

# **ADOLESCENT DATING VIOLENCE AND THE NEGOTIATION OF GENDER**

**A thesis submitted to the  
sub-faculty of Sociology  
in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements for the degree of**

**Doctor of Philosophy**

**of the**

**University of Oxford**

**by**

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Oxford  
Michaelmas 1995**



# **ABSTRACT**

## **Adolescent Dating Violence And The Negotiation Of Gender**

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Michaelmas 1995

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of  
the requirement for the degree of D.Phil.

The purpose of the thesis is to investigate psychological, physical and sexual violence in adolescent, heterosexual, intimate relationships. Questionnaires were administered to 487 pupils at two secondary comprehensive schools in Oxford. Data from the questionnaire reveal that a minority of adolescents regularly employ violence in intimate relationships and suggest no significant differences in levels of violence between adolescents of different gender, religious affiliation, household composition or social class. A review of the literature on the use of this standardised questionnaire highlights serious methodological and epistemological problems and questions the use of such questionnaires in future research on the phenomenon of intimate violence

The primary focus of the thesis concerns transcript data from seventeen single-sex focus groups and thirteen individual interviews. Transcript data reveals that girls and boys recount different experiences of reality. The discourse used by girls and boys represents an active negotiation of personal experience and cultural prescriptions of meaning.

Peers, parents, siblings, teachers, school administrators and media inform adolescents about dominant definitions and boundaries of gender. These definitions are discussed as 'hegemonic masculinity' and 'emphasised femininity' in which gender is structured as distinct, separate, hierarchical and biologically determined. Girls and boys who employed discourses of biological determinism described intimate violence as inevitable and largely a function of female responsibility. Conflict results from the negotiation of this culturally dominant discourse and personal experience. A minority of girls and boys employed other discourses such as those of socialisation and feminism. These discourses provide alternative understandings of personal experience and social identity which some adolescents may find empowering and represent a crucial resistance to the ascendancy of culturally practiced gender.

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*Diamond in the Rough*  
*Shawn Colvin*

*As a little girl I went down to the water  
With a little stone in my hand  
It would shimmer and sing  
And I knew everything  
As a little girl I went down*

*But, in a little while I got steeped in authority  
Heaven only knows what went wrong  
There is nothing so cruel  
As to bury that jewel  
When it was mine all along  
But I'm going to find it*

*You're shining I can see you  
You're smiling, that's enough  
I'm holding on to you  
Like a diamond in the rough*

*I was angry back then  
And you know I still am  
I have lost too much sleep  
But I'm going to find it*

*In my dreams I go down to the water  
With a little girl in my arms  
And we shimmer and sing  
And we know everything  
In my dreams we go down*

*Strength*  
*Meryn Cadell*

*We both read the papers*  
*We both know that it's wrong*  
*But the news makes one of us helpless*  
*And one of us bold*

*We've had our ears to the floor for years*  
*I know the signs of fright*  
*One of us fills with regret*  
*The other will fight*

*I would if I could*  
*Look into her eyes*  
*And show exactly where I'm getting it from*

*The marks I've made like wounds*  
*Are my successes on the Earth*  
*I turn and she turns with me*  
*I love but she won't hear me*  
*How can that be?*

*She says "you amaze me*  
*How did you get so strong"?*  
*As if I am older and wiser*  
*And she's just old*

*I would if I could*  
*Look in to her eyes*  
*And show exactly where I'm getting it from*  
*I would if I could*

*This Must Be The Place (Naive Melody)*  
*Talking Heads*

*Home*

*Is where I want to be  
Pick me up and turn me round  
I feel numb, born with a weak heart  
I guess I must be having fun*

*The less we say about it the better  
Let's make it up as we go along  
Feet on the ground, head in the sky  
It's okay, I know nothing's wrong*

*Hi-ho, I got plenty of time  
Hi-ho, you got light in your eyes  
And you're standing here beside me  
I love the passing of time  
Never for money, always for love  
Cover up and say good-night  
Say good-night*

*Home*

*Is where I want to be  
But I guess I'm already there  
I come home, you lifted up your wings  
I guess this must be the place*

*I can't tell one from another  
Did I find you, or you find me?  
There was a time, before we were born  
If someone asks, this is where I'll be*

*Hi-ho, we drift in and out  
Hi-ho, sing into the night  
And of all those kinds of people  
You got a face with a view  
And I am just an animal  
Looking for a home  
To share the same space for a minute or two*

*Will you love me until my heart stops?  
Will you love me until I am dead?  
You got eyes that light up,  
Eyes that look through  
Cover up the blind spots, hit me on the head  
Say good-night*

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### *Aims of the Thesis:*

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The recent report of the Commission on Children and Violence (November, 1995) concerns the phenomenon of violence committed by children. Although the Commission acknowledges that children are far more likely to be victims of violence rather than perpetrators, children and adolescents are now recognised to commit acts of violence (pg.10). The report focuses on several types of violence committed by children and youths such as gang violence and bullying in schools. Several explanations for these forms of violence are also explored: family dysfunction, drug and alcohol abuse, corporal punishment in schools, media influences, the influence of school and peers, mental illness and biological factors. The report does acknowledge that violence within intimate adolescent relationships does exist, but does not address this problem in any depth. Other recent studies in Britain, such as those by Felty, Ainslie and Geib (1991) and Archer and Ray (1989) have begun to explore adolescent 'dating' violence as a serious social problem in Britain.

The purpose of my research is to explore the ways in which female and male adolescents negotiate intimate 'dating' relationships in situations in which psychological, physical and/or sexual violence occurs. I am specifically interested in the ways in which girls and boys understand their experiences of violence and how these

understandings 'fit' with cultural definitions of violence. I want to understand the ways in which certain definitions of reality come to be accepted in these adolescent's discourses, even in the face of contradictory, lived experience. Researchers in the United States and Canada have examined adolescent dating violence since the early 1980's. This research has largely focused on 'risk factors' proposed to be associated with violence such as ethnicity, class and the use of alcohol. These research studies have 'borrowed' techniques used to measure wife assault, offering adolescents possible reasons for their use of violence and then tabulating the responses. I propose to study adolescent dating violence from a different theoretical perspective and using a different method. I am interested in exploring how female and male adolescents understand the meaning of dating interactions. What expectations do males and females have? Do female and male adolescents feel any conflict between their own preferences and expectations and those of their dating partners and the larger social group? How do they reconcile this conflict?

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***Approaches of the Thesis:***

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**Theoretical:**

There are a number of inherent problems in accounting for a phenomenon as complex as violence against females by known males (DeKeseredy and Hinch, 1991; Dobash and Dobash, 1979; Yllo and Bograd, 1988). Attempts to synthesise disparate accounts of the prevalence and incidence of violence are hindered by varying definitions of violence. Wife assault and adult date rape have received considerable study compared to violence against girls by boys in the playground. Female violence against known males remains remarkably under theorised. Sociology focuses on group explanations of violence amongst known persons. Whereas psychological explanations use the individual as the basis of discovering the aetiology of violence, sociological explanations look at how groups of people engage in aggressive and violent acts. Also, there is considerable overlap between psychological and sociological theories.

Much of the research conducted on adolescent intimate violence has employed a systems theory approach and I will summarily address this theory here. Systems theory conceptualises relationships as systems; that is social systems with inter-related parts (Bandura, 1973; Eron, 1987; Frude, 1991; Straus, 1973; Sussman and Steinmetz, 1987). The parts of each 'system', in the research in question, include the members' relationships with each other, and the norms, values and laws of the society and culture in which that system exists. Each of these parts interact together in a system of constant feedback. The system adapts and changes in order to maintain homeostasis. Violence results from the *interaction* of the members of the group. The violent act is

triggered by the individual who survives that same act. The focus of systems theory is on the relationship between perpetrator and victim. The responsibility of the perpetrator is lost in this type of analysis. Moreover, systems theory fails to account for male violence in relationships in which the female has more 'power' (economic, familial or personal). It assumes that gendered power is static and we then face the problem of accounting for female violence.

I have approached my research study from an explicitly feminist perspective. That is, all relationships, individual, family, social groups and social institutions concern the practice of gender. Violence within relationships is understood as a feature of gender relations structured by power. Males (institutionally occupying the dominant power position) benefit from females' institutionalised subordination through the availability of power as a means of controlling females and as a restricting mechanism for women's lives. My research attempts to gain insight into several aspects of this power relation. I am interested in how female and male adolescents understand gendered power relations and how these relations are negotiated. I see violence as a specific, severe, product of the use of power. At the same time it is clear that any *individual* social relationship consists of an infinite number of *actions*. These actions, in themselves, may not constitute any individual male having greater power. Thus, a significant aspect of my thesis addresses female violence; its structure, action and negotiation.

### **Methodological:**

To date, the overwhelming majority of research studies have attempted to

describe adolescent dating violence employing questionnaires such as the Conflict Tactics Scale. This method has proven to be useful in garnering estimates of the prevalence and incidence of dating violence, yet quite limited in its ability to measure any of its complexities such as attitudes towards, and responses to, violence. I chose to explore adolescent dating violence using a different method. The majority of research studies investigating adolescent dating violence share a common language, method and interpretation of findings. These components of past research were examined in order to illustrate the ways in which adolescent dating violence is usually understood and to support my intent to explore this phenomenon from a different theoretical perspective and using a different method. I began my research by administering a questionnaire (based on The Conflict Tactics Scale) in order to obtain estimates of the prevalence and forms of adolescent dating violence among the population studied in the United Kingdom. I then conducted a series of seventeen focus groups and several in-depth interviews. The qualitative data garnered from the groups and interviews was used in two ways: to compare it to the data gathered from the questionnaire; and to explore the meanings that male and female adolescents ascribe to this violence. An important aspect of my research has been to raise issues of validity with regard to the Conflict Tactics Scale and my employment of the qualitative data for comparative purposes will be fully discussed in Chapter 6.

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*Summary of Chapters:*

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Chapter 2 provides a comprehensive review of relevant literature. I begin by discussing past research concerned with wife assault, followed by studies which have focused on physical, sexual and psychological forms of violence in university and secondary school populations. Much of the literature focuses on 'risk factors' as significant indicators of violence and this chapter reviews those most frequently cited. One of these 'risks' seems to be the attitudes that adolescents themselves report about violence against females and victim-blaming and these research findings are discussed. Finally, limitations of terminology, method and interpretation of previous studies' findings are outlined.

Chapter 3 outlines the theoretical framework I have chosen for the research. The theoretical framework definitely structured the data collection and analysis. I have highlighted the themes of adolescent social development, moral reasoning, female silencing, active negotiation and theorising female violence. Next, the purpose of the research is stated, followed by a description of the research questions and definitions. Chapter 4 concerns the methods I employed to investigate adolescent violence. The first part of the chapter reviews the pilot study, the choice of schools and the process of gaining access to my sample. The next part of the chapter deals with the research instruments themselves, both their construction and administration. The instruments consisted of a questionnaire and interviews. The chapter's final section concerns how the data from the questionnaire, interviews and census data was analysed. Chapter 4 ends with issues of validity and a brief outline of the research timetable.

Chapter 5 focuses on an analysis of the questionnaire. As outlined in the description of the purpose of the study, one of the important aspects of my research was to use complementary quantitative and qualitative data in order to analyse the contributions and limitations that each method has to sociological understanding. I have detailed the findings of the questionnaire and then compared these results with the data that emerged from feedback discussions about the questionnaire in the focus groups. In Chapter 6 I attend to the criticisms of the Conflict Tactics Scale. These criticisms include those emanating from the literature, the transcripts of the adolescents in this research and my own experiences of administering and analysing the questionnaire.

Chapters 7, 8 and 9 are the substantive chapters, concerned with the analysis of male violence, female violence and social class, respectively. Whilst Chapter 5 focused primarily on the data from the questionnaire, these next chapters use this data simply to augment the focus group and interview data. Chapter 7 reviews the results of the questionnaire, but primarily focuses on the data gathered from the focus groups and individual interviews. Themes to emerge from the data include incidence and prevalence rates of violence, definitions of violence, the negotiation of violence, female's first experience of male violence, and males' experience of violent action. Chapter 8 begins with an outline of the scant literature about female violence and proposes reasons for this academic 'silence' on this phenomenon. Analysis of the data in this chapter again include gendered definitions of violence, male experience of female violence, female experience of their own violence and the discourse used to understand and describe the violence. Chapter 9 attends to the impact of social class on

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the male and female adolescents' understanding and experiences of, violence in relationships. In this chapter I have combined the data from three sources: the questionnaire, the postcode analysis and the focus groups. I explore social class as both distinct from, and within, the larger theme of gender. Finally, Chapter 10 provides a summary of the results of the research study and highlights the emergent themes of the data.



## CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### *Introduction:*

---

The purpose of my research is to explore female and male adolescents' understandings of their experiences of 'dating' violence and how these understandings 'fit' with cultural definitions of violence. Research in this area began with the study of wife assault and I review this literature first. I have then divided the findings from past research into physical, sexual and psychological violence. Much of the literature focuses on 'risk factors' such as the use of alcohol and 'attitudes' such as victim-blaming and the main findings of these studies are outlined. I have chosen a largely descriptive format for the review of previous research in this Chapter. Findings concerned with prevalence and incidence, risk factors and attitudes served as the backdrop to my research project. My research was mainly concerned with a more complex exploration of the negotiation of adolescent experiences of gendered violence. Finally, limitations of previous studies are discussed with particular emphasis on gender-neutral language, method and interpretations of findings. It is some of these limitations that I have attempted to overcome in my research study, discussed in Chapter 4.

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***Past Research:***

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The serious social problem of wife assault has come to the attention of researchers, practitioners and, more recently, the public, within the past twenty years (Macleod, 1987). Traditionally violence against women in heterosexual relationships has been assumed to take place only between adults. This assumption is proving unfounded. Quite recently, researchers have begun to uncover violence against adolescent girlfriends as an equally prevalent and serious problem as wife assault (Makepeace, 1981; Mercer, 1986). The necessary reliance on estimates of incidence and prevalence of adolescent girlfriend assault has resulted in varying statistics. Further confounding the accuracy and validity of the numbers is the absence of any national, official statistics on adolescent girlfriend assault. It is important to note that samples of adolescent subjects have only been surveyed within the last five years and that these surveys have been mainly American and Canadian.

**Wife Assault:**

In the early 1970s, the phenomenon of wife assault first began to surface as an area of concern beyond social service providers. Prior to the publication of the first studies documenting the prevalence of wife assault, many researchers did not perceive that violence against wives actually existed; those who were aware of the problem often did not believe that it existed with sufficient incidence to warrant investigation. A plethora of studies have since underscored the widespread finding that the family is the most violent Western institution.

Estimates of the prevalence of wife assault vary. Most studies estimate this prevalence from a combination of hospital and police records and the records of the few shelters for battered women that exist. Dobash and Dobash (1979), in a landmark study conducted in the United Kingdom, found that assaults against wives was the second most common form of violence (second only to violence between unrelated males). More recently, in Canada, Macleod (1987) estimated that one out of every ten married or cohabiting women regularly experience violence by their male partners. Barnes, Greenwood and Sommer (1991) concluded that a third of all injuries to Canadian women are the result of violence perpetrated by their husbands. These researchers further related that six out of every ten women who are murdered each year in Canada are killed by their husbands or boyfriends.

Researchers have proposed several 'explanations' accounting for wife assault. These theories range in focus from individual pathology to societal accountability. For instance, some researchers study individual characteristics such as alcohol consumption and stress management abilities as variables that correlate with the presence of wife assault. Other theorists, such as Wolfgang and Feracuti, support a "subculture of violence" theory (in DeKeseredy, 1991). These researchers propose that violence is the result of subcultural patterns which exists among certain groups in society. Violence is viewed as a normative response within these groups. However, such theories have been widely criticised by researchers who have documented wife assault amongst all social classes, races, ethnicities and other such groups (Dobash and Dobash, 1979). These researchers propose that wife assault will only be understood when the structure of society as a whole is considered and wife assault is contextualised within that

structure.

Researchers have considered the similarities and differences between wife assault and adolescent dating violence and have suggested that the similarities include: a significant amount of time the couple spends together, a shared vulnerability due to the disclosure of personal information, a presumed right to influence each other and a mainly sex-based assignment of responsibilities and roles (Roscoe and Benaske, 1985; Carlson, 1987). However, despite these similarities, some important differences need to be noted. Among the adolescent dating population, there does not exist a formal, legal relationship. Rarely are there children present. Female adolescents are usually not economically dependent on their boyfriends, as most adolescents live with their families of origin. Moreover, adolescents are clearly at a different stage of emotional, cognitive and behavioural development than adults. These similarities and differences are important as they suggest the ways in which female victimisation in dating relationships may be understood and what needs to be done in order to address the problem. For instance, among the research on wife assault, external factors such as economic dependency and the presence of children are viewed as contributing to the woman's decision not to leave her abusive partner. However, when the characteristics of dating violence are considered, these factors are rarely present and yet many female adolescents still remain in the abusive relationship (Cate, Henton, Koval, Lloyd and Christopher, 1980; Kutner, 1991).

### **Physical Violence:**

Before research regarding the prevalence of physical aggression in non-marital relationships is reviewed, it is necessary to define exactly what 'physical aggression' will include for the purposes of this review of literature and my own research. Physical aggression consists of any physical act which intends to harm in some way. This includes pushing, shoving, grabbing, wrestling or pinning down, throwing an object at someone, scratching or biting, slapping, punching, hitting with an object, kicking, strangling and using a lethal weapon such as a knife or gun.

#### **A. College and University:**

Makepeace (1981) conducted the first study on violence in American university students' dating relationships and found that one in five relationships featured physical violence. This particular study dramatically changed the perception of violence between males and females in heterosexual relationships as it became clear that female victimisation extended beyond the limited sphere of marriage and cohabitation (DeKeseredy, 1988). A plethora of subsequent research, using college and university samples, have revealed that, indeed, dating violence is prevalent and serious (Carlson, 1987; Follingstad, Wright, Lloyd and Sebastian, 1991; Lloyd, 1991; Muehlenhard and Linton, 1987; Stets and Pirog-Good, 1987). Stets and Henderson (1991) uncovered that at least one third of dating females had experienced some form of physical aggression. Barnes, Greenwood and Sommer (1991) found that forty-two percent of college dating relationships contained violence. To date, the only study of physical

aggression amongst college dating couples revealed that, out of twenty-three couples, eighty-seven percent featured at least one act of physical violence.

The most common forms of physical aggression employed by males in college and university dating relationships include pushing, grabbing or shoving, slapping, kicking, biting and hitting with a fist (Henton, Cate, Koval, Lloyd and Christopher, 1983).

#### B. Secondary School:

Fewer studies have been conducted employing an adolescent sample. O'Keeffe, Brockopp and Chew (1986) conducted a study of high school students in California and found that one in four students had experienced physical violence from their dating partner. The most common forms of violence included slapping, threatening to hit, pushing or shoving and punching. In a more detailed American study, Burcky, Reuterman and Kopsky (1988) report that twenty-four percent of their female adolescent respondents had been victims of physical violence on at least one occasion. Approximately fourteen percent of the female respondents were regular victims of their boyfriend's physical aggression. Most of the females (approximately forty percent) began to experience physical victimisation between the ages of fourteen and fifteen. However, approximately twenty-eight percent of twelve to thirteen year old girls had also experienced physical violence. The age of the boys who perpetrated the violence were as follows: approximately thirty-six percent were over eighteen; forty-five percent were sixteen to seventeen years old; and almost seventeen percent were fourteen to fifteen years old. Mercer (1986) notes in her Canadian study that there is a

significant difference between male and female adolescents reporting of physical violence in relationships. While eleven percent of female students reported that they had been victims of physical violence, only one percent of males reported that they had used physical violence.

### **Sexual Violence:**

#### **A. College and University:**

It is estimated that fifty percent of all women either have been, or will be, raped or experience an attempted rape in the course of their lives (Levine and Kanin, 1987). Moreover, of all rapes that occur, approximately seventy percent take place on dates (Roscoe and Callahan, 1985). For the purpose of this research 'sexual violence' includes non-consenting sexual relations, unwanted sexual touching, or forcing a female to engage in degrading sexual activity. In an American study, thirty-four percent of female university respondents reported having experienced unwanted sexual contact (Ward in DeKeseredy, 1991). A further twenty percent of females had experienced attempted non-consenting sexual intercourse and ten percent had been forced to have sexual intercourse against their will. Similar to the reporting of physical violence, wide discrepancy is found between male and female reports. Spence, Losoff and Robbins (1991) report that only a small percentage of their male sample reported having attempted or successfully forced a female to have intercourse. Approximately five percent of males reported that they had restrained the female in order to have sex. However, when women were asked about sexual violence, sixty-five percent of the sampled women reported being victims of attempted sexual activity.

### B. Secondary School:

The highest incidence of sexual assault has been found to occur within the adolescent age group (Jenny, 1988). Moreover, the most common situation in which this sexual assault is likely to take place is on a date. Muehlenhard (1988) found that approximately seventy percent of female secondary students reported being victims of sexual aggression, whilst almost fifty-one percent of boys reported perpetrating sexual aggression. Research findings regarding the reasons given by males and females for this violence and the attitudes towards sexual violence will be discussed in later sections of this chapter.

### Psychological Violence:

Psychological violence is the most elusive form of violence to measure. Individuals are perhaps least aware when they are they are being psychologically victimised. 'Psychological violence' includes intimidating, terrorising, humiliating, insulting, isolating the person from family and/or friends, yelling and/or screaming at the person in order to induce fear, destroying the person's property or controlling the person's movements. Most of the studies to date have focused on physical and sexual violence because these forms of violence are more easily identified by victims, perpetrators and friends. Those few studies that have asked respondents to include psychological violence in their reporting have consistently found that psychological abuse almost always accompanies physical and sexual violence. Estimates of psychological violence may actually be higher than estimates of physical or sexual violence, since this form of violence may occur on its own. Both adults' and



adolescents' reports of psychological violence concur as to the high prevalence and 'normality' of this type of violence within dating relationships.

### **Risk Factors:**

Much of the research conducted on adult and adolescent dating violence focuses on various risk factors perceived to be associated with the incidence of dating violence. These risk factors include ethnicity, race, class, alcohol and/or drug use, and witnessing wife assault. To date, no studies have found a significant association between the ethnicity or race of either perpetrator or victim and the presence of violence in a dating relationship (O'Keeffe, Brockopp and Chew, 1986). Similarly, the social class of the victim and perpetrator do not seem to effect the likelihood of a violent relationship. Truscott (1992) found that boys who grew up in homes characterised by wife assault were statistically more likely to be perpetrators of dating violence. No such relationship was found to exist for females, as victims.

Several researchers have suggested an association between the use of alcohol and/or drugs and dating violence. Burcky, Reuterman and Kopsky (1988) found that a third of the males in their sample had ingested alcohol before a violent incident, whilst fourteen percent had consumed drugs. In contrast, Stets and Henderson (1991) found no significant association between alcohol and/or drug use and the presence of violence in a relationship. From her research results Muehlenhard (1988) suggests that while using alcohol and/or drugs is not related to dating violence, it provides an excuse for males to initiate violence. That is, although a minority of boys physically or sexually

assaulted their girlfriends whilst using alcohol or drugs, some boys rationalised their violence as a consequence of alcohol/drug use. Gryl, Smith and Bird (1991) also suggest that remaining in a violent relationship tends to increase the likelihood that the violence will continue.

Finally, there is some evidence to suggest that aggression by boys towards girlfriends may be a pre-cursor to wife assault. It has been found, for example, that fifty-one percent of the victims of wife assault had been victims of dating aggression (Roscoe and Benaske, 1985). This suggests that either girls' relationships with boys can be a guide to women's relationships with men and/or that adolescent gender relationships may be of significance to adult gender relationships.

### **Attitudes Towards Dating Violence:**

With regard to characteristics of dating violence, several studies have revealed disturbing findings. Two separate studies conducted in the United States (Cate, 1986 and Kutner, 1991) observed that fifty percent of all girlfriends remained with their boyfriends after they had been abused. Furthermore, a significant minority of these girls believed that the violence was an indication of their boyfriend's love for them. It was also found that these children's parents were rarely aware of the violence that was taking place (Kutner, 1991). Similarly, a study of secondary students reported that sixty-six percent of the girls would tell friends about the abuse, twenty percent would tell no one, but only eight percent would tell their parents, eight percent would tell a sibling, six percent would tell a teacher or counsellor and a mere two percent would inform the police (Burchy, Reuterman and Kopsky, 1988).

Adolescent attitudes towards dating provide insight into conventions and norms which guide the social interaction of boys and girls with each other. With regard to physical aggression, most adolescents hold negative attitudes towards intimate abuse and yet a significant number nevertheless engage in this type of aggression. It is clear that merely holding negative attitudes toward aggression is not sufficient to inhibit these behaviours (Mercer, 1986). The reasons boys who abused their girlfriends were most likely to give were jealousy, disagreements, their girlfriend's rejection of them and their girlfriend's non-compliance with their demands for sex (Burchy, Reuterman and Kopsky, 1988). Most of these boys viewed physical abuse as at least somewhat legitimated by the circumstances of the conflict. As already mentioned, many girls seemed to believe her boyfriend's use of violence was an indication of his love for her (Kutner, 1991). Research on attitudes concerning sexual aggression also reveal disturbing findings. From his research on the attitudes of American college students, Abbey (1982) suggests males interpret the world in sexual terms, frequently misinterpreting female signals and intentions. The same researcher also found that male subjects have reported that, in their view, a female consenting to any sexual activity is indicating her willingness to have full sexual intercourse. Adolescent attitudes also warrant concern. In another American study DeKeseredy (1988) found that fifty-one percent of boys and forty-one percent of girls thought males had the right to force females to kiss the male if that male had spent 'lots' of money on the date. Furthermore, sixty-five percent of boys and fifty-seven percent of girls thought it was acceptable for a man to insist on intercourse with a woman if they had been dating for more than six months.

Such investigation in the United Kingdom is warranted for several reasons. To date, no study of dating violence in an adolescent population has been published in Britain. The intention of administering a questionnaire to a sample of secondary school pupils in Oxford is to garner information concerning the prevalence and incidence of, reactions to, and attitudes towards, violence. However, my goal is to go beyond a descriptive analysis of dating violence and explore the ways in which girls and boys describe their experiences of violence through discourse analysis.

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***Limitations of Past Research:***

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The majority of research studies investigating adolescent dating violence share a common language, method and interpretation of findings. These components of past research studies are examined in order to illustrate the ways in which adolescent dating violence is usually understood and to support my intent to explore this phenomenon from a different theoretical perspective and using a different method.

**Gender-neutral Language:**

The first major issue regarding past research concerns terminology. Feminists have expended tremendous effort in encouraging the use of gender-neutral language. However, an inadvertent effect of this effort has been that some phenomena that are more accurately described using gender specific language have not had the benefit of this specificity. For instance, the term 'caregiver' of the elderly implies that males and females are equally likely to maintain this role. However, statistics suggest that women are almost uniquely in the position of caring for elderly persons in our society (Wilson, 1991). The same problem occurs with violence against women, and more specifically, dating violence. Stets and Henderson (1991) explicitly state that they employed gender-neutral language in order to reflect the mutuality of dating violence. However, they later concede:

We do not deny that the injury that women incur probably far exceeds what men experience. Moreover, when a woman hits, it may more likely be out of retaliation or self-defence. (pg.237)

These authors further admit in their conclusions that women receive more violence

than men, clearly showing that gender-neutral language is inappropriate for a gender-specific social problem.

### **Method:**

The second issue, involving methodology, concerns both measuring instruments and sampling. Chapter 6 of the thesis will examine these issues in detail as they form a central motivation for the use of focus groups and individual interviews in this research project. I will briefly outline the major criticisms of method here. The quantitative component of my research entails the administering of a questionnaire based largely on the Conflict Tactics Scale. This scale was developed in order to measure 'family' violence. However, since this scale's wide adoption as the standard measuring instrument for the study of intimate violence, several criticisms have been raised. These criticisms include the failure of the questionnaire to: inform the respondents of the purpose of the research; differentiate between perpetrator and victim actions; include the motivation for and intention behind violent actions; account for differences in 'typical' female and male violent actions; take into account the different consequences of violent acts committed by males and females; make provisions for conflicting partner's responses; contextualise intimate violence; and the sole reliance on respondents' recollection and interpretation of events.

Other problems of method include the reliance on exclusively male respondents (that is, excluding females from the sample) who self-report their own levels of violence (Barnes, Greenwood and Sommer, 1991; Stets and Pirog-Good, 1987). There is obviously a question about the effects of social desirability on these reports - males

tend to underestimate the frequency and seriousness of their own violence towards their partners. Indeed, Follingstad, Wright, Lloyd and Sebastian (1981) found that males *did* underestimate the effects of their physical force on females, and a valid estimate of the violence could only be ensured when both partners' responses were elicited. Without questioning the females in the relationship, a comprehensive understanding of the amount, type and contributing factors of the violence will not be understood.

### **Interpretation of Findings:**

The third main issue concerns the researcher's interpretation of her/his findings. For example, Roscoe (1985) refers to "dating violence" throughout his study and concludes that both males and females find some forms of intimate violence "acceptable". In accordance with the method discussed, Roscoe informed the female subjects at the outset of the study that violence occurs in many relationships in our society. He asked students "what forms of violence are acceptable in dating relationships?" (pg.390). Despite the bias in this question towards increased reporting of "acceptable" violence, the second highest response was "none" (after slapping). Furthermore, when this researcher asked the female subjects to list situations in which physical force is acceptable for dating partners, the three highest responses were: self-defence to prevent sexual abuse, that it is never appropriate, or when their boyfriend is out of control. Roscoe concludes his article by stating that females are as likely as males to perpetrate violence in dating relationships and that these females view this

violence as acceptable! This is not so much a problem with the measuring instrument itself as it is with a seriously biased analysis of the findings.

A second example concerns the research conducted by Straus who labelled milder forms of violence “normal violence” (in Sigelman, Berry and Wiles, 1984:544) because of the regulating function that violence serves within the family. One must question the degree to which the term “normal” implies “acceptable” as it is reported to the popular media.

Bernard, Bernard and Bernard (1985) conclude from their study that:

To the extent that young women do not wish to be abused by men with whom they are romantically involved, our data would seem to suggest that they should try to be more traditionally feminine” (pg.596).

These researchers, as did many others, conclude their studies with findings that clearly show females are far more likely than males to be the victims of violence in intimate relationships, and that when females are violent it is often due to reasons of self-defence. Some studies even note links between violence against females in dating relationships and other forms of violence against women. However, few studies (with the notable exception of Mercer ,1986) discuss findings without subtly blaming the female for her victimisation or suggesting constraints on women’s lives to ‘solve’ the problem (as Bernard’s statement exemplifies).

Therefore, considering all of the problems with methodology, terminology and interpretation of the findings, there is a strong need for caution with regard to the ‘knowledge’ of adolescent dating violence that research has provided. In my research study, I have attempted to address these limitations by combining quantitative and qualitative methods. I used a questionnaire based on the Conflict Tactics Scale and



compared the results of the questionnaire with the data collected through focus groups and in-depth interviews. The results of this analysis appear in Chapter 6.

## CHAPTER 3: THE PRESENT STUDY

‘Just like a woman’ is a commonplace phrase in British society which says everything and tells us nothing.

(Moore, 1994:83)

### *Introduction:*

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The purpose of this Chapter is to lay the theoretical foundation on which my research was based. This project is the result of a process of research, and as such, the findings bear little resemblance to the theoretical starting point. At the time that I started my research I was highly informed by the works of Gilligan (1982, 1988, 1990), Spender (1980), Lees (1986, 1993) and Sharpe (1994). As my data collection and analysis progressed I found these works were often unable to explain my findings. In fact, I concluded that the theories expressed in these works were inadequate for my research. Whilst the empirical findings on which these works are based continues to encapsulate what ‘good’ research is all about, theoretically the works lack rigour.

My data analysis compelled me to explore other sources. I eventually turned to anthropology theorists such as Moore (1994) and sociologists such as Kappeler (1995) and Connell (1987, 1995). These works provided a more helpful theoretical perspective for my data. However, whilst these works excel in theoretical explanation,

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often it is at the expense of empirical grounding. I have therefore attempted to synthesise theory with empirical research, providing primary data on which to test the theories described by what has been called the 'new sociology of gender'.

In the next section I discuss the body of literature which first informed my research. This consisted of adolescent social development, moral reasoning and the negotiation of roles. I also include my initial literature survey of feminist theory as related to violence against women. It was from this theoretical perspective that I constructed the goals and objectives of my research. My later readings of the literature advised the eventual theoretical analysis of my data. So this chapter should be read as a process of theory development.

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***Theoretical Framework:***

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**Adolescent Social Development:**

Research and theory concerning adolescent social development focuses on the dramatic changes that take place within the individual during the ages of thirteen to eighteen. Physically, adolescents experience enormous increases in growth as well as sexual maturing of the body. Cognitively, adolescents become better able to analyse increasingly abstract concepts. Socially, adolescents are exposed to an expanding network of relationships and social structures which must be negotiated. Adolescents express an increased reliance on peers as family influence diminishes.

Erikson presents the most widely known theory concerning human development. According to Erikson, it is the adolescent's task to complete the sixth of eight stages of development; that of "Identity versus Identity Confusion" (1950). For Erikson, the adolescent is in a state of "moratorium" (pg.236) between the morality learned during childhood, primarily through parents, and that of the world of which the adolescent is becoming increasingly aware. This stage manifests itself in an increase in the adolescent's self-consciousness and a preference for being in the company of other young people. It is during this period of adolescence that interest in the opposite sex emerges.

Socialisation theory suggests that males and females are subject to very different societal expectations. Society emits clear messages of what distinguishes masculinity and femininity (Walby, 1990), and these messages polarise female and male

identities to a large extent. Expectations are conveyed through parents, siblings, toys, games, books, magazines, clothing, television, films, songs and education, among other agents. All aspects of social life involve notions of appropriate masculine and feminine thought, feeling and behaviour. An important aspect of this socialisation is the task of separation. Adolescents are assumed to struggle to detach themselves from their parents and concentrate instead on their own understandings of the world and its negotiation.

Certainly the adolescent's capacity for detachment is increased by growth in physical, cognitive and moral development (Gilligan, 1982). Gilligan hypothesises that it is an erroneous assumption that both boys and girls strive for separation and detachment in the same ways. Boys are socialised to emphasise separation from others as early as possible, whilst girls are expected to maintain connection with others. Girls, in general, learn that they are responsible for the maintenance of relationships. So for girls, the negotiation of adolescence, their increased ability to arrive at abstract, 'impartial' decisions regarding themselves and others, is tempered by this concentration on connection and intimacy. For Gilligan, therefore, females must negotiate conflict between expectations of intimacy and connection, and the demand for separation.

McCabe (1984) proposes a five-stage model of adolescent dating behaviour. In the first stage, adolescents form and socialise within small single-sex groups. During the second stage, these unisex groups contact, and converse with, opposite sex groups within a public context. The third stage of dating sees these unisex groups

disintegrating as the leaders of each group form heterosexual relationships. During the fourth stage, these unisex groups interact more with opposite sex groups. The majority of the adolescents form heterosexual relationships during this stage. Finally, in the fifth stage, the bond of the unisex group disintegrates and the heterosexual couple emerges as the dominant relationship form. The research of Adams and Gullotta (1989) supplements this model by suggesting that, between the ages of fourteen and seventeen, adolescents usually experience a succession of highly emotional and intense short-term relationships.

A major interest for the adolescent is the pursuit of relationships which include sexual intimacy. Boys and girls typically begin dating at earlier ages than in the past and the percentage of adolescents experiencing sexual intercourse has increased. VanHasselt and Herson (1987) found that, whereas 30% of adolescents in Britain in 1971 had engaged in sexual intercourse, by 1979, 77% of adolescents had.

Research indicates that girls and boys seek heterosexual relationships for different reasons. With regard to an adolescent's first sexual experience, girls clearly link sexual intercourse with love and state love as the primary reason for first engaging in sex (VanHasselt and Herson, 1987). Securing and maintaining a relationship with a boy are also reasons frequently mentioned for engaging in intercourse (VanHasselt and Herson, 1987). In contrast, many of the males did not connect the concept of love with sexual intercourse. In another study on adolescent dating, Adams and Gullotta (1989) found that the boys were very aware that girls receive this message and used it to their "advantage", by professing love in order to secure intercourse with girls. Finally, the

adolescent heterosexual relationship is characterised by an age difference between partners, boys being almost always older than girls.

#### A. Moral Reasoning:

Normative theory suggests that, to some extent, conventions and norms provide guidelines for appropriate behaviour. Adolescents may be expected to seek out these conventions and norms as parental control and influence lessens and adolescents must negotiate new and ambiguous situations on their own. Social learning theory proposes that boys and girls learn through a system of rewards and punishments (sanctions) what constitutes appropriate behaviour. Indeed, it is the hallmark of adolescent development that boys and girls attempt to apply morality to a new set of situations. Piaget (in Anderson, 1988) outlines the cognitive growth of morality. He proposes that adolescents arrive at conventions through social agreement with peers; so that conventions are subject to peer influence.

