freedom and shifted their balance of power (invested by Hanif's employer) upwards in providing a venue free from the scrutiny of others (such as adults and uninvited young people). Similarly, the venue of the park in itself does not enhance status, but the freedom and enjoyment that come from the group identity embedded in the locale of the park bestows a capital that distinguishes an identity. For example, the park group talked a lot about their own form of style, their non-snobiness, lack of material resources, and group activities to achieve the distinction for their own brand of hedonism, and distinctiveness from 'snobby' counterparts.

The significance of social capital to constructions of self again illustrates that identity is embedded in social relations in particular contexts (Giddens 1991). The particularities are boundaried by the specifics of time and space (ibid.) and had it not been for the opportunity to hear about social lives, the data on identity would be only partially representative. Time and space became salient in participants' reflections on general representations (as in commonly held views) of 'youth' identity (see Griffin 1993 for overview). At the first meeting, when asked whether they complied with discourse that views young people or 'adolescence' as a distinct and troublesome phenomena, they rejected such ascriptions outright, arguing that they did not view themselves as different or abnormal. They contended that representations of youth were based on ignorance and the need to maintain adult (particularly parents) denial over the realities of young people's identity and practices. Because much of the social capital was derived from 'secret' socialising, and at times and in spaces outside the family orbit, parental denial was kept intact.

Interestingly, and to repeat a comment made previously, they viewed themselves as so 'normal' that the research interest was questioned:

'Our lives are quite boring really, are you sure you want to do this (research)? We're just normal ...uninteresting and quite boring really. I Don't think many people will buy (believe) it' Sean.

This perception of 'normal-ness' again revealed the importance of time and space and connectedness to social identity. Though they distinguished themselves from school mates and different socialising practices, they also qualified their social identity on the basis of similarity (Cohen 1982) with other groups in different geographical contexts. Such commonality enhances the power of symbolic capital to justify their normality and make meaningful their collective identity. Disclosures resonate with Gill Jones's (1999) study of transcultural and socio-spatial identity (*The same people in the same places*) wherein identity and practice is marked by similarity and difference through a combination of the commonality and difference provided by structural and motivational factors:

'Like we know of other kids who go to parks like us, like those from Oakhead and Burton school go to Greenvale Park and do stuff like us, you know just messing about and then there's others, like kids here who are more into townie things and go to clubs and stuff. It depends what you like and what you're in to ' Josie.

Generalisations were restricted to familiar people and places. Thus they suspected they might be different from other young people because of the different contexts in which they were raised:

'... different to them in big cities like London or in different bits of the world' Jo
'Yeah that's right we can't speak for everyone' Sean
'Why's that ?' JH
'Well we can't speak for them that's been brought up in a different place by different people' Sean
'Yeah it's like my cousin, she's from Reading and she's my age and that but she goes into town all the time and goes to these things ... they're like youth groups but better, more clubs for under eighteens. She'd never go out on a night to the **park** ' Maisie (her emphasis)
'Maybe there isn't a park' Jo
'Yeah maybees (sic) but it's still different' Maisie.

Hence they were aware of the potential influence of differing context and applied caution in making transferable generalisations.

In justifying their normal-ness, the park group also linked social identity to specific practices, albeit in different contexts. They regarded sex and drug activity as normalised with much in common, not just to other groups in the city, but young people more widely.

'I think most teenagers know about drugs and stuff and some have tried it and some haven't. Most will have been pissed at least' Dale
'What about sexual activity?' JH
'Same I think. Some will have some won't. Like my cousin Jenny, she's done stuff like me just in different place cos she goes to loads of parties at people's houses. They all live in reight big houses and their parents let 'em have parties or go on holiday and they just have parties and parents don't know' Maisie.

However, while some respondents gained capital from positioning their own behaviours alongside those of other groups of teenagers, that is by attempting to 'normalise' their practices, it was also acknowledged that this provides little by way of power to challenge normative conceptions of young people:

'There's always stuff on telly about teenagers and getting pregnant and drugs, like all the stuff about raves and stuff' Dale.

Such reductionist representations of young people in media coverage were argued as enhancing parental denial and the related resistance to accepting responsibility for supporting young people through teenagehood:

'We know we all do these things or at least know about them, but parents, no, they don't feel like that' Jo
'Well even if they know it they won't believe it'¹ Sean
'Do you think Jenny's parents are any more knowledgeable or accepting of her behaviour than yours?' JH
'No she's told me about them going mad if they knew she'd been drinking or even madder if they knew she'd had it [sex] with her boyfriend, or messing about wi' lads' Maisie
'When it comes down to it they're [parents] all the same, just ignore it as if it's not happening. It dunt (sic) help anyone does it?' Jo
'What do you mean?' JH
'Well we can't tell 'em the truth cos they'll ground us [not allowed out] so they never know the truth and we can't talk honestly to them but they keep on saying "talk to me" but they don't really want to hear it so they never can understand us' Maisie
'Yeah that's it, it's a big problem' Josie.

The 'problem' of adults' failure to hear young people's version of their lives is not unique according. Hugill (1997) argues that hyperbolic media hype on teenage sexual and drug behaviour enhances parental angst, even though the incidence of irrevocable harm is minimal. Presenting evidence to the contrary does little to alleviate misrepresentations because of the enduring conception of the teenage body that is coded as rebellious (Pini 1997). The power of dominant ideological and cultural beliefs also predisposes young people to assume there is little point in challenging parents' beliefs and moreover influences personal constructions of self and collective identity. This is developed further in subsequent themes, but here it is sufficient to say that Foucault's (1979a) notion of control by the processes of biopower had great influence on

¹ For discussion of reasoning see theme 9.

young people's (particular females') ability to make claims to legitimate identity. This will be seen to be especially acute in relation to sexual identity.

Gender identity

The decision to include gender identity as a separate theme is intended, first, to emphasise the methodological commitment to seeing the data from the female standpoint as justified by the feminist critiques of literature on identity (see chapter 3) and youth (see chapter 2). The recognition of gender blindness can be remedied by looking at ways in which gender functions to produce and reproduce male domination and female subordination (Meehan 1995). Secondly, while gender has correlations with social, cultural and symbolic capital, to subsume gender under these headings risks diminishing the importance of dialectical explanations in recognising the contradictions inherent in social systems and their resolution, particularly through recourse to the internal dialectic in producing agency. For example, the data will show that gender resources invested (some) power in certain situations and interactions which can not be explained solely through reference to economic or physical power, inequality and discrimination. Though functional (external) explanations no doubt make some contribution to the system's reproduction, they can obscure the place of agency (Jary and Jary 1991) since gender was particularly significant in phenomena that resulted from participants' (or social actors') own decisions and actions to operate independently of the constraints of social structure. Here, actors displayed their reflexivity and knowledge of the dominant relations of ruling to manipulate outcomes (see data below). Specifically, this relates to young women who actively resisted normative expectations of gender based identity and sexual behaviour (e.g. as passive victims of male desires) to achieve their ends (see theme 3). Theme 9 'Relationships with adults' illustrates how knowledge of parents' expectations was used to teenagers' advantage in securing greater freedom from domestic chores (e.g. appearing as 'good' daughter) and in contesting patriarchal sex education teaching (see theme 4 'Sex education'). Here, young women situate themselves both passively (former example) and actively (latter example) within the structure-agency debate, but agency is consciously operating here: the knowledge that conforming to normative expectations will yield desired outcomes (particularly in family/home domain) evidences the young women as social actors with the power to operate intentionally and manipulate the constraints of social structure. However, the final analytic theme 'Futures, hopes and fears' depicts limitations to this agency.

Within sociology the debate over the relationship between gender, class and patriarchy continues. Heidi Gottfried (1998) argues that class and gender have been intertwined to too great a degree by the concept of patriarchy which impoverishes analysis of both gender and class through devoting energies to exposing the macro processes of patriarchal systems, rather than focusing on the effects of gender in practice. In other words exposing the lived experience of gender in the everyday is what counts (Benhabib 1992, Smith 1988) particularly if, as Pollert (1996) argues, the static opposition of capitalism and patriarchy is to be (she argues necessarily) dissolved. In contrast to Smith and Gottfried, Wendy Bottero (1998) argues that the class legacy has hampered understanding of material gender inequality by developing 'additive class-plus-gender explanations' (p469) that fail to excavate the importance of gender in its own right. While structural accounts of gender are justifiable, this should not mean that other causal explanations are excluded, because different actors and social spaces will differentiate the prominence of different explanations. The point is that to emphasise only the macro and universal relations of ruling, misses the opportunity to appreciate diversity, difference, the nuances of behaviour, and the interconnectedness to the micro world of everyday experience.

Turning now to the data, we see how gender is used in the active sense as a cultural commodity to explain subjectivities and behaviour. They also contrast with earlier studies of youth that tended, to reiterate Bottero (1998), to affirm normative constructs of gender identity, by restricting analysis to class based explanations for the differences observed. Taking the CCCS sub-culturalist work on class-based resistance as an example, my respondents discussed resistance in the classroom but described a form different from the 'gang of lads' analyses where boys displayed explicit practices of cultural resistance (Willis 1977) and girls less explicit forms such as giggling (McRobbie 1978). In my research cohort, white and African Caribbean females perceived themselves as more actively resistant and far less passive than males. This was corroborated by observation during the research process. On first meeting, females were more dominant than males and in mixed sex interviews they contributed more often and with lengthier disclosures, took the lead in organising interview arrangements, 'bossed' males around and interrupted and contradicted boys' comments. In contrast, males were quieter, less domineering and less likely to question the opinion of female peers, appearing at times

almost subservient to the wiles of more dominant females such as Maisie or Jo. The less powerful position of males might be explained partially by the fact there were fewer males than females in the group but, this aside, females asserted themselves as more generally resistant. White and African Caribbean females offered examples of not conforming to 'rules' or expectations they considered unreasonable and perceived themselves as,

'.. more gobby, cheeky, and more in trouble with teachers than lads' Julie.

All females and males, of all ethnicities, endorsed constructs of females as more resistant than males, though not all felt they were more cheeky:

We're [girls] quicker than lads to see what's going on and we point it out' Jo.

Another break with the 'gang of lads' mould emerged in explanations for resistance. Rather than being resistant to class or cultural oppression, females were consciously and specifically resistant to gender oppression. While this might be indicative of the changed temporal and political context, and employment patterns, with class relations less topical than in Marxist analyses of the late 1970s, females nevertheless had a critical awareness of patriarchy in the classroom and family life which motivated specific forms of resistance to expose sexist practice. The following extract from a group interview on the differences between males and females illustrates this:

'If, as you're all saying, the girls are the loudest does that mean you're naughtier or badder (sic)' JH

'No boys just get let off things we [females] don't' Maisie

'Like?' JH

'Well I think they expect girls to be more quieter (sic) and not act daft and stuff' Maisie

'Why's that do you think ?' JH

'Cos girls are more maturer (sic) but that shouldn't mean we can't have a laugh and cheek teachers back and I think they think it's not ladylike so we get done for being loud but when lads shout out and stuff they don't get done' Maisie

'What does happen to lads then?' JH

'They just let it go or **even** laugh or **even** request for it, that's it, they ask 'em to be quiet. Can you believe it? Don't demand it or yell at them like they do with us' Millie (her emphasis)

'They get away with murder, just like at home, lads get much fairer treatment' Maisie.

'So you aren't any worse than lads then really?' JH

'Yeah we are but only cos we've got to be' Jo (her emphasis)

'Meaning?' JH

'You know what we mean, you've got to stick up for yourself 'cos no-one else will. Lads are just spoilt' Jo.

Discussion on gendered relationships in the home revealed more inequalities. Females felt they had greater responsibilities than males (including fathers) for domestic chores but interestingly admitting a greater willingness to help particularly in caring for younger

siblings¹. Males endorsed females' comments but did not or could not elaborate further apart from Sean saying dryly

'Well it's a sexist world we live in, end of story'.

In a number of ways, these examples support the feminist critique of Foucault's work (see 'Gender and Foucault' in chapter 3). While data no doubt underline the importance of power to constructions of identity (Foucault 1979a) they also problematise the idea that power is not possessed by individuals (Foucault 1980; see 'Foucault and power' in chapter 3) as these young women clearly believed that male contemporaries held greater power than females. Secondly they underscore the importance of inequalities to the making of subjectivities, which McHoul and Grace (1995) observed as an opaque area in Foucault's ideas. Thirdly, the importance of gender to visiblising female subjectivities supports McNay's (1994) contention that Foucault's (1979a) minimal notion of the subject together with the lack of prominence of gender, fails to allow for

'... a fuller understanding of the subject as a thinking, willing, responsible agent of choice.' (McNay 1994:104).

Despite these criticisms, the female respondents' challenge to the prevailing balance of power are reminiscent of Foucault's (1979b) notion of positive power, wherein more autonomous individuals have the capacity to resist the dominant authority (Grbich 1999), despite the hegemonic workings of class and gender differentials.

Overall, these disclosures support the contention that it is not sufficient to restrict analyses to the external (or macro) workings of experience (Smith 1988, Benhabib 1992). Within the debate on dualisms, the micro (or lived experience of localised practices) must also be understood if we are to appreciate, among other things, the role of gender inequalities in structuring everyday lives and opportunities (ibid.). The phenomenon of males gaining fairer treatment than females (agreed as accurate by male and female participants) is a case in point. Furthermore, only when such real or authentic versions of the 'concrete other' (Benhabib 1992) are documented can they be positioned alongside the macro. Without knowledge of the micro realm of experience, synthesis of the micro and macro is limited and it is not possible to fully appreciate the mechanisms

¹ This supports Hilary Graham's (1983) assertion that caring has emotional as well as physical aspects which rely on the assumption that women will care, do care, and want to care. This is discussed further in theme 9 'Relationships with adults'. Also, Jennifer Mason (1996b) suggests that acting in ways that typify the female role can be enjoyable in confirming a sense of feminine subjectivity.

by which female and male identity are 'shaped in the extended relations of larger social and political relations' (Smith 1988:10).

The ways in which identities are mediated are developed further in subsequent themes. For instance sexual identity is discussed in themes 3 ('Sexuality and Sexual Activity') and 4 ('Sex Education'). These pick up on Giddens's (1991) notion of reflexive selves, and the challenges posed to ontological security by late modernity's 'abstract systems' and fateful episodes in the lifecourse. Likewise theme 8 'Desires and discontents' and 10 'Futures, hopes and fears' yield perceptions of *future* identity wherein distinct gendered subjectivities were envisaged.

Theme 3: Sexuality and sexual activity

New insights

Chapter 2 noted that definitions of sexuality are often absent (that is not seen as requiring definition), taken as given (Padgug 1979), ambiguous, or reduced to essentialising constructs of what constitutes appropriate sexual behaviour for males and females.

Where young people are concerned these debates focus on risk and sexual activity, and problematic outcomes such as unwanted pregnancy and single motherhood (Edwards 1997). This can yield decontextualised and over-deterministic representations, and little by way of understanding the social processes and cultural beliefs that influence how young people become sexual; and how sexuality and sexual practices shape identity, agency and subjectivity. My findings offer new empirical evidence to support this contention. They also serve to problematise conceptualisations in more traditional literature.

Taking first, the saliency of context and culture. In my data, the 'who', 'where', and 'what' of sexual practices was variable. It depended on, as Giddens (1984) argues, a complexity of modes of practice, structures and histories. This challenges essentialist constructs that accept sexuality and sexual activity as static and immutable phenomena. Second, in contrast to essentialising approaches, my findings make conspicuous the impact of power dynamics between individuals, differences in cultural beliefs, and the power of discourse to influence how individuals make sense of their world (Spencer et al 1988). This is related to a third point. My data contrast markedly with the partial and gender stereotypic view of relations between females and males in some of the cultural studies of youth (see McRobbie and Garber 1976 for critique). In my study, sexuality was visibilised in the broader landscape of lives, and for females, not just males. Young women's perspectives are more prominent than young men's because they contributed more readily, with greater comfort, and were more reflective than males. For the majority, 'talk' on sex was neither reticent nor regarded as taboo. This contrasts with the work of Holland et al (1998) and Lees (1993) who found males to be more comfortable than females. Fourth, unlike discourses in educational and political debate on teenage sex, respondents' discourses were not restricted to the practical aspects of vaginal intercourse and outcomes. Rather, descriptions were inclusive of non-penetrative sex and

mutual masturbation, and positioned emotionality, and 'sex' as 'pleasure' (not just problem, Selverstone 1993). Fifth, the data reveal that there was far more to definitions of sexual safety or risk than whether one uses a condom or not. Moreover, risk assessment involves an array of considerations, and physical health is not always the priority. Details now follow.

'Shall we talk about sex now?'

As I expected young people's dialogue on sexual activity and identity was diverse, complex and contradictory. Though frank and detailed, it was immediately clear that there was no agreed language for talking about sex (Plummer 1995, Opie 1992). Initial conversations were rife with innuendo, euphemisms, and double meanings. The decision to take socialising as the first issue for discussion, both to access contextualised insights, and develop research relationships, was vindicated as a pre-cursor to more intimate disclosures. It provided time to familiarise each other to languages, dialects and the effects of using slang parlance. Because I did not judge their slang, suspicions of lack of trust were alleviated¹. This meant that when sexual behaviours were introduced, both the respondents and I had 'tested the water', and were more confident to check out meanings and inferences, without risking a premature termination of the discussion or undue embarrassment. Within a relatively short period of time, discussions became fluent and relaxed. In fact, it was interviewees that instigated moving discussion on from general socialising to sexual behaviour:

'Shall we talk about sex now?' Maisie
'You talk about it if you want to' Sean
'Don't you want to then?' Maisie
'Yeah as long as it's not a boring talk' Sean
'Well she said [JH] it was up to us, we can decide what's important' Maisie.

Without prompting, more vocal members then began relating stories of sexual activity. In the large group white females dominated the discussion, but in small group and individual interviews, others disclosed sexual experiences and substantiated the disclosures from group discussions. Pakistani males did not mention their sexual behaviours until separated from white peers.

Sexual identity and practice, whether active involvement in sexual behaviour or talking about it, was constructed as a significant part of socialising by all group members except

the Muslim females. Like young people in the work of the WRAP team (Thomson and Scott 1991; Holland et al 1990) these respondents did not see sexuality as an adjunct to identity, lives and practices, which again contrasts markedly with the earlier 'gang of lads' work on youth identity (see Griffin 1993). The difference in female and male standpoints (Smith 1988) was made visible. Males stuck to broad descriptions of 'events', with females adding the detail and emotional aspects. Moreover females made a point of saying they enjoyed the untypical opportunity to discuss sex/sexuality with an adult. This was an early indicator of females' desires for more open relationships with adults, particularly regarding issues they had previously experienced as taboo.

Conceptualising sexuality

Interviewees did not articulate 'sexuality' as a familiar or easily definable term but nevertheless disclosures constructed a knowledge and understanding of a tangible concept of sexuality which included broader criteria than essentialist definitions that restrict 'sexuality' to sexual acts or sexual orientation (see chapter 2). In this way, the data lend support to social constructionist arguments in pointing to a plurality of influences. Holland et al's (1999) definition is apt:

'By sexuality we understand not only sexual practices, but also what people know and believe about sex, particularly what they think is natural, proper and desirable. Sexuality includes people's sexual identities in all their cultural and historical variety. While sexual intercourse is a meeting of bodies, these bodily processes are given meaning by ideas and values, and are situated in social relationships' (p.458).

Though respondents did not delineate influences, they have been categorised here to stress the range:

- social relationships - who they enjoyed/did not enjoy mixing with; contexts for different types of relationships; dominant influences (individuals, processes and structures);
- sensuality - what they 'liked' and made them 'feel good' (e.g. music, clothes, social lubricants such as alcohol) and what they rejected as oppositional to the identity they sought;
- personal values - what is 'right' and fair vis-à-vis personal and/or religious/ cultural codes;
- societal/cultural values and expectations - some of which were consistent with the latter but others were in conflict;

¹ When interviewees used slang words or swearing they often paused or looked directly at me to assess my response. My non-response, or encouraging gestures (nods, smiles etc.) enhanced their confidence to speak without censorship, and in a mode they felt comfortable with.

- sexual activity - with self and/or others involving activities beyond vaginal penetration with a penis;
- aspirations and futures - talk on future self-identity, practices, social relations, commitments and obligations.

In general, disclosures on sexual identity were interwoven with other aspects of *being* and *doing*. This allowed me to appreciate its unfixed and dynamic nature, and the impact of social and cultural influences. As in Sue Lees's view (1993), sexual identity was depicted as a product of an ever changing process with social practices as the central mechanism. Within this, young people's ambivalences, anxieties and contradictions were made visible. On the one hand they justified what they did and cared little about how they were perceived, but at the same time were aware of social pressures and expectations to behave differently. This was reinforced by their awareness of a hierarchy of authenticities wherein young people, along with non-heterosexual identities and relationships (Donovan et al 1999) are positioned at the bottom.

Overall, disclosures on sexuality and sexual activity, more than any other theme, laid bare young people's reflexivity (Giddens 1991) and the knowledge that sexuality is a highly contested concept (Harding 1998, see chapter 2 for elaboration) with numerous opinions and beliefs on how it can be explained and regulated (Foucault 1979a). Meanings and manifestations were variable and complex, and often took considerable time to make them clear. This need for time may not have been afforded in past studies that have omitted definitions, variability and complexity. My data show, as Lear (1995) contends, that elucidating what sexuality *is*, or how it is *done* relies, first, on hearing about sexuality in the *words* of those participating, so that the nuances and symbolic meanings of discourse could be appreciated. Second, these words need to be understood in relation to the *contexts* in which meanings are made since this exposed the significant influence of spatial, social and temporal factors (Giddens 1991). A product of this was the revelation of conceptual gaps in understanding and communication between young people and the adults in their lives which language (or the lack of a commonly agreed language) mediated. This is significant because, without appreciating the meaning and language of sexuality, there can be no satisfactory approach to sexual health promotion with young people (Lear 1995). The next section looks at contexts for sexual activity.

Contextualising sexual activity

All those who admitted being sexually active revealed this in the context of discussions on social lives. Contrary to the impression created by the content of sex education (see theme 4 'Sex education'), 'sex' was not a private act nor was it a practice restricted to bedrooms, rather it was intrinsic to the collective socialising event and as such sexual identities were indistinguishable from social identities. For the white and African Caribbean males and females, all the sexual activity disclosed had occurred during the Friday 'meet' at the park i.e. outdoors, often in the vicinity of friends. Put baldly,

'Well it (sex) only happens on a Friday night, say any time between eight and ten o'clock. Most of us have to be in by half past ten at latest' Maisie.

For both Pakistani males, all sexual activity had occurred in the one-roomed flat above the 'take-away' after Hanif's late night shifts:

'Anytime between 2.15 and about 4am' Javed
'Well we have to share the room, there's only one' Hanif.

The constraints of time, place and lack of privacy, raised two related concerns for participants. The specific context of a *public* place for sexual activity was regarded as likely to enhance any condemnation (should it be exposed); second, and more significant (for females particularly) was the effect on self concept of partaking in sexual behaviour in a context that was inconsistent with the romantic and idealised imagery they had been led to believe in:

'It's not just that we are doing it [having sex], it's that folk would go mad if they knew we did it in the park, and it's not exactly how you'd like it to be either or how you thought it would be' Maisie
'Yeah it's horrible really to think you have to get all mucky and get leaves on your bum [sex in the park], it's nowt like you thought it were gonna be, like in films and sex education lessons' Josie.

So, positive self-worth was influenced twofold. First personal aspirations of sexual identity were at odds with the context in which sexual activity occurred and second, perceptions of condemnation by others for sexual activity per se, coupled with that of the unacceptable public context for this activity, enhanced constraints on achieving a sexual identity they could be proud of.

On sexual repertoires

Having established the context, African Caribbean and white teenagers had lengthy discussion on their range of sexual activities and the language they used for sex. The propensity to refer to 'sex' as 'it' is already obvious from disclosures above, but the

inherent euphemisms and colloquialisms required greater clarity. They laughed when I confessed I was unsure what they meant by terms like 'getting off with', 'had him', 'down to basics', 'and the rest' and sought clarification¹:

'Course you know, do you want us to give you a lesson?' Maisie
'You're kidding aren't you?' Sean
Oh, this'll be a right laugh' Dale.

My suspicions that this might be seized as an opportunity for bravado did not materialise. Males contributed less often but did not obstruct the discussion while females carefully offered alternative meanings for their slang or euphemisms, displayed very little embarrassment, sometimes agreeing or disputing meanings, but with the intention of getting it right for my benefit. Interestingly, at this stage, previously quieter members of the group joined in (Ruby, in particular). They appeared to enjoy the status of 'knowledgeable' imparted by the opportunity to tell an adult (i.e. myself) something they assumed would already be known. I asked why they thought their meanings would be understood:

'You're an adult, you've been young once' Sean
'You aren't daft, Miss' Julie

This perception of adults (as knowing everything) might come from observation of the rules and resources (Giddens 1984) that adults deploy in attempts to create the impression of a superior knowledge capital. What is more certain is that these young people rarely experienced the opportunity to offer their expertise and experience, especially over matters sexual. Adults' silence or an unwillingness to seek clarification was the dominant experience and this had hindered communication and understanding between the generations (see theme 10 'Relationships with adults' for further discussion).

Once they believed I was genuinely interested in hearing their descriptions, they offered an uncensored guide to their language of sex. They used many non-specific terms and seemed unconfident in using accurate definitions, especially in relation to female genitals. As I recapped on terms previously used by them, they described their repertoires through words and gestures as follows:

'Kissing and snogging is kissing on the face or on here or here' Maisie (pointing to her breasts and groin).
'Fondling means feeling here (pointing to breasts) or here (groin) through or underneath your clothes' Angela

¹ This is an example of my methodological strategy that involved risking credibility in order to accurately understand (and gain evidential data on) participants' discourses as practices.

'Rubbing off means playing with a peni (sic), sometimes till he comes (ejaculates)' Jo
'Fingering is fingering inside her or just on outside' Josie
'Gobbing off or gobbled off means your mouth on the peni (sic)' Maisie
'Licked out or licking off is same as gobbing off, but a boy doing it to a girl's bits' Josie.

These descriptions not only challenge taken for granted typifications of sexual activity (as presented in their experience of sex education), they were also important in revealing values and assumptions about what is construed as 'real sex'. For instance, 'letting him inside', 'putting it inside' referred to *acts* of vaginal penetration, but 'going all the way', 'doing it properly' and 'getting down to the basic thing' exposed the *meanings* for how sexual activity was constructed in the broader frame. That is, with vaginal penetration as the assumed and accepted outcome of 'proper' or 'real' sexual activity. Such coding of norms provides empirical evidence for Foucault's (1979a) theoretical idea that power-knowledge discourses are all important in the regulation of populations (see chapter 3). Respondents asserted that these norms for '*doing it properly*' came from sex education lessons. On the basis of my data, this is at best unrepresentative, and at worst, unwise in enhancing pressures to comply, and in mitigating against safer alternatives. Theme 4 will elucidate this further.

Weaknesses in education to aid awareness of sexual anatomy and communication was also laid bare by their limited vocabulary¹. For instance, the penis was referred to as the 'peni' by females throughout the research, and in describing oral sex with the female as the recipient, or masturbation, females either pointed to their genitals or used all-encompassing phrases like, 'on the girl's bits', 'you know, under your pants'. I asked,

'So you mean the labia, vulva and vagina?'
'Dunno ... where is ya valva (sic)?' Maisie.

They requested clarification, so I offered an impromptu guide to female sexual anatomy with a quick diagram of the labia, vulva and vaginal canal. None of the group had ever used the words labia or vulva, nor mentioned the clitoris and were unable or unwilling to locate it accurately on the diagram. Sean bravely offered his estimated location:

'It's somewhere at the front of your vagina isn't it?'

Deciphering the actual meanings of sexual liaisons revealed departures from my perception. I confessed assuming that 'getting off with someone' meant sexual activity but was corrected for the indiscriminate use of the term. In the context of liaisons (in the

¹ This does not suggest that communication cannot occur without clearer knowledge of sexual anatomy and vocabulary, but rather that young people should not be denied the right to this awareness simply because denial maintains the veil of silence and ignorance that ideologies demand (Greer 1999).

park) 'getting off with' might signify no more than a physical movement away from the main grouping into a more private area (in the woods) with someone they might know or not, but never had a sexual experience with (apart from flirting). It did not necessarily mean anything other than kissing someone, perhaps giving or receiving a love-bite, but, then again it might include mutual masturbation or penetrative sex. What is certain is that 'getting off with' or 'having someone' did not necessarily equate with having lost one's virginity (as I first understood it), and revealed ambiguities over what constitutes 'sexual experience'. As important, it did not necessarily mean unsafe behaviours with reference to pregnancy, HIV or other STDs.

While the discussion on sexual language was unrestrained and uncensored it is notable that the words 'sex' or 'sexual activity' were rarely used by interviewees. This is not to suggest they were embarrassed about using these words rather they did not appear to embrace them as usable parts of their vocabulary to describe behaviours. Relatedly, 'love' was not mentioned at any point. This is significant when one makes comparisons of the language used by young people and that used by adults in sex education, HIV and safer sex initiatives and research, where there are few commonalities. Respondents did not use terms (familiar to any sexual health practitioner) such as vaginal penetration, sexual intercourse, sexual activity, making love, mutual masturbation, oral sex, safer sex, exchange of body fluids, etc. Hence, reports of alienation and/or disinterest among young people in relation to the content of sex education (see theme 4) are understandable.

One can only speculate on the possible consequences of statements such as,

'I know what a lad (with reference to male genitals) feels like,
but don't know what it's called or what it looks like' Josie.

This statement is no doubt symptomatic of their context for sexual relationships and lack of knowledge about sexual anatomy - they did not experience 'sex' with the opportunity to explore, learn about, and discuss each other's bodies; they did not have relationships in cosy environments. Thus the opportunities for negotiation of safer sex were limited through lack of time, appropriate environment and comfortable vocabulary. But, it is paradoxical that some of these young people were so sexually knowing in the sense of having had sexual encounters, but they did not have the knowledge or a comfortable vocabulary to articulate their experience, and may enter adulthood without ever having seen the genitals of their previous partners. Such perceptions of sexual anatomy,

physiology and the language thereof are arguably salient to the success or otherwise of sexual health and/or safer sex initiatives. This issue is discussed in the final chapter on implications for future research.

On a more positive note, constructions of female identity as passive recipients for the sexual fulfilment of males (Holland et al 1991) were refuted by requests for information (in single sex interviews) on extending sexual knowledge:

‘Can you tell us anything about how to get it going again when it’s finished ... ‘cos like, you don’t always feel you’ve had enough’ Maisie
‘Yeah, like more on spicing it (sex) up’ Jo.

This is discussed further in theme 8 ‘Desires and discontents’.

On anal sex

Because anal sex was not mentioned in descriptions of sexual repertoires, they were asked if anal sex featured in their sexual experience. All males declined discussion on this, instead laughing with some degree of embarrassment. Females did not admit experience but cited friends who had. Two reasons were offered:

‘She had it (anal penetration) by accident, she said it just slipped in’ Maisie.

Second, anal sex represented more safety from pregnancy than vaginal penetration:

‘It’s safer, can’t get pregnant’ Josie
‘If ya have n’t got any jonnies [condoms]’ Jo.

Neither males nor females had considered the risk of transmission of STDs through unprotected anal sex (see ‘Sexual safety and contraception’ below for further discussion of risk).

Problematising normative conceptions of sexual identity and practice

Disclosures so far could be taken as complying with dominant conceptions of sex active teenagers as heterosexual, but equally, they problematise the exclusion of non-white ethnicities from conceptions of sexual identity, particularly those used in school sex education (Hirst and Selmes 1997). This supports the idea that the *acknowledged* (as in known about) sexual body is coded (Foucault 1979b), in some ‘official’ discourse (i.e. not young people’s), in ways that do not recognise the diversity of ethnicities. Javed and Hanif’s reflexivity was evidenced by their awareness of selective (and excluding) representations that concealed their identity and experience. This was illustrated in an interview with Javed and Hanif when they challenged my assumptions about their sexual

experience:

'Are you gonna ask us about sex?' Hanif
'Yeah what do you want to talk about?' JH
'Well you think we're virgins don't you?' Hanif
'Well I don't know, are you?' JH
'No but 'cos we haven't said owt when we were in the group talk you think we are' Hanif
'Well I suppose 'cos you were shaking your heads when the others talked about the park, I thought you didn't agree with it' JH
'We don't agree with drinking and getting drunk, but we aren't virgins. Everyone who isn't a Muslim thinks that we don't do it 'cos of our beliefs and 'cos we don't allow being in sex education lessons. But you're wrong there, very wrong' Javed.
'Well all I can say is I'm sorry if I got the wrong impression, and thanks for pointing it out' JH.

They were bemused by my admission of misconstruction but not discouraged from correcting it with descriptions (albeit vague) of their sexual activity, as described above in theme 1.

Other divergences were also apparent. In respondents' experience of school sex education, three aspects were cited as contradicting their actual experience. First, 'sex' in practice was rarely experienced as a manifestation of love or close relationship but rather as something one might do as part of an evening out and specific social network. Second, involvement in sex was not interpreted simplistically as satisfying peer pressures or 'adolescent' curiosity. They actively resisted the imposition of any essentialising relationship between 'adolescence', age and curiosity (Edwards 1997):

'You don't just do it because you're a teenager or your mates tell you to, you do it 'cos you want to and they can't say it's teenage curiosity, everyone - mums, dads, teachers - everyone's curious about what it would be like with so and so. If you aren't curious there's summat up with you, you must be **dead boring**' Dale (his emphasis).

Third, though it produced tensions, they rejected the reductionism of adultist norms where sex was only ever discussed solemnly in relation to vaginal penetration (for the purpose of conception). This illustrates how the majority had moved beyond heterosexist ideologies of sexual behaviour and identity, so that sexuality was decentered and not motivated by the needs of reproduction (Giddens 1993). For them, as the following section illustrates, sex for the most part was about enjoyment; included wider repertoires (beyond vaginal penetration) and was implicitly inclusive of non-heterosexual identity.

On straight and gay identity

While no interviewee identified themselves as gay, lesbian or bisexual, there were equally no indications of an exclusive heterosexist agenda. Questions were asked to test this further and assess whether perceptions of sexual identity and practice were shaped by

heterosexist and homophobic processes, as in the work of Gonsiorek (1988), Trenchard and Warren (1987), and Mac an Ghaill (1994):

'Have you been talking only about relationships between females and males?' JH
'What do you mean?' Josie
'Well are they all heterosexual?' JH
'Well, yeah, do you mean, I only like lads to have sex with, is that it?' Maisie
'Oh that's what heterosexual means. I'm one of them' Josie
'But some aren't and we could talk about that' Sean.

Thus followed a discussion which evidenced that gay identity was relegated to one of invisibility in their formal curriculum and wider schooling experience, but despite this they were keen to demonstrate empathy in their questioning of intolerance. As Sean continued,

'We can only speak for ourselves but it's like we never get taught about it' Sean
'No it's like in our sex education lessons, it's just men and women, so I suppose that's another reason why it dunt come up' Josie
'I know of this lad, right, well we all do, and everyone said he had boyfriends, but I don't know if it's true, they used to pick on him. I felt sorry for him' Jo
'Why was that?' JH
'That's just it - why did they pick on him or why did we all feel sorry for him? 'Cos nobody knew anything about him so we did n't know if it were true or they just wanted to pick on him for anything' Jo
'Who picked on him?' JH
'Oh stupid immature lads - they're so stupid sometimes' Maisie
'They should leave him alone, you are what you are, aren't ya?' Jo.
'But teachers don't help, they don't say owt' Millie.

Dankmeijer (1994), in a review of European research, comments that pressures to conform to heterosexual role models are common, as are heterosexist curricula in schools. He argues that this leads to homophobic bullying with enhanced levels of depression and suicide among gay young people. Disclosures suggest that the Horton School curriculum and the ideologies embraced did not facilitate disclosure of gay identity or what Gilbert Herdt (1992) refers to as 'coming out' as a rite of passage (p.373). This contrasts with respondents who at least acknowledged the marginalisation and lack of support for gay identity.

Referring back to the discussion on anal sex, I asked why males appeared uncomfortable, 'was it anything to do with associations of being gay?'. Of the males present only Sean offered his defence, saying,

'No it's not that, it's 'cos of ... it's a bit mucky, in your arse and that.'

Some females seized on this, arguing that it was a typically male response because they did not fear pregnancy in the same way as females, and ignores their indiscriminate use of the penis when under the effects of alcohol:

‘You would say that, you don’t have to worry about getting pregnant do you?’ Julie
‘And you’ve got a cheek Sean, you wouldn’t know which hole it went in when you’re pissed’ Maisie.

Young women’s ‘put-downs’ of male behaviour indicated a firmer and more negative construction of males’ attitudes and practices than had been anticipated.

Friendship group influences on sexual identity and practice

While respondents had previously rejected peer pressure as a mediator in sexual experience, there was a relationship between friendship groups and whether individuals and groups talked about sex, or, were involved in sexual activity. It appeared that the peer norms of the ‘park group’ and Pakistani males favoured sexual activity, whereas the peer norms of the Pakistani and Somali females did not. Data from the sexually experienced will be explored first, followed by that from the less sexually experienced.

Contrary to my expectations (see markers for enquiry, Appendix 1) disclosures from *sexually experienced* white and African-Caribbean females did not construct identities or practices as subordinate to males. As McFadden (1995) notes,

‘....perusal of academic and popular practices reinforce observations of women robbed of any sense of agency and depicted as the object of man’s desire.’ (p.141).

I had anticipated that females would make some reference, however rudimentary, to the sexist and/or patriarchal values of wider society or their male counterparts, in influencing their experience and choices. While this was true of identities in the domestic sphere where gender socialisation vested more responsibilities in females, the same could not be concluded of sexual identity and the mediations thereof. This is not to dispute that structural inequalities foregrounded their experience nor that they would influence future identities and practices, rather that respondents themselves did not present these influences as dominant constraints, and this is the point that requires acknowledgement if academics and other professionals are to understand life worlds from the young persons’ perspective. Without this it is all too easy to offer broad and generalised analyses which remain consistent with theoretical thinking that either subsumes gender under social class (Bottero 1998) or adopts patriarchy as the primary factor in oppression (Gottfried 1998).

As argued previously (see 'Gender identity' in theme 2) this can obscure appreciation of the specific and practical factors that influence behaviours in micro-contexts.

In part this observation can be accounted for by the tendency of all members (males and females) to be more concerned with the present, the *doing* in the here and now, as opposed to reflecting on wider issues or less immediate concerns. So decisions to become sexually active were explained in the context of the situation in which activities occurred, rather than reflecting on longer term sexual biographies, and disclosures were initially brief and unqualified. For example, the response 'it just happens' was oft repeated by females and males to the question of how one decides to be sexually active. Further questioning revealed more tangible influences and 'it just happens' actually referred to two aspects of their identity. First was the way they perceived sexual behaviours as part of their normalised life-events, a phenomenon intrinsic to the life-course, which began during 'teenagehood'. This could be taken as reminiscent of essentialising constructs of adolescence (see chapter 2) where the ravages of hormonal disturbance necessitate sexual experimentation, but this suggestion was regarded with disdain. As Sean commented:

'It's part of growing up isn't it? Everyone does it sometime, it's not 'cos your a teenager and you want to be bad, it's 'cos you **can do it now** and you **want to do it now** (raised voice). If you could only do it after say when you're twenty years old, they (adults) wouldn't go on about how bad it is. If teenagers do something, it's bad, if adults do the same thing, it's not bad.'

This explanation was endorsed by all those who were sexually active, including Muslim males who previously intimated perceptions of sexual activity as a rite of passage (see theme 1).

The second aspect refers to the pragmatism inherent in explanations for practice. As they saw it and in their experience, decisions to be sexually active did not involve lengthy considerations of pros and cons, rather the immediate parameters of the event and its situation, mediated outcomes. Thus in the context for socialising, alcohol and boredom were cited as particularly relevant to making 'it just happen' all the more likely. The fact that some of these young people had nowhere else to socialise except in the park, coupled with the boredom experienced, was felt to encourage sexual activity:

'If we had somewhere else to go, somewhere a bit more exciting, we might not get as drunk and probably not have sex. Quite often it's 'cos we're bored, there's nothing to distract you' Josie

Those in the park group spoke about their reasons for not 'going all the way', that is sexual behaviour to intercourse. For females, this was attributed to 'not being drunk enough', lack of privacy and shortage of attractive partners. They linked the latter to 'reputation' concerns, not in the expected sense of fearing insults and accusations (of 'slut' or 'slag' for instance, see Lees 1993) but more in relation to the acceptability of the sexual partner concerning his physical appearance and personality:

'If he's good looking and a good laugh and all that, I'm more likely to go all the way' Maisie.

Although aware of the potential for sexual behaviour to influence reputation (Lees 1989), Josie claimed this was unlikely among her peers:

'I know it can happen but it dunt in our school. Lads couldn't badmouth girls off for anything, 'cos they are just as bad, in fact they don't care who they go with. We're a bit choosier'.

'Not being drunk enough' was explained as referring to situations wherein the potential partner did not meet the criteria of acceptance, and

'.. you're more likely to hold back and not go through with it' Maisie.

Males appeared less discerning, offering reasons of inability (through drunkenness), restrictions on time, comfortable places and willingness of the (female) partner. Non-availability of contraception was not cited as a reason by either sex (see 'Positioning risk' below). The place of locale and time in mediating identity and practices (Giddens 1991) is again evidenced as highly relevant.

Non sexually active or less experienced individuals offered different explanations for perceptions of self. Most information disclosed here is taken from small group (maximum of three) and individual interviews and includes only females since all males were sexually active. The saliency of ethnicity and religious norms is made more visible here and supports Stoler's (1995) critique that conceptualisation of identity and discourse formations are limited if one relies entirely on Foucault's line of thought because of his inattention to issues of racial difference. Different themes emerged from two friendship groups, Pakistani and Somali females, and African Caribbean and white females:

Pakistani and Somali females

When asked to relate how they saw their sexual identity, Pakistani and Somali females

echoed earlier disclosures (see 'cultural capital' in theme 2) by again defining themselves on the grounds of their religion, and by distinguishing their identity from white peers:

'I should tell you I'm a Muslim' Ruby
'Yeah, so we don't do the same as the white girls' Soraya.

Taking their faith as the framework for identity, they went on to describe not just the expectations of parents but personal hopes for marriage and children, being categorically convinced that they would not have any kind of sexual relationship until they were married. They located a Muslim and female identity by contrasting it with that of Muslim males, of whom they knew several who had had sexual relationships before marriage and often outside marriage:

'They (men) do it and we (women) don't' Ruby.

Variable sexual experience and attitudes to pre-marital sex among different ethnic groups was recorded in a study by Rosenthal et al (1990). As in my data, they found that Asian (and Greek in their case) culture afforded greater sexual freedom for boys and put greater emphasis on sexual chastity for girls. In defence of a non-sexually active identity, Ruby cited anecdotal evidence of Muslim females who had had sex before marriage:

'I know of loads of them and it's worse because they have to leave home as well. I know this girl, right, and she's disappeared 'cos she was pregnant. She rang me up ages ago. But I don't know what's happened since, she could be dead. I know there's some girls in X (named area) who are living on their own 'cos they got pregnant. Just all on their own. Someone said that they have sex things with old men, just for the money that they need'.

Despite earlier contributions to defining sexual activities in the group session, Ruby appeared to contradict herself by stressing ignorance of the behaviours of her white peers:

'I was surprised to hear what they get up to. I can't understand it. I didn't know what to think. I didn't know what they meant'.

In contrast to Muslim male peers, she was more compassionate in not condemning behaviours of white peers but perceived it as axiomatic that sexual activity would result in negative outcomes:

'I'm just worried for them, right, getting pregnant is the baddest thing that could happen to a teenager. And the poor baby, they will both need help. I'd help them if I had time, but I can't, because of my homework'.

In trying to encourage Ruby to talk more about her own identity, she said with some discomfort that this was not possible as she knew so little about sex¹ having had no sex

¹ It is possible that Ruby was influenced by hearing about the sexual experiences of the 'park group', and measured against this she felt she had little to say.

education from home and in being excused from sex education lessons in school, 'because of my religion'.

While acknowledging that the cultural differences between Ruby and myself may have played a role, it was unclear whether Ruby's unwillingness to talk about sexual identity was attributable to her lack of sex education and personal sexual experience, or, whether being a Muslim imposed constraints on her willingness to disclose and in so doing contributed to the impression she wished to create as 'law-abiding' (see 'Cultural Capital' in theme 2 above). Although unsubstantiated, the latter seemed more likely because in an earlier interview, she had contributed to discussions on sex education lessons which suggested she had been present (see 'sex education' theme below). Reasons for this contradiction are unknown; maybe she had not actually been present and was referring to hearsay, but the relevance is her desire to manage her identity construction (Goffman 1969) through appearing sexually un-knowledgeable and her perception that equated sexual identity to sexual knowledge and/or practice. The latter suggests Ruby's conception of sexuality was more reductionist than that of sexually active peers.

In veering discussion away from herself, to views and stories of sexual risk amongst her peers, Ruby seemed to seek affirmation of her identity through a pastoral role. She kept reiterating her desire 'to help':

'I'd help my friend. Yes, I would. If she rang up I'd help her. That's why I want to know about health, so I can help with their bodies. They would not do some of these sex things if they knew it was bad for them'.

Ruby was unusually distracted and ill at ease during questioning about sexuality, so questions were not pressed and she resumed relating anecdotes about her friends. Reasons for this are speculative but appeared bound by cultural and religious mores, but this is open to question without further substantiation. What is more certain is that this young woman's experiences and values were very different from that of her white peers.

As Smith (1988) argues, the perspective of the subject and her/his differences, contradictions and ambiguities (see 'Summarising Smith' in chapter 3) can only be unearthed by utilising methods that allow for a variety of variables; cultural and ethnic affiliations are core variables in this case. Methods and content of sex education should arguably be designed with this in mind. As theme 4 'Sex Education' (see below) will

illustrate, whole group, mixed sex, mixed ethnic group lessons do not cater for the variety of student needs. Furthermore, it seems that the potential of expert systems (Giddens 1991) such as sex education, to colonise young people's lifeworlds (Habermas 1987) enhances the marginalisation of the subject's perspective from the dominant discourse, and might also be influential in motivating 'fabrications' (Ball 1997) of identity. Such colonisation and fabrication might explain Ruby's decisions to resist providing more depth data on her identity. This is developed below (see theme 4).

White and African Caribbean females

Disclosures from less sexually experienced females yielded data that further problematise the categorical language of sex and sexuality often used in sex education. Descriptions of sexual experience, in the language and vernacular of those experiencing it, revealed challenges to some categories, with many contradictions and ambiguities soon becoming apparent. For instance, terms like 'virgin' might have shared meaning as in 'person who has not had sexual intercourse' (OED 1998) but this does not automatically mean sexually *inexperienced*. The potential for misunderstanding was made plain in an interview involving only females:

'We're the virgins us (pointing to self and two friends)' Josie
'But were n't you talking earlier about your sexual experience?' JH
'Oh yeah but we're virgins but we've done everything but **that** (intercourse) ... lots of groping and ... and ... messing about wi' lads' Josie (her emphasis)
'We don't get that far. Not as far as Maisie and Angela and ...' Josie
'We only end up kissing and stuff like that, but nothing big has ever happened yet' Millie.
'Plenty of love-bites but not in full view' Josie.

Applying the official discourse, these young women are rightfully classed as virgins but reliance on this categorical language for sex makes no allowance for the fact these young women are so sexually knowing. This highlights the frailties in sex education initiatives that categorise behaviours and identities on the basis of rigid definitions (e.g. virgin/non-virgin) and then respond with interventions that do not acknowledge the dynamic continuum between substantial and non-existent sexual experience. This point had not gone unnoticed by these females:

'Its like in sex education, you either have sex, as in, with a willy inside ya, or you don't. Well it's not true, there's all sorts goes on between that' Angela.

Failure to recognise this surely sabotages the opportunity for input on maintaining safer sexual practice without the need for penetration:

'There's nothing for me in sex education ... I know all the stuff about how to have a baby

but they don't tell us owt about other types of sex. It's stupid 'cos it makes you think you're maybe a bit weird 'cos you're not having proper sex' Julie (her emphasis).

Among other problems raised by the failure to acknowledge the 'youth' vocabulary (see theme 4 'Sex Education' for further discussion), using official language in teaching and researching sex and sexuality runs the risk of obscuring some identities and practices and yielding inaccurate and non-representative data. Without the space and security eventually created in the research interviews, these young women's experiences might never have been exposed.

A lengthy discussion followed on whether they expected to remain virgins for the foreseeable future. Initially they spoke romantically and more akin to expectations of female identity restricted by cultural and patriarchal constraints, thus fears for reputations were balanced with maintaining an image of being a 'nice girl' (this contrasted with the disclosures from sexually active peers):

'It just doesn't feel right yet and I don't want to do it with anyone' Millie (her emphasis)
'Who are you waiting for?' JH
'The right person (laughs)' Millie
'Someone who's older and maturer and not snobby like them in our school. I don't want sex not knowing them. I want a fair person, not a reputation. You don't want to ruin your reputation do you?' Josie.

However, paradoxes became evident. Like girls in other studies (see Moore and Rosenthal 1993) they wished to avoid the socially unacceptable role of taking part in 'casual' relationships because of the threat to reputation and the desire to hold out for a relationship characterised by commitment, but they also stressed a necessity for sexual experience to avoid appearing naïve or ignorant:

'.... and what people think about you, like if you're ready or not. They can tell you know' Josie
What can they tell?' JH
'Well if you know what to do' Josie
'Is that a good or a bad thing?' JH
'Well you'll feel daft if you're clue-less' Millie.

Similar to sexually active friends, when disclosing criteria for the 'right person', older males were seen as appealing:

'Most boys only want you for your body anyway. Not all of them, older boys don't. Older boys are more mature' Millie
'You don't get the commitment from younger men' Josie.

This preference for older men supports Wielandt et al's (1989) study of Danish adolescents who reported similar wishful thinking for an older first sexual partner. They argue this is in line with societal expectations that females have sex with older male

partners. But, an older age is not the only pre-requisite. When asked to consider what their 'ideal' experience of sex would be like or who it would be with, they produced a telling list of emotional and physical needs. One, within an affirming relationship:

'With someone who's not in our school, so they can't tell everyone' Millie
'... older and wiser ... says nice things about me ... sees my personality and not just my glasses' Josie
'Yeah makes you feel good about yourself' Millie
'..... reassures you when you're down' Josie.

Two, communication and personal safety:

'With someone you can talk to who'll protect you from risks' Josie
'Such as?' JH
'Pregnancy, diseases, getting into trouble with police and all that you know, someone who's not immature. I like to be with adults who aren't my Mum or my Gran ... who like, you can talk to and they can like ... support you sort of' Millie.

They spoke earnestly and at length about their ideal future relationship, but when asked if they honestly believed it would turn out this way, previous aspirations were abandoned, and they relocated themselves in the reality of everyday lives:

'If I'm honest, I think I'll probably do it soon' Josie
'I think I'm getting to that age where I'm ready and I'll just do it' Millie

and for reasons related to the influence of alcohol, self-esteem and desires for a relationship:

'I think I might end up getting too drunk, and you've got to do it sometime with somebody. If I keep wondering if he likes me enough, I'll never do it' Josie
'Well, how long can you say no? If I want a boyfriend I think I'll have to. They're gunna think something's wrong with me eventually. But how do you decide how far to go? It'll just happen, won't it, Josie?' Millie
'Yeah I think I'll forget their age if he's gorgeous' Josie.

Not unexpectedly these young women had strong desires to be valued, cared for and respected, but as adults not children. They were in a precarious position - on the edge of adulthood but lacking autonomy and places for authentic selves to be achieved; and feeling sexually naive and subject to gender constraints with respect to reputation. Currently they were resisting pressures in the hope they might gain affirmation of their adult status from older men outside their friendship group. They were sceptical as to the likelihood of this - socially, choices were limited and therefore their 'ideal' relationship was perceived as unlikely to materialise. This created a sense of pessimism. Perhaps with more support and validation they might feel encouraged to hold out for relationships that did offer the positive self-identity they sought.

Though Millie and Josie were more reflective, I concluded that for all young women in this sample, cultural definitions of gender were instrumental in defining what constitutes acceptable female sexuality, but this was dynamic and rife with contradictions. Just as Thomson and Scott (1991) suggest, female sexuality was ‘the locus of a number of differing and often contradictory discourse’ (p2). As I argued in my literature review and methodology, it is insufficient to adopt either the macro or micro, or public-private perspective, to the exclusion of the other; both must be seen as two inter-related sides of the same coin in a dualistic relationship (Giddens 1979). The effects of social class, gender, ethnicity, and specific micro-cultural locales will create particular subjectivities and structural trends, but nuanced understanding of contradictions, diversity, and complexity, of the ‘everyday’, evolves from stepping outside the structural modes of ruling (Smith 1988). Only then can the unquestioned assumptions of the norms of the ‘generalised other’ be problematised and gaps in understanding remedied through hearing about their influence in the words of those living the private realm of the ‘concrete’ everyday (Benhabib 1992). The next section provides further support for positioning subjective narratives in the debate on structural inequalities.

On enjoyment and choosing sex

Contrary to dominant conceptions that conjure images of young people as being coerced into sex either by peer pressure or dominant males (Lees 1989), sexual relationships were motivated (to a degree) by desires for pleasure. Disclosures under this and subsequent headings also problematise Foucault’s (1970, 1979a) notion of the subject as minimal, and support McNay’s (1994) contention (see ‘Gender and Foucault’ in chapter 3) that subjects should be understood as thinking and willing agents of choice:

‘It’s gotta be about enjoying yourself, for most of the time anyway, there’s ups and downs, like if someone finishes with you’ Jo

‘I’ve always done it (sex) ‘cos I wanted to, not ‘cos me hormones made me. My brain and my feelings made me’ Maisie (laughing and simultaneously pointing to her groin)

‘Yeah nobody makes me do it, you do it cos you want to enjoy yourself’ Josie.

This does not suggest that individuals were never passive objects of regulated power; as Foucault (1980) insists, extrinsic processes of control cannot be under-estimated. Relatedly, there were also contingencies in micro locales (such as, the influence of alcohol on sexual activity, see below) that undermined individuals as agents of choice or control. But as Weeks (1995b) argues, understanding of sexuality in late modernity has to embrace the issue of choice, and how and why we make choices. If choice,

contingency and contradiction are seen to operate in sexuality and decision making (as in my data) then sexuality as a purely innate phenomenon resistant to the impact of the social and cultural world remains problematic.

Narratives of pleasure were not situated explicitly in the sexual discourse, nor in motivations for sexual activity. As data discussed earlier reveal, recollections from both the sexually experienced and inexperienced exposed the conspicuous absence of a discourse of pleasure relating to sex. This is not to suggest pleasure was not experienced but that respondents did not include pleasure in disclosures until specifically questioned on the issue. This is unsurprising in supporting existing literature on sex and young people, particularly that on young women (Holland et al 1991, Wyatt and Lyons-Rowe 1990, McFadden 1995). Respondents' explanations yielded interesting responses:

'Well you're just not used to talking about it' Jo

'How are you meant to admit ya like it? Teachers would think you're a slag' Maisie.

It seemed that in addition to the alleged sexist prejudices of teachers and the paucity of readily usable vocabulary for describing the physical aspects of sex, there was also a deficit in comfortable language to articulate the emotional aspects of sex. They were in effect unaccustomed to what Michelle Fine (1988:35) describes as the *discourse of desire*.

Given the content of sex education described by these young people (see theme 4 'Sex Education' below) wherein sexual pleasure and sexual entitlement were missing, the omission of a discourse of pleasure was reinforced. Not only did such curricula fail to provide a usable vocabulary for articulating desire, they also endorsed the ideology of women as passive sexual victims of male sexuality with little or no subject in their own right. Thus, for young women to include pleasure in reflections on sexual biographies entailed considerable risk to issues of reputation in challenging these social constructions of female sexuality. Hence, irrespective of the place of pleasure in lived experience, it was not disclosed willingly in larger group settings and was only discussed in detail within the security of small group or individual single sex interviews. For instance, to reiterate earlier quotations mentioned above, Jo and Maisie requested information on strategies for increasing pleasure:

'... you don't always feel like you've had enough' Maisie

'Yeah, like more on spicing it (sex) up' Jo.

As representative of more assertive females, these are unusual exceptions but should hold optimistic inferences for sexual communication. Yet, these private disclosures of desire are not guaranteed automatic transference to more effective communication and decision making about sex. For unconfident females the likelihood of choate communication is diminished. More egalitarian sexual communication that does not involve risks to reputation for females (such as Josie and Millie) requires, as Holland et al (1991) assert, a need for a fundamental redefinition of men and women as sexual agents which allows females a voice, 'generated out of their own sexually constructed meanings' (Lear, 1995:1314).

While this is undeniably necessary for intimate relations between individuals, it requires the endorsement of such a standpoint by sex education curricula and practitioners, irrespective of whether it is universally acknowledged by societal norms. The latter would require more climacteric changes but should not excuse changes at micro levels of educational discourse. For individuals such as Jo and Maisie with a greater potential than less confident peers (eg Millie and Josie) for achieving sexual and emotional desires, the support (Giddens 1991) of teachers for positive representations of female sexuality would go some way to redressing the power differentials and render them less likely to defend desires for pleasure and enjoyment. The place of pleasure and choice (in female narratives particularly) is picked up in theme 8 'Desires and Discontents' below.

Sexual safety and contraception

The findings below are largely derived from small group and individual interviews with females, though quotes from the larger mixed sex discussions and interviews with males are included. Considerably more information was offered by females than males. Males (white and Pakistani) contributed very little to discussion of contraception and explanations for safe or unsafe practices. Females appeared more knowledgeable about contraception than males, but white and African Caribbean teenagers were better informed than Pakistani and Somali peers. This might allude to the Asian young people's exclusion from sex education and Ruby's assertion that matters sexual were never discussed in Muslim culture.

However, for all respondents, awareness of contraceptive methods was partial and confused, and only extended to the relative merits of the condom and contraceptive pill.

All the non-virgins had had unsafe sex (vaginal penetration without condoms) on at least one occasion. The females who had had most sexual partners had gone on the contraceptive pill, but had used condoms in the past. The rest used condoms most of the time, but not always. Three females had used emergency contraception, aka *morning after pill*, having had unprotected vaginal penetration (with ejaculation), but there were occasions where this had occurred and they had not sought emergency contraception. The white males 'usually' used condoms and the Pakistani males 'sometimes, but not always'.

These findings are consistent with other studies that suggest significant levels of unsafe sexual behaviour among young people (Bowie and Ford 1989, Wellings et al 1994). But, unlike my data, these studies offer little by way of explanation for unsafe behaviour. The UK government funded Social Exclusion Unit [SEU] (1999) has begun to explore reasons for the non use or inconsistent use of contraception and its corollary, teenage conception. Three reasons have been suggested. One, ignorance - young people lack the knowledge about contraception. Two, mixed messages - young people are bombarded with sexually explicit and implicit messages that sexually activity is the norm, but this contrasts with their world of adults and institutions which are either embarrassed or silent about sex. Three, low expectations - with poor prospects for the future, many young people see no reason to prevent pregnancy. My data suggest this is an over-deterministic view, with the reality being more complex and involving a greater number of variables. Condoms are discussed first.

Factors affecting use of condoms

Availability and know-how: The SEU conclusion that ignorance mediates the non-use of contraception, was both contradicted and supported by my data. Though it cannot be verified, all assured they knew how to use condoms, and this would not deter use; but some said they were ignorant of how to obtain them. Ethnicity was the significant variable. All the African Caribbean and white females and white males believed that condoms were easily available; they had not felt embarrassed about buying them and cost had not deterred them; their main source of supply had been chemists. None had used the Family Planning or Youth Clinics, though they were aware that condoms could be obtained from 'family planning places'. In contrast, Pakistani males said they did not know where to buy them and relied on girls or peers to provide them. They

argued condoms were expensive and said they were unaware condoms were available free of charge at Family Planning Clinics. Ruby said she did not think about it as she had no use for them.

Private versus public domains: The African Caribbean and white females and white males shared experiences of buying condoms and of shop assistants' embarrassment but assured they were not deterred from using condoms by the discomfort of buying them. Not unexpectedly, given the extensive media coverage of HIV/AIDS during this time, condoms had entered the discourse of their public talk and they were discussed with apparent familiarity and without embarrassment. However, the impact was unanticipated, with discussion focusing not on the function of condoms and impressing the need for safer sex, but rather as objects of humour or as sought after collectors' items. Maisie's collection of condoms was notorious:

'I like collecting different ones, I've got glossy ones, skinny ones, fat ones, smelly ones'.

The SEU suggestion that mixed messages deter the use of condoms was evidenced by Maisie's mother's alleged collusion with a denial of function; the irony in her behaviour was not lost on Maisie,

'My mum's okay about me collecting them. She sees them in my bag but it would be different if she thought I used them' Maisie

'How do you know?' JH

'Well, I don't, but she thinks I'm a virgin and should stay that way. Mad in it?' Maisie.

Others endorsed this contradiction in parents' attitudes that accepted condoms as a part of public life (in media and marketing terms), but did not accept their use by their offspring. Here the boundary between the public and the personal is maintained (Harding 1998), and young people feared that admissions to condom use were more likely to reinforce the boundary than to erase it. Therefore, the potentially positive effects of feeling comfortable with discussing condoms, such as greater confidence to actually use them, was diminished by the attitudes of parents:

'Sometimes I don't take them out (going out socially) in case my Mum finds them. If I haven't got my jeans on then I haven't got anywhere to put them, I can't just have them in my hand' Maisie

'My Mum would kill me if she found one on me' Julie.

This related to the fear of contradicting parents' denial of their children as sexually active:

'I think my Mum suspects something, but she doesn't want it proved, and she would go mad and ground me if she found out' Maisie.

Since only two teenagers had been bodysearched before leaving their homes (in these instances for cigarettes), it is not possible to verify the extent of parental influences on use, or whether they were merely excuses for inconsistent use. But, the point that adults need to hear is that the threat of discovery was perceived by young people as imposing unnecessary restrictions on safer sexual practice.

Not unexpectedly, the white and Pakistani males assumed their parents would be 'okay' if they found they carried or used condoms, hence evidencing the different and iniquitous perception of female and male sexual activity (Griffin 1993) and supporting Kitwood's (1980) findings that girls are under greater obligations than boys to persuade parents that socialising will not put them at risk from sexual activity. Young people's knowledge of this gendered perception, coupled with the fact that it was left to females to provide contraception (see below), might render unnecessary obstacles to safer sexual activity, though the evidence is inconclusive. I am convinced that if these young women wanted to take condoms out with them, then they would find a way.

Self-esteem and attraction to potential sexual partners: African Caribbean and white females said they would be more likely to insist on a condom if they were not too concerned about a longer term relationship:

'If it's just casual like' Angela

'Look, you just say to 'em 'you can do nothing if you're not wearing a Jonnie''. You just say something like that' Maisie.

But, the rules might be broken, if attraction were more acute:

'If you really liked them and for ages, you might still tell 'em to their face but be scared of what they're going to say' Julie

'If I liked him loads, I suppose I might not insist' Jo.

Reconciling the knowledge of the need to be safe with desires for acceptance, was not easy:

'I did like one lad, liked him for ages and ages and he wanted to do it without one. I said "no, I didn't want the risk" and he didn't speak to me again' Josie

'Will that affect your decision if this happens again?' JH

'Yeah, I think it will. I've been holding back, but it will probably happen some day' Josie.

Thus desire and self-esteem can override rational informed decision-making and diminish the chance of theoretical knowledge translating into actual safe practice. This endorses Ingham et al's (1992) critique of the inadequacy of sex education which relies on the assumption that knowledge (often biomedical) will alter behaviours in the desired direction. This is discussed further in 'Positioning risk' below.

Reputation: Returning to reputations, none of the African Caribbean and white females, nor white males, felt that carrying or using condoms had implications for sexual reputation. Matching physical attraction with personal and peer group criteria had far more impact:

‘If you go with someone who's ugly or smelly, everyone will call you a slag’ Maisie
‘If he's gorgeous and you did it (had sex) with him, no one would call you a slag.
They'd be jealous’ Julie.

This supports the notion that, for these respondents, the construct of 'reputation' is not based on sexual activity (or readiness for) alone. Rather, it is infused with currencies of symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1977) that render acts less significant to identity than physical appearance. The importance of physical identity in these young women's disclosures might reflect more general society-wide obsessions with beauty and notions of acceptable identity (Bordo 1993).

Here again though, on the issue of reputation, ethnicity introduced stratifications over gender, as Hanif, Javed and Ruby unanimously agreed that it was not permissible for Muslim girls to carry condoms:

‘Muslim girls would never do it. They'd get kicked out of home and never get a husband. That wouldn't happen to a white girl’ Javed
‘She (any Muslim girl) just would never ever do it. Not ever. Even if she was carrying it (condom) for another girl it would seem like she were gonna be doing summat she shouldn't’ Ruby.
‘What about Muslim boys?’ JH
‘You wouldn't brag about it, but it'd be okay if you got found out’ Hanif.

Carrying condoms therefore is seen as anathema to the maintenance of chastity and fidelity for some ethnicities, as Rosenthal et al found in their study (1990).

Gendered responsibility and condoms: The importance of gender to mediations of identity and behaviour (see ‘Absence of gender in Habermasian theory’ in chapter 3) is made transparent here. On being asked whether males or females took responsibility for contraception, males initially responded with vague remarks such as,

‘Don't know it varies’ Dale
‘Do you ever suggest using a condom for instance?’ JH
‘No, not really’ Sean.

All males, albeit reluctantly, admitted leaving it up to females to produce a condom, or disclose she was on the 'pill', but in most cases they did not ask. The Pakistani males reiterated the excuse of not knowing where to buy condoms and cited friends who had

resorted to using a crisp bag and elastic band as a makeshift barrier. This already familiar anecdote hardly justified the excuse, but does not diminish their reasons for telling it - they wanted to be seen as 'responsible', which was again part of their desire to stage-manage their identity. By contrast white males offered no excuses for their lack of responsibility.

On the basis of male disclosures therefore, males conformed to the common tendency to abdicate responsibility for contraception to their female sexual partners (Moore and Rosenthal 1993). But, data from females problematise this. They offered an alternative analysis that supports the significance of choice in sexual identity (Weeks 1995b). It is not so much that males did not take responsibility, but that they were not offered it:

'They've got no choice in it. I take responsibility for my body. It's nowt to do with them'
Maisie

'If you're having casual sex, you sort out what you need to do. You don't want to get caught out (get pregnant) for someone you don't really like, when all you did was shag 'em and you don't want owt else from it, except a bit of enjoyment' Julie.

This offers a perspective that renders women less as passive victims of male wiles and more as active agents assuming control for their destiny. Furthermore this questions the argument in some feminist literature (see Frith and Kitzinger 1998 for review) that women do not *choose* 'casual sex' but are passively responding to male needs, for it seems that some of these young women are electing to have casual sex and avoid potential commitments by taking responsibility for their own contraception. While these comments on casual sex contradict some of those on aspirations for an 'ideal' relationship, it does not mean that young women do not have the necessary competencies to deal with or even choose casual sex. Also, by bringing desire and pleasure into the frame (as did Foucault 1987), these data liberate analyses of sexual subjectivities from more essentialist perspectives that rely on unitary categories of desiring males and obliging females.

Role of drugs: Alcohol in particular, but 'ganja' (cannabis or marijuana) on occasions, was cited as an accompaniment to sexual activity for the white males and females. All those who had had some sexual experience said they were more likely to have unprotected sexual intercourse or 'go all the way' if they were drunk or 'spliffed up' (i.e. under the influence of cannabis). The females said that alcohol sometimes gave them the

confidence to request condom use, but this was limited by the amount of alcohol. The more they had, the less likely they would be to request one:

‘If I was drunk, I just don't think I'd whip them out at the last minute’ Angela.

This supports findings from a study by Speak et al (1995) that drinking alcohol reduced natural caution and the ability to use condoms.

Preference: In trying to establish whether HIV featured in decisions to use condoms, I asked, ‘Why else might you use condoms?’. This elicited comments, not on HIV, but on the practical merits of condoms compared with the ‘pill’:

‘.. lot of messing about taking the ‘pill’ everyday’ Maisie

‘.... and if your parents catch you’ Josie

‘... and if you forget about it and everything’ Maisie

‘... and if you drink and smoke, it's increased cancer risk isn't it?’ Jo

‘.... and you have to take it everyday’ Maisie

‘If it's one-off sex, why take the ‘pill’ everyday?’ Josie.

We see here young women’s awareness of a feminist and biomedical critique of the ‘pill’ (Greer 1999), coupled with the impracticality and anxiety over parental discovery. However, neither of these had stopped three young women from going on the pill. Hence ignorance is hardly a significant factor in explaining contraceptive use.

The use or non-use of condoms was also related to pleasure and pain. Negative attitudes to condoms emerged at this point. Those on the ‘pill’ said sex without a condom was ‘more natural’. All males seemed unaffected by the ‘naturalness’ factor, agreeing with Sean who said,

‘I aint bothered either way’.

Females who had used condoms in the past said they did not like them because they were ‘artificial’ and often painful. This had motivated a change to the ‘pill’:

‘If it goes on for a bit, then it really starts rubbing’ Maisie.

None of them was aware that lubrication might aid this, but dismissed its potential usefulness on the grounds that a tube of KY jelly represented another burdensome object to hide from parents or carry around in preparation for a casual encounter. They did not agree with my suggestion that individuals might be dissuaded from carrying KY jelly because it might indicate a preparedness for a sexual encounter, instead arguing that the particular context for sexual encounters (i.e. outside in the park) did not facilitate use. This again indicates the futility of sexual health campaigns that advocate strategies for

effective condom use but do not acknowledge the practical context for their use. Other general comments reflect this:

'They're not nice, horrible in fact' Maisie
'They're so foul, stinky' Jo
'They're quite funny, but god, the smell' Julie
'So slimy and everything. I wish there was something else,
I really do' Josie.

'AIDS and all that': The emphasis on practical aspects of use was in stark contrast to what had been anticipated with expectations of HIV/AIDS featuring in their reasoning, thus I asked more directly:

'What about sexually transmitted infections and diseases?' JH
'If I really fancied someone, I would worry about .. has he got anything ... diseases ... crabs (pubic lice) or summat. I wouldn't go on the pill, I'd use a condom' Josie
'Yeah, for diseases, crabs and all that' Julie.

Others agreed with this but without further explanations. They appeared genuinely surprised when told that condoms would not protect them from pubic lice. Eventually, I explicitly asked if HIV and AIDS features in their decisions over contraceptive use. Despite previous discussions (and not mentioning HIV/AIDS), they were united in saying that the 'stuff on telly' had affected them and had it not been for this they might not be as willing to use them but only Josie volunteered AIDS (sic) as a primary reason for her preference. HIV and AIDS media initiatives therefore appeared to have had some impact in contributing to a culture of familiarity with condoms but was less significant than anticipated in influencing preferences. Praxis and reflexivity (Giddens 1991) were nowhere more absent than in relation to HIV and AIDS (see theme 6 'HIV/AIDS' for further discussion).

Other types of contraception

Only the 'pill' and condom had been tried or used. Females said they knew 'a bit' about other forms of contraception but their knowledge seemed unclear. Two young women constantly used the term 'contra-protection' and this was not corrected or commented on by peers. The 'cap' was mentioned but no one knew how to use one, nor what it looked like. Regarding the options available, the SEU (1999) explanation of ignorance, is borne out.

Fear of pregnancy

Finally, those opting to use the 'pill' had been motivated by their fear of pregnancy. Everyone (males as well as females) said they feared pregnancy more than contracting

HIV or other sexually transmitted infection (STIs). This corroborates Australian data collected during the same time period (Donald et al 1994) and is explicated below in relation to respondents' constructions of risk.

Positioning risk

Peter Aggleton has argued,

'We still know least about what probably matters most in influencing individual ... behaviour - not what people *know*, but what they feel and *believe* to be the risks, in particular *contexts*, and at particular *times*.'

(Aggleton 1998:2; his emphasis).

My data show that risk assessment processes are influenced by the wider social schema of individual's lives. The mix of emotional, situational, cultural, familial, and individual influences, rendered beliefs and contexts for sex that did not naturally lead to risk-free decision making (Ingham et al 1992). For example, those involved in sexual behaviour in the park and at the flat interchanged partners, and the only consistently 'safer' sex was amongst females who had not 'gone all the way'. Rather than feeling at risk from the potential pool of sexually transmitted infections, they assumed an insulation from risk due to the social proximity and familiarity with those involved. By contrast, not knowing someone inhered greater risks:

'... having sex for money, with someone you don't know, or married men, is just too risky' Jo.
'Like Andrea, she'll go out with fairground people and they give her money. She follows 'em round t'country and she's only a second year - twelve or summat' Maisie
'She goes with married men, she has sex with one who's 25 or 26. She'd only known him for two hours and she had sex with him in the park. We were embarrassed. He was as well when he saw us' Josie.

Paradoxically these young women had previously spoken of their desires to have relationships with older 'more maturer (sic) men'. Clearly having sex for money or with married men went beyond their boundaries of permissibility, but they drew no parallels with their own unsafe behaviours. They were persuaded not so much by public norms of sexual morality (such as sex before marriage or sex within a loving relationship) but rather, as Coleman (1980) suggests, by private and personal attitudes over what is morally right or wrong. Within this, contradictions are more easily justified, since personal codes are open to amendment and revision throughout the biographic journey *and* to suit specific ends vis-à-vis management of identity. Here again the significance of the micro/private to the macro/public is illustrated.

Also, we see here that some teenagers' characterisations for 'risky behaviour' impart ill-conceived notions of 'high risk' based on identity rather than behaviours (Wilton 1997). These are not seen as contradictions but rather as practical responses shaped by the norms of their social and cultural capital. This contrasts sharply with the unitary concept of risk used in sex education and was illustrated by the answer to the question 'what is risk defined as in sex education lessons?':

'It's if you have sex without a condom' Dale.

For them, the use or non-use of condoms was not about irresponsibility but attraction, desire, and mediations of self. This problematises more traditional health promotion approaches that assume risk should always be minimised (Woodhouse 1999a) and points up that effective harm minimisation programmes should acknowledge the varied and complex ways in which 'health' is understood. For these teenagers, preventing physical morbidity was not the primary concern in maintaining good health. They adopted a more complex and sophisticated approach, in effect, a taxonomy of meanings with a hierarchy of risks and potential outcomes. For instance:

(i) non-monogamy and multiple partners are often judged by sexual health promoters as 'risky' (Clift and Stears 1991) albeit incorrectly if safe sex is involved, but young women involved in non-monogamy perceived this as a choice they made to avoid commitment. The 'risk' was not the *sex* involved but the *implications* of it, for how they wished to run their lives. Furthermore the important outcome was not the prospect of being identified as promiscuous, but as feeling in control and exercising autonomy:

'It's up to me who I go with (have sex with) but I aint gonna stay with one lad just 'cos I might get called a slag. It's too risky, getting stuck with one person' Maisie
'You don't wanna be stuck, committed like, at our age' Julie.

(ii) as mentioned previously, excessive alcohol use imputed risks in making unsafe sex (without a condom) more likely. But for young people in the park group, behaviours were not presented as calculated in terms of risk only, but in terms of risks and benefits. So the risk of unsafe sex was balanced against the greater risk of not enjoying oneself, lacking confidence and the socially lubricating effects of alcohol, or experiencing boredom. Thus the risk of unsafe sex was outweighed by potential benefits;

(iii) strategies for the assessment of risk were not concerned with what sexual acts one might become involved in, rather they involved judgements of social and physical identity

so that physical appearance, age, and background were more significant in deciding whether a sexual liaison was sanctioned. This was confirmed in earlier responses (in whole group discussions) to the question ‘what would you say is safer sex?’:

‘Doing it with someone you know’ Maisie

‘... knowing about their background, where they come from’ Josie

‘Someone who looks clean’ Hanif

‘Someone who’s not too old but knows what you’re about, like you wouldn’t do it with someone who’s fifty’ Julie.

Thus sexual relationships were judged relative to the relationship rather than the risk, and ‘risk’ was not constructed objectively as a context-free unitary concept. For them risk was subjectively constructed in the context of different categories of relationships. So there were sexual relations known as ‘casual’, between close friends, which infer some risks, but these were not as risky as ‘casual’ relationships with strangers. There were longer term ‘serious’ or ‘steady’ relationships which were not regarded as risky so less likely to involve condoms and more likely the ‘pill’, because of subscribing to ideologies of romance and commitment which made it harder to behave as though they believed their behaviour was risky. Of course there was the place of betrayal in challenging all of this; but respondents denied having much if any experience to contest their constructs or call for the reassessment of risk;

(iv) a hierarchy of risks was most conspicuously evident in relation to distinguishing the risk of pregnancy from the risk of STIs (including HIV). These were not considered equally risky with greater concern attached to unwanted pregnancy than disease prevention. It followed that the risk of pregnancy was far more significant in determining contraceptive use, with the contraceptive ‘pill’ favoured by some females. Some of the young women’s family histories come into play here in having mothers with personal experience of teenage pregnancy. The threat to autonomy and freedom was thus perceived as far more real and immediate than the distant threat of HIV which allegedly had not entered the life world of any respondents. Temporal considerations were also relevant. Pregnancy represents an immediate threat to their current being and they could visualise immediate repercussions, whereas HIV was less definite and the repercussions remained unacknowledged;

(v) related to the last category is the observation of ambivalence and/or complacency about HIV (see theme 6 ‘HIV/AIDS’ below). To avoid confronting the risk of HIV they

appeared to construct a cognitive dissonance and they handled the dissonance by distancing the threat. They reduced the importance of their behaviours by either denying its risk or comparing it to riskier behaviours (e.g. pregnancy) or depersonalising the situation, for example,

‘We don’t know anyone with AIDS’ Maisie.

These disclosures on risk illustrate how identity is linked to a reflexive ordering and re-ordering of social relations (Giddens 1991). For ontological security, and the search for rewards and satisfactions, individuals have to constantly refigure risks, insecurities and the plurality of choices created by the macro and micro aspects of late modernity (Giddens 1992). The reflexive making and re-making of selves and biographic narratives positions subjects as active agents in their own destiny. This contrasts with Foucault’s (1979b) notion of subjectivity and identity conceptualised almost entirely in relation to strategies of normalising capillary action and resistance, rather than strategy linked to subjectivity, collective identity, the reflexive self and the micro-cultural realm of experience.

As mentioned previously, how and whether individuals and groups talked about sex had normative influences in predicting their sexual experience. So in relation to collective identity, assessment of the risks involved in sexual activity were not objective processes of choosing safety or not, but configured by the norms of the friendship group. This is not to suggest young people were under pressure to be sexual (as the disclosures from the two virgins in the park group confirm) but rather the rules and regulations (Giddens 1991) of the milieu created by the friendship group and its location were persuasive and facilitated sexual encounters. This is more than a simplistic semantic difference for it again highlights the importance of context to decision-making and confirms that behaviours do not necessarily relate to objective knowledge of risks. However, identifying the norms of friendship groups and contexts for socialising are surely useful in terms of sexual health interventions.

Theme 7 ‘Discourses of sex and sexuality’ picks up on sexual risk taking and risk assessment in its relationship to ineffectual communication and incomplete and contradictory knowledge. Because the latter renders discomfort in talking explicitly about sexual preferences, it is argued as enhancing the potential for unsafe behaviour.

Problematising public health conceptions of risk

Finally, it is significant that these young people evaluated health promotion interventions on 'risk' from the media, political and education sources (e.g. sexual health campaigns, sex education lessons) as failing to reflect their experience, naive (or in denial), anachronistically moralistic, and with potential to enhance self-blame. For instance, some health promotion initiatives were criticised for attempting to inculcate the message that young people have *control* over their bodies, that they are individually responsible for their own destiny. We have seen that females (more than males) articulated aspirations to achieve some control and make informed choices but it was insisted that control rests on a number of contingencies which require qualification if such platitudes are to hold any meaningful significance:

'Those "Just Say No" adverts are a waste of time' Sean
'You can't have control over everything in *real* life, there's loads of things that affect it and sometimes ya might take risks' Jo (her emphasis).

Where risks occurred, young people imputed justifications that constructed risk-taking as natural or normal, an omnipresent phenomena:

'Everyone, *even* parents, *even* teachers lose a bit of control when they're pissed'
Millie (her emphasis)
'Who doesn't get carried away in the heat of the moment?' Maisie (her emphasis).

Hence such messages were viewed as laudable in principle but naive in practice with age as an irrelevant variable. As importantly, the failure to abide by the sentiment could result in a personal sense of failure. It is notable that the unfairness of this was equally appreciated by the sexually inexperienced:

'It's not fair that you always blame yourself if something gets a bit out of hand when you know deep down that everyone, well mostly everyone, has done the same at some time.' Ruby.

Health promoting strategies that utilise the victim blaming approach based on the belief that problems and responsibilities rest with the individual¹ (Bunton and Macdonald 1992) have been criticised for the failure to acknowledge the structural influences of social and economic environments (Aggleton 1999). Data here support this critique but emphasise the additional need to acknowledge specific micro situational and biographic factors which mediate outcomes.

¹ Nettleton (1996) asserts the potential for negative effects on self worth stemming from the victim blaming approach should not be underestimated.

The significant variables that influenced choices (as discussed above) and which are rarely, if ever, acknowledged in public health campaigns, stem largely from the domain of the micro-cultural. This illustrates the importance of appreciating subjectivity in the routines and practices of the everyday (Smith 1988) and how harm minimisation campaigns continue to rely on the assumed norms of the 'generalised other', thus failing to include consideration of the diverse and lived norms that govern practice and mould identity in the world of the 'concrete other' (Benhabib 1992).

The prioritisation of knowledge based on the external or 'generalised other' (ibid.) can also result in sexual health promotion that fails to recognise variability and complexity. The unrepresentative emphasis in public discourse (in medicine, academia, media and health policy) crudely reduces young people to those who *are* or *are not* having sex (e.g. see Ford 1988, 1991) with a focus on the former, and with little attention to understanding the detail, complexity, and differences among young peoples' identities and practices. This failing legitimates the 'ostrich position' (Lee 1983, Boxall 1994) of sex education policies and practices in the UK. Such a position is one of denial regarding the need for acknowledgement of real need and experience (NAT 1991). Due recognition is necessary for those preferring sexual monogamy or celibacy, and those with experience of multiple partners; account must also be taken of the variable mediators on sexual behaviour and the saliency of the micro cultural. The next theme develops this further.

Theme 4: Sex education

Sex education as expert system

This theme turns attention to young people's reflections on sex education. It develops concepts raised previously in the literature review and themes 1-3 of the findings, on the ways in which identities and subjectivities can be seen as combined products of the macro and micro relations of ruling. Data on 'sex education' are taken to provide an empirical illustration of Giddens's (1991) theoretical notion of an 'expert system'. The 'expert system' is argued as operating from the macro structural level but influences the micro-cultural because of its potential to colonise young people's 'lifeworlds' (Habermas 1987). This colonisation influences current and future identities. It is argued that sex education pays little regard to young people's 'everyday worlds' (Smith 1988) and as a result poses challenges to micro/private worlds and ontological security (Giddens 1991).

Though young people's criticisms of sex education were not verified through formal interviews with the teaching staff concerned, other data provide corroboration. These include data from a number of discussions with the School's Co-ordinator for Sex Education and the Pastoral Head of Year, and data from feedback following an In Service Training (INSET) day wherein my findings were presented to, and discussed by, the staff group. None of the data was disputed though some explanations were offered for the weaknesses identified. Wider dissemination to teachers, headteachers and school nurses involved in sex education across the city evidenced that the issues raised were not unique to Horton School. Findings from another study conducted in a different region (Hirst and Selmes 1997) confirm similar experiences, as do observations conducted during my employment as the Advisory Teacher for PSE and Sex Education¹

Hyde (1984) suggests the validity of data on retrospective accounts of sex education can be criticised for inaccuracy of recall since they will be tainted by present identities (Gagnon and Simon 1969). But my intention was not to explicate a static account of sex education; rather I wanted to understand the impact on sexual awareness, practice and subjectivities, that is, the micro realm of lived experience.

¹ An element of the post involved an evaluation of sex education teaching and learning in the City's schools.

The disclosures that follow echo Lynda Measor's (1989) findings on the quality and character of school sex education, with didactic and teacher-centred methods, and content that reflected teachers' agendas rather than issues central to students' concerns. Accounts confirmed that sex education had focused on the physiology of reproduction with little acknowledgement of personal and social aspects and with emotional considerations omitted entirely (see Lenskyj, 1990, and Measor et al 2000). Despite the backdrop of the HIV/AIDS epidemic and the inclusion of personal and social education (PSE) in the school curriculum, reflections implied that the reductionist and reproduction-centred approach was still a significant force in shaping teaching on sex and sexuality. This supports Scott's (1998) assertion that change has not been great and the old/traditional prescriptions and proscriptions still exist in the 1990s and cross international borders, particularly regarding attitudes to sexual morality.

Interviewees were asked to reflect on their experience of sex education¹ and how they had learnt about sex and sexuality from formal and informal sources. I saw the two elements of the question as related but Maisie made a distinction which others supported:

'We can tell you about sex education but it's not the same as how we learnt about it'.

Data followed on the groups' unanimous dissatisfaction with sex education at home and school, and applied both to the actual experience at the time of input and current perceptions. The sexually experienced and sexually inexperienced derided the *content* of sex education and the *context* for teaching, with the sexually experienced qualifying their complaint:

'There's only one way to find out (about sex)' Maisie

'Well, you find out on t'job, don't you?' Angela.

Justifying this, they argued that sex education had had little positive impact in preparing them for future sexual identities or practices.