In 1958, Kohlberg outlined six stages of moral development. This three-level model progresses from a basic understanding of morality founded on individual need (stages one and two), to an understanding of fairness based on shared societal conventions (stages three and four), to the highest form of moral reasoning based on the appreciation of abstract concepts of reciprocity and equality (1981). Kohlberg's theory has since been widely criticised for its exclusion of female subjects during its development and the assumption that female moral reasoning mimics male reasoning. Carol Gilligan was at the forefront of this criticism. Her research uncovers a quite

different moral reasoning pattern amongst females.

Gilligan (1982) initially asserted that moral dilemmas are actually solved differently by boys and girls, using different conceptualisations of morality. The first concept is that of “justice”, viewed by Kohlberg as the cornerstone of moral reasoning. According to this concept of justice, relationships are seen as organised in terms of equality; and morality therefore involves decisions concerning justice, inequality and oppression. Kohlberg judges the child to be acting morally (or making moral decisions) based on the extent to which that child uses the model of justice in decision-making. The identification with issues of justice necessitates a view of the individual as a separate entity. Relationships are contractual or hierarchical featuring either constraint or co-operation. The second concept is “care” and is identified by Gilligan as central to female solutions to moral dilemmas. The primary concern of caring is attachment and connection to others, and moral concerns are thus based on problems of indifference and detachment. Individuals are seen as interconnected. Solutions to problems are sought that will maintain this connection, featuring what is ‘best’ for both individuals. Gilligan judges that girls are acting morally (or making moral decisions) to the extent that girls incorporate the considerations of care into the decision-making process.

Each of these two concepts, justice and care, construct, among other things, a way in which an individual sees her/his self in relation to others. Widely varying judgements result when individuals use these respective organising principles. For girls, how they act is strongly influenced by the imperative to consider the needs of others. The girls in Gilligan’s study struggled to find solutions to their moral dilemmas which



would consider the needs of everyone involved. Not surprisingly, these girls were uncomfortable with the conflict they perceived between society's expectation that they be 'impartial' in solving moral dilemmas and their real-life experiences of prioritising relationships and connection with others.

Since this initial debate between competing arguments of the construction of morality, several authors have criticised Gilligan's work, which she has since revised. Gilligan's work was immediately criticised for suggesting that care and responsibility should take the place of impartiality as a basis for moral decision making. Furthermore, both Kohlberg and Gilligan can be accused of bias; later empirical work suggests that boys and girls actually use both orientations, depending on the situation presented (Flanagan and Jackson, 1986). In her later work Gilligan agrees, and suggests that these two kinds of morality interact in a complex dialogue within varying contexts. Furthermore, it may not be that *either* care or justice considerations are deployed in specific situations: in the 'messiness' of information assimilation and moral deliberation there is no reason why care and justice may not be involved at the same time.

Third, Gilligan has also been criticised for an arbitrariness of categories. Specifically, the criticism is that she defends only two psychologically and philosophically distinct moral strategies. Care and impartiality do not necessarily encompass all of morality and the fact that three, four or any number of 'moral voices' are not theorised suggests a limitation to Gilligan's research. Critics of Gilligan's work point out that neither care nor justice conceptions necessarily encapsulate how morality should best be conceived. Fourth, the categories of care and justice actually assume a

common understanding of these concepts. Flanagan and Jackson (1987) point out that forgiving foreign loans could be conceptualised as an issue of *love* between nations whilst a parent might interpret positive affection from her/his children as something that s/he is *owed* (pg.624).

Fifth these researchers point out that a clear classification of just what care and justice include (and exclude) remains a theoretical project. Current theories lack, for instance, definitions of what 'bad caring' means. Bubeck (1995) has gone some way to address these issue. Bubeck suggests that the former separate categories of 'justice' and 'care' are, in fact, connected. Bubeck does not propose that either 'bad' caring or 'bad' justice do not exist, but suggests that assumptions about the gendered nature of caring greatly informs the identification of the value of caring. For instance, Bubeck argues that "public care is not necessarily bad in virtue of being public, and that private care is not necessarily good in virtue of taking place between people who know...each other" (pg.229). Defining exactly the qualities of good and bad caring remain a theoretical project. There is also the problem of assuming that attitudes, beliefs and moral orientations may be derived from narrative data based on hypothetical scenarios. Both Kohlberg and Gilligan have based their theories of morality on these sorts of data. Other authors (Adler, 1989; Blum, 1988) point out that research on morality must focus not on the infinity of hypothetical dilemmas but rather the "range of real moral situations that individuals are likely to confront" (this methodological problem will be discussed further in Chapter 6).

A larger set of criticisms have been levelled against Gilligan's derivation of the

psychology of moral development from early childhood development theory. Her work largely draws from Chodorow's theory which proposes that girls and boys develop differently because girls do not enter the same process of separation from their primary care-takers (usually women) as boys do (1989). Assuming the validity of this argument, then there is clearly nothing inherent about sexual differences in moral reasoning between boys and girls. The argument returns to the issue of defining the concepts of 'care' and 'justice'. If boys learn separation which then produces a justice model of reasoning, this concept of justice negates such avenues such as caring for the community. But even caring for a community suggests some form of attachment. The concepts of caring and justice need further refinement.

#### B. Female Silencing:

The next body of theoretical work that constituted the starting point for my project is the anthropological and linguistic theory of female silencing. In order to understand the process of reasoning that females and males use in their determination of who is right and wrong in a situation, the language voice must be extracted and examined; as it is language that gives meaning to the situation. This concentration on language is necessary because it is language that gives the meaning and structure to individual's belief systems about themselves and the world.

Spender proposes that language explicitly promotes a masculine view of the world. In her book Man Made Language (1980), Spender outlines many ways in which male imagery and the male point of view have been created and maintained in

discourse. For women, this has meant that they have had to think, conceptualise, feel and act within a language that does not necessarily represent their own interests, concerns and experiences. Beyond a language that legitimates only dominant male perspectives, the verbal interactions of males and females reveal a consistent authority of male reality. In mixed male and female conversation, males talk more and interrupt females more. Males tend to complete women's sentences and to discourage the discussion of topics initiated by women. Women often become merely an audience for male discussion, relegated to facilitating and supporting the male dialogue. The differences found between female and male adolescents' moral reasoning and the consequent discomfort females experience with regard to this conflict, according to this theory, reflects both the fact that male reasoning is the accepted norm and that females lack the language with which to express their own realities.

My process of data collection suggested such a monolithic and absolute theory of female silencing in a male world was simply too crude. The theory does highlight that there may be two divergent understandings of experience in operation and that this divergence may be gendered. However, further refinement was necessary. In *Feminism and Linguistic Theory* (1992), Deborah Cameron criticises Spender's work on silence and alienation as too simplistic and deterministic. Basically these criticisms can be summarised in two important points. The first limitation of Spender's conception of a 'man made language' is that it implies that the constraints of language cannot be overcome. Somehow and in some ancient time, men gained control of language (what Cameron refers to as a "Big Bang scenario" (pg.147)) and this control has been

maintained since that time. There are two obvious problems here. First, how did men gain control of language? If it is reasonable to think of men as gaining control of medicine, law, science and philosophy and controlling the discourses emanating from these systems, it is less easy to understand how men *also* gained control of local, everyday language. Women must have been either absent from everyday talk, complied in the 'take-over' or literally silenced.

The second problem is tautological. If language has been man-made then the clear implication is that language can be changed. But is it that women lack the power to change language or that women cannot change language and therefore lack power? Furthermore, the unattractive and unconvincing implications of Spender's view of power are manifold. Spender conceives of power as something that all men have over all women. My later readings of Foucault, Moore and Connell suggest, as others have remarked, that power "is a much more complex and subtle matter" (Cameron, 1992:160). I will discuss this point at great length in subsequent sections of this Chapter.

But at a basic level, it was clear from my initial analysis of the data that the practice of power intersected with more than just gender: social class and ethnicity significantly informed the discourse used by the boys and girls in my study. Furthermore, boys also inherit language and social structures. Spender is concerned with the ways in which power determines language. My later readings suggest a much more realistic assessment of girls *and* boys as negotiating a complex system of gendered, classed etc. hierarchical social relations, through their practice of language.

Spender's work raises serious questions as to the relationship between language, experience and identity. Spender seems to assume that language directly reflects experience but *not* women's experience. Other authors, such as Cameron, suggest that perhaps meaning provides the basis for experience and identity. Language is the process by which individuals learn a self-identity within a practice of social relations.

Work by Elizabeth Frazer (1989) examines this issue by exploring the talk of female adolescents. Frazer proposes the ways these girls have of talking and their differences in identity and experience are "discursively constructed" (pg.281). By this the researcher means that individuals have a repertoire of discourses which they may employ, such as those of feminism and popular culture. These discourses define and constrain concepts, categories and meanings. Discourses are learned and girls and boys may choose which discourses they employ through active negotiation. Female children and adolescents are particularly vulnerable to the constraint of male discourse, as reflected in powerful discourses of the media, as well as more empowering discourses such as those of feminism.

An excellent example of the constraint of adolescent girls within male discourse and the consequent silencing of females is found in Sue Lees's (1986) study concerning the attitudes of male and female adolescents towards sex and sexuality. She proposes that sexual acts themselves are constrained within societal norms concerning male and female appropriate behaviour. Lees notes that the boys and girls she talked with had an extensive repertoire of derogatory words with which to refer to active female sexuality

and none to refer to active male sexuality. When girls were accused of being a 'slag' (a nebulous term referring to either perceived sexual promiscuity or abstention from sex), they reacted by denying that this categorisation was applied to them. That is, what the girls objected to was the accusation, not the category itself. The girls in Lees's study did not have the language to express their own experiences of sex and sexuality, but had to operate within a language that judges moral worth on the basis of male conceptualisations. Consistent with this theory, both boys and girls used the term 'slag' and categorised girls according to negative stereotypes. Lees points out that both sexes live in a world which is structured by male language.

#### C. Active Negotiation:

So far, the discussion of adolescents growing up in society has concerned the ways in which males', and particularly females', experiences are constrained within a structure which largely defines their experiences and realities for them. This discussion leads to a phenomenological question: are males and females, through the process of socialisation, acquiescent receivers of a societally structured reality or do males and females actively negotiate their worlds? To subscribe to the first view, implies that females have a false consciousness: interpreting the world in ways that do not derive from their experiences and realities but are instead constructed for them by the dominant, patriarchal world. Research which focuses on girl's responses to their environments, suggests that girls experience conflict between their own experiences and what they are told these experiences mean (Frazer, 1988; Lees, 1993). Moreover,

adolescent girls actively struggle to reconcile this perceived conflict of realities. McRobbie and Nava (1984) note a common response to this conflict was the recognition that “whatever we do, it’s always wrong”. Gilligan, Ward and Taylor (1988) assert that girls must assume this problem of resistance as the only way in which they can develop a clear personal and social identity. In their study of girls’ progress through adolescence, they found girls attempted to reconcile personal experiences with often quite disparate cultural explanations of these experiences. In order to develop a stable sense of self, these girls developed discourses which ‘fit’ both their lived and ‘told’ experiences. For example, one girl developed a repertoire of discourses that described herself as an outgoing “radical” girl. Describing herself in this way, this girl was able to explain (to herself) why her experiences of being an intellectually active and powerful girl did not correspond to the identity offered to her by cultural prescriptions of what it is to be female.

### **Feminist Theory:**

Since my research project was informed by a feminist perspective, it is important that I sketch the main theoretical threads from which I began the thesis. At the beginning of the second wave of feminism in North America and Europe, a number of feminist scholars took on the task of investigating the prevalence, incidence and typology of violence against females. In 1979, Dobash and Dobash’s penultimate study in Glasgow (culminating in Violence Against Wives: A Case Against Patriarchy)



informed the public that a quarter of all violent crimes are wife assault. This research established that the assault of women by males known to them as well as strangers was both prevalent and serious. The findings of this and other studies have been discussed in Chapter 2 of this thesis. These studies led to a theorising of violence against females as a product of patriarchy.

While there are several feminist analyses of violence against females, common to all such analyses are certain premises. The most salient of these axioms is that the fundamental unit of analysis in the investigation of social problems is gender.

#### A. Gender:

Individual relationships, families, social groups and social institutions are structured and re-structured by gender. Closely related to gender is the concept of power. Violence against women is viewed by feminists as one very important and significant instance of, and expression of, male power. The salience of both males and power is two-fold. First, all men can potentially use power as a means of controlling women. Second, men as a social unit (and class within a Marxist feminist perspective) benefit from the fact that women's lives are restricted. Males benefit from women's dependence, women's unequal treatment in the paid and unpaid (home) environment and more subtly through the dividends of unequal power. Understood in these terms, violence does not represent a breakdown in society. Rather, violence against females signifies the maintenance of a social order based on male privilege and power. I will return to this discussion of power in more detail in the later section 'Foucault and the

concept of power’.

#### B. Marriage and the Family as Social Institutions:

The second axiom is that social structures such as marriage and the family must be located as historically significant institutions. The family has developed within society as the site of isolation, division of labour by sex in the public and private and the subordination of women legally, socially and personally. The assault of females (child, adolescent and adult) within the family is viewed within this context. The family, as it were, mediates between the institutional subordination of females by society and the personal subordination of females by the men in their lives.

#### C. Voicing Women’s Experiences:

Feminists working in the area of violence against females are also explicitly dedicated to prioritising women’s experiences in both research and scholarship. For feminist scholars it is not a coincidence that females are found to be victimised as children, adolescents and adults by males of the same age cohort. Females are abused precisely because they are females. Violence is the demonstration of the power relationship between all males and females in society. The development of feminist explanations of violence against females has seen a movement away from the discussion of the most “severe” forms of violence such as assault and rape toward the view that anything that serves to control females through intimidation or fear must also be considered to constitute violence. Embracing, amongst others, sexual harassment,

flashing, obscene phone calls and playground violence reveals more honestly the real extent to which male violence against females permeates female's lives (Stanko, 1985). A related theme concerns the agency attributed to males and females. A feminist project is to reveal females as active survivors of violence as opposed to passive victims of male violent action.

The analysis of intimate and stranger rape has been a central project for feminists. Rape, like other forms of violence against females, is viewed as resulting from the long tradition of male dominance over women. Rape is associated with the disparity between males' and females' social status, economic and political power. There is some discussion amongst feminist theorists as to the extent to which rape is centrally concerned with violence or with sex. Some theorists propose that rape is primarily motivated by the need for power and dominance whilst other theorists maintain that violence and sex are inextricably enmeshed and their separation is artificial (MacKinnon, 1987: 85, 86). However, all theorists agree that domination shapes the ways in which rape is defined and who in society is privileged to define rape. It also affects the way that legal institutions such as the police react to rapists and their victims as well as the degree to which rape is criminalised or implicitly accepted. Male dominance is seen to indirectly affect the amount of government spending on shelters for battered women.

An interesting topic for investigation has been females' consistent reporting of their fear of rape. This fear response has been the subject of considerable debate. On the one hand have been criminologists who have discussed women's fear of rape in

terms of a more diffuse fear of crime in general. Criminologists understand women's fear as being directed towards the fear of stranger rape and the dangers of 'the street'. Feminists such as Elizabeth Stanko (1988:76) point out that whilst females most often report being fearful of stranger rape and assault by strangers, in fact they are more likely to suffer both rape and physical assault within the home. Stanko believes that this myth of the 'safe home' serves to maintain the belief that women are protected by the males that they know and that females may avoid male violence by retreating to the safety of their homes. In reality, females are most likely to be abused by men they know rather than by strangers. Several implications emerge from this fact. Because the public continues to believe women are safe in their homes attention is drawn away from the serious problem of intimate violence. The police and courts may justify their continued de-emphasis of 'domestic disputes'. Women continue to assume they are safe in their homes. This raises serious questions concerning female's dependent relationship on males such as husbands, lovers, brothers and fathers and the social, political and economic consequences of this dependency. Females are directly taught by their families, schools, peers, the media and other social institutions to rely on males they know for protection. Feminists regard this 'sleeping with the enemy' as highly problematic for females. So whilst criminologists and psychologists have often conceptualised women's higher reporting (than male's) of fear of crime as an indication of female's passivity, feminists understand this fear as the very logical evaluation of both their risk of victimisation, the known males which are most likely to assault and their ability to defend themselves from assault.

#### D. Theorising Female Violence:

In the course of my research I became aware that there is a conspicuous lack of research and theorising on female violence. Theories to explain female violence are broadly evolutionary, psychological or sociological. Each of these theories relies on assumptions of caring as a fundamental females characteristic. Evolutionary theories discuss female violence only in terms of competition with other females over males and the protection of children. Psychological theories discuss female violence in terms of dysfunction (since females are natural carers). Rich (1986) examines female abusers of their children in terms of mothers who have themselves experienced severe violence throughout their lives. The oppression that a mother has experienced through a patriarchal society is transformed into aggressive fantasies and actions. Systems theory, as the most widely written sociological theory on the topic of female violence, fails to differentiate between male and female violence: both are seen as mutual and consensual within intimate relationships. Much research (discussed in Chapter 2) rejects female violence as being as significant as male violence. Feminist theory seems reluctant to acknowledge findings of female violence. These theories and the results of my analysis of girls' and boys' talk about female violence appears in Chapter 8.

**Social Class:**

Social class represents a fundamental axis of sociological study and forms an important part of the discussion of this thesis. Social class in Britain is based primarily on the grouping of people according to their economic and social situation. Whilst Weber and his modern counterparts such as John Goldthorpe maintain that an individual's social class is determined by market forces (the relative value of labour), for Marx and his followers the relations of social class are fundamentally conflictual. This conflict results from the exploitation of working-class people in the production process as their labour is necessarily de-valued in a capitalist society. Social relations are both political and ideological. Whilst this surplus labour and exploitation informed a political struggle of the working-class, a feature of post-capitalist society is that exploitation is made remote and social class identity has become muted. Protest and conflict have arguably increasingly become as much within classes as between classes. I would argue here that division within the working-class is not only encouraged but necessary to the capitalist state. Working-class individuals need to compete against each other in the hope of upward social mobility in order that the middle- and upper-classes may continue to exploit. And as the solidarity of the working-class erodes, so too must the social identity of any individual as 'working-class'. Some scholars have, in fact, proposed that social identity based on class is no longer viable. The results of my research suggest that a part of social identity informed by social class persists. Differences in discourse, meaning and understanding of the social world were considerable between pupils at the two schools. I will argue in Chapter 9 of the thesis

that social class should be maintained in any discussion of social identity.

### **Discourse:**

All discussions of discourse begin with two premises. First, dialogue, in written or spoken form, is the basic unit of all discourse. Second, all talk and writing is social. Talk is social in the important sense that the words used and the meanings of the words vary according to the context of the talk. That is, dialogue takes place *in relation* with other dialogue. Discourses differ not only at this individual level, but also with the kinds of institutions and social practices. For instance, discourses used in educational institutions may vary widely from those used in medical institutions. This is not to imply that discourses are homogeneous within any given institution. On the contrary, a hierarchy of discourses exists within institutions.

For example, Chapter 9 of the thesis will examine the various discourses used within educational institutions such as schools. In schools, middle-class discourse is hierarchically positioned above working-class discourse. In the case of Parsons School, in particular, the middle-class discourse of teachers, administrators and the educational system required a very active negotiation on the part of the mainly working-class pupils who attend that school. Some of the resultant conflict in meanings and expectations is highlighted in the transcripts I garnered from this school. My research concentrates on the educational system as a primary location for differences in discourses between pupils at Parsons and pupils at Chiswick. I will show in Chapter 9 of the thesis that Parsons School largely comprised working-class children whilst the

majority of Chiswick pupils were middle- to upper-class. I will further argue that the educational system, both formally in terms of school curriculum and policy and informally in terms of the school personnel, operated within a middle-class discourse. This conflict of discourse (in terms of expectations, prejudices, 'stream-lining' of pupil's career goals) resulted in the necessity that Parsons pupils in particular negotiate between two divergent discourses. This argument has been suggested by Paul Willis (1974) in Learning to Labour and my research was informed by his empirical work.

Discussion of discourse in the school milieu must involve the problem of whether or not gender and class can be usefully separated. On one side of the debate, gender is subsumed within social class. On the other side, social class and gender are viewed as independent categorisations which inform discourse separately. I will argue in my examination of social class that neither polarised position is correct: more useful is a schema in which education is an institution in which gender and social class *intersect*. The education that a girl receives due to her class and sex will largely determine her position as a woman in the labour force.

Individuals are not restricted to one discourse, nor are they unaware that other discourses operate. As noted in Frazer's work (above), particular discourses, in the form of what she calls "discourse registers" are differentially available to individuals. The access to discourses varies across social groups and institutions as well as the rules associated with their use. For instance, Chapter 7 examines the adolescents' understanding of media discourse on feminism. This discourse might be called a 'tabloid register', attributing a particular negative meaning to feminism. The



ideological implications of these assumptions will be discussed in the next section. However, it is important at this point to assert that people are active in their negotiation of discourses within structures that restrict access. And because there are a number of discourse registers from which individuals may choose, the *context* becomes the salient feature to which research must attend. What is particularly interesting about discourse is the underlying assumptions on which that discourse rests - its meaning.

In her book, Feminism and Linguistic Theory (1992), Deborah Cameron outlines various traditions in understanding language. Structuralism, applied to linguistics, is based on an understanding of the relationship between “signifiers” (sequences of sounds) and “signified” (concepts). Both signifiers and signified are arbitrary, that is, there is nothing ‘natural’ about the assignation of a word (or sequence of words) and the concept. Sue Lees’s (1993) discussion of the word ‘slag’ demonstrates that this signifier and the concept of female sexual promiscuity (amongst other concepts) are closely linked in adolescent speech (pg.11). Lees also demonstrates that once signifiers and signifieds are linked in a culture, that union comes to be viewed as both ‘true’ and permanent: what is contingent may be widely viewed as necessary. However, as Cameron points out, *how* words and meanings become associated is not adequately addressed by structural theory. Socioculturalists are more concerned with language as a ‘repository’ of cultural values and norms. For these scholars, words like ‘slag’ reflect a society in which female sexuality and resistance is categorised and labelled in a specific way. That adolescents generally share a common meaning for ‘slag’ reflects adolescents’ understanding of female sexuality in a particular way. Not

only does calling a girl 'slag' put that girl down (because this word is always used negatively), but it also signals that her sexuality is confined to a certain meaning and that it is different from male sexuality. This discussion leads back to the inevitable question of volition: to what extent do individuals actively determine their reality through language and to what extent is their reality controlled by language? Whilst linguistic determinists would propose that language actually determines reality, phenomenologists would see reality as a process of individuals' re-construction.

An important element of the discussion of discourse is the related discussion of meaning. For feminist scholars such as Stanko and Spender (discussed above), women and men begin with different realities because experience is fundamentally gendered. The different ways in which women and men use language is a reflection of this different reality. However, Cameron contends, meaning is, in fact, prior to experience and identity. It is through meaning that experience is interpreted and contextualised. The development of social identity is the process of learning the meaning associated with particular discourses and positioning oneself with particular discourses. It is primarily through language that individuals make sense of the world. Language gives us a voice to express our thoughts, emotions and experiences. But these very thoughts, emotions and experiences are also constrained by language. The fact that all the adolescents in my research attributed a particular meaning to the word 'slag' demonstrates the impossibility of infinite meanings. On the contrary, the essential feature of discourse implies that meaning is restricted, manipulated and controlled.

**Foucault and the Concept of Power:**

That there were at least two discourses at Parsons School highlights an important feature of discourse: it represents and reflects a standpoint that is taken up in *opposition* to another discourse. And it is in this sense that discourse is political: it represents the means by which institutions claim to 'speak for everyone'. The political nature of discourse is that it masks the very real differences between individuals based on, amongst others, gender, class and race. Early feminist scholarship conceived of power as monolithic: men *have* power and use it against women. More recent feminist scholars recognise that this definition of power is too simplistic. Work by Foucault has become the centre of much feminist discussion of power. Foucault is less concerned with what he calls 'naked violence' or economic power (Cameron, Frazer, Harvey, Rampton and Richardson, 1992). These means of social control are less important in modern society. Instead, it is "regimes of truth" - expert discourses which function to legitimate particular social practices (pg.2). So for Foucault, power is not a monolithic 'thing' but rather a force which operates within a complex system of social interaction. Power operates along all social dimensions including gender, class, race, generation and ethnicity. The salient point of departure for Foucault here is to conceive of power not as something that individuals have or do not have. Individuals have a variety of power potentials that may be used in different social relations.

My thesis will largely attempt to identify the social relations in which power operates. For example, I am interested to discover the extent to which social class remains a viable social relation in terms of the power that Foucault describes. In

particular, I will look at the educational system and the discourse employed by school personnel: schools arguably use middle-class discourses in which pupils must locate themselves. I am also interested in gender and its relation to power. Girls and boys are not simply free to create any meaning they like with regard to discourse. These adolescents operate within a system of existing discourse in which social norms operate to encourage particular gendered social identities. My research is less concerned with boys' power *over* girls and more concerned with the ways in which discourses available to both girls and boys operate to produce more or less power in particular social contexts.

### **Ideology:**

Marx and Engels referred to ideology as "nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships, the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas" (in Williams, 1976:126). This definition grasps the idea of ideology as emanating from a sort of conscious set of ideas. However, it also pre-supposes that ideology consists of a *variety* of belief systems which operate in conflict with each other. Current Marxist theories of ideology refer to ideology as a single belief system (namely middle-class capitalism) in which individuals are differentially located. A modern definition commonly highlights the individual's relationship to the larger social system:

The term ideology...stand(s) for an organisation of opinions, attitudes, and values - a way of thinking about man (sic) and society. We may speak of an individual's total ideology or of his ideology with respect to different areas of social life: politics, economics, religion, minority groups, and so forth. Ideologies have an existence independent of any single individual; and those

which exist at a particular time are results both of historical processes and of contemporary social events.

(Adorno, 1950: 2)

This definition encompasses many important elements of current notions of ideology. First, ideology engages the individual at the level of thoughts, feelings, emotions and values. This implies that ideology operates at both a conscious and unconscious level. Second, an individual's relation with social institutions involves ideology in the sense that this individual engagement with institutions involves the internalisation of norms and values emanating from the members of the established institution. Using the example I have referred to above, the educational system is undoubtedly a powerful location of ideology. Pupils are encouraged to internalise a set of norms and values that correspond to the social expectations of the school.

Explanations of ideology raise a number of issues. In the presentation above, ideology is described in 'neutral' terms in which different ideologies may co-exist with one another. Conspicuously absent from this understanding is the location of power and domination. Here I refer, again, to Foucault's notion of knowledge and power. It is precisely through ideology that knowledge tends to be experienced in institutions as common-sense, natural and inevitable. One of the tasks of sociology is to uncover and clarify institutional ideologies. This project involves confronting "unarticulated assumptions" of individuals, groups and social institutions. Untangling exactly what individuals take for granted reveals their tacit acceptance of norms. And individual alignment with an ideology necessarily means alignment with particular sites of power and domination:

It has often been assumed that ideology operates like a sort of social cement, binding the members of a society together by providing them with collectively shared values and norms. On the contrary, it seems more likely that our societies, in so far as they are 'stable' social order, are stabilised by virtue of the diversity of values and beliefs and the proliferation of divisions between individuals and groups. The stability of our societies may depend, not so much upon a consensus concerning particular values or norms, but upon a lack of consensus at the very point where oppositional attitudes could be translated into political action.

(Thompson, 1984: 5)

One of the projects of this thesis is to examine the discourses chosen by adolescents in order to gain insight into the various ideologies (norms, beliefs, values, ideas) subscribed to. The adolescent must locate her/himself within these ideologies. I am interested in understanding to what extent ideologies are fluid; how easily do adolescents take up one ideology as opposed to another. I am also interested in the process by which adolescents choose often conflicting ideologies, and the extent to which this choice is based on perceived power and knowledge. For instance, discourses of traditional femininity (offered in many ways by families and schools) conflict with feminist discourse. I am interested in the extent to which girls 'take up' feminist discourse as a source of knowledge and power or traditional discourses of gender. Whilst many feminists would suggest that feminist discourse offers girls knowledge about the location of power as within patriarchal society, it is also clear from the research that girls use feminist discourse in the face of strong oppositional discourses.

In order to address this project, a closer examination of the notion of ideology is necessary. Ideologies of gender are particularly relevant for my research. This

analysis begins with the recognition that institutions such as families, schools and peer groups emphasise sexual difference. In important ways, these differences are employed to legitimise the oppression of females. Whilst the process of this legitimisation will be discussed at length in the next section, it is useful to point out here that it is these various ideologies of gender (heterosexuality, marriage, division of labour, motherhood) that feminists identify as rationalising women's oppression. However, as Frazer identifies, ideology is used to explain a rather vague process through which girls and women come to accept their oppression. Marx referred to this process as "false consciousness", whereby individuals reconcile the disjunction between their own experiences and the dominant ideology (Frazer and Cameron, 1989:30). However, this paradigm poses two problems. First, it assumes that girls and women are not active in their interpretation of the conflict between their real experiences and the ways in which ideology informs their interpretation. It is not that girls' and women's experience of violence, sexuality or womanhood are *incorrect* (as the idea of false consciousness would suppose), it is that these experiences are not the same as the dominant meaning ascribed to them. Second, beliefs are assumed to correspond to behaviour, the exact mechanisms of which remains vague. Discourse analysis circumvents these problems by searching for the *meanings* of people's descriptions of reality. In this way there is no assumption made that 'reality' can be known. The task of this research project, then, is to understand the ways in which certain definitions of reality come to be accepted in people's discourse, even in the face of contradictory, lived experience.

Recent works by Frazer and Cameron (1989) and Brown and Gilligan (1993)

have tackled the ideological assumption of false consciousness. Frazer and Cameron reject a 'muted group' theory of language referred to in the work of Spender. At the same time these authors also repudiate the positivist argument that language simply reflects social reality. These authors attempt to account for the numerous contradictions found empirically in people's talk. They propose that the contradictions are, in fact, "passages of discourse" (pg.32) which are structured according to conventions. Individuals will have varied access to, and experience in, using contrasting discourses. The relevant question, in this paradigm, becomes who is saying what in which circumstances? My data clearly suggested that girls and boys employ different discourses in specific contexts and the research study discussed above alerted me to look at *how* certain groups such as middle-class white girls at Chiswick school have access to discourses that working-class white girls at Parsons do not learn. What determines the acceptability and status of certain discourses over others also emerged as a salient issue from my data.

In the article "Meeting at the crossroads: women's psychology and girl's development" (1993), Brown and Gilligan report their empirical findings from a study of female adolescent development. These authors found that the girls in their study struggled to maintain a consistent identity in the face of adopted discourses that effectively disempowered them. Interestingly, what Brown and Gilligan found was that the girls reacted to this conflict in a number of ways. Some girls resisted these competing discourses openly and maintained a visible, outspoken struggle. Other girls resisted by taking their "inner voices" underground" (pg.14). These girls effectively



lived a 'double life' in some sense as they maintained an appearance of pretending not to know and adopting popular discourses. Whilst these authors focus on female adolescent development, my data suggested that boys also may experience conflict between what they 'know' as reality and the accessible discourses which describe reality. Therefore, my search for theoretically grounded approach led me to more recent theories by Moore and Connell.

### **Gender Identity Re-visited: Multiple Femininities and Masculinities:**

So far, my discussion of gender has presented gender as an unproblematic concept. Gender is usually conceived of as a binary operation of feminine and masculine. This section will examine the concept of gender and propose that homogeneous categories of male and female are far too elementary. I suggest that any useful research involving gender must engage in deconstructing this concept.

In the book A Passion For Difference (1994), Henrietta Moore tackles the problem of deconstructing gender. The analysis of social class, race, ethnicity and other fundamental variables makes it clear that there is no (useful) universal categorisation of 'woman' or 'man'. That is, if the experience of gender is changed at all by the co-existing experience of these other variables, then the categories of gender vary as well. Moore frames this problem within the project of sociology and anthropology as the relationship between the individual and society. Symbolic interactionism, structuralism and standpoint theory all invite the scholar to look at the

individual's understanding and interpretation of culture and society. Feminist standpoint theory, for example, would use women's experiences as the basis for understanding reality. The presumption is that a woman's experiences will both differ from men's and also from other women's experiences.

The obvious retort to the above discussion is the reminder that the division of gender is based on differences of *sex*. Is there a way that 'speaking from the body' brings all of women's experience together as different from men's? The project of my thesis, to theorise girls' experience of domination through violence would be greatly aided by such a starting point. One of the most salient problems in discussing differences between girls and boys is to separate the differences experienced *because of sex* and those experienced *through gender*. As Moore crucially points out, it is the difference between *female* (sex) and *feminine* (gender). Work by Lees (1993), McRobbie (1984), Sharpe (1994) and Frazer (1989) reveal that girls' experience of gendered identity is often not consistent with cultural prescriptions of sexual difference based on discrete binary categories. Which brings the discussion to the concept of self-identity.

The study of identity in sociology usually emphasises socialisation as the primary mechanism for identity formation. Through parents, siblings, schools, religion and other social organisations, individuals learn culturally constructed gender identities. Gender identities fostered through socialisation are always assumed to be based on sexual differentiation. In this way socialisation becomes an inevitable and 'natural' extension of pre-existing, apparently obvious divisions (Freudian theories are

of this genre). Lacan's theory of subjectivity departs from more essentialist theories by arguing that self-identity does not arise from essential qualities of the body. Self-identity is constructed through the individual's interpretation of social, historical and cultural representations. This interpretation takes place within discourse and it is discourse that introduces the individual to various subject positions. My research is based on a theoretical understanding that discourse illuminates various subject positions that individuals may adopt or resist. I am centrally concerned with how girls and boys negotiate various subject positions, how they are resisted and supported. In particular I am interested in finding out how girls and boys experience every-day activities *informed by* subject positions and *informing* subject positions.

Two recent works by Connell, Gender and Power (1987) and Masculinities (1995), explore gender relations from the perspective that Moore (1994) suggests. Moore's work is theoretically dense and needs empirical verification. Connell's work is based on a great deal of empirical research conducted with adolescent and adult males. Connell is concerned to incorporate this 'new sociology' of gender. He borrows from Gramsci's theory of hegemony to construct a theory of gender in which multiple femininities and masculinities are hierarchically structured. Individual females and males must negotiate within these genders. In an engaging blend of empirical data and theory, Connell explores various masculinities and femininities that either resist, comply or co-operate with the dominant masculinity (referred to as 'hegemonic masculinity'). Hegemonic masculinity is premised by the culturally reproduced subordination of women. Whilst most men may not actually practise hegemonic

masculinity, many other practices of masculinity comply with this hierarchically dominant discourse as males benefit from the inequality between males and females. Other discourses, such as those of gay men, actively reject and resist hegemonic masculinity. Females, on the other hand, are not so restricted in their access to discourses of femininity. Connell describes the practice of 'emphasised femininity' as one which most complies with hegemonic masculinity, but he is also quick to point out that females also resist hegemony with a multitude of other femininities. Connell assumes that individuals are both active in their negotiation of gender practice and that resistance to hegemonic masculinity is a fundamental part of the structure of masculinities and femininities.

Although discussed in the section of this Chapter on power, it is worth reiterating here I understand that the availability of subject positions and their adoption not to be a neutral process. Indeed, it is a political process. That subject positions can be resisted and contested necessarily means that the process of negotiation is political. Power enters into the negotiation between females and males of subject positions that will either increase or decrease individuals' autonomy and control in particular contexts. Social identities such as 'mother' and 'wife' are culturally prescribed and any female's adoption of such identities requires a process of negotiating between her lived experience of these identities as well as the normative explanations of these identities which support a social order based on a hierarchy of social identities. In fact, the example of 'mother' and 'wife' captures much of society's prescription of feminine. Female social identity is wholly based on assumptions of the feminine as embodiment

of carer. Women who work at home as homemakers are fulfilling their primary (societal) prescription as carers. Women who work outside the home do so in subordination to their role as carer. As Moore (1994) points out, the signifier 'mother' defines female's relations to work, sexuality and social relations:

There is nothing natural about motherhood or womanhood. Every woman knows the meaning and experience of motherhood and womanhood for the white middle-classes has little to do with their meaning and experience for black working-class women.

(Moore, 1994:99)

### Discourse and Violence:

In my research I take the view that violence is political. By this I mean that social identities are hierarchically stratified in society. Certain subject positions endow an individual with more power in certain contexts. However, a political analysis of violence must then recognise the will of violence; that violence is a personal decision based on the negotiation of subject positions. Feminist analysis of violence is in danger of collapsing the social identities and contextualised individual actions so that individual behaviour becomes subsumed within an analysis of social power relations. It is quite easy to slip into discussions of 'violent men' and 'women as survivors' as though these were exclusive, unchanging, monolithic categories. This process negates both females' resistance to violence as well as their own violent acts. This problem emanates from the traditional feminist analysis that applies oppression on the basis of gender so that men are, *by definition*, oppressors as women are victims. My previous discussion of the problems of gender identity negates this sort of analysis. An

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individual's gender, in other words, does not provide a sufficient answer to the use of power and violence. The examination of violence must begin with the negotiation of subject positions by females and males. It is not that men and women are embodiments of violence and victimisation, respectively. We must understand gender in terms of multiple femininities and masculinities. Some of these subject positions embody violence in particular contexts. This is the project of a feminist analysis of power and violence. The means of this investigation is discourse.