Taking Thomson and Scott's (1991) typology of sexual knowledge as derived from young women's disclosures in their study, different levels of knowledge are said to operate in the context of school sex education:

'.... firstly, "knowing that there is something to know about" but not necessarily understanding what it is or why it seems so important

¹ For all interviewees, the main source of sex education was from school. No males and only white and African-Caribbean females had any input from home and this had been minimal - involving mothers talking to their daughters about sanitary protection at the onset of menstruation.

.... secondly, “knowing” in the sense of having information and thirdly “knowing about” sex through practical knowledge based on experience’. (p.2).

These stages of knowledge and understanding existed for respondents in my study, and verified Thomson and Scott’s assertion that they do not operate in a linear fashion. Where young people were positioned varied in relation to knowledge and how it was assimilated but was also complicated by how it was dealt with in the changing tide of social relations and emotional feelings at any given time (Farrell and Kellaher 1978). Reflections therefore involved different levels of knowledge, contradictions, and opinions of the cultural constraints on acceptable identity and practice.

Ruby and Josie’s recollections of sex education at age eleven illustrated the first stage:

‘Teachers talking about things as if we should know what they are talking about’ Josie
‘If you don’t know owt about it at the time, it can feel even more mysterious’ Ruby.

Maisie highlighted the second stage wherein feelings of confusion arose from having information without the understanding gained from experience:

‘It’s like you’re supposed to know these questions. What questions to ask, I just didn’t know at the time’.

By the third stage tensions arose for the more sexually experienced, firstly in matching knowledge with experience in usable ways,

‘As you get older, you want to know about different things, they didn’t tell you up to date things’ Jo
‘Up to date things?’ JH
‘Well like things that were related to, well they didn’t tell you anything you didn’t know already’ Jo.

Secondly, by the failure to locate sex in the context of relationships:

‘Yeah, they didn’t tell you anything about things like who you’re doing it with. You know, relationships and stuff’ Maisie.

Thirdly in creating an atmosphere which mitigates against honest disclosure because of the growing awareness of cultural constraints on acceptable practice:

‘You would never dare say what you’re actually doing or even if you weren’t doing anything, they’d think you were, just by asking the question’ Josie.

These disclosures (and subsequent data) evidence that participants did not evaluate the content and methods of sex education purely in terms of *what* is said, nor in the isolation of that time and place. Rather they are considered more reflexively in relation to the stock of values, knowledges and ideologies that individuals call on to authenticate their

own or others (e.g. teachers') claims. In other words, as Habermas contends in calling for a dualized conception of society, if the micro cultural is not positioned alongside the macro, the system (in the Habermasian sense of expert systems such as education, 1987:117) perpetuates a knowledge that is not 'subjectively coordinated' (Habermas 1987:150).

Knowledge of the normative (and objective) framework for sex education (and what is or is not permissible) predictably rendered many questions unanswered with the result that while some of these young people were sexually experienced formal input had provided little more than knowledge on how to prevent pregnancy, and their resources for negotiating alternative practices to vaginal penetration and avoiding diseases were considerably underdeveloped. Here we also see an example of an episteme (Foucault 1970) wherein the pre-suppositions and discourses inherent in sex education (in a particular ideological time) 'make only certain kinds of thought thinkable' (Cuff et al 1998: 259) and thus obfuscate counter discourses and questions. If young people's voices are to challenge the dominance of expert systems to decide what is *thinkable*, then the microscopics of everyday worlds must be acknowledged (Smith 1988). Data suggest that the standpoint of the 'generalised other' was adopted in sex education, and so will maintain epistemic limitations if it is not infused with the voice of the 'concrete other' (Benhabib 1992:168).

Criticisms of sex education were justified by more detailed reflections on the content and context of sex education input.

Content of school sex education: 'not getting the whole sex story'

As mentioned previously, the emphasis on reproduction was highly visible and there was scant regard for issues of emotionality, sociality, or student centred discussion. This reflects the edicts of government policy at this time (DES 1988a, 1988c, 1989). The recommendation (Massey 1990) that personal, social and sex education form part of the spiral curriculum assents to appreciating that learning about sex and sexuality is a continuous and dynamic process, and as such cannot be satisfied by a discrete one-off programme of instruction. This is at odds with young people's reports (and confirmed by staff) that all input had taken place in the biology component of science lessons, at age

eleven to twelve years and entailed five or six hours in total. Two decades ago, Wolpe (1977) observed a similar subsuming of sex education into discrete curricular subjects and the adoption of narrow perspectives.

Teaching focused primarily on physical aspects of puberty, menstruation and vaginal penetration:

‘It was about coming on your periods and that was it’ Jo
‘Yes, your body in change at this age, then that happens at that age’ Ruby
‘.... all you do is like, it’s a diagram of like inside of a body and you have to label the bits inside. That’s it. Then they give you a tester pack of tampons’ Josie.

The emphasis on the role of sexual behaviour in reproduction reflected my expectation that sex education was taught within a heterosexist framework (Dankmeijer 1994) that assumed male dominance (Wolpe 1988). The imposition of norms was clear:

‘They just tell you **normal** things like when you have sex and like Tampax and that’s it’
Millie (her emphasis)
‘Normal?’ JH
‘You know - you get periods, then there’s this bloke, then he gets on top, and then you have a baby’ Angela
‘Yeah, that’s it’ Josie.

Angela’s comments illustrate how sex education reinforced inscriptions of normative identity (Foucault 1979a). The discourses used coded the sexual body by gender with socially prescribed norms for female and male sexual behaviour (Segal 1994) and heterosexuality (Holloway 1998, Donovan et al 1999). As previously mentioned, gay and lesbian identities and practices were omitted from educational input and the emphasis on conception contributed to invisibilising same sex relationships. This is not surprising given that Section 28 of the Local Government Act (DES 1988b) was in force at this time¹ and has been argued as preventing support for gay and lesbian identities and practices (Douglas 1997). This was illustrated further in a reference to a lesson on contraception where the explicit purpose (as confirmed by staff subsequently) was to familiarise students to a variety of different contraceptives and explain how to use them in the prevention of pregnancy. The lesson on ‘types of contraceptives’ involving a condom demonstration caused acute embarrassment:

‘Oh God, I nearly died, he (referring to teacher) was bright red’ Julie
‘It was awful. Look we’ve been in school for five years and two lessons stick out for me, one was on diagrams of bodies and all that and the other was this guy teacher putting a

¹ At the time of writing, this legislation was being considered for repeal or amendment. It should also be noted that Section 28 was not intended to apply in schools, but confusion regarding the extent of its powers was commonplace.

condom on his finger and saying "this does this and that does that". Then pointing to a drawing of the male system, the penis, and saying "this goes on here and this thing, this goes inside the woman's thing" ' Ruby.

Normative ascriptions of gender and heterosexual practice are clear here. In addition, the desired ends (from the teacher's perspective) were achieved in so far as respondents were unable to offer explanations for how contraceptives prevent STD infection, so in effect sex for the purposes of conception was reinforced, and did not ameliorate the greater significance young people gave to preventing pregnancy than disease (Donald et al 1994).

Overall, students' reflections make visible the ideologies that dominated and structured their schooling. As Aggleton et al observed,

'Official prescriptions about sex education operate with an almost uniform commitment to heterosexuality, procreation and "traditional" role relationships between men and women.' (1989b:42).

Jackson (1982) drew similar conclusions from her study.

Lessons did little to alleviate ignorance and as in Wolpe's (1988) study, students were aware of omissions:

'You didn't find out how you actually get down to it and they never talked about how you feel or about foreplay' Maisie

'Yeah, no information on like foreplay, what to do and what it feels like, if it hurts' Millie

'If it would be painful, yeah, I thought that' Josie

'Yeah, pain, that video made my eyes water' Millie

'I was frightened about sexually attracted (sic) diseases and pain' Josie

'One thing we never ever talked about was oral sex' Angela.

Irrespective of sexual experience, the group had sufficient existing knowledge to realise they were not given a genuinely broad insight into sex and sexuality to meet real needs, both now and in the future (Wolpe 1987). Mac an Ghaill (1994) in his review of sex education, situates the failure to attend to student needs as oppositional to educational commentary of the time:

'Ironically, at a time of much pedagogical rhetoric about student-centred teaching approaches and cross-curricular initiatives, there appears to be little movement among policy-makers or within schools to design whole-school programmes of effective sex education that starts with the students' experiences and needs.' (p156).

Students' knowledge of omissions in content did not inspire their confidence to ask questions, rather this 'knowing' was matched by caution intended to conceal any sexual experience:

'You aint gonna tell them though, you just know what they're gonna say' Maisie
'Yeah, you get too scared to ask, 'cos you don't know what they're gonna say' Millie.

Jo commented that the lack of opportunity to check out queries made sex even more intriguing and mysterious and first ventures into sex might be influenced by 'knowing' there was something more to know, coupled with intrigue about what the fuss was all about:

'Well everyone talks about sex at that age and you're all giggly and excited but sort of scared when ya know sex education lessons are coming up. But afterwards you just knew you weren't getting the **whole sex story**, you're bound to be curious, you want to find out for yourself' Jo (her emphasis).

Context for sex education

In addition to the content of sex education, the context was accused of enhancing discomfort. The fact that input had occurred in biology (part of general science lessons), in science laboratories, and was taught by a male teacher to the whole group (mixed sex and ethnicity) was said to render an inappropriate formality. An insightful list of issues explained their dissatisfaction:

Methods were criticised for being didactic, lacking the opportunity for discussion and for an over-reliance on videos:

Yes, they just sit you down, plonk you down and watch a video. That's the answer to everything' Josie
'The teachers didn't talk. We just had to do diagrams and worksheet things, we didn't have discussions like we are now' Maisie
'We couldn't ask questions and feel relaxed about it' Millie.

Males supported females in being critical of being taught by a male teacher:

'It were a man in every lesson weren't it?' Jo
'Never a woman, it would have been much better, for talking and that' Sean
'I'd never talk to a man teacher, they get too embarrassed' Maisie
'What all male teachers?' JH
'Well I can't think of any of ours that wouldn't be. I think women would be better' Sean
'You wouldn't get me talking to any man about it in class' Maisie.

They recalled students and teachers being equally embarrassed:

'He made me so embarrassed, me and my friend Jill. It was so shameful. We just sat round watching videos. I didn't know where to look' Maisie
'He were embarrassed an' all. I was shamed up. Not a bit relaxed' Jo
'We just sat there. He didn't want to be doing it, so we were bored or embarrassed, just looked at the floor' Julie.

In an individual interview, Ruby commented that as a Muslim, participation in sex education lessons was prohibited further if taught by a male teacher:

‘In our religion we can’t talk about those things with men’.

Contrary to some perceptions Muslim girls are not forbidden from inclusion in sex education¹, rather it was instruction by a male teacher that forced Ruby’s self-exclusion from subsequent sessions.

This again suggests that practices in sex education had little regard for individual lifeworlds, nor their stocks and knowledges, and different cultural values. One can begin to appreciate how the expert system of sex education was so distancing of Ruby’s reality, that it became effectively uncoupled (Habermas 1987) from it, with Ruby’s perspective holding no status in validity claims (ibid.) because it was not consistent with the dominant institutional ideology.

‘It doesn’t happen like they say’: anomalies in educational input and sexual experience

Significant anomalies existed between participants’ authentic experience and sex education. As Foucault (1979a) contends, certain identities are legitimised, and others are not, through discourses of the power-knowledge system. The ‘expert system’ (Giddens 1991) of sex education, involving both the power of the professionals (teachers) and the processes adopted, convey a desired way of being, which is at odds with most respondents’ lifeworlds (Habermas 1987).

It is significant that sexually inexperienced individuals were as critical as those with more experience. All problematised both the content and imagery, particularly that in videos; the disparities were not surprising, with age, ethnicity and marriage mentioned immediately:

‘Well for a start they were all about fifty (years old) in the video. They were married ‘cos it showed you the ring and they never have black people in them’ Jo.

‘There’s nothing about us in them videos’ Hanif

‘I haven’t never seen a Pakistani person in any school video. Don’t think I’ve seen a black person for that matter’ Ruby.

¹ This perception was confirmed in feedback from Horton School staff, and commonly found in discussions with staff (across the city’s schools) in my Advisory Teacher role.

Especially profound in its impact was that the sexual behaviours viewed on video occurred in surroundings very different from most of the young people's experience. This and subsequent disclosures endorse Giddens's (1990) insistence of the importance of space, time and place:

'Well they aren't gonna make a video of two people having it on a garden wall or in the park are they?' Jo
'Well they couldn't do that' Josie
'Why not?' Maisie
'I don't know, maybe 'cos they think it's too dirty or summat' Josie
'Do you think it's dirty?' JH
'No, but it's no good pretending that it's all comfy and warm 'cos most of the time it's freezing and we're covered in mud. I once got in and I had leaves stuck all over my bum. I had to wash my jeans three times to get muck off' Maisie.

These females were asked what the ideal circumstances for sexual activity would be like:

'In an ideal situation, where would you be and what would it be like when you got off with someone?' JH
'Oh definitely in a bed and I'd take all my clothes off and there'd be loads of time' Angela
'Yeah, I've never done it without my clothes on' Maisie.

The dichotomy between the *ideal* and the *actual* was perceived as a deliberate ploy to reinforce messages of the acceptable and non-acceptable:

'They (teachers) know it's not like in the videos and if they can't get a more realer (sic) one they should admit they know it doesn't happen like that. But they tell it like they do so you know they think it's wrong' Josie
'You can just tell that they think we shouldn't be doing it, so how can we ever ask honest questions? It's so stupid' Julie.

These disclosures vividly illustrate Mary Douglas's (1966) notion of the effects of the symbolic representation of identity. And, Julie's comment signals young people's reflexive knowledge that their experience, that is, practices of the 'concrete other' (Benhabib 1992) were not welcomed as an alternative discourse (Foucault 1979a). Because young people feared asking questions, their realities were subjugated to one of invisibility by the disciplining strategies of the dominant discourse (Foucault 1979b).

These disclosures evidence how social life can be seen to be constituted in terms of Giddens's structuration theory (1984) and the intersecting influences of both the macro structural and the micro interpretative stance. However young people's recognition of this duality was matched by a recognition that teachers did not share this dualised conception of society, and thus rendered little by way of agency or empowerment:

'They just ignore our lives as if they don't matter' Jo
'And there's nowt we can do it about it. We don't learn owt that will help us in our lives, you know to try and make things right for our sens (ourselves)' Maisie.

Related to this, they were angry that there had been no opportunity to question the *untruths* perpetuated in sex education. For example, they argued that the implicit message in sex education was that sex was only permissible in the context of love and marriage:

‘It just doesn't happen like they say, you know falling in love, getting married, then having sex - it's just **not** like that’ Maisie (her emphasis).

In effect respondents were arguing that their embodiedness and embeddedness was not recognised. Their ‘stocks of knowledge’ and ‘generative rules and resources’ (Giddens 1977:122) were regulated to positions of obscurity by the more powerful status of the dominant discourse. However, the ‘rules and resources’ that teachers had called on had little credibility. For instance, it was argued that teachers had attempted to support notions of a specific moral identity by reference to legal sanctions:

‘They tell you “not to do it” ‘cos the Law says so’ Dale
‘Yeah, until you're over 16’ Maisie
‘Yeah, but they didn't tell us why not. I mean **really** why not. As if a copper's (Police) gonna find you doing it. They use the Law as an excuse ‘cos they can't think of a better one’ Sean (his emphasis).
‘And you can't argue wi' what the Law says really’ Dale.

The inference is that prescriptions of morality, as enshrined by the legal framework on the age of consent, impute greater power because they are externally fixed, and therefore teachers can abdicate all responsibility for whether they are realistic or not. Receiving this instruction on the legal aspects of sexual activity together with being deprived of arenas for discussion, was perceived as another indicator that admissions to sexual experience would be condemned.

Anachronisms in the law were said to have no bearing on behaviours:

‘You never think at the time whether you're breaking the law’ Maisie
‘No, never thought about it’ Jo
‘The law's so out of date you just ignore it’ Sean.

Though they received no discrete or explicit lessons on ‘morality’, clearly discernible messages, implying a specific set of rules, were recognisable. These were viewed as embracing out-moded and hypocritical ideals:

‘They don't actually read out a list of rules but it's obvious they think there are **rules** for how we should be’ Jo (her emphasis).
‘The videos and what they teach tell us how we should be and you think “you hypocrite, is that what you did ? ”. I'm thinking no chance, did you heck’ Millie
‘Can you give me an example?’ JH
‘Yeah, to have sex you're married and ’ Sean (interrupted by group laughter)
‘And you're in love I wish’ Maisie
‘In a gorgeous bedroom ...’ Jo

‘Yeah not in’t park’ Maisie.

Again, this supports Scott’s assertion (1998) that outdated prescriptions on morality persist, as do desires to ignore authentic experience. As Wolpe argues,

‘The ideology on sex and sex education, and its relation to moral order, structure the official way in which sex and sexuality are handled within a school. In spite of these discourses and the tendency for teachers to accept these seemingly unquestioningly, sexual issues are ever present but not necessarily recognised as such by teachers.’ (1988:100).

However, deeper probing revealed a sense that teachers were colluding with moral prescriptions that they did not ascribe to nor believe realistic, with some empathy for teachers invested with the responsibility to impose unrealistic moral mores:

‘Who are they (teachers) talking about then?’ JH
‘You tell me ‘cos these lot in the videos they (teachers) show us are nowt like any teenagers we know. They just think they **should** tell us cos the government or vicars or someone says they’ve **got to**’ Jo (her emphasis)
‘Are you saying they don’t believe it then?’ JH
‘No, how can they if they live in this world?’ Sean
‘They never ask us if we agree ‘cos they know we know it’s not real life’ Jo
‘They can’t say “we know some people have sex when they aren’t married” ‘cos they’d get done [get into trouble]’ Sean
‘By who?’ JH
‘All them like governors, national curriculum thingy, god squad on telly’ Sean.

These references to external policy and ideology were corroborated by teachers in their explanations for the constraints on providing more realistic input, specifically the power of the overloaded subject-based National Curriculum and Governing Body to decree what is taught (DES 1989). Mac an Ghaill (1994) comments that these developments hold little scope for changes to meet student needs. Such policy developments are examples of the external steerage of educational practice (Smyth and Dow 1998; as discussed in chapter 3) that seeks to inject control through extrinsic regulative mechanisms. The values, experiences and personal moralities of these young people became emaciated by these edicts, and the ideological hegemony of the expert system was maintained. This issue is elucidated further in theme 9.

But external controls were not the only influence. Teenagers recognised that the micro world of teachers and parents also motivated certain messages about morality, albeit unrealistic but well intended:

‘Teachers and parents know its a waste of time to pretend we’ll wait till we’re married to have sex but most of our parents aren’t that stupid, they just pretend to be ‘cos they don’t want to face the truth’ Maisie
‘What do they want to do then?’ JH

'They want to keep us young' Sean
'Yeah, their babies' Maisie.

This highlights Moore and Rosenthal's (1993) observation of adults' denial or refusal to acknowledge the sexuality of teenagers, and the conservative principle of protecting the 'innocence of minors' (Measor et al 2000). Paradoxes result because denial also inculcates condemnation:

'Does a bit of you understand parents feeling like this?' JH
'Yes a lot of me does, they want to protect us but it's wrong to make us feel bad' Maisie
'What makes you feel bad?' JH
'Well if you're always doing the exact opposite to what they're telling us is right you're bound to feel bad' Maisie
'What is bad though?' JH
'Sex (shouts). Look if sex is meant to be being married or being in love, and you aren't any of them things then what are you? Bad, bad, bad, wrong, wrong, wrong' Millie
'Man it's always the same, we aren't what we should be' Maisie
'Do you feel bad?' JH
'No, well yeah, sometimes, you can't help it, if you're feeling fed up and all that' Maisie.

Maisie's and Millie's feelings of 'bad' identity echo Foucault's (1979a) idea of the power of dominant discourses to code bodies as deviant. While individual reflexivity and social praxis (Giddens 1982) might yield some resistance to such negative inscriptions, confidence is mutable and linked to the shifting specifics of time and place (Giddens 1990), and thus hold different potentials for selves and subjectivities.

Despite these criticisms of external attempts to prescribe morality, the group were adamant that overall their behaviours *in situ* were not influenced by any public norms of morality, and hence support Coleman's (1980) argument that young people's sexual behaviour is largely a matter of private morality¹. Private morality relates not just to decisions to exclude external prescriptions in the here and now of sexual decision making and actions, but also to their own informal codes of immorality. Females had spoken previously about morality in terms of prostitution, sex with married men, or strangers and 'fairground people', and the Pakistani males had a clear cultural/religious morality with reference to sex with white women. Further discussion on the morals which influence adolescent sexual identity and practice would surely aid adult understanding of the motivations and contradictions underpinning behaviour. This recommendation is supported by the Sex Education Forum (1994).

¹ While public codes may not affect behaviour in practice, it still stands that subjectivities are not shielded from the more insidious effects of internalising dominant norms of morality (Matthews 1992). This is developed further below.

This raises two issues. First, their personal experience of sex had variable temporal meanings - during the activity any conscious feelings of 'badness' were ameliorated by the more persuasive effects of enjoyment, and, within the security of collective group identity, sexual activity was not perceived as bad per se. But, outside the group context when alone and without the comfort of collective identity, reflections become more self-chastising with adult constructs becoming more influential. So while they joked (in the group context) about the falsehood of messages and imagery conveyed in sex education, privately some individuals were more deeply affected by the insidious censoring of their realities. The important issue is the mediating influence of involvement in sexual activity on perceptions of identity - where the boundaries blurred, the impact had unnecessarily far reaching consequences for they ended up believing that it was not just the *act* of sexual activity which was 'bad', but the totality of *self* (identity) that was 'bad'. This issue is developed in chapter 7.

Second, this raises implications for practitioners invested with the responsibility to acknowledge diversity and understanding of different values' frameworks. While teachers may feel constrained by the legal requirement to inform students about the law relating to sexual activity among minors, this does not mean they cannot debate the issue, acknowledge its emotional significance, or the different cultural values that embed young people's view. Warnings may be well intended, but if their role is not self-evident, in isolation they can do great harm (Nettleton 1996) because, as for this cohort, young people will 'switch off', and lines of communication will remain impenetrable.

Other sources of information and support

Despite dissatisfaction with school sex education, these young people like respondents in other studies (McFadden 1995, Hirst and Selmes 1997) considered school to be the most appropriate venue. Firstly this ensures that everyone has the opportunity for some input since many, like students in Mac an Ghaill's study (1994), had no input from home. Secondly parents were regarded as ill-equipped to provide this education, with embarrassment enhancing difficulties:

'My mum, or my dad for that matter, wouldn't know where to begin and anyway I'd be, and they'd be, so embarrassed if they started fumbling on about it' Josie.

Emotional support rather than 'facts' was considered more appropriate from home:

'I'd prefer it if my Gran could just check out if I was all right in myself, and if I understood

it but I wouldn't want her starting it off with all the detailed stuff on what goes on' Jo
'Yeah at least then they'd be admitting that they knew you knew about it and they'd have to talk to you if only for a bit' Angela.

Females also spoke about the acquisition of non-reproductive sexual information from friends, hence endorsing Holland et al's' (1990) observation that access to elusive sexual knowledge is provided by an informational sub-culture in schools. However they expressed reservations with sole dependence on this source, being unconvinced of the reliability of information. This was based on past experiences where peers had been a source of misinformation and rumour:

It's not knowing if things are true or just made-up to impress. When you're younger you hear about loads of things and then discover they're rubbish' Angela.

This echoes Lees (1986) and Thomson and Scott (1991) in highlighting the potential for informal sources of learning about sex to hinder positive conceptions of female sexuality. Respondents also agreed with McRobbie's (1978) observation that sexual discussions tend to be covert and confidential, but questioned the reliability of assuming confidences would not be breached by peers:

'I don't think I'd be very honest. How do you know they won't blab? Loads of the lads are stupid like that, blabbing on you when you've told 'em not to tell' Maisie.

A culture of 'Chinese-whispers', similar to that described by Thomson and Scott (1991) was apparent and discussed for its potential to further distort sexual information and reinforce negative sexual identities, such as sexual 'reputations' (see Lees 1986). Together with the emphasis on reproduction and passive images of female sexual behaviour in school sex education (e.g. Angela's reference to 'man getting on top, then you have a baby'), these sources of information hardly presented empowering images of female sexual identity. These findings align with Holland et al (1990) and McFadden (1995) that primary sources of information for young people relegate sexuality to nothing more than a biologically based definition which establishes sexually identity as innate rather than socially derived. With the lack of opportunity, as respondents described, to discuss non-penetrative sexual activity (such as fore-play, oral sex), relationships or enjoyment, as legitimate aspects of sexual identity, this was not only confusing in failing to match with experience, it also reinforced a passive and negative view of female sexuality (Holland et al 1990) and failed to acknowledge the diversity of other factors and social implications involved in learning about sex (Farrell and Kellaher 1978). On the basis of this it would not seem unduly pessimistic to conclude that the sources of information that were

available hindered the process of learning about sex and sexual relationships. Regarding changes to current practice, Jo concluded:

‘Anything’s better than what we had’.

Explaining lack of support

They expressed sympathetic explanations for the lack of support and guidance they desired from adults; it seemed young people recognised the pressures in adults lifeworlds but this reciprocity was not mutual. Teachers were construed as under considerable pressure, leaving little time for issues of support, and 'pastoral duties' were equated with reprimands for misdemeanours:

‘What about pastoral year tutors?’ JH

‘They just do teaching, they haven’t got time to care about us¹ just tell us off now and again.’ Sean.

Similarly parents were to some extent forgiven for poor support because of other worries:

‘Parents have got other things to worry about - money is one thing’ Maisie

‘Yeah you don’t want to make it worse by getting ‘em to worry about your sex goings-on’ Millie.

Despite this empathy and willingness to offer excuses on behalf of adults, they remained convinced that adult embarrassment was the most significant factor in de-motivating adults from addressing these issues:

‘Even so, they’re still too embarrassed to talk about sex unless they’re absolutely forced to, like teachers’ Dale

‘Or when you’ve started your periods and they’ve got to say something’ Josie.

Studies by Ingham and Kirkland (1997), Measor et al (2000) and Frankham (1993) suggest that a majority of parents want to give information on sexuality to their teenage sons and daughters but only a minority carry out the intention.

These findings were corroborated by data from Wingate School participants (site 3) but contrast markedly with those from site 2 (Burton School) and site 6 (friendship group) who disclosed that parents had provided education and support on sex education, and furthermore embarrassment had not been a factor in the experience. The significant difference between the Horton and Wingate students, and latter groups, was social class, for all those admitting open communication about sex with parents were middle class

¹ Teachers’ lack of support for students is developed in relation to notions of self-regulation in theme 9.

(see themes 7 and 9 for further discussion).

Scope for improvement

Participants felt improvements would not be possible without adults' demonstrating a greater willingness to understand their perspective and set aside the propensity for making judgements and assumptions about their lives. Moore and Rosenthal (1993) observed similar tensions between parents and teenagers.

Specifically three basic changes were regarded as imperative. First, sex education should not start from the premise that all sexual activity occurs within marriage, or in the context of white, heterosexual, naked, indoor, bedroom sex. This would involve adults breaking with the normative codings for sexual bodies and permissible behaviours (Foucault 1979a). There may well be young people who enjoy the liberty of warm and conducive sexual environments, but for this particular group, interactions occurred outside (in the park) on makeshift 'beds' (e.g. on grass or on the floor at the flat) and partially clothed. Clothes were not kept on just to preserve modesty but in efforts to stay warm - proving there is more to achieving sexual intimacy than the problems of communicating openly.

Second, and in acknowledgement of the different perspectives that females and males bring to communication and dialogue (see 'Habermas appraised' in chapter 3), all females (irrespective of ethnicity and sexual experience) wanted single sex small group work with a female adult. In contrast males were wary of all male groups fearing that male teachers may not be as skilled as female teachers in facilitating discussion¹.

Third, echoing recommendations suggested by Massey (1990) and the Sex Education Forum (Thomson 1994), sexual behaviour should not be broached in isolation from relationships, with more attention to acknowledging emotional needs and providing safe forums for discussion. This was considered to exclude didactic methods of teaching and the dismal atmosphere they had experienced:

'It should be enjoyable and not so serious and tensed up' Sean.

¹ Measor et al (2000:159-162) review research on working with boys and suggest strategies for improving boys' generally negative responses to sex education.

This related to the opportunity for fun:

‘You should be able to have a laugh yeah there’s gonna be embarrassment but you can accept that if you’re not been made to feel crap at the same time ‘cos they’re telling you off all the time. It’s meant to be about something that’s good about life, not bad’ Jo
‘We’ve had a laugh (in research interviews) but we’ve been discussing dead serious things. It shows it can be done’ Josie.

Situating poor communication

Taking disclosures on sex education and sexual experience together, the general conclusion is that discourse marked by poor communication was a major problem. This is not a unique phenomenon. The work of Plummer (1995), Holland et al (1990) and Lear (1995) catalogues the problems of lacking an agreed language for talking about sex. My data show that young people had their language for sex but it was rife with non-specific colloquialisms and euphemisms; teachers hid behind clinical/medical terms and parents were perceived as unable to articulate any language for sex. This made a significant contribution to sanctioning against explicit sexual communication. In the school setting, any willingness among young people to discuss issues more openly was undermined by the non-participatory methods of teaching that did not facilitate discussion. Communication in both informal (among young people) and formal settings (with teachers and young people) was coded and/or non-verbal, with the result that it remained abstract, ambiguous and plagued by assumptions.

Given that these young people were living out their sexuality and sexual behaviours in the age of HIV/AIDS, surrounded by a plethora of messages and pressures to communicate more openly (Weeks 1989), one might expect health promotion strategies to encourage more open, honest and trusting communication. But to the contrary, this data confirms Dana Lear’s (1995) proposition that there exists a professional pressure to maintain distance that thwarts shared understanding of the diversity of practice and identity:

‘There is political pressure on public health to keep the language of sexuality vague - or even silent, so that there is little information about what behaviours are truly within the realm of normal practice or what shared meanings do exist’
(p1312).

This is reminiscent of Smith’s (1988) argument that the exigencies of educational bureaucracy and ideology create a way of knowing the world that excludes the realities of everyday lives and minority status subjectivities (in this case young people). Young

people's suspicions that teachers might have been under external pressures to teach to a rigid and moralistic curriculum without necessarily believing in its merits (see above) evidences their insight on an adherence to Lear's and Smith's assertions.

Sex education as service encounter

In analysing the overall experience of sex education, both what they reported and the 'linguistic character' (Silverman 1993: 115) of what they reported, parallels can be drawn with Kinnell and Maynard's (1996) findings from ethnographic research on pre-test counselling sessions for HIV and AIDS. The problematic interaction they observed between doctor/counsellor and patient is comparable to that deduced from these data between teacher and student. Like Kinnell and Maynard's counsellors, teachers appeared to regard their input as a 'service encounter' (p.407) wherein the relevance of advice-giving is assumed, and students, like patients, were generally unenthusiastic about receiving prescriptive advice and responded with criticism.

The classroom is akin to the hospital clinic (in Kinnell and Maynard's study), wherein the model for conveying knowledge and recommendations rests on biomedical principles with the consequence that it essentialises sexual identity and practice and reduces them to physical acts with no acknowledgement of social or emotional experience. Hence, we witness the crossing over of 'expert knowledge' (Giddens 1991) and dominant discourses (Foucault 1979a) that emanate from essentialist readings of sexuality, to other spheres of influence (Griffin 1993).

Where Foucault and Smith (see chapter 3) cite general and macro-structural mechanisms that maintain ideological positions, greater understanding of the specific micro-cultural processes and discourses is provided by Kinnell and Maynard's analysis. They summarised interactions in pre-test counselling as abstract, assumptive and ambiguous. This can be applied to sex education, with the additional ascription of derivative. There was no evidence that the agenda for sex education was devised from assessment of student need (Mac an Ghaill 1994), rather there was an assumption of relevance, probably derivative of an historical and political legacy of what had been done before, and that which was enforced by legislation on sex education (DES 1988a, 1988c, 1989) or interpreted as relevant to education in schools, such as Section 28 of the Local Government Act (DES 1988b). Thus messages conveyed in inappropriate imagery

(relating to age, ethnicity, sexual orientation and context for sexual behaviours) and emphases on reproduction and prescriptions of sex in the context of love and marriage, were not questioned nor revised. These traditional approaches suited the political ideologies of the day that were concerned to reinforce 'family values' and the sanctity of marriage (Thatcher 1993¹). As an ex-teacher of sex education the derivative content and methods were all too familiar, exposing it as neither innovative nor specific to this group of students.

Lack of specificity was maintained by impersonal methods such as the afore mentioned didactic lessons, use of videos, lack of discussion, and the failure to personalise issues by asking students whether they could relate this to their experience. This created a distance between the hypothetical and the real and permitted the use of oblique references to sexual behaviour and unrealistic scenarios:

'They talk about "some people do this" or "you can do that", who are they on about?
It's not us anyway' Jo.

This maintained an ambiguity that allowed advice giving which was difficult to contest. Where advice-giving rests on these hypothetical situations involving 'some people' (meaning people in general) and 'you' in the indefinite sense, without acknowledgement of actual experience, and with students' awareness that any confessions might be condemned, teachers could make suggestions based on the hypothetical scenarios and obliquely referenced people without risking confrontation or contradiction. The impersonal tone not only circumvented potential resistance, it also implied a moral position at odds with student realities. This not only presented barriers to students questioning or disputing the effectivity of advice, it also reduced the likelihood that students might ask embarrassing questions and prevented teachers having to acknowledge that her/his students might be sexually active.

Furthermore it comes as no surprise to learn that students had difficulty in engaging with the lessons, feared asking questions, or elected to ignore the advice:

'You just switch off, it just becomes boring. You never think about it (sex education lessons) when you're doing it (having sex)' Angela.

¹ For more detail on the conservative government's policy of 'returning to family values', see Margaret Thatcher's (1993) memoirs (p. 628-30) which cover the period during which my data were collected.

Hearing about sexual activity that is generally rather than personally relevant also enhances the potential for complacency in relation to unsafe sexual practice.

Other strategies were intrinsic to this model of teaching that disadvantaged students and advantaged the teacher. Delivering the teaching en masse (to groups of twenty five or more individuals of both sexes, and varied ethnicities and religious beliefs), and relying on non-interactive learning (by text books and completion of diagrams and worksheets) enhanced distancing between teacher and student. This also created a climate unconducive to intimate discussions and questioning. Likewise, the sex of the teacher, in this case male, distanced females (particularly) and discouraged honest disclosure. For Ruby the presence of a male teacher prevented any participation at all. From the teachers' perspective, disinterest (such as Julie's recollections of 'just looking at the floor') or physical absence from lessons might be interpreted as consensual non-participation¹, but in fact amounted to an imposition which rendered females (Muslims in particular) with no option:

'I can have sex education, just not with a man' Ruby.

In conclusion these methods and content for teaching allowed input to remain at the level of informational rather than personal (Kinnell and Maynard 1996). This occurred despite a well established body of research which concludes that information is not enough, firstly because of the falsehood in believing that knowledge will automatically translate into rational (or desired) response (Ingham et al 1992) and secondly, because it reduces learning about sexuality to biologically-based norms without acknowledgement of how sexuality is socially derived (Holland et al 1990, Farrell and Kellaher 1978). In fairness, some teachers may be unaware of this theorising, since it has long been argued that research is not disseminated effectively to practitioners (Sex Education Forum 1996) thus maintaining the dichotomy between theory and practice². But successive governments and policy makers will (or ought to) be aware of it, but do not act on the recommendations it offers, which supports Lear's (1995) argument that a conspiracy exists to maintain silences and omissions and the status quo that fails to challenge

¹ The co-ordinator for sex education in the school subsequently asserted that Muslim students opted to be excused from sex education 'because of their religion'. She was not aware that the sex of the teacher was the primary reason for non-participation by female Muslims.

² This perpetual and unsatisfactory state of affairs instigated a national conference ('Sex Education: Using Research to Improve Practice') involving practitioners, researchers and policy makers in 1998. Proceedings available from Sex Education Forum, London.

dominant ideologies of heterosexist practice, identity and the nuclear family. This analysis provides a good example of the problems and contradictions that can ensue when 'technical specialists' (Giddens 1991:3) and the macro relations of ruling fail to acknowledge the perspective of the lay actors in everyday worlds (Smith 1988).

Many of the points raised in this summary are equally applicable to analysis of experience with sexual health services external to the school. This is developed in the next theme.

Theme 5: Sexual health services

The ensuing theme develops notions of contrasting and contradictory discourses, boundaries of knowledge, and young people's variant powers of reflexivity. It provides another example of how official discourses and practices can invisibilise and silence young people's perspectives, with consequences for perceptions of how they are viewed by sexual health practitioners, and ultimately their uptake of services.

Uptake of services

Respondents contributed a great deal on justifying their negative evaluation of sexual health services, or decisions not to use the service. This confirms studies by Allen (1991), Altman (1994), Wilson (1994) and Hirst and Selmes (1997) that concluded under-usage was largely attributable to the failure to acknowledge the complexity of 'user' problems, young people's fears that services were not confidential and negative word of mouth publicity. My data suggest a unifying theme in the latter is that practitioners are not informed by any sense of the 'concrete other' (Benhabib 1992) and thus practice operates on the basis of assumptions and values derived from the 'generalised other'.

Analysis focuses on female respondents' reflections on attendance at a specific 'Family Planning Clinic'. They had used the service to obtain supplies of the contraceptive pill and emergency contraception (i.e. 'morning after pill'). They recounted feeling ill at ease because they suspected that health practitioners (both nurses and doctors) were judging them, which rendered a reticence to be honest about their sexual histories. This was deduced from the nature of questions asked by the health professionals that implied a specific moral stance that excluded sexual activity outside a relationship. For instance, Maisie said she had pretended to be in long term sexual relationships to justify her requests for the 'pill':

'You could tell by the questions she were asking that she didn't agree with teenagers having sex so I told her (doctor) I'd been going out with a lad for two years and we'd just decided to have sex' Maisie (to guffaws of laughter from other females in group)

'What sort of questions were you asked?' JH

'Well it was more ... erm ... she gave me the answer to her questions she sort of told me what she were thinking. Like she said, "and, er ... now then Maisie how long have you been in this relationship?"'. I couldn't say, "well I'm not in one, I just want to be on the pill in case" 'Maisie.

'Yeah it was like that for me. I was going out with Cal but they still sort of made me feel crap' Jo
'Crap?' JH
'Well, like, sort of guilty ... that I should n't really be asking'. Jo.

The power of such experiences to influence peer perceptions and diminish the credibility of publicity about the service was evidenced by other young women being deterred from using the service:

'I was gonna go to the clinic but I couldn't face it after what Maisie and Jo had told us about it' Julie.

Giddens's (1976) suggestion that reflexivity and human agency are significant in social practices is evidenced here, because young people's reflexive consideration of these poor experiences contributed specific outcomes. First, females said they would only use the service in exceptional circumstances such as needing emergency contraception, or in cases where no alternative was available (e.g. not 'trusting' or 'liking' their GP). Second, condoms were bought from chemists because they preferred to pay for them rather than 'have a meeting and be examined'. Third, sexual health services were not perceived as appropriate for emotional advice on personal and sexual relationships as they could not envisage being able to confide in the professionals nor gain advice they considered useful. Here, young people have developed perceptions of the service based on the medical model for health that excludes psychological well being (Illich 1976).

These disclosures shed light on some of the reasons for the poor utility of services targeted at young people, and raise questions about where young people could confidently seek out support for their emotional and physical sexual health¹. None of the group could envisage using their General Practitioner for advice on relationships, STIs or contraception because they did not believe the service was confidential and feared parents or teachers would be contacted by the GP². These perceptions of mistrust of general practitioner services support the Brook Advisory Centre report (1991/2) and Allen's study (1991) which concluded that teenagers are deterred because of the fear of being 'told off' and anxieties that

¹ The SEU's (1999) report on 'Teenage Pregnancy' provides examples of practice designed to attend to this issue.

² This probably results from the aftermath of Victoria Gillick's attempt to bring in legislation that prevented teachers and medics giving contraceptive advice to under-16s without the consent of parents (see Weeks 1989b for details).

consultation would not be confidential.

It is unsurprising then that this results in young people perceiving sexual health services as no more than access points for crisis management (e.g. on suspicion of pregnancy and/or desires for emergency contraception), and, not unrelatedly, the issue of sexual safety becomes reduced primarily to the prevention of pregnancy with little or no acknowledgement of psychological health. Hence the medical model continues to define and regulate the sexual body (Samson 1999).

Other limitations in sexual health service provision were evidenced. I asked whether the clinic could be used for anything other than obtaining contraception. They were surprised there could be any other reason for attendance:

‘Well what else is it for? It’s called ‘Family Planning’, that’s what it’s for in’t it?’ Josie.

The name of the service, therefore, contributes another dimension (together with negative experience) to perceptions of the service. The misnomer of ‘Family Planning’ has long been contested as inappropriate in not reflecting the aims of sexual health services (Allen 1991), and perhaps as a result, the term had been substituted with ‘Youth Clinic’ by the service cited by these respondents. However, these comments show that historical perceptions persist, and, moreover, the misnomer had not been challenged by school sex education input or first hand experience. This has obvious implications for the marketing of such services.

Gender and ethnic differences

Perceptions of sexual health services were marked by gender and ethnic variables. All males had poorer awareness than females, and Pakistani males seemed the least well informed. Only African Caribbean and white females had knowledge of or had used the sexual health clinic. None of the Pakistani and Somali females nor white and Pakistani males were aware of the clinic’s location or the services on offer. Explanations again relate to perceptions of the limited role of these services in providing contraception and ‘family planning’ advice. The non-sexually active had no requirement for contraceptives and thus perceived no need:

‘... well I’m not planning a family so no I’ve never thought about it’ Ruby.

Sexually active males offered similar explanations but utilised them to defend their abdication of responsibility for contraception on the grounds that such services were intended for women:

‘... they’re for women I thought, not geared to men’ Javed
‘I don’t need condoms if lasses have got ‘em and anyway men don’t go to family planning clinics. In’t it for women?’ Hanif

Likewise, Sean and Dale said they would not consider using this service, and viewed the idea with some amusement:

‘No I’d never go there with all them women and women nurses and that’ Sean
‘Can yer imagine it, ’’I’ve come to talk about planning a baby’’ ’ Dale
(with laughter).

The issue is not only that males elected to believe they were excluded from this provision (and hence raises issues about publicising the service and making men intrinsically inclusive) but that the misnomer of ‘family planning’ also legitimises their excuses for failure to accept mutual responsibility for sexual health and thus reinforces patriarchal and unequal relations between the sexes (Lees 1993). Boys’ perceptions that sex education is for females (Measor et al 2000) might also be relevant here.

From this sample, views on whether sexual health services included ethnic minorities in targeting were inconclusive since none recalled seeing any publicity. However, white females felt it significant that they remembered seeing only white practitioners and only white clients in the waiting room:

‘There might have been some other doctors but I didn’t see ‘em and if you were someone like Ruby you’d be the odd one out’ Maisie¹.

In an individual interview, Ruby said she would not consider attending the ‘family planning clinic’ to discuss ‘private’ concerns. She also feared the lack of confidentiality:

‘It’s such a private thing ... you don’t go and talk about it with someone you don’t even know. And my God ... if they told on you. I’d be so embarrassed that they’d tell on me’.

This begs consideration of the issue that even where (or if) services encourage attendance by ethnic minorities, it might not translate into utility if different macro

¹ This ethnocentricity that privileged white identity was supported when I visited the clinic and saw no notices or posters that included ethnic minority identity. Also, the whole staff group was white.

and micro cultural considerations have not been acknowledged. Lack of awareness of services on offer and concerns about culturally-specific appropriateness were evidenced as deterrents to seeking help in a subsequent disclosure. Ruby described an experience of suspecting she had a pelvic infection:

'I was itching right ... down there (points to genitals) and I thought it might be thrush and it were getting worse and worse and I didn't know what to do or where to go 'cos it's so embarrassing. Anyway after ages ... about a week I thought I'd better go to my doctors, even if it were gonna be right embarrassing. Anyway I were right nervous and I was sitting there in the waiting room and there was this rack of leaflets on this stand and I saw one for thrush. There were loads of people in the waiting room so I dare n't pick it up 'cos it had got this rude picture of a women on the front, you know a diagram of her insides. So I went and sat right next to the rack and I were trying to read it without picking it up 'cos I didn't want no-one to see me with it. When no-one was looking I picked it up and put it in my bag. I sat there thinking I can't take it home in case anyone saw it, but I didn't want to talk to the doctor either. So in the end I went into the toilet it were quite funny really 'cos I ran in and read it and it said that you could cure thrush with natural yoghurt. I saw that and as I was coming out they were just calling my name and I just ran out, went to supermarket and got some yoghurt. It sorted it out ... and I didn't have to worry about talking to the doctor. It would have been so much easier though if the leaflet hadn't looked so ... so rude on the front (cover)'

This points up a number of issues:

- (i) though Ruby regarded her GP as inappropriate she lacked other options and therefore visited him as a last resort. Studies by the Brook Advisory Service (1994/5) confirm the same tendency among larger samples of young people, though ethnicity as a variable is not acknowledged;
- (ii) Ruby had not considered the sexual health clinic due to her perception of an exclusive 'family planning' role and assumption of catering only for the sexually active;
- (iii) the leaflet on *thrush* helped in this instance in preventing disclosure to the GP and in dealing with the infection but this was a fortuitous discovery and unreliable in guaranteeing solutions and accurate advice;
- (iv) the furtive measures necessary to read the leaflet also raise questions about its cultural and ethnic appropriateness. Because the leaflet was not available in an alternative form that considered the heterogenic requirements of client groups (such as translation in urdu and less sexualised imagery), it gave out cultural messages that created embarrassment and reinforced taboos.

Like Ruby, other respondents said they would only visit their GP for advice on sexual health if it was the only foreseeable option, that is, not out of informed

choice. This questions findings from a study by Seamark and Periera Gray (1995) who suggest a greater willingness by teenagers to utilise GPs than has been concluded in earlier studies (see above). But, records of 'good' attendance at GPs (as in the Seamark and Periera Gray study) cannot be uncritically translated as positive evaluation of the services, since no indicators of teenagers' motivations to attend the GP, or assessment of the quality of the consultation, were documented. It is possible that attendance was forced and not chosen. Furthermore, Seamark and Periera Gray did not record any breakdown of attendance by ethnicity, so it is impossible to deduce whether 'good' attendance included representation of ethnic minorities.

My data suggest that 'one-stop' advice clinics (see SEU, 1999, for examples) might be more appropriate to catering for a range of needs. This would take the emphasis off 'sex' associated with 'Family Planning' or 'GUM' clinics, and allow individuals like Ruby to attend without conclusions being drawn on the reasons for attendance.

Genito-urinary health, STIs and HIV/AIDS

In the event of emotional concerns and/or physical problems regarding genito-urinary and sexual health (excluding requests for contraception) no respondent was able to say to whom or which service they would confidently turn. Given the context of increasing numbers of young people infected with sexually transmitted infections including HIV in the UK (CDSC 2000), the admissions made above precipitated concerns about how these young people would act on suspicion of infection or concerns about vulnerability to risk.

Contrast of discourses

It became clear that accessing advice on this issue was an unknown area for them. They were adamant that they would not attend the GP because of the stigma attached to STIs, and the associated fears about breaches of confidentiality. But, they were unaware of alternatives. The Family Planning Clinic was dismissed because of afore mentioned anomalous assumptions that provision centred on 'family planning' and thus excluded concerns other than pregnancy; and they had

not heard of the Department of Genito-Urinary Medicine (GUM clinic) which was widely promoted (at the time) as the only service guaranteeing anonymity. However, respondents did not regard this as particularly worrying, because as resourceful young people, they confidently assured me that if they needed this service they would, 'if forced to' (their term) look up 'STD' or 'Clap Clinic' in the telephone directory ('Yellow Pages') to trace the required number.

Because I was concerned at the unreliability of this method, I later made a salutary attempt to role play a teenager who was seeking these telephone numbers. First, I checked the BT telephone directory and *Yellow Pages*, but to no avail. Then, I rang the BT operator service, and asked for the number for the 'Clap Clinic', then the 'STD Clinic', then the 'HIV Clinic'. The telephonist could not locate any of these, so I reluctantly conceded to use the term 'GUM' (with insight that young people had no knowledge of this term or service), and a telephone number was provided. But, on ringing this number I was inexplicably put through to 'Prudential Insurance'! Despite the patient efforts of the BT operator and the Prudential's receptionist (whom I recalled three times), the correct number for the 'GUM clinic' was untraceable¹.

This experience confirms a contrast between official and lay discourses (Warnke 1995) and signals two things. First, health providers' lack of acknowledgement of young people's unofficial discourse in advertising strategies, and second, an educational failing to attend to young people's ignorance of the official discourse. Benhabib's (1992) observation that the 'concrete other' does not inform generalised (i.e. 'official') perceptions is salient here (see chapter 3).

This ignorance renders the possibility of young people being unable to access support and treatment for a sexually transmitted infection or other genito-urinary problem. Just as worrying is that young people's reflexivity regarding STDs (HIV in particular) was much less sophisticated than that relating to other aspects of sexuality. This rendered a complacency that did not motivate any desires to widen

¹ Subsequently I passed this information on to the local GUM Clinic.

their boundaries of knowledge regarding discourses or resource usage. For instance, on re-telling my experience of trying to find the telephone number for the STD Clinic, respondents did not share my concern that they might find it difficult to secure a contact for face-to-face support:

‘Don’t worry. You could ring that national phone line thingy’ Maisie
‘Yeah that AIDS number that’s been on telly’ Josie
‘Do you know what the number is?’ JH
‘You could look it up in the phone book’ Jo.
‘What if you can’t find it?’ JH
‘Dunno. Don’t wanna think about that now’ Jo.

Theme 10 discusses the potential of these limited boundaries of knowledge to influence the reproduction of identities and close down opportunities and life chances (see theme 6 below for further discussion).

Summary: failings to legitimise the voice of the other

This data and review of the UK literature confirm a growing consensus among social scientists and health practitioners (significantly including medics) that teenage sexual health services are in need of thorough review. Studies by Jacobson and Wilkinson (1994), Woodward (1995), Morgan et al (1995), Pearson (1995), Simms (1993) and Smith Battle (1995) are unanimous in concluding that failings to provide appropriate harm reduction, advice and care services are enhancing the potential for psycho-social problems and morbidity linked to unwanted conception, STIs (including HIV), pregnancy and abortion.

Pertinent to my findings that teenagers felt generally unconfident to seek advice is that only the more confident females had used sexual health services, and retained the belief that their behaviours are judged as unacceptable. Jacobson and Wilkinson assert that teenagers with low self-esteem, poor confidence, and less hope for their own futures are more likely to lead lifestyles that put them at risk and are less likely to ask for help on their health and lifestyles. This is explained through summarising research studies, corroborating data from my study, that teenagers’ perceptions of services and own concerns are at variance with the goals dictated by health professionals and governments. As such, they predict overall population health gains will be difficult to achieve unless an atmosphere of teenage patient centredness and further research is fostered in this area. The UK

Government's target of a 50 per cent reduction in under 18 conceptions by 2010¹ will hopefully acknowledge this evidence. It is notable however that while these recommendations acknowledge variable needs, the specific cultural needs of ethnic minorities are not mentioned. The SEU (1999) report that the UK government commissioned has since amended this omission, and points out examples of good practice for work with young people from ethnic minorities.

Commentators cited in the UK research above often look to studies in other European countries and some states in the USA for examples of good practice, particularly those from Holland (Clarke and Searles 1994), Denmark (Segest 1994), and California (Medora et al 1993). Good practice is deduced from these areas having the lowest rates (percentage of teenage population) of pregnancy, abortion and STD, when compared to rates in Western Europe or the rest of America. Herein service provision is unlike that in the UK which adopts an unrealistic policy of *prevention* in efforts to meet targets for reducing rates of conception etc. This is exemplified in the 'Health of the Nation' (DoH 1992) and its successor 'Targets for Sexual Health' (DoH 1998). In more open-minded approaches to young people's sexual behaviour (as in those referenced above), abstinence models concerned with changing personal attitudes and values are considered ineffective so health targets are reoriented with a realism shaped by social policy that considers the impact of self-esteem, social class, poverty and economic standing. This strategy, together with a more liberal approach and improvements in access and marketing, has resulted in a decline in teenage conceptions and related morbidity (Plotnick 1993). In other words, it seems that efforts are made to uncover some sense of the practices and discourses in young people's lifeworlds, rather than to invisibilise and silence them. The SEU report (1999) suggests this is also the way forward for future strategies in the UK.

Attention now turns to more specific data on HIV/AIDS.

¹ <http://www.open.gov.uk/doh/ohn/natass.htm>.

Theme 6: HIV/AIDS

As indicated in the 'Markers for Enquiry' (see Appendix 1) the political and cultural discourse of the HIV/AIDS epidemic was expected to feature in recollections of how young people learned about sex, what they knew, and, by implication, how this impacted on sexual decision making. But as previous sections have highlighted, concepts of HIV and AIDS were considerably less significant than anticipated.

When asked why HIV and AIDS had not come up in discussions, they responded:

'Well we don't really think about it, do we?' Maisie

'But we have a joke about it ... about who's catching it and all that' Julie

'But HIV and AIDS, no we don't really think about them' Josie.

Thus their cultural imagining excluded any significance for their own lives or behaviours. This was uncontested in their schooling because they had had no HIV education. This was unexpected given the extensive media attention to HIV during this period. Their year tutor subsequently defended the omission of HIV/AIDS education on the dual grounds of

'.... not having space on the timetable ... and Section 28 (DfE 1994) makes it very difficult for staff to know what they can and can't teach'.

This supports the assertion made previously that legislation (or lack of clarity in its translation) creates a caution (see Douglas 1997 for explication) that can lead to gross omissions in content.

Sources of HIV information

The African Caribbean and white females said they learnt most about AIDS (sic) from magazines and from friends, apart from Josie who had briefly discussed the issue with her mother. The males said they got some information from television but most from their female friends in schools; they had never discussed the issue with male friends. The Muslim females said they knew very little, with Ruby explaining this on the basis of rarely watching television. She was asked if she had seen any leaflets:

'Oh leaflets, yeah, but no-one takes any notice of them in our religion. You don't never talk about it in your family. And you either can't understand what it's talking about or they're too rude'.

Muslim males endorsed this comment and said they had nothing to say on the issue; they spoke only in response to direct questions. They said they had neither seen television programmes nor leaflets on HIV/AIDS. Ethnic identity and family formations are again seen to mark out boundaries of knowledge (Khoo 1985).

African-Caribbean and white young people referred to late-night TV documentaries 'that come on once a year' (reference to World AIDS day programmes) but these were not considered reliable sources of information:

'None of us really know what we're talking about' Maisie.

This was unsurprising since such programmes were not designed to meet the needs of this target group and assumed a basic level of knowledge and familiarity with a medical vocabulary (Bloor 1995). They made reference to the soap 'Eastenders' which had carried a storyline about HIV/AIDS, but this appeared to reinforce the message that 'AIDS = Death' (Wilton 1992) since all recalled a female character that 'got killed from AIDS', but made no further comment on the social consequences of HIV that the programme sought to convey.

Given their ambivalence to discussing HIV/AIDS it was surprising to learn that HIV/AIDS issues had provided an impetus, though superficial, for dialogue between some parents and teenagers:

'My Dad told me not to do anything stupid 'cos of this AIDS thing and asked me if I'd done it at school. I told him I'd seen it on telly and he said "good"' 'Sean.

In contrast to general discussions on sex and relationships, the majority of white and African Caribbean felt their parents/guardians were slightly more willing to accept the need to be well informed about HIV. While this was as perfunctory as encouraging them to watch TV programmes about HIV, and none had watched the programmes in the company of a parent (except Josie), nor been able to ask clarifying questions, it does suggest some parental acknowledgement of young people's sexuality and potential as sexually active beings. So it appeared parents may have been influenced (more than their school/teachers) by the media profile on HIV/AIDS.

Poor awareness

In general, disclosures revealed confusion, misunderstanding and a distancing of the issues. On being asked specifically 'what do you know or feel about HIV or AIDS?',

they did not answer directly, instead stonewalling the specific HIV cue with more general remarks constantly referring back to condoms, 'catching things' or pregnancy:

'Well we know we should worry about catching things ... diseases, you know, like we said, crabs or summat' Jo

'Yeah, and you've got to wear condoms if you don't want to get pregnant' Julie.

More direct questioning did not produce the expected response:

'Do you know how HIV is passed on?' JH

'Well condoms can stop it' Sean

Allowing considerable time and repeating the question for others to add something, led to silence, thus more specific questions were asked:

'Do you know that HIV can be passed on by anal and vaginal sex if you do it without a condom?' JH

'Oh yeah and you can get pregnant' Angela

'Yeah, so it's good to use them, so you don't get AIDS as well' Josie

'It's passed on from one to the other, girl has sex then has sex with another' Ruby

The initial question was rephrased and revealed misinformation:

'Do you know how condoms stop the virus being passed on?' JH

'Does it go in with the egg and sperms?' Millie

'No, it goes in through the skin, I think' Maisie

'It must do if you get it by oral sex or by touching someone's bum' Sean.

Here it seems that the impact of HIV and AIDS on young people's learning about sex, had been one of confusion and misinformation. This in turn had led to perceptions of invulnerability.

Complacency and invulnerability

They were asked if they felt at risk from HIV or AIDS or if they were worried about it:

'No, I'm not at risk' Dale

'How do you know?' JH

'I don't know, I don't think about it' Dale

'Yeah, I'd worry about it before (sex), if he's got a disease or summat. You know, crabs, like we said' Julie

'I worry but if you get it, you're dead and that's that' Josie

'Oh, I think I might be (at risk), then I think, no I won't. That's it' Jo

'I don't think I'm at risk, you'd know ... or maybe you don't know. I don't think about it' Julie

These disclosures expose some doubts about immunity to risk but also a reticence to engage in a more reflexive way.

There was general and confident agreement that appearance, disclosure of personal sexual history, and 'knowing' someone socially, offered all the necessary guarantees. In

other words, knowledge of a familiar lifeworld conveyed a sense of honesty and immunity to risk:

'I know I'm not at risk ... 'cos I always ask' Hanif
'You just ask them, if they said "yes" you wouldn't do it with them' Dale
'I ask if they're a virgin and if they've got AIDS' Hanif
'You can tell by looking 'cos I've seen them with AIDS on telly, they look well bad (not healthy). You can definitely tell' Dale
'I'd never have sex with someone if I didn't know their name' Angela
'Someone's background is important. Yeah, if they're mucky and all that ... you just wouldn't go with them' Millie
'Yeah you need to know what their background is' Maisie
'I'd always think about where they've been and what they've done' Jo
'If a person's fair, they'll tell you if they've got it' Angela.

The implications of this naiveté were enhanced because the more sexually active individuals were the ones who appeared most confident about the lack of risk they were exposed to. As in the findings from the Australian study (Donald et al 1994) mentioned above, involving 932 sexually active secondary school students, those appearing to take greatest risks were not more likely to take precautions to protect themselves against HIV/STDs, being more concerned with unwanted pregnancy than disease prevention.

This coding of sexual histories wherein 'social acceptability' provided the necessary reassurances, but enhanced vulnerability, was partly justified by the defence that HIV had not entered their realm of personal experience:

'It won't happen to us. I haven't heard about it if it has' Maisie.

Additionally, imagery and messages on HIV/AIDS from television and magazines did not relate to their normative identity nor the micrological locales of their sexual experiences (i.e. the flat and park), thus ambivalences remained unchallenged.

Here we see Habermas's three aspects of communicative action (1986) that individuals draw on to validate their claims: the social world of interpersonal relationships regulated by their stocks of knowledge, norms and assumptions (friendships, family, schooling etc.); the world of subjective experience (tangible and authentic experience); and the objective, external and factual worlds (images and discourses emanating from the institutions of the media and education wherein young people are not constructed as at risk). Any counter validity claims appeared to be resisted because there were no gains, only unsettling threats to desires for enjoyment. For instance, knowledge of the

potentially fatal effects of HIV infection predisposed a sense of fatalism that made them unwilling to engage with longer term implications:

‘It just kills you, end of story’ Jo
‘You’re dead, aren’t you?’ Millie
‘Well, you get it in your body or you don’t’ Sean
‘So there’s no point worrying about it now’ Dale
‘I know I should think about it but it’s too depressing’ Josie.

The reluctance to consider the implications of HIV contrasts with risk assessment strategies discussed previously in relation to sexual behaviour (see theme 3), where a much stronger sense of reflexivity was evidenced. However, while reflexivity was not well developed in relation to HIV, it seemed they were consciously aware of a deficit, because they became increasingly more sombre and less ebullient than in previous discussions. There was a strong sense that this was linked to feeling too frightened, ignorant or inarticulate to express any genuine notions (or reflexive consideration) of what HIV and AIDS meant for them but attempts at facilitating further discussion drew a blank.

Their fatalism is interesting in light of earlier HIV education initiatives (beginning of the 1990s) which utilised fear tactics in stressing the number of deaths attributed to HIV infection (Bloor 1995). The effect appears not to have instigated safer behaviours but rather created a perception so alarming that it had to be distanced so as not to threaten current identities and ways of being. Herein denial and/or reliance on networks of social familiarity were more easily reconcilable with justifications for identity and practices. This relates to the dichotomy between how young people conceptualised ‘risk’ and how it was represented in HIV prevention campaigns at the time, with the emphasis on specific ‘high risk’ groups which excluded anyone other than homosexuals, intra-venous drug users, sex industry workers and people of African origin (Wilton 1992).

Not diminishing the worrying elements of these specific disclosures, there were more positive indicators of the potential for safer sex among females who requested ideas to ‘spice up’ their sex lives. Maisie, Angela and Jo said they would like information (‘leaflets and stuff’) on ‘foreplay’ and ‘afterplay’ (sic) and ‘stuff that was safe’. This offers optimistic opportunities for safer sex input, because of their willingness to talk explicitly about alternatives to penile penetration.

Current low profile of HIV

Aside from instilling fear, the high profile discourse of HIV and prevention initiatives at the time of data collection appeared to have little impact. In comparison, HIV and the threat to health has a much lower political and media profile (despite rises in infection rates, CDSC 2000) as the new century dawns. One wonders how this will impact on current teenagers and their sexual practices.

Theme 7: Discourses of sex and sexuality

The hidden discourse of sex

Themes 3 and 4 illustrate that (most) of these young people (females in particular) did not have difficulty talking reflectively about sex and sexuality. This contrasts with literature that argues young people are reticent to discuss sex with adults because of cultural taboos (Lees 1993) and fears that sexual disclosures might be condemned (Brannen et al 1994). Data confirm that respondents held similar assumptions but frank disclosures ensued because of the research context (as created in interviews) that provided comfortable and trusting environments. In situations where respondents felt less safe (e.g. in sex education lessons) we have seen that discourses of sex were far more limited. Since research interviews are not representative of usual forums for discussing matters sexual, data suggest that it remains the case that young people are deprived of opportunities to talk about sexuality in the routines of everyday lives. This contributes to hidden discourses of sex that have implications for young people's sexual safety and relationships (with adults and peers), both of which are connected by inchoate sexual communication.

The issue is not that young people do not have a language for sex but rather there is no sense of a clear discourse that facilitates communicative action (Habermas 1986) and shared understanding between different parties and in different contexts. Habermas argued that language is just one of many devices that individuals call on to achieve communicative ends; the production of agency through communicative action also depends on non-verbal language, cultural norms and historical scripts, personal motivations, and egocentric desires. Thus, to achieve a common goal of effective communication, a shared sense of these factors has to be in place. But this is rarely the case, for as Foucault (1979a) argued, sexuality is regulated and disciplined through regimes and discourses of truth, with the meanings and truths of sexuality continuously modified, fragmented and resisted, with the dominant ideology selecting which truths it will 'hear' and which ones it will not. Since young people rarely if ever occupy this dominant position, it is reiterated (see 'Situating poor communication' in theme 4) that their discourses are obfuscated by desires to keep the language of sex silent (Lear 1995).

The dominance of institutional discourses (Jenkins 1996) - particularly in public health, education, and the family - has implications for the social construction of young people's identity and sexual relationships (Segal 1997). In turn, this has effects on agency and action. Young people's reflections on sex education evidenced that normative conceptions of female and male behaviour were enforced, and, moreover, they were aware that their embodied practices, sexual experiences and sexual discourses were largely inconsistent with these constructs. The salient point for action and agency, then, is whether or how this affects their constructions of self and relationships, and whether they are empowered or disempowered in their subjectivities and actions.

The ensuing analysis deploys data that provide empirical application of three theoretical concepts discussed in chapter 3. The first relates to Benhabib's (1992) notion of the necessity of uncovering the connectedness between the public and the private and removing the 'veil of ignorance' from the 'concrete other'. The second and related concept is that gender holds significant implications for sexual scripts (Holland et al 1998, Smith 1988) and the ways in which sex and sexuality are discussed and negotiated in the routines of everyday lives. The third centres on Giddens's idea of fateful moments (1991). These theoretical concepts also relate to two subsequent themes, 'Desires and discontents' and 'Relationships with adults', but only data broadly related to sex and sexuality are deployed in this ensuing section.

Uncovering the everyday

Respondents were adamant that their discourse of sex (and the activities they exposed) were unacceptable to most adults in their lives, which contributed to a denial of their realities, and a silencing of their discourse in public realms of experience. As previous themes have illustrated, discussion of sex was not a matter of straightforward description (see sub-section, 'On sexual repertoires' in theme 3). The fact that a shared understanding between interviewees and interviewer was achieved does not diminish the contradictions and difficulties that abounded in their narratives, nor the initial omission of a discourse of desire. Such limitations, young people argued, are enhanced in interactions with adults, because of a lack of a mutually acceptable language. A language was required that did not cause offence, and did not contribute to negative ascriptions of identity and practice:

'In the first place, sex is just embarrassing, we're brought up to believe that, so you

aren't gonna feel that happy about just bringing it up, just having a casual chat with your mam or dad or teacher. It's rare (very) embarrassing. And what words do you use? (group laughter) ... there in't any that don't make it even more embarrassing than it already is. They'd tell us off for swearing if we used words we've used wi' you. It's just too shaming' Maisie (her emphasis).
'And with teachers, one thing is you daren't ask questions 'cos they'll think it's a confession or summat and then you'll get done (punished) ... and you'll get done anyway 'cos they'd think we were just being rude if we used words like we are now' Jo
'And they'll think 'she's a scrubber' for talking like that' Julie.

More evidence follows in chapter 7, but here it is sufficient to point out that transgressing these communicative barriers with adults was regarded as almost impossible. Yet, young women in particular longed for more open communication. All females shared Josie's opinion:

'It would be great if you could be more honest. Then we could all stop pretending' Josie.
'Pretending?' JH
'Well that kids do know about sex whether they (adults) like it or not' Josie.

Such desires for adults to acknowledge their private worlds were perceived as not reciprocated:

'They just don't seem to want to know. It goes back to what we were saying about trying to keep us young and all that but it's stupid. Really stupid' Josie.

Parental over-protection was not the only explanation for adult's failure to acknowledge their authentic experiences. Fears that punishments would be invoked mitigated against honest dialogue:

'It's a big risk (talking to parent about sex) even if I dared to do it, 'cos I'd end up getting grounded. Then I'd stop talking to her (mother) completely and we'd be back to where we started' Maisie.

These experiences of poor communication between young people and parents is corroborated in studies by West et al (1995) Allen (1992) and Ingham (1993). In Allen's (1992) study, the main reason for difficulty was parental embarrassment; other reasons were 'not knowing how to do it', 'the possibility they might "lose face" if they tried to discuss sex with their children, or their own inability to communicate caused by their own upbringing (Carrera and Ingham 1997:20). These explanations reveal a paradox in that parents' own histories and cultural capital might mitigate against honest communication with their children. In other words, a parent's reluctance to reveal their concrete experience stacks the odds against revealing the concrete worlds of their children, therefore, the public realm of discourse and knowledge remains disconnected

from the private (Benhabib 1992). Effectively, the invisibility of the concrete world risks being reproduced from one generation to the next.

This capacity for reproduction of familial norms might be a product of the capital (Van Campenhoudt et al 1997) and 'rules and resources' (Giddens 1984) derived from social class stratification (see theme 2), since middle class respondents in other sites reported contrasting experiences. Middle class females (with parents in professional occupations) from Burton School (site 2) and respondents of both sexes from the self-selecting friendship group (site 6) said sex was not considered taboo and all felt comfortable in seeking guidance on sexuality and issues such as contraception and relationship problems, but notably only from mothers. Respondents accounted for the willingness of their mothers to discuss sexuality on the basis of liberal attitudes:

'She's just really laid back and liberal sort of thing. You can talk to her about anything and she dun't get embarrassed sex, drugs, whatever. She always says she prefers us, her kids that is, to talk to her instead of asking your mates or whatever cos it might not be reliable' Alison (site 6)
'And she has a laugh your Mum, she's always saying "I was young once, I've been there myself, there's not much can shock me"' Sam (site 6)
'She does get shocked with some stuff but she still talks to us, and doesn't go mad like some of me mates parents. She talks to you in a way that makes you think it's really helpful. There's nothing I wouldn't tell her about. It's got to be the best way to bring up kids' Alison.

These disclosures lend support to Ingham and Kirkland's (1997) findings on the impact of different discourses on communication between parents and children, and the 'British National Sexual Attitudes and Knowledge Survey' (Johnson et al 1994) which found that working class respondents had less permissive sexual attitudes than middle class respondents. Similarly a less recent but relevant study by Farrell and Kellaher (1978) found that middle class parents were more likely to think they should talk to their children and answer their questions on sex than working class parents. They were generally more likely to talk to children at an earlier age and were more liberal and human relationship oriented.

My respondents also recognised the implications of communication for the reproduction of particular subjectivities; good communication was felt to have a positive effect on agency and action:

'It sets a good example, I'll be dead open with my kids' Amy
'The most important bit is that it helps you to make decisions, you sort of feel more confident and that' Susan.

The potential influence of poor communication on future subjectivities is developed in subsequent themes.

Juxtaposing social class and subjectivities alongside the ability/inability to talk about sex would be less significant if all young people, irrespective of class, received adequate sex education and support in school. However, as the 'Sex education' theme (see above) concluded, this was not the case. Thus the challenge to overcoming inadequacies in sexual communication remains minimal. This has significant implications for negotiating safer sex and securing healthy physical and emotional futures. Though there are examples of young people (see next sub-section) who appeared more skilled and confident than others in negotiating sexual liaisons and outcomes thereof, this appeared related more to individual experience and assertive personalities than to learnt competencies and knowledge of how sexual preferences might be achieved. This leads to the relevance of gender in sexual communication and agency.

Gendered language of sex

In interviews, the realisation of shared (between respondents and researcher) deficits in sexual vocabulary to accurately describe activities and anatomy was common to males and females. Though clarity eventually resulted it would not have been possible without the willingness of some females to volunteer graphic explanations. Thus, the language of sex was found to be both limited and gendered. In the context of one to one sexual liaisons, this has implications for the negotiation of sexual practices.

A number of issues are relevant here. First, as disclosures in 'Sexuality and sexual activity' (theme 3 above) illustrated, sexually experienced females were more willing than males to provide clear descriptions of sexual repertoires, and offer explanations for their experiences and preferences. This echoes Thompson's (1989) findings. There are notable examples. For the 'park group' the majority of sexual stories were retold by young women and this included the disclosure of males' sexual histories by female peers (see 'sexual repertoires'). Javed's and Hanif's disclosures of sexual experience were devoid of detail and seemed to be volunteered to challenge my assumptions about Muslim identity (see 'normative conceptions of sexual identity and practice' in theme 3). Second, females' criticisms of sex education were subjective and more readily located in relation to prescriptions of normative gender identity and practice, and connected to personal

realms of experience (see 'content of school sex education' in theme 4). This contrasts with males who held more objective and general criticisms. For instance, Sean and Dale had firm opinions on the prescriptions of morality and legality enshrined in sex education. Hanif and Javed were critical of sex education, not for its failing to provide useful insights on sexuality but for the omission of Muslim identity. Furthermore, they did not discuss this omission for its relevance to personal constructs of identity. Third, narratives of sexuality for males were not infused with the emotionality that females included in their discourses, nor was reflexivity as well developed in males as females. This was explicit in most females' accounts (notably Maisie, Angela, Josie and Jo) but for males the issue of emotions and relationships often had to be posited with some being rather more willing (e.g. Sean and Dale) than others (e.g. Javed and Hanif) to admit any emotional implications of sexual experience.

These observations are refreshing in that they position the female standpoint (Smith 1988) and respond to Benhabib's (1992) call to make (young) women's activities in the private sphere audible and visible. But, while these data shed some light on private worlds (the 'concrete other') and as such counter universalising theory that privileges the public-macrological perspective (see 'absence of gender in Habermasian theory' chapter 3), it does not follow that the capital, some young women are endowed with, will necessarily equip them to achieve sexual choices and safer sexual behaviour. Safer sex, as Lewis (1997) insists, will only happen if there is the will to talk about sex, but also the will to change the *way* we talk about sex. Effective dialogue necessarily involves a willingness from both individuals, first to verbalise any needs, and second, to have a mutual sense of desired outcomes. Thus contradictions arise when young women's competencies in communication are not matched by those of male partners. Moreover, any personal narratives of desire have to be situated against normative constructions of identity and practice, which hold greater risks for women's than men's subjectivities and sense of selves. Also, the influence of other situational factors (such as alcohol) on abilities to follow up desires, cannot be ignored. Therefore, it is unsurprising that young women's disclosures, in the safety of a female only research interview (wherein the effects of negative constructions of female sexuality are ameliorated), are permeated with a greater confidence and articulations of choice and desire, than seemed to be the case in actual sexual liaisons with young men.

This is illustrated in 'sexual safety and contraception' which evidenced (see theme 3) that sexual outcomes are products of a diverse and often contradictory typology of risks. Sexual encounters for the majority appeared to involve little spoken communication, certainly early on in relationships, or in those involving only 'sex' and no longer term relationship. Ambiguity was maintained by communication that is coded and non-verbal, so failure to 'read' the code or interpret non-verbal cues contributed to non-existent or inchoate communication. The criteria used by Hanif and Javed to assess whether or not to have sex with white girls, is especially telling in this respect. There was no actual communication involved in assessing a female's sexual history, rather they relied on assumption, trust and visible characteristics of appearing 'clean' or 'healthy'. As Lear (1995) maintains, poor communication forces discussion of sexual history to be indirect, relative to the relationship, rather than to the potential risks involved. Furthermore, desire and construction of trust seem to operate against directly questioning a partner's trust. Hence young women's comments that they might not use a condom if it threatened a potential sexual encounter with a very desirable (attractive) partner.

Analysis of sexual communication (and safety) must also involve consideration of the specific of time and space (Giddens 1991) within which sexual liaisons occurred. The 'public' locales of the park and flat were not conducive to discussion of needs and preferences. Given the concurrent absence of clear modes of sexual communication, it is understandable that respondents reported minimal or no negotiation prior to or during the sexual act.

Overall, the gendered nature of sex talk suggests a greater potential for females than males for producing agency and incorporating preferences and desires. However, females must be empowered to seek out these preferences, because data do not provide optimistic indications that males will assist in facilitating this. Such empowerment relates to notions of femininity and masculinity, and regrettably females are disadvantaged in this identity equation (Skeggs 1991). It is arguable that young women's reflexive knowledge of the fact that they are not routinely empowered by constructs of female identity (Frith and Kitzinger 1998), accounts for their greater tendency to provide depth and meaningful data - perhaps justification and explanation feels more necessary? In contrast, (some) men are empowered by their masculinity (Holland et al 1998) which renders less need to explain or verify claims. While white males were not obviously empowered by

their masculinity, it nevertheless remains the case that they were only moved to justify their claims when forced by young women in the group. By contrast, Hanif and Javed were more obviously endowed with a greater confidence. Undoubtedly this stems in part from the fact that no females were present during their disclosures, so they were not forced to offer justifications, but masculinity combined with the ideology of their Muslim faith seemed to bestow social advantages that mediated confidence to state sexual histories without the need for justification. For example, endorsement of their sexual behaviours (with white girls) as rites of passage by fathers and Muslim females in the group supported patriarchal and masculinist constructions of identity. No counter discourses (as exist for females, particularly Muslim females) or doubts were offered and thus do not threaten confidence or ontological security (Giddens 1991).

Fateful moments

Giddens's notion of fateful moments (1991) is relevant if sexual encounters are taken as an example of such an episode. The argument is that discrepancies and discomfort in sexual discourse between sexual partners, and adults and teenagers, can lead to outcomes that are disempowering. With greater support from adults or 'expert systems' (such as education), young people could be assisted to develop skills, abilities and greater faith in authentic selves so that fateful moments do not necessarily mean that individuals lose out or feel disempowered. A quotation from Giddens is worth repeating here:

'In any given situation, provided that the resources of time and other requisites are available, the individual has the possibility of a partial or more full-blown reskilling in respect of specific decisions or contemplated courses of action.' (Giddens 1991:139).

But because (some) adults (teachers and parents) appear, for a number of reasons (e.g. impact of own histories, external steerage of education, time pressures) to be demotivated from providing this support, young people enter into fateful episodes with less than the necessary skills to secure outcomes that do not threaten their sexual safety or confidences. Resistance to acknowledging young people's private worlds maintains adults' denial of teenage sexuality and ensures the need for support is not taken seriously. Abdication of responsibility for negative outcomes (such as unhappiness, moodiness or pregnancy) can therefore continue, and be explained on the basis of

outdated typifications of teenagers (see chapter 2), rather than as stemming from lack of support and ignorance:

‘They tell us to stop being grumpy, or to cheer up. They (adults) never think “what can I do to help her?”’ Josie
‘My Dad just tells me, “you’ll be reight (alright), it’ll pass (reference to being ‘fed up’), you’re a teenager’ Sean
‘Yeah, serve you’re sentence (teenagehood) and don’t expect any help on the way’ Dale.

The metaphor of ‘sentence’ to describe the experience of teenagehood is an indictment on adults’ and broader society failure to take the experience more seriously. The implications for subjectivities are developed further in subsequent themes. In addition, such ingenuous and reductionist explanations for difficulties observed stands in explicit opposition to calls for more support to reduce the rate of conceptions among teenagers (Social Exclusion Unit 1999).

It seems we are stretching the available discourse on teenagers, their sexuality, and appropriate support mechanisms ‘beyond its operational capabilities’ (Armitage 1998:40). This theme concludes with a brief look at the implications for sexual health interventions.

Sexual health interventions

My data provide empirical substantiation for Benhabib’s (1992) theoretical statement that the epistemic gains from the knowledge of the microscopics of everyday lives (its languages, gendered experiences, values and desires) cannot be underestimated. For effective sexual health interventions, generalised conceptions of young people must be problematised and infused with knowledge of the ‘concreteness of the other’ (ibid).

While such perspectives can be drawn out of respondents within the luxury of a research initiative, they do not routinely foreground sexual health education as it occurs in practice. Undoing the taboos regarding language are key to more effective strategies. As Lear contends (1995), how do we design prevention without language? As a pre-requisite adults would benefit from opening themselves to an appreciation of the taxonomy of meanings of sexual activity and the varying social milieus that determine specific forms of sexual communication. Everyday lives cannot be homogenised and diversity on the grounds of gender, ethnicity and normative friendship groups must be recognised. For example, the norms for sexual behaviour varied between the ‘flat’ and the ‘park’ groups, with different (or absent) vocabularies for talking about sex and

explanations for outcomes (see theme 3 'Sexuality and sexual activity'). Hence these two groups require a different appreciation. In other words young people's experiences cannot be taken as homogenous nor be satisfied by a universalistic approach to sexual health promotion that takes certain assumptions of 'teenagehood' as reliable (see chapter 2).

Theme 8: Desire and discontents

My data are consistent with Giddens's (1991) comment that individuals do not have a present identity without a sense of the past and future. But it seems that females are rather more inclined to contemplate this than males. Disclosures suggest that white and African Caribbean females were more discontented than (all) males, and had specific desires in relation to future identities and relationships. Of course it is likely that discontents were not articulated or that some individuals (males particularly) were not as reflexive. Whatever the explanation females had a greater tendency to deliberate questions of ontological security. Moreover, in projecting to the future, some females had more 'fragile identities' (Giddens 1991) connected to insecurities about the nature of future biographies and the challenges posed by expert systems and fateful moments (ibid.). For some females, distinctly gendered subjectivities were envisaged.

Relationship discontent and desires for future relationships

Irrespective of ethnicity, young males were resistant to speculate about the future.

Comments were vague and fateful:

'What about relationships in the future ?' JH

'Dunno see what happens' Sean

'No point in thinking about that now is there?' Hanif

'Why's that?' JH

'Well there's just no point, what comes will come, you just wait and see' Hanif.

Pakistani and Somali females were similarly consistent in not wishing to speculate about the future, though Ruby assured,

'I just know my husband will have to be a good man'

'Good ?' JH

'Yeah good to me and our children, don't know what that will mean yet but he'll have to be good'. Ruby

In contrast, white and African Caribbean females were more verbose with clearly low expectations of longer term or future ('serious') intimate relationships on both an emotional and sexual level. They were unable to imagine meeting someone who might offer what they desired. Explanations rested on experience to date and related both to their own relationships and observation of kin, particularly mothers and fathers.

‘Naff lads’ and desires for ‘mature’ company

Female members of the ‘park group’ viewed their current cohort of male friends as acceptable but ‘second best’ to aspirations for relationships with ‘older’ men whom they regarded as more ‘ideal’ partners:

‘Older men are more maturer (sic) and they’ve got more money’ Maisie.

Maturity was a key issue in appraising current relationships, with feelings that one had to make allowances for the immaturity of same age male peers:

‘What do you mean you allow for their age?’ JH

‘Well most boys we know are immature and you expect them to be’ Jo

‘What does this mean for friendships with them, does it affect it?’ JH

‘It means you don’t expect a lot’ Jo

‘A lot?’ JH

‘Well you just get on and have a laugh ‘cos some of ‘em are quite funny’ Jo

‘Like Dale’ Maisie

‘Yeah like him but you don’t expect a deep conversation’ Jo

‘Why not?’ JH

‘Cos they can’t cope they tell you to stop being so serious. Lads are naff when it comes to talking’ Jo

‘Have you tried to then?’ JH

‘Yeah it always happens, ya best not trying’ Jo

‘Do you think it’s because they’re less mature than you or just a bit shy?’ JH

‘They aren’t shy ‘cos they say all sorts, but sometimes ... you know it’s not true but ya think they’re a bit thick, or just reight scared of opening up¹. I get fed up of doing all the talking, get sick of my own gob’ Jo.

Such disclosures could be interpreted as evidence for young women’s emotion work in compensating for communication deficits in male friends (see Hochschild 1979). But since this was talk produced in interaction with other females in an interview situation, rather than actual observation of interactions between females and males *in situ*, it is impossible to know whether this actually goes on² or moreover whether participants would recognise themselves in this analysis. However, these disclosures certainly served the more obvious function of impression management (Goffman 1969) in creating constructions of selves as more mature than males, and in attempts to explain their current boredom with male peers.

In justifying the merits of older boyfriends, females had not considered that they too might be unwilling ‘to talk’ and express themselves emotionally since they had no

¹ This quote illustrates Jo’s awareness of Chodorow’s (1994) idea that boys fear ‘opening up’ because of the association with all things feminine.

² Frith and Kitzinger (1998) caution that analyses based on ‘emotion work’ do not always provide a ‘transparent’ window to assess the behaviour behind the ‘talk’ in interview disclosures.

experience to suggest that older men would be any different to younger ones. It became clear that aspirations for better relationships were not really about wanting an older boy friend, nor about maturity or even masculinity. Rather, it was more about closer relationships *per se* with older people, that is adults more generally¹:

‘It’s like, I enjoy the park and all that and it’s better than a crappy youth group where all t’kids go but it would be nice to go somewhere nice and comfy and talk to maturer people’ Jo

‘Yeah just sitting and chatting like we are now would be good, you can’t do that really when you’re outside and the lads don’t really like talking about serious things’ Maisie

‘Is it female company you enjoy then?’ JH

‘No doesn’t have to be, just with folk that you can have a conversation with in a grown up way’ Maisie.

Gender differences were apparent here. Males in the ‘park group’ were more ambivalent about changing current arrangements and less able than females to perceive older people as sources of good company:

‘I wouldn’t mind having somewhere else to go that’s inside but I’m okay with going to the park or my mates house’ Sean

‘Yeah so am I, we have a laugh and all that, suits me’ Dale

‘What about conversation, like Maisie was saying?’ JH

‘Dunno I’m not bothered. We do have conversations whatever she says. Anyway if you start getting talking to older people they’ll start nebbing (prying) and telling you what to do’ Sean

‘What - all older people would do that ?’ JH

‘Yeah, we’re better off without them’ Sean

‘Don’t be stupid Sean, there are some that are older than us and won’t tell us what to do all t’time’ Jo

‘Like who?’ Sean

‘Well I don’t know ... like her (points to JH) and some of my sister’s friends are really nice and they don’t act like teachers, they treat you like, I don’t know, not a kid ’ Maisie.

Hence past experience had served males less well than females.

Differences in ethnicity were also evidenced by Somali and Pakistani females who did not share the aspirations of those in the ‘park group’ because their socialising already embraced people of all ages and maturities:

‘Well we just mix with people of all ages all the time so I don’t know what they (‘park group’) mean’ Ruby.

It is of course possible that there was less caution regarding ‘older’ company, not just because it was more familiar but because there was less ‘hidden’ or ‘secret’ activity (from available evidence) to expose. Furthermore, disclosures from male Pakistanis revealed differences in the way females and males were regarded in their Muslim families. Hanif said he enjoyed the company of older people but would conceal

¹ The relatedness to poor relationships with parents/step parents is discussed in detail in theme 9.

any illicit behaviours, feeling confident that discovery might involve chastisement but not sanctions, whereas he assured that female peers would be punished severely:

'I spend loads of time with older people but we don't tell what we're doing' Hanif
'What if they found out?' JH
'We'd get told off but if we keep it quiet it'd be okay' Hanif
'What do you mean?' JH
'Well as long as we don't shame our community, they ignore it' Hanif
'So if they found out about you and the white girls at the flat?' JH
'Yeah they know that goes on, but as long as it's kept quiet they ignore it' Hanif
'What about Pakistani girls, if they got found out?' JH
'Well they wouldn't do anything like that and if they did they'd get killed, there'd be no chance for them, just big shame (on them). They'd never be let out again' Hanif.