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***The Present Study:***

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This thesis reflects a process of theory development through empirical research. This chapter has outlined the sequence of theories that I explored at the outset of the study as well as during my data collection. It was at the stage of data collection and initial analysis that I recognised theories of gender proposed by Lees, Sharpe, Spender and others as too simplistic. Further reading led me to explore much more complex ideas about gender as practice and negotiation. The purpose of my research developed as a need to test out empirically these theories of gender.

My data is largely comprised of accounts of relations and practices. In all research of this narrative form, assumptions are made about the validity of interpretation. First, I recognise that there could be a gap between the girls' and boys' accounts and their meaning. Second, I am not suggesting that my interpretation is the only one possible: I have constructed a series of meanings that I think reflect in the most useful way what these adolescents have recounted. Third, I am not assuming that the accounts are actually 'true' reports of what *actually* happened. I make no claims that the events and experiences described in the transcripts actually happened. I am only treating these transcripts as the adolescents' accounts of their experiences.

**Research Questions and Definitions:**

The present study will attempt to answer the following questions:

1. With what frequency is aggressive behaviour reported to occur during interactions with girls and boys?

2. How do boys and girls understand aggressive interactions?
3. Do attitudes towards the appropriateness of aggression vary according to a girl's and boy's age, social class, educational attainment and ethnicity?
4. To what extent is this aggression a response to, and controlled by shared expectations and attitudes, and to what extent is it regarded as deviant and unacceptable?
5. How do girls and boys negotiate these expectations and norms? How do boys and girls understand differences in expectations and norms based on gender?

The term 'date' is borrowed from American and Canadian literature. I engaged in a lengthy discussion with my sample of adolescents as to the variety of ways in which they interact with each other, and how they define this interaction. I suggest that there is a wide range of situations that may be defined as 'dating'. For instance, a typical situation may be that a group of girls meet a group of boys at a designated place (such as a movie theatre or ice rink). There may be a temporary pairing of boys and girls, and then a return to their own groups at the end of the evening. While this situation does not adhere to a strict definition of dating, I incorporated these situations into my research to allow for a more complete context in which violence may occur. I attempted to resolve disagreement among my sample of adolescents as to what is considered a date by including as many definitions of dating as possible.

Similarly the term "violence" is ambiguous, as I discussed in Chapter 2. The definitions of physical, sexual and psychological violence defined for this research did not always agree with the adolescents' definitions. In initial group discussions I explored the variety of labels that the group members ascribe to violent interactions. I



sought to include as many forms of violence as the students offer.

## CHAPTER 4: METHOD

### ***Introduction:***

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This chapter will outline the method I used in my research study. It includes an account of how I gained access to the two schools and the pupils. I describe the research instruments and their administration. I also describe the organisation and administration of the group and individual interviews. I then introduce my employment of pupils' post codes which I linked with census data in order to gather information on relative levels of deprivation and social class. Next I outline the statistical tests I used to analyse the questionnaire data. Finally, I provide the timetable I followed in completing the research study.

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*The Pilot Study:*

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I completed a pilot study prior to the main research project. I did this for several reasons. Firstly, I wanted to test out several drafts of the questionnaire for validity and reliability. Secondly, I wanted to complete sample group and individual interviews in order to garner feedback with regard to the questions I intended to pose in the main interviews, the structure of the group sessions and the reaction to my research topic.

To this end I obtained a list of nine community centres in Oxford which conducted youth programs. I wrote to the program directors of each community centre including a letter of introduction and research proposal. I contacted each of the program directors by telephone. Some of the youth programs had terminated and some did not resume until the autumn or winter terms. I obtained interviews with two directors who proved very helpful in suggesting youth groups which might be amenable to participating in the pilot study. I consistently attended two youth groups, one in North Oxford and the other in West Oxford. The former group consisted of between ten and twenty (depending on the particular evening) females who ranged in age from thirteen to eighteen. I met with these girls over a period of two months. I administered the draft questionnaire and received valuable input with regard to the types of questions asked, the vocabulary employed in the questionnaire and the time required to complete the questionnaire. I spoke with several girls informally concerning the research study and received much interest in the topic of the project. Interestingly, several of the girls at this youth group attended the girls school which subsequently denied access for my research study.

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The other group in West Oxford consisted of males and females between the ages of eight and twenty-two. I restricted the administration of the questionnaire to those members between the ages of thirteen and eighteen. I again elicited feedback from those people who had completed the questionnaire concerning the questions asked. The youth group leader expressed considerable interest in my research and with her permission and the interest of four of the girls, I piloted two group interviews. I tape-recorded both sessions and elicited a great deal of feedback concerning the questions I asked, the format of the group sessions as well as my role as facilitator and researcher.

From the information that I gathered from the young persons at these youth groups I altered both the questionnaire and the group sessions. At this stage, I was in the process of contacting schools in order to gain access for the main research study.

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***The Schools:***

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**Choosing and Gaining Access To The Schools:**

I needed to sample from the adolescent population which led me to the decision to base my research in secondary schools. My target population consisted of male and female pupils between the ages of fourteen and eighteen. I began by contacting the Oxfordshire County Council Educational Service which provided me with a list of both public and comprehensive secondary schools in Oxfordshire. From this list I began the process of selecting the schools which I would contact. Due to practical limitations of not having access to a car, I restricted the list to schools which were within cycling distance of Oxford. Through discussions with my supervisor and administrators at the Educational Service I decided to further restrict my applications for permission for access to state schools. This decision was based on the judgement that due to the sensitivity of the research subject, public schools would be less likely to grant access to their pupils. These two restrictions limited the choice of schools to six, which were all contacted. I wrote a proposal outlining my research topic and what I would require from the school in order to achieve my goals. My supervisor enclosed this proposal, as well as a covering letter of his own, to each of the six schools. Two of the schools were single sex (one all boys and the other all girls). Both of these schools denied my access due to the “sensitivity” of my research. One mixed-sex school denied permission for the same reason. One mixed-sex school contacted my supervisor and granted me an interview with one of the Deputy Heads of that school. I did not receive any correspondence from the remaining two schools.

I met with the Deputy Head of the school (which I will hereafter refer to as Chiswick) that had contacted my supervisor and it was eventually agreed that I could

administer my questionnaire to voluntary participants in the sixth form. The administration at this school decided that the topic of my research was too sensitive for all of the other pupils in the school. I would be allowed to elicit volunteers for my group and individual interviews at the time that I administered the questionnaire.

I telephoned one of schools (hereafter referred to as Parsons) and gained an interview with the Head Teacher and a Deputy Head. This school was to prove extremely helpful in facilitating the collection of my data. I eventually gained permission to administer the questionnaire to all grade levels in the school as well as elicit volunteers for the group and individual interviews from any of the pupils in the school. In exchange for the complete access that I gained to this school I counselled several pupils throughout the year and took part in relevant meetings and school activities.

### **Pseudonyms:**

In order to preserve the anonymity of the schools that agreed to participate in my research study, I have assigned the names of Chiswick and Parsons to these schools.

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***The Pupils:***

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**Gaining Permission From Parents and Guardians of the Pupils:**

At Parsons school, the administration of the questionnaire required that I receive permission from the parents or guardians of the pupils before administering the questionnaire. I distributed permission forms to pupils during year tutorial group morning assemblies, proceeding from a description of the purpose of my research project. These permission forms provided the options to the parent or guardian of consent or non-consent. A reward of ten pounds was offered to pupils as an incentive to return the permission forms (one of the returned permission forms would be selected at random for the reward). Within a month of the permission forms being sent out to the parents or guardians, only a small proportion had returned. The administrators at Parsons then decided to send a letter out describing the research and assuming consent unless parents or guardians contacted the school requesting that their children not participate in the study.

At Chiswick, the school administration decided that since my sample would be restricted to pupils in the sixth form, permission from the parents or guardians of these pupils was not necessary. These pupils were assumed to be of sufficient age to determine for themselves whether or not they agreed to complete the questionnaire and participate in interviews.

**Sample Size:**

Of a total population of 1041 pupils from both schools, I collected questionnaires from a sample of 487 pupils. At Chiswick school I was restricted to the

pupils in the sixth form for my research study. Of a total population of 167 pupils in year 12 and 132 pupils in year 13 at Chiswick. I collected completed questionnaires from 98 pupils. There were a total of 505 pupils at Parsons and I collected completed questionnaires from 389 pupils. In total there were 245 female and 242 male respondents.

### **Ages:**

From Parsons school, there were 96 thirteen year olds (all in year 9). There were 119 fourteen year olds (45 respondents in year 9 and 64 respondents in year 10). There were 93 fifteen year olds (49 in year 10 and 44 in year 11). There were 50 sixteen year old respondents (one in year 10, 25 in year 11 and 24 in year 12). There were 23 seventeen year olds (17 in year 12 and 6 in year 13). There were 13 eighteen year olds (two from year 12 and eleven from year 13). Finally, there was one respondent who was aged nineteen and in year 13. At Chiswick school I was only able to garner responses from pupils in the sixth form. I collected questionnaires from 64 sixteen year olds (all in year 12), 32 seventeen year olds (31 in year 12 and one in year 13), and one eighteen year old who was in year 13.



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***The Research Method:***

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**Questionnaire:**

The questionnaire was largely based on the Conflict Tactics Scale which will be fully discussed in Chapter 5. For ease of coding later in the study, the questionnaires were copied on different colours of paper according to the school and sex of the pupil. Chiswick school was assigned the colours yellow for females and grey for males. Parsons school was assigned peach for females and green for males.

At Chiswick school, I administered the questionnaire to the pupils during a single tutorial session. Prior to this administration, I introduced the subject of my research. I explained that the completion of the questionnaire was voluntary and that individual pupil's responses would be confidential. I answered any questions that the pupils and teachers posed regarding the research project itself and the questionnaire. I provided instructions regarding the completion of the questionnaire after which I distributed the questionnaires. These instructions included completing all relevant parts of the questionnaire and completing the questionnaire without the input from other pupils. I remained in the classroom in order to answer any questions that might have arisen during the completion of the questionnaire. Teachers and administrators remained in the classroom during the completion of the questionnaires.

At Parsons school, I was allowed access to all year levels. I gained access to the pupils by meeting with the year heads to explain my research study and devise a schedule for the questionnaire completion. I arranged to enter individual classes either during tutorial or class time. I provided the same information to each class and gave consistent instructions for completion of the questionnaire. Again, pupils were told that participation was voluntary and individual responses confidential. I remained in each class in order to answer any question that the pupils had. My presence also helped to

insure that pupils did complete the questionnaires. Teachers usually remained in the classroom during completion of the questionnaires, although infrequently teachers left the classroom for a short period of time.

At both schools I was assured of a high return rate since the pupils were a 'captive audience'. My presence encouraged pupils to complete the questionnaire rather than draw attention to themselves by returning an unanswered questionnaire. Fewer than five pupils in total declined to complete the questionnaire.

### **The Interviews:**

#### **A. Access To Pupils: Chiswick School**

At Chiswick school I elicited volunteers for participation in individual and group discussions through my initial (and only) contact with the sixth form. After the pupils had completed the questionnaires, I explained to the group that I was interested in speaking with pupils in individual and group settings concerning issues involved in adolescent heterosexual relationships. I provided several sheets of paper on which pupils wrote their names. I compiled a list of interested pupils which I submitted to the school administrator in charge of assisting me. A meeting time was organised which I attended in order to speak with the pupils and form groups. Unfortunately, the meeting was arranged at a time when many pupils attend courses off campus and so were not at the school that afternoon. Nevertheless, several pupils were able to attend the meeting. I reiterated the purpose of my research and asked pupils to form groups of their choosing. Two female groups and two male groups formed as a result of this meeting. One female pupil requested that she be interviewed individually.

I received permission to use a teacher's office in the sixth form common room to conduct the individual and group interviews. I began the group sessions with the two female and two male groups. My presence in the sixth form became known by more of the pupils, who soon began to 'drop in' for informal conversation. Two further groups of female pupils sought permission to begin sessions which increased the total number of groups to six. A female pupil requested that she be individually interviewed. The following week her female friend also volunteered to be individually interviewed. Two weeks later these two female pupils and another female friend agreed to participate in group discussions bringing the total number of groups to seven. Later, the boyfriend of one of the female pupils in another group approached me to request that he and his friend begin group sessions. Two more male pupils approached me informally and I began to hold separate groups with these pupils and their friends. In total, I conducted nine groups at Chiswick school; four female groups and five male groups. I also conducted nine individual interviews, some interviews extending to two or more sessions. I initially organised the groups into five sessions each with a sixth session should the pupils express interest in continuing the group. Eight of the groups continued for several months, on a weekly and sometimes bi-weekly basis. These groups were maintained for at least eight sessions and a few groups continued past fifteen sessions. I eventually disbanded the ninth group because the male pupils failed to consistently attend.

#### B. Access to Pupils: Parsons School

At this school, I was allowed to co-conduct a series of class discussions with two sixth form classes. From these large groups, I solicited volunteers for smaller focus groups. I conducted four groups from this process: the two large mixed-sex

groups; two small female groups and a small male group. I organised a further male group which later disbanded due to lack of consistent attendance. I also conducted one female group from pupils in year ten. These pupils asked to participate themselves, as they had completed the questionnaire in their class and learned that I was conducting focus groups. I eventually replaced three of these pupils with two other pupils from another class as the former three pupils failed to attend three consecutive sessions.

The two mixed-sex class groups originated at the request of the sixth form Head who wanted to redress what he considered to be a void in the curriculum, as the school curriculum did not specifically address the issues involved in violence in adolescent relationships. I agreed to co-lead these groups with the school counsellor. I also conducted four individual interviews, some of which extended over two or more sessions.

#### C. Structure of the interviews:

A review of the literature, a garnering of the types of questions asked by other researchers and those questions *not* asked in similar research, and discussions with my supervisor led me to construct a format for the group interviews. Within the topic of each session, the interviews were unstructured in order to elicit the spontaneous responses of the pupils. Approximately six group sessions for each group included the following topics: an introduction; the rules of the group; get-to-know each other games; critique of the questionnaire; vignettes; class identification; discussion of newspaper articles; and topics of their own choosing.

**The Postcodes:**

A portion of my research study included an analysis of relative levels of deprivation for pupils at Chiswick school and Parsons school, as part of my analysis of social class and levels of violence. Strictly speaking, I could not feasibly obtain such information due to its intrusive nature and problems with access and confidentiality. The nearest I would be able to come would be to receive a list of post codes of all of the pupils in the school for the year that I collected data and to match these post codes with the enumeration districts in the Oxfordshire area. These enumeration districts are connected with Census Data which provides information on family income and reliance on government benefits. This information would be useful in my analysis of class differences between pupils at the two schools; a prominent characteristic of my sample. To this end, I requested and received a list of post codes of pupils at both Chiswick school and Parsons school.

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***Research Instruments:***

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**The Questionnaire****A. Descriptive Variables:**

The questionnaire begins with nine demographic questions (refer to Appendix A). Due to the colour coding of the questionnaires, I already knew the sex of the respondent and the school they attended. The first and second questions ask the age and school year of the respondent respectively. The third question asks what country the pupil was born in. The purpose of this question was to garner information concerning the immigrant status of the pupil. A further question asking for the ethnic origin of the respondent was designed to assess whether the pupil's membership within a particular ethnic group would have a significant relationship with their responses to the questions regarding aggression. Question five asks the respondent whether s/he considers her/himself to be religious. Should the respondent have answered in the affirmative to this question, several choices of organised religion as well as a space for another religion were listed. The purpose of this question was to be able to look at any relationships between religious affiliation and levels of reported violence.

Questions six, seven, eight and nine relate to the social position of the respondent in society. Question six asks respondents to list members of their household. Questions seven and eight require the respondent to list the paid and unpaid work of their parents. The listed occupations were coded using Goldthorpe's social class groups which will be discussed further in section eleven of this chapter. The final demographic question asks respondents in what area of Oxford they live.

The following series of four questions ask respondents about their general dating behaviours. Questions ten and eleven ask pupils how many times in the past

month they have gone out with a person of the opposite sex alone and, if they have gone out more than ten times, how often they have gone out per week. Questions twelve and thirteen ask pupils how many times in the past month they went out with someone of the opposite sex, in a group. For those respondents who reported that they had gone out more than ten times, they were then asked how often in a week they would go out in a group.

#### B. Measures of Physical Aggression:

Questions fourteen to sixteen inclusive refer to the occurrence and forms of physical aggression that take place within relationships. Questions fourteen and fifteen correspond directly to questions in the Conflict Tactics Scale. For these questions, respondents are offered a list of nineteen actions and a corresponding list of frequencies. The actions vary in intensity and severity from discussing an issue calmly (the mildest action) to using a knife on their partner (the most severe action). The frequencies vary from never to more than twenty times. Respondents are requested to check off which action they and their partners have made in the past twelve months. The option of “don’t know” is also included. Question sixteen asks respondents to record how long ago the first physical fight occurred between themselves and their partners.

#### C. Measures of Reaction to Aggression:

Also from the Conflict Tactics Scale, questions eighteen, twenty, twenty-three and twenty-six refer to the reaction of respondents to aggression in their relationship. Question eighteen asks respondents to remember the most serious physical conflict

which took place between themselves and their partners. Seven (plus an “other” category) reactions are provided and respondents are required to check each response that they made to the aggression. The question assumes that the respondent is reacting to aggression perpetrated by their partner. Question twenty asks respondents how often they have considered ending their relationship with their partner, *because of* the aggression. Question twenty-three asks respondents to estimate the probability that their partner will be either physically or sexually aggressive towards them and are provided with a ten point scale from zero percent to one hundred percent to record their choice. Finally, question twenty-six lists eight responses that the respondent may have made in an attempt to stop their partner from “hurting” them. Respondents are requested to check whether they ever made the response and how effective it was in stopping the aggression.

#### D. Measure of Approval of Physical Aggression:

Questions twenty-four and twenty-five ask respondents whether they could imagine any situations in which they would approve of a male slapping his girlfriend’s face or a female slapping a boyfriend’s face, respectively. Respondents could choose between affirmation, negation and uncertainty.

#### E. Measure of Sexual Aggression:

Question twenty-one asks respondents whether their partner ever attempted or forced the respondent to have sexual relations through the use of physical force or psychological pressure. Respondents chose between the responses of attempted to, did force, never happened and not sure if it ever happened. Those pupils who responded



affirmatively to this question were asked in question twenty-two how many times this had happened to them.

#### F. Measure of Risk Factors:

Respondents were asked in question nineteen to report any consumption of alcohol by either partner before the physical conflict. Many research studies in this area focus on the use of alcohol as a possible precipitator to violence (Stets and Henderson, 1991; Muehlenhard, 1991).

#### G. Measures of Reliability:

Questions twenty-seven to thirty-seven ask respondents questions that are asked previously in the questionnaire, simply in a different form. The purpose of these questions is to provide a reliability check for the questionnaire. Respondents are asked whether they currently have a partner, how often they go out with their partner, how many previous partners they have had and the longest time period they have gone out with their partners. They are also asked whether they ever argue with their partners and whether there has been any physical conflict present in the relationship. Due to the centrality of the issue of validity, measures of validity of the Conflict Tactics Scale are dealt with in Chapter 6.

**The Interviews:**

The group interviews followed a general semi-structured format:

- Session 1: Introduction
  - Rules of group: confidentiality, attendance, honesty
  - Games to get to know each other
- Session 2: Critique of the questionnaire
- Session 3: Vignettes
- Session 4: Vignettes continued
  - Social class identification
- Session 5: Newspaper articles
- Session 6: Their own topic

In the first session, I introduced myself to the members of the group. We discussed administrative issues of the group such as meeting times and places. I reviewed the rules of the group which consisted of confidentiality of everything said within the group, consistent attendance and punctuality, and respect for the opinions and feelings of every member of the group. I encouraged the members of the group to be as honest as they felt they were comfortable with and offered to them that any question that I asked them, they could ask me. I also organised two games aimed at introducing members of the group to one another in a non-threatening atmosphere. The first game consisted of giving each member of the group one minute with which to say everything they could think of about themselves. I usually took the first turn in this game. The group members took it in turn to time each other. The second game consisted of answering a number of questions which I had written down on index cards

(refer to Appendix B). The cards were passed from member to member who were requested to answer the question written on each card they received. This procedure was repeated until either time or new cards ended. The questions varied from what types of books the member liked to read to what they wanted to be doing in ten years time.

The second session primarily concentrated on eliciting a critique of the questionnaire which all members of the group had been requested to complete prior to the commencement of the group sessions. Group members were asked to comment on both the comprehensibility of each question and the validity of the questions. Members were also asked to comment on their overall impression of the questionnaire to sample whether they felt some questions may have been inappropriate, or some questions had not been asked which would have been relevant.

The third session focused on vignettes which I wrote for this research study (refer to Appendix C). The purpose of these vignettes was to introduce the topic of aggression in relationships less directly than asking potentially highly sensitive questions. Members of the group were able to comment on the thoughts, feelings and actions of the vignette characters without having to disclose any personal experience with relationship aggression. I read each vignette out to each group in order to ensure reasonably consistent administration. Members of the group were then asked to respond to questions related to each vignette as well as comment generally on the vignettes.

The vignette technique has enjoyed increasing popularity in social survey research. This instrument has been used primarily to circumvent some of the problems with traditional survey methods. Whilst a more complete explication of the limitations of survey measures of attitudes and beliefs appears in Chapter 6, it is useful here to

point out the most obvious problems. First, questionnaires are constrained by both wording and coding. Even the most sophisticated questions can be criticised for their non-contextualising of situations (Finch, 1993). Vignettes provide the opportunity for the researcher to situate the events which respondents are requested to respond to. Questions 24 and 25 of this research questionnaire asked the respondents to answer questions about their attitude towards the acceptability of a man and a woman slapping their partner's face. I was concerned that these questions were adrift of any context in which the pupils could attach any meaning to those statements. The vignettes provided me with the opportunity to contextualise a situation in which boys and girls might employ violence. By using this technique I was acknowledging both that "meanings are social and that morality may well be situationally specific" (Finch, 1993:106). The purpose of vignettes, basically, is to provide short stories about hypothetical actors in specific situations to which individuals are asked to respond. Some vignettes, such as those of Finch (1993) and Alves and Rossi (1978) provide various options of what the fictional characters should 'do next'. I left the outcomes of my vignettes purposefully unwritten and invited the girls and boys in the focus groups to discuss the realism of the stories, their probable outcomes and the feelings and motivations of the characters. As Finch (1993) observed in her study, I found that the girls and boys responded very positively to the vignettes (some even reported that it was like talking about a soap opera). A very important feature of the vignettes was that they described fictional characters. The sensitivity of my research topic necessitated that I develop a means of eliciting information from the girls and boys in such a way that was minimally threatening. Prior experience demonstrated that simply asking girls and boys to recount experiences of perpetrating and/or experiencing violence is not generally successful (unless a substantial relationship with that individual has been developed). Employing

vignettes allowed us to talk about violence in the character's relationship instead of their own relationships. The discussions of the vignettes often led into discussions of their own situations, the disclosure of which they were able to control. That the discussion of the vignettes often transformed into detailed and lengthy discussions of their own lives suggested two things. Firstly, I was less concerned about the realism of the vignettes as the girls and boys almost invariably told their own stories to which the vignettes were 'spring boards'. The girls and boys seemed quite ready to criticise any portion of the vignettes which they deemed to be unrealistic. For instance, most of the groups told me that the boys and girls in the first vignette would need to be younger than the ages that appeared in the vignette. Both girls and boys said that the situation of a boy calling a girl slag and the girl's subsequent reaction was more common in middle-school, for girls and boys aged about thirteen. Many of the girls and boys in the groups said that the second vignette in which a girl is raped by her boyfriend was unrealistic in the sense that relationships that have lasted for a year usually already involve sexual intercourse. Secondly, my concern about the validity of extrapolating the features of the vignette that triggered a particular response was mitigated by the strong tendency for our discussions to discard the transcripts in favour of talking about the adolescents' own lives. It would have been difficult for me to identify exactly what combination of variables in the vignettes elicited the adolescents' decisions about the motivations and behaviours of the vignette characters. Our discussion was then not of their accounts of hypothetical situations, but their own concrete and lived experiences. It is clear that the technique of vignettes does not, in itself, say anything about the respondent's own actions or potential actions.

The first vignette concerns an incidence of verbal aggression. The second vignette describes an incidence of date rape, the third depicts a boy being physically

aggressive towards his girlfriend and the final one describes a situation in which a boy threatens to slap his girlfriend.

The fourth session usually continued with a discussion of the vignette. When the discussions had terminated I had each member of the group write on a piece of paper provided, the “class system in Britain” as they conceptualised it. I followed the procedure employed by Frazer (1988) in her study of adolescent female’s discourse on class. I purposely offered limited instructions for this task in order not to influence members’ responses. I followed this exercise by asking several questions regarding their diagrams (or lists depending on how they chose to complete the task). I concluded the fourth session by asking the members if they thought that their class positions influenced the forms of relationships that they experienced and if so, then in what ways.

The fifth session was used to examine recent court cases concerning date rape, as reported in various British newspapers. The bulk of the articles concerned trials of accused rapists. Members were requested to comment on both the cases and their perceptions of the newspaper reporting itself. The sixth session was reserved for the members of the group themselves to both decide on a topic for discussion and then lead this discussion. Several groups chose to discuss certain issues that had arisen in previous sessions which had been problematic for them for various reasons. Often, the groups requested that the sessions continue and we continued to meet on a regular basis discussing a variety of issues.

### **The Census Data:**

The purpose of obtaining the post codes of all of the pupils at Chiswick and Parsons schools was to ascertain the geographical areas in which they lived in Oxford.

Using the postcodes of the pupils I was able to determine the “Enumeration District” (ED) in which the pupils lived. Enumeration Districts refer to the smallest areas for which census data is made available. In Oxford, the average population size for ED’s in 1991 was approximately 480 people and 180 households (Noble, Smith, Avenell, Smith and Sharland, 1994). In total, there are about 235 ED’s in Oxford. Note that the postcodes I obtained from the schools were of all the pupils; I did not have postcodes for any *named* individual. Therefore, the data I obtained on levels of deprivation applied to the pupils at the school level and not the individual level. With the ED’s I was able to access Census data from 1991 for the individual enumeration districts. Therefore, I was able to access all of the Census information for pupils at both Chiswick and Parsons schools. I was able to analyse differences in economic deprivation, in general, between pupils at these two schools.

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**Data Analysis:**

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**Questionnaire:**

I performed descriptive analyses on the quantitative data consisting of frequencies and crosstabulations. I employed the Statistical Package For Social Sciences (SPSS) for this analysis. The nature of the data did not warrant the use of such statistical tests such as multiple regression. I obtained frequencies of all of the variables in the questionnaire. I then performed bi-variate crosstabulations using independent variables such as gender and social class (see previous section on descriptive variables) with the measures of physical and sexual aggression. A more detailed description of the data analysis of the questionnaire appears in the next chapter of this thesis.

**Postcodes:**

Information available from the Census (1991) is extensive. As I wanted to assess relative levels of economic deprivation of the pupils at Chiswick and Parsons, I chose to focus on variables in the Census that most related to low income (that is, variables that indicated dependence on income support). I divided the Chiswick and Parsons ED's by gender, garnering four groups: Chiswick males, Chiswick females, Parsons males and Parsons females. As gender constitutes the major subject of my thesis, assessing differences in social class and economic deprivation between pupils at Chiswick and Parsons *highlighting* gender was useful. I also had the average Oxford adolescent's ED from the Census data. I compared Chiswick and Parsons pupils, and then the pupils at these two schools to the general adolescent population in Oxford on



the following variables: number of unemployed, renting of council housing, ethnicity, owner occupied housing, economic inactivity, dependence on income support and dependence on single income. The results of this analysis appear in Chapter 8 of the thesis.

### **ATLAS/ti:**

The volume and complexity of the qualitative data of this study directed me to search for a qualitative computer software programme. After a considerable period of trial-and-error use of several programs such as Ethnograph 4.0 and NUDIST, the programme ATLAS/ti emerged as the most appropriate package for the analysis of the focus group and individual interview data. This programme provides a useful facility for coding the more than thousand pages of transcriptions I had collected. At a more conceptual level, I was able to build “families” of codes and explore the associations between them. Finally, I was able to create “networks” or associations between the families. The advantage of ATLAS/ti over other programmes is that the nature of the association was not automatically defined in hierarchical terms. Since the data did not ‘fit’ a hierarchical structuring, I was able to define associations between variables (codes in this case) of equal importance.

I began the process of analysis by reading through all of the transcript data. As I had transcribed all of the recorded tapes myself, I was already initially familiar with the data. I amalgamated each group’s sessions into one large transcript per group. In all I had seventeen (combined) transcripts for the focus groups as well as several transcripts of individual interviews. I went through each of the transcripts assigning codes to excerpts of the transcripts. For this first round of coding, I assigned codes fairly loosely. That is, I simply read the transcripts and assigned codes according to the

*substance* of each excerpt (refer to Appendix E for a sample list of these codes). I employed the coding strategy suggested by Bogdan and Biklen (1982:167-172). This procedure involves assigning several different ‘types’ of codes. These categories of codes consisted broadly of: setting codes, definitions of situation codes, perspectives held by subjects, subjects’ ways of thinking about people and objects, process codes, activity codes, event codes, strategy codes and relationship and social structure codes.

“Setting codes” referred to all parts of the transcript concerned with the date, time, membership and topic of each session. “Situation codes” included, for example, how girls and boys defined the word ‘slag’. “Perspectives held by subjects” codes referred to all transcript excerpts to do with more specific shared norms and rules and general points of view such as ‘the most common form of rape is stranger rape’. The “subjects’ ways of thinking” codes referred to all talk about the sample’s understandings of each other, of outsiders and of the objects that make up their world. So, for instance, girls talk about ‘types of blokes’ was subsumed under this heading. “Process codes” referred to various sequences of events that occurred through passages of time such as the girls’ and boys’ year in school, getting a boyfriend, breaking up, or having sex for the first time. “Activity codes” referred to behaviours that regularly occurred such as smoking, going to parties and shopping. “Event codes” were reserved for changes in the transcripts resulting from such events as Christmas, half-term and exams, such as passages reminding all group members where we had left off from the last session. “Strategy codes” referred to the tactics, methods and techniques that the girls and boys used to accomplish their goals. For instance, I placed all of the girls’ talk about flirting and snogging under strategy codes. Finally, “relationship and structure codes” referred to regular patterns of behaviour, such as ‘going out’ and ‘friendships’.

After I had assigned the initial codes I began again, performing a second round of coding. ATLAS/ti provides a statistical account of how many times each code has been used so I was able to ascertain which words (such as 'slag') and which subjects of talk (such as 'marriage') appeared most frequently in the transcripts. In the second round of coding I combined codes under larger, umbrella codes (referred to as 'Axial Coding' by Strauss and Corbin, 1990:96). So, for instance, the codes of 'slag' and 'bitch' were subsumed within a code called 'psychological put-downs'. This procedure resulted in a smaller, more manageable number of codes. In the third round of coding I created coding families by linking various codes together (termed 'Selective Coding' by Strauss and Corbin, pg.116). For example, I combined all of the codes on psychological violence together, all of the codes to do with physical violence together, and all of the codes on sexual violence together. I combined codes in which the adolescents talked about 'explanations' of violence. I combined codes to do with such topics as family life and future plans. Finally, in a third round of coding, I looked for associations, what ATLAS/ti terms 'networks', between these larger codes (similarly referred to by Strauss and Corbin as building a 'Conditional Matrix'). For instance, I determined a positive association between codes to do with sexual violence and those to do with biological explanations. I found a negative association between codes to do with biological explanations and those to do with feminism. Through this process of coding and re-coding I derived the analysis of the data.

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***The Research Timetable:***

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I began my review of literature for the research study in November 1992. I submitted my proposal for transfer to full D.Phil. status in July 1993. I gained permission to continue the research study in September of the same year. I made my initial contact with schools in the Oxfordshire area in August and gained access to Chiswick and Parsons Schools in October. I conducted my pilot study between September and November 1993. I completed my questionnaire collection in February of 1994. I conducted seventeen focus groups between December 1993 and January 1995. I began analysing the quantitative data (including coding) in March. Although I attempted to transcribe my interviews whilst I was still conducting group sessions the volume of interviews prohibited this procedure. I transcribed the majority of the interviews between June and September 1994. I began analysis using ATLAS/ti during that time. My analysis continued until May of 1995 at which time I began writing up my results in full. I successfully passed my confirmation of status examination in April, 1995.

## CHAPTER 5: THE SURVEY

### *Introduction:*

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This chapter focuses on the survey that I conducted in Chiswick and Parsons schools. The composition of the questionnaire is detailed in Chapter 4 and a copy included in Appendix A.

First, I provide a demographic profile of the respondents including sex, place of birth, ethnicity, religious affiliation, household composition and the area of Oxford lived in. Next, a summary of the findings is presented in five sections.

Section One looks at tactics used to resolve arguments and, in particular, psychological and physical aggression. This section includes the respondents' reports of their own and their partners' levels of aggression. As I outlined in the previous chapter, I was unable to secure access to years nine, ten and eleven at Chiswick school. Therefore, I was unable to make any comparisons between respondents for these three years at the two schools. I was only able to compare respondents in years twelve and thirteen at both Parsons and Chiswick schools. The point of comparing respondents at the two schools was that this approximated a comparison between working- and middle-class respondents. For this reason I have structured the reporting of the data by sex and by social class.

The next section looks at respondents' expectations that they would be

subjected to physical or sexual aggression. Section Three examines respondents' reactions to aggression including their first physical conflict, the effect of physical fighting on ending the relationship, reaction to the most serious physical conflict, attempts to stop the aggression, re-consideration of the relationship due to aggression and the use of alcohol. In section Four respondents' reported attitudes towards the acceptability of aggression are considered. The relationship between social class and aggression are detailed in section Five.

Section Six reports on other associations of reported levels of aggression, including religious affiliation, household composition and age.

The final section considers the reliability of the questionnaire. I included a set of questions at the end of the questionnaire that asked the respondents the same questions as they responded to in earlier questions. I was concerned about the reliability of the questionnaire for several reasons. First, the respondents in years nine, ten and eleven reported considerable problems in understanding and completing the questionnaire. The Conflict Tactics Scale was designed for an adult population and whilst it has been applied to adolescent samples, I would argue that the detail of the questions, the concentration necessary to complete the questions, and the sophistication of the question wording prohibit confidence of reliability and validity. In Chapter 6 I detail my concerns about these issues of reliability and validity in more detail. I critically examine the questionnaire, drawing on the literature and detailed feedback from the focus groups.

**Demographic Profile of the Respondents:**

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I administered questionnaires to a total of 487 pupils at Chiswick and Parsons schools. There were 389 respondents from Parsons and 98 respondents from Chiswick - the lower number of respondents from Chiswick relates to the limited access I was given to younger pupils (see Chapter 4).

**Sex:**

The following table details the sex of the respondents:

**Table 5.1: Sex of Respondents**

| Year     | Parsons |      | Chiswick |      |
|----------|---------|------|----------|------|
|          | Girls   | Boys | Girls    | Boys |
| nine     | 71      | 71   | -        | -    |
| ten      | 50      | 66   | -        | -    |
| eleven   | 38      | 32   | -        | -    |
| twelve   | 23      | 20   | 54       | 42   |
| thirteen | 9       | 9    | 0        | 2    |

**Place of Birth:**

At both Parsons and Chiswick Schools, the majority of the respondents were

born in England, whilst a small minority were born in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland or outside of Britain.

**Ethnicity:**

As table 6.2 shows, the overwhelming majority of respondents at both schools were white. The largest minority ethnic group at Parsons was Black - Caribbean (4 per cent) while at Chiswick the Chinese (3 per cent) were largest.

**Table 5.2 Ethnic Origins of respondents**

|                   | Parsons |      | Chiswick |      |
|-------------------|---------|------|----------|------|
|                   | N       | %    | N        | %    |
| White             | 346     | 91.3 | 87       | 90.6 |
| Black - Caribbean | 15      | 4    | -        | -    |
| Black - Other     | 4       | 1.1  | 1        | 1    |
| Indian            | 4       | 1.1  | -        | -    |
| Pakistani         | 1       | -    | 2        | 2.1  |
| Chinese           | 3       | -    | 3        | 3.1  |
| Bangladeshi       | 1       | -    | -        | -    |
| Other             | 5       | 1.3  | 3        | 3.1  |



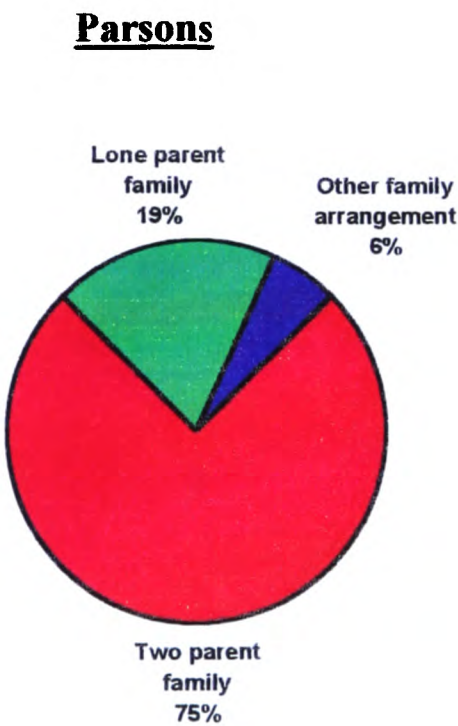
**Religious Affiliation:**

Only 12 per cent of pupils from Parsons reported a religious affiliation whereas nearly 36 per cent of Chiswick pupils so reported. Among Parsons pupils who had a religious affiliation Christians accounted for over 76 per cent. Catholics at 40 per cent slightly outnumbered Protestants (36 per cent). Other religions included Sikh (7.3 per cent) and Islam (3.6 per cent).