As in other discussions, Ruby corroborated Hanif's perceptions of punitive penalties for females and the more liberal attitudes to males. All in all these young men appeared to face few threats to their ontological security and hence there was less sense of Giddens's (1991) concept of fragile identities than that displayed by females.

Influence of kin on relationship aspirations

Some females had pessimistic expectations of future intimate partnerships based on past and current observation of kin:

'I suppose it's to do with my Mum and Dad, they're always fighting and don't act nice to each other. I can't think of any grown ups who seem to have a loving relationship' Julie
'Yeah my mother can't get on wi' any bloke. Him she's got with now is same as all t'others. They argue then make up but it's all pretend, they'll fall out again soon' Maisie
'And my real Mum and Dad don't even speak to each other, never ever' Jo
'It's as if no one gets it right or you're just lucky if you meet Mr Right, don't think that'll happen to me. I just keep me fingers crossed I don't end up wi' someone like my mother's got' Angela.
'No, I don't wanna end up like my mother' Maisie
'Well, I don't want to repeat my mum's mistakes with men.' Angela.

These disclosures evidence perceptions that future identities might be shaped by reproduction of kin norms despite attempts at distancing. Additionally, a sense of inevitable reproduction was borne out by their unanimous agreement that this was a reason for enjoying pleasures now before meeting the challenges of 'fateful moments':

'You've gotta (sic) enjoy it now, have a laugh, don't take life seriously 'cos it gets harder once you've got a husband and that ... kids and stuff' Maisie
'I say put it off for as long as possible' Julie.

Discussion of these issues is elaborated below in theme 10, 'Futures: hopes and fears'.

Modelling sex education

In addition to the influence of kin role models, it is arguable that these young people's perceptions were not helped by their experience of sex education. With emphasis on the physical aspects of sex and denial of social and psychological elements, it is unsurprising that it did not provide a model of behaviour that promoted the satisfying of emotional needs, particularly for females represented as the passive receptacle of male desires.

While my findings on this issue cannot be generalised to larger populations, their relevance is acknowledged by wider debates in social science research on young people's sexual behaviour (see Kirby et al 1994). But this remains at the level of conjecture in the absence of rigorous evaluations in the UK that shed light on whether sex education raises expectations of sexual relationships or provides effective tools for achieving expectations (Oakley et al 1995). However, an MRC funded research project is currently addressing this and other issues in a longitudinal initiative intended to follow up young people until age 20 years and assess the features of successful sex education programmes (Wight et al 1996).

Findings from this latter study will be interesting not only in addressing the lack of robust findings on the impact of school-based sex education, but also for the transcultural comparison it provides with studies in other countries such as the Netherlands and Scandinavia (Dankmeijer 1994) which provide less scientific and more social skills based sex education and support. The depth of data attainable through the method of a randomised control trial used in the UK study (Wight et al) will usefully compare with data from a qualitative Finnish study (Haavio-Maanila et al 1998) that supports findings from my study that sexual scripts exist on cultural, interpersonal and personal level and hold clear expectations regarding sexual behaviour and in defining appropriate behaviour. However, the similarities end there in that the so called sexual history 'love maps' (p.2) of female respondents, in Haavio-Maanila et al's study, were consistent with their aspirations. Moreover the sex education of respondents was regarded as having positive links to these expectations. This contrasts with the experience of students in my study where learning from the public domain of the expert system (Giddens 1991) of education etc. is detrimental in not being consistent with lived experience in the private domain of intimate relationships. No doubt Dorothy Smith and Seyla Benhabib would argue that

this is entirely consistent with systems that obfuscate the private and the everyday, and the female standpoint within this. It is no wonder that feelings of fragile identities are enhanced when both previousness and futures feel under threat:

'It's like sex education hasn't done owt to help what you're like now,
or what ya used to be like' Maisie
'And the future?' JH
'... well (laughs) sex education dunt say owt about that' Jo
'Well, it does really ... it must think we're all gonna have babies and be mothers.
We didn't have lessons on owt else' Julie
'It's so depressing to think about it' Josie.

Females recognised gender as mediating different futures; a point reinforced if sex education is modelled:

'Do you think the lads think it's depressing?' JH
'They might do, you can't say 'cos they'd never tell you, but they haven't got as much as us to worry about. We have to worry that we aren't gonna end up pregnant' Maisie
'They might become fathers though' JH
'Not the same. It means loads more, looking after kids and that. They know that they can go on enjoying themselves even if they are fathers' Maisie
'Sex education doesn't say that does it?' JH
'No but it dunt say owt different so lads don't have to think about it' Maisie.

Through omitting reference to shared responsibility for future roles and responsibilities, sex education has the potential to reproduce the norms and expectations of family and gender biographies, which does little to help young women feel confident that their desires will be acknowledged and discontents remedied in the future. Data deployed in the next theme develop this further.

Theme 9: Relationships with adults: ‘It would be nice to be asked if we’re happy’

This theme develops the issue of tensions in young people’s relationships with adults and explicates factors that appeared to influence this. First, some teenagers felt that relations were adversely affected by adult expectations that complied with negative and normative constructions of youth (see theme 1). Second, (some) adults’ intransigence to revise these constructs was perceived as enhanced by micrological factors such as parental denial, embarrassment and poor communication regarding teenage sexuality (see theme 4 ‘Sex education’ and theme 7 ‘Discourses of sex and sexuality’), and also by macrological factors that relegated young people’s perspective to one of obscurity. For instance, the priorities set by the national curriculum and external steerage of educational processes and outcomes (Smyth and Dow 1998) left little time for discussion or issues of support (see ‘anomalies between educational input and sexual experience’ in theme 4).

Third, relationships in home life and schooling were influenced by different needs vis-à-vis gender and the varying emotional requirements of females and males. Data concur with the critique (Meehan 1995, Cohen 1995) that patriarchal ideologies - such as those Habermas is accused of subscribing to (see ‘Absence of gender in Habermasian theorising’ chapter 3) - do not acknowledge the subtext that feminine and masculine roles and subjectivities (Butler 1990, Hollway 1998) bring to communicative action (Habermas 1986, 1987) and dialogue. Once disclosed, young women are seen to have needs that are largely unattended to in their relationships with parents and teachers. Furthermore, being subject to patriarchal modes of ruling (Smith 1988) in relationships with adults, inheres greater freedoms for young men than women and reinforces gendered notions of identity and practice (see ‘gender identity’ in theme 2).

These referents are given further corroboration by the data that follows, within which they are recognised as mutually influential and have variable impacts and outcomes dependent on the individuals and contexts involved. The analysis reinforces the now familiar conclusions that macro and micro factors have inter-related or converging ramifications for both the subject and society (Giddens 1986). From the subjective position, this duality has consequences for agency and the production and reproduction

of subjectivities and practices (Giddens 1979, Habermas 1987). But *understanding* of these phenomena by late modern society's 'expert systems' and 'technical specialists' (Giddens 1991:3) is not taken to its potential because of failings by adults and systems (e.g. of education) to acknowledge and listen to the 'concreteness' (Benhabib 1992) of young people's everyday worlds and experiences (Smith 1988). Again, it follows that adults are accused of a rigid compliance to viewing the world from the position of the 'generalised' other (Benhabib 1992) and thus ignorance of young people's realities is maintained. All in all, this state of affairs raises moral and ethical issues because of the power created to structurally and emotionally regulate young people's identities and practices. As such, it deserves political responses that seek to ensure policy and practice are informed by genuine understanding of young people's needs.

Who'd want to be a teenager?

The introductory paragraphs of Theme 1 illustrated young people's awareness of normative assumptions regarding teenage identity and practices. They are also aware of adults' resistance to contestation of these constructs (Woodward 1999b) and feel there is little opportunity for positioning the variable contours of their authentic identity. This was reflected in responses to the question 'how would you describe yourself to a Martian?'. They erupted in laughter, predicting that adults would reach the Martians before them to give their version of 'young people':

'We wouldn't get a chance to tell 'em [a Martian] owt, 'cos some grown up [would] get there first' Jo
'Yeah to warn 'em' Sean.

Here again, teenagers automatically assume that their constructions will be subordinated by those of adults, i.e. their view will be obfuscated in the hierarchy of legitimate identities and practices. Adults' lack of understanding was a key theme in narratives - a lamentable situation perceived as bound to continue so long as adults did not take the time to find out what it was like to be a teenager. Explanations rested on lack of time, disinterest and a sad conviction that teenagehood held no appeal:

'It's not exactly exciting, you're only interested if it sounds good or you'd like to do it. But who wants to be teenager?' Josie
'They're just not interested or can't be bothered to take any time in us' Jo
'Yeah just to ask what it's like for us' Josie.

Questioning on 'what adults might ask them about' to gain greater understanding rendered disconsolate responses:

'..... it would be nice, just to be asked if we're happy' Jo

'To be asked what we worried about, or what it felt like to be sixteen and have no chance of a job' Maisie
'They could ask us to tell them what we do instead of thinking that if one person does a bad thing, we all do it' Josie
'Would they want to be a teenager? No chance. My Dad tells me "you're only young once, enjoy it"'. When I do, he goes mad and tells me to grow up' Dale.

Such ironies are not lost on young people - exhortations to enjoy life come with conditions (of behaviours acceptable to parents) and show little sensitivity to the structural obstacles and anxieties that these teenagers face, to which attention now turns.

Threat of disapproval

All white and African Caribbean teenagers lived with these expectations of being disapproved of, thus they did not enjoy the benefits of honest relationships with parents (or teachers, see below). As mentioned previously, the majority had lives that were kept 'secret' or not fully disclosed to parents. In anticipation of parental disapproval they were cautious and did not risk seeking approval for fear of negative consequences, such as restrictions on freedom, choice of friends and, ironically, loss of parents' trust:

'My mum would kill me if she found out. She'd never trust me again if she found out I was lying about where I was going' Maisie
'My dad would kill me if he knew' Julie

'I'd like to be able to go somewhere where I like going and my Mum will be happy knowing I'm there' Josie.

In addition to normative assumptions about teenagers, other explanations for anticipating disapproval related to past experience of punishment for more minor misdemeanours:

'I got done for a bad report last term, can you imagine what they'd do if they knew about getting the morning after pill' Angela.

and, adults' refusal to hear their daughter's/son's opinion:

'I'd just like them to hear our side of the story, before they go mad at us' Dale.

Young people's response: managing by manipulating

Several strategies for preventing or overcoming disapproval to achieve greater freedom were disclosed:

- (i) 'acting' in the role of 'good' daughter/son which served to protect parents from the truth of more realistic lifeworlds, prevented worry and assisted parents in their denial e.g. maintaining a pretence of being sexually inexperienced or sexually naive;
- (ii) exchanging favours e.g. baby-sitting, picking siblings up from school, domestic chores, in return for going out early/coming in late(r);

- (iii) confronting parents with double standards e.g. excessive drinking and drunkenness, serial sexual partners, having children as teenagers themselves, and granting of greater freedom in parents' own youth;
- (iv) discovering the path of least resistance. This might involve asking the 'softest' parent for permission to stay out later, or a discerning selection of the context/timing most likely to secure 'wants' e.g. making requests when parents were in a rush and therefore more likely to respond hastily without inquisition, or staying out late if only the 'soft' parent was known to be at home on their return;
- (v) involving grandparents as allies e.g. in providing evidence that parents as youths were allowed greater freedom, and using grandparents as adjudicators in disputes with parents;
- (vi) making only low demands and responding to parents' expectations of increasingly greater self-sufficiency, e.g. not requesting new clothes, money, time (from kin), 'meals service', and doing one's own laundry and ironing.

The issues raised in (ii) and (vi) were agreed as those most likely to achieve greater latitude with parents in respect of freedom,

'It's like if you don't ask for much they might feel bad saying you can't go out somewhere or stay out later' Julie.

But ironically some females confided that these were also the issues that involved greatest self-sacrifice,

'I'd like new clothes and stuff and not to have to make me own food or do me own washing but it's like there's no point asking, 'cos they'll think you're being a pain and you just don't wanna get in their bad books. So if you can avoid a row by not asking then you just do it. You have to forget about what you'd like 'cos you can't have it' Maisie.

This is interesting in relation to their sense of limited symbolic capital (see theme 2 'Types of capital') that they had previously defended but which had implied notions of agency e.g. in distancing themselves from more middle class young people. In reality it seemed that identity and behaviour involved less choice and autonomy than had previously been admitted or acknowledged, and, furthermore, exhibited a stronger sense of reproduction of family/class norms. The contrast with middle class young people is discussed below in the sub-section 'Exceptions'.

Language and letting parents down

As mentioned previously, communication difficulties were the main barrier to more honest relationships with parents, being particularly acute in relation to sexuality, sexual activity and emotions. This explanation was given clearer meaning in small group interviews. Two problems were identified; the first, was the already familiar problem with having no mutually acceptable vocabulary which allows both parties to feel comfortable:

‘If they get embarrassed when something a bit sexy comes on telly, you just know they aint gonna be too relaxed about talking about their kid doing it’ Sean

‘Yeah my Mum either says nowt or gets all flustered when she tries to talk to me and ends up saying the usual, “don’t learn the hard way”, meaning don’t get pregnant like she did. She never says the word “sex” or anything’ Maisie

‘You just can’t broach the subject in a relaxed way. If we talked to them like we have to you, you know using slang and that, we’d get told off for swearing before you even got started and if you talked like all medical sort of thing, you wouldn’t be able to explain what you meant. And anyway you can’t explain how you feel in school sex education language type of thing’ Josie (her emphasis).

The second problem was the fear of ‘letting parents down’ and burdening them with evidence that might question their denial and desires to preserve a public image of being a ‘good’ parent (hence the strategies mentioned above for minimising this recognition):

‘Parents don’t want to know this stuff about their kids ‘cos they can’t deal with it, it would shame them up’ Sean.

‘You have to think what it does to your parents’ reputation. If it gets out that your child is doing bad things then they would be ashamed and embarrassed’ Ruby.

While social and familial norms seem to forbid an honesty that might challenge parents’ public status (i.e. parents’ symbolic capital), at the same time it can enhance disenfranchisement between generations (see Moore and Rosenthal, 1993, and Measor et al, 2000, for further discussion of factors that influence communication between different generations). It is arguable that these young people are taking far more responsibility for their parents’ self-esteem and public image than adults might expect.

As a result these teenagers were wary of raising the issue of sexuality or simply asking questions since this might be taken as a definite indicator of sexual activity. Similarly their parents were perceived as not asking questions for fear of hearing an honest response and receiving information they preferred to remain ignorant of. Statements such as ‘I only want the best for you’ were understood as well intentioned but perceived as implying the exclusion of some social and all sexual relations. It was argued that if

parents were fully aware of their children's social and sexual lives they would consider themselves to have failed in rearing them. They believed parents would react to these feelings of failure by punishment rather than talking to them to enhance understanding. A variety of possible consequences were shared:

'They'd give up on me, you know, stop talking to me even throw me out, they did that to my sister' Maisie

'They might not throw me out, but my life wouldn't be worth living. They'd stop my pocket money and wouldn't let me out, always checking up on me' Millie

'They'd think that if I'd lost my virginity then that was it, I'd end up doing everything that they see in the papers about teenagers. They'd be so shamed up by me. They wouldn't try and understand' Angela.

While the majority of disclosures on adult reactions were speculative, there was unanimous agreement that parents preferred not to know the truer picture. Silence on these matters was interpreted as disapproval. From the parents' perspective, silence may be used to resist acknowledging the sexuality of their offspring, and from the teenagers' perspective, parents' reluctance to talk (or even ask) about sex and sexuality is preferable to suffering embarrassment, feeling they have let their parents down or enduring the consequences of restrictions on freedom. Ingham and Kirkland (1997) point out the significance of different discursive contexts that frame discussion between parents and children.

Gendering parent:child relations

There were gender differences in responses to this state of affairs. Sean and Dale adopted a more pragmatic line, attributing parents' behaviour to the pressures of maintaining a respectability amongst their peers:

'I think they don't want to own up to their kid doing things that might be embarrassing ... you know, things they couldn't admit to their friends. And that's fine by me, less they know the easier my life is' Dale

'Yeah my dad's not gonna sit in the pub saying, "Well our Sean enjoys his drugs and messing about wi' lasses in t'park." ' Sean.

Females generally agreed with this but corroborated earlier disclosures (see theme 8 'Desires and discontents') that lamented the lack of someone they could confide in. They named confidantes they had fond memories of but with whom they no longer had contact e.g. estranged mother, grandma (now deceased), older sister (left home), teachers (who had since left the school). Talking with friends provided a ready forum for talking about relationships but not the more intimate advice they sought about particular sexual

activity, anatomy, and emotions. Thus, confidantes with greater social maturity were preferable:

‘You can talk to your mates and all that but well ... I don’t know, it’s great to talk to someone who’s older who’s been through it all ... and you can have a really good talk and it makes you think’ Jo

‘I used to talk to my sister before she left home, she gave me really good advice. Stuff I could act on’ Maisie

‘I’d like to be able to talk to someone, really talk like we are now, where you ask questions, not nosy questions but questions that make me think about me. It gives you sort of ... something to help you in making decisions and that’ Josie.

In effect these young women were seeking someone who would help develop their reflexivity and life skills (Giddens 1991).

These data also demonstrate the saliency of gender (Smith 1988) to visiblising the different perspectives and needs that females and males bring to communication and dialogue (see Fraser 1995); and the gendering of spheres of intimacy (Fleming 1995) that recognises differences in values and desires that are grounded in pre-existing (and gendered) histories and beliefs. It follows that theorising the relationship between the private and the public must recognise the ‘legitimacy of ... different [female and male] voices’ (Warnke 1995:258) since this has consequences for subjectivities and agency. Desires for relationships that ‘make us think’ evidences females’ knowledge of the impact of such dialogue on their production of agency. The consequences of poor relationships with adults on subjectivity and agency is also evidenced in the next section.

Dissonance, othering and forgiveness

A dissonance to negative and essentialising constructs of youth was apparent which could not be interpreted on the same basis as subcultural analyses of youth (e.g. see Willis 1977). These tended to view resistance as a moral response to institutional hegemony that honoured working class parents and subjectivities. My data suggest that any dissonance served a more pragmatic purpose of maintaining ontological security (Giddens 1991) and retaining a positive sense of self:

‘You’ve got to try and ignore what they feel about teenagers, ‘cos my God, if you took it all on you’d want to commit suicide’ Maisie

‘You just have to tell yourself that you know you aren’t as horrible as they make out. If you started believing it you’d never have faith in yourself and you’ve got to, you’ve just got to ‘cos no-one else thinks we’re worth owt’ Josie (her emphasis).

‘Othering’ is well demonstrated in these disclosures with the unspecified use of ‘they’ throughout the dialogue. Individuals rarely specified to whom they were referring nor were asked for qualification by group participants, suggesting unsaid agreement and a universalising perception of ‘others’. This confirms Gilroy’s assertion that,

‘The Other, against whose resistance the integrity of identity is established, can be recognised as part of the self.’ (1999:315).

Gilroy positions the fragility of identity (Giddens 1991) in ‘the dialogic circuit that connects “us” with our “others” and cites Battaglia (1995) in naming this as a ‘representational economy’ (Gilroy op. cit.). The saliency of the relationship between negative representational economies and fragile identities was evidenced in the angry reactions to the question of who ‘they’ referred to. Maisie challenged the question with such brazen scepticism that my credibility risked nose diving:

‘Who’s “they”?’ JH
‘Well who do you think? Dun’t take much working out. I don’t believe you don’t know who I’m, ... no, we’re on about’ Maisie (her emphasis)
‘Well tell me’ JH¹
‘No you tell me, you can’t live in this world and not know’ Maisie

Here, I hesitated and Maisie scoffed,

‘You’re pretending not to know’ Maisie (group laughter)
‘I’m not, I just want you to tell me so I don’t get it wrong’ JH
‘I don’t need to tell you ‘cos it’s **everyone** (shouts) and you know it’ Maisie
(blushing and appearing flustered).

At this point, Josie’s skills in diplomacy prevented further inquisition:

‘She does know, you can tell, she does n’t want to say it’s teachers, mums and dads, telly, ... all them who go on about how awful kids are’ Josie
‘Okay, thanks Josie, I give in, so do you mean adults, grown-ups in general?’ JH
‘Yeah it’s what ya hear, day after day, year after year’ Maisie.

The unanimous and collective group anger also positioned identity on the basis of social solidarity (Hall 1997) with a united resistance to the ‘other’ and generalisations regarding signifying practices and representations. Specifically, they were angry that representations were applied uncritically because this impacted on the way they were treated, that is, as accorded little or no respect, or,

‘... people to be wary of’ Jo.

¹ This is an example of suppressing my pre-suppositions or assumptions in order to hear young people’s explanations, but which also included risks to my credibility (see methodology, chapter 4).

This, in turn was recognised as influencing agency, particularly their boundaries of freedom:

'It's not just something we're pissed off about, just 'cos everyone wants to be understood properly, it's 'cos it ends up with us not being able to do stuff 'cos they (adults) always think it's gonna be bad' Sean

Anecdotes of 'not being heard' were shared by the group, with some feeling that neither parents nor teachers actually cared about what they did. However, in individual and small group interviews deeper probing revealed a more forgiving view of adults, with some females finding excuses for parents:

'They want me to work hard at school and get a good education' Millie

'Cos parents worry about you, you see my mum failed that exam that you do when you're eleven and she just wants the best for me' Josie

'If it's your kids, you do get worried and think the worstest (sic)' Ruby.

Overall, feelings towards parents were mixed but most attempted to empathise and became more discerning in avoiding sweeping generalisations about adults. This reflects findings from Brannen et al's study (1994) where young people had less generalised views of adults, than adults had of young people, and were more likely (than adults) to express preferences to judge and be judged on an individual basis. When young people were asked 'do you think teenagers generally like or dislike adults as a group?', one third of responses were totally positive and half included positive and negative elements. By contrast, when parents were asked 'do you think adults generally like or dislike teenagers as a group?', responses were more generalised, and nearly two thirds thought teenagers were generally disliked.

This picks up on a second reason for dissonance, in that active and vocal resistance was felt necessary to achieving agency through more involvement in decisions that affected personal lives. Easy generalisations about the 'irresponsibility' of youth were resorted to when it suited a parent's purpose - specifically in disagreements over greater freedom. Even where there was a lack of evidence (from own offspring) such pre-suppositions were perceived as foregrounding and biasing the negotiations young people might attempt with parents. Resentment at their lack of power to challenge the dominant discourse was enhanced when parents were unwilling to accept an alternative view,

'Even when my mum knows I'm not like that she won't give in' Angela

'They might as well be deaf, they won't listen' Maisie.

While some individuals recognised that parents' aspirations were well intended, such intentions are misguided, as Giddens (1991) would argue, if they result in poor communication, absence of appropriate guidance, and failure to validate self-identity:

'They don't want us to make same mistakes. I won't, I'm not like her.
Well I am, but I'm not her, she doesn't see that' Maisie.

In addition, young women may be enhancing their vulnerability to risk in protecting their parents from the knowledge of their daughters as sexual beings. Because young women do not feel they can confide in parents, parents are given no opportunity to help their daughters make safer choices. The immediate risk of sabotaging parents' trust (or incurring punishment) was more important than the potential risk to their future health and well being:

'I just could n't risk it. Yeah she might be understanding but I bet she would n't. Then I'd be in a reight mess 'cos she'd be watching me all the time' Julie.
'You don't know how bad it is till you've lived with 'em (parents)' Angela.

Young men disclosed no comparable experiences and thus suggests that knowledge of young women's 'concrete' worlds (Benhabib 1992) reveals gendered differences in relationships with adults. These position female and male identity and practice differently so that males experience fewer constraints and females are encouraged to take risks that hold potentials for agency and subjectivities. The fact that females (compared to males) feel they have more to conceal from parents undermines their desires for more honest relationships.

Double standards

Prohibited discussion of sexuality and sexual behaviour among parents and teenagers was criticised not just for its effect on communication but also for the dishonesty exposed by contradictions in the position adopted by some parents. For instance, perceptions of ignorance were ridiculed:

'My Mum acts like she doesn't know what shagging is. Where did I come from then? Millie.

Double standards in adult behaviour diminished the impact of some warnings:

'She (mother) tells me what not to do and when I asked her about what she got up to with Dave (Mother's boyfriend), she's worse than me, and she was rare (very) embarrassed.' Maisie
'It's true, if they could be more honest we'd all be better off' Angela.
'Preach, preach, preach, who does that help?' Sean.

On the one hand young people were critical of parents because of the hypocrisy they witnessed, but on the other hand (and perhaps less consciously) they might criticise parents' behaviours because of the discomfort associated with constructing a parent as a sexual being. Parents as risk takers or sexually active are inconsistent with essentialising views of parents, thus it creates an impasse where it is easier for both parties to ignore it.

Thus, attempts at acknowledging the need for sex education and self-regulation were reduced to perfunctory warnings, with no attempt to personalise matters:

'They tell us to watch out and stuff about AIDS but they might catch it as well' Maisie
'My Dad told me not to do anything stupid 'cos of this AIDS thing and asked me if I'd done it at school. I told him I'd seen it on telly and he just said "good". End of story.' Sean.

Endearingly, respondents did not dwell on chastising these alleged double standards but moved on to accounting for them. Parental embarrassment and the lack of shared vocabulary were again held to explain reluctance to acknowledge vulnerability to risk in themselves and their children. Few parents would feel comfortable being asked about their own sexual behaviour by their children, and professionals involved in sex education will be able to relate episodes of being confronted by double standards. The issue is not one of disclosing all intimate detail, but of explicitly acknowledging the contradictions that exist for many of us. Most teenagers are well aware of the contradictions (SEU 1999), they live in a society where sex and sexuality has never been more topical, it is brazenly sexual on the outside but deeply puritanical on the inside. They are surrounded by sexually explicit imagery, at least inasmuch as there is ample access to it in the media. Sex sells products, teenagers like other age groups, consume it. Thus, like the rest of us, they are cajoled into believing that sex is no longer as taboo as it was, that is, until private worlds are scrutinised. When this happens young people suffer most from the schizophrenia of a society with huge marketing gains from using sex (particularly women) to sell products (see Lawson 2000), but great losses in terms of its moralising and sanctioning of individual behaviours or group identity. Where young people are concerned they are well aware that what is preached is not practised and furthermore their behaviours will rarely (if ever) be endorsed by adults in their lives. So while aware of the perceived unacceptability of their behaviours, these teenagers were pressurised into colluding with societal denial and took the path of least resistance: one which allowed them some freedom but which was also secretive, furtive and enshrined with

risks to health and happiness. This goes some way to explaining the lack of contentment some of them feel in relation to their self identity and sexual behaviours.

Exceptions

There are exceptions in that some teenagers (from other sites) had more honest relationships with parents. This is borne out in respondents' disclosures and in video recorded interviews (conducted by young people) with parents and a parent's close friends. Herein the accounts of young people and adults were consistent.

In the former case, two siblings and a close friend described their parents as 'more liberal than most' and recounted strategies for 'getting on' with them. This involved policies of honesty, empathising with the parental role (and worries about children) but with the requirement of according children the status of adults:

'... not keeping anything from her (mother). She is my Mum and she does worry and I understand that she wouldn't be a very good mother if she didn't worry, but that's not a reason to protect her. She doesn't lie to me so I'm honest with herabout owteverything' Alison (site 6)
'Yeah, thinking of your parents as friends is the best way, that's as long as they don't treat you like a kid' Sam (site 6).

Likewise Alison's mother argued (in video footage):

'You can't treat teenagers as children and whether we like it or not risk-taking is part of growing up' Jean
'I think you're right, preferring honesty to ignorance' John (Jean's friend).

Relevant to Horton participants' complaint about parents' double standards, Alison's mother stressed the need to avoid hypocrisy and reflect honestly on the experiences of her own youth:

'I grew up in the sixties, I was no angel, I can't pretend I've not tried drugs or had sex out of curiosity. Parents have to recognise the need to be honest about this'.

In addition to enjoying more genuine and equal relationships, another major difference between this and other groups was that this connectedness (and shared sense of 'concrete' experiences) was explicitly negotiated and worked at by both parent and child. To illustrate, both parties shared stories of events that necessitated a re-orientation of the relationship so that mutual agreement was reached. For instance, on the occasion of Alison and Joe's mother discovering drug use, the initial response was one of alarm:

'At first you were really shocked and worked up' Alison
'Yes I had real anxieties' Jean.

They explained that this was countered by:

'... talking about it calmly, asking questioning so that I could understand it' Jean

‘Eventually, after loads of talking, we came to an agreement on some ground rules on drug use or whatever it was we were discussing’ Alison.

So, rather than seeking to ban all drugs or sexual activity, a compromise was reached that felt fair to all. They also had ‘unwritten rules’ of agreeing ‘to sort it out there and then’ and ensuring disagreements didn’t end in stale mate:

‘Have healthy rows to clear the air. No one wants silence and guess work’ Jean.

Jean acknowledged that she found this aspect of her parenting role difficult since it involved,

‘... forcing myself to admit my kids aren’t children anymore’ Jean.

Yet Jean’s strategy had resulted in diminishing ‘the veil of ignorance’ (Benhabib 1992:167) that appeared to be still in place for the majority of young people’s parents in the data set. Jean’s children appreciated her efforts and both benefited from its positive impact on their relationship.

Though we cannot disregard that some individuals in this group were older (17 and 18 years) than those in other groups and therefore perhaps accorded more freedom, the ‘quality’ of relationship with parents was said to be less to do with transitions that come with age and adult status and more dependant on the liberal attitudes and past experiences of their parents.

Is teaching about caring?

Returning to the main data set, in discussing relationships with teachers, respondents were initially critical:

‘They (teachers) don’t really care about you, they just want their own way, full stop. You’d think they’d know better, aren’t they trained to know how to get on with us?’

Josie (her emphasis)

‘I suppose it might come into teacher training. But I suppose you can’t teach someone how to get on with everyone, it depends on different personalities doesn’t it?’ JH

‘That’s just a cop out - they could at least listen’ Josie

‘Isn’t teaching about caring?’ Jo

‘Yeah, they go on about involving us in school decisions - like we were on telly about interviewing for the new headmaster but when it came to it they just ignore what we think. They don’t respect what we think at all’ Dale.

They referred to a specific example of a ‘consultation exercise’ (their description) to decide whether a spare cloakroom should be used as a senior common room for year 11 students. Teachers were accused of paying lip service to the school policy of ‘consultation’ and ‘student rights’ wherein consultees’ responses went unheard or ignored:

'.... 'cos they knew already what they wanted, they just thought they had to 'cos they make a big thing out of the student charter. You just feel even more let down' Sean
'Some kids might be bad like you hear on telly and stuff but that's not all of us, we just get branded wi' same brush' Dale
'And why let someone be on the stupid *student committee* if you think they're not worth it and you're gonna ignore everything they say?' Maisie.

While these reflections signify essentialising tendencies about teachers, there were dissenting voices. Sean argued that some teachers care about pupils well-being but external and bureaucratic pressures work against this in demanding so much of their time;

'I feel a bit sorry for some of them 'cos they do care about how we are really, but they haven't got time any more. The problem is all the form filling and changes in what they have to teach. Mrs Smith told us she didn't agree with the history course but had to teach it' Sean.

Similarly, Josie pinpointed the National Curriculum as operating against student support needs:

'Teachers just do the teaching, they haven't got time to care. They used to care but the National Curriculum finished that off'.

It is notable that 'teaching' was perceived as mutually exclusive to 'caring'. This supports Smyth and Dow's (1998) observation that teaching has become bound by the external steerage of educational outcomes that leaves little time for person-centred learning and caring. When asked 'doesn't day to day teaching include caring?' they argued vociferously that the primary aim of lessons was the completion of rigid targets with little attention to anything else:

'You should be in our lessons. There's a task to get done for that lesson, get it ticked off, move on to the next one. It's tough if you can't do it or you're feeling a bit rubbish that day, you don't have a chat about how it's going, they (teachers) just seem in such a rush all the time. Then you move on to the next lesson and it starts again, this job for this day, that bit of work for that day, how many times do they say "this task had better be in on time or else"?' Jo
'Yeah you don't have time to think, it's boring and like there's just a ... a ... a boring routine. It can make you feel crap' Dale.

This has echoes of Giddens's notion of an 'expert system' that can threaten ontological security and self identity (1991). Similarly, it resonates with 'systems' in the Habermasian sense (1987) of bureaucratic processes and ideologies that are not linked by 'communicative action' and risk becoming *uncoupled* from the lifeworld of those it ostensibly serves (ibid.). This was illustrated in young people's perceptions that adjustment to change in education policy had negatively affected the quality of schooling experience and manifested in both the formal context (i.e. in lessons where teaching methods were experienced as 'uncaring'), and in the demise of caring regimes in the

informal curriculum. One teacher had explained his lack of time for informal pastoral duties:

‘Mr Williams even apologised to us for not having as much time to talk to us at break time and stuff ‘cos he had so much paper work to do. He said it wasn’t his fault and we should complain to the government’ Maisie.

In addition, they had witnessed changes in the role of pastoral year tutors from an agenda which centred on informal support to one of policing:

‘When we first came to this school our Year Tutor was great. She was always around before school, at breaks and dinner time and that, and you could drop in [to her room] and have a chat and that. Nowadays Year Tutors are just there to tell you off or do the dirty work of other teachers when you haven’t done your homework or cheeked one of ‘em off’ Maisie.

‘Yeah Year Tutors used to be them that you could talk to but now you just know that if they want to see you it’s to give you a bollocking. They’ll have a queue of other kids to tell off and they’ve got ten minutes to do it, so they “don’t have time for excuses” (mimics teacher)’ Dale

‘Miss Swanson told us that she wasn’t gonna be a Year Tutor anymore. Do you remember when she got really mad with us on top corridor and we were trying to explain what had gone off?’ Millie

‘Yeah and she said summat like “shut up and get out, talking isn’t a luxury I can afford anymore”’ ‘Josie.

These disclosures again support Smyth and Dow’s conclusions that educational processes tend to prioritise only those elements which can be quantified and therefore meet the need for documented evidence of outcomes (see chapter 7 for further discussion). Taking time to ‘talk’ and learn about young people’s wider concerns (i.e. those beyond curriculum based issues) are not validated by ‘outcomes rhetoric’ (1998:292) and thus regulate (Foucault 1979a) the experience of schooling. For young people, caught in these policy changes, the repercussions have been negative. But these data also suggest that this applies to teachers too insofar as they were keen to point out that external pressures were constraining their teaching role and experience (e.g. references to Mr Williams, Miss Swanson and Mrs Smith). But while they expressed a dissonance to external regulatory controls and acknowledged the transformative implications, teachers are seen to have submitted to a professional self-regulation (Foucault 1979a) that enhances the dichotomy between teaching and caring.

A decade since Coffield et al’s (1986) study of young people in the North East of England, it seems that little has changed in as much as (some) young people (particularly

those who are working class) remain as disenfranchised from adults as those in Coffield's work. It is arguable that 'the unofficial, unwritten contract between young people and society' (Coffield et al 1986:203) and adults is at best opaque and at worst broken down, be this contracts in the micro sphere of relationships or contracts in the macro domain of economics, employment, and education. By providing data on connections between present and future subjectivities (see theme 10), my study extends the parameters of Coffield et al's ideas in suggesting that disenfranchisement is not just an issue for young people during their teenage and schooling years, but rather what they experience during these years has a cumulative (and not easily shaken off) relevance for their future lives and opportunities. As Giddens (1984) and Habermas (1987) predicted, without recognition of the synergy between the macro and micro and the past and the present, there are consequences for both the subject and society. In this context of relationships between young people and adults, all subjects, that is, parents, teachers and teenagers (females in particular) lose out because reciprocal understanding is denied by the resistance to acknowledging 'concrete' or authentic realities. It follows that as a society we lose out because of the epistemological omissions or inaccuracies that result from assuming that 'generalised' readings of discourses and practices (Benhabib 1992) will suffice in providing appropriate support and educational interventions. Whereas the moral will to excavate the private/concrete worlds (ibid.) of young people, together with societal endorsement and reduction in prescriptions of how young people ought to be, holds potential to yield more sophisticated and accurate constructions of young people.

Theme 10: Futures, hopes and fears

This final analytic theme on respondents' perceptions of futures makes a particularly unique contribution to knowledge. Other studies of youth deploy data that position current identities and practices but the relationship to futures is not explored. For example, my study is comparable to work by Aggleton (1987), Griffin (1985a, 1986, 1993) Coffield et al (1986), Mac an Ghaill (1988, 1994) and Holland et al (1998) insofar as young people's private worlds are explored for their contribution to appreciating the social construction of female and male subjectivities and experiences, and their contradictions and tensions. These works also (like my study, but with varying emphases) position narratives in relation to normative constructs of adolescents, gender, the ideologies and practices of schooling and parenting, and wider implications of economic/material opportunity and inequality. While all these texts theorise on the impact of policy on future subjectivities, be this educational (Mac an Ghaill 1988, 1994, Aggleton 1987, Griffin 1986, 1993, Holland et al 1998), health (Holland et al 1998), or social/economic (Coffield et al 1986, Griffin 1985a, 1993) policy, empirical data from young people's perspective on future positionings is not included. In this sense my data take theoretical projections a step further in providing empirical corroboration.

Concepts applied

This theme makes further reference to concepts raised in the literature review and earlier analytic themes on the ways in which identities and practices are mediated:

- Giddens's (1991) notion of the reflexive self, and the challenges posed to ontological security by late modernity's expert or 'abstract systems' and perceptions of fateful episodes in the future lifecourse.
- Within this frame, insecurities are evidenced regarding previousness and futures and we gain a sense that some young people are 'struggling to keep [the] narrative going' (Giddens 1991:54) with some regarding their futures as less certain than others.
- This relates to the coding of embodied selves (Foucault 1988) and the classifying of self-worth based on specific forms of capital particularly that derived from gender, ethnicity/culture/family, social class and academic ability (Pini 1997). For some young people, distinct gendered (Smith 1988) and class-based (Bonney 1998) subjectivities are envisaged.

- The regulational and transformational effects of schooling (Foucault 1979a) and the family (Brannen et al 1994) and the potential of processes of education to colonise young people's lifeworlds (Habermas 1987) are seen to have structural and psychological implications in failing to endorse authentic identities (Giddens 1991) and at the same time reinforcing the capacity for reproducing some class and gender based subjectivities.
- The skills and confidence to deal with future challenges and new territories are seen to be related to class positionings and the currency this does or does not provide (Lucey and Reay 1999) for rationalising and mastering the fear of the unknown and sustaining a sense of who to be, how to be and how to act in future identities and practices.

In sum, ensuing data on young people's predictions for the future are aptly summarised by Giddens:

'Reflexively organised life planning, which normally presumes consideration of risks as filtered through contact with expert knowledge, becomes a central feature of the structuring of self-identity.' (1991: 5).

Currencies of capital and future subjectivities

Disclosures revealed a dichotomy regarding perceptions of the future. Somali and Pakistani young people assumed futures were mapped out quite definitely, whereas African Caribbean and white teenagers held less secure perceptions of the future. This related to differing assessment of the capital judged as necessary to equipping them in future roles and responsibilities. Somali and Pakistani young people's capital was largely based on ethnic and cultural mores that inhered specific expectations that all respondents declared intentions to fulfil (see 'certain futures' below). This imbued a certainty that in turn yielded greater confidence and negligible fears. Such was their certainty that disclosures centred on *expectations* rather than *hopes*. They were less reflective and had less to say concerning futures than white and African-Caribbean peers. This contrasts markedly with white and African Caribbean young people whose currencies of capital involved more numerous considerations and far less certainty, and juxtaposed desires for the future against inability to resist unappealing working class subjectivities and destinies (see 'uncertain futures' below).

Certain futures

Somali and Pakistani young people evaluated their futures on the basis of two types of capital (Bourdieu 1977). Most significant in its influence was cultural capital, particularly those resources acquired through the lifeworld (Habermas 1987) experience of adhering to the Muslim faith. The stocks of knowledge (Habermas 1986) derived from the norms and expectations of their religious creed, ethnicity, family, and wider Muslim community, prescribed particular expectations regarding marriage and parenthood. As a result, all predicted they would marry in their early twenties and excluded the possibility of marrying a non-Muslim. Females and males alike assumed they would become parents soon after marriage, with all wanting 'at least three kids' and no preference regarding the sex of the children. Their readiness to comply, and confidence that these expectations would be realised, related to their social capital (Van Campenhoudt et al 1997) and knowledge that this embraced social resources (such as kinship and community networks) that could be mobilised to achieve the desired ends of finding a spouse and settling down to rear a family. This evidences, as Giddens (1990) argues, that social capital is salient to constructions of self, particularly where identity is clearly embedded in social relations in particular cultural and geographic contexts. The constancy and predictable familiarity of these contexts rendered more confident speculation on the future.

The second, though less significant type of capital cited as influencing future identities and positionings by Pakistani and Somali young people, was economic or material capital. Security in employment was desirable, though the contrast with white and African Caribbean young people was marked, in that none expressed tangible fears regarding independent financial resources. There was some uncertainty regarding type of employment, but females and males assumed they would find employment while acknowledging the constraints imposed by limited educational and skills based qualifications. However, in contrast to African Caribbean and white peers, the merits of academic qualifications received only minimal comment compared to that of social capital, in that current social relations were credited as enhancing employment potential, particularly for males. Javed and Hanif were confident that should they not achieve entry qualifications for further education, employment could be secured through family and word of mouth community connections in the catering, retail and taxi industry. Here again social capital as linked to specific biographic journeys is seen as tangibly significant

to perceptions of identity in intersecting with other types of capital (Giddens 1991), in this case, future economic resources.

Females had less to say on material capital and made little comment on preferred type of employment when specifically asked, though Ruby had previously disclosed desires to work as a nursery nurse. All answered 'don't know' when asked for views on the 'ideal job'.

Uncertain futures

White and African-Caribbean young people perceived their futures with a pessimistic lack of confidence, having more *fears* than *hopes*, and were more readily able to say what they did not want as opposed to what they did. In response to the question 'how do you see your future?' (same question addressed by Somali and Pakistani peers) answers were situated in relation to biographic experience and positive or negative mental health status, such as situations/events and friends/collective identities that made them happy or unhappy. Thus more positive aspirations related to issues currently regarded as enjoyable, such as 'hopes' for a good social life:

'I'd like to think I'll be able to go out a lot' Josie
'.... like we are now having a laugh with your mates' Maisie.

Given that earlier justifications for current social lives included the alleviation of boredom, it was unsurprising that all feared boredom:

'I just don't wanna be bored if you can't go out and that, it would be terrible. I'd go mad' Sean.

Like their Pakistani and Somali contemporaries, future identities were linked to current material, cultural and social capital, but the meanings derived were different in that they focused on the negative consequences of structural inequalities and identities as future unemployed, lacking financial independence and the implications of early parenthood. In addition they emphasised the emotional burdens this might involve:

'If I can't get a job and have me own money and that, it'd be crap. On the dole you wunt [sic] be able to do owt wi' your life. You just **wouldn't be able to do owt**. I'd be depressed all t'time' Jo (her emphasis)
'It's just not knowing what you'll do, how you'll cope, especially if you've got kids. I'd go mad I think' Maisie.

These disclosures echo Giddens's (1991) and Beck's (1992) ideas that psychological unease can be linked to a heightened sense of insecurity regarding access to equality of

life chances in late modernity (Furlong and Cartmel 1997). This is explicable if we look to more specific data on competencies derived from different types of capital.

‘Certificates in crapness’

Academic achievement was judged as a major currency in mediations of self identity. Thus, for 15 and 16 year old African Caribbean and white students, imminent GCSE examinations figured significantly in perceptions of the future and contributed to feelings of low self-esteem. They did not view exams as a procedural formality in the sense of an aid or step in the pathway to further education or vocation but as a device to confirm others’ negative expectations and certify their ‘worth’ in the ‘real’ (post school) world:

‘I’m dreading my exams ‘cos they (teachers and parents) expect me to do bad and I will’ Angela
‘Yeah it’ll just prove what they’ve been expecting’ Sean
‘But your exam results might help you decide what you really want to do next?’ JH
‘Nar they’ll just be summat that reminds me I’m thick. Here’s your qualifications Sean, your certificate in crapness that you keep as a reminder for rest of your life. Certificates in crapness, that’s what I’ll get. I’ll get a great job with that’ Sean.

Hence this sense of academic inadequacy was not considered as something that might be corrected later in life but as irredeemable once sanctioned by the GCSE certificates - the official stamp of moral disapprobation, a millstone of failure.

The significant place of exam pressure/failure and its contribution to poor self-esteem was corroborated by all other groups with members in this age range. The perception that identity and self-worth can be judged entirely on academic merits exposed failings in educational philosophy and ways of conceptualising ‘success’:

‘But you shouldn’t judge who you are and what you’ve achieved just on what GCSEs you get’ JH
‘It dun’t matter what you think of yourself as a person, you know that really that’s not important ‘cos your exams are like your passport to the rest of your life and if you flunk it there’s no other way of letting people know what you’re really like’ Dale.
‘But you have achieved other things, you’ve moved on into becoming an adult, you’ve got an amazingly sorted view of the world with some well thought out and intelligent opinions. Doesn’t that matter?’ JH
‘No dunt count for owt in the real world’ Dale.

These and similar insights reveal a sense of being deprived of support and affirmation from people one assumes have the responsibility to expose ‘merit’ and personal development in all its guises. This obviously ties in with young people’s reflections on their limited relationships with teachers and parents (see theme 9). Furthermore, it

exposes that academic status was rigidly viewed as currency to success, and a commodity or mode of cultural capital that was not available to them.

Limited rites of passage

This latter point ties in with white and African Caribbean young people's realisation of their limited rites of passage and the related sense of anxiety about leaving school at sixteen. The opportunity to experience rites of passage (Van Gennep 1960) such as job security, economic independence, and living external to the family home, were considered unlikely because of their limited currency regarding academic capital, the depressed labour market, and absence of skills based apprenticeships.

While the majority did not enjoy school culture or studying, none looked forward to the prospect of leaving because of perceptions that this would lead to a concomitant imposition of adult responsibilities. The act of leaving school was seen as axiomatic to the granting of adult status - a paradoxical status that on one hand was desirable (for greater freedom and authenticity of self) but on the other feared¹ because of not feeling equipped emotionally or practically:

'I wanna leave school but it's scary. It's like you're leaving school byeeeee, off you go, you're an adult now having to fend for yourself but not having the job or dosh [money] to like get your own place or buy your own food or go out when you want 'cos you're skint. Like we said before we can't be going to park on a Friday for ever more but where will we get money to do owt else?' Maisie.

'Yeah it's like we'll probably be leaving with a certificate in nowt and no ways of sorting it out like wi a job or whatever' Sean.

The prospect of not gaining economic self-viability and related prestige and the effects on self-confidence of leaving school without a certificate of 'worth' (i.e. GCSEs) was seen as potentially precipitating moves into domestic security as a means of living independently from families. Only females were willing to admit this possibility:

'What do you think you might do if what Maisie or Sean say happens?' JH

'Dunno don't wanna think about it' Dale

'No idea, but I hope I don't get tempted to settle down and like live wi' somebody for a bit of security and to get away from home' Julie

'Yeah when you look at it like that you can understand why women have kids so young you might be bored and have no money and think well I might as well get on with having a family. There might be nowt else you can do' Maisie.

¹ This may be linked to what Selverstone (1989) calls fear of de-satirising from or emotionally leaving the family orbit towards independence.

In general, all agreed that this was not ideal but more easily resisted if able to gain financial independence. In reflecting on the limited capital bestowed by social class and economic standing, financial independence was the primary motivator for wishing to enter the job market. In speaking of 'jobs', there was no sense of considering employment as 'career', that is, they did not discuss jobs in relation to future self-identity, job satisfaction or career paths. This poor sense of ambition might again reflect the paucity of educational and family input on raising self-esteem, dealing with the challenge of future fateful decisions (Giddens 1991) and explaining resistance to looking at longer term prospects. Giddens's notion of 'existential isolation' (1991:9) and feelings of personal meaningless and lack of faith in abilities to self-actualise, accurately conveys the impression gained from hearing these resigned and gloomy narratives; this is not surprising if one considers that young people were not just deprived of support, but also had their authentic lives invisibilised and to varying degrees colonised (Habermas 1987) by some aspects of schooling (see theme 4 'Sex education'). This both fails to add to their competencies or resources, and has the potential to challenge, undermine and hence diminish any existing resources. This issue and its implications are developed further in chapter 7.

It is paradoxical and perhaps hopeful that at the end of this discussion, females asserted desires not to be financially dependent on a male partner, though they did not know how this would be achieved given the impending domestic roles they could not rule out:

'I'm gonna try to be independent of any man but you can't tell what'll happen. Like having kids and that' Maisie
'Yeah just try to have your own money, but they (men) don't have same housework (sic) and wifely (sic) jobs to do as women' Jo.

In fulfilling traditional gender representations, males had not considered they might ever be economically dependent on female partners:

'Can't imagine it but you never know. Don't wanna think about it' Dale

Finally, all African Caribbean and white teenagers predicted entering tertiary education, not primarily for further education but by default because of assuming they would not find employment.

Cultural capital and familial biographies

Disclosures have already touched on explanations derived from the cultural capital bestowed by derisory observation of family life and its constraints. These were explicated further in perceptions of futures:

'I don't want to end up like in my house just watching telly and being stressed up all the time by kids and arguments and the house, housework when it's untidy and needs looking after and all that' Angela.

Unlike Muslim peers, marriage and children were not revered:

'I don't want to think I'll end up with loads of kids and living with somebody that's a mistake' Maisie
'What do you mean, mistake?' JH
'Like a bloke that you just ended up with, but you shouldn't have' Maisie
'How might this happen?' JH
'If you got pregnant or you thought he were alright until you married him' Maisie
'Is that likely?' JH
'I hope not but you never know my Mam says you can never tell how they'll turn out' Maisie.
'What? Partners, husbands?' JH
'Yeah blokes' Maisie
'You don't know till you've lived wi' 'em for a bit' Julie.

Here we see identity as most definitely embodied and embedded (Giddens 1991) and as products contingent on current familial biographies and gendered roles and responsibilities (Doyal 1995). But in contrast to Somali and Pakistani peers who gave primacy to familial and ethnic/cultural mores in endorsing a positive sense of identity, African Caribbean and white females constructing motherhood and spousehood as deficit models of identity, with the potential to yield negative or spoiled identities (Goffman 1968). Cultural capital (particularly evidence of unhappy family life and intimate relationships) therefore had instilled a cynicism that made the possibility of reproducing family and gendered norms undesirable. This also intersects with earlier disclosures on relationships with adults, poor academic potential and consumer/economic capital:

'Even if you tried not to settle down and that, it's hard if you haven't got qualifications and no money to like sort yourself out and have a chance' Josie

Herein tensions arose between desirable identity and that considered more likely to actualise, because, as mentioned above, all females said they would probably settle down and have children because of negative perceptions of self potential and limited abilities and lack of power to resist such outcomes. This evidences identity as fluid, as always in the making, and as Jenkins asserts, identity is best understood, not as fixed, but 'processually ... [with] ... trajectories of being and becoming' (1996:75).

One of the most significant determinants in ending up in less than ideal relationship was the desire for intimacy and security. Julie's comment was agreed as representative of female and male views:

'I could see myself settling down 'cos I've got fed up with being on me own not being with someone special, someone I can talk to and you know just be close to. But that's a bit stupid 'cos if you're on your own for too long you might settle for someone who turns out to be the wrong person 'cos you just rushed in to it'.

Such desires for emotional support are arguably linked to earlier disclosures on poor inter-generational communication particularly between parents and teachers (see theme 9) and perceptions that 'maturer men' could satisfy emotional needs (see theme 3). The absence of significant individuals in whom they could confide or spend time with ('just being myself') was oft lamented as a barrier to greater happiness. This does not suggest that this is axiomatic to them 'settling down' prematurely but it endorses the point made before that meaningful support and guidance for fateful moments (Giddens 1991) such as entering intimate relations and parenthood can assist in preventing undesired outcomes, threats to ontological security (bid) and confident self-reliance. This is vindicated by the data resulting from involvement in the research process which evidences the capacity of these young people for reflexive consideration of their desires and destinies.

Furthermore, in feedback on participation in the research study, comments emphasised the role of the research interviews in helping them think and question who they were and what they wanted¹. The empowerment potential of 'talking', be this in interviews or other contexts, contrasts with disclosures situated in the public realm of schooling, particularly sex education lessons, that configured less confident constructs of self or opportunities to disclose authentic selves (see theme 4 'Sex education'). And here again it also makes salient the possible outcomes of processes of education that have the potential to diminish authentic experience through colonisation (Habermas 1987) and its regulational and transformational effects on subjectivities and the reproduction of class and gender based identities and practices.

¹ Examples of feedback include:

'It made me think about me. That I can have some choices. That I don't need to rush into things, relationships and that' Jo;

'It made me feel more confident about myself' Josie;

'We could off-load stuff. Stuff that normally you can't talk about wi' an adult. And you can think about different ways of dealing with it' Maisie;

'Just asking questions and getting sound advice. It's good' Sean.

Parental aspiration and reproduction of class based expectation

Data so far on white and African Caribbean young people illustrate a strong sense of Giddens's notion of fragile identities and personal meaninglessness (see chapter 3) that contributed to feelings of insecurity when they looked to future subject positions and identities. Lack of faith in their abilities to prevent undesired futures undoubtedly contributed to this almost universal phenomenon, but this was enhanced by fears that parents' aspirations (or more definite expectations in some cases) would or would not be realised.

Looking at the total sample, a dichotomy of parental aspirations was evidenced and differentiated on the basis of social class. Working class aspirations are more accurately interpreted as *hopes* than expectations (a distinction significant because of the degree of pressure resulting) and were often rather ambiguous, being of the 'just want the best for you' variety. Specifically this related to parents' concerns that offspring would not repeat their mistakes. Herein gender socialisation and the relationship to stereotypical expectations was made clear (Lees 1989), with different hopes for females and males. Furthermore females disclosed that their mothers were more likely than fathers to raise the issue of futures, whereas males were more aware of their fathers' expectations. For females, mothers' concerns typically focused on avoiding the reproduction of domestic roles and responsibilities:

'My mum just says work hard and don't make a mess of it like me' Millie
'What does she mean?' JH
'She means don't get pregnant when you're sixteen like she did' Millie
'Yeah my mother said that to me' Maisie.
'Yeah and mine' Julie

In contrast males were only aware of expectations relating to potentials to secure employment and economic viability:

'My Dad just says don't end up like me with no job' Sean
'Yeah my Dad says make sure you end up doing summat you enjoy. That's 'cos he dunt like his job' Dale
'Mine wants me to have enough money for stuff he never had' Sean.

So while females and males were subject to different aspirations, all were related to parents' anxieties about the capacity for reproduction of family experience.

Respondents from more middle class families, notably those from Burton school, disclosed no delineation on grounds of gender with regard to parental expectations.

Furthermore, they were not just *hopes*, being more specifically and explicitly articulated

as 'pressures to succeed'. Both females and males described fears of academic under-achievement linked to pressures to emulate the professional success of their parents:

'My parents are always going on about working hard or flunking my exams and how I'll let them down if I don't get into university' Amy

'I've got that, they just expect me to do law at university and join their firm they know I've got no chance but they ignore it it's a big, big pressure' Gordon

'I've just got to cope to accept that I'll never live up to what they want. I'm one big disappointment to them and there isn't a day goes by when they don't tell me that' Grant.

Unlike Somali and Pakistani peers, both working class and middle class white and African Caribbean teenagers were unable to speak of futures without inclusion of feelings that some failure was inevitable vis-à-vis parents' projections. But there is a cleavage which distinguishes the classes. Working class young people shared their parents' aspirations of not making the same 'mistakes', and with a degree of resistance, but the potential for *undesired* reproduction was unwelcome and commonplace. Conversely, middle class young people felt subject to greater parental pressure, but this was related to predictions of failing to meet parents' expectations for maintaining family norms. In other words reproduction was *desirable*.

Such perceptions of poor potential and consequential low self-esteem can again be linked to inadequate communication and support for fateful episodes and decision making. This was supported by disclosures from the self-selecting friendship group (site 6), most of whom grew up in middle class households but were exceptional in having parents with whom they communicated honestly and effectively (see theme 9 'Relationships with adults'). These young people articulated positive aspirations that were unburdened by parents' expectations and often endorsed through consultation with parents. This does not infer that parents always agreed with their children's decisions, rather they invested a right to teenagers' self autonomy that was not limited by parental ambition or personal experience:

'Our parents just respect our right to get on with our lives. They don't always agree with us but they'll always support us and understand why we did or will do certain things' Charlie.

This was markedly dissimilar to those who had not benefited from discussion with parents/adults about concerns for the future or insecurity regarding abilities to make informed fateful decisions:

'They don't think about what it's like for us. We've got loads of decisions to do in the future, you don't know what's round the corner, and we're on our own with that' Julie.

Future identity, space and place

Related to fateful moments is the specific dilemma associated with the confidence to seek out and experience new territories and experiences. Middle class interviewees had been helped by parents to take on new challenges and develop self-empowerment:

‘It’s like they won’t make the decisions for you ‘cos in the end you have to be independent. But I’ve done loads of stuff and been places ‘cos my Mum encouraged me’ Alison.

‘Such as?’ JH

‘Well like I got a part time job ‘cos my mum dared me to apply and I got it. She said we’d deal with it together if I didn’t get anywhere with it’ Alison

Yeah when I were switching to college my dad was really supportive and said “you’ve just got to be brave and see it as a challenge whether you succeed or not you’ll feel good about it after”. He was right and all ‘cos you tried it at least’ Charlie.

Such parental help in rationalising fears of the unknown as a pre-requisite to broadening geographic and biographic horizons supports the afore mentioned work by Lucey and Reay (1999) that (some) middle class young people are less fearful than (some) working class young people in transcending the psychological and physical boundaries of experience that might limit transformations in identity and empowerment. Theme 1 (‘Social lives: identity in context’) drew attention to how respondents from Horton School conceptualised collective identity in relation to experience of space and place (such as that associated with the park and flat above the take-away food outlet). As Thrift (1997:160) argues:

‘Places form a reservoir of meanings which people can draw upon to tell stories about and thereby define themselves’.

Place and identity as powerfully connected, have been conceptualised particularly within urban geography, as involving processes of exclusion (See Massey 1995, Byrne 1999) especially that deriving from gendered differences in the experience of place and space (Valentine 1990, Pain 1991, Rose 1993) and the exclusionary impact (on women of all ages) of perceived dangers associated with masculinised public spaces. My data support that by Lucey and Reay that the experience of public and new spaces and places is also structured by other social power relations, notably, class, culture, age and race/ethnicity. While Pakistani and Somali young people had few desires to broaden current horizons, and appeared content with the territories open to them bestowed by cultural capital, African Caribbean and white young people lamented that current locales were set to change and feared this crossroads in transformations. However the emotional elements in disclosures (see also theme 1) posit an additional structuring dimension. Place is not constructed only as a physical locale but as space associated with boundaried and

localised practices that endorse ontological security (Giddens 1991) because of the significant meanings they mediate for individual and group identity (McDowell 1996). In this frame, space and place invest powerful emotional and cultural resonances and procure an important distinction, as McDowell argues, between space as relational and place as a location or a structure of feeling focused on a specific territory (Williams 1977):

'It's just that going to new places and meeting new folk, it's scary 'cos you don't know them and they don't know you and you can't be yourself' Josie

'Yeah, you like worry that they'll judge you and that. I can't be doing with it. I'll avoid all that if I can' Sean.

'What about after school and college or whatever you'll do?' JH

'Dunno, don't wanna think about it. It'll take ages to get on with what you're meant to be doing, college, work, or whatever cos you'll not be your self, with all new people you don't know and that' Sean.

A significant premise (and highly relevant to my data) in work on identity, space and social exclusion, is that the perceptions of new places are mapped out on a psychic level. This processing appears rather passive for young people who do not benefit from supportive adults. Rather than taking on new challenges (as in Charlie's example above) working class interviewees were more inclined to avoid new challenges or remain vaguely ambiguous in answers to specific questions on future territories. In this way we see that the material and symbolic capital of the Horton group produced and shaped their boundaries and defensive strategies, or geographies of exclusion. For example, the park group spoke about not being 'posh enough' to access clubs or alternative peer groups, being more confident among friends with comparable home lives. In turn, this enhanced their peer group solidarity (see theme 2). Similarly, Ruby had no desire to venture beyond socialising that centred on her family and Muslim community; Hanif and Javed marked out their socialising in relation to the snooker hall and flat, and specified the identities of young women they mixed with. These spatially segregated identities create a psychic distancing that differentiates 'us' (the 'park' group, Muslim female group, or 'flat' group) from 'them' (others) and provides a strategy, as Cohen (1996) contends, for justifying 'keeping to ourselves' and keeping 'others' out. This lack of mixing and resistance to new challenges (of space, place and people) to identity, seemed to have direct consequences not only for limiting social horizons, but also social maturity, for their main domain of sociality operated in a closed system of influences. Thus as Giddens (1991) would argue, without appropriate support they are slow and restricted in discovering their skills to deal with new horizons, perspectives and competencies -

reskilling that is so useful to dealing with fateful moments and socially adept adulthood (ibid.). Thus it comes as no surprise to learn that some (particularly the park group) are fearful of the independence that adulthood is perceived to impose. With knowledge of the time-bound demise of the security of the park and related collective identity, their psycho-spatial differences are challenged and they are not confident of their strategies for dealing with this. As teenagers part of the protective cocoon (Giddens 1991) of schooling and the regulatory effects of material, social and cultural capital, they safely and confidently regulate other groups of young people to the outposts of otherness, but, the dawning realisation of a future need to cross the line between 'them' and 'us' in the adult world, imbues powerful insecurities and feelings of potential alienation and loss of belonging.

Blaming selves and coding success

This returns us to the importance of expert systems (Giddens 1991) (e.g. schools, teachers, pastoral year tutors) and parents in assisting young people's confidence to develop agency and actively seek out new territories and opportunities. While I do not intend to fuel the 'discourse of derision' (Ball 1990b) epitomised in the right wing rhetoric of commentators aiming to undermine State schooling (Delamont 2000), it remains arguable that (some) young people's social, emotional, academic and employment potential is being jeopardised by the failure to embody reflexive modernity in the goals and processes of schooling and education. As Sara Delamont (2000:104) argues, sociology should bewail the lack of data on this subject for it has important consequences for the ways in which society reproduces subjectivities and its labour force. What is more certain from my data is that adults'/teachers' reflexivity could begin to match that of young people, by learning and listening to narratives of authentic identity, practice and aspiration, to gain a sense of young people's perspective, for as Giddens contends:

'In order to have a sense of who we are, we have to have a notion of how we have become, and of where we are going'. (1991:54).

The lack of support for keeping the biographic 'narrative going' (Giddens 1991:54), and a more nuanced and sensitive understanding of the complexity of young people's lives, was seen to have significant and tangible implications for constructs of self and measures of personal capital - perceptions of identity, as linked to deficits in individual capital,

were permeated with self-blame and shame. All those with poor parent-child relationships and negative perceptions of schooling held unanimous feelings that their future status rested on individual merits and thus failure to achieve would be explained on individual grounds. When asked the direct question, 'how will you explain it to yourself if you don't live up to what your parents want for you?', all responses (irrespective of social class) looped back to self blame:

'I should have worked harder, got on with my schoolwork, listened to my teachers who've always said I'll regret all my messing about' Maisie (site 1)
'Well I'm just crap' Gordon (site 2)
'I'm a waste of space, don't try hard enough, never have' Grant (site 2)
'I was destined to let them down, so in one sense I've lived up to what they expected' Amy (site 2).

None had considered the possibility of a link between failing to meet potential and the effects of internalising (Foucault 1979a) negative ascriptions made by self and others. In other words all looked to individual and (in most cases) internal traits for explanation. In effect, they were demonstrating a reflexive awareness that more positive definitions of self had limited currency, being inextricably linked to the power of dominant external ways of coding (Foucault 1979a) 'success'. In other words, young people did not see themselves as a blank canvas but as embodied selves - over the coding of which they had little control. Internalisation of this coding has led, as Foucault predicted, to self-regulation and contributed to a resultant sense of limited self-worth.

A Foucauldian perspective (1979a, 1988) or poststructuralist perspective more generally, is particularly relevant here in recognising that subjects are never free of power with specific cultural and historical ideas inscribed as codes. As discussed in chapter 3, these are set out by the knowledge/power process of surveying and classifying bodies to give meanings to identity such as ability, race, gender etc. (Pini 1997). Taking Foucault's notion of where there is knowledge there is power, young people had awareness of this knowledge and were utilising the power as resistance in speaking up and challenging the establishment or institutionalised 'truth' (Jenkins 1996) during research interviews. However, they were all too aware of the limited influence of this resistance to their regulation outside this research study context. As experience had shown them, resistance or challenge (to school policy for instance) rarely resulted in personal gain and more often resulted in punishment or sense of failure (see theme 9). This realisation partially explains their reticence to dwell on far-sighted speculation of what futures hold for them.

Equally, dismal feelings regarding longer term social and economic potential contributes to appreciating why the physical body and its place in enjoyment was such a major theme in reflections. With feelings of being able to resist or manage little else in their lives it is understandable that the body became a primary vehicle for articulating identity (Burkitt 1999) and the achievement of pleasure (Weeks 1995b) and exertion of control. The use of 'secret' social lives, alcohol, cigarettes, other drugs and sex can be seen as resistance to and a staking out of independence from parental or societal regulation. Through elaborate organisation and strategies for concealment they are invested with the control to give alternative or more welcome meanings to their identities, creating what McRobbie (1994) describes as oppositional identities.

However, while oppositional identities have significance in investing power in the short term, these same resistant teenagers are anxious about the fateful moments of leaving school and home when they will no longer be subject to such stringent controls and therefore familiar resistances are not anticipated as carrying the same capital. What do identities look like that aren't subject to the regulatory systems of schooling and the family? Of course there will be other regulators but it is the knowledge of not knowing what their identity or the regulators look like that makes them fear the future so much. This seems laudable if considered in relation to the greater confidence of Pakistani and Somali young people when considering futures. Based on available evidence, females in particular had no such oppositional identities in the sense of not having alternative or secret ways of being, and thus, their identities were unlikely to undergo huge changes once free of the regulatory orbits of parents and schooling. Moreover projections to the future could be made with some degree of certainty. This might account for the greater confidence apparent among Pakistani and Somali teenagers when discussing futures.

For white and African Caribbean teenagers, oppositional identities undoubtedly served some purpose by investing a degree of control and setting out towards independence but this should not obscure the simultaneous and undermining effects of feeling insecure about alternative identities and ignorance of what authentic identities actually look like in future lives.

Summary

The preceding section has illustrated that some of the problems young people envisaged (e.g. life after GCSEs, worries about unemployment) were enhanced by feeling forced to negotiate them at an individual level. This holds true especially for African Caribbean and white teenagers who had subjective perceptions of uncertainty in perceiving difficulties as individual shortcomings (eg. predicting they would not get jobs because they have no certificates of 'worth', because, in turn, they are 'thick'). While they were aware of depressed labour markets, and changes in educational policy, they did not use these to explain their poor prospects. Similarly, under-achievement was not seen as resulting from processes which were largely outside their control, such as, the consequences of material circumstances and/or lack of compensatory mechanisms in schooling resulting from crises in education and employment. As Furlong and Cartmel conclude, in conceptualising the place of young people in late modernity,

'Blind to the existence of powerful chains of interdependency, young people frequently attempt to resolve collective problems through individual action and hold themselves responsible for their inevitable failure' (1997: 114).

Analysing my data in macro terms, it is not difficult to impute structural explanations particularly that of class inequality, as in earlier studies of sub-cultures (e.g. Willis 1977, Mungham and Pearson 1976, Corrigan 1979, Patrick 1973, and Aggleton 1987). But the difference here is that today's youngsters do not actively embrace such meanings in explaining their position, or, more accurately, have been brought up to underestimate their influence. Instead of relying on collectivised social identities, they represent moves towards conceptualisation of individualised (Beck 1992) social identities and personal responsibility thereof. Furlong and Cartmel argue this is the result of life in late modernity revolving around an 'epistemological fallacy' (1997: 5) wherein the process of diversification within the labour market and schooling obscures underlying class relations. To illustrate, non-selective (comprehensive) education and the movement away from explicit streaming in schools, and strategies to conceal the true extent of youth unemployment (such as illegibility for unemployment at 16 years, youth training/employment schemes), may provide the impression of greater equality and individualisation, but they do not provide anything of substance for young people to explain their exclusion from mainstream opportunity. There is no doubt that these young people's subjective perceptions of uncertainty and separation from collectivity represent

part of longer term historical and political process that is closely associated with privileging individualism over collective responsibility. For Pakistani and Somali young people who had clearer futures because of choosing to adhere to familial and ethnic/religious identities and mores, the impact of such individualism was ameliorated, and to a degree absolved responsibility from individual selves to cultural collectivities, while at the same time diluting the significance of academic under-achievement and its influence on poor self-esteem.

Finally, this state of affairs seems set to continue if generalised readings of identity and practice are not infused with knowledge of the 'concrete' other (Benhabib 1992). Young people's narratives that position the past and present in relation to the future suggest the two standpoints remain distinct and even oppositional. Chapter 7 dissects this assertion in more detail.

Synthesis: Fabrication and colonisation

Further interpretation of themes raised in preceding discussions is presented in this final chapter of the findings, to make the knowledge claims of this thesis more explicit. These claims would not be possible were it not for the methodological exactitude which was so successful in accessing previously unresearched insights. These aspects of the analysis were postponed to this stage so as not interrupt the schema of findings nor detract too far from the disclosures as young people articulated them. It includes some already familiar data and some which have not been deployed previously.

First, the identities and practices that young people disclosed as reflecting their ‘authentic’ sexual lives are considered in relation to the perspectives presented in the ‘official view’, or by the ‘expert system’ (Giddens 1991). The latter denotes that promoted in respondents’ experience of sex education and ‘family planning’ clinics. In order to emphasise the differences between the ‘authentic’ and the ‘official’, the two perspectives are positioned alongside each other in a table (table A). Presenting them in this stark manner obfuscates nuances, contradictions and opacities, and could therefore be seen as an over-deterministic analysis. My hope is that the analysis of data presented so far, with its density and complexity, diminishes any sense that I understand the data in either a generalised or reductionist way. Rather, the table makes a bold statement

intended both to emphasise the analytic point, and draw out the aspects that participants saw as particularly salient. Here I draw on ideas by Gayle Rubin (1989) and Mary Douglas (1966) but, in contrast to their original conceptualisations, I insert the relevance of young people's perspectives to understanding bounded identities and symbolic classifications.

The dichotomies between the 'authentic' and the 'official' views are then considered for their influence on the 'fabrication' (Ball 1997) of identities and practices; the potential of the 'expert system' to colonise (Habermas 1987) young people's lifeworlds; and the regulatory effects of processes of education on subjectivities and identities. Within this, I apply a theoretical concept formulated by Smyth and Dow (1998), and provide an empirical illustration that Smyth and Dow admit their theory lacks. The findings are brought together by synthesising the various elements and processes at work into a summarising diagram (diagram B).

Positioning official and authentic discourses

The evidence presented in previous analytic themes renders visible the differences between young people's version of authentic lives and that promulgated and assumed in official versions by professionals. Applying Foucault's ideas (see chapter 3), we are left with two quite different 'rituals of truth' (1979b: 194) with distinct discourses to describe, identify and explain sexual practice. The processes of power or 'biopower' (Foucault 1979a) used in sex education and sexual health provision (which may not have been consciously used, but are nevertheless identifiable), are argued as constructing their own system to suit ideological conventions and appropriations of 'desirable' (good) and 'undesirable' (bad) sexuality¹. This resonates with Mary Douglas's (1966) idea that boundaries of identity can be reinforced by symbolic classifications that are based on 'appropriate' and 'inappropriate behaviour'. Such classifications contribute to increasing pressures to conform, or conceal, the identity and practices perceived as 'inappropriate'. Reflecting my findings, Douglas suggests that anomaly and contradiction within the 'ideal' type appropriations, also attract a particularly symbolic load (1966:42). This was

¹ The terms 'good' and 'bad' are those used by young people; they are not my descriptions.

witnessed in the anger young people articulated (see 'Anomalies between educational input and sexual experience' in theme 4) in explaining the moralising tendencies of methods and content of sex education teaching, and consultations at the 'family planning' clinic. The lack of relationship to their lives, together with contradictions and double standards, was especially significant to them. In sex education lessons, the proclivity towards ambiguity and non-evidence-based practice, seemed to occur regardless of young people's experience. This contributes (along with more direct indicators) to reproducing existing representations that had little semblance to reality.

Rubin's model

Gayle Rubin (1989) follows Douglas's and Foucault's lead in seeking to understand the mechanisms by which these regulative powers operate. In *Thinking Sex*, Rubin (1989) arranges beliefs about 'good' and 'bad' sexuality into a diagram that identifies degrees of social acceptability and unacceptability among a range of social and sexual institutions and practices (see Rubin, p.281). 'Good', normal, natural, 'blessed' (i.e. 'desirable') sexuality is at the top of the hierarchy, and Rubin refers to this as the 'inner charmed circle' of identity and practice. At the lower end of the hierarchy, or in the 'outer limits' of the circle, is bad, abnormal, 'damned' sexuality.

Rubin is concerned with understanding the experiences of those most marginalised by mainstream society (here she uses examples of transvestites, transsexuals and sadomasochists), but her ideas make no reference to ethnicity or young people's perspective. This fails to capitalise on the relevance to more routine structuring agents, such as those that typify 'youth' and ethnic identity. Hence I have broadened her original conceptualisation by adapting it, and using it as an heuristic device to position young people's actual experience with that represented in 'official' or adult/professional accounts¹.

¹ In presenting and naming the 'official view', I acknowledge that this is a textual construction that does not apply universally, inasmuch as not all adults subscribe to it, nor live out their lives accordingly. However, this is the essential point, because young people recognise the lack of authenticity and contradictions that make this 'official view' redundant. Hence, the starkness of the 'official view' is not representational in absolute terms, but is representational of the starkness by which their worlds were typified in sex education.

Applying Rubin's model to young people's experience

Where Rubin uses the term 'inner charmed circle' to denote the institutional i.e. dominant view, I have used the term 'official view'; where she uses 'outer sanctum' to typify the non-institutional 'outer limits' view, I have substituted the term 'young people's view'. See table A below. The characteristics of 'clean', sanitised, married sex, that appear in the 'official view' are those that young people perceived sexual health professionals as promoting, i.e. the 'ideal', 'best' and 'acceptable'. Because young people received no signs to the contrary (apart from the respondents in site 6 whose negative experience of sex education was ameliorated by the more positive attitudes of parents), their practices, and the discourses involved, were relegated to the confines of the 'outer' realm. Respondents, particularly females, interpreted this as meaning that their practices are unacceptable or 'bad'; and as oppositional to, or flaunting the authority of, the 'official view'. This depiction of contrasts should not be construed only as an analysts' interpretation because, as disclosures mentioned earlier testify, young people came to the same conclusion:

'...if you're **always** doing the exact opposite to what they're telling us is right you're bound to feel bad' Maisie

'..... if sex is meant to be being married or being in love, and you aren't any of those things then what are you? Bad, bad, bad, wrong, wrong, wrong' Millie.

My appropriation of her model makes conspicuous the differences between young people's version of their lives and that promoted in the 'official view'. Moreover it makes visible the negative meanings that young people felt were conveyed by the 'official view'. The 'official view' codes sexual identity as white, heterosexual, married, and monogamous. Sexuality is reduced to sexual practice and concerned with vaginal penetration for the purposes of procreation. All of which occurs at 'home', with warmth and privacy, and in the absence of alcohol. The only common factor between the two versions is heterosexuality, with some vaginal penetration, but for young people the latter represents only one aspect of their sexual repertoire (see theme 3 for corroboration). In all other aspects, young people's experience violates the normative expectations of the proscribed model for sexual conduct. This model for sex education does not accord the level of complexity necessary to appreciate young people's range of experience.

Table A: A comparison of the ‘official’ view of sexual identity and practice with young people’s ‘authentic’ view. Adapted from Rubin (1989: 281).

THE ‘OFFICIAL’ VIEW (based on sex education)	YOUNG PEOPLE’S VIEW (authentic identity & practices)
Adult	Youth/teenager
Married	Unmarried
Heterosexual	Heterosexual but homosexual included
White	Pakistani, African Caribbean, white
Monogamous	Serial partners
Coupled	Coupled and alone (masturbation)
In a relationship/committed/long term	Casual/no commitment/short term
‘Love’	Not ‘in love’
Procreative	Non-procreative
Vaginal penetration	Vaginal and anal penetration; Non-penetrative
Dominant male (‘on top’)	Either sex dominant
At home (indoors)	Outdoors (in the park) Indoors (not at home)
In bed	Never in bed
Warmth	Cold, rain
Private	Public (with others in vicinity)
Clothes off	Most clothes on
Solemnity	Pleasure/hedonism
Sober	Accompanied by alcohol/drug use
RESULT	
Sanitised/clean	‘Dirty’ (literal and metaphorical)
‘Good’	‘Bad’
Normal	Abnormal

While it is important to establish the reasons why professionals (might choose to) perpetuate the falsehood of this single ideal of sexuality, it remains the case as Foucault observed (1979a) that it serves as an agent of the state to control types of sexuality and sexual expression that do not conform to the dominant orthodoxy:

‘.. pedagogy, medicine, and justice, incite, extract, distribute and institutionalise the sexual discourse’ (p.33).

Young people can become defenceless victims of this process of institutionalisation, if the emotional significance of the meanings conveyed are not acknowledged. Potentially, this has far reaching effects, for as table A documents, some young people end up believing that their identity is typified (literally and metaphorically) by the descriptors of ‘dirty’, ‘bad’ and ‘abnormal’.

Obfuscating and reproducing effects

The empirical evidence deployed here highlights, albeit in stark terms, the potential for young people’s authentic experience and identity to be obfuscated by the more powerful discourses used in sex education and sexual health provision. Diagram B (below) suggests a model for summarising the ‘processual’ (Jenkins 1996:75) nature of this phenomenon, and its implications for identity. The narrative that follows describes each of the stages in the process.

In conceptualising young people as subjects in the classroom and sexual health clinics there develops an appreciation first, of reasons why these teenagers ‘fabricated’ (Ball 1997) themselves to avoid the ‘gaze’ or judgements of those with power over them (see chapter 3). This was the only way to avoid punitive repercussions (such as breaches of confidence, restrictions on freedom) or gain what they desired (e.g. contraceptive pill) with minimal interrogation. As discussed previously, this did not occur in the active sense with young people consciously creating synthetic representations. Rather, the ethos and processes inherent in the teaching of sex education and service encounters at ‘family planning’ clinics used a discourse that was perceived as prescriptive and judgmental, and in so doing, did not create a climate that facilitated a sense of safety for more honest disclosure. This discouraged young people from believing that authentic accounts would be welcomed. Thus, they fabricated identities and practices, and hence became unintentionally compliant, in efforts to secure desired outcomes or minimise judgements.

These two sets of discourse manipulate representations and as a result there develops a dislocation between educational practice/service provision and the behaviours they ostensibly intend to influence. The failure to acknowledge young people's meanings and experience yields little potential for mediating safer sexual practice.

Situating this theoretically, we can see the potential for some young people's lifeworlds to become colonised (Habermas 1986) and hence restricted by the power of an alienating discourse that hinders mutual understanding and communicative action (ibid.). The system remains in control of power by using impersonal and theoretical scenarios, and a language that is ambiguous, scientific, and distancing (see theme 4 'Sex education as service encounter', and theme 7 'Discourses of sex and sexuality').

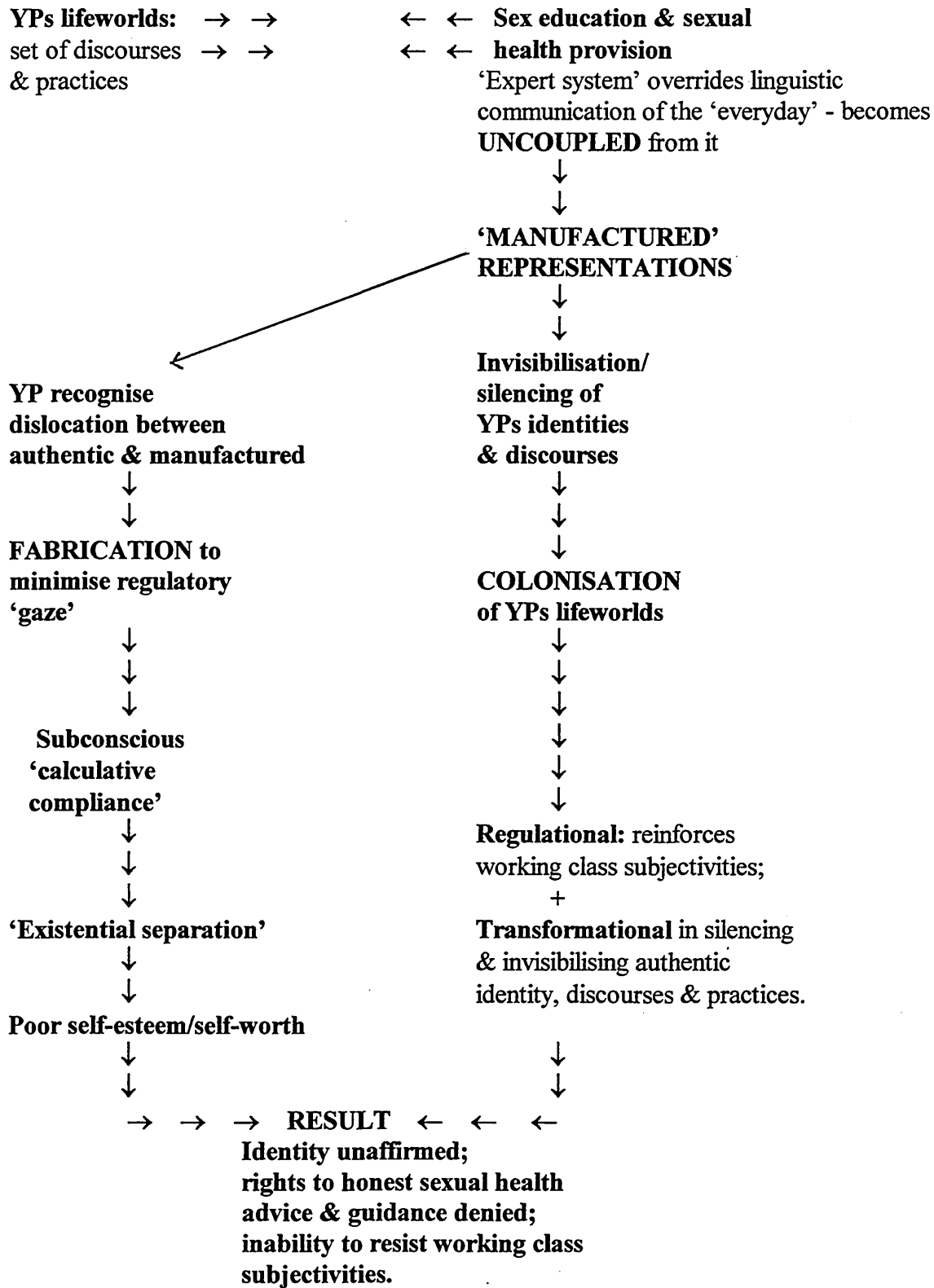
While this analysis focuses on the alienating effects of discourses of the sexual, it does not follow that the effects are restricted to this aspect of identity, for sexuality was seen to permeate all aspects of identity (see theme 3 of findings). As Foucault observed,

'Nothing that went into [one's] total composition was unaffected by ... sexuality' (1979a: 43).

Another effect is the internalisation of the mismatch between the *assumed* 'ideal' or 'good' sexual identity, and the *real*. However much some young people tried to resist taking notice of the 'ideal' construction of sexual identity and practices, the effects of the meanings conveyed were often too powerful. This created a repressive self-regulation wherein personal experience becomes insignificant with little worth, meaning or validity. As we saw in theme 10, this can have tangible and far-reaching consequences for confidence and self-esteem, so that some teenagers were beginning to feel increasingly ill equipped for future subjectivities and expected ways of being. Giddens refers to this as a process of psychological, 'existential isolation' (Giddens 1991:9).

Taking together the scenarios described in reflections on sex education and sexual health provision, we saw how dominant forms of power were realised and reproduced. These inscribed a way of being for both teenagers and adults (professionals and parents) wherein debate and controversy were subsumed by all parties adhering to a system that permitted little questioning. While participants maintained that the adults in their lives were equally as sceptical (as themselves) of the falsehood of the 'official view', there was

Diagram B: Process of invisibilising young people's identity and silencing their discourse and practice. (YP = young people)



no vehicle to make this heard or be legitimised, thus the power of traditional proscriptions was maintained. It is arguable that this mechanism contributes to maintaining the pervasive myths about 'alternative' sexualities, and the 'sin of youth' (Foucault 1979a:117). Without a recognised counter discourse, the regulative mechanisms of education can appear justified.

For some young people the failure to invest in their authentic experience and validate it with understanding and appropriate support rendered them with little by way of resources to meet the challenges of fateful moments (Giddens 1991) in future adulthood. They feared the assumed impositions of independence and responsibility for self, and past experience had instilled the belief that they should conceal their true identity:

'We're on our own once we leave school. If they don't care about what we need now, what will we do then? I can never be honest about myself or my past' Maisie.