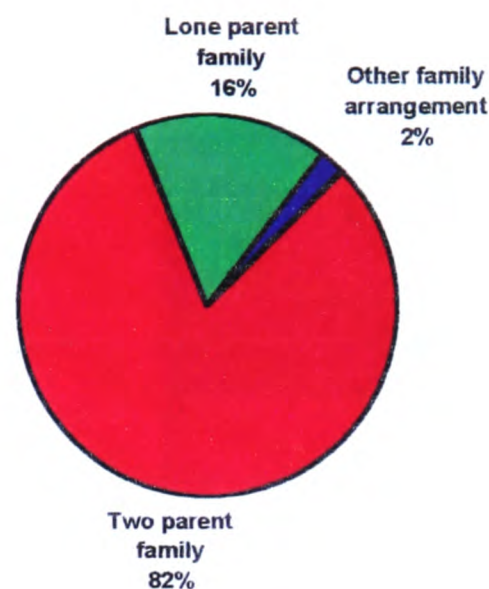
At Chiswick Christian religions also predominated (72 percent) but here Protestants far outnumbered Catholics (56.3 percent compared to 15.6 per cent). Minority religions included Islam (n=3 9.4 per cent) and Judaism (n=1 3%).

**Household Composition:**

**Figure 5.1: Household composition of respondents' families**



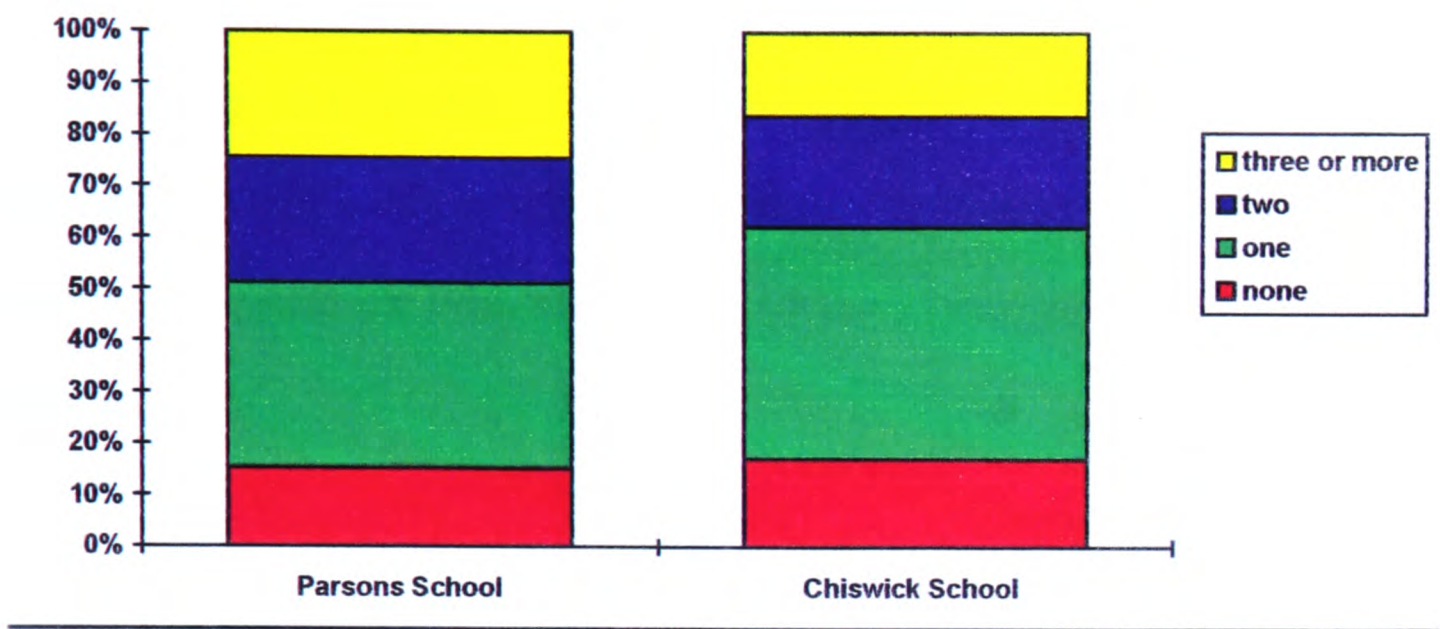
**Chiswick**



As Figure 5.1 shows, the majority of respondents at both Parsons and Chiswick schools came from two parent families. However, slightly more respondents from Parsons were from lone parent families.

As figure 5.2 shows family size tends to be larger at Parsons. The percentage of children with no siblings and the percentage with one sibling only is higher at Chiswick while the percentage of children with three or more siblings is higher at Parsons.

**Figure 5.2: Numbers of respondents' siblings**



**Area Lived In:**

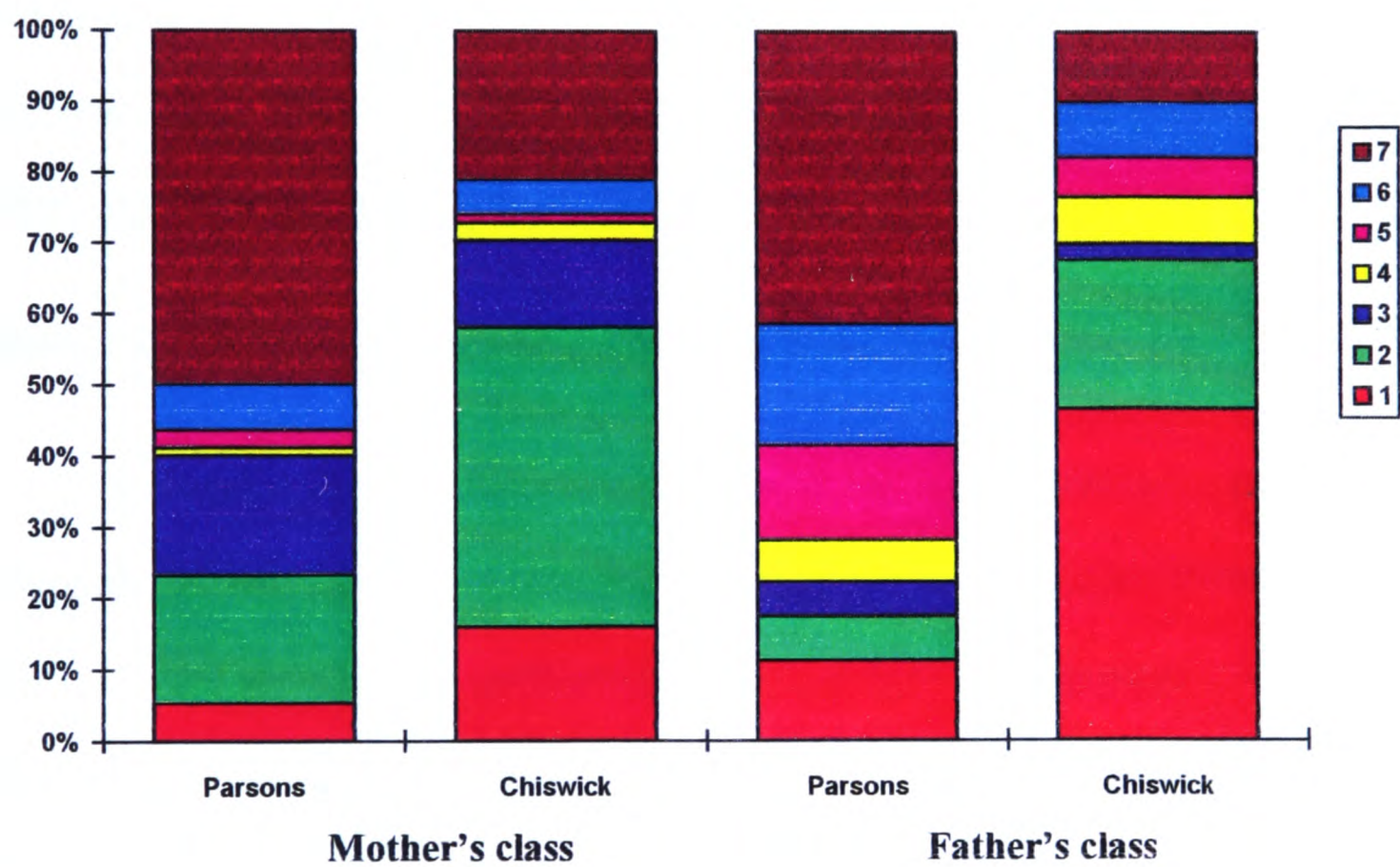
The area in which the respondent lived depended largely on which school the respondent attended. Although catchment areas were formally abolished as a result of the introduction of ‘open enrolment’ following the Education Reform Act 1988, proximity , ease of access and ‘rules’ introduced by more popular schools effectively have meant that they subsist to large extent in the study area. Thus respondents attending Parsons School, reported living in east and south Oxford while pupils at Chiswick school were much more likely to live in north Oxford and the city centre. As I will show in Chapter 8, these ‘catchment’ areas had markedly different socio-economic profiles.



**Social Class:**

My analysis of social class consisted of two steps: linking social class with school attended and then discerning any differences between social class and levels of aggression. I found a very clear, significant relationship between both the respondent's mother's occupation and father's occupation (and thus social class) and the school the pupil attended.

**Figure 5.3: Social class divisions between Parsons and Chiswick schools:**



Pupils at Parsons most often have parents from the lower social classes, whilst pupils at Chiswick come from households with higher social classes.

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***Findings:***

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The rest of this chapter reports the findings from the questionnaire on various dimensions of aggression. My main concern in this analysis is to examine aggression in association with sex and social class. As has been stated (and as I justify in Chapter 8), I use school as a proxy for social class. Because data could only be collected for the sixth form at Chiswick, the age dimension could only be examined at Parsons. In each section, I have thus presented a separate analysis by sex for Parsons years nine through eleven. I have then used pooled Parsons/Chiswick data to look at sex differences in the sixth form. I have followed this by an analysis of class differences for years twelve and thirteen as Chiswick data was available for these years.

**Section 1. Tactics to resolve arguments - Psychological and Physical Aggression**

The Conflict Tactics Scale was represented in the questionnaire as a check-list of nineteen possible responses of resolving an argument with their girl/boyfriend in the previous twelve months. The questionnaire explored both the respondent's level of aggression and that of the respondent's partner. Three of the possible responses were categorised by the designers of the Scale as 'non-violent' and consisted of 'discussing an issue calmly', 'getting information to back up their side', and 'bringing in or trying to bring in someone to help settle things'. Five of the responses were classified as 'psychologically aggressive' and consisted of 'crying', 'insulting or swearing at the partner', 'sulking or refusing to talk about an issue', 'stomping out of the room or

house' and 'doing something to spite the partner'. Finally, the remaining eleven responses consisted of 'physical aggression': 'threatening to hit the partner or throw something at them'; 'throwing or smashing or hitting or kicking something; throwing something at the partner'; 'pushing, grabbing or shoving the partner'; 'slapping the partner'; 'kicking, biting or hitting the partner with something'; 'beating the partner up', 'choking the partner'; 'threatening the partner with a knife'; and 'using a knife'. Respondents were asked to record the number of times they had responded in any of these ways, as well as the number of times their boy/girlfriend had responded in any of these ways.

A preliminary analysis of each of the nineteen responses proved quite difficult. No consistent patterns emerged for any of the three conflict resolution tactics. In order to get a clear picture of the relationship between the independent variables (sex and social class) and the dependent variables (non-aggressive, psychologically aggressive and physically aggressive responses) I collapsed the data in two ways. First, I combined all of the individual responses in each of the three categories to get one set of responses to each category. Second, I collapsed the frequency of particular responses from eight categories to two: 0= never and 1= ever having used the tactic.

There are a number of advantages and disadvantages to collapsing data in this way. The individual tactics showed no consistent patterns, making any conclusions difficult and unconvincing. By collapsing the nineteen tactics into three categories, I was able to obtain a clear picture of the relationship between the independent variables such as sex and the three dependent variables of non-aggression, physical aggression

and psychological aggression. However, collapsing the data into three general categories also presented problems. For instance, collapsing the physical aggression tactics from eleven to one (overall) tactic, necessitated losing much of the meaning of this form of aggression. Slapping a partner could be argued to be significantly different from and using a knife on that partner. By collapsing the tactics, the severity of the physical aggression is lost.

#### **Respondent's Own Level of Aggression (question 14):**

For each of the three categories of conflict resolution tactics, there were significant differences for sex but not for either social class or age. Girls were significantly more likely to report more non-aggressive responses ( $\text{chisq.} = 4.995$ ,  $p < .025$ ), psychologically aggressive responses ( $\text{chisq.} = 20.48$ ,  $p < .00001$ ) and physically aggressive responses ( $\text{chisq.} = 30.30$ ,  $p < .000$ ) than boys. Looking at both the age and sex of the respondent, no consistent patterns of association emerged. I was unable to conclude any consistently significant associations between the sex and age of the respondents and non-aggressive, psychologically aggressive and physically aggressive responses.

#### **Respondent's Partner's Level of Aggression (question 15):**

Respondents were also asked to report their girlfriends'/boyfriends' conflict

resolution tactics. Significant sex differences were found for non-aggressive responses and physically aggressive responses, but not for psychologically aggressive responses. Girls were significantly more likely to report that their boyfriends employed non-aggressive tactics ( $\chi^2 = 8.208$ ,  $p < .004$ ) and physically aggressive tactics ( $\chi^2 = 4.61$ ,  $p < .032$ ). Social class, as an independent variable, was not significantly associated with conflict tactic resolution. The age of the respondent proved significant for non-aggressive and psychologically aggressive responses. Respondents at the age of sixteen were significantly more likely to report that their girlfriend/boyfriend used non-aggressive tactics ( $\chi^2 = 20.55$ ,  $p < .002$ ) and psychologically aggressive tactics ( $\chi^2 = 13.06$ ,  $p < .042$ ). Again, regarding the age and sex of the respondent, no consistent patterns of association with conflict resolution tactics emerged.

### **Section 2: Estimated Chances That Partner Would Use Physical or Sexual Aggression:**

Respondents were asked to estimate the chances that their boy/girlfriend would use physical or sexual aggression towards them and were provided with a scale. On one end (zero) there was 'no chance', in the middle (5) there was a '50-50 chance' and at the other end (10) there was a 'sure' chance. Respondents circled one of the eleven provided numbers (0 to 10).

In every year the majority of girls and boys reported that their partners were unlikely to be aggressive towards them. Indeed, as the following chart shows a significant proportion (often a majority) stated there was no chance of aggression.



**Figure 5.4: Percentage of girls/boys expectations that there was *no chance* that their partners would be aggressive towards them**



NB sex difference are not significant

Looking at the two schools, no significant differences were found between respondents at Parsons and Chiswick. In year twelve, seventeen (56.7%) respondents at Parsons compared with twenty-one (48.8%) respondents at Chiswick reported that there was no chance that their partners would be aggressive towards them. In year thirteen, five (71.4%) of girls and two (40%) of boys reported that there was no chance that their partners would behave aggressively towards them. One (14.3%) girl and two (40%) girls reported between a ten and 30 percent chance of their partner’s aggression.

**Sexual Aggression (questions 21 and 22 of questionnaire):**

The questionnaire addressed the issue of sexual aggression with three

questions. Question 21 asked respondents to recall whether they had ever been out with a member of the opposite sex who had ever tried to, or forced them to have sexual intercourse through the use of physical force or pressure. The choice of responses consisted of: 'attempted to', 'did force sex', 'no' and 'not sure'. Respondents then wrote down how many times they had been forced to have sex or survived a forced attempt.

In years nine, ten and eleven, the majority of girls and boys reported that they had never been threatened or forced to have sex. In year nine, the majority of girls (48, 90.6%) and boys (42, 85.7%) reported that they had never been forced to have sex or threatened.

However, the results were confused by conflicting responses to the question concerned with the number of times respondents had been raped. The number of boys and girls who stated that they had been forced to have sex was lower in each case than the number of boys and girls who recorded the number of times they had been raped. That is, whilst no girls reported that they had been forced to have sex, four girls then went on to list how many times they had been raped. One boy reported that he had been raped whilst eight boys listed how many times they had been raped.

My experience of administering questionnaires to the year 9's at Parsons suggested that some of the boys and girls did not take the questionnaire at all seriously. Despite my best efforts to prevent it from happening, some of the boys called out loud to their friends in the class asking them how many times they had had 'sex'. I suspect the higher number of male than female responses resulted from a combination of the

boys wanting the appearance of being so 'irresistible' that girls would try to force them to have sex; these boys wanting an opportunity to tell me that they had had sex; and wanting to appear the victim of female aggression as opposed to being a member of a sex who they are repeatedly told in the media is guilty of perpetrating the majority of violent personal crimes. The more general issues of respondent bias and limitations of the questionnaire will be fully discussed in Chapter 6 of the thesis.

In year 10, the majority of girls (33, 80.5%) and boys (31, 79.5%) reported that they had never been forced to have sex or threatened with force. Again, whilst only one girl reported having been raped, seven girls reported how many times they had been raped. One boy reported being raped, whilst nine boys reported how many times they had been raped. In year eleven, of the 43 pupils who responded to the question concerning having been forced to have sex, the majority of boys (18, 81.8%) and girls (17, 81%) reported that they had never been threatened with forced sex or been forced to have sex. Whilst only one girl reported in the previous question being forced to have sex, three girls reported having been forced to have sex between one and five times. No boys reported having been forced to have sex and yet one (33.3%) boy said he had been raped once and two (66.7%) said they had been raped six times.

In year twelve, a significant difference was found between boys' and girls' reporting of being victims of forced sex ( $\chi^2=8.43$ ,  $p<.038$ ). Most girls (40, 85.1%) and most boys (27, 79.4%) reported never having been threatened or forced to have sex. Finally, in year 13, no significant differences were found between boys and girls. The majority of boys (3, 60%) and girls (6, 75%) reported never having been

threatened or had forced sex.

### **Section 3: Reactions to Aggression (questions 16, 17, 18, 20 and 26 of questionnaire):**

#### **First Physical Conflict:**

Respondents were asked to try to think back to the very first time there was a physical fight between themselves and their girl/boyfriend and to estimate how long ago that was. In years nine, ten, eleven, twelve and thirteen, no significant differences were found between girls' and boys' responses. Most girls and boys did not, in fact, respond to this question. Of those that did, most girls and boys stated that their first physical conflict had occurred in the past year.

#### **Effect of Physical Fight on Breaking Up:**

Next respondents were asked whether they thought that the physical fighting in their relationship had anything to do with ending their relationship with their boy/girlfriend. In all of the year groups, no significant differences were found between the girls' and boys' responses. The majority of girls and boys reported that fighting had not ended their relationship. Generally, slightly fewer girls than boys reported that fighting had ended their relationship. There were no significant differences between the school that the respondents attended. In year thirteen, only pupils from Parsons responded to this question, so comparisons between schools were not possible for this

question.

**Reaction to Most Serious Physical Conflict:**

Respondents were asked to recall how they reacted when their partner initiated the conflict and were given a series of alternatives consisting of: 'hit back or threw something', 'cried', 'yelled or swore at him/her', 'ran to another room', 'ran away from the situation', 'called a friend or relative', 'called the police' and 'other'. The last option provided respondents with the opportunity to describe in their own words how they reacted to the conflict. Also, respondents were not limited to checking only one option. Too few respondents in each year answered this question, negating any tests of significant differences of sex and school. In years nine, ten, twelve and thirteen, slightly more girls than boys reported using the seven alternative responses. In year eleven, approximately the same number of girls and boys reported using all of these actions.

**Attempts to Stop the Aggression:**

Respondents were asked by what means they attempted to stop their partner's aggression and were provided with the following options: 'talked their partner out of being aggressive', 'got their partner to promise to stop being aggressive', 'avoided their partner or certain topics', 'hid from their partner when s/he was being aggressive', 'threatened to call the police', 'threatened to break up the relationship', and 'fought back in any way possible'. No significant differences were found between

girls' and boys' responses in years nine, ten, eleven, twelve or thirteen. In years twelve and thirteen, no significant differences were found between pupils' responses from Parsons and Chiswick.

Discrepancies are apparent when this question is compared with the earlier question regarding how the respondent reacted to their partner's aggression. For instance, in the previous question, a greater number of males reported having contacted the police than females. Responding to this question, a greater number of girls reported having called someone else in to dissipate the conflict.

#### **Re-considering the Relationship:**

Respondents were asked to report how often they had considered ending the relationship due to the presence of violence. No significant differences between boys and girls were found for this question. Comparing Parsons and Chiswick, no significant differences were found in responses. No Chiswick pupils in year thirteen responded to this question, so it was impossible to compare pupils at the two schools on this particular question.

#### **Use of Alcohol:**

With regard to the consumption of alcohol before an aggressive incident, most respondents (64.7%) did not respond to this question. For the minority of respondents that did answer this question, no significant differences were found, either between

girls and boys or between Parsons and Chiswick. The majority of girls and boys in each school year reported that neither they, nor their partners, had consumed alcohol before a physical conflict. In year nine, most of the female pupils (25, 80.6%) and male pupils (20, 66.7%) reported that neither person was drinking before the conflict. In year ten, the majority of girls (14, 56%) and boys (9, 36%) reported that neither their partners nor themselves had been drinking before the conflict. In year eleven, nine girls (90%) and five boys (50%) reported that neither person had been drinking before the conflict. In year twelve, more girls (5, 50%) than boys (2, 25%) reported that neither had been drinking before the conflict. In year thirteen, only pupils from Parsons responded to this question. Three girls (75%) and two boys (100%) reported that neither partner had been drinking.

**Section 4: Attitude Towards the Acceptability of Aggression (questions 24 and 25 of questionnaire):**

Respondents were asked to record whether they could imagine a situation in which they would approve of a male slapping his girlfriend's face and a situation in which they would approve of a female slapping her boyfriend's face. Overall, more respondents reported approval for a female slapping her boyfriend's face than a male slapping his girlfriend's face. Only in year 13 did significant differences emerge between boys' and girls' responses to the approval of slapping. Significantly more girls than boys approved of both boys and girls slapping their partner's face.

No significant differences were found between pupils at Parsons and Chiswick

in their approval or disapproval of slapping. More pupils at Chiswick both disapproved of a boy slapping his girlfriend's face, whilst pupils at both Chiswick and Parsons were more likely to approve of a girl slapping her boyfriend's face.

### **Section 5: Social Class and Aggression:**

I was interested in any associations between the respondents' social class and reported levels of aggression, attitudes towards the acceptability of aggression and levels of victimisation. I have used pooled data from Parsons and Chiswick schools, limiting my analysis to the sixth form in order to control for age. For both respondents' responses to their own conflict resolution tactics and those of their girl/boyfriends', only physically aggressive responses were significantly associated with social class. Neither non-aggressive nor psychologically aggressive tactics were significantly associated with social class.

With regard to respondents' reports of their own physically aggressive responses to conflict, the social class of the father was significantly related to frequency of the use of physical aggression (chisq.=14.02,  $p<.03$ ).



**Table 5.3: Father’s Work and Frequency of Own Physically Aggressive Responses**

| Father’s Work<br>(Social Class) | Physically Aggressive Responses |               |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------|
|                                 | No                              | Yes           |
| Class One                       | 37<br>(23.1%)                   | 19<br>(13.6%) |
| Class Two                       | 19<br>(11.9%)                   | 9<br>(6.4%)   |
| Class Three                     | 8<br>(5%)                       | 3<br>(2.1%)   |
| Class Four                      | 8<br>(5%)                       | 13<br>(9.3%)  |
| Class Five                      | 18<br>(11.3%)                   | 14<br>(10%)   |
| Class Six                       | 25<br>(15.6%)                   | 23<br>(16.4%) |
| Class Seven                     | 45<br>(28.1%)                   | 59<br>(42.1%) |

**Table 5.4: Father’s Work and Respondents’ Partners’ Frequency of Physically Aggressive Responses**

| Father’s Work<br>(Social Class) | Physically Aggressive Responses |               |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------|
|                                 | No                              | Yes           |
| Class One                       | 37<br>(23.6%)                   | 20<br>(16.3%) |
| Class Two                       | 23<br>(14.6%)                   | 6<br>(4.9%)   |
| Class Three                     | 5<br>(3.2%)                     | 6<br>(4.9%)   |
| Class Four                      | 11<br>(7%)                      | 9<br>(7.3%)   |
| Class Five                      | 17<br>(10.8%)                   | 13<br>(10.6%) |
| Class Six                       | 19<br>(12.1%)                   | 25<br>(20.3%) |
| Class Seven                     | 45<br>(28.7%)                   | 44<br>(35.8%) |

**Table 5.5: Mother’s Work and Respondents’ Partners’ Frequency of Physically Aggressive Responses**

| Mother’s Work<br>(Social Class) | Physically Aggressive Responses |               |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------|
|                                 | No                              | Yes           |
| Class One                       | 16<br>(10.8%)                   | 4<br>(3.3%)   |
| Class Two                       | 37<br>(25%)                     | 23<br>(19.2%) |
| Class Three                     | 24<br>(16.2%)                   | 18<br>(15%)   |
| Class Four                      | 0                               | 4<br>(3.3%)   |
| Class Five                      | 3<br>(2%)                       | 4<br>(3.3%)   |
| Class Six                       | 10<br>(6.8%)                    | 10<br>(8.3%)  |
| Class Seven                     | 58<br>(39.2%)                   | 57<br>(47.5%) |

**Section 6: Religious Affiliation, Household Composition and Age:**

Beyond sex and school type I was interested in finding out what effect certain other independent variables had on levels of reported aggression. I specifically examined the effect of religious affiliation, household composition and age. I found no consistently significant associations for any of these variables.

**Section 7: Reliability of the Questionnaire:**

I was concerned to test the reliability of the questionnaire. Two questions included at the end of the questionnaire were designed to test the reliability of responses to previous questions. Specifically, these questions referred to respondents

having hit their girl/boyfriends or having been hit by their girl/boyfriends. I considered using Cronbach alpha test on the items of the Conflict Tactics Scale. However, this test requires that the test items must 'pull' in the same way. There was no *prima facie* reason why the items would match in the same way. For instance, it would be possible for a respondent to have discussed an issue calmly with their partner more than ten times in the past year and also to have threatened their partner with a knife. There were no items, in other words, that negated other items. The items on the CTS in fact include a wide repertoire of responses and therefore this type of reliability testing can not be achieved. Concluding that Cronbach alpha testing was inappropriate, I conducted a Phi test on the data. Comparing the responses on question 14 for hitting ('slapped' and 'kicked, bit or hit with a fist') with the later question asking whether the respondent has ever hit their partner, the Phi test showed that the reliability of responses was not high ( $\Phi=.631$ ). With regard to being hit by their partner, the Phi test revealed an even lower level of reliability ( $\Phi=.480$ ). These results suggest that significant issues of reliability were relevant to this survey. It is the task of my next chapter to take up the discussion of reliability and validity concerns.

## **CHAPTER 6: THE QUESTIONNAIRE INTERROGATED: METHODOLOGICAL AND THEORETICAL ISSUES**

### ***Introduction:***

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In the previous chapter I was concerned to present the quantitative data derived from the questionnaire. In this chapter the focus shifts to the reliability and validity of the questionnaire itself and larger issues concerning the appropriateness of survey research for the topic of intimate violence. The reliability tests presented in Chapter 5 suggest that the reliability of the respondents' reports may be quite low. My first task in this chapter is to critically review the limitations of the questionnaire. These limitations consist of those I developed in the course of administering the questionnaire and those outlined in the literature. As stated in Chapter 4, the questionnaire was discussed in each of the focus groups and the adolescent responses to the questionnaire form a significant and valuable part of the critical review. Next, I tackle the problem of attitude measurement. Whilst only two questions on the questionnaire refer to attitudes, a substantive amount of survey research on adolescent intimate violence have relied on measures of attitudes. Finally, I have concluded the 'interrogation' of the questionnaire with a critical exploration of the fierce debate in social studies surrounding the use of such surveys as the Conflict Tactics Scale in measuring phenomena such as dating violence and wife assault.

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*Critically Reviewing the Questionnaire:*

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Apart from the demographic questions at the beginning, the questionnaire was largely copied from the most popular measurement instrument called The Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS). I used the Conflict Tactics Scale with trepidation. My review of the literature revealed that there were scant statistics regarding the prevalence and incidence of violence in adolescent relationships using a British sample. As the CTS is the most popular scale, employed frequently in the United States, Canada and Australia, I wanted the results of this study to be as comparable to these other studies as possible. However, my review of the literature on the CTS also highlighted several serious criticisms levelled against its use. The sequence of my data collection afforded me the opportunity to talk with my sample of adolescents about the questionnaire. In this section of the chapter I will outline my criticisms, those I found in the literature concerning the CTS and then review what the adolescents themselves had to say about the questionnaire.

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***Criticisms From the Data Collection:***

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As stated in the introduction of this chapter, my criticisms of the questionnaire largely emanated from the process of administering the questionnaire in the two schools. My main concern is that the Conflict Tactics Scale seems to be very difficult for adolescents to complete. The Scale consists of a very large number of questions, and even though I employed an abridged version, the respondents seemed to experience problems in completing it. These problems consisted of the complexity of the questions, the requirement for prolonged concentration, the age of the respondent and the vagueness of the questions.

Many respondents reported that they had difficulty in understanding the questions during the administration of the questionnaire. Particularly questions 14 and 15 seemed to present problems. First, the respondents had to try to remember every conflict they had had with their girl/boyfriend over the past *year*. Then they had to try to remember how they resolved this conflict and respond to how many times they had employed each of these tactics and how many times their partner had employed these tactics. Simply trying to remember all conflicts over the past year was difficult enough, without having also to remember how each was resolved! Many respondents reported that they could not remember, for instance, whether they had ‘discussed an issue calmly’ three to five times or six to ten times, in the past year. Second, many of the respondents, particularly the younger ages, seemed to have problems in concentrating for the amount of time required to complete the questionnaire.

Third, the age of the respondents may have impacted on the reliability of

responses. In the focus groups, I initially elicited information about the adolescents' general impressions of the questionnaire. Most of the pupils in the groups and individual interviews said that they were not very used to filling in surveys and some pupils said that it was most like filling in a test or exam. One of my concerns about the use of surveys with people in an educational setting is that the inevitable comparison with performance on tests. This was particularly true for the younger pupils, who seemed more preoccupied with their performance. When I raised the questionnaire in the group of year tens', the members asked me "how they had done". Although I made explicit in my instructions to every class that the questionnaire was not a test and did not have "right" and "wrong" answers, the more powerful context of the educational system in which pupils' performance is essential might well have had an effect on responses. Jeffrey, in a year 12 group at Chiswick reported that when he responded to questions 24 and 25 (slapping a partner's face) "I was kind of worried about how you would take it". Jeffrey understood that I would be looking at all of the questionnaires and expressed concern that I would not "approve" of his opinions.

There are also serious issues concerning the usefulness of questionnaires for research concerned with a multi-faceted problem such as intimate violence. The adolescents that I talked with were quite frank in their criticisms of the questionnaire; criticisms that I propose extend to most questionnaires. Often the pupils said that they simply could not remember the frequency with which they had engaged in certain behaviours. Some pupils handled this by guessing, others left those questions blank. Reena stated:

I didn't really bother filling them in. It's quite detailed and I don't know how many people would remember that.

Some pupils reported that they could remember more severe forms of aggression more easily, because of their severity. Rose, on the other hand, said:

It is really hard to remember because you kind of forget because you want to block out, you don't like remember.

Some pupils described significant confusion as to how to define aggression; when to label the action as 'aggressive' and when to label the action as 'play' or 'non-intentional'. Emma recalled:

I remember doing it and think it is very hard because they are really black and white. I don't know, it was very hard to decide whether what has happened and at what point you say it happened and at what point it was a joke and at what point you would take it seriously and so on...something like 14(d) 'insulted him or swore at him'. I mean all of them. We swear at each other all the time. It is part of how we talk, our language, and to say more than twenty times it sounds like you are making it very serious whereas we treat it very lightly...Insulting can be quite a major part of a relationship. In a way it's part of a friendship. You know it's joking.

Many of the pupils in my groups echoed Emma's concern that defining violence using a questionnaire check-system is too crude. Questionnaires miss the complexity, the subtlety of human action.

A related concern is that pupils responded to the questionnaire according to what they perceived I 'wanted to hear'. Elicia voiced this concern:

I think you will get a series of answers because some people will be thinking now this is the type of thing we do all the time so maybe I should put it down because we do it all the time and some people will be thinking we do it all the time but only every now and then it is serious so I will just put down the serious times. So a lot of people were thinking (of) what you were looking for.



Several pupils told me that they had filled in the questionnaire according to the questions provided, not because those were the salient questions for them. Other pupils said that they had never thought about the questions or about aggression in relationships. Some pupils were able to tell me that they would have told me different things, what was salient for them. Some girls and boys suggested other questions that I might ask and a couple were as bold as to suggest that “maybe I should just talk to (them)”.

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*Criticisms in the Literature:*

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In 1975 Straus and Gelles published the results of research based on The Conflict Tactics Scale which they had developed. This study, and their subsequent study in 1985, had a dramatic impact on the conceptualization of intimate violence as a mutual and “normal” phenomenon which was practised by males and females equally in relationships. Straus and Gelles concluded from their study that “women are about as violent within the family as men” (Straus and Gelles, 1986:470). This finding received considerable media and public attention, resulting in a perception of mutuality in domestic violence. This research strongly contradicted the findings of crime surveys, medical records, police reports, civil and criminal court records and clinicians which consistently find that wives are far more likely to be the survivors of domestic violence than are husbands. However, the damage was done. This ‘scientific evidence’ was widely quoted and used by the courts and by men's groups amongst others to reject theories of violence against women. The case for stronger laws and policies protecting women was weakened; the opposition to opening more shelters for battered women was justified. Presently, the Conflict Tactics Scale is the most widely used measuring instrument for domestic violence research.

The Conflict Tactics Scale was developed by Gelles and Straus as a means of measuring “family” violence, including parent to child and spouse to spouse conflict. Basically, the CTS requires respondents to self-report their methods of conflict resolution. There are three general means of conflict resolution measured: the use of “rational” discussion and agreement; the use of verbal or nonverbal expressions of

anger (for example, refusing to talk or hitting something); and the use of physical force (for example, hitting with a fist or pushing someone). For the first study, conducted in 1975, subjects completed the questionnaire during a sixty minute interview in which the researcher asked the questions on the questionnaire. In the second study, conducted in 1985, the questionnaire was filled in by researchers asking subjects the questions over the telephone. The instrument itself consists of a series of demographic questions recording such data as marital status, gender, ethnicity and age of respondents. These questions are followed by a series of questions regarding the incidence and type of violent acts used by each spouse to resolve conflict.

The first major flaw of the CTS is that it fails to inform respondents as to its purpose. The following description of “typical” spousal interaction is provided for respondents:

no matter how well a couple gets along, there are times when they disagree, get annoyed with the other person or just have spats or fights because they're in a bad mood or tired or for some other reason. They also use many different ways of trying to settle their differences. I'm going to read some things that you and your partner might do when you have an argument. I would like you to tell me how many times in the past 12 months you...

(Gelles and Straus, 1988:227)

Clearly, the CTS is measuring violence. Yet nowhere in the questionnaire do the researchers use this term. The word “violence” connotes unlawful and serious behaviour, the researchers choose instead to use terms such as “argument”, “spats”, “differences” and “fights”. Essentially, then, the researchers imply that they are studying “normal” married behaviour. In no way do the researchers acknowledge or suggest that violent acts have negative consequences. Indeed, the researchers seem to suggest that violent acts are the result of one partner simply being “annoyed”. We are

presuming too much to believe that this purposefully chosen terminology is lost on the respondents: both women and men understand from its description that violence is normal and accepted.

The second serious limitation of the Conflict Tactics Scale is that it fails to differentiate between perpetrator and victim patterns of behaviour. Other research on wife assault reveals that typical male acts of violence against their wives include choking her, throwing her, dragging her by her hair or feet and raping her. None of these behaviours are included in the CTS. On the other hand, behaviours such as kicking, biting and struggling are included. So, the wife who kicks and struggles in self-defense with her husband while he rapes her actually scores *higher* on the violence index than her husband. Moreover, this problem illuminates a third limitation of this scale: the failure to include the motivation and intention of the violent acts. Saunders (1986) reveals that battered wives will often fight back against their violent partners. However, since the reason for the violence is not recorded by the CTS, the wife who defends herself is seen as being as violent as her abusive husband.

Actually, in the previous example, the wife would not be recorded as being equally as violent as her husband: she would be viewed as being *more* violent. She would receive a higher violence score because rape, smashing or kicking an object and threatening to hit (which is a criminal offence in several countries) are not included as items on the scale. Not surprisingly, these acts have been found to be used primarily by men by one of the creators of the CTS (Gelles, 1972). In reality, many women are not actually physically hit by their husbands. It is enough that he punches holes in the wall

beside her head and smashes his fist on the table in order to threaten her with what will happen to her if she fails to comply with his demands. No violent physical contact is necessary in order that a woman be victimized.

A fifth problem with the Conflict Tactics Scale is that it does not take into account the different consequences of violent acts committed by males and females. A punch by a husband is more likely to cause severe injury than a punch by his wife (Small, 1981). According to the CTS, though, these acts are treated the same. Moreover, this act is considered "minor" by the CTS. Indeed, research subsequent to the CTS reveals that many behaviours considered "minor" by the Conflict Tactics Scale actually result in serious injury.

A sixth limitation of the Conflict Tactics Scale is that it does not make provisions for conflicting husband and wife responses. Research by Szinovacz (1983) found that couples disagreed significantly with each other on the frequency and severity of certain violent acts. It is interesting to note that this research showed that women tend to over-report their violence (compared with their husbands reports of their wives violence) and men tend to underreport their violence (compared to their wives's reports of their husband's violence). It is a common finding amongst clinicians working with wife batterers that these men consistently underreport the frequency and severity of their violence (Dobash and Dobash, 1979; Yllo and Bograd, 1988). This difference in reporting that the CTS fails to recognize perpetuates the myth of mutuality in spousal assault.

A seventh limitation concerns the sampling used for the two Straus and Gelles

studies using the Conflict Tactics Scale. For those couples who co-habited but were not married to each other, a significantly higher proportion of men than women refused to complete the questionnaire. The validity of any measuring instrument will be questioned when a certain proportion of the population are missing from the sample. It may be that the men who refused to complete the questionnaire were more violent, intoning that the resulting data was skewed.

An eighth limitation of the Conflict Tactics Scale is that it relies on respondents recollection and interpretation of events. It may be unreasonable to expect a woman to accurately remember the exact number of times her husband slapped her. Perhaps merely the recollection of this violence is psychologically painful for her and she actively attempts to minimize and forget the incidents. For her husband, too, his incidents of violence may evoke feelings of shame and loss of control and he may also try to forget the assaults. And while the same argument may be used for the under-reporting of violent acts committed by a wife against her husband, it is unreasonable to assume that the incidence of husband and wife violence is the same and that the under-reporting of both spouses would “cancel” the response error out. The Conflict Tactics Scale lacks a verification mechanism for the incidence of violent acts perpetrated by husbands and wives.

A ninth limitation of the Conflict Tactics Scale is that it does not study the problem of domestic violence in context. That is, the CTS only records incidents of violent behaviours in isolation. However, in reality, violence does not occur in a vacuum. Most feminist scholars agree that wife assault is an example of a wider

violence against women which takes place in society. To investigate “intimate” violence without regard for the power differences between women and men, the often economic dependence of women on their husbands and the implicit and explicit social support for violence against women is to provide only a “snapshot” of the phenomenon. The Conflict Tactics Scale obviously fails to situate its findings in the societal context. Husbands who used two or three years of intimidation at the outset of the marriage to create and maintain a pattern of control over their wives are not recorded as being violent by this scale because the CTS cannot recognize the complexity and subtlety of human interactions. Makepeace (1981), who was the first researcher to specifically study the adolescent population regarding dating violence, concluded from his findings that females were as violent or more violent than men in relationships. This researcher speaks at great length of adolescent female violence, but later concedes that the females in his study sustained more injury, the males underestimated the effects of their physical force on their girlfriends and that there were generally more negative effects of the violence on females than males.

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*Adolescent Talk about the Questionnaire:*

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The questionnaire was discussed in every group and some of the individual interviews. Sometimes I directly elicited pupil's reactions and at other times the adolescents themselves raised it as a topic for discussion. Some of what the adolescents had to say corresponded to the criticisms outlined in the literature (above). In other instances what my sample had to say provided new insights about how the questionnaire was interpreted and the process involved in completing surveys. Eliciting feedback was extremely useful, and was not limited to the questions concerned with levels of aggression and attitudes towards aggression. The adolescents provided useful information regarding such questions as religion and household composition. Whilst the questionnaire asks the questions "are you religious?" and lists several choices of organised religions, some of the pupils found this apparently straightforward question quite problematic. Those pupils (most were at Chiswick) who identified themselves as Christian did not like the word "religious". As one pupil explained, "religion is Man searching for God whereas being Christian is God coming to Man". For these pupils, the distinction was very important and I engaged in lengthy discussions with several pupils on this point. These pupils did not want to label themselves as Protestant or Catholic and some left that question unanswered. Similarly, the question regarding household composition left out the options of living with a parent's girlfriend or boyfriend. I had completely failed to provide this option on the questionnaire. I have already discussed my use of coloured questionnaires to denote the sex and school of the respondents. I fairly arbitrarily chose the colours of grey, yellow, green and peach.



However, even this detail of the questionnaire met with enquiry. Some of the boys remarked that they thought that some boys (not them, of course) would have felt uncomfortable completing a pink questionnaire and advised me not to make any of the boys' questionnaires this colour in future research.

### **Limitations Outlined in the Literature:**

The first limitation outlined in the literature, that the instructions fail to inform respondents of the purpose of the survey, was highlighted in my research. Most of the pupils reported that they had been quite surprised to complete a questionnaire about "violence" rather than about "relationships". This girl at Chiswick's comment was fairly typical:

I was quite surprised. I thought it was going to be more sort of like personally into the relationship. Like you know about sex and that.

Some of the pupils expressed worry that the more serious forms of violence, such as using a knife or beating up did form part of some relationships. These pupils seemed to believe that these more "serious" forms of violence only featured in adult relationships. Other pupils, those who told me that they had experienced violence themselves or had witnessed intimate violence, seemed significantly less surprised by the questions concerning aggression and violence.

Another limitation outlined in the literature concerns the motivation and intention of violent acts. The motivation of self-defense is perhaps the clearest example of an act that, in itself might be highly violent, but in the context of defense against a

violent partner mitigates the act. Some girls and a few boys told me that they had been violent with their partners as a response to their partner's violence. Some of these girls expressed their violence as the reasonable response to their partner's violence whilst others told me with strong hesitation and reports of feeling guilty that they had struck back. Gillian said:

someone I know got pushed against this wall by this bloke at a party and he was like pushing himself against her kind of thing and she hit him and I think that's exactly what she should have done...even if he hadn't gone any further he was still doing something that she didn't want and she made it clear that she didn't want it. And he didn't take any notice so she hit him. And I think that's what I would have done really. I hope I would have done that.

Similarly, Martha said:

I think it could be...like in the context it could be in. Like I put yes for a woman because if they were like trying to strangle me or were doing something completely stupid.

Questions 24 and 25 ask the pupils if they could imagine approving of a girl or boy hitting their partner's face. With very few exceptions, all of the girls in the groups and individual interviews said that they would approve of a girl hitting her boyfriend in self-defense. Some girls said that she should not have to hit him in that the boyfriend should not be violent towards the girl. But if that was the situation then these girls said that it was totally legitimate to hit back in self-defense. A number of girls at Parsons reported that hitting a boyfriend was legitimate if he was cheating on that girl (ie. engaged in another relationship without the girl's knowledge). None of the boys or girls I talked with in the groups talked of boys hitting girls in self-defense.

The Conflict Tactics Scale makes scarce reference to the use of psychological

aggression, and yet this form of aggression formed a significant amount of the talk of the boys and girls in my research. The CTS concentrates on physical and sexual forms of violence as more easily quantifiable, but for several adolescents psychological violence held far greater personal relevance. Krista told me that she had experienced problems in filling out the questionnaire because the main forms of coercion listed were physical:

I mean some of my answers might seem a bit confusing. There was one question like do they ever force themselves on you or something and I wrote down 'sort of mentally' where it was hard to explain because it was with my first boyfriend and it was like the first person I ever slept with and he sort of had a mental hold on me.

Many of the girls and boys, in discussion over several months, told me of many instances of bullying, put-downs, and manipulative behaviour; all defined in the literature as psychological aggression. The Conflict Tactics Scale only makes reference to this form of aggression in questions fourteen and fifteen and refer only to insulting, sulking, and stomping out of the room.

The Conflict Tactics Scale is criticised for its failure to acknowledge the consequences of aggressive actions. These consequences include differences in the harm of actions. For instance, boys are generally stronger than girls so that a hit from a girl may not cause as much harm as a hit from a boy. The social 'rule' that boys do not hit girls because they are stronger was repeated many times in the groups. Consistent talk of not physically hurting girls as it was 'not fair' and that boys should 'pick on someone their own size' was common in the many discussions I had with both girls and boys. Both sexes also agreed that a boy hitting a girl might be 'worse' than a girl

punching a boy in the sense that the boy's strength might mean that he actually does more harm than the girl. In fact, several boys lamented what they considered to be 'unfair'; that girls were 'allowed' to hit them but that they were prohibited from hitting back.

A serious problem with the Conflict Tactics Scale is that it fails to take into account the context of aggression. Differences in power relations between boys and girls is ignored and actions are only situated within 'a conflict'. Krista's comment above makes sense only when the context of her relationship with the boy is acknowledged. Although he did not physically force her to have sex, I could nevertheless propose that Krista was victimised. Krista reported that she often felt disempowered in her relationship with her father and brother; she performed more household chores and received a great deal of pressure to quit school rather than pursue her desire to study Maths at university. Krista was strongly encouraged to marry, produce children and work in the service industry. In her relationship with her older boyfriend, she reported feeling constantly 'trying to keep up' with him. Krista informed me that this boy was very popular, had had sex with all of his many previous girlfriends. Krista described feeling really stupid around him, that she was always struggling to please him. In this context, it may not have been *necessary* for this boy to actually use physical force the first time that Krista had sex with him. The nearest that Krista's vocabulary comes to describing this context is that her boyfriend "had a mental hold on me".

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***Issues Related to Attitude Measurement:***

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The concept of 'attitude' remains central to a great deal of theory and research in the social sciences. Despite the fact that an attitude is a hypothetical construct which must be inferred indirectly (attitudes cannot be touched or seen) much interest in attitudes exists, exemplified by the large number of attitude scales available to social scientists. Attitudes are assumed to be essential in mediating individuals' behavioural responses to the environment. That is, attitude measurement assumes that there exists a relationship between the symbolic (thoughts, ideas, beliefs) and the non-symbolic (actions) (Atkinson, Atkinson, Smith and Hilgard, 1987). Questions 24 and 25 of the questionnaire ask respondents to indicate their *attitude* towards the acceptability of hitting a partner. In this section I intend to examine the validity of attitude measurement: the extent to which attitudes may actually be understood, defined and predicted. In some cases attitudes are studied in their relation to variables such as class, education (and, indeed, other attitudes). However, an important issue in attitude study is their predictive ability with regard to future actions. Most research in the area of adolescent intimate violence has reported measured attitudes as though they do predict violence.

According to Thurstone (in Edwards, 1957) an attitude is:

the degree of positive or negative affect associated with some psychological object (p.2)

The "object" that Thurstone refers to consists of any symbol, person, institution, phrase etc. which may be specific or general. Thus, an individual who has a positive

affect associated with an object is described as 'liking' that object while 'disliking' an object to which a negative object is associated. Attitudes may form either through direct experience with the attitude object or more indirectly, through interactions with other people and imitation (Sudman and Brodburn, 1983).

Attitudes are often referred to as having three components (Blalock, 1974). The affective component comprises an individual's likes and dislikes; their favourability or unfavourability towards an attitude object. The cognitive component refers to what the individual understands and thinks about an object. Finally, the action component of an attitude refers to the intention or desire of an individual to take action with regard to the object. Individuals strive to maintain a consistency among each of these three attitude components. However, it is equally clear that differences may certainly exist among them (Procter in Gilbert, 1993).

Research suggests that attitudes have several characteristics (Shaw and Wright, 1967). First, attitudes vary in intensity from positive to negative. Second, attitudes are learned; individuals develop attitudes toward objects as opposed to attitudes towards objects being innate. Third, attitudes often display interactiveness with each other; certain attitudes commonly being associated with other attitudes (for instance, an individual who holds a negative attitude concerning the consumption of meat and who also hold a negative attitude towards 'blood sports'). Finally, attitudes have been found to be relatively stable over time.

With reference to action, a crucial characteristic of attitudes is that any given attitude that an individual has is essentially a determination of the action that individual

may take towards a given object. Thus, an attitude may substitute for a future act. For example, an individual who holds a negative attitude towards the consumption of meat will not be expected to eat meat. Of course, no simple relationship exists between attitudes and behaviour. Any given action is determined by many factors besides attitudes. LaPierre (in Forcese and Richer, 1970) surveyed hotel and restaurant proprietors' attitudes towards allowing racial minorities to use their services. Subsequent to this survey, LaPierre and an Asian couple stayed at the hotels and restaurants he had surveyed, seeking service from each. LaPierre discovered that many of those proprietors that who responded to the survey with negative attitudes towards Asians and explicit intent to deny service to them, nevertheless did supply service to this Asian couple. The constraint of a particular situation may strongly impact on an individual's behaviour. It is plausible that the hotel proprietors may have allowed the Asian couple to stay because they were uncomfortable with expressing overt racism when faced with an actual action decision.

Two basic methods can be used to access individual's attitudes: direct questioning and direct observation. In this research study, I employed both methods. With a direct questioning method individuals may either be asked questions in an interview situation or respond to a questionnaire. Researchers typically interview respondents in a qualitative research study (Hakim, 1987). The purpose of this type of study is to obtain descriptive reports of perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, feelings and the meanings that individuals ascribe to each. The concern is for the individual's own account of their attitudes and behaviours. From the individual's own account,

researchers will attempt to extrapolate links between attitudes, motivations and behaviour. The researcher is not as interested in each individual's accounts as s/he is in patterns of thought and feeling which emerge in populations of respondents. The obvious strength of qualitative research is that it provides the researcher with very 'rich' data: the researcher may be confident that s/he has obtained sufficient data to garner a clear and valid report from the respondent. The obvious limitation of this form of measurement is that it is unrepresentative. That is, the depth of questioning that the researcher seeks to obtain, necessitates lengthy interviews and a smaller sample size. Therefore, what the researcher understands from her/his small number of respondents can in no way be accepted as valid for the general population.

The second method of direct questioning is the questionnaire. This is the most common measuring instrument used to understand attitudes. Questionnaires require respondents to indicate their agreement or disagreement with a series of statements about an attitude object. For example, the Likert Scale consists of a set of statements about a given subject. Respondents respond by agreeing or disagreeing with each statement and the final 'attitude score' is the sum of the responses (Deaux and Wrightsman, 1988).

There are many issues involved in the construction of attitude questionnaires. These include: the length of the questionnaire; the order of the items and the inclusion of a middle (neutral) position; the memory of the respondent; the respondent's motivation to complete the questionnaire, communication between the researcher and the respondent (which may help the respondent to understand what the researcher



means by certain concepts but may also implicitly alert the respondent to what the researcher wants the respondent to indicate); and the knowledge that the respondent has of the issues and situations concerned (Sudman and Brodburn, 1983; Presser and Schuman, 1980). Variations in all of these have been demonstrated to affect the responses that subjects give.

There are a number of practical advantages to using an attitudinal questionnaire. It is relatively easy (particularly if the researcher employs an existing questionnaire), mechanical and inexpensive (Singleton, Straits, Straits and McAllister, 1988). For these reasons, questionnaires are a very popular method of attitude measurement. However, beyond issues related to the reliability and internal validity of these questionnaires, critical issues must be addressed regarding whether attitudes can actually be measured. Essentially, test items are selected on the basis that they are perceived to be relevant. Items are not selected because they can be confirmed to actually describe an attitude (Singleton, Straits, Straits and McAllister, 1988). That is, test items only *seem* to measure attitudes; there is no consistent evidence that they do.

The external validity problems of attitude measurement can be delineated into two essential issues: the imposition of a verbal response onto a symbolic situation; and the subsequent imposition of a symbolic situation onto an actual action (Atkinson, Atkinson, Smith and Hilgard, 1987). With regard to the first issue, it is essentially a question of the content validity of the measuring instrument; the degree to which the scale items actually measure the attitude concerned. Previous research on adolescent intimate violence has generally relied on data gathered from questionnaires which

require male and female adolescents to agree or disagree with a series of statements concerning the moral justification of using violence in the context of various situations. In order to complete this questionnaire, these adolescents must envision the situation described in the questionnaire and then impose a verbal interpretation. Regardless of how many items the questionnaire contains to measure any single attitude, the researcher must still assume that her/his conception of the acceptability of violence, male and female roles (and many other issues) and the situation described is the same as the respondent's understanding of these issues. However, the way in which the adolescent actually responds to the questions is based on several factors. First, the adolescent may not have encountered the situations described in the questionnaire. Even a single encounter with an object (violence within a heterosexual dating situation) may be insufficient for the adolescent to form an attitude towards it. Furthermore, the actual questioning of the adolescent may instigate the development of her/his attitude. This may occur for several reasons including perhaps that the young person had not explicitly thought about the issue previous to the research study. In addition, the status difference between the researcher and adolescent is not lost on the adolescent. The potentially threatening nature of questions regarding attitudes towards violence may encourage the adolescent to provide the 'politically correct' response.

The second major issue concerning attitude measurement is the ability of questionnaires and interviews to measure what individuals will actually do in specific situations - the predictive validity of the measuring instrument (Blalock and Blalock, 1968). LaPierre's research demonstrates that a simple relationship does not exist

between reported attitudes and subsequent behaviour. Similarly, using the previous example in this section: to what extent can the researcher predict that a male adolescent will be psychologically, physically or sexually violent towards his girlfriend, based on his attitudinal answers on the questionnaire? One common feature of the research situation is that respondents may express attitudes on questionnaires and in interviews without consideration of the consequences (Vernon in Welford, Argyle, Glass and Morris, 1967). That is, the male adolescent may express strong negative attitudes towards females within the 'safe' context of the questionnaire and only face the possible reprisal of the researcher. However, expressing these attitudes through behaviour such as violence may invoke serious negative consequences. In reality, then, it is clear that action is based on much more than attitudes. The situational context and other aspects of the individual's personality also impact significantly on the eventual behaviour that any individual exhibits.

Deaux and Wrightman (1988) provide a model for understanding the relation between attitudes and actions. The individual begins with a given attitude toward an object. A component of this attitude is the outcomes of the behaviour that the individual expects to exhibit that are consistent with the attitude. The value that the individual places on these outcomes is also considered, consciously or unconsciously by the individual. Added to the attitude are any norms surrounding the attitude object. The individual holds certain beliefs about other people's opinions of the attitude object. The individual has a certain motivation to comply with the expectation of those around her/him. The combination of these two factors leads to a behavioural intention.

Situational constraints are then added to the equation and the individual exhibits a behaviour.

Maintaining the previous example, a male adolescent holds a generally 'liberal' attitude toward females, maintaining equality in his relationships with his girlfriend. He expects that the outcome of non-violent behaviour towards his girlfriend will be respect and a continued relationship with this girl. However, amongst his close friends, a practice exists which implicitly supports the use of violence against girlfriends in order to secure sexual intercourse. The male adolescent knows that his friends will not only support his use of violence but expect him to exhibit a certain amount of violence. The attitude and the practice combine to produce a behavioural intention. The situation arises in which the couple is on a date and a lengthy period of foreplay has taken place. The male very much wants to have full intercourse with his girlfriend. Although he has a non-violent attitude *symbolically*, faced with conflicting norms and a context in which violence may easily be used without immediate repercussion and with a strong probability of success, the male adolescent forces his girlfriend to have sexual intercourse. This over-simplified imaginary example illustrates that there is no necessary consistency between attitudes and behaviours. Researchers cannot be confident that the respondent will act in a way which is consistent with the attitudes which s/he reports.

Any investigation of attitudes (whether through interviews or questionnaires) must, therefore, be understood to provide only a partial understanding of human thoughts, feelings and behaviours. While it is true that certain attitudes seem to be

measured with reliability and predictive validity (such as political attitudes and voting behaviour) (Znaniecki, 1968), still more attitudes continue to evade valid measurement. And for these reasons I was sceptical of the Conflict Tactics Scale's measurement in questions 24 and 25 of attitudes towards the acceptability of violence in an intimate relationship.

### **Adolescents Talk About Attitudes:**

Discussions with the pupils in my research highlighted the problems with measuring attitudes. Whilst many pupils disagreed with each other with regard to such issues as the acceptability of hitting a girl, more distressing was the high degree to which girls and boys contradicted themselves in the course of discussion. A good example of this contradiction was Cathy and Gillian's discussion of the effect of alcohol on aggression. Early in one session, the conversation included the following:

(Alcohol) is the only time I could see my friend, well my male friends, like my friend if he had been drunk I would have felt very uncomfortable...If someone told me they were drunk and did this (being violent) I could imagine it happening. Because they don't really know what they are doing. When they're drunk, they could do anything.

However, later in the same session, Cathy states:

I don't think drinking could cause aggression. I mean because there's got to be something underneath that's making you react physically aggressively. If you weren't drinking, you might express your anger in a different way.

The questions concerned with attitudes towards the acceptability of hitting a girlfriend or boyfriend elicited much debate amongst the pupils and the often contradictory talk

filled more than one session. Even questions that appeared straightforward such as religious affiliation and household composition proved to be rather complex and invited a considerable amount of discussion. I will return to a discussion of contradictory talk in Chapters 7, 8, 9 and 10. At a minimum, contradictory talk must mean that confidence in attitude measurement of phenomena as complex as intimate violence must be cautious. And whilst many of the adolescents in the focus groups reported that they had responded to the two attitude questions on the survey, it was clear in discussion that their unitary responses did not reflect the complexity of their discourse on the acceptability of employing violence in intimate relationships.

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***Feminist Versus Non-feminist Perspectives: A Case of Researcher Bias?***

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The literature on intimate violence has increasingly become concerned with whether or not violence by females is as prevalent and serious a problem as violence towards females. The accumulation of arguments ‘for’ and ‘against’ the conceptualisation of intimate as ‘equal’ in this sense have culminated in a veritable slinging match between non-feminist theorists and their feminist counterparts. I briefly explore these arguments in order to situate the difficulties expressed by the girls and boys in the focus groups in completing the questionnaire. The remaining substantive chapters of the thesis draw from the qualitative data and often contradict the quantitative findings derived from the questionnaire.

Straus, the creator of the Conflict Tactics Scale, defends the questionnaire method of determining the amount and severity of violence in intimate relationships (1993). Straus refers to the National Family Violence Surveys and United States government crime statistics such as the National Crime Victimization Survey which corroborate evidence derived by the CTS which suggest that wives are more violent towards their husbands than their husbands are towards them. Straus defines what he calls the “clinical fallacy” and the “representative sample fallacy” (pg.77). The clinical fallacy refers to the discrepancy between the findings from surveys (primarily the CTS) that find women to be more violent, and findings based on police, court and shelter records which suggest women are far more likely to be victims of violence. Straus explains this discrepancy as an “unwarranted generalisation” made from the severe cases of assault usually dealt with by the criminal justice system and the relatively

“minor” cases of violence picked up by surveys. The representative sample fallacy refers to the opposite effect of the underreporting of severe assaults in the community. Straus suggests that the controversy over violence by women is the result of survey researchers (presumably he is not included) assumption that their findings apply to cases known to the criminal justice system, and the assumption by clinical researchers (that is, feminist researchers) that the predominance of assaults by men applies to the whole population. Straus concludes that feminist criticisms of his work are unfounded and that the work of feminists contains “many factual errors” (pg.81). Straus argues the errors are repeated as “deliberate distortions intended to discredit the scientific findings by discrediting the researchers whose studies revealed equal rates of assault” (1992:211). He concludes his article by stating that the criticisms of the CTS is really a case of “blaming the messenger for the bad news” (1993:83).

On the other side of the argument are researchers who point to competing data from national surveys which suggests that the ‘symmetry of violence’ hypothesis is unfounded. Dobash, Dobash, Wilson and Daly (1992), for instance, argue that husbands’ and wives’ use of violence differs both quantitatively and qualitatively and that claims that women are as violent are “exaggerated” (pg.72). These researchers describe several methodological problems with survey data such as telephone interviewing and assuming that one spouse’s account of intimate violence is a valid assessment of the actual level of violence in the home. They also point out that there is a very low concordance between wives’ and husbands’ reports of violence. On several CTS items, agreement between husband and wife was actually statistically unlikely



(Szinovacz, 1983). These authors also point to a plethora of national crime surveys which find that women are far more likely to sustain injury. The criticism that criminal justice system records are biased because men do not report victimisation by women is countered by several findings (for example Schwartz, 1987) that find that actually slightly more men than women called the police after being assaulted by their wives.

In a recent study Nazroo (1995) investigated the controversy between those researchers who espouse a sexual symmetry theory and those who maintain that violence against wives is a far more serious problem. Using a sample of 96 cohabiting couples derived from GP patient lists, each member of the couple was interviewed separately by different interviewers. Interviewees were asked to describe incidents of physical aggression in their relationship. The results of this study initially suggested that more women than men were violent in these relationships. However, the data also clearly shows that male violence (across dimensions from undefendable, intimidating, injurious and dangerous) was far more likely to be dangerous than female violence. Female violence was more likely to be of a threatening nature. Nazroo's findings suggest that excluding meaning from the survey means that women appear to be more violent than men. But if the meaning of the physical acts of aggression are also measured, then men are much more likely to physically abuse their wives. Also, when self-defence reasons for violence were excluded, all of the other cases in the study found that the violence used by women was ineffectual, easily overcome by their husbands. In detailed interviews Nazroo found that men were not only able to easily defend themselves but did not appear to be intimidated by their wives' violence

because of their greater physical strength and because their wives' violence that lacked the serious intent of harming their husbands.

This research study strongly suggests that the *context* of violence is crucial to understanding intimate violence. Straus' conclusion that all violence is equally wrong fails to acknowledge the hierarchical order of gender relations and the power dimensions of intimate relations. Dobash, Dobash, Wilson and Daly point out that researchers such as Straus do not acknowledge that the supposed higher levels of violence by women in relationships contrasts strongly with women's behaviour outside the family. Certainly outside the home females are far more likely to be the victims of violence by men than men are victims of women's violence.

The results of my analysis of the questionnaire suggest that the reliability of the adolescent respondent's reports may be quite low, especially for those respondents in the lower age range. Although the CTS is widely used with adolescent samples, my experience in administering the questionnaire strongly suggested that many of the respondents did not understand the questionnaire and lacked the concentration for its completion. Also, I was not able to test the respondent's reports of violence against their girlfriend's or boyfriend's responses. However, a much larger and salient concern was that the questionnaire data provided no understanding of the *meaning* or *context* of the reported violence. I believe that in depth interviewing might provide the opportunity to investigate both the process and practice of violence.

## CHAPTER 7: MALE VIOLENCE

I think violence is something that is very under cover. Nobody talks about it. It is very hush hush. And a lot of people might know it but they will never talk about it.

(Harriet)

### *Introduction:*

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In this chapter I will report the major part of my research findings. I collected a great deal of data, in the form of transcripts, on this broad subject and a central task of this chapter is to organise this data. The subject of violence and aggression raised a multitude of related subjects, emotional debates, personal disclosures, consensus and disagreement. The chapter begins with a discussion of the forms of violence that I outlined in Chapter 3: psychological, physical and sexual. Analysis of the talk generated by these forms of violence highlighted several emergent themes, which are discussed in the second section. The underlying connecting thread of these themes emerged as a discourse of 'sexual character'. This term signifies the extent to which individuals talk about females and males as distinct groups having different character traits. Some girls and boys talked about gender in terms of fundamental differences between females and males. Other adolescents described gender in terms of shared

qualities. In this chapter I have organised this data into themes of 'biological explanations' 'socialisation' and 'media presentations' of the aetiology of violence and theorising difference and similarity.

I suggest in this chapter that there is little evidence to suggest that male and female social relations are structured by biological 'natural' differences. I suggest instead that females and males operate within a complex system of social relations in which multiple femininities and masculinities exist, are hierarchically structured and are practised through the interpretation of contexts. If we do not subscribe to the ideology of 'sexual character' then we must find a different way to understand the differences we find in levels of violence. This difference exists in the discourses of the adolescents.

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***Talk About Violence:***

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I introduced the topic of violence into the groups through the use of vignettes (see Appendix C). The purpose of the vignettes was to provide a 'spring-board' for discussion. By using fabricated stories about fictional characters, the adolescents in the focus groups could talk about their experience and understanding of violence without directly referring to themselves. In fact, the vignettes often did lead to personal disclosures of witnessing, experiencing or perpetrating violence. The first vignette described an instance of psychological violence, the second vignette described sexual violence and the third and fourth vignettes described scenes of physical violence.

Talking about violence raises methodological as well as ethical issues. From the questionnaire the pupils in the groups were well aware that I was interested in talking about violence in relationships. As described in Chapter 4, I began each focus group with a session designed to explicate the rules of the group (such as confidentiality, respect for group members and agreeing to commit to attending each session). In the second session I introduced the topic of violence by asking group members the very general question: "have you ever seen, heard about or experienced any violence in relationships here at this school?". This question was often met with a negative answer.

However, in the course of the group sessions, I discovered that a number of levels of interpretation were in operation. First, when I asked group members to define what they understood the term 'violence' to mean, the girls and boys almost invariably talked about very severe forms of violence such as beating up to the extent that the

victim would die or need extended hospitalisation, or stranger rape. Some group members reported that they understood 'violence' to take place only in adult relationships. Second, after several sessions, members of groups would often ask to speak with me alone and during individual interviews would disclose accounts of experiencing violence. My negotiation of initiating talk about violence involved two issues. First, not wanting to 'put words into the mouths' of the group members - I was concerned that pupils might recount stories of violence in order to provide 'what the researcher wanted to hear'. Second, I was also concerned that recounted experiences that I would label 'violent' might not be labelled in the same way by the girls and boys. This anxiety was particularly relevant for the girls' discussions of rape. In some cases girls would describe being 'pressured' or 'forced' to have sex, but not 'raped'. The effect of identifying an experience as 'rape' rather than 'something I didn't really want to do' is significant. I was placed in an ethical quandary. My role as 'objective' researcher dictated that the girls' and boys' talk remain as untainted by my interpretations as possible. However, my role as a feminist researcher meant an obligation to empower the girls whenever possible. I eventually relied on my judgement as a trained therapist and researcher in decisions of whether or not to delicately probe girls in these situations as to the usefulness of employing a feminist analysis of their experiences. My responsibility in providing support in the event that personal experiences of violence were disclosed extended beyond a year after my data collection was complete. Further discussion of my role as a researcher is discussed in Chapter 10. It will suffice to point out here that I realised quickly that researcher and respondent bias would remain an issue throughout my data collection.

**Psychological Violence:**

Academic literature concerned with lives of adolescent girls abounds with discussions of terms such as 'slag'. This word, together with others, forms a discourse employed by both girls and boys. This discourse centres around the sexual behaviour of girls. Terms such as 'slag', 'tramp', 'slut' and 'tart' rarely refer to boys. My first vignette deals with the term 'slag' through a story in which a girl does not want to go out with a boy who has asked her for a date. He tells his friends at school that she is a 'slag' and this rumour is spread across the school. I asked group members to discuss this vignette in terms of realism, predicted outcome for the girl and boy and the use of the term 'slag'. Most of the girls and boys in the focus groups reported that the vignette was realistic in regard to the girl being termed a 'slag'. However, there was a frequent suggestion that the setting (a skating rink), the interaction between the girl and the boy, and the girl's reaction to being called a 'slag' were more indicative of middle school than secondary school pupils.

The use of the words 'slag', 'tart', 'bitch', 'bit' and others were talked about in the groups as very common features of everyday adolescent language. Most of the girls I spoke with told me that they had been called a 'slag' at least once in their lives. These words always connote something about the girl's sexual behaviour. Specifically, girls are put-down in two basic ways centred around female sexuality. A girl who is called a 'slag' is being referred to as sexually promiscuous. A girl who is called 'frigid' is being told that she is 'not feminine' in the sense that she is not interested in heterosexual relationships. She is basically being told that she is not conforming to cultural prescriptions of traditional femininity:

- MH: Do you call guys names?  
Elicia: Bastards. That's about it. There isn't a male version of slag. I mean you just say whatever describes him.  
MH: Why is that?  
Elicia: It is easier for blokes to put girls...  
Emma: Into boxes.  
MH: Why?  
Elicia: Because of the stereotypes there are?  
Emma: They can't think of anything original.  
Elicia: If she's clever then she's 'square' and if she's friendly she's a 'flirt' and she's a 'slag'.

Boys are not subjected to the same words, and the categories into which they are placed do not have anything to do with their sexuality in terms of promiscuity. The major exception to this categorisation is the strong prescription that boys demonstrate interest in heterosexuality. Boys who did not show sexual interest in females were invariably categorised as homosexual.

Concurrent with Sue Lees's (1993) findings, the girls that I spoke with rarely questioned the categorisations into which they were placed. They recognised that these terms often had little to do with their own behaviours. However, the girls seemed willing to allow that the categories applied to other girls, most often girls whom they were not friends with. Indeed, just as Sue Lees discovered, girls reported calling other girls 'slags' as often as boys ever did. Girls often rejected the categories applied to themselves or their friends. However, the idea of rejecting the categories as legitimate was never expressed by the girls. I did not find an instance in any of the transcripts in which the girls directly rejected the use or meaning of the term 'slag'. Often it was as much what the girls did not say:

- Gillian: I've got a friend. He told me that I was obviously really frigid. He said 'you must be really frigid because you're not going to have sex with a man. You must be frigid if you are going to hold on until you are married. (And I said) 'you obviously do not know me the slightest. I am



very passionate but I just have a lot of self control'. And he made this bet. That I would lose my virginity before I got married.

Cathy: This whole thing about being frigid - it's such a label and I think it's really damaging...If you don't want to go out with someone, there's nothing wrong with that, it doesn't make you frigid.

MH: Do guys get called 'frigid'?

Cathy: No.

Gillian: Not at all.

MH: Even if they have never gone out with a girl or had sex with a girl?

Both: No.

Two of the boys that I talked with at Chiswick School, Joff and Mike, reported that some girls at the school referred to them as 'flirts'. However, both of these boys considered this term as a positive reflection of their interest in heterosexual, sexual relations. Boys certainly did not question the categorisation of girls into sexually promiscuous or sexually repressed. In this excerpt Mike employs the term 'tart' without questioning the meaning or the gender specificity:

MH: Do you think girls are more likely to be aggressive when they are drunk?

Mike: They act more tarty. I don't know about aggressive.

MH: What do you mean by 'more tarty'?

Mike: They are not afraid to play little miss hard-to-get.

MH: Do you mean that they flirt more?

Mike: Oh yeah.

MH: Do you think girls understand the way guys interpret their flirting?

Mike: Probably.

Psychological abuse was not confined to the use of words that exclusively defined female sexuality. Boys also talked about girls as 'under the thumb', referring to the site of power and control in the relationship as the boy:

David: Men have images to live up to.

Tim: It's like blokes saying your woman should be under your thumb and everyone says this is how you should be.

David: I bet not one of us could say that we haven't said 'you are under her thumb' to at least one of your mates.

Tim: Yeah.

- David: I even said it to Paul last night. I said 'you got something on your head' and he said 'what is it?' and I said 'it's a finger print'. But when I said it he knows it's a joke.
- Tim: Like in public if someone says 'you are under the thumb' then you think bastard and you don't want to be seen as that and you try saying something like 'oy, bitch come here' just so that...
- MH: But isn't a guy more likely to turn it around and say 'yeah, well at least I am getting regular sex'?
- Both: Yeah.
- MH: But women don't do that. Like if someone said to me that I was under Sean's thumb I wouldn't say 'yeah, well at least I am getting regular sex'.
- Tim: But that's what everybody sees men as.
- David: Guys do say that. But then the next guy says 'yeah, but it's with the same girl every time'. And it just gets into a silly argument.
- Arnold: I think it comes from the fact that men want to keep their relationship with their girlfriend more exclusive. They want it to be separate. Women tend to want to share it.
- David: Yeah, I think that's true.

Girls, too, understand that part of the dominant masculinity involves not maintaining an exclusive relationship with any one girl:

- Krista: Like it took a while for him (boyfriend) to sort of be seen out with me and accept that he actually had a girlfriend rather than sort of being a lad that sort of slept around with everyone and didn't care about the woman because she was under his thumb even though I'm still under his thumb it took quite...but now...like a lot of boys don't want to be tied down to one woman even though they are madly in love. They have this image to live up to. Like 'I told her'.
- MH: How do you mean 'I told her'?
- Krista: Well, you know. 'She's nagging me so I told her to piss off ' or whatever. Like 'she doesn't tell me what to do'. Cause they have to be masculine. A lot of them are old fashioned. Like he won't ever let me see any other males. It doesn't worry me that much.

Girls and boys talked quite regularly about girls as possessive, nagging, emotional, hysterical and boys as bastards, harsh and unfeeling. Some adolescents such as Tim and Krista (above) were able to identify that personality traits had been gendered, in that

they talked of “stereotypes”. However, all of the boys and girls employed discourses in which these gendered characteristics were assumed.

### **Physical Violence:**

The discussion of physical violence in the focus groups was prompted by my reading vignettes three and four in each group. Vignette three depicts a secondary school couple. The girl in the relationship is described (purposefully) as emotionally and socially dependent on her boyfriend, demanding much of his time. The boy wants to spend some time with his male friends and in the pursuant argument, shakes his girlfriend and punches her on the arm. The physical violence is described in terms of the boy’s ‘last resort’, as reasoning with his girlfriend has not been successful. In the fourth vignette, a boy threatens to hit his girlfriend when she teases him about his alcoholic father in front of his friends. In both vignettes the male is physically aggressive towards a female partner and the violence is contextualised in an apparently ‘reasonable’ response to provocation.

To general questions about prevalence, both boys and girls usually talked about physical violence as something they understood to occur in adult relationships. Many pupils talked about violence in schools; mainly bullying and gang violence. The sixth form groups talked about bullying as very common in years nine to eleven in secondary school. Bullying usually entailed verbal put-downs, intimidation and physical violence in the form of hitting, punching, kicking and slapping. Bullying was always described as a group of (usually) boys ‘ganging up’ on a single boy. In my counselling role at

Parsons school I was very aware that bullying was also a problem for girls. Group discussions of gang violence also took place. Gang violence, as described by group members, referred to groups of young men from working-class housing estates who engaged in violent conflicts with other gangs and sometimes tormented a girl or boy who had incidental contact with the gang. However, the central concern of my research was violence in intimate adolescent relationships, and it was within this context that I discussed physical violence with the adolescents.

Some girls and boys described acts of physical violence such as slapping, hitting and punching as 'joking'. Physical acts such as these were described as a normal, familiar part of adolescent relationships. Girls and boys often described incidents of friends of the same and opposite sex hitting them "in fun". These incidents did not arouse any conflict in the talk of either girls or boys, who reported that they were unconcerned about this behaviour. The groups' members were careful to differentiate between the physical 'joking' they engaged in with their friends, and the physical violence described in the two vignettes.

With regard to the third vignette, all of the girls and boys in each of the groups reported that Lindy (the girlfriend) was unreasonable in her expectation that Paul (the boyfriend) remain with her at all times. In the girl's groups, talk focused on Lindy as insecure and overly-dependent on her boyfriend. Many of the girls described Lindy's insecurity in negative terms *because her boyfriend would be more likely to end the relationship*. That is, many of the girls talked about the necessity of not *showing* insecurity towards boys, as boys would interpret the insecurity as curtailing their own "freedom". Lindy's insecurity was viewed as emanating from the anxiety at her

boyfriend ending the relationship. What was important to the girls was not the fact that Lindy was insecure: this seemed very reasonable and not worth discussing. The salient feature of the story was the danger in Lindy expressing her insecurity so openly, thus inviting rejection. Paul's action of shaking and punching Lindy was seen as inappropriate, but reasonable.

When asked about the acceptability of violence, almost all of the boys and girls reported that the use of violence by boys was not acceptable. However, these discussions invariably and swiftly led to discussions of 'mitigating circumstances'. Both boys and girls talked about the unreasonableness of Lindy's expectations on Paul. Paul's violence was discussed in terms of his frustration at Lindy not listening to him. Some of the group's members talked about Paul's violence in instrumental terms; Lindy would understand the seriousness of Paul's feelings and would cease to pressure him. As Martin described:

I suppose if the stress is that sometimes he doesn't know how to get through to her then I think then yes like this is the way to get through to her.

For these adolescents, Paul's violence was actually seen in positive terms, as it was a means to an end. The 'end' was sustaining the relationship. All of the girls and boys recommended that Lindy be more co-operative or risk 'losing' Paul to a girl that Paul perceived to be less 'possessive'.

Discussion of the fourth vignette produced similar talk. The adolescents in the groups described Sarah's teasing Peter about his alcoholic father as very inappropriate and insensitive. Some of the boys and girls reported that they might have actually hit their partner if s/he had teased them about such a sensitive topic as an alcoholic parent.

Some of the adolescents in the sixth form groups described this vignette as most likely occurring in a younger relationship. Regarding the segment of the vignette in which Peter's friends watch Peter to see whether he will 'take it' from Sarah (i.e. that he will allow Sarah to control the situation), most of the group members did not report that Peter's friends would be able to pressure Peter into hitting Sarah if Peter did not want to hit her. Some of the girls and boys recognised that peer pressure did operate in situations in which there was a public display of a private relationship. However, my query about the ability of peer pressure to produce violence was met with scepticism.

In both the third and fourth vignettes the group members reported that the decision to continue the relationships would rest with the boys. This finding is important: the girlfriends' reaction to their boyfriends' violence would not be to end the relationship because of that violence. The decision to end the relationship (seen in terms of the power in the relationship) was with the boys who would determine if their girlfriends were too possessive or inconsiderate.

The use of violence by the male characters in these vignettes, then, was viewed as potentially instrumental. It was also seen as the result of emotions such as frustration and anger. An interesting dimension to the discussion of male emotions was the description by many girls of boys' feelings of insecurity. This finding was somewhat paradoxical in light of the girls' and boys' assumptions that girls are more insecure than boys. The female characters highlighted the discussion of feelings such as insecurity and possessiveness. In terms of physical violence, some girls and boys talked about boys not 'acting out' the same emotions in the same way as girls do. As Harriet described:

I think that males would be a little more scared of showing that it's because they care about her and make it come out more in anger. Whereas women are more...whiny.

The notion that feelings such as fear, insecurity, possessiveness and jealousy are shared by both females and males was most often stated explicitly by girls. The girls in the groups talked about boys being just as jealous and possessive as girls were assumed to be, but that boys expressed these feelings in different ways. Boys were more likely describe feelings without attaching descriptions such as possessiveness to these feelings. Whilst mentioned here, this finding reveals a great deal about the discourse employed by girls and boys about gender identity and will be discussed in detail in later sections.

### **Sexual Violence:**

I mean you can't go on the pitcher's mound unless you are willing to play.

(Mike)

No other topic produced the controversy, strong emotions and depth of discussion as did talking about sexual violence. Whilst my initial plan had been to spend between one and two sessions on the topics of sexual harassment and rape, I found that with the majority of the groups this was not feasible. Talking about sexual violence evoked many associated issues and the talks often spilled into several sessions beyond what I had scheduled. In many ways, this topic marked a turning point for

some of the groups. After I raised the subjects of sex, sexuality and sexual violence, I began a series of individual meetings with girls who disclosed their personal stories of stranger rape, date rape, child sexual abuse and sexual harassment. Some girls disclosed this information in the group setting, but often they seemed to prefer to talk to me alone. Perhaps because I was known to be a counsellor and because I had clearly located myself as outside of the school domain, I was judged to be someone 'safe' to whom they could share information they had not disclosed to anyone else. Most of these girls expressed a strong desire that the rest of the school not find out what had happened to them and I committed myself to not talking about their experiences in their groups. I always gave the girls the option that I would change the topic in the groups so that they would not have to talk about sexual violence in generalities should they not want to. However, all of the girls reported that they did not mind talking in the context of the group so long as I did not raise their experience as a subject to discuss. At times my knowledge of personal experiences of the girls made the groups difficult to manage. At times girls would talk about girls 'leading boys on' to the distress of the member who had been raped. I would suggest that some of the emotions expressed in the transcripts reflect this dynamic.

It is also important to note that raising the topic of sexual violence was quite disturbing to some of the girls and I spent a long time with quite a few of the groups in 'debriefing' the topic. For instance, in differentiating between the stranger rape and date rape, I provided the information that date rape is more common, statistically, than stranger rape. For girls who had been socialised to protect themselves against stranger rape, indeed to only conceptualise rape as occurring between strangers, this resulted in



a disjuncture between what they had been told was reality and what actually is reality. I will return to this discussion later in this section, but it is worth noting that some of the girls told me that they had never discussed these issues prior to my focus groups.

The enormous amount of data I collected on the topic of sexual violence made the organisation of this data both difficult and critical. I begin my analysis with the various definitions given to 'rape' by the groups. Defining rape was imbricated with issues of consent. Talking about sexual violence often led to discussions about 'mixed signals' and responsibility. Responsibility for sexual violence often combined with discussions of male self-control, which invariably involved discussions employing biological explanations. At one stage in the group discussions I read out newspaper articles concerned with particular cases of date rape. Media coverage became central to these discussions. Finally, various strategies that girls employ to protect themselves from rape were discussed and debated.

The first task of this series of discussions was to talk to the adolescents about how they defined rape. Defining rape in terms of individual girl's stories will be discussed in the following section. For these first general discussions, I introduced the topic through the second vignette. In this vignette the characters of John and Ann have been going out together for a year. Whilst Ann is baby-sitting, she invites John over to the child's parent's home. They begin to snog on the couch and then John has sex with Ann. Ann tells John that she does not want to have sex. In the first session of the series on sexual violence, I read out this vignette to each group and asked what they thought of the story. Some boys and girls commented that they would assume that after a year of going out and considering that John is eighteen and Ann is seventeen, that they

would already be engaged in regular sexual intercourse. Other girls and boys reported that they had read similar stories in the problem pages of various magazines such as "Just Seventeen". All of the group's members said that they judged that Ann had been raped:

MH: So do you think it is sufficient that Ann tells John that she doesn't want to have sex?

Mark: If she says no then he should stop. I think it's intruding.

Mic: If she says stop then he should.

Martin: And he actually held her down.

MH: Then you would define that as rape?

Mark: Yes.

Mic: I would define that as rape because she said no.

This group's response was very typical. The definition of rape was based on the girl's not consenting to sexual intercourse. Because Ann had said that she did not want to have sex, then the various groups defined John's actions as rape. However, it was equally true that 'what saying no' meant was controversial. For the girl's groups in general, the girl verbally expressing non consent to sexual intercourse was sufficient. Most of these girls strongly recommended that girls make it "very obvious" that they do not want to have sex. 'Making it clear' usually involved verbally stating 'no' and making it physically clear through the use of body movements such as walking away, taking the boy's hand off her body, turning away or other movements such as these. For some of the boys, non-verbal communication was more powerful:

Joal: All they have to do is push your hand away.

MH: So it doesn't have to be verbal then?

Tim: Actually, you are more likely to do what they say if they actually push you away than if they say 'no let's not' because you think 'if I just try a little more maybe I'll get her into it. But if she pushes you away.

Joal: Yeah. If they push you off then you feel stupid. If they tell you 'no' then you just think 'well, I can persuade them and get around it'.

Arnold: It depends on how well you know them. The first time you would give

up. But then if you go out with them for a while and at first they say no and then they will have sex occasionally.

This interchange was informative for many reasons. First, it highlighted the first of many differences I found between the male and female group discussions. The definition of rape almost immediately turned into discussions of consent and girls “leading men on”. Second, this interchange introduced the differences in how rape was perceived between strangers compared with rape within relationships. Arnold states that not stopping in attempting to have sex with a girlfriend was somehow ‘different’ than not stopping with a stranger. Third, I was also interviewing Tim’s girlfriend Rose and it was interesting to compare what Tim said about his girlfriend saying no and meaning yes with Rose’s account. I told Rose’s group that I was meeting with a group at the other school in which the boys had said that sometimes their girlfriends said no when they really meant yes. I relayed the idea that non-verbal signals were taken to be more valid than verbal signals. Rose and Krista responded with the following discussion:

- Rose: For men sex is so important. Like why can’t they tell. Can’t they just tell from body language?
- Krista: And especially when they come round and you are wearing like 50 jumpers and you haven’t done your makeup and you haven’t done your hair. You obviously don’t want to have sex...Sure girls do need to be convinced but not convinced about wanting to have sex.
- Rose: I think reassured that their partner loves them. I think if they take the pressure off you it allows you to feel what you feel for them at your own pace. It often makes you want to have sex with them because you feel confident. Rather than like forcing you all the time.
- Krista: I mean even now sometimes I don’t want to have sex. At least not that frequently. It doesn’t mean that I’m scared to.
- MH: Well is it true then that when girls say no they really mean yes?
- Krista: No. They don’t mean yes. It doesn’t mean they can’t enjoy it once they are doing it. But if you don’t want to have sex then you don’t want to.
- MH: Then why do you end up having sex?

Rose: To shut them up...And sometimes I am doing it and I think 'Jesus Christ he is raping me because I don't want to and he is kissing me and I am kissing him back but I don't really want to and I am trying to say no and he is saying come on and I'll kind of give in and he'll take over.

Rose's account of agreeing to engage in sexual intercourse was significantly different from Tim's. In another group, Sandra expressed that her non-verbal communications had a similar intent:

I might be laughing but I'm still saying no. It's still no. But I would want to keep the situation friendly and I might be smiling. It doesn't mean I am saying yes, it just means 'I'm not angry with you'.

Each of these girls talked about their use of non-verbal body movements as a method of communication. However, the girls firmly stated on a number of occasions that verbally stating non-consent was sufficient. They also suggest that communication about consenting to sex is a more complicated process for them than it is for boys. In fact, an enormous amount of discussion was generated from talk about non-verbal versus verbal forms of communication. In the context of 'flirting', non-verbal communication took on a very important, often subtle and always powerful dimension. Indeed, flirting was a group of actions through which girls could negotiate a very complex social relations structure in which girls are held responsible for controlling the boundaries of sexual contact. Flirting, as a site of negotiation, will be discussed in a later section.

As I have stated, initial discussions of the definition of rape transformed into discussions of consent. In these discussions, debate concentrated on the responsibility to gain consent for sex. Throughout all of the discussions, the implicit assumption

made was that all males want sex. Only one boy raised the issue of a boy not wanting to have sex but this discussion rapidly returned to a discussion based on the assumed perpetual male sex drive. The adolescents quite consistently talked about the importance of communication between the girl and boy in situations of engaging in sexual intercourse. Group members said that boys should seek some sort of consent and that girls should make their consent or non-consent clear:

Cathy: If a girl wants to make sure that she has looked after herself then she should make sure she has made it clear but when it comes down to it it's the man's responsibility to make sure he has consent.

Gillian: I think that it involves two people and they have to communicate with each other.

Cathy: But the problem is that it ends up being the woman who is forced. The woman's got the most to lose. That's why it should be the man's responsibility to make sure.

Boys were definitely described as being obligated to obtain some sort of consent for sex from girls. However, exactly *how* boys obtain consent and what counts as consent raised two important issues. First, there was an inherent contradiction between the idea of sex as spontaneous and sex in which explicit consent must be obtained. Girls and boys talked about their desire to have sex in which emotions of passion and desire 'overtook' them. Talking about consent was viewed as 'spoiling the mood'. To make explicit a sexual contract, in actual sexual relations, was not something that the boys or girls actually wanted to do. Interestingly, related discussions of 'safe sex' were centred around the prevention of "AIDS". Most girls that I spoke were engaged in sexual relations with their boyfriends. These girls did not use condoms because they reported that they "knew" their boyfriends; that is, they knew that their boyfriends did not have "AIDS". The use of condoms was recognised by girls and boys alike as affording less

spontaneity than other forms of birth control such as the pill. It was in discussions of sexual relations *in general* that the issue of consent was talked about as essential. The second issue that discussions of consent raised was that the responsibility for initiating sex rested with boys whereas the responsibility for limiting sex rested with girls. In all of the discussions of rape, it was with females that the burden of responsibility rested.

Female responsibility extended to many aspects of social relations between boys and girls. From clothing to flirting, girls were always referred to when I raised the issue of responsibility. In fact, I found that I had to specifically raise male responsibility as the discussions would invariably remain on the topic of female responsibility unless I consciously turned the discussion back to topic. My talk with Joff and Mike reflected similar discussions in other groups:

MH: How do you think it sometimes comes about that guys sometimes rape women that they know or that they live with?

Mike: I can only see it as some sort of misunderstanding. Where the guy has been led on and he just thinks 'oh you've taken it this far and now you are just going to shut me out' and he feels annoyed.

Mike talks about rape as a "misunderstanding". He also uses what became a very familiar term in the transcripts: "led on". Girls, through a variety of behaviours were seen to lead men on, that is, to promise sexual intercourse through action and then renege on that promise. There is a problem of logic here. Boys are viewed as initiating sex because boys are assumed to be more interested in having sex than girls. As the next section will discuss, there was a strong conviction that boys are biologically determined to have a stronger sex drive than girls. But girls are assumed to lead boys on which implies that girls are interested in sex also, at least to a certain degree. When

I asked the boys and girls about why girls lead boys a common answer was that girls enjoy the power and control that leading men on implies. As Joal said “women have power over men. Men have strength but women have their bodies”. Lucia, Reena and Proust all thought that the fictional character of Ann (vignette 2) had led her boyfriend on, that John was expecting to have sex from the way that Ann was acting.

A great deal was said about girls giving ‘mixed signals’ to boys. It is through mixed signals that girls lead boys on. The boundaries of mixed signals was vague and seemed to depend more on how the boy interpreted a girl’s behaviour than what her intentions were. Two good examples of commonly referred to mixed signals were clothing and substance use (whether alcohol or drugs). Most of the girls and boys talked about the importance of girls’ clothing in signalling to boys regarding sexual availability. All of the adolescents who talked about clothing reported that it should not matter what a girl wore, but that “in the real world” what a girl wore affected how she was perceived. Interestingly, several girls defended their own choice of clothing, often saying that they wore what was “comfortable” or “fashionable”. In the case of substance use, differences in boys and girls were again highlighted. In the case of boys drinking, this seemed to diminish their perceived responsibility for their actions. As Mike said:

I think the fact that he is drunk and he is really not in control of what he is doing...It’s a step up from normal rape. I mean she’s led him on with the added problem with the fact that he does have less control over himself.

On the other hand, for a girl to use drugs or alcohol seemed to increase her responsibility. Girls needed to be very careful when drinking at parties in order that

they not do “anything stupid”. Girls talked about watching out for each other at parties, so that if one girl became drunk, her girl friends would make sure that “nothing happened to her”.

Adam: If there are no words said and they are both pissed then there is no way you can pin it down to one person. Because when you are pissed, I mean alcohol provoketh desire doesn't it?

In all of my discussions, one of the primary findings to emerge was that boys and girls talked almost exclusively about stranger as opposed to date rape. Although university, college and to some extent adolescent date rape has received a growing amount of attention in the media, discussions in my groups focused on stranger rape. All of the girls that I spoke with had been taught by their parents various strategies to protect themselves from stranger rape. This excerpt from a transcript was typical of the kind of specific training that most of the girls had had regarding their personal safety:

Proust: When we are going out late at night we will walk in the middle of the road. We will walk towards incoming traffic.

Lucia: There is a long cut and a short cut to school and I will always take the long way. I walk where a lot of people are so that I know I will be safe. People say like you should walk really slowly. Like if someone is following you shouldn't walk really fast then he will know that you know he is following you.

Proust: And if you are going home late at night you can always get a taxi and pay them when you get home.

MH: Do you find that your families worry about you and your safety?

Lucia: My Mum is so unbelievable.

Proust: They say “hang around with everybody else and don't go off on your own. And make sure you come home with somebody”.

Lucia: If I come home even fifteen minutes late my Mum is always worried about me.

MH: Do you ever worry about being attacked?

Proust: Especially when you have to take a cab and you have to come back from town. I worry about that. And if you see any weird people at night down town.



Most of the girls had stories to tell about instances of sexual harassment from strangers. These instances varied. A man walked by Elicia, grabbing her and kissing her. Reeta and Cathy were followed back to Cathy's home and the man stood outside the house for approximately half an hour after they had run inside the house. Harriet had an older boy stop her and ask the time. He followed her down the street, ran up behind her, grabbed her and put his hand on her breast under her blouse. Most of the girls talked about being whistled at and commented on by various male strangers.

Boys, also, had learned several strategies to protect girls from other boys and men. Several boys talked about walking girlfriends home late at night or at least waiting at the bus stop with female friends. Some boys talked about consciously attempting to appear non-threatening to girls by smiling, holding their school bags in a prominent position so that girls would know they were going to school, crossing to the other side of the street from a girl and not walking too close to a girl. Many boys spontaneously told me several strategies for protecting females from stranger rape. They also talked about protecting their mothers and sisters from stranger harassment.

Several of the girls groups engaged me in interesting talk about asking boys to protect them. These girls were quite conscious of the irony of asking males to protect them from other males:

Cathy: It makes me angry.

Gillian: Yeah, it irritates me.

Cathy: You are just as safe with a girl or boy really. It's the fact that it is two people together that makes it less likely that you will be attacked. It irritates me so much to ask a bloke I just say I'm walking home right now and I won't ask them to walk with me.

MH: Do you ever have guys making fun of you wanting to protect yourselves?

Both: Yeah. All the time. Yeah.

Cathy: I don't let things like that worry me. Like I can look after myself. Like

I'm not a child and I can work it out for myself and I find it quite patronising because they do tend to make fun of it.

Gillian: You want to have the choice.

I asked the boys groups about this and I found some recognition that girls get "upset" when they asked to be walked home. Some boys seemed to understand the issues of dependency involved in asking a boy for assistance whilst others were more concerned that girls appreciate that they were attempting to assist.

Strategies of protection would invariably involve protection from strangers. I would then specifically raise the topic in the girls groups about protecting themselves from boys they knew. In all cases the conversation would return to strategies of stranger rape protection. I finally raised this issue in the groups:

MH: You know, in the groups I am finding that we all seem to talk about protecting ourselves from strangers a lot. Do you notice just then that when I asked you all to talk about protecting yourself from boys you know that Reeta returned us all to talking about stranger rape?

Elicia: I think we do that in a way because it's less frightening. I can cope with the fear of being attacked by a stranger in a way it's something you can believe. You understand that an insane stranger would want to attack you. But you cannot understand how your boyfriend who is supposed to love you, protect you and like you could do that to you. That's terrifying. And I also think 'well, what can I do about it? Can I actually do anything in a relationship?' You can be in a relationship and always surround yourself with people but that wouldn't be a relationship. You can think of things like take a taxi and stuff but it won't protect you from your boyfriend.

The salient feature of focusing on stranger rape was perceived control. With stranger rape girls seemed to feel that they could not control the situation. That is, girls did not estimate that they could prevent themselves from being raped. As I discussed earlier in this section, control and responsibility were inextricably linked. Date rape was

associated with a strong degree of responsibility in preventing the boy's action:

Cathy: We're more frightened of being raped on the street because they know they have no control over it. It's because they are a woman on the street (that) they are raped. It's not because they are out with this man or they know this man. Whereas if they are with this man at least they should try to control the situation and communicate with this man. And they know their relationship...Whereas on the street they are just another woman and that's why they are victims and they have so little control over that. There is nothing they can do about it.

When we did discuss date rape, a myriad of issues emerged with regard to female responsibility and mixed signals such as choice of clothing, rules of flirting, trusting boys and assessing the likelihood of attack. In discussing stranger rape some of the girls talked about being able to "tell" who was more likely to attack them. This judgement was most often based on intangible factors such as the male "looking dodgy", being drunk, large physique and dressed shabbily. The girls were also aware that these judgements were based on stereotypes, which nevertheless seemed irresistible. However, if girls were able to assess which strangers would be more likely to attack them, the implication was that girls should be able to assess what friends might potentially attack them. Girls adamantly resisted talking about the potential their male friends had of attacking them. Female friendships with boys was wholly dependent on the assumption that these boys would not abuse girls' trust.

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*Experiencing Gender: Girls' Talk About First Experiences of Violence*

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One of the salient findings in the talk about sexual violence was girl's experience of acquaintance or friend sexual violence. The types and severity of violence varied significantly. From the many talks I had with girls about this violence, I have chosen six accounts of sexual violence. I have purposefully chosen to report the accounts as *texts*, leaving analysis until the end of the girls' talk.

Reeta:

Reeta was involved in a choir group at Cambridge University which brought her into contact with a group of university students with whom she became friends. In one situation, Reeta was at a student house that some of the men and women from the choir group lived in. She was alone in the house with one of the male students. After talking in his room for about two hours, Reeta described this man moving from the chair in which he was sitting to come and sit with her on the bed. He attempted to kiss her and she immediately got off the bed and walked towards the door. The man managed to get to the door before her and lock it. He would not let her out of the room until she had kissed him, which she did. After kissing him for some time he let her out of the room after suggesting that they "get together again". Reeta described the experience as frightening. She said that she was very surprised by the incident as she had always considered this man to be a friend of hers. Reeta focused on her own "signals" during the incident. She suggested that she should not have sat on the man's bed as this might have led him to think that she wanted to "do something". She also

talked about what she was wearing at the time and how she really did not think that she had “led him on”. Her talk was quite defensive, as if the group members would implicate her in the incident. She repeated several times that she “couldn't believe it happened”.

Gillian:

Gillian was talking with Leon (also in one of my male groups at Chiswick school) one day in a classroom. Gillian was lying on one of the desks. During a joking interaction, Leon grabbed Gillian, turned her over so that she was face down on the desk, climbed on top of her and simulated having anal intercourse with her. Gillian described her immediate reaction as being one of embarrassment as there were a small group of friends in the room and Gillian felt that she “looked stupid”. As Leon continued to hold Gillian down, she struggled to get up and realised that she could not move. Gillian told Leon to get off her but he continued to lie on top of her, holding her arms down. At some point Gillian became upset and the friends told Leon to let her go. When he did, Gillian said that she felt quite shaken. She reported that she had not really realised before that (some) boys were stronger than her and that she might be physically powerless to stop such an event.

Elicia:

In a similar situation, Elicia described “play-fighting” with her boyfriend Jim. During this interaction Jim sat on top of Elicia on the bed. He held both of her arms down above her head. When she realised that she could not move him off her, she told

him to let her go. But he continued to hold her until she showed that she was upset and yelled at him to get off her. This small incident resulted in bruises on Elicia's wrists and a pulled muscle in her shoulder from her effort in trying to get Jim off her. Elicia said that she was quite disturbed by the incident. She explained Jim's actions by saying that Jim was known to be a very sensitive "honorary girl". Elicia reasoned that this reputation resulted in Jim wanting to assert his identity as a male by demonstrating that he was physically stronger than Elicia. Elicia described feeling very uncomfortable with this event. Until that time, she had not considered that Jim, whether intentionally or by accident, could ever harm her. Elicia's friend Emma was also disturbed by the incident as she realised that Elicia had sustained physical injury. Emma confronted Jim about what had happened and this produced an awkward interchange between Jim and Elicia in which Jim attempted to reassure Elicia that he would never harm her. Elicia and Emma described the incident:

MH: Did you ever talk to him about it?

Emma: It's not something that you can talk to boys about.

MH: Why?

Emma: You can either make a joke about it at the time or you can't go back to it.

MH: Supposing you were to say 'we need to talk about this. This makes me feel really uncomfortable'.?

Emma: Are we talking about immediately or later?

MH: Either.

Emma: Immediately. If I got pressure like that as I have done in the past I would just laugh and say 'what are you doing like exerting yourself and trying to prove you are male?'. If you just slightly take the piss, just slightly then he'll think...you will have convinced him not to do it again. I know it's not an ideal solution.

Elicia: Later we did talk about the relationship and he asked me how I thought it was going and he said really quietly 'you know I would never hurt you'.

MH: And what did you think?

Elicia: I thought I didn't realise that he knew. I just couldn't understand how he could do that. I trusted him so much. I trusted him completely. I

trusted him more in a relationship than I had trusted anyone before.

A short time after this incident, Jim broke up with Elicia. Emma's talk about how she would deal with male violence is important. She is describing a *strategy* by which she would negotiate a particular social action with a boy. I will return to girls' use of strategy in the next section.

Linda:

Linda had a friend who was not at Chiswick and she had gone to stay with her in a different city. The friend, Helen, and Linda had gone over to one of Helen's friends homes to meet a boy that Helen liked. Linda was left alone in the front room with one of the boys:

He tried it on with me. And I said 'no, I'm going out with someone' and pushed him away and he just wouldn't take no and I was just completely freaked out and I didn't know. And he came onto me again and like the second time I couldn't believe it and I didn't want to make a big deal and though well it is only a kiss. Although I should in no way feel responsible for letting him especially since I told him I was going out with someone else. Then it had been so little time like about twenty seconds or something and he started undoing my belt and I said 'no'. And he didn't feel bad about anything and he just sort of sat there and I just felt so sick and I said 'I'm going' and I went downstairs. If I had been completely scared I wonder what he would have done? It was like he was on me and I didn't have the strength. Too many things were going on in my head and I couldn't really cope with it and as I couldn't really understand. I kept thinking 'what signals have I given him? Have I led him on in any way?'.

Linda was very concerned to talk with me about whether I thought she had given this acquaintance mixed signals.

Sandra:

Sandra described an incident in which she had a male friend and female friend sleeping overnight in her room. She woke up in the night to find that her male friend was feeling her breasts. She described her reaction:

I was just so embarrassed by the whole situation I just lay there and didn't say anything. And now I just feel so pathetic for not doing anything. I told my friend Debbie about it and she said 'well, why in the hell didn't you stop him?' but the fact that I liked him so much and it really upset me. First of all I couldn't figure out what was going on cause I didn't know why I had woken up and then it had been a while and he had put his hand back again. And I tried, I literally opened my mouth to say something and no words came out. So it would look like I had let him for a bit and then stopped him. And then a few days later he was talking to Debbie about how he was really into getting off with girls with big tits and stuff...I just felt sick.

Sandra was as pre-occupied as the other girls in explaining to me that she was not responsible for the boy's behaviour.

Krista:

Both Krista and Rose were in one of the female groups at Parsons school. Both had been raped by their boyfriends. For these girls the boys who raped them were their first boyfriends. Krista was fifteen at the time and had been going out with Ned for several months. For some time he had been pressuring Krista to have sex with him. One night Krista and Ned were walking in an ill-lit, deserted park. Ned attempted to have sex with Krista, who refused:

Krista: It was really, really dark and he took my top off and he said that if I didn't have sex with him he would finish with me. And I thought 'what do I do, what do I do? I don't want to finish with him but I really, really don't want to have sex'. And he started having sex with me and I started feeling sick and scared. And there had been loads of times when we had just spent the whole night getting off and kissing and he had always stopped and said 'I had better go because you are really turning



me on and I know you don't want to'.

MH: Why did you feel scared?

Krista: Just because that was the one thing that I really did not want to do. I was totally out of control. And he started shouting at me and he was angry it was like he had flipped and I knew he was very emotionally mixed up and I knew that he would never be able to love just because of how he had been raised and brought up and passed around by so many people.

MH: So what happened?

Krista: He walked off but he came back. I think he knew he would have to stop me being upset so that I didn't go back to everyone and say what a bastard he was which is what I would have done and he knew this and so he started telling me that there was this girl after him and she was blonde and was perfect. I think he just really wanted to hurt me. And he just sort of got on top of me and it was over before I knew it. I was so scared.

Krista became pregnant from this first sexual intercourse and subsequently had an abortion. She described the incident as having such a strong effect on her that she nearly failed all of her GCSE exams that year. Through Ned's boasting, many of the pupils in the school found out that Krista was pregnant and she described the waiting time between learning that she was pregnant and having the abortion as very traumatic as the "whole school knew about it". Krista said that her relationship with her parents deteriorated as they had always trusted her and that now they were much more watchful of her. Krista also said that she felt that her parents were very disappointed in her. Krista also found out that Ned raped his next girlfriend.

### Rose:

Rose, like Krista, was raped by her first boyfriend. However, Rose was raped repeatedly during her relationship with David. She described the context:

Rose: If I just went to him just for a cuddle it would always turn into sex. And I would sort of like say 'no, no I don't want to' and he'd force me and

I'd cry and say 'I just wanted a cuddle, I didn't want sex'.

MH: How do you mean he'd force you?

Rose: He would sometimes pressure me into sex because...he wanted to basically, so...he was stronger than me and...

MH: He actually physically forced you?

Rose: Yeah, and there were quite a few times that he forced me. All of a sudden he was sort of...it's like he went into, like he blacked out or something, he would become very aggressive. Cause I'd be crying and saying 'I don't wanna. Get off' and so if you think it is rape, really, if I say no. And he would sort of think 'shit, what have I done'. I think in a way he mistook my actions, like I'd go to him for a cuddle, and that's all I wanted, but he got the wrong impression. And at the end of the day it's wrong for him to do that and I know it's wrong and still don't forgive him for that.

Although the actual events varied, the commonality of these texts is obvious. All of the girls either felt psychologically powerless and/or physically powerless to stop the sexual aggression. All of the girls analysed in minute detail their own actions in order to defend themselves from their own and other's (potential) accusations of responsibility.

What is also clear about these transcripts is that the girls did not relate these relevant experiences to discussions of personal safety. Girls were very comfortable in talking about the danger imposed by strangers but quite uncomfortable when the discussion turned to boys that they knew. These girls did not make the connection between personal safety and their most likely perpetrators. Indeed, when I queried this lack of connection, several of the girls became upset:

Linda: It happened a year ago and it's like I've blocked it out. I don't want to think about it. Not all boys are like that I think.

Harriet: But the interesting thing is that even if he isn't the type and he wouldn't do that, he could. Since it happened to me I haven't actually thought about it until now when you have sort of got me to think about it again.

In these many discussions, the girls were confronted with two realisations. First, that their personal experiences were not unique. When I told the girls that I had heard many similar stories during my career as a counsellor, most of the girls reacted with surprise. They seemed to believe that they were the only girls that had experienced sexual violence from boys that they knew. Second, that girls are more likely to be assaulted by boys they knew. This made explicit differences in friendship based on sex. When asked how they felt about the statistic that girls are more likely to be abused by someone they know, all of the girls entered into a dialogue to reassure me (and themselves) that their experiences were *not* the norm and that they really could trust their male friends. Even Sandra who had had a boy assault her in her room maintained that it was safe to have boys stay the night at her home.

These realisations also invited the question concerned with self-identity and again, I found my data departing from mainstream theories of child development. Traditional theories of social relations, particularly those emanating from psychoanalytic theory, assume that girls learn that they are female through comparison with the phallus. Girls learn that they are different from boys because they do not have a penis. Girls learn their gender *by comparing themselves to* males. Feminist theories such as those suggested by Nancy Chodorow (1978) invert the theory to posit that it is boys who learn that they are male through comparisons with their primary carer, who is usually female. Because boys spend the first years of their lives highly dependent on a female they must learn to separate themselves from 'being female' in order to establish their gender identity as male.

My data suggests that a gendered identity can only be established through a

process of comparison. It is not that boys *or* girls establish self-identity through comparisons with the other gender. Instead, *both* sexes engage in a process of constant comparison and adjusted identity. Girls talked a great deal about when they first realised that they were not as strong as the boys around them. The discussions about sexual violence highlighted a process of realisation that these girls were victimised precisely because they are female. That they were assaulted by male friends emphasised that friendship did not necessarily negate violence by males. My data corresponds with the theoretical perspectives of Connell (1987, 1995), Moore (1994) and Kappeler (1995) discussed in Chapter 3. Gender is a project, something that is 'done'. Self-identity as feminine or masculine is not learned in a vacuum. Indeed, the social construction of gender means that learning gender can only be done in relation to an 'opposite'. Boys constantly re-learn what is 'boy' as what is not 'girl'. And girls constantly re-learn what is 'girl' as what is not 'boy'.

### ***Explaining Violence:***

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#### **Biological Explanations:**

Naturalisation...is not a naive mistake about what biological science can and cannot explain. At a collective level it is a highly motivated ideological practice which constantly overrides the biological facts. Nature is appealed to for justification more than for explanation. To be able to justify, nature itself must be got in order - simplified, schematised and moralised.

(Connell, 1987:246)

I use the term 'biological explanations' to refer to a set of discourses employed by adolescents to understand their experiences of violence. The main theme of this discourse consisted of understanding boys' aggression towards girls and other boys by way of differentiation between males and females. In this discourse males and females are described as being fundamentally different. And the difference is based on the binary biological opposition of male and female. Boys were seen as 'naturally' different from girls, based on biological difference. Talk about biological differences concentrated on vague notions of hormonal differences, differences in physical strength, differences in desire for sexual intercourse and differences in ability to control behaviour.

Discussions of physical violence and sexual violence most often brought out discourse based on assumptions of biological difference. The link with biology was sometimes made explicit as in the case of Reeta:

I mean if we all came from a society of being all animals or whatever or living in that sort of time. If you look at the animal kingdom then the male species is more dominant.

Reeta, and other adolescents conceived of “the past” as a largely gendered society in which males “dominated” females physically. This image of earlier societies was mainly informed by the media as will be discussed in a following section. Several interesting themes emerge concerning the adolescents’ talk about human ancestors. First, the past is viewed in unitary terms, as though there was a single society or at least as though in all societies males dominated in exactly the same way. Second, it is the domination of *all* males over *all* females. Domination and power are conflated in a simple equation of male control. The most salient feature of this argument, and one which I will return to, is the conception that male domination is both inevitable and unchangeable.

Related to evolutionary arguments were discussions focused on hormonal differences. As Paul said “I think guys are driven by their hormones more than girls are”. Whilst hormones were often brought up in talk about sex, the ‘hormonal argument’ was certainly not restricted to issues about sex and sexuality. Hormones were also associated with male aggression as Emma described:

I was reading New Scientist and they were looking at who was most likely to be a football hooligan. And what they found out was that a lot of football hooligans are small blokes. And they went on this long spiel about the genes that cause you to be short may also be linked with the genes that cause football hooliganism.

Note that Emma talks about genes instead of hormones. In fact, most of the girls and boys seemed to interchange these two biological influences. Hormones were assumed to dictate male’s greater physical strength than female’s. Differences in strength were generally assumed to emerge during early adolescence, as at least two girls in the focus groups recalled a time period in their childhood’s when they were stronger than boys.

So greater physical strength was not limited to the adult population, nor was it talked of in terms of individual variation. The overwhelming majority of talk in the girls' and boys' groups described boys and men as uniformly stronger than girls and women (respectively).

Hormones were even employed at times to explain differences in levels of certain feelings in males and females. For instance, Rose explicitly linked hormonal differences between females and males to the emotions anger and confidence. This girl talked about boys as more angry and confident because they are "more physically powerful" than girls. This physical power emanated from hormones.

As with discussions of evolution, reference to hormones was usually vague. Some girls and boys referred specifically to testosterone as the source of all the differences. However, for most of the adolescents it seemed enough to make vague reference to "biology" or "hormones". The *mechanism* of biology or hormones was never discussed. That is, how a society based on male control emerged from a hormone, how individual boys and girls demonstrate varying levels of aggression was left unanswered. Once the phenomenon of female violence had been raised by group members I linked this discussion back to previous talk of hormones. The most common answer I received to the counter example to the argument that male's biological "destiny" is to be aggressive consisted of either an acknowledgement of not understanding "the ins and outs of how hormones exactly work" or the request that *I give them the answer*.

I referred to the use of biological explanations during discussions of rape and sexual harassment. It was during the discussions focused on sex and sexuality that

assumptions of biological determination were most obvious. As outlined in the previous section on physical violence, nearly all of the adolescents said that boys should not hit girls because of boys' physical strength. Male physical superiority over females was viewed as giving them an 'unfair advantage' and the potential to inflict significantly more damage than the same action committed by a female towards a male. Biology was most often referred to in discussions of sex and sexuality. Almost all of the boys and girls assumed that males have a "stronger sex drive" than females. As Mark explained:

I think guys want it more than girls. Girls don't seem to be driven by their hormones half as much as guys. So guys are doing it for that reason. As far as I know guys aren't doing it as much out of peer pressure. But girls are just doing it out of being asked to do it. They don't have the drive to do it.

The "it" that Mark refers to is having sexual intercourse. Mark's assumptions about male and female sexuality were shared by most of the other adolescents. I talked with Chris about male physical "domination":

MH: In what ways do you think that guys are more physically dominant?

Chris: It is latent but guys have the potential to be so much in control. When it all comes down to it the guy can take control and just do what he wants.

Tom used "chemistry" to explain his attraction to a girl in his school:

Like I liked a girl for six or seven years and I didn't really know her. It was just that the chemistry was so strong. And if a girl can wind a guy up that much in a really concentrated short period of time it is difficult to say what's going to happen. It's sometimes difficult for me to see and I don't think women can see it at all the kind of feelings it's like.

Tom also alludes to girls' intentionality in arousing boys' sexual interest. This ability of



girls to “wind up” guys is discussed later. The assumption that males desire sexual intercourse more than females was also shared by most of the girls I talked with. Krista explained to me:

I was talking to someone yesterday about how men want sex more than females and I said that it's because men have more testosterone than women. Women have some of it but men have more.

The consequences of the assumption of male's greater “sex drive” is very significant and will be discussed in much greater detail in the section ‘Theorising Difference’. However, at this point it is important to note that the two assumptions of male physical superiority and greater sex drive very structured talk of social relations which the girls negotiated. Reena and Proust highlight one of the basic ‘rules’ of social relations between boys and girls:

MH: Do girls talk about boys as ‘all guys want to have sex?’

Proust: Yes. I think the girl is more likely to say no.

Reena: The girls set the limit but they don't always say no. They're not always raped.

MH: How is it that girls are expected to set the limit for how far a couple or a date will go?

Proust: Cause it's always the girl that's going to get hurt. I mean she could get pregnant. They guy will always want sex.

Martha even described male's sex drive as unconscious:

(discussing the second vignette) Well he feels frustrated when she keeps stopping him so he obviously thinks well she's not going to stop me this time. In some situations it is unconsciously done. I mean if it is done more consciously then it will be more forceful and more likely to be rape and then it becomes difficult to prove as to whether it was conscious or unconscious.

This understanding of the male sex drive as something “beyond the control” of males was echoed by many of the boys:

MH: So why do some men rape?

Joal: Too much sexual drive.

Tim: They just can't read the signs. No matter what the woman does. Their need for sex is more important than...

Notice that Tim describes the male sexuality in terms of "need" and not 'want'. The assumption that male sexuality was "instinctual", pre-given and unitary was prevalent throughout the transcripts. These assumptions have a great deal to do with the ways in which girls and boys negotiate interpersonal relationships with the members of the other sex. I will return to this theme in the forthcoming section.

In referring to the second vignette in which the fictional character of Peter rapes his girlfriend, Jeff interpreted the vignette in this way:

Jeff: Lots of controversial stuff in there. The first thing was Peter saying all girls want to have sex. It's probably quite true but controversial to state it. And convincing sort of implies force.

MH: If most or all girls want to have sex then why don't they have sex?

Jeff: Maybe they don't know they do. Guys have the fortune of having their hormones come in to play a lot more. I think very few people can deny the male sexual drive.

What is interesting about this transcript is that Jeff actually refers to females as having a sex drive. Jeff was one of the very few adolescents in my research to directly refer to female sexuality in terms of a sex drive; that is, a need and motivation to engage in sexual intercourse. Notice, though, that Jeff talks about "girls wanting sex" as emanating from something other than hormones, as opposed to boys' sex drive. Girls are not as "fortunate" as boys in that girls' hormones do not dictate their need and desire for sex. This excerpt does not refer to a discourse of biological explanation in the same way as the other transcript texts do. It demonstrates that discourses of

biological determinism were both vague and often confused. Clearly if males are driven by a biological sex drive and girls are not, then girls' wanting sex must come from some other aspect of girls. But Jeff insisted that sex drive is a property of biology. The monolithic nature of discourses of biological determinism produce just this kind of confused, conflicting account. Jeff's comments also occur in the context of discussing a vignette about rape. Jeff's talk about the social relations between boys and girls being one of boys needing to "convince" girls to have sex (that is, to bring out the 'natural' desire for sex that girls have but are somehow not consciously aware of) is quite disturbing. This transcript reflects a common discourse repeated throughout the transcripts about rape and sex. The myriad implications of this discourse are discussed in the next section.

Biological differences also accounted for behaviours, emotions and feelings that were viewed as very largely gendered. When reviewing the questionnaire, I asked the focus groups about questions twenty-four and twenty-five. These questions referred to the acceptability of girls and boys hitting their partners in particular circumstances. Most girls and boys reported that it was not acceptable to hit a girlfriend or boyfriend. However, this statement was mitigated under certain circumstances. For females, it was generally viewed as being acceptable to hit a boyfriend if that boyfriend was being physically or sexually aggressive. In the context of self-defence, a girl hitting her boyfriend was understood to be acceptable. In discussing circumstances in which a male hitting his girlfriend would be acceptable, the responses were surprisingly uniform. Males were reported to be acting reasonably and acceptably if they hit their girlfriends if the female was *hysterical*. Talk of hysteria was by no means restricted to

the boys groups. Girls were as likely to spontaneously provide hysteria as a reason for hitting a girl:

MH: What about questions 24 and 25? Are there any situations you can think of a boy slapping his girlfriend's face?

Gillian: No. Well, unless she was being quite hysterical.

Cathy: In a way I quite approve of that one because he is doing it to help her. He doesn't want her to be hysterical so he wants her to stop. It's not because he's trying to hurt her because he's angry with her. It's because he doesn't want her to be hysterical so I rather approve of it.

In every group, "hysteria" was defined as a female characteristic. My discussion with Jeff was typical. Even when Jeff refers to "people" he is actually referring exclusively to females:

MH: Okay. So can you imagine any situations in which it would be appropriate?

Jeff: I mean I think people can sometimes get quite hysterical and a slap sort of snaps you out of it. I suppose that's a rational way of thinking about it.

MH: Could you imagine yourself getting hysterical and your girlfriend slapping you?

Jeff: I could imagine my girlfriend but I don't think I would.

MH: It's interesting when I ask about this in the other groups and they say the same as you. Do you notice that 'hysteria' is always linked to females?

Jeff: I suppose women getting hysterical is related to women screeching...because women are much more emotional.

A wide variety of emotions and behaviours were attributed almost exclusively to one sex or the other. Girls were talked about as more emotional, irrational, hysterical, possessive and jealous, caring and verbally skilled. Boys were talked about by both boys and girls as stronger, more cerebral, more aggressive, less verbally skilled, less able (or willing) to cry and express emotions associated with caring. The talk varied somewhat depending on the sex of the group. Girls' focus groups tended to talk about

girls as maturing faster than boys and more verbally skilled, whilst boys usually denied that these attributes were exclusively female. However, with few exceptions (discussed in the following two sections), boys and girls were talked about as unitary social groups. Variety within each of these social groups (between women or between men) was de-emphasised in favour of generalisations.

### **Socialisation:**

Although much of the discourse concerned biological explanations of aggression, there was some acknowledgement of socialisation as a predictor of aggression and victimisation. Discussions of socialisation primarily focused on three factors: violence learned in the family of origin, peer pressure and role theory. When I asked members of the focus groups how some girls and boys come to be violent, both boys and girls sometimes answered that they might come from families in which they had witnessed violence. In this sense, boys were understood to copy the behaviours they had witnessed whilst growing up. Girls, in the same way, were assumed to be victims through watching their mothers being victimised by their husbands. The mechanisms by which girls and boys learn to be aggressive or victimised were unclear. Why boys and girls would simply copy their same-sex parents was left unanswered. Indeed, often when I posed this question in group discussions, I was called upon to 'give the answer'. Part of my qualifications as an academic in the area of adolescents was to "know how" socialisation works.

Discussions of peer pressure and role playing often blended in a rather vague

reference to aggression. Some boys talked about the pressure they experienced to conform to what they termed “male stereotypes”. These stereotypes involved appearing strong, capable, and rational. They also involved enjoying physical sports such as football and not being interested in any one girl in particular. Being interested in one girl for an extended period of time implied being dependent on that girl for emotional fulfilment, something boys were not supposed to need. As Tim explained in one group discussion about why some men rape and some men do not rape:

It could be the way you are brought up or the people you are with. If you are with a group of people who say ‘did you score with this girl?’ then you think this must be the top priority and then I’ll be able to tell everyone I did. So if you go out with her the top priority is that at the end of the day I’m in bed with her.

Tim is describing how boys might influence other boys to prioritise sex in relations with girls. Although in other discussions Tim returned to the familiar emphasis on biological explanations of gender differences, here he does allow that peers might influence behaviour. How the boys come to prioritise sex in relationships in the first place usually involved reliance on biological theories. Another group focused on the discussion of “lads”:

Joff: They (lads) don’t have friends that are girls. They might have girlfriends but I don’t think they ever talk to them. And also I mean people get like that because they are so insecure and they don’t talk about anything with their friends and all they talk about with their friends is who they would have as a striker if they were making up the perfect team.

Dave: Because if they say anything about themselves, they are going to be vulnerable.

MH: But why do you think there is that difference?

Adam: It could be family situation. Your background really. And it could be the school you go to.

Joff: And it breeds. Like you get a school with that kind of attitude and it just perpetuates itself.

One of the girl's groups echoed a similarly vague notion of socialisation:

MH: Do you think guys are aggressive because of something in their brains?

Heather: It's something to do with stereotyping too though isn't it? Like a boy being raised to be so tough and a girl being raised to look after the children and I have never in my life seen a man pushing a pram on his own without a woman being next to him.

MH: But were do you think that socialisation comes from?

Karen: From the dawn of ages. From Henry VIII and his wives.

Heather: It's just like they get it from their father.

So there was a sense, then, that boys and girls somehow 'learned' to be such stereotypes as 'lads' and 'mothers'. *How* this occurred was unclear. Some of the boys and girls described the influence of having feminist mothers, who had taught their children to understand females as 'deserving' equal rights. Some girls talked about their brothers' violence in the context of their brothers extending their aggression towards eventual girlfriends and wives. However, all of the talk about socialisation, peer pressure and role modelling remained elusive in terms of just how socialisation effected levels of violence. For instance, the groups were very unsure why girls were not usually socialised to be very violent whilst boys were socialised to be rational, aggressive and emotionally distant.

### **The Media:**

I think girl's magazines are responsible for half the troubles in this world. You get an article on the best things to wear out at night and right after than an article on date rape. And they don't seem to make any connection between the two.

(Adam)

Generally, I found the girls' and boys' talk in the focus groups to be highly informed by the media. A great deal of talk about media focused on magazines, television, songs and artists, and reading. For girls, magazines played a very central role in their learning about clothing, makeup and hair styles, as well as 'typical' teenage issues, according to the magazine problem pages. Boys reported also looking at 'girl's magazines' such as *Just Seventeen* but usually this was reported to be done in order to "have a laugh" rather than to garner any information. I found most of the girls to be very informed about the details of the lives of 'supermodels' and other media personalities. For instance, in three of the girls groups at Chiswick school the girls were all able to tell me the body weights, dress and shoe size, current boyfriend and eating habits of several of the supermodels. A great deal of time was spent in the groups talking about fashion, makeup and advice provided by magazines. I organised the group sessions in order to give each group at least one session in which they would dictate the topics for that session. Whilst the boys invariably wanted to discuss sex, the girls usually opted to discuss magazines and the information learned from them. In earlier sessions when I had introduced the vignettes into the discussion, quite a few of the girls and boys asked if I had copied the stories from the problem pages of magazines. These adolescents reported that they were quite familiar with issues such as date rape through reading magazines. The discussion of magazines, television and radio (particularly song lyrics) raised a number of issues such as eating disorders that are beyond the scope of this thesis. My task in this section is to highlight the talk that focused on aggression and violence.

Girls told me that magazines directed at females were mainly concerned with



providing information about securing a boyfriend. This involved recurrent articles on makeup, mannerisms, appearance, birth control and dieting. These issues were viewed as being central to a girl's likelihood of having a boyfriend. For example, one girls' group provided me with an article that asks readers (primarily teenage girls) to determine "how much do looks mean to you?". Girls filled in a number of questions which were scored. Girls were then categorised as either "shrinking violets", "level-headed" or "vanity rules". Shrinking violets were admonished to "get your act together fast" or else be in danger of "letting yourself go". "Vanity rules" girls were also admonished, but because "just who are you trying to impress with the prima donna act?". Girls in this category were told that boys do not like to date vain girls. For girls who fit into the "level-headed" category, they were congratulated by the article that read:

You have a level-headed approach to get the best that you can. And there is nothing wrong with that. You know how it can pay off.

The "pay-off", not surprisingly, was a boyfriend.

The problem pages of the magazines were filled with stories of girls being pressured to have sex, boys not sure whether they are in love, girls deciding to have sex, boys cheating on their girlfriends and other such themes. The adolescents in the focus groups told me that using drugs or alcohol were often introduced into these stories as a primary reason *why* girls are raped. If the girl or boy was reported to be under the influence of drugs or alcohol, then the girl was seen to be *more* responsible for the rape and the boy was seen to be *less* responsible. Assumptions that males could not control themselves whilst women must set the limits on sexual activity in

relationships dominated the pages of teen magazines.

Magazines, films and songs also reproduced traditional understandings of gender differences. Indeed, films re-enforced and informed the use of biological explanations in the discourse that the adolescents used. For instance, when I raised the question of the acceptability of hitting a partner, this boy's group was typical of the response:

Joff: It sounds like a movie kind of thing.

Dave: Yeah, it is. Detective films.

Adam: Like she's screaming and he slapped her and she stopped.

Joff: Blokes hit women in no other context except when she is hysterical.  
And girl slap blokes when he has been cheating.

Media influence also extended to sexual violence. As Rose observed:

And like in so many movies I have seen she is pushing him away finally he kisses her and she gives in and it's like 'oh, my hero' and it's such a load of crap. That is giving rise to the whole idea of using violence to get what they want is it is such a load of crap. Because then men get it into their heads that it is okay to do that kind of thing.

The adolescents in my research were very adept at talking to me about how other teenagers would be influenced by such depictions, but not themselves. This finding supports the work of Richardson and Corner (1986) who found that individuals "frame" their accounts of media presentations. The adolescents in my research, like the respondents in this study, arrived at interpretations of media accounts through a complex process of "collective construction" with others (pg.488, 507). However, the ways in which the boys and girls described such issues as responsibility for sexual activity often betrayed strong similarities with media messages.

At Chiswick school, the sixth form was visited by a guest speaker who was a

male police officer from the Oxford force. I did not attend the officer's talk, but after his visit my sessions became very dominated by discussions of what the officer had said. According to all of the groups at Chiswick, the police officer had painted a very grim picture for the boys with regard to the legal state of date rape, sexual assault and sexual harassment. According to both the boys and the girls, the police officer told the group that if a boy rested his hand on the shoulder of a girl, this was considered by law to constitute sexual assault. The police officer also stated that all girls who reported date rape were now believed and that the girl did not have to provide any corroborating evidence such as bruises, torn clothing or semen samples.

This news caused a great deal of distress in the boys' and girls' groups, as well as a strained and tense sixth form common room. Amongst the boys' talk were statements that this was unfair and "it's because of all those feminists". At no point did any of the boys or girls actually question the validity of what the police officer had told them. Foucault's concept of the "legitimacy of knowledge" (1974) was aptly demonstrated by this event. When I attempted to describe the formal and informal legal system with greater accuracy, I was met with initial scepticism. Harriet told me that "he seemed to be unbiased and fair". As discussed in Chapter 3, the central point of Foucault's work is that power is located within institutions of legitimacy. Institutions such as schools, medicine and the police become purveyors of 'truth'; knowledge which comes to be seen as legitimate. The police officer and the movies are examples of such legitimate knowledge which informed the adolescents about gender and power relations.

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*Theorising Difference and Similarity:*

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In this section I will attempt to decipher the underlying themes which connect each of the sections above. My analysis of violence rests on the assumption that patterns in gender relations are social. Whilst believing that differences in gendered social relations are somehow 'natural' might be seductive, it is not useful. In this section I will first examine the literature on social differences between males and females. I will then examine the discourse that the adolescents use as they emphasise biological differences or similarities between the sexes.

Western culture dictates that differences between women and men are wholly due to biological differences. Biological explanations are used to describe differences in aggression, a wide variety of abilities, sexuality, sex and family life. Books such as The Selfish Gene (1989) popularise the message that men and women are ultimately different and that the difference is self-evident. In a brilliant expose of this genre of books, Connell (1987) (and others such as Williams, 1995) shows how a faulty logic is used to 'prove' that all is biological. Social patterns such as females caring for their offspring and males abandoning the female and the offspring are 'explained' by evolution. However, in cases where evolution has resulted in practices that do not conform to the author's view of how evolution should operate, these practices are termed "biologically unhealthy" or as "evolutionary aberrations". For Connell, these books "reflect what is familiar back as science, and justify what many readers wish to believe"(pg.69).

One of the fallacies on which evolutionary theory, as applied to social

phenomena, rests is that society is viewed as a system of open competition. Hormonal differences between males and females are used to suggest that males have a competitive advantage over females, so that in 'free competition' males will out-succeed females. Of course, an unbiased reading of history will demonstrate that there has never been a system of equal competition between females and males, or males and males for that matter. Another fallacy is that our culture's current social relations are the result of the human animal's pre-destination to reproduce. A wide variety of social arrangements would produce sufficient heterosexual intercourse to propagate the human species and provide enough child care so that children could survive. That advocates of biological determinism arrive at the nuclear family, bigamy or polygamy (any of which arrangements involves the female caring for young children and the male having at least one sexual partner) says more about the philosophy of the authors of this type of theory than it does about human social relations. Theories of biological determinism become political as they reproduce the needs of the public to have reflected back to them through a discourse of science their familiar social arrangements. Gayle Rubin summarises this 'making of difference':

Men and women are, of course, different. But they are not as different as day and night, earth and sky, yin and yang, life and death. In fact, from the standpoint of nature, men and women are closer to each other than either is to anything else - for instance, mountains, kangaroos, or coconut palms. Far from being an expression of natural differences, exclusive gender identity is the suppression of natural similarities.

(1975:157)

Culture and social relations, in fact, amplify small differences in females and males, often "exaggerating and distorting" them. Finally, how females and males come to

identify themselves as girls, boys, women or men is much more complex than possessing a particular combination of X and Y chromosomes, possessing a penis or clitoris. As outlined in Chapter 3, there are actually many more than two categories of gender recognised in our culture. Lesbians, fathers, girls, old women make up only a small part of this list. And there are arguably as many differences *within* any one category as there are *between* categories. Deciphering those differences becomes the task of overcoming the bias of society towards hegemonic gender.

Biological differences between females and males transform into differentially prescribed personality traits. So males are commonly identified as aggressive, instrumental, rational, strong. Females are associated with weakness, caring, nurturing, emotion and lack of reasoning abilities. Whilst this unitary model of human traits is associated with traditional theorists such as Freud and Talcott Parsons, unfortunately many feminist scholars have relied on such a model. Andrea Dworkin (1984), for instance, talks of a male desire for domination as though this trait 'belonged' undifferentiatingly to males. Psychological tests have been widely criticised for their assumption that certain traits are more characteristic of one sex than the other. Beyond the inherent problems with statistical testing in which results that do not fit the theory can be easily discarded, there is the fundamental problem of how psychologists 'know' that the scales measure femininity and masculinity. Why scales posit males and females on opposite ends of the spectrum instead of, say, separate scales on which any individual could score highly on both scales, has more to do with the ideological assumptions underpinning the scales than it has to do with what is feminine and what is masculine.

An alternative paradigm is offered in the face of biological determinism. It is a paradigm based on multiple femininities and masculinities. Work by Mac An Ghaill (1994) and Willis (1977) examined in Chapter 3 lay the foundations for discussion of an alternative to conceptions of femininity and masculinity as unitary. Femininities and masculinities are lived experiences, transforming in particular contexts and never static. It is to the various transformations of femininities and masculinities that I now turn.

In Chapter 3, I outlined my dissatisfaction with (what I call) 'traditional' interpretations of gender relations, such as those of Lees (1986, 1993), Gilligan (1982), Spender (1980) and Dobash and Dobash (1979). My search for a non-reductionist explanation led me to writings of Gramsci (in Hall, 1991), Foucault (1980), Connell (1987, 1995) and Moore (1994). My analysis began with a conception of power as non-monolithic and gender as learned.

Gramsci's (in Hall, 1991) concept of 'hegemony' provided a starting point. In a series of notebooks which Gramsci kept whilst in prison, he examined the relationship between the ruling and subordinate classes of capitalist society. Gramsci borrowed the term 'hegemony' from the original Greek to describe the relationship between classes and other social forces (in Hall, 1991:23). This relationship was based less on force than consent. Like Marx's relations of production, Gramsci was concerned to create a concept that would assist the working class in understanding the ways in which the bourgeois creates and maintains a system of alliances through the practice of politics. And similar to Marx, Gramsci proposed that power would only be achieved by the working class through the transformation of popular consciousness. Gramsci suggested that subordinate social groups could organise opposing "counter-hegemonic"

strategies (pg.27).

The work of Foucault closely resembles two important notions of hegemony. First, the concept of power is seen less as entity controlled by the state (a Marxist axiom) and more as a relation diffused throughout society. As Smart remarks:

Hegemony contributes to or constitutes a form of social cohesion not through force or coercion, nor necessarily through consent, but most effectively by way of practices, techniques, and methods which infiltrate minds and bodies, cultural practices which cultivate behaviours and beliefs, tastes, desires, and needs as seemingly naturally occurring qualities and properties embodied in the psychic and physical reality (or 'truth') of the human subject.  
(Smart, 1994:210)

Second, Foucault and Gramsci share a notion of opposition or resistance to dominant social relations. In his History of Sexuality (1980), Foucault examined counter-cultured sexual practices such as homosexuality as a form of counter-hegemony.

Foucault was also concerned with the myriad forms which hegemony assumes in a society (society here meaning the set of practices which provide social cohesion). Foucault (1982:224) outlines three sites of what Gramsci termed 'hegemony': historical; analytical; and political. The historical developments of industrial capitalism and complex technologies have shifted the primacy of law and force to the emergence of discipline. Discipline has cultivated more submissive individuals who negotiate social relations based on the governmentalisation of power relations. That is, relations have increasingly come under state control. Analytically, Foucault's explanations effectively do away with ideology replacing it with a focus on the process of relations based on 'truth' and 'power'. Finally, Foucault focuses on the intersection of "objectifying and subjectifying practices" (pg.213) such as punishment, confinement



and sexuality. Through 'regimes of truth' particular actions are rationalised. The objective of sociological investigation must necessarily shift. The objective becomes less one of providing a theory of adolescent dating violence and more one of explaining how boys and girls act in certain conditions (such as violence).

This concept of hegemony provides a useful inroad to the examination of the project of gender. My data strongly suggested that boys and girls negotiate cultural reproductions of hegemony. I was now concerned to situate broad discussions of hegemony in a more specific discussion of gender. Connell (1987) outlines two forms of femininity and masculinity that are structured around male dominance over women: "hegemonic masculinity" and "emphasized femininity" (pg.183). Connell defines hegemonic masculinity as a set of social relations amongst men that is constructed with various subordinated masculinities and the subordination of all women. It consists of a hierarchy achieved through social relations that transcend "brute" power to the very organisation of private life and cultural relations.

There are important features of hegemonic masculinity that are salient for contextualising my research within this theory. First, hegemonic masculinity rests on the assumption of heterosexuality. The dominant form of masculinity is fundamentally connected to the institution of marriage, women as carers of offspring and their male partners. Homosexual masculinities must necessarily come at the bottom of masculinity hierarchies. Hegemonic masculinity is not a fixed character type. Where gender, class, race, ethnicity, age etc. intersect, different masculinities will occupy the hegemonic position. In white, middle-class Britain the actor Hugh Grant might personify a certain hegemonic masculinity. For black, working-class American men, O.J. Simpson might

represent hegemonic masculinity. Second, the number of men that actually practice hegemonic masculinity may be very small (it is actually quite difficult for men to live as Arnold Schwarzenegger). Some men instead practice what Connell refers to as 'complicit masculinity' which involves "masculinities constructed in ways that realise the patriarchal dividend, without the tensions or risks of being the frontline troops of patriarchy" (pg.79). These men comply with hegemonic masculinity as they benefit from the subordination of females. Other masculinities are ones defined by Connell as 'marginal'. They are marginal in the sense that they protest and conflict with the various hegemonic and complicit masculinities. Gay masculinity would be an obvious example of a masculinity of the margin.

A third feature of the theory of multiple masculinities and femininities is that any individual female will not necessarily object to hegemonic masculinity. Indeed, any number of females might find this form of masculinity more "familiar and manageable". Emphasised femininity is defined "around compliance with this subordination and is oriented to accommodating the interests and desires of men" (pg.183). Other femininities are defined by their strategies of resistance, co-operation and/or situational compliance.

So the theory is that social relations are structured around heterosexuality; around a masculinity and femininity that reproduce males as dominant over females. There are, of course, a multitude of other genders, including homosexuality, lesbianism, child-free married women and male homemakers. And this multitude of genders highlights the assumptions on which this 'new sociology of gender' is based. First, gender is not a priori to social interaction. Gender is constructed and re-

constructed in interaction (Connell, 1995) It also means that gender can only be constructed in relation to other genders: “masculinity does not exist except in contrast with femininity”(pg.68). Second, there is diversity *within* masculinities and *within* femininities. One project of the sociology of gender is to investigate these relations between the different kinds of masculinities and femininities. Third, hegemony is not monolithic. This means that individuals are not totally controlled within a system of cultured gender. Nor is the process of gendering one-way. It is not just that the mechanisms of culture somehow ‘pass down’ prescriptions of gender. Individuals, like the boys in Willis’s (1977) study, also ‘pass up’ oppositional masculinities and femininities. Fourth, my concern that this new discussion of gender will lead to yet more monolithic talk of discrete categories of gender (that some girls will subscribe *only* to a *category* that is emphasised femininity) means an emphasis on the *process of gendering*. Gender is an experience and, as such, is in constant flux. My focus throughout the thesis on discourse emphasises the point that gender must be identified in specific contexts.

My research concerning violence is centrally concerned with the ways in which adolescent girls and boys negotiate these various masculinities and femininities through discourse. In the course of discursive practice, boys and girls can ‘take on’ different gendered identities. Previous sections have already examined the ways in which girls and boys explain differences in male and female action. Much of that discourse employs hegemonic masculinity and emphasised femininity. Through discourse concerned with flirting, talk about sex and feminism I will examine how the girls and boys in my research negotiated conflicting experiences of femininities and

masculinities. At this point my emphasis is on the ways in which the talk illuminated that gender necessarily requires negotiation.

### **Conflicting Experiences of Gender - Resistance, Co-operation and Compliance:**

The girls and boys in my research study seemed to enjoy discussions of flirting. Flirting was viewed by girls as a harmless way of being friendly with a boy. The positive aspect of flirting is that it provides physical intimacy with a member of the opposite sex without necessarily signalling interest in developing a relationship. The meaning of flirting was fluid, relying on often subtle interpretation of messages:

Gillian: There's all sorts of flirting. I think everybody is a flirt to a degree because I have been told that I'm a flirt but then I've been told I'm a 'matey flirt' and that means that I hug my friends a lot, and I laugh at my friends and stuff. But then I've got another friend that's classified as a 'seductive flirt' you see and there is sort of like a difference between the two.

Flirting is a set of actions that also conforms to a number of rules:

MH: Are there rules about flirting?

Cathy: Don't flirt with people who you know are attracted to you and you don't fancy. That's dodgy because that's unfair.

Gillian: That's so unfair on them.

Cathy: It's so confusing. I wouldn't flirt with someone if they were drunk unless I was drunk as well.

Cathy: Flirting is just part of the relationship. It's just a sort of flirtatious friendship. If you are enjoying it and he is and it is clear that you are just having a sort of laugh that's good, that's fine.

All of the girls that I spoke with reported that they defined themselves as flirts or were defined as flirts by friends. Being defined as a flirt did not seem to be a negative experience for either girls or boys.

However, flirting for girls represents more than simply a way to be physically close to boys. I argue that flirting is a strategy by which girls negotiate an emphasised femininity in which girls are not supposed to either initiate or desire sexual intercourse:

Gillian: I do think there are times when girls give off mixed signals.

MH: Why do girls do that?

Cathy: Because girls are always supposed to be innocent and if they're not, they're tarts. Whereas for a bloke it's not like that. More experience is like macho. They are just 'mature' but for a girl, she is a 'flirt'. So she sort of pretends that she wasn't really interested when she was flirting so that she can say 'well, it wasn't my idea'.

Gillian: And you allow some signals to escape, but not enough for them to think 'oh they fancy me and then you find out that you just completely misread their signals and it was just friendly flirting.

The result can be mixed signals. Boys experience that girls do not always act consistently; their actions vary depending on the context.

Connell (1987) remarks that girls are not as confined by cultural prescriptions of femininity as boys are by hegemonic masculinity, because hegemonic masculinity must deny other forms of masculinity (pg.187). I found evidence to support this idea in the girls' use of a feminist discourse. I certainly found that some girls, such as Emma describes in an earlier passage (see pg.174 of this chapter), at times *complied* with hegemonic masculinity. In this passage, Emma describes how she would communicate with a boy about his violence in such a way as to both dissuade him from further violence and at the same time not invite the label 'feminist'.

Some of the girls at Chiswick School employed a feminist discourse, particularly in the context of interpreting issues such as male violence, family obligations and future plans. I discuss the associations I found between girls' use of feminist discourses and social class in Chapter 8. In talking about male violence, girls

who had a feminist discourse available to them were much more likely to talk about male responsibility, concepts of power and control and talk about females as victims as opposed to accomplices; that is, to *resist* hegemonic masculinity:

Elicia: I don't think rape is that connected with sex. It's an act of violence against women or one woman in particular because it's a way of men having ultimate power over women...I think women's sexual urges are played down at an early age because men from an early age are expected to have sexual urges...In society you get an awful lot of hatred of women and I think men who rape must hate women. Because by raping a woman you are degrading her intentionally. That is the purpose. You are showing her that you are very powerful over her and you can cause her pain and suffering.

Whether having a feminist discourse available, and using that discourse in particular contexts, actually had any effect on the girl's behaviour is beyond the explanatory power of the data. It was clear that boys were often very uncomfortable with girls' use of feminist discourse

Joff: Feminism is just like sexism the other way around. Like when you say sexism people go 'it's men slagging off women' but it goes the other way around too and it does. There are lots of feminists just turning it the other way around.

Mike: It's as bad as chauvinism.

I did find some association between boys' expression of discomfort with feminist discourse and their understanding of girls' reality:

Mike: Like the girl after two or three months (after being raped) and through some sort of clinical re-hab will at least feel a little bit better. Well if like she had been brought up, like it's bad but it's not something to get so worked up about. I mean I don't know if it's possible but like if women could see it as being something that just happened then after the rape then they won't have actually lost so much.

Mike is saying much more about females than simply a rejection of feminism. In many

other discussions it was clear that Mike sometimes practised hegemonic masculinity and his statements about the effects of rape on women reflects this practice. For instance, Mike spent a great deal of his leisure time engaged in weight-lifting. He also expended a great deal of time in attempting to gain as much sexual experience as possible. He would describe these encounters with girls in some detail to me and it was clear that one of his primary goals in these situations was to demonstrate a traditionally male sexual prowess (ie. longevity of sexual intercourse, frequency of intercourse, size of penis and knowledge of many sexual positions) to these various girls. Mike also talked about the 'kinds' of girls he was interested in; namely, traditionally feminine (ie. physically attractive, fragile, accommodating, loyal).

I also found that some girls employed discourses of emphasised femininity. Much of the girls' discussions of female responsibility in preventing violence against women, leading boys on, and choice of clothing and makeup strongly suggested that girls struggle to negotiate between discourses that appear to more validly support their experiences as girls (such as feminism) and discourses that fit more easily into the culture's dominant discourses. In the following excerpt, Elicia and Reeta employ discourses which conflict with each other in order to describe their understanding of stranger rape:

Reeta: I don't think it's got anything to do with power.

Elicia: I do.

Reeta: I don't think it's got anything to do with men.

Elicia: No, not all men. But I think a few men.

Reeta: I don't think this whole feminist view of power. I reckon it all comes from their background. But I don't think that because they are male therefore they have to be powerful.

Elicia: But I'm not saying that. I think it's partly because they are male.

Reeta: We rape people emotionally, they rape us physically.

Elicia: No. No way. Men rape emotionally as well as physically.

Reeta: Then we rape emotionally more.

Elicia: I think men tend to be more aggressive because they think society tells them to. Yeah, it's part of their background but that background tells them that they are superior.

Reeta: Yeah, but I reckon we rape emotionally. A lot.

MH: How do we rape emotionally?

Reeta: Well just think of all the hassles we put against them. All the hassles. Men do it as well. Like guilt and stuff. And you play that over people.

MH: But why do you use the word 'rape'?

Reeta: Because I think you are depriving someone of their right to disagree with you or you are depriving them of something.

Elicia: But rape is more than that. Rape is a physical act of aggression...

Reeta: Yes, of course it is. But women can't physically rape someone can they.

In many ways Reeta exemplified the practice of emphasised femininity. In several discussions, Reeta explained to me that she expected boys to "make the first move" in initiating dating relations, to initiate all levels of sexual relations and to "protect" her. In fact, Reeta expressed deep resentment towards feminism as she said it proposed that girls should be responsible for these things. At the time of our series of discussions about feminism, Reeta was very attracted to a boy who, as yet, had not asked her out. In one session she exclaimed in frustration "well if men are supposed to be so bloody in control then why doesn't he make a move on me". Reeta was expressing an expectation that boys practice a hegemonic masculinity in which one dividend would be that Reeta would not have to take (much) part in the initiation of relationships. However, one of the disadvantages of an emphasised femininity discourse, such as the one employed (above) by Reeta, is that explaining personal experiences of victimisation by males becomes more problematic. In fact, it necessarily entails that the girl must ultimately blame herself for her own victimisation. On the other hand, employing a feminist discourse in the contexts of adolescent heterosexual relationships



and schools also presents the problem of the unpopularity of feminist views within sites of social relations which determine heterosexual relations to conform to the discourses and practices of hegemonic masculinity and emphasised femininity.

I discovered some tension in the negotiation of discourse by boys as well. Some of the boys in the groups talked about the pressure to operate within social relations structured by hegemonic masculinity. The tension for these boys, in their experience of their everyday lives was powerful:

- Tim: When people say that men aren't as open as women, believe me they would be if they had the chance.
- MH: Do you think that is one of the reasons that men are attracted to hanging out with women just as friends, because they do get the opportunity...
- David: I was just going to say that. It is much better if you have got half of your mates as guys and got a few girl friends who are just good friends. I feel I could talk to a girl more easily. When you talk to guys it all has to be when you are drunk.
- Tim: Yeah.
- David: Like you are falling down drunk with your mate and they say they love you and 'don't leave me'.
- MH: Do you think that women look at this and feel sort of superior?
- Tim: But that's not our fault.
- David: Men have images to live up to.

In another group I questioned the boys about a 'stereotype' that they had identified:

- MH: So why don't guys want to have long-term relationships?
- Joal: I think they do. I think it's what people are told they are allowed to think.
- MH: So you are saying that for a guy to say 'oh I think I am in love with this person and I hope we last forever' and that kind of thing is not cool?
- Joal: Yes.
- Adam: I wouldn't say it. I would say it to some people, but I wouldn't say it to everyone. I mean it is so difficult. You have to watch out when you live in a society where there are so many different people where if you want to keep your self-respect, you either keep it to yourself or you only tell it to people who are not going to misunderstand it. I mean I have been

crucified for saying what I think to everyone and then I just realised that you don't say that and I don't have a problem with that. I'll switch between groups of people. I mean I am not acting. I will talk about some aspects of myself and you talk about other things. You have to. It's the only way you survive. And if you don't want to get hassle and it's not worth it. You don't walk into a bunch of really hard guys and say 'oh I am really in love'.

I interpreted this as Adam describing the various discourses he employs in order to negotiate the demands of certain groups in school on his public display of masculinity. This excerpt from the transcripts provides an excellent example of an individual negotiating between a variety of discourses, depending on the context in which he is in. The choice of discourses is not infinite and the struggle to manage these discourses is obvious. It is also clear that maintaining a discourse of hegemonic masculinity (signified by the "really hard guys" referred to) is not rewarding for this individual boy.

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***Conclusions:***

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In this chapter I have examined the girls' and boys' reporting of male violence. My analysis has included an attempt to make sense of the ways in which girls and boys understand this violence. One of the major tasks for adolescents is to choose between a variety of discourses in particular contexts. Adolescents are involved in a constant process of negotiating their own lived realities with the various interpretations that culture offers to them. When we talk about multiple femininities and masculinities what is important is not just describing these concepts. We must acknowledge that we are saying that within gender there is a multitude of variation. Boys can be very violent and very passive. So can girls. Particularly for the case of experiences of gender, those interpretations offered by hegemonic masculinity and emphasised femininity provide powerful paradigms.

My research findings suggest that some girls and boys rely on biological explanations of male violence and female victimisation which refer to discourses of hegemonic masculinity and emphasised femininity. Other discourses, such as those of feminism, rely on different assumptions about gendered social relations. There is a certain amount of tension displayed in the transcripts as girls and boys attempt to employ discourses which will accommodate both their lived experiences of self *and* the social relations in which they operate. However, it is very evident from my data that in a battle between biological determinism and other explanations such as socialisation theory and feminism, discourses of biology are clearly winning. I also found a difference in the ways in which girls and boys talked about gender. As Connell points

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out, girls do not need to subscribe to emphasised femininity or hegemonic masculinity to the extent that boys do, so in this sense girls have a wider variety of discourses available to them.

## CHAPTER 8: FEMALE VIOLENCE

### *Introduction:*

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This chapter examines the results of my analysis of the data on female violence. The majority of the data gathered in my research concerns male violence. However, in the course of my research, I was confronted by female and male adolescent accounts of instances of female aggression and violence. I approached this topic with little prior knowledge and have engaged in a process of exploration of the literature and the first steps in developing theory. I am specifically interested in adolescent female violence directed toward male and female adolescents with whom they are not biologically related. Violence directed towards parents and siblings involve complex issues related to the nature of those relationships. The female violence I wish to understand is that violence which is not self-defence and not resistance to male violence.

There is a conspicuous lack of research and theorising on non-retaliatory, non-defensive female violence. I think this is the case for a number of reasons. The main reason concerns the development of research and theorising of male violence. Feminist scholars, whether front-line workers or academics, have expended an inordinate amount of energy in highlighting the largely gendered nature of violence; that is, violence against females. We now know that violence against females comes in all shapes: child abuse, battered wives, date and stranger rape and sexual harassment. The barest acknowledgement by the state in terms of survivor provision such as anti-harassment and battered wives legislation, shelters and police protection have been a very long time in coming. And there remains much to do. With these essential goals

still to be realised, the bulk of feminist work in this area is understandably well occupied.

The second reason for the lack of theorising on female violence stems from the observation that everyday behaviour, some of which is violent, is not usually subjected to serious theorising. “Everyday” violence does not fall within the criminal or deviant “umbrella” (Kappeler, 1995:7). Murder, serious physical assault and sometimes sexual assault are more likely to enter the public domain through the police and the courts. However, a slap, shove or punch from a partner is much less likely to receive such attention. Indeed, I contend in this paper that these forms of violence occur with such frequency that they form the fabric of “everyday” violence which remains largely invisible.

The third main reason I think female violence has not received adequate theorisation amongst feminists concerns a political agenda of the feminist movement. The unending, fierce struggle that women have had to engage in in order to place violence against females in the public forum has implications for the study of violence in general. There has been (and continues to be in many areas) an extreme reluctance to acknowledge and take seriously the reality of violence against women. Many attempts have been made by researchers, academics and the media to represent violence as a problem for only a very small minority of women. Slightly more subtle is the continued assertion that violence in relationships is mutual; that there are violent couples, not violent men. It is understandable if feminists engaged in this struggle are reluctant to focus on female violence. There is a strong potential for the media to use data on female violence to divert attention away from male violence. Previous experience has amply demonstrated the need for feminists to approach the public arena with their findings cautiously. Although I recognise and support this caution, I contend that it is in our best interests to address the topic of female violence, as it is best examined within a feminist framework.

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***Theoretical Explanations of Female Violence:***

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Theoretical explanations of violence are broadly evolutionary, psychological or sociological. Evolutionary theories simply conceptualise males and females in terms of polarities. Male aggression is discussed in terms of competition for females and territory. Female aggression, on the other hand, seems to be mentioned only in relation to the protection of offspring, sometimes defence against male violence, and competition with other females for males (Dawkins, 1989; Morris, 1967). Clearly evolutionary theories are inadequate in their explanation of female violence. Female adolescent violence within relationships cannot be explained in this way.

Research in psychology generally supports the finding that males are more aggressive than females, using a wide variety of settings and wide range of behavioural indexes. However, there is also an acknowledgement that males and females are 'reinforced' for different forms of aggression. So girls may express hostility in subtle ways (often described as 'catty'), whilst boys are more likely to be reinforced for physically aggressive acts. Just as important is the finding that girls are more actively discouraged from aggressive acts whether through direct punishment, withdrawal of affection, being ignored, or simple training which says "girls don't do that". What is important about these findings is that males and females do not actually differ in terms of "real" aggression: what differentiates the sexes is the behavioural forms that aggression takes (Eron in Crowell, Evans and O'Donnell, 1987; Frude, 1991).

Discussion of female aggression within psychoanalytic theory begins with basic assumptions about aggression. Aggressiveness is seen as developed early in the child, unconscious and forming part of the individual's fundamental character. Modern psychoanalytic theory no longer describes aggression in terms of instinct. Female aggression is paradoxically described in terms of masochism, referring to the female's derivation of pleasure from pain. Since females remain biologically determined to give

birth to children, pain is viewed as an integral part of the female experience; primarily in intercourse and childbirth. In order that they continue to “service the species”, females are theorised to masochistically receive pleasure from these sources of pain. This obviously seems to say more about females as victims than perpetrators of violence.

Female aggression is invariably associated with motherhood and the relationship of the mother to her child. That is, female aggression towards persons of the same age group, such as a wife towards her husband or a girl towards her boyfriend, is rarely discussed. Because of the absolute dependency of the child on her/his mother, the mother is seen as all-powerful. Sometimes, the oppression that a mother has experienced through a patriarchal societal and family structure is transformed into aggressive fantasies and actions. Adreinne Rich understands child abuse by a mother in these terms. In her book Of Woman Born (1986) Rich describes several cases of mothers who violently abused and murdered their children. She contextualises this violence within a patriarchal society. These women are seen as becoming mothers through rape, ignorance, poverty, no access to safe, affordable and reliable birth control and/or failed abortion. “Patriarchal violence” occurs through the mother (pg.280).

Chodorow, in her book Feminism and Psychoanalytic Theory (1989) discusses the whole problem of psychoanalytic theory’s explanation of female violence. Although Chodorow examines the problem as it applies to child abuse committed by mothers, her comments are valuable. She describes a “moral paralysis” with which psychoanalysts discuss maternal violence. Whereas male violence has been both described and opposed, female violence remains enigmatically silenced. Female violence emanates from “patriarchy”; seen as both the cause and motivation of violence. Chodorow believes that this has happened because of feminist cultural assumptions about mothers: that early infancy is idealised and development is an



exclusively painful process; and that children (daughters) are the victims of pressure from the mother and society.

Sociological theories also fail to address the phenomenon of female violence. Systems theory researchers derives nearly equal estimates of male and female violence and concludes that violence within intimate relationships is mutual and for the most part consensual. The cornerstone of systems theory is the understanding of all social relationships as 'systems'. Relationships within a family are viewed as interactions between system units. These interactions depend on all other system interactions as well as influence interactions. Wife assault is understood in this framework and 'explanations' of violence usually consist of the wife arguing with her husband who becomes increasingly irritated. The wife continues to argue, her husband becomes increasingly angry and finally hits his wife. The husband, in systems theory, becomes angry *because of his wife's arguing*. The responsibility for the husband's violence is shared by the husband and his wife. Coping strategies using systems theory most often involve significant changes in female behaviours which are supposed to break the circle of mutual influence. Problems with systems theory are obvious to feminists. The responsibility for the violence is removed from the male. Discussion of the gendered imbalance of power both within the relationship and in the wider societal system are absent. When females do change their behaviour in an attempt to stop their partners from assaulting them, the battering continues because it is not contingent on her behaviour. Violence in relationships is about the exercise of power and control and continues regardless of the female's behaviour. Systems theory also fails to ask the reason for the fact that most violence is perpetrated by males.

Feminist theory seems reluctant to embrace findings of female violence. Indeed, that feminist scholars continue to theorise intimate and non-intimate violence with a discourse of male aggressiveness and power and female submissiveness and lack of power is simply inadequate. Sue Lees records important writings on female adolescent

experience and reality. Lees describes and analyses female understanding, and experience of, sexuality and relationships with boys in the context of a patriarchal society. In Sugar and Spice (1993) Lees asserts that “male violence is condoned whilst female anger is outlawed” (pg.227). She goes on to say that girls are sometimes bullies as well and “sometimes fight each other” but that this form of female violence is rare. Female violence, female volition is subsumed again under the discourse of male violence, and is not discussed by Lees in its own right. Henrietta Moore (1994) cautions that categories of woman and man are “broad outlines” of a discourse which do not account for variations in gender relations that take place at an immediate, day-to-day level. It is at this point that I begin my discussion of female violence as a subject in its own right. It is female violence that is not retaliatory, not self-defence and not resistance that I wish to explore.

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***Violence as Action:***

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My analysis of female violence begins with Kappeler's discussion of action as opposed to phenomena. Kappeler asserts that the feminist analysis of power and the discourse applied to women's oppression and men's dominance is applied both wholly and individually. That is, individual men and women, and their behaviours towards each other, are defined *by their gender* (Kappeler, 1995). So women are, by definition, victims. Men are perpetrators. We look no further than this because gender identity identifies the actors' relationship. Kappeler argues that through a process of "discursive reconstruction" we accommodate instances of female desire for power, control and their behaviours of manipulation into a paradigm of female victimisation and selflessness (pg.115). So we do not talk about individual behaviours and talk instead about relationships. Girls and women are now free to talk about what they desire and what they do "for the sake of the relationship"; not because they desire control or power over the other person:

Thus I can want to have a relationship, whereas wanting to have a person would be suspiciously close to wanting to own and rule that person. I can make the relationship my need, whereas needing another person might make it clear that this means using that person for my need. Not only does this look unselfish, but in being 'willing to take more responsibility than the partner for initiating the relationship and keeping it going' we think moreover that we are taking the sacrificial part, carrying the greater share of the 'work'(pg.115-116).

The basic problem is that we talk about violence almost exclusively in terms of social relations. Individual compunction, desire, tenacity does not exist. And this is one of the paradoxes of feminist scholarship on violence. The explanation we often offer for female violence is that it is in response to male violence. It is self-defence, either immediate or projected. An often cited example of this is battered women killing their husbands. There are well documented cases of women who have been severely beaten, sexually violated and psychologically abused sometimes resisting further battering and

defending themselves by either maiming or killing their partners. Female violence, in these instances, is situated as a last-resort defence against inhuman levels of victimisation. As Anne Campbell (1993) notes, “wife beating has become so intimately bound up with feminist ideology that there is a real reluctance to focus on the other side of the coin - physical aggression by wives” (pg.179). We have inadvertently relegated ourselves to responders of males. They are violent and we resist. Sometimes that resistance is in the form of violent behaviour, but it is always after male action. We do not allow a discourse of female action, female volition. As Kappeler (1995) bluntly states “where the woman’s behaviour towards others is the issue, we speak of others’ behaviour towards the woman” (pg.78).

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***Social Representations:***

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What The Will To Violence does not do, in all of the discussion of other works' failure to discuss female violence, is really discuss female violence. My search for theorisation of female violence as non-defence led to an examination of Anne Campbell's Out of Control. Campbell's previous work considers the phenomenon of female gangs. Female gang members, Campbell found, were both reactive to a "male world" and active in their own right. In this, her latest book, Campbell attempts to theorise female aggression. She spoke with single-sex groups of adult men and women about anger, aggression and violence. Campbell analysed the ways in which the male groups and female groups described experiences and feelings of anger and violence. Members of the male group described participating in violent incidents in terms of the behaviours, rather than emotions, invoked by the experiences. These men most often described instances when they had been aggressively challenged by other males. For instance, one man described physically fighting with another man who was urinating in front of a group of girls. This man described the physical fight in terms of "not backing down", that is, that it challenged his conception of his masculinity (pg.59). Most of the men in the group described violent incidents not so much in terms of needing to assert masculinity, but rather in terms of avoiding being called a coward. But in all cases there was a central theme of hierarchy. Men describe social relations as hierarchically structured and violence as a response to any sort of challenge to this hierarchy. Violence, for these males, is about power and control. The purpose of violence and aggression is to gain (or maintain) power over another person. Campbell theorises that male violence is *instrumental*; it serves the function of establishing power.

Female aggression and violence, on the other hand, is described quite differently by women. Whilst boys are socialised to express aggression in certain contexts in order to achieve control, girls learn both that they should not show

aggression or violence and that if they do, it will not be noticed. In the group of women that Campbell talked to, aggression and violence were most often described in terms of the emotions of anger and frustration. These women described situations in which they felt very angry and *lost control* of themselves and acted violently. Acting aggressively or violently was described as the last resort for these women. Violence was the *expression* of this loss of control, this last straw. For Campbell, then, women do get angry and do act aggressively and sometimes violently. But the reasons that men and women show aggression and violence are quite different. Men's violence is instrumental; it achieves power over another person or situation. Women's violence is expressive; it is an overt demonstration to another person of feeling very out of control. When women are violent it is a cry for help, not the expression of a desire for power over someone else.

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***Women and Violence:***

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There is a body of literature that has directly addressed the subject of female violence. It is a growing body of research concerned with female violence in lesbian relationships. Bringing violence in lesbian relationships to a public forum has taken a long time, for many of the same reasons that female violence in heterosexual relationships has been concealed. Fear of a backlash against *all* women and an ideal held of the “utopian lesbian bond” has meant a difficult struggle to highlight the issue. Although not a very common experience, some women do physically, sexually and/or psychologically abuse their partners. Joelle Taylor and Tracey Chandler (1995) discuss some of the main stereotypes associated with lesbian battering, including sado-masochism, butch and femme roles and the cycle of abuse theory. The practice of sado-masochism is fraught with mis-representations. A salient myth of this practice is that the women involved enjoy abusive violence. Taylor and Chandler point out that sado-masochism is based on consent. Blaming lesbian violence on sado-masochism at best diverts our attention. It is also a myth that butch and femme lesbians subscribe to roles in which the butch lesbian is abusive and the femme lesbian passively submits to this abuse. The authors point out that butch-femme lesbians do not simply “ape” male-female roles and it is often the publicly femme lesbian who is the perpetrator of abuse. Stereotypes held about butch lesbians often serve only to silence her from speaking out against the abuse she suffers.

The cycle of abuse theory has gained much popularity in the literature (especially systems theory discussed above) attempting to explain men’s violence against women. The theory proposes that those individuals who have suffered abuse from their parents in childhood will become abusers in adulthood. This theory has been traditionally used to explain why men abuse and why women remain in relationships (since women are much more likely to have been abused as children and they are much

less likely than men to abuse as adults). Whilst this theory has enjoyed some success in describing male behaviour, both female victimisation and female violence remain inadequately explained.

Perhaps this theory's popularity has more to do with our unwillingness to grapple with the realities of intimate violence as Liz Kelly (1992) points out:

Recognising the deliberateness of abusers' behaviour is disturbing. It is more comfortable to believe abusers or their partners are merely repeating what they learned in childhood (pg.51).

Taylor and Chandler conclude that it is power and control that really explains violence in female relationships. Whether a battering woman uses violence against her partner consciously or not, the effect of her actions is the same. On this point male and female abusers are similar. However, the authors emphasise that whilst males in society are often rewarded for their ability to control others, female abusers are much more likely to hide their actions. In the present climate of silence surrounding female violence, we assist in the abusive woman's invisibility.



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*Adolescent Girls' Talk:*

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Although the focus of my research was male violence, discussion of female violence was initiated, in all instances, by the pupils themselves. Sometimes the boys raised this topic in discussion, but often it was the female adolescents who tentatively raised the issue. My data suggests that whilst male violence remains a very serious problem in adolescent relationships, violence perpetrated by females does exist. Sometimes the aggression was self-defence, but not necessarily proportionate to the 'threat', as in the case of Emma:

Sometimes I hit people when I feel they are invading my personal space. In which case it probably is a violence of a kind because I don't want them near me. And by hitting them you are shocking them into backing away so although it is a shock tactic it works. Like last night Joe came over to my house and as he was leaving I made some catty comment and he was hugging me at the time and he was hurting my back because I have back problems and he I said look stop and he didn't and I slapped him on the face as hard as I could and he backed away immediately and he looked really, really shocked. And that's exactly what I wanted him to do.

In an individual interview which Emma requested, she described many instances of her using physical aggression in order to "control" her boyfriend:

There's a thing inside me that is holding me back from saying I hit. But I do. I hit Joe...I am much more violent in our relationship.

Emma described feelings of intense anger when her boyfriend would not do what she wanted. On several occasions she had hit him on the face and head. She had also kicked and punched him. Emma's account conflicts with Campbell's finding of females as employing violence as the expression of feeling out of control. Whilst Emma may have used violence to express this feeling, she also clearly employed violence to gain control over her boyfriend. Campbell reserves this instrumental use of violence for

males only. Jeff had not responded physically to her violence. Another girl, Elicia described similar instances:

It wasn't good and he was really pissing me off and I couldn't find a way to react and he was upsetting me and he didn't realise how much he was upsetting me and I slapped him in the face. And I hit him as hard as I could...men have violent feelings but so do women. There are some times when I just really, really want to hit people. Sometimes I just get really angry and aggressive and I see Mark and I just find an excuse to argue and hit him.

Elicia, too, approached me privately to talk of her relationship with Mark. She had gone some way in trying to understand the context in which her aggression takes place:

And we may say oh that's not violence because we're not hurting them but the fact we are hitting them is still violent even though you are not hurting them. There is this stereotype that when men hit girls and men hitting me it is done because of lack of communication. But is that always true? When women actually hit, is that actually a way of communicating what we feel? I think women have to justify all emotions. I think women justify emotions that are not supposed to be in their character. Like violence. Like aggression...I think women have the desire to dominate. I think men do too. I think that it is a lot easier for women to accept that they have a desire to be dominated...I think that's treating women as passive objects of violence. They're not. There are women who are, okay, it comes out in different ways, but I have seen girls who are very, very manipulative over men. Women can do it just as much as men can. Women are just as nasty as men.

In my numerous meetings with Elicia, over several months, she talked a great deal about reconciling her ideals of feminism and her violent actions towards her boyfriend. Elicia described feeling that to be a "good feminist" she should not engage in any acts of aggression or violence.

Similarly, Sally described her feelings of anger and aggression as her "male side":

And I think that was the male side of me saying that's mine. I don't believe in people owning each other but it just overtook me this feeling and I just thought get your hands off him he's mine. I think that's a male thing.

Further discussion with Sally revealed that Sally thought that individuals contain both female and male "parts". Female identity, for Sally, included co-operation, expression of emotions, closeness with others and male parts included a need to dominate and control, think rationally, hide emotions and act aggressively. When Sally felt very angry towards a girl who was going out with Sally's ex-boyfriend, she expressed her feelings of aggression as her "male side".

Some of the talk concerned female aggression and violence towards other females. Indeed many of the girls described instances of aggressive interchanges amongst girls. This exchange, between Reena and Sue took place in a mutual friend's house. These two girls had been arguing for several months, both girls reporting that the other girl was mean and spiteful. During a get-together of friends Sue approached Reena (along with a friend of Reena's) and called her a "bitch". Reena and her friend Lee later described the experience:

Lee: It was so aggressive. I mean Sue was threatening physical violence. She wanted to go out and have a fight. Afterwards I was shaking and I really felt I wanted to do something.

Reena: ...the reaction of the blokes had was to pull up a chair and watch. They thought it was great fun. They think it's a laugh.

Lee: It's also a way of putting down women. If you laugh at their obvious serious aggression or serious feelings you are making it comedy. It's the same as when women get stressed or angry and they say oh is it that time of the month.

At one of the schools I had heard several rumours of physical fighting between girls. During one of my sessions with a group of year 10 pupils, I asked the girls about these rumours:

- MH: What does beating up mean?  
Viv: They will punch each other.  
MH: Really does that actually happen?  
Beth: Yeah.  
MH: What would be the circumstances of that happening?  
Ann: Boyfriends probably.  
Viv: Don't like the other girl.  
MH: So what actually happens? Does it spontaneously happen? You see them in school and you just go for them?  
Viv: Yeah.  
MH: Do girls actually hit each other and kick each other?  
Beth: Yeah.

Krista approached me on the subject of her boyfriend's jealousy and possessiveness and much of our talk over several months concerned this relationship. However, in the course of our many discussions, Krista would often make comments such as "well, it could be worse". When I finally asked what she meant by this, Krista described, at great length, a relationship she had had with a school mate. This female friendship had, for Krista, been very painful. Indeed, she described it as the worst experience she had ever had with another person:

...she wouldn't speak to anyone else because she didn't like it. She used to really hate it if people just, you know, spoke to me...we used to swim together and I beat her at breast stroke in a race and she stopped speaking to me for days. I mean I wasn't even in the lane next to her, I couldn't see that I was beating her, but I beat her, I didn't do it on purpose. I just swam and she stopped talking to me. I used to purposefully do badly in the French tests so that she'd do better than me so that she wouldn't break friends with me. And English as well I used to purposefully do badly so that she would get better grades than me so that she wouldn't moan at me.

Krista did not only feel in constant competition with her friend. She actually felt controlled and "abused" by her:

I'm the only person I know that's ever been so totally dominated by their best friend... Mentally that relationship was a killer. It really twisted me up. I'd be constantly sad. I'd never be happy with myself. Just because I knew I couldn't do anything I wanted to do. I couldn't work hard. I couldn't have more money than her. I couldn't have other friends. I worried about it all the time. Waking

up in the morning and thinking 'oh bugger'. If she rang up the night before and said 'I'm too ill to go to school' the next day I would be so happy.

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*Adolescent Boys' Talk:*

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The boys, too, had a lot to say about female aggression and violence. Several of the boys I talked with, after months of meeting in closed groups and individually, described instances in which they themselves or males they knew had been aggressed. Mark described such a situation:

...and Jane hit me. She slapped me around the face really hard and that was quite shocking and I mean I couldn't do anything back.

Mike described a similar instance:

Mike: Sally beat me up once swearing at me in Spanish.

MH: What does "beating up" mean?

Mike: Thumping me around. Slapping me. Generally being attacked.

MH: Like play-fighting? Or real?

Mike: No, real...I remember once Sally got so stressed out I was lying there and she like (pounded on his chest) on my chest and like half of it was me and half of it was just stressed out about something.

David was quite distressed about his older brother's relationship with his girlfriend. He described the relationship:

My brother is going out with someone at the moment who regularly gets things chucked at my brother. He comes home with black eyes from her and he doesn't hit her back but he does get beat up by his girlfriend...the best thing she has is a, you know a pipe? She hits him on the head with it and then chucks it at him. And metal Hoover pipes.

Other boys described more subtle acts of aggression. Tim talked about his girlfriend's jealousy:

But if I do mention a girl's name, she'll hate them. She scribbled her name and number out of my address book. And that kind of thing annoyed me but she's allowed to be immature and she said oh I'm only joking but now she's got rid

of the number and I can't (call the girl) so she may have been joking but she got rid of it which is what she was intending.

Jock told me of a similar instance with his girlfriend:

You know I mentioned I went on holiday with another girl? Well I have this picture of us and Kathy didn't like that and she just ripped it up and ripped my little head out of it and threw it on the floor with my head missing and I said 'what are you doing' and she said 'you don't want it there anymore, why do you want it there?'. And I said 'I've got pictures of football players up there as well' and she said 'that's different'.

These, and other, descriptions of their girlfriends' and female friends' aggression and violence raised the question of how the boys understood these actions. More rigid definitions of male and female identity would suggest that female aggression is an abnormal phenomenon; as aggression of these sorts is usually assigned to the male. To a certain extent the boys that I talked to did describe female aggression in this way. Some of the boys seemed to understand their girlfriend's aggression or violence as particular to her; that is, not a 'female characteristic' in general. These boys negotiated their experiences of male and female interaction with their ideas about what males and females 'are' by relegating their experiences of female violence to the position of the abnormal or abhorrent.

On the other hand, some boys understood female aggression as something that girls "get away with". Mark described it in this way:

What I find quite ironic is that some girls think it is acceptable for them to hit blokes and not the other way around. Some girls actually really do think that. They say it's all right for me to hit you if you've done that but you can't hit me.

A recurrent theme in the boy's talk was that girls "get away with it" more than boys do. In one group the boys described it in this way:

- Joal: If a woman came up to me in the street and slapped me...
- David: Slap you in the face. She's good. Well done. You slapped a man in the face.
- Tim: That does annoy me in a way because everyone says 'oh I'd never hit a girl...
- Joal: And girls know that.
- Tim: And having said that I was really tempted.
- Joal: Girls take advantage of it.
- Tim: Yeah
- MH: How do girls take advantage of it?
- Tim: Well they know...
- Joal: Well Elaine will start grabbing me and dig her nails into my neck. If a bloke came up to me and did that I would probably hit him or pushed him off or something. But with her, no I've just got to let her carry on doing it.
- Tim: Yeah. You just can't do it.

There was some recognition that conceptions of males as powerful, in control, macho and girls as weak, vulnerable and sensitive did not always work in the boy's favour. Martin describes this:

You get things like they will say offensive thing and say 'oh it doesn't matter because he can handle it' and things almost in a sarcastic manner and I mean sometimes they actually go out of their way to deliberately thwart you.

Simon describes a similar reaction:

Like Elicia. If I make some chauvinistic crack because it is so easy to wind her up, she gets so wound up about being in the kitchen and stuff she will kick me and punch me hard. She can't laugh at the joke or throw it back in my face and she feels she has the right to punch me as a last resort. And I don't think that's on. And then if they say 'oh did it hurt?' I am expected to say 'oh no', like a macho response. One good kick or punch could do a lot of damage. You could get easily winded on certain parts of your anatomy. I mean you could get poked in the eye. It doesn't take a lot of strength to do a lot of damage.

Several other boys described similar struggles to negotiate different expectations of male and female behaviour. These boys recognised that girls are not



expected to be aggressive and boys are expected not to hit girls. There seemed to be a consistent feeling amongst the boys that when girls act aggressively towards boys, these girls know both that the boys are not supposed to act aggressively back (hence the adage “pick on someone your own size”) and that the boys also know that they should not respond aggressively. These boys described this as an unfair advantage that girls have over boys. For the boys who viewed their experiences of female aggression as abnormal, the aggression was seen as something largely unique to that particular girl. In contrast, the boys who described female aggression as a frequent occurrence had a difficult time reconciling both their expectations of male and female behaviour and the power and control that the boys felt the girls obtained through the knowledge that boys could not return the aggression.

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*Multiple Femininities:*

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How, then may we understand these accounts of female violence? A post-structuralist approach to the concept of the subject provides a useful theoretical framework. In a post-structuralist account, discourses provide various subject positions and that individuals adopt these subject positions within these different discourses (Moore, 1994). The subject is not a unified entity; a single individual has multiple subject positions available to her. So a woman may 'identify' with a range of subject positions within a range of discourses and social interactions. Such an approach does not chain individual women and men to our current dominant representations. Women do not have to be represented only as passive and men do not have to be represented only as dominant. And it is this theory that allows female action and volition. As Henrietta Moore points out, such a framework does not "engender women and men as persons who *are* defined by difference"(pg.51). The interesting question then becomes how women and men choose a particular gender identity in the face of conflicting and competing multiple discourses. An interpretation of my data suggests that girls do not simply accept a single feminine identity. Girls are active in their identifying with particular subject positions and discourses. In a similar way, Elizabeth Frazer's (1989) work with adolescent girls' understandings of social class suggests that girls have available to them a variety of "discourse registers". Girls choose from this variety of discourses through a process of active negotiation depending on their context. The question of how girls and boys take up certain subject positions as opposed to others and in what contexts these positions are adopted, is central to my investigation.

Regarding violence, Moore (1994) employs Wendy Holloway's idea that we become "invested", which she describes as something between an emotional commitment and a vested interest (pg.66). Our investment is influenced by others, by

our fantasies of what subject position we want to identify ourselves with, and by our needs. Our choice of positions is not simple, but is both historically and societally influenced in that some positions are more positively rewarded than others by society. A subject position of passivity and compromise may provide much more reward for a girl in her negotiation of relationships with boys than a subject position of action and dominance. The key point here is that girls and boys negotiate a variety of subject positions; they are not bound to a single one. According to Moore, violence in interpersonal relationships occurs when an individual's taking up of a subject position is "thwarted" in that the position cannot be sustained (pg.67). This may occur through the conflict of shifting between positions, attempting to sustain a particular position or when the other person refuses to take up their complementary subject position. When we are not able to control another person it is because they do not allow us to. The conflict of sustaining subject positions in the face of conflicting positions and boyfriends who do not endorse the positions is expressed by the girls in their words above.

The transcripts reflect girls who are actively attempting to negotiate a number of competing subject positions. We can interpret Elicia's descriptions of the conflict between her feelings and actions and her desire to be feminist as her negotiation of two conflicting (as it appeared to her) subject positions. Some of these positions, often offered by the media, parents, school personnel and the males that surround them encourage subject positions of traditional femininity (what Connell refers to as 'emphasised femininity').

Reena and Lee's description of Reena's confrontation with Sue also describes the boys' unwillingness to take the girls' aggression seriously. Clearly, the boys were not prepared to accept female anger and aggression as a legitimate subject position. Indeed, I interpreted the boys' reaction to the girls' confrontation as the boys feeling quite threatened by the obvious display of female aggression. In the face of actions that

clearly do not 'fit' a traditional female subject position, these boys reconciled this dissonance by appearing to not take the aggression seriously. By pulling up chairs to 'watch the side-show' these boys were demonstrating that they did not accept female aggression as a legitimate female subject position and therefore were not prepared to take it seriously. Feminist discourses, experiences of female friendship and experiences of control over their own lives encourage more radical female subject positions.

## CHAPTER 9: SOCIAL CLASS

Martin: I am helping out at a school for physically disabled children.

Mark: Oh, you can put that on your CV.

MH: What was your happiest moment today?

Sandra: Today when I found out it is my pay day. My Mum'll be happy cause it means we can pay one of the bills.

I don't have any trouble answering that I am a woman and that I am white. These appear to be two separate questions, which I can answer separately; my brother answers one of them as I do, the other not. But does this mean that there is a "woman part" of me, and that it is distinct from something that is the "white part" of me? (Spelman, 1990:133)

### ***Introduction:***

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Social class, as fundamental division, experience and discourse continues to interest sociologists. My interest in social class was two-fold. First, I was interested to discover if social class had any association with aggression, in all of its many forms. Second, I was interested in the adolescents' own perceptions of social class. Some very interesting differences emerged in the discourses employed by pupils from Chiswick and Parsons schools. These discourses covered such diverse topics as aggression, feminism, future plans, female and male relations and politics. I found the differences between not only the ways in which these two groups talked, but the things they talked about to be quite stark at times. The intersection of social class and gender has also formed a central theme in my analysis and will play a major role in this chapter's discussion.

This chapter is organised to examine social class as an important basis for social groups. I will begin with a general discussion of the concept of social class followed by the demarcation of the two schools by class. Whilst there was some overlap, I will argue that the schools could be meaningfully divided into distinct upper/ middle and working classes. The ethos of the schools, parents' attitudes, and perceptions of the pupils delineated Chiswick as upper class and Parsons as working class. I was aided in this task by the use of pupil postcodes, which combined with the 1991 Census Data, provided additional support for the division of the schools into two distinct classes. I will follow this discussion with a detailed account of the pupils' perceptions of social class, their parents' attitudes and the school ethos. I found the differences in discourse between pupils at Chiswick and Parsons best examined in terms of discussions of their own social class, feminism, race and ethnicity and political beliefs. Finally, I will discuss associations between social class and intimate aggression, relying on the results of the questionnaire and pupil perceptions.

My understanding of the influence of social class is based mainly on the transcripts of the pupils. I have outlined already that the categorisation of pupils' class was based on: their mothers' and fathers' paid work, the area of Oxford they lived in and the social benefit data accrued from the matching of pupils' postcodes to the census data. However, the attitudes of parents and school ethos was based entirely on the discussion transcripts, my field notes of meetings with parents, teachers, school administrators and written material provided by each school concerning their pedagogical goals and activities. My discussions with the pupils at Chiswick and Parsons and the months that I spent working in these schools often provided data very similar to that of Sue Sharpe, Sue Lees and Martin Mac An Ghaill. I have relied on their respective works, Just Like a Girl (1994), Sugar and Spice (1993) and The Making of Men (1994) most often in this chapter.

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***The Concept of Social Class:***

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Social class analysis remains a fundamental and central concern of Sociology. Competing models of social class definitions and boundaries emanate primarily from the works of Karl Marx and Max Weber. Whilst the intricacies of these works are beyond the scope of this thesis, the basic proponents are outlined to situate my analysis of social class in the present study. Class may be defined as a “large-scale grouping of people who share common economic resources, which strongly influence the types of lifestyles they lead”(Giddens, 1993:215). The central defining point of social class in modern societies is the intersection between industrialisation and market capitalism. Industrialisation refers to the growth and development of technology, manufacturing industry and the organisation of production. For Marx relations between classes are necessarily ideological and political; for Weber the central concern is market forces. Weber envisaged the individual’s economic and social life chances as determined by her/his position in a capitalist market. For a Marxist, this thesis assumes an equal exchange between capital and labour; the particular and crucial relation of exploitation is ignored.

Contemporary theories of social class focus on the relevance of the concept to modern societies. Some theorists maintain that a reality of capitalism has been the demise of a largely free market: multinational corporations and the growth of the public sector have irrevocably changed the capitalist relation between labour and production. Multinational corporations have moved the labour elements of their industries to countries in which labour remains relatively inexpensive and this has meant a shift towards an international economy. Changes in technology have virtually eliminated the skilled industrial worker in many areas. The post-industrial proletariat is now largely composed of casual, contracted, part-time and temporary workers; compounded by a decrease in traditionally ‘male’ manufacturing jobs and an increase

in low skilled and low paid female jobs. Under these conditions, class structure is perceived as more to do with manipulating one's own market situation, and less to do with political struggle. Capitalist values such as egoism, cynicism and individualism are absorbed by bourgeois and proletariat alike. Economic prosperity becomes the means by which individuals manipulate the market. The consequence for the proletariat is the disintegration of any solidarity through a shared life-style. In a nutshell, as the forms of ownership and control (oppression) become more distant and intangible, the strength of class as a social identity collapses. As Steven Lukes (1984) points out:

Labour or work itself, and the sphere of production, seems to be becoming less central to the identity and consciousness of workers, while consumption, especially with respect to housing and transport, has become more central to their basic interests.(pg.269).

Individuals feel powerless against an economy controlled by distant market forces. Protest is replaced by helpless disillusionment. Scholars point out that social conflicts have increasingly become intra-class conflicts supporting the view that solidarity through class is no longer a reality. Some social scientists further suggest that the private sphere becomes more important in shaping social identity than the public sphere. Social identity developed in the family will have more to do with social action than solidarity with workers of a loosely defined class.

Whether or not social class as a source of political struggle remains a central theme of contemporary British society, the results of my thesis strongly suggest that social identity through class persists. Whilst I would not argue that social class identity translated for the adolescents I studied into any form of identifiable political or social action, differences in discourse, meaning and understanding of the social world were considerable between Chiswick and Parsons schools. The girls and boys I talked with strongly identified themselves with particular social classes and discussed,



at length, the meanings of social class for them. Talk of future plans, parents' education and occupational status and the schools nearly always resulted in talk about social class. I would therefore