Furthermore, data leave little doubt that this perception had enhanced their scepticism towards health promotion agencies, and their reticence to utilise such services, because of the belief they will not be heard:

'Because of who we are, we'll always be ignored. They'll just look at us or hear us and think "working class"' Josie
'What do you mean?' JH
'They won't listen and they'll tell us what they want, not, what we want' Josie (her emphasis).
'What do they want?' JH
'Well they don't want to listen 'cos you don't get listened to if you're not posh. ... It's like the way we talk and that, they, like, judge us for being like, like, common I suppose' Josie
'Does that affect how they treat you or help them get what they want?' JH
'Yeah 'cos they don't listen, they aren't bothered about us, don't take time with us, just give ya the pill or whatever to get you out of the room, they're not interested in like how you are or how you feel' Josie.
'They just expect lasses like us to get pregnant, and don't do owt to help us not do that. They think it's not worth bothering' Jo
'And you think that definitely influences how they talk to you?' JH
'Yeah, if they thought we were posher or brainier, I bet they'd take more time to talk to you, and tell ya to think about your school work, and your future' Jo.

Here we see recognition of a class based sexuality and suspicions that particular constructs of sexuality are applied differently to different identities. Foucault recognised this potential in arguing that,

'.. sexuality is originally, historically bourgeois, and that, in its successive shifts and transpositions, it induces specific class effects.' (1979a: 127)

Thus in addition to colonisation (Habermas 1987) as a *form* of power that can contribute to oppression, these females recognised class power as exercising structural inequalities. Moreover such pigeonholing of identity is identified as contributing to assumptions about

the reproduction of working class subjectivities. This can reinforce young people's negative sense of self, for as we saw in earlier themes (see theme 10), African Caribbean and white young people were unable to speak of futures without inclusion of the unwelcome potential for reproduction of family norms. They configured familial histories as a deficit model of identity. Related to this white and African-Caribbean females were particularly concerned that they might lack other resources (such as educational qualifications, financial independence) to resist repetition of parents' biographies, and conceded they might end up in less than ideal relationships, particularly because of desires for intimacy and security. Fears for the future were also heightened by perceptions that any personal problems would be translated as individual shortcomings:

'You aren't gonna ask 'em to help you if they just gonna blame you for being daft, or stupid, or whatever. It'll just make you feel worse.' Julie

Accepting personal responsibility had unsettling repercussions in reinforcing feelings of being alone and unheard:

'You're on your own with it really. That's scary, knowing it's up to you, 'cos nobody's gonna listen to you' Maisie.
'Do you feel left out? You know, sort of excluded?' JH
'Too right' Maisie (nods of agreement from Jo, Julie, Josie, Angela).
'Well there's nowt we can tell you that makes us think it's any different' Jo
'You mean there's nothing that contradicts your feelings of being left out?' JH
'Yeah, I wish there was, but there in't [is not]. They, adults and that, get on with what they've got to do, and we're nowhere in that' Jo.

The following quotation captures the situation as these young women perceived it:

'We have learned to set aside as irrelevant, to deny, or to obliterate our own subjectivity and experience. We have learned to live inside a discourse that is not ours and that expresses and describes a landscape in which we are alienated and that preserves that alienation as integral to its practice'.(Smith 1988:36).

External steerage of policy and practice

The question that remains is, why has change been so slow in recognising the needs of marginalised groups or 'hidden' voices? One way forward is to make links between the colonisation of young people's lifeworlds by systems of the state (particularly education and medicine), and more formal measures that are used to inject control and regulation. Giddens (1994) argues that in the contemporary era, representations are manufactured by desires to create the impression of predictability, in an age of great uncertainty. Unravelling the processes involved in this manufacturing were helped by Smyth and

Dow's (1998) paper on manoeuvres in Australian educational policy to reposition the state's role in education. Though the emphasis is different, their conclusions echo some of Ball's (1997) thoughts (see chapter 3) on the synthesising or fabrication of educational practice to meet the demands of external inspection (in his example, OFSTED inspections). Smyth and Dow's argument is that outcomes set by the state over-regulate (and restrict) what goes on in schools. This 'outcomes rhetoric' (1998: 292) has become so deeply embedded in official discourses of teaching and learning, that it constitutes a pervasive myth in justifying regulative mechanisms of education. Smyth and Dow do not offer empirical evidence and confess their investigation is 'unashamedly polemic' (p291). Here I offer a non-polemical application of Smyth and Dow's work and support it with empirical substantiation.

If we return to the idea of sex education transforming and regulating young people's actual experience, it might reasonably be suggested that the 'outcomes' for sex education marginalise and render other discourses (i.e. young people's) irrelevant, in order to make them 'fit' what is acceptable to policy makers and the national political agenda.

Outcomes in the UK context relate specifically to the targets for reducing rates of STDs, unwanted pregnancy and teenage parenthood (DoH 1998). The contention is that the combined effects of these targets and adherence to the edicts of the National Curriculum on sex education (DfE 1994) take priority over other aspects of understanding sexuality and sexual development.

In many respects the process of transformation reflects Smyth and Dow's view that in the new ideology of schooling, students are seen essentially as customers; teachers as producers; and learning as outcomes (1998:294). Seen in these terms, during the process of education, the person and the humanity, and the potential for production, is all but eradicated. Bound by the external pressures to achieve outcomes, there is not the time nor latitude for person-centred learning, as Sean observed:

'.... they [teachers] do care about how we are really, but they haven't got time any more. The problem is all the form filling and changes in what they have to teach ...'¹.

Moreover, 'testers' of learning (ie outcomes) are based on quantifiable measurement of whether certain biological knowledges have been achieved by specific key stages (DfE

¹ See theme 9 'Is teaching about caring?' for further corroboration.

1994) in the belief this will be translated into safer sexual practices, and thus meet targets for sexual health. None of these measures requires evidence (or outcomes) of the recognition of authentic selves, or of values and beliefs. Rather, as the above discussion suggests, they effectively repress young people's discourse and discovery of actual realities.

Outcomes that decontextualise young people's lives also serve to exclude moral, ethical and political dimensions, and inequalities, from the curriculum. Such issues do not appear as educationally legitimate components of the learning experience because they are not consistent with the ideological function of centrally defined goals of schooling. As such they are excluded from outcome measures. Furthermore there is no forum for disclosure of beliefs, emotions, or needs, that cannot be controlled or measured objectively; they are seen as non-essential, irrelevant, or even subversive. As Josie lamented:

‘Teachers just do the teaching, they haven’t got time to care.
They used to care but the National Curriculum finished that off’

Thus, from the students' perspective, no effort appears to have been made to take them seriously, and the implications for their social and psychological well being are perceived as ignored. Though I have no data on this issue from the staff perspective, Smyth and Dow see it as inevitable that values and moral concerns will become emaciated in contexts of increasing economic stringency. This is because these are also difficult to measure in outcome terms - they cannot be readily rendered 'true' or 'false' or quantified efficiently - thus they cannot be regarded as legitimate knowledge. As young people's opinion on the constraints affecting the content of sex education evidenced (see theme 4), while their values and moral concerns were excluded, it does not mean that outcomes rhetoric is value neutral. Prescriptions on 'acceptable' sexual identity and behaviour are made, and backed up by the legal framework on the age of consent. The dominant position of 'what is' (that which is measurable) over 'what might be' (not measured) maintains existing social order and ideological hegemony

Conclusion

The interpretations offered above do not claim the status of generalisation or truth. Rather their validity comes from young people's endorsement of the analysis and its

capacity to make visible the mechanisms, discourses and practices that privilege one set of meaning over others.

Obviously, the processes of colonisation, fabrication, and the rhetoric of curriculum measures and frameworks for learning, discussed here, are not embraced by all schools and all teachers/health practitioners. But it is understandable that some frameworks of discourse and practice might be more palatable, and less threatening to convey than others, and thus more likely to be reproduced in other settings and with other young people. A subject like 'sex' that is laden with variable moral values, feelings, and experiences, is easier to teach if one abides to a strictly impersonal format that minimises self-surveillance and questioning, and provides assurances of a predictable response. Unfortunately this does not acknowledge the reflexivity of young people and propensity to internalise the 'other' 'truth' of official accounts.

This chapter has attempted to demonstrate how the acquisition of positive sexual identity and right to enjoyable and healthy practices is jeopardised by certain ideological standpoints and discourse. Practices are overtly discriminatory in privileging the professional/adult white view and disadvantaging the young people's perspective. These measures have greater significance to feelings of disempowerment and alienation for those that are also regulated by structural and material disadvantages. While the generalisability to other schools and young people is contestable, this caveat does not invalidate the empirical evidence that, as far as the Horton sample is concerned, the particular experience of schooling and sex education has implications for self-esteem, subjectivities and life chances.

PART IV

Conclusions

Final remarks

This chapter begins with an assessment of the research process. First it addresses limitations in the study, then returns to the research objectives of the thesis to draw out the key issues and to demonstrate how the research questions have been answered. Taking each objective in turn, I will highlight the contribution, which the thesis makes to new knowledge in the area of young people's identity and practice. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the implications of these contributions for working with young people. These will be summarised in a number of recommendations for practice, policy, and research.

Assessment of research process

Limitations of the study

This study has accessed aspects of young people's lives and endeavoured to understand them in relation to empirical and theoretical literature. This process has exposed gaps in knowledge, and challenged the various critiques of representations of youth by arguing for a more dynamic model based on the work of Dorothy Smith and Seyla Benhabib. These ideas were grounded in the theoretical ideas of Anthony Giddens, Jurgen Habermas, and Michel Foucault. The empirical evidence and analysis does not supply a model for explaining the experiences of young people *per se* and is most likely to hold useful insights for the specific organisations and young people that participated. However, by privileging young people's voices, conceptual themes are raised that have significance for deepening understanding of other young communities. The detailed

description of social lives and sexual practices, and their relationship to processes of schooling and home life, can suggest ways in which future responses and policy can be advanced, specifically strategies for sexuality education and personal and social education.

The study is not easily replicable in the form adopted here for two reasons. First, my access to the sites, and flexible licence to carry out the study in modes and time periods of my choosing, was facilitated by existing contacts in the field and previous professional relationships. This endowed support for the project, and a confidence that it would be conducted ethically that might not be routinely available to researchers who do not have an existing track record with key stakeholders. These considerations are particularly significant in research on a sensitive topic like sexuality, not only because of stakeholder anxieties about its contentious nature, but also because it is difficult to predict the time required for adequate relationship building with participants, and the time it takes for authentic lives to be understood in full. If I were to attempt to conduct the research again, I am confident, given the passage of time and changes to personnel, that my passage to participants would not be so easily facilitated.

My own role as researcher in the study also imposes limitations on what the study has achieved. My subjective judgements have affected the entire process. By applying reflexivity, and using the research tools and checks available to me, I have attempted to minimise the impact of my own pre-suppositions and to appreciate the data from diverse perspectives, but inevitably my interpretation will be privileged, albeit to different degrees and at different points. The full history of the research process, as discussed in chapter 4, is an essential element in making transparent my role in the nature of the data that has resulted. It is an honest account of the questions I asked myself, of the issues and perspectives I sought to prioritise, and of the difficulties I encountered. Ultimately the reader makes his or her own judgement about the validity and reliability of the findings.

Finally, I acknowledge that this study can only provide a snapshot of *some* experiences of *some* young people, in a given time and place. However, as I have argued previously,

my aim was not to select a sample that was representative of whole populations but, rather, representative of a range of possible observations, so that conceptual generalisations could be made (Gilbert 1993). The concepts I have raised have been corroborated by professionals working with different young people in different contexts (established in feedback during dissemination events) and have provided the impetus for changes to their existing practice. However, the temporal nature of 'snapshots' has implications that warrant further discussion. The timing of the study influenced what my participants said and believed, but more significantly the questions I asked and what I interpreted from their disclosures. At the time, the participants had experienced tangible changes in their schooling experience due to the implementation of the National Curriculum (DES 1989), together with changes to the teaching of sex education (DES 1988a, 1988b). This period arguably represents one of great uncertainty and constraint regarding what could be taught, by whom, and in what context (Mac an Ghaill 1994). Related to this was the media publicity on sex and HIV/AIDS during this time, which presented new discourses on sex and sexuality, and challenges to beliefs and practices. While the latter appeared to have little direct effect on influencing participants' sexual behaviour, the more insidious effects of this new sexual agenda were less clear.

Since this time, there have been few changes to educational policy and practice. National Curriculum subjects still dominate the curriculum, hence PSE is not a core, compulsory requirement, and therefore many students may continue to receive sex education through the same methods and contents described by participants in my study. Recent moves to repeal Section 28 (DES 1988b) have met with mixed responses, meaning teachers are no clearer on guidance regarding the inclusion of homosexual identity or more liberal approaches that do not have a heterosexual bias in sex education provision. The greatest difference between the period when the data was collected (1994 - 5) and the present day is the absence of any media or political debate on sexual health and HIV/AIDS. The debate on the ever increasing rate of teenage pregnancy, and the most effective strategies to reduce it, has continued throughout this period. The question then, is whether today's 15 and 16 year olds would corroborate the findings from my study? A review (Gerrard 2000) of the issues relevant to reducing teenage conception rates as a precursor to the government's latest media campaign, albeit in journalistic (but, I would argue, balanced)

terms, suggests that little has changed, and my findings retain topical and political relevance.

Returning to the research objectives

The first research objective of this thesis was to explore young people's identity, discourse and practices, with emphasis on sexuality and sexual behaviour. My priorities were to ensure that participants were able to articulate genuine accounts; that disclosures were embedded in their social and cultural context; and that sexuality and sexual behaviours were not separated from other aspects of identity, discourse and experience. In essence, I set myself the task of contributing new knowledge by providing holistic descriptions of contemporary young people's experience that problematise debates and concepts that tend to essentialise young people and their lives. As I described in chapter 2, accounts that rely on the biological basis of 'adolescence' to explain young people's passage to adulthood do not give adequate recognition to the external mediators of identity and practice, and are wont to take the sexualised aspects of adolescence as explanation for most of that which is observed on young people's behaviour. By adopting an approach that facilitated detailed and rich disclosures, original primary data have been provided that lets the reader hear young people's voices with all the diversity and complexity that their everyday lives enshrine, hence avoiding any reductive tendencies. Moreover, sexuality has not been compartmentalised as an adjunct to the broader aspects of identity, and the perspectives of female and ethnic minority young people have been thematised. The latter provides a corrective to debates that limit coding of teenagers to the 'sexualised' body, or privilege sexual constructions of white or male identity and practice. By focusing on these 'concrete' aspects (Benhabib 1992) of these young people's everyday lives, this detailed synthesis makes a unique contribution to literature.

My decision to incorporate not just current, but future perceptions of self and subjectivity, makes another unique contribution to knowledge. It provides empirical primary data to illustrate Giddens's assertion (1991) that identity cannot be fully understood without acknowledgement of the past, current and future. The research methods provided space for young people to develop and express themselves reflexively, and hence yielded data on perceptions of the future challenges posed by new terrains,

‘expert systems’ and ‘critical moments’ (Giddens 1991). These data make salient the importance of understanding and supporting young people in their anxieties concerning the autonomy they associate with leaving school. From this we learn that teenagers do not construct this period in the lifecourse as a discrete period, disembedded from the wider social order, nor as something to be endured (by them or the adults in their lives) because it will ‘pass’ (as soon as the hormonal turmoil settles down), but, rather, as a stage that requires nurturing and investment from those with the power and skills to understand its embedded and embodied nature, and temporal ramifications.

Throughout this document I have located the data in relation to, and critiques of, other empirical studies. This meets the final aspect of my first objective. By emphasising the role of social and cultural context, and ideological and political norms, the omissions in earlier psychological and psychoanalytic literature, and some biomedically oriented accounts of sexual behaviour, have been attended to. The privileging of female and ethnic minority participant’s voices presents further support for feminist criticisms of essentialist accounts, or those sociological studies that looked to the structural mediators of identity but ignored females by prioritising the ‘gang of lads’. My findings have some parallels with more recent studies on young people, such as that of Holland et al (1998) and the related work of the ‘Women, Risk and Project’ (WRAP) (Holland et al 1993, Thomson and Scott 1991, Holland et al 1990b). As in my study, these authors underline the tensions in young people’s identity and practice, particularly the problems posed by normative constructs of female and male identity. My research also suggests that not all young women were constrained by norms for permissible sexual practices¹, and not all males had a sexual confidence or superior credibility, that was associated with, and supported by, their masculinity. For some of the African Caribbean and white females, their brand of ‘feminism’ had given them a way of thinking about sexuality, and a mode of agency that allowed them to redress some of the imbalances in power between males and females². For young white males particularly, there appeared to be no equivalent. This has implications for future research and will be discussed below.

¹ Holland et al (1998) also looked at young women who manage to develop alternative views and individual practices.

² I acknowledge this represents only a partial shift in the balance of power since these young women’s position was still regulated by normative conceptions of gender and practice, such as, retaining responsibility for contraception, and predicting they may ‘settle down’ and raise a family.

The second research objective aimed to identify the factors and processes that influenced constructs of identity, social practices, and learning about sexuality. By adopting a methodological approach that facilitated in-depth insight of factors that operate in public and private domains, a model of understanding has resulted that traverses macro and micro factors, and that recognises their mutual influence and the complex ways in which learning about sexuality is shaped and regulated. In this way my study transcends current debates, because it accepts (and documents) that there are some phenomena that operate within micro worlds that are highly symbolic in their influence, such as the impact of peer friendships, family biographies, and the influence of context for sexual behaviours and the role of alcohol, but, these are interpreted alongside macrological factors and broader structuring agents (e.g. gender, culture, religious faith, social class) and the more specific features of constructs of adolescent sexuality, and the processes and policies in education. In this way, my analysis privileges the micro world of young people's everyday lives (Smith 1988), and moreover exposes areas of life previously hidden or silenced (Ramazanoglu 1989), but does not limit explanation to this domain, instead looking for new and more specific ways of appreciating the data. The markers for enquiry (see appendix 1) created a framework of possible clues that might answer the question of broader influences on identity, discourse and learning about sex, but my methodological strategy included measures to ensure these were not privileged. This strategy had two strands. Firstly, the markers for enquiry would be borne in mind but not without acknowledgement of concepts that emerged as significant following my review of the literature. These included attention to issues of power, language and discourse; meanings; synthesis of the macro and micro; and methods for allowing authentic and depth disclosures on sexuality to be articulated. This established a broad framework for the overall conception of the research process, but this had to be translated into methods for research practice, that is, the second strand of the approach to collecting data. For this I chose qualitative methods with emphasis on some specific principles of feminist researching (see 'Principles for feminist enquiry', chapter 4) as a means to elicit data with insights and depth that would contribute new knowledge. These principles were operationalised in ways that allowed me to hear young people's genuine accounts of their lives. It is the commitment to the following principles that rendered the methodological strategy so successful. First was my commitment to privileging participants' standpoints. This could not occur without acknowledging the issues that might deter honest

disclosures, such as power differentials between myself and the research participants, lack of comfortable language to articulate their experiences, and lack of trust to willingly share their authentic lives with me. To this end I created a climate for research interviews that ameliorated power differences as far as possible; encouraged participants to use their everyday parlance; emphasised my perception of participants as 'experts' on their lives; and minimised my position in the research interaction, while ensuring participants felt validated by their involvement. Second, I felt that depth and honest disclosures would be more likely to result if participants felt they had something to gain from their involvement. Possible gains included empowerment, increased consciousness and the raising of self-esteem. The methods used to bring them about signal non-exploitative and effective ways for working with young people, and are as important to the process of research as the outcomes themselves, for the latter would be less enriched had young people not committed so positively to the project.

To summarise key issues, my analysis of data suggests that young people's identity, social practices, and the processes of learning about sexuality, can be understood as a product of competing conceptualisations of power that operate in multifarious ways, in multiple sites, and in and between different interested parties and agencies. Postmodern social theory has opened up the possibilities for conceptualising power in this way so that explanations are not limited to one or two macrological factors (e.g. social, class, ethnicity or gender), or isolated micrological features, such as, individual vulnerabilities or behaviours, or inter-subjective relations between individuals in discrete populations or geographic contexts. Rather, I have suggested that young people construe their identity, and explain their behaviours and knowledge, on the basis of competing constructs of identity and discourse that emanate from friendship groups, family orbits, contemporary debates and ideologies, what they are taught, what they are not taught, and what they desire but do not get. Because their authentic behaviours and identities are rarely represented in dominant constructions, young people are struggling from a deficit position of power to have themselves heard. Their needs and interests are superseded by the greater power of other interested parties, namely teachers and clinicians, and the political edicts of the educational and health policies they promote.

Young people's learning about sexuality is as much influenced by the effect of the meanings they abstract from strategic omissions in content and other mechanisms to prevent a visiblising of authentic practices, as it is by their family histories, cultural backgrounds, macro discourses, and personal sexual experience. Moreover, for the young people who feel they are not complying with normative expectations, or whose identities are obfuscated in representations, there is a significant and negative impact on self-esteem, subjectivities, and sense of personal resources to meet future challenges. Hence, my conclusion is that while there is much to applaud in the strategies young people use to buffer the hardships they face, there is also much more that could be done to make this easier. This would involve being listened to, having feelings acknowledged, being provided with space for discussion, being spared the hypocrisies of sexual double standards, being treated as young adults rather than adults in the making, and having needs recognised in concrete actions rather than disengaged interest. More specifically, sex education initiatives could focus less on the mechanics and 'facts' of sexual behaviour (Jackson 1982), and more on emotions and relationships (Lenskyj 1990), the precursors to sexual activity, talking about 'sex' and sexual preferences, and discontinue the disconnection of sex from pleasure (Fine 1988). If educators and policy makers are to make any advances in making sex safer or reducing rates of conception and sexually transmitted infections, my data also indicate that much could be learnt from listening to young people on their conceptualisations of risk and 'risky behaviour'. This is because of the anomalies in insight between adults and young people; until we appreciate the varied concepts, myths, and motivations that we are working with, we cannot hope to influence them. All this demands that practitioners be provided with support to relinquish some power to young people. The recommendations that follow pick up these issues.

Finally, the findings from my research reiterate the point that no amount of sex education or information-giving will be sufficient in itself. Broader policies should acknowledge issues of poverty and social exclusion, because the young people (females in particular) who had least in terms of emotional and material support, were the ones divulging greatest risks and possibilities for compromising their future opportunities and life chances. This is echoed in policy statements made in the report on 'Teenage Pregnancy' (SEU 1999).

The last objective of my thesis has been to synthesise the various conceptualisations of young people's experience and discourse and suggest a new way of theoretical understanding through developing the explanatory potential of existing theory. By taking various aspects of Foucault's theories (1980, 1987, 1980, 1979a) and neo-Foucauldian theorising (Weeks 1989b, Poster 1984, Layder 1994) on the social construction of identity and discourse, my data have re-affirmed the enduring power, and negative impact, of reductionist theorising and essentialist constructs of young people; have offered evidence for the ways in which practices and ideologies in education invisibilise authentic identities and behaviours; and addressed how power works, both positively and negatively, to 'code' the teenage body. By developing, and addressing the ambiguities, in Foucault's ideas, with insights from feminist authors (Ramazanoglu 1993, Fraser 1989, McNay 1992, Rubin 1989), a firmer sense of the subject as possessing agency, and a graspable sense of who possesses power, has been accommodated. Moreover, females as subjects in their own right have been visibilised in the power-knowledge (Foucault 1980) dynamic.

Dorothy Smith's (1988) work complements the latter, and has been useful in turning attention to the microscopics and subjectiveness of everyday lives, to intersubjectivity, and the relation between macro and micro workings of power. Application of Smith's ideas to my data permitted an even more tangible understanding of what power *is*, than could be elucidated from Foucault's (1979a) more ubiquitous notion of power. Thus, the systems and agents of power that young people's narratives evidence became identifiable (i.e. nameable), and are seen to operate from multiple sites or relations of ruling (ibid.). As importantly Smith highlights the importance of understanding female subjectivities in research and explains their past exclusion from mainstream academic theorising in relation to the methodologies that have been devised by and for men. In this way she offered me tools for a way of reflexively researching young women alongside young men, without losing sight of the constructed nature of identity for both myself and the research participants.

The work of Anthony Giddens and Jurgen Habermas was used to firm up linkages between the macro and micro influences on identity and practice, that remained opaque in Smith's and Foucault's writing. The complexity and cumulative nature of influencing

agents cited in my data were also recognised by reference to Giddens's ideas in particular. But Giddens's notions of the self as reflexively made, of 'expert systems', and futures, time and 'fateful moments' (1991), were of great assistance when applied to interpreting and understanding the impact of sex education and other processes of schooling on participants' ordering and re-ordering of identity. The concept of 'fragile identities' (Giddens 1991) helped to interpret the data on participants' predictions for future identities, and supported my thesis that young people require more support and endorsement for their exit pathway from school (see Post Script, Appendix 4).

Habermas's formulations in his *Theory of Communicative Action* (1986) were developed to address, more specifically, how the processes used in sex education and sexual health services, operate to maintain the power of the expert system (Giddens 1991) and obfuscate young people's authentic voices and practices. By appropriating Habermasian concepts of the 'lifeworld' and the 'system', I have argued that knowledge of young people's everyday worlds has been 'colonised' and sequestered by the 'system', and in extreme cases (like knowledge of sexuality, sexual practices and discourse), become 'uncoupled' from it. This results in young people's voices having little power, in validity claims to truth, or the social processes, that regulate and define their lives.

Seyla Benhabib and the work of other feminist critical theorists (see chapter 3) supported my desire to develop the explanatory potential in Habermas's theories to ensure females were not marginalised in my analysis of identity, discourse and behaviour. By adding the gendered structuring of identity to Habermas's theory of communicative action, a more nuanced and realistic appreciation of how discourse, identity, behaviour, and the 'system' intersect, became possible. Past deficits in epistemological reasoning became reconciled with gender as a core factor. Benhabib's (1992) interpretation of society, as privileging the perspective of the 'generalised' other, provided an additional means of understanding the reasons for young people's perspectives being continually 'unheard', and for suggesting that less artificial understanding could evolve by infusing normative constructs with genuine knowledge of the 'concrete' other.

Finally, the fine tuning for a more effective and inclusive utilisation of Habermas's, Giddens's, Foucault's and Smith's theories emerged from incorporating appropriations

of Stephen Ball's notion of 'fabrication' (1997); Gayle Rubin's 'charmed circle' (1989), Furlong and Cartmel's 'individualisation' of experience and risk (1997), and Smyth and Dow's notion of 'outcomes rhetoric' (1998). Taken together these ideas were fashioned to suggest new ways of explaining how the power of the system works to regulate and transform young people's experiences to one of obscurity and/or illegitimacy, while recognising the role of young people in maintaining its reproductive power.

All in all, my claim to contributing new theoretical knowledge is that while each of the author's theories has contributed to my analysis, none is satisfactory in itself. My synthesis of these different theories contributes a new dimension to explaining the whole.

Based on this analysis, I will now make recommendations for practice, policy and research in sex education.

Recommendations for working with young people

I have already made reference to ways in which working with young people could be improved. Here, I will summarise some key pre-requisites, then offer more specific suggestions for school-based interventions.

1. Acknowledging 'concrete' lives

First there is the commitment to questioning generalised readings of young people's identity and practices, particularly regarding their sexuality. For this, significant adults (teachers, parents etc.) would need to open themselves up to hearing about the 'concrete' aspects of young people's lives. It would mean casting aside fears and denial, (acknowledging that teenagers have a sexuality), and prioritising concerns to support young people's needs; and relinquishing some power by conceding the role of 'expert' to young people.

2. Refashioning learning environments and discourse

I could not make any recommendations without stressing the importance of providing contexts and learning climates that allow young people to articulate honest accounts of their lives. Open-ness to 'alternative' terminologies and parlance, and contracts of confidentiality, must infuse this, if censorship and perceptions of judgement are to be

ameliorated. Without this, I can see little scope for advancing the effectiveness of sexual health initiatives.

3. Support for ‘critical moments’

If recommendations 1 and 2 were operationalised, appreciation of the nature of ‘critical moments’ and their relationship to fears for the future would more naturally follow.

There is no script for this, rather, decisions on appropriate measures of support would emerge once understanding of young people’s perspectives was in place.

4. Prioritising personal and social education

My twenty years of teaching and researching in schools has convinced me that there is no better place for effective sexuality and life skills education, than in the context of personal and social education. This has low status because of its omission from the National Curriculum core subjects¹ (DES 1989). Thus, it currently rests with the senior managers and governors in schools to prioritise this theme in the curriculum. It provides students with a unique space and place to reflect on their lives and non-scholastic self-achievement. It is precisely because PSE is not an academic subject that renders it more likely that students and teachers be able to break with the usual ‘norms’ for learning, and hence use methods and discourses that encourage greater open-ness and debate. In my experience, the shared perspectives that come from PSE also have positive ramifications for student:teacher and peer relationships in other subjects.

5. Content and methods of sexuality education

While there may be no academic agreement on what works in sexuality education (DoH 1998), young people are in agreement on what does not work (see theme 3 and 4 of findings). Therefore, whatever strategies are undertaken, it is clear that imagery must be more representative; acknowledge the variable experiences and needs of students, the emotional significance of ‘sex’ and sex education, and the implications of gendered socialisation processes and discourses that can privilege males and disadvantage females; and finally, contextualise sex in relation to relationships (in all its guises). This means there must be space for discussion and opportunity to question and disagree about issues. Enjoyment and humour should be primary goals.

¹ The Qualifications and Curriculum Agency is currently reviewing this (Measor et al 2000).

All in all, these pre-requisites require an allowance in the timetable to develop trusting and respecting relationships between tutor and students, before the sex education input begins. PSE in the spiral curriculum provides the most realistic opportunities for this to occur (see point 4 above); in its absence, sex education ‘modules’ should encapsulate a preliminary relationship-building stage (see below for discussion).

Suggestion for a school-based intervention

For sex education to be meaningful, my data suggest that the adults involved need to demonstrate a genuine commitment to working in young people’s best interests. This requires a common vision which signals that adults are on young people’s ‘side’ and want to help them achieve a positive sense of self and entitlements. This is not an easy task but my experience of piloting more innovative approaches suggests that the following are steps in the right direction:

Commitment to a spirit of open-ness and collaboration

The approach to sex education should be debated and agreed by all those directly and indirectly involved. This helps avoid the potential for contradictions (e.g. in other lessons, or at home) that might undermine learning in sex education lessons, and contributes to teachers feeling they are supported by colleagues and parents in their work with young people. A useful starting point is awareness raising sessions for any adults with a stake or interest in sex education¹. These provide information on the aims and justification for the intended initiative; details on the programme of work; examples of activities which attendees (are requested to) participate in²; suggestions for how parents can collaborate by following up the school input at home; and last but not least, provide a forum for discussing concerns and objections, and airing support for the initiative³.

Representatives from the school’s senior management and the LEA are essential in answering queries regarding the legal framework for sex education (as well as enhancing the status of the initiative).

¹ In my experience, 2 sessions of 2.5 hours were the most effective. They included parents, teachers, head teacher, school governors (from host school and feeder primary schools), school nurses, sexual health practitioners, detached youth workers, local GPs, and a representative from the LEA. The MP for the area was invited to sessions at all schools but none attended.

² Scenarios on giving advice, answering ‘embarrassing’ questions, and reminding students of the importance of respect in relationships, have proved successful in lessening parent’s fears.

³ Comments from these parents were often more instrumental in diminishing the fears of less convinced parents than the justifications of teachers or other professionals.

Such initiatives provide a tangible first step towards working in partnership with parents, and signposts to potential ‘healthy alliances’¹ with external sexual health practitioners. Of course, they also intend to facilitate better communication regarding sexuality between young people and their parents that my data highlight as problematic.

Methods of working and contracts for sexuality education:

The commitment to working in young people’s interests means there should be evidence that input is needs-led. Hence a requirement for space and safety to articulate needs, and accordant flexibility in the timetable to respond to them.

Flexibility is more easily accommodated when sex education is taught in PSE, as opposed to the science curriculum, but encouraging students to articulate genuine needs and experiences is more than a timetabling issue. To this end, I have found it useful to negotiate contracts for learning. Such contracts also invest students with a sense of ownership of their learning, and at best, operationalise in ways that devolve power from teacher to student group.

In small groups, students are asked to consider the type of learning environment that might enhance confidence to speak openly, ask questions and enter into debate with peers and tutor(s). Students less accustomed to PSE-style methods rarely have a readily available model but are able to brainstorm factors that they predict might affect their experience of sex education². Before processing these lists, students are then asked to brainstorm a more specific list of ‘wants’ and ‘don’t wants’ regarding content (issues to be covered) and methods of sex education. The tutor also takes this opportunity to point out issues s/he regards as important and which students may want to bear in mind in their considerations. For instance, I tell students that, in my experience, bravado and ‘showing off’ are ways that people (by which I mean boys but do not say this) conceal their embarrassment or fear, and ask them to consider how we might avoid this.

¹ For example, as a result of similar sessions alliances were set up between a school and youth workers involved in sexual health initiatives.

² Examples from my experience include: ‘time for discussion, big gobs let quieter ones speak, girls-only groups, no name-calling, no pressure to speak, see people’s different experiences and respect each other, teachers should not talk all the time, let us have a say, don’t get told off for using slang’.

On completion of this task, they return to the first list and add new factors that emerge as a result of the second task. The two lists are then discussed collectively and the implications drawn out for codes of conduct and teaching approach. Eventually, a contract is negotiated that details the 'rules' for the ensuing programme of work, together with sanctions for breaking the contract¹.

Content

My data suggest that programmes of sex education require three elements: the physical aspects, social and cultural aspects, and service provision. The emotional implications should infuse all three, and not be seen as an adjunct to the core content. None of this need adopt a heterosexual framework in the methods I recommend:

The biological component will vary dependent on key stage, but any discourse on the anatomy of the body, and the body as capable of 'sexual' responses following puberty, should stress that these processes occur irrespective of whether one is heterosexual, homosexual or bisexual. Likewise, the physical and emotional responses to stimulation or sexual attraction occur irrespective of whether one is attracted to someone of the same or opposite sex. To illustrate, the process of the penis becoming erect or the enlarging and moistening of the female genitals should be discussed without imagery that reinforces these processes as occurring as a product of heterosexual desire. By this I mean, avoiding commentary, diagrams or videos that show these processes only through pictures of a male body (or just his genitals) interlocked with a female body. This aims to diminish stigma and begin to demystify same sex sexual orientation.

In traditional approaches to sex education there is a tendency to focus on the reproductive capacity of the sexual body (Lenskyj 1990). This reinforces heterosexuality as well as legitimising vaginal penetration as 'proper' sex (see theme 4). Non-penetrative aspects of sexual behaviour (e.g. kissing, stroking, mutual masturbation) should be included as these serve both to be more inclusive of same sex practices as well as offering alternatives to less safe (penetrative) sexual behaviour. My data (especially theme 3) reinforce the need for discussion of oral sex and anal sex, but of course

¹ I ask students to agree a 'term' that is used (by them) to signal that the contract has been contravened. The group decides how many times an individual can break the contract before being excluded. This peer group control of behaviour has proved powerful and I have never had to resort to excluding an individual or re-taking the lead role in classroom management.

stressing that these, like other forms of sexual behaviour, are options and not everyone chooses to participate in them.

While the process of conception needs to be included at some point, the other possible outcomes of sexual behaviour (such as STI's, emotional consequences) should not be ignored. Related to this, contraception should be discussed for its merits in preventing disease as well as pregnancy. This again avoids enhancing any feeling of marginalisation among gay students.

The social and cultural aspects of learning about sex and sexuality are as important as the physical and should represent a significant portion of the sex education agenda. It is routine in more radical approaches (see Massey 1990, Sex Education Forum 1995, 1996, HEA 1997, SEU 1999) to dedicate time for exploration of the various permutations of 'relationships' and the implications for identity, practices and self-esteem. Students should also be offered consciousness-raising sessions on the processes of gender socialisation and the making of femininities and masculinities. Within this the hegemony of masculinity and heterosexuality, and sexual double standards can be problematised for their impact on creating different expectations of male and female identity and practice. Exploring the discourses and languages that frame females and males differently and affect communication is a key component here.

The aim is not to attack masculinity or make young men feel apologetic or ashamed but to explore the reasoning behind displays of macho or disrespectful behaviour and language. Young people, but boys in particular, should be guided in seeking alternative ways of being that demonstrate mutual respect and stress the emotional similarities between females and males and not just the differences (Trudell 1993). My strategy has been to question the assumption that 'boys have it easier than girls', and convey a sense that males have an equal entitlement to understanding and support.

It is recommended that such lessons include mixed and single sex activities but a sharing of perspectives in groups of both sexes should always follow single sex sessions.

Information on **sexual health service provision** is recommended as a routine element in sex education. This should include services for advice on sexual relationships, sexual identity, abuse, contraception, pregnancy and STIs. Students need clarity on which of these are available in school, and which can be accessed through national phonelines, local clinics (in and outside the vicinity), and youth projects (see SEU 1999, for examples).

In my experience it is not sufficient to restrict this to school-based and teacher-led information session. For a majority of young people these services are not within familiar boundaries of knowledge. Two methods are recommended to address this¹. First, visits to sexual health clinics, GUM clinics and any other relevant projects². These visits raise awareness of the services on offer, allow students to meet staff who explain procedures and stress the confidential nature of the service, and of great importance, get rid of some of the myths associated with the services.

Peer-led initiatives have also been used to raise awareness and complement the out of school visits. Older pupils can be trained as 'peer-signposters'. Their task is to be 'approachable' and available for students who are seeking informal advice on services, in other words, the 'off-the-record' version of what to expect. In my experience, peer-signposters are proving effective in reducing scepticism and taking the fear out of attending services, and opening up perceptions of the parameters of services on offer. Peer-signposters are also available to accompany students to external services. It has been found that students are for more willing to approach a peer-signposter than teachers because they do not trust teachers to maintain confidentiality.

Overall my strategy would be to refashion the sex education agenda so that it conveys a sense of working towards entitlements to useful knowledge, enjoyment, intimacy, and developing trusting and equal relationships (for the present and future). This contrasts with the learning from sex education that my research participants conveyed (see theme 4).

¹ The timing of these has to be negotiated in individual schools but ideally should not be delayed beyond year 9 (13-14 years).

² These visits can take place after school to avoid timetabling problems.

There are other recommendations for teaching sex education that I would like to make but which could not materialise unless they were supported by policy and research evidence.

Recommendations for policy and research

1. Valuing alternative information sources

More than most groups, children have been ‘spoken for’, and often misunderstood or misrepresented [young people] need to voice their own views of the way they live and to relate their personal histories, if [we] are to understand their situation and provide appropriate support. (Slim and Thompson 1993: 73)

My commitment to participatory research has given a voice to an often silent or misrepresented group. Through genuine acknowledgement of these perspectives, policy and practice could be shifted, from one based on passive disinterest (or pathology) to one based on active engagement with everyday lives and experiences:

Within this, my data suggest that there is a specific need for better understanding of differences between genders and ethnicities. Young women are beginning to gain some power from feminism in organising their thoughts and opening opportunities for choices, and I endorse debate that calls for support for young women to have greater equality in sexual relations (e.g. Holland et al 1998). But, we must also find ways of better understanding the experiences of young males, and help them to articulate their feelings and desires¹. I propose that their needs are not very different to those of young women, vis-à-vis desires for love, support and encouragement. Likewise, Pakistani respondents had experiences that are not attended to in sexual health agendas. These require deeper enquiry and prioritisation in research initiatives. Analysis of power, structures of oppression and opportunity, and sites of resistance and tension, are advocated as perspectives worthy of greater understanding.

Through adopting methodologies that allow participants to articulate their biographies, together with a commitment to acting on these testimonies, the position of the ‘expert’ shifts from researcher to participants. This also renders it less possible for young people

¹ Measor et al (2000) review new initiatives on working with boys.

to be represented on the basis of a disembodied, third person, but rather with a focus on, and embedded in, real lives.

This reconceptualisation with a focus on qualitative, contextual understanding of young people, is not a panacea. Rather it forms part of larger programme with a commitment to social change that includes theoretical and methodological insights that question taken for granted assumptions and more established ways of arriving at policy. This would require a greater commitment to:

- funding a larger repertoire of research methods, with qualitative, participatory, emancipatory, and longitudinal studies, as legitimate parts of this repertoire. Built-in evaluation strategies would also make findings more robust.
- re-orientating the ‘problem’ of youth
- democratising the research and policy process

2. Re-orientating the ‘problem’ of youth

I have argued that studies of youth have tended to focus on their ‘troubling’ nature. The evidence has been used to support the rhetoric of the ‘underclass’, or more recently the ‘social exclusion’ debate (MacDonald 1997). While there are data (including mine) that provide appreciation of the effects of (some) policies and discourses on the ‘excluded’, there is very little that focuses on the ‘excluders’. My data alone suggest that a more nuanced understanding could evolve by looking at the perspectives of the ‘excluders’ (in my case teachers and clinicians). This should also help critique the workability of policy in practice. Notions of the ‘problem of youth’ might then be oriented with emphasis on providers as well as consumers. This might also help to build bridges of understanding between young people and adults, as my project has attempted to do.

3. Democratisation of research and policy process

None of these recommendations has any chance of success unless young people’s perspectives are acted on in concrete terms. A concrete goal would mean that these perspectives *matter* because they are understood in relation to how they intersect with policy and practice. Otherwise, learning about young people’s everyday lives can become a vehicle for justifying policies and discourses of regulation (Foucault 1979a); and policies can continue to be implemented *in spite* of the communities they are intended to

serve, because it is the internal logic and ideology that drives the policy, not the efficacy of the policy. Judgements of efficacy could come from the consumers and providers, but this should not be limited to their representation through empirical data. Key stakeholders (including young people and others with a vested interest) could be included in committees and decision-making bodies. The Netherlands offers a model that has democratised policy making by including young people in the planning and evaluation of policies that affect them (Brown 1999). The fact that this country has one of the lowest rates for teenage pregnancy in the world, is indicative that the UK (with one of the highest rates) has nothing to lose from learning about their innovative responses to understanding teenage sexuality.

4. Support for more liberal approaches

My hope is that research evidence and policy recommendations will eventually provide the legislative backing for teachers to work with young people in ways that are not restricted by conservative ideology. This should allow teachers to work without constraints of centrally (top-down) defined outcomes, and instead work from a bottom-up perspective that sheds light on specific needs, and most appropriate methods. Teachers must be supported to believe that innovatory approaches to working with young people will not risk their professional reputations, in the eyes of governors, parents or politicians. For me, teachers' fears of this possibility are outweighing any desires to work in alternative ways. In my findings, young people held teachers responsible for many of their complaints, but also understood that they were probably doing the best they could within the constraints imposed on them. These constraints require fuller enquiry. The smallest steps in this direction would be welcomed, because as Josie said,

‘Anything’s better than what we had’.

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Appendix 1: Markers for Enquiry

1. Identity and practices in the context of social lives

In efforts to avoid reductionist notions of sexuality and sexual practice, and hear about them as contextualised narratives, my intention was to delay questioning on this issue until a broader understanding of participants' social lives had been explored¹. It was anticipated that specific and local socialising practices would be prominent features of social lives - not necessarily as exotic, spectacular or mass cultural activities, as in radical subcultural analyses on 'gangs'² (e.g. see edited works in Hall and Jefferson 1976) - but rather questions arose over whether socialising would be inclusive of different identities or what currencies were used to collectivise different groups.

2. Impact of education, schooling and home life on experience

Home and school life, and the role of relationships with parents and teachers in forging identities was an area of interest. Were the values and belief systems of teenagers and adults compatible, how were they explained, justified or reconciled? In particular, I was curious whether changes in educational legislation, such as the National Curriculum (DES 1989) or Education Reform Act (DES 1988c) which foregrounded contemporary schooling, were perceived as affecting young people's experience.

3. Influences on discourses of sexuality and sexual activity

I wanted to understand more precisely whether or how socio-cultural institutions (school, family/home, religion, media, etc.) featured in how young people perceived and organised their sexual identity, reasoning and practices. Through securing a sample inclusive of both sexes, different ethnicities, and varying sexual experience, I sought to maximise exposure of the variability of perceptions and influences. While I expected that discourses would be diverse and perhaps contradictory, I also assumed they would collude with an underlying conception of the sexual teenager as white and heterosexual. I was also curious whether young people's disclosures would reflect debates about traditional values and practices of the nuclear family, monogamy, sexual diversity, unmarried sex and single motherhood. Would gender, ethnicity or religious tradition invoke different permutations? And given the temporal context for the research, the HIV/AIDS epidemic was expected to feature in discourse on sexual expression.

4. Constructions of gender & sexual identity

The degree to which young people conformed to dominant perceptions of gendered sexuality (females as passive, unassertive and receptive to male needs) was an area of interest, along with an anticipation of varying permutations of identity mediated by sexual experience, family history, age, situation etc. The work of Foucault and feminists (see chapter 3) prompted intentions to explore the balances of power between females and males; and relatedly, feminist critiques of research that emphasised negative outcomes motivated enquiry of whether enjoyment and desire featured in sexual narratives.

¹ Social lives were anticipated as being more likely to initiate responses at the outset of building research relationship, than issues considered more private or complex.

² This did not exclude the possibility that exploration of social lives might indirectly shed light on whether young people's experiences constituted a contemporary phenomena of 'folk devils' or risk to moral order through associations of delinquency or disaffection.

5. Learning about sex

As well as the relationship to markers above, I wanted to establish a more depth understanding of the saliency of sex education to learning about sex. Did the content and discourses of sex education relate to young people's everyday parlance and experience; was there any discernible impact on learning about sex, sexual decision making, and constructions of self? Here again the impact of political and cultural discourse on HIV/AIDS and changes to sex education curricula (DES 1988a, 1988b, 1988c, 1989) were anticipated to feature in recollections of how respondents learned about sex,

6. Service provision for young people

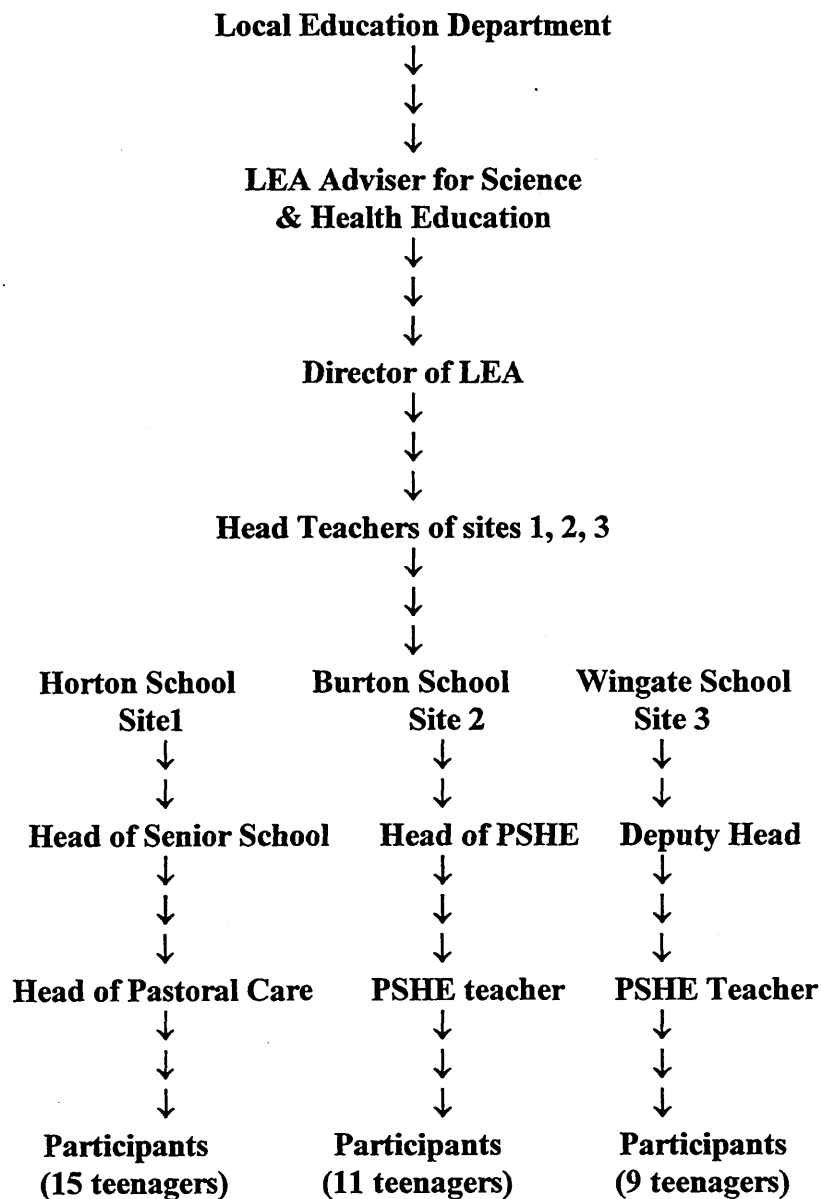
Research and media coverage related to the HIV epidemic has enhanced awareness if not acceptance of young people as sexually active beings, and in turn spawned interest in evaluating sexual health services. Studies revealed an under-utilisation by young people (see Allen 1991 for review) but told us little by way of understanding the reasons. Data on young people's perception and/or experience of such services would usefully contribute to this debate.

7. Current and future perceptions of self and subjectivity

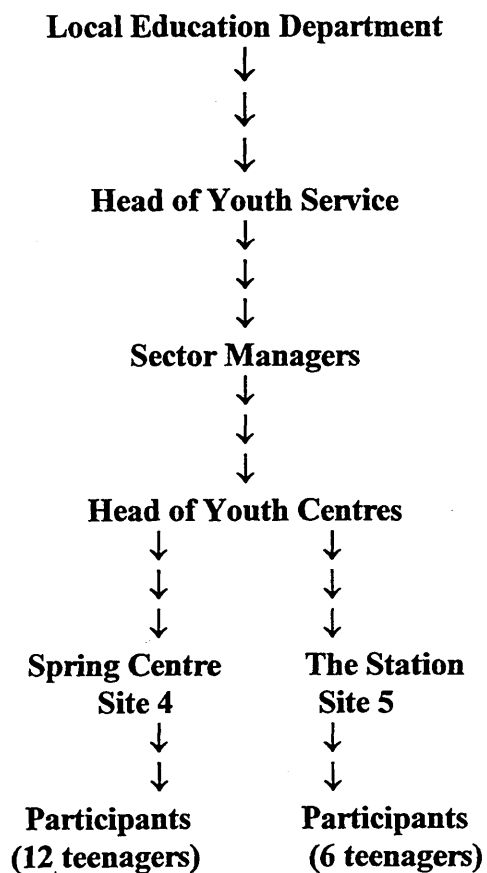
Taking all the above considerations together, I wanted to gain some sense of cumulative influence and its relationship to young people's perception of the positioning of their subjectivity, both currently and in the future. Other issues were also of relevance here. The 'delinquent' youth as perpetrator of 'trouble' is less new than the phenomena of youth as an 'underclass' or youth as subject to social exclusion. Much of the 'underclass' literature is policy oriented and lies beyond the scope of this thesis but nevertheless prompted an interest in whether or how young people reconcile these representations with their own experience. Specifically, I was interested in which factors were considered most significant to affecting their passage to adulthood, any notions of exclusion/inclusion, and whether there was evidence of reproduction and production of subjectivities?

Appendix 2: Table 1: Routes of access to participants

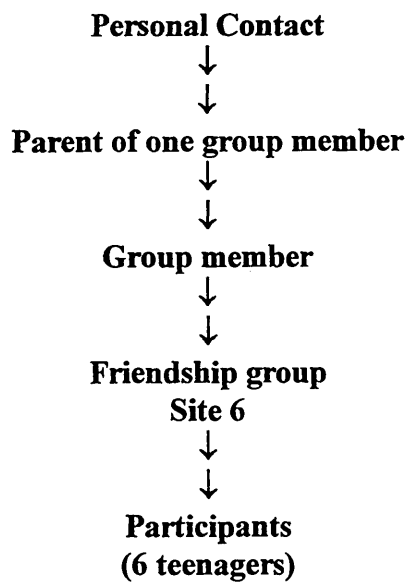
1. Schools



2. Youth Groups



3. Non-statutory Group: Self-Selectors



Appendix 3: Pathway to access

Strategic preparation for the initial approach

First contact with the key agencies occurred through letter or telephone. In all cases my preference was to register the level of interest via a courtesy call. Given the heavy bureaucratic workload of some of the senior personnel who represented key gatekeepers, I feared my letter might be judged as low priority and 'filed' accordingly without due consideration. Thus, verbal communication felt more suitable - confident that at best I could negotiate a meeting and at worst persuade them not to refuse involvement at the first hurdle. The agenda for these calls was carefully planned, to the degree of rehearsing my opening remarks (out-loud) prior to the actual call. A diary entry from the early stages of negotiating access captures my desire to appear assertive and harness the temptation to plead for consent to participation:

'First calls make me nervous. Primarily because I'm aware of how busy this man is and I'm intimidated by his senior status - a throwback to my baggage from school - he's the headmaster and I'm the naughty schoolgirl. Except, Julia, he's not going to threaten to phone your parents if your explanation proves unacceptable! Secondly, I want him to consent to this so badly, I fear my desperation may come over and he'll utilise the opportunity to dominate the conversation'

(Diary notes 4.9.94)

In only one case, were the latter fears realised but rehearsals became a routine necessity. These included not only the content of discussions, but also my air of authority, that is, an appropriate level of assertiveness coupled with appropriate pleasantries.

Successful first calls included the following: thanks for their time; reason for the contact (research project focus and target group); a brief summary of my professional experience and research credentials; outline of the research aims with acknowledgement of its sensitive nature, possible benefits for their agency should they become involved; and (most crucially) a coherent overview of what I was requesting from them. Effectiveness was judged by the duration of the conversation (usually the longer the better); their engagement with the issues through asking clarifying questions; and whether I secured commitment (date and time) to a preliminary meeting to discuss the project in more depth. Where it proved impossible to speak to the individual in person, a letter was sent communicating these same issues with a request for a meeting.

In the interim period before the first meeting, a letter was sent ostensibly to re-iterate the points made in the call and provide further detail, but this also served as an agenda for the meeting. Dependent on the specific content of the first telephone call, items included some or all of the following:

- clarification of what I wanted from them (e.g. support in accessing research participants, guidance on key individuals to speak with, advice on mode of contact)
- criteria for selection of sample (age range, mixed gender and ethnicity, where possible)
- ethics (sensitivity, confidentiality, support for participants)
- participant time requirements in relation to overall time-scale
- interview location (guidance on appropriate venues for interviews dependant on needs of interviewees and agency requirements)

- the need for a discussion on research outcomes (publication, ownership of data, dissemination of findings)
- process of securing informed consent to participation.
- invitation to call or write for further clarification.

Preparation for the first meeting also included consideration of my attire - clothes that conveyed professionalism but which inferred 'trendiness' so that I might be judged as having some connections with young people.

The LEA as gatekeeper to accessing schools - utilising previous professional relationships

As mentioned in chapter 4 (methodology) my access to research participants in schools was facilitated by my previous role as a secondary school teacher and adviser for the LEA. This provided a useful legacy of an unblemished professional profile and on-going relationships with teachers still employed in the schools in which I had been employed. The more recent role of advisory teacher for 'Personal, Social, Sex and HIV/AIDS Education' provided more direct entry to the Director of the LEA and just as importantly, clerical staff. Credit is due to these administrators for speedy and efficient organisation of meeting with senior LEA officials. Without my 'insider' knowledge of key individuals in the bureaucracy, particularly secretaries who hold diaries, the reservation of a 'window in the diary' of directors and senior advisors may have proved more problematic. A diary note captures this:

'Tried all week to get a meeting with Director of LEA, but no-one had knowledge of her whereabouts. In the end decided to resort to 'its who you know, not what you know' and rang Angela, one of the secretaries I regularly liaised with when I was an advisor. I felt uncomfortable but was forthright in reminding her of who I was, asked after her kids and then asked the favour. Bingo! She was so obliging and commented on the 'over-protectiveness of personal secretaries disguised as loyalty'. She actually got hold of the Director's diary from another office and entered a provisional appointment, subject to the Director's approval. At my request (to cover my back and hers) she agreed to leave a note for the Director ostensibly explaining my contact difficulties but also excusing this break with procedure in making the appointment'.

(Diary note, 10 February 1993)

My former manager whilst in the advisory role was of immense help in facilitating access. As the LEA Senior Advisor for Science and Health Education, Sheila held responsibility for overseeing the content and management of sex education in all the Authority's Schools. Thus she held crucial knowledge in relation to schools and staff that might be more interested than others in consenting to participation in the research. Furthermore, she met regularly with the Director of the LEA and promised to 'have a word in her ear' before I made a formal approach. Sheila and I met informally (for lunch) to 'catch up' and discuss the details of the research proposal. As a result of this meeting, the first stage of access negotiations progressed with relative ease.

The Director of the LEA was supportive from the outset and provided written evidence of her support immediately following my first phone call. As the primary gatekeeper, she consented to my request to approach a number of (named) head teachers, but consent to proceed from this point had to be negotiated with individual head teachers and their staff. Additionally and of great value, she volunteered to draw

attention to the research project via a weekly news-sheet to all schools and would seek to encourage involvement through making her consent explicit.

Thus it emerged that the majority of head teachers were aware of the research project before I made personal contact. Coupled with information gained from Sheila on staff likely to be empathic to the research aims, it was possible to prioritise certain target schools, therefore avoiding a lengthy trawl of all schools.

Approaching school staff

In the first instance I approached five headteachers of secondary schools through the process outlined above (telephone calls and/or letter). Three of these responded immediately (Horton, Burton, and Wingate Schools) and meetings were arranged to discuss the project in detail. The other two made contact subsequently but their interest was lukewarm and they seemed relieved to hear I had (by that point) gained consent from other schools. We agreed that no further contact would be made unless required (for instance if the currently interested schools withdrew).

Following meetings with the three provisionally consenting headteachers, I met with the Headteacher's appointed delegate (see table 1) in each school and repeated discussion of the issues as laid out above. Negotiations with other Horton School staff (Year Tutors and Form Tutors) were very productive and within a short time the first meeting with the Horton participants took place. Negotiations at Burton School and Wingate School were more laboured, thus we agreed that I would return to this site, once my work at Horton was underway.

Negotiating access to Youth Service sites

Unlike the schools, negotiating access to the youth service sites involved a different set of unknown entities. I had no personal contacts who were currently working in target sites who might facilitate or endorse my entry to informants. Thus, access through the youth service created the need for more formal approaches, and not unlike those described in Cassel's (1988) and Hoffman's (1980) accounts where boundaries are clear but the mechanisms for penetration via relevant gatekeepers are not always straightforward. Hammersley and Atkinson (1996) illustrate that the problem of who to approach, or whose permission to secure, or, more specifically, identifying individuals with the authority to grant or refuse access, is an age old problem in sociological research.

Common sense suggested I should chase up some old acquaintances for guidance on the most effective strategy before venturing into unknown domains, but because my relationship with the contacts was not as strong as those in the school sector, I had less confidence in the reliability of information provided. Informal enquiries revealed disparate opinions as to the most appropriate strategy. All were agreed on the formal process but disagreed on whether this carried any guarantees in achieving contact with the target sample. Informants with lower status (but with more practical experience of involvement in research) painted unfavourable pictures of their senior colleagues whom they perceived as holding the power to block participation in the study.

Therefore, while these off the record inquiries were successful in identifying the relevant gatekeepers, it also highlighted potential obstacles and raised the issue of whether to circumvent these individuals.

Temptations were strong - to go straight to the target settings would save considerable time but of course run the risk of encountering a plethora of problems, not least for my conscience but also in harming the professional reputations of workers involved and threatening appropriate methods of dissemination. It is this last consideration which persuaded me to pursue more official channels. As already mentioned, commitment to feminist research principles (Stanley, 1990) endowed the intention to ensure that participation in research was remunerated by the provision of feedback on the findings. To carry out research without the official sanction of bureaucrats risked the utility of the findings. How could workers use the findings to best advantage, for instance in changing practice to meet needs as identified by the research, if they could only be discussed covertly? Of course it is entirely reasonable to assume the findings would be of no useful gain to the workers in the field but the workers eagerness to be involved suggested they perceived more positive outcomes. To proceed without deception, at least in the first instance, felt like the only way to avoid severe constraints in relation to publication and risk compromising my research ethics.

Thus the actual pathway for securing access to research participants involved negotiations through official channels in parallel with informal consultation with workers of less senior status. Appendix 2 provides an overview of the final process to access, but other channels were pursued that met with difficulties and rendered the need to resort to alternative channels for support in moving the project forward.

Informal discussions with contacts working in the organisation advised that it was routine practice for the Head of the Youth Service to delegate responsibility for liaison with external researchers to senior managers and/or site workers. Thus it was considered more appropriate to send a courtesy letter informing him of the initiative and relevant project details, but not to seek his consent to proceed. Rather, in the interests of more rapid progress, the letter should indicate that access would be negotiated with those more directly responsible for the specific target localities. Thus the letter indicated this course of action and an invitation to communicate any comments within a 14 day period. Should no comments be received, I would assume his approval for this strategy. In the event, no comments were received. However, I did not greet this with the relief one might expect, rather I worried that a non-response might not indicate approval - perhaps he hadn't received the letter or been on vacation? Had I made my myself clear? Were there any grounds for misunderstanding?

In retrospect, I should have requested a reassuring letter of acknowledgement from the head of the Service, because I went on to risk exposing lack of faith in my organisational skills by making several phone calls in efforts to gain verbal acknowledgement. But to no avail, due to his commitments outside the City during this period. Eventually, I was reassured by a somewhat perplexed administrator that my letter had been processed and had not required any further action on the part of the Head of the Service. She added with considerable irritation:

'... I believe this is in line with your suggestion'.

This diary entry continues with more self-flagellation:

Have more faith in yourself and your contacts Julia, or be willing to spend excessive amounts of time in sticking to more formal procedures, even if they prove less appropriate.

(Diary note 7.9.93)

Subsequently, this episode of self-doubt proved more meaningful, when, at a later stage of negotiation, the assurance of 'processing' was tested when I had to return to the Head of the Service for further advice due to the emergence of access problems (see later).

As planned, the next stage was contact with secondary gatekeepers. Individual Sector Managers in the Youth Service were identified as key to accessing target samples. Difficulties soon became apparent, perhaps in part due to the fact that these managers had been invested with greater power to approve access because of the strategy outlined above which effectively by-passed the need for more senior approval. A courtesy letter was sent to the Sector Managers outlining the research project, and a reply soon followed. This was a curt response merely indicating the letter had been received and required further discussion. Effectively, this left the ball in my court as there was no indication who might be party to these discussions nor whether I would be involved. Thus I rang and arranged an appointment to meet. They cancelled this appointment two hours before it was due to start and then followed a series of unanswered phone calls and letters with requests to re-schedule the meeting. Five weeks after the first letter, a meeting was arranged, though indirectly, through pestering the Sector Managers secretary who eventually confirmed a mutually convenient time.

In the interim period, two youth workers approached me directly with expressions of interest in the research project, having heard about it 'on the grapevine'. They suggested the young people involved in their centre might be appropriate participants and invited me to meet them. It felt unwise to take up their offer before gaining approval from the Sector Managers.

Thus to return to the distinction between *site* consent and *bureaucratic* consent discussed above, consent had been secured with relative ease at the *site* level but could not be assured higher up at the *bureaucratic* level. Furthermore, complications ensued from a lack of clarity between the *gatekeeper* and *stakeholder* role. The site youth workers clearly held a gatekeeper role in providing the consent to approach young people in the field. Their stakeholder interest rested on the conviction that involvement in the research process would be of considerable interest to the young people and the subsequent findings would benefit the related educational and support initiatives available from the agency workers (this issue is discussed further in 'Motivations for involvement in research' below). However, the stakeholder investments of the Sector Managers were not apparent and it is notable that site youth workers suggested quite damning explanations. They regarded the unwillingness of the sector managers to abdicate responsibility to proceed to those working in the field as symptomatic of

'... over meddling megalomaniac bureaucrats'
(Diary note 10.10.93).

In the youth workers' experience, consent to involvement in previous research initiatives had been approved entirely by site workers and they regarded it as their sole responsibility to ensure no individual was harmed as a result. As formal gatekeepers in the tiered organisation, the Sector Managers were assumed to have no other role than that of administratively supporting the research to the next stage of the access process, for instance, to facilitate networking and liaison between interested parties. In respect of considering the appropriateness and legitimacy of the actual research project, the site workers felt this lay within their realm of responsibility and supported the assertion by

workers felt this lay within their realm of responsibility and supported the assertion by affirming that they also accepted responsibility in the event of negative outcomes, and they did not expect nor receive support from Sector Managers in their experience. These discussions with the site workers exposed frailties in the agency's bureaucratic policies. It highlighted that formal procedures and lines of responsibility for research activity were unclear and proved unavailable when requested. Indeed, nobody was able to ascertain whether they existed at all.

Henceforth considerable frustrations resulted for both myself and the site workers who were angry that the administrative gatekeepers could wield such power, to at best, delay the research, and at worst, prevent it.

In efforts not to prolong formal negotiations and create a spirit of open communication, I requested that the site workers be invited to the meeting with the Sector Managers, confident that the site workers would support my case and also place us in a better position to prevent further procrastination. Surprisingly the sector managers agreed to this and I naively assumed the battle was all but over.

In preparation for the appointment with Sector Managers and site workers, I opted not to speak with the site workers beforehand in order to prevent there being any suggestion that we had been involved in subversive plotting to undermine the Sector Managers' position. It transpired that such honourable decisions were foolish when as on arrival at the meeting I was informed, without explanation, that the site workers had not been invited.

'The most difficult of all meetings' (Diary note, 31.10.94)

From the outset this meeting was unpleasant. Having been kept waiting for 30 minutes I was ushered into the office of the Sector Manager (Shirley) who offered neither apology nor explanation for the delay. From a seated (and raised) position behind her desk, Shirley said 'have a chair' pointing to a low armchair placed at the opposite side of and below the level of the desktop. Thus, there I sat for the entirety, symbolically separated by physical and behavioural means (me gazing up into her face in desperate attempts to secure eye contact). The physical separation as metaphor for the immutability of their position (as yet undisclosed) was enhanced on Derek's (no introduction) entry. This second Sector Manager brought a chair with him and sat behind the desk, aside of Shirley. At this point, my nervous urges to laugh at the ridiculousness of this arrangement were suppressed by focusing hard on the gun metal back of the paper tidier stack which my eyes met naturally as I looked forward from my disconcerting (disad)vantage point.

At their request I provided an overview of the research study - funding, rationale, aims, target group and timescale. Their non-verbal communication suggested disinterest and cynicism. I received no affirming nods or cues that might normally be construed as 'active listening'. Instead, Shirley regularly looked out of the window, checked her watch and repeatedly shuffled in her chair, crossing and uncrossing her legs and repositioning herself. Such was the extent of shuffling that I asked her if she was alright, thinking that maybe she had a back problem. Unfortunately no such orthopaedic reassurances were forthcoming and I was told to continue 'as time was short'. Meanwhile, Derek focused on his papers and made notes (or perhaps doodled) while I spoke. In addition, Shirley took three phone calls during my commentary but told me to continue talking whilst she took the call. Concentrating in this unconducive atmosphere

was very difficult but I retained an air of attentive and obliging good nature. Despite invitations to question or comment, neither Shirley nor Derek spoke, thus I did not feel encouraged to talk for too long and actually found myself rushing through the relevant issues in efforts to curtail their apparent boredom. On requesting their response to my proposal, neither offered any directly related comments. Instead, they offered, in their words,

'... a few home truths.'

Alarm bells rang immediately - the suggestion that I would benefit from their 'insider' wisdom was obviously legitimate but the notion of a 'home truth' implied a perceived lack of awareness on my part. Indeed, together they provided a number of reasons intended to put me off pursuing access, most of which rested on their perception of me, for example:

'As an outsider, it will be impossible for you to understand the young people's needs' Shirley

'It's all well and good, devising proposals from the ivory tower of academia - but this is the real world - have you any idea what to expect?' Derek

'The key workers are likely to be very suspicious - you waltz in, do your interview and waltz out leaving them to pick up the pieces' Shirley

I was given little space to respond other than saying I understood their concerns and welcomed their honesty. Each of the specific issues raised was worthy of serious discussion but several frustrating attempts failed to engage them in a two way discussion. The prime motive appeared only to dissuade me from seeking access, in that when I stated explicitly that their concerns did not diminish my interest but that I would do all I could to attend to them, they resorted to presenting a series of worst case scenarios:

'What if you discover things you wished you hadn't?'

'.. a young girl involved in sex work?'

Again, these 'what-ifs' could have proved useful in clarifying our respective positions and responsibilities, vis-à-vis such potential developments, but I was not given the opportunity to respond. Shirley continued that it was unwise to,

'... open up that can of worms'

I seized on this as a gift, suggesting that the research findings might provide insights which youth services could use in their sexual health initiatives. Neither of them responded to this. Thus, I reminded them of the option for me to liaise directly with the youth workers who had close contact with young people who may be involved in risk activities. Neither commented on this option and moreover, at this point, the meeting was drawn to an abrupt end, ostensibly because of other pressing commitments. Perplexed at the premature termination of our discussions (only half of the 60 minutes reserved for the meeting had elapsed), I irritatingly enquired how we might proceed since little seemed to have been resolved. Shirley, as spokesperson retorted:

'We'll think about it and get back to you'

At this point she began gathering her things together, clearly indicative of her intention to leave the room, following Derek who had already disappeared. As I was ushered out by her arm gesturing, I asked if a response could be communicated within seven days, to which Shirley nodded - I thought, signalling agreement.

Predictably seven days elapsed without any contact from the sector managers. On the

ninth day (to avoid appearing over-zealous) I rang Shirley and Derek but neither returned my call. Ethical dilemmas followed - how could I gain legitimate access without their consent? Was it ethical or appropriate to pursue the optional route and take up the site workers' offer to speak directly with their team, in the absence of the Sector Managers' consent? While remaining hopeful that the Sector Managers' consent would materialise, I decided it was too risky to pursue the latter alternative since both my own and the social workers' reputations might be jeopardised and it would render no grounds for bureaucratic support in the event of difficult developments.

Following much deliberation I returned to my 'contact' in the youth service and confided my dilemma. His response was reassuring in that, in his words, 'the resistance you experienced is not unique - par for the course', and should not be allowed to sabotage the research intentions. He felt it entirely legitimate to bypass these two individuals and cease wasting any more time, hence suggesting I write another letter to the Head of the Youth Service requesting his written consent to proceed.

The previous strategic step of providing written courtesy information for the Head of the Youth Service stood in good stead for the follow up letter. This pointed out (without detail) the access negotiation difficulties with the Sector Managers, together with the willingness to collaborate from workers in the field. I received a reply almost immediately. This gave his consent to bypass the Sector Managers and approach potential research sites directly. Additionally, he offered his personal apology for the delays experienced. Interestingly, his letter made reference to details of the project which had not been included in any of my written communications, notably with regard to the timescale for the project. His sources were of obvious interest to me, but were not identified until several months later. It transpired that the Head of Youth Services was a personal friend of an officer at the LEA and they had informally discussed my research prior to knowledge of the access difficulties.

Thus, in the context of considering the influence/power of gatekeepers and stakeholders, another, previously unacknowledged agency, enters the frame indirectly. Until this point, I had not acknowledged the value of maintaining communication with individuals in the primary gatekeeper sites. Publicity wise, I was well served by the regular updates I provided for the LEA representative designated with an external liaison responsibility. I sent regular written reports and kept in touch by telephone, which he clearly appreciated. However, I did not consider utilising him in any access negotiations, yet he may be credited for influencing the Head of Youth Services to approve access consent.

The variation in relationship dynamics and their influence are demonstrable here. In the youth services setting, networks between bureaucracies and tiers in the organisation aided access negotiations, in the absence of more direct contacts or personal relationships. Whereas, in the schools context, personal relationships with the school and LEA advisors aided less circuitous access.

I have mentioned previously that access was influenced by the varying motivations of gatekeepers and stakeholders. Attention now turns to this issue.

Motivations for involvement in research

During access negotiations, the potential of four factors to influence the stakeholder's willingness (or not) to be involved was not fully appreciated. These relate first to the

differing perception of research outcome and the implications thereof for working practice; second, to the specific nature of the young people (research participants) for whom the stakeholders were responsible; third, the influence of my academic links in the research project, and finally, the responsibility of researchers to negotiate contracts of agreement with respect to the status of findings and their dissemination within and external to the agency.

1. Motivations based on outcomes

In the school context, the headteachers and teachers saw specific gains for their curriculum and pastoral development. The research findings were anticipated as providing useful information to inform their personal and social education programmes. During negotiations I had pledged to provide verbal and written feedback to all who were interested and offered INSET training if considered appropriate. Unwittingly, the INSET offer dangled a much coveted carrot. In a climate where so called 'Baker Days' had been imposed by government and relinquished teachers of five days annual leave, they were viewed with considerable dissatisfaction and cynicism. Moreover, teachers were reticently cajoled into planning INSET activities and the offer of external input to fill an INSET day was much appreciated.

In the youth services context, motivations were not unsimilar to those of teachers. Site workers welcomed information which could inform their guidance/informal education programmes and offer evaluation (albeit systematically crude) of their current practice and policy regimes. However, as already mentioned, from the Sector Manager's perspective, there were anxieties about the nature of the findings, particularly those outcomes that might be construed as conflicting with the legal position and policy recommendations of the Youth services Directorate.

The wider ramifications of the findings as perceived by youth services managers, when compared to more limited perceptions of school teachers, is reflected in the Sector Manager's comment on 'opening up a can of worms'. To paraphrase his words, '... if the can of worms is opened up and we don't like what we see - what do we do? It opens up the gates for all sorts of resource demands and legal action.' A plethora of interpretations, on my part, followed this comment - a defensive excuse, over-cautious protectionism, ostrich-like censorship or a realistic assessment of potential economic cost to the agency? Actual explanations are unfortunately unavailable but it is important to acknowledge that his prediction makes apparent a major difference between youth services and educational providers that may have influenced decisions to be involved. Explanations remain speculative, but off-the-cuff comments made by teachers and youth workers provide some insight to decipher the more defensive stance of the latter.

The teachers held a perception that there were clear boundaries of responsibility as compared to the more unwieldy perceptions of youth services personnel. That is, while the boundaries of responsibility for schools is generally indistinct and variable, these particular teachers saw themselves as responsible only for young people in their role as pupils and as such cannot legitimately hold responsibility for everything that young people do in and out of school. Though they acknowledged the debate is hot, the influence of the home environment and other out-of-school factors was not felt to rest directly within the school or teacher's realm of responsibility. Thus, in responding to research findings, they felt able to define some restrictions over what is and what is not realistic for them to endeavour to

influence or change.

Conversely, in the youth service settings, workers were unclear of their responsibilities, or how findings would be acted on, particularly if policy infringements were exposed. Maybe the Sector Manager was more in tune with wider ramifications than I acknowledged at the time. This issue is discussed further in point 4 below.

2. Nature of young people

The particular character, history and demeanour of the young people targeted for involvement in the research samples was obviously more apparent to the gatekeepers than to myself. This is not unconnected to the point made above and may have had an equally persuasive or dissuasive influence.

Firstly, on the matter of legality vis-à-vis sexual activity and related drug use or. At the outset of discussions with youth services, there was an implicit assumption (from their perspective) that the youngsters they worked with would have some experience, however variable, of sexual behaviour and drug use and. For them, the stakes were already highly stacked, and oft repeated discussions centred on possible responses once and *when* the activities were disclosed.

However, in the school setting, teachers erred optimistically on discussing courses of action *if* illicit behaviour was discovered. The tendency was to assume that a minority might hold experiences not befitting a school student and that the majority would not disclose behaviours, views or knowledge levels previously unapparent to the teachers.

To a degree, youth service professionals were well endowed with background knowledge to shape their perceptions of young people they worked with. It turned out that many came from 'broken homes', had not been able to cope in mainstream schooling and/or had been involved in crime. The likelihood of familiarity with sexual behaviour and drug use was perceived as fairly high. It is notable that the latter deterred some gatekeepers but encouraged others, the former wishing to keep 'the lid on' unpalatable knowledge and the latter seeking to establish some clear knowledge and act accordingly.

In the school context, some teachers may therefore have consented to participation based on rather more naive assumptions of teenage students and their behaviour. This was subsequently confirmed on receipt of the research findings which some teachers found 'shocking and incredible'. Ironically, this naiveté among certain staff had provided the motivation for the senior managers of one school to participate in the research. A headteacher and senior tutor confidentially disclosed that they hoped the research findings would help challenge the clearly held, somewhat blinkered belief of some staff, that 'all pupils were law abiding citizens'. They maintained it was preferable to gain a realistic picture of students' behaviour through a project over which they had some measure of control and had instigated, than to have incriminating evidence forced on them through media surveillance or unfortunate outcomes such as pregnancy. Additionally, there was a sense among some staff that more traditional, conservative teachers needing 'shocking' in order to spur them into providing more realistic educational input which linked knowledge with experience and offered greater potential for young people to believe their teachers were 'tuned in' and therefore offer more meaningful lessons as a result.

On the contrary, most youth services' fieldworkers believed there was little that could be discovered about which they were not already aware. The 'shockability' factor was less important. Yet, both shared the incentive of gaining specific data which could not be ignored and thus used as currency to negotiate better resourcing of strategies for support and education.

3. Academic connections

My connection to a university yielded two disparate responses - either being perceived as giving kudos to the research, or, attracting ridicule. Comfortable in perceiving myself as not adhering to the academic stereotype and perhaps feeling I had not yet been 'contaminated' by arrogant scholarly-ness (due to the newness of my first academic post), I did not anticipate the strength of feeling nor significance of my association to a university from some quarters.

Aware of the stereotype from the outset, I deliberately played down the Higher Education connection and mentioned it only briefly during formal introductions, perhaps in reflection of my suspicions that such an association did not enhance my credentials. Rather ingenuously, without exception I referred to myself as a researcher and only discussed my lecturing role if specifically requested.

In the main, individuals with whom I had no previous relationship were most sceptical of the university connection. While this could be anticipated, I also expected some cynicism (at least) from ex-colleagues in schools who might understandably question my retreat from secondary school teaching. As it was, any misgivings on their part were either not made apparent or dissipated by my emphasis on the importance of my school teaching experience to being able to carry out the research.

In situations where there was no shared biographic history between myself and gatekeepers, I was acutely aware that suspicions were aroused, as demonstrated by direct questioning about my academic role, jokey but piercing references to 'ivory towers' and 'sandal-wearing sociologists'. For example, one youth worker asked if I'd got a rope ladder in my bag. On asking why I needed it, he replied 'to escape from the ivory tower'. On another occasion, while attending a team meeting at youth centre, an introductory and timely ice-breaker was provided by light-hearted and humorous banter regaling the 'head-in-the-clouds' stereotype of sociologists. Satirical moments like these provided the opportunity to assure them of my down-to-earthness and in most cases the significance of my scholarly affiliations diminished without further mention. In the main, male youth workers were most overtly cynical.

I sensed that teachers felt that the research gave their institution some kudos. Students also seemed proud to be involved with a university affiliated project.

While it is unclear how directly academic connections influenced working relations in the field, the significant number of negative references to '*ivory towers*', '*separateness*' from the real world and '*sociologists*' provide an important reminder that the stereotype is alive and kicking and as such has implications for research - negotiating access in particular. It also endorses the need for careful consideration of the mode of first contact. To communicate in the first instance via university letterheaded paper may be the key to rejection whereas a personal phone call may pre-empt such premature decisions.

4. Negotiating contracts in relation to research outcomes

Reflecting on these differing stakeholder perceptions leads me to formulate that there were weaknesses in my approach to negotiating the procedures for dissemination of the findings (Bulmer 1982). Specifically this relates to the formalising of requirements for more explicit discussion on modes and types of feedback. These should acknowledge that tensions might arise from the need to protect the rights and confidences of those involved (both participants and stakeholders) and meet the need to publish in the public forum (Adelman 1979).

The reticence of the youth service Sector Managers to engage in detailed dialogue on operationalising the research and mechanisms for feedback (of findings) could not have been predicted but with the benefit of hindsight, it would have been beneficial to produce written documentation on issues requiring clarity with a view to publication that offered some protection for those involved in the research act. The provision of a written commitment to negotiation about the exchange of information may have encouraged greater participation in discussion of potential conflicts and coping with any dissonance which might arise from my interpretation of data. Smith (1980) reminds us of the researcher's dual responsibility to protect self and respondents:

‘The core ethical problem in any social science research is acting in the context of two conflicting values - the pursuit of truth through scientific procedures and the maintenance of respect for the individuals whose lives are being lived, focally or peripherally, in the context of one's research project.’ (p192).

In relation to my research practice, such a truism can be seen to apply directly to research participants, ‘.. whose lives are being lived focally’ (ibid.) and indeed endorsed in my specific actions. However, in relation to stakeholders and gatekeepers, ‘... whose lives are being lived ... peripherally’ (ibid.), less diligent efforts were more customary. The process of negotiating informed consent, and methods utilised in collection of data, and dissemination of findings, honoured a commitment to maintain confidentiality and ensure no individual could be harmed as a result of participation in the study. However, commitments to respecting the rights of research participants were perhaps not matched by those to some stakeholders. Respect for the latter's investment in the research outcome was perhaps diminished in instances where relationships were problematic. It is true to say that where stakeholders were welcoming, open and positive about involvement in the research, time was afforded by both parties to negotiate appropriate feedback mechanisms. But where there appeared a resistance, I was quick to draw rather simplified conclusions without acknowledgement of more complex explanations. Maintenance of the status quo was interpreted as a reason not to pursue that channel of access, whereas declaration of a commitment to change within the institution, was perceived as far more honourable and accordant with my expending of more time to ensure all parties remained comfortable with their involvement. Thus, my efforts to pursue the Sector Managers' consent were curtailed perhaps prematurely at a personal cost of remaining unenlightened about their particular reasons for not signing up for the research.

Returning to the Sectors Managers' ‘can of worms’, two possible factors are proposed to explain why this scenario may have been posited. The first relates to differences in perception, vis-à-vis limits of responsibility discussed in point 1 above. The second possible explanation relates to the variance in relationship dynamic between the gatekeepers and researcher. In the school setting, the relationship between researcher and teachers had a positive history and in some ways the research project served to

consolidate these associations. One can only hypothesise, but perhaps this invested a greater degree of trust and gatekeepers held greater confidence that no harm would result from participation in the study. Lack of familiarity with my personal principles and record of sensitive practice may have rendered these youth service managers less optimistic about my research integrity.

Naturally and rightfully, all gatekeepers will be aware that whatever the implications of the research findings and moreover whatever responses they evoke in their specific setting, the external researcher can always take their data and run (Simons 1989). Even where findings raise difficulties for institutions, the researcher can at any point take flight and her interpretations remain intact, albeit ethically blemished if measures have not been implemented to enable discussion of conflicts and reach agreement which does not detriment the agency concerned.

Irrespective of actual boundaries of responsibility, in relation to managing the implications of findings, it would have been beneficial to draw up a written contract with all stakeholders which embodied the sentiments of ethical research conduct, in particular as it pertains to dissemination of findings. Simons (1989) offers useful guidance on how these contracts may be drawn up and notably cautions that guidelines are often not perceived as necessary at the outset, the need only arising when difficulties are encountered. As it transpired, difficulties in relation to dissemination did not result in this research study but the issue of explicit negotiation of guidelines is raised here due to its relevance in holding the potential to adversely affect the process of securing access to research participants.

Specifically, there should have been greater clarity about the status of the findings. This was an external piece of research and not a systematic evaluation of specific agency practice. As such the stakeholder agencies were under no obligation to accept the findings nor act on the recommendation. With regard to the findings moving from the private to the public domain, publication would only appear in academic forums, and as such strict measures would be enforced to ensure agencies were not identifiable

The right of agencies to accept or dismiss findings was discussed at the time but the time allowed for such important discussion was minimal and in retrospect assumed greater understanding than was perhaps the case, hence supporting the need for written documentation. Furthermore, in the youth service setting I was more of a 'stranger', an 'outsider', than in the school settings, thus it follows that, first, there may be less confidence in my ethical principles vis-à-vis disclosure of findings, and second, I did not fully acknowledge that collegial relations among youth service's staff were less robust than those of individuals in (some of) the collaborating schools. These considerations might also have influenced the Sector Managers reticence to participate in the research. The youth service agency involved a large, complex network of staff and satellite organisations, often with greater unofficial autonomy than the LEA sector, therefore, effective management of conflict or lack of agreement within and between the disparate agencies, philosophies and working practices, might well be an onerous and unwelcome task.

A lack of confidence in my role to ensure no harm resulted, anticipation of having to manage the outcomes, and the lack of statutory agency guidelines on managing research involvement, could understandably account for the Sector Managers less than welcoming response to my request for participation.

Appendix 4: Post Script

Three years after completing the fieldwork I bumped into three individuals that had contributed a great deal to the study data. In catching up on each others' lives since the research project, they recollected that during the period after leaving school (when they were searching for work and/or considering enrolling at FE College) they returned to Horton school on a routine basis at lunch times and at the end of the school day:

'Just hung about, chatting to old mates and teachers and that'.

Essentially they felt uprooted and in a state of,

'... not really belonging anywhere'

'... just a bit, you know, not confident anywhere else'.

These recollections support the predictions they made for their futures (see theme 10) and are reminiscent of feelings of anxiety associated with fateful moments (Giddens 1991) and self-doubt (in relation to sufficient personal resources) to deal with 'new' challenges of unfamiliar territory and different routines. Two of the young women continued to return to school for 'about three months' after having started FE courses, demonstrating that even when the 'new' became familiar, they retained yearnings to return to old stomping grounds. This re-positions some of the original disclosures from the realm of the possible, to the actual, and hence gives greater validity to the analysis. This post script is all the more meaningful because despite these young women having been so critical of their schooling experience, they continued to see school as a place of sanctuary. As such, schools are favourably construed and positioned to provide the support young people requested, as summarised in the recommendations of the thesis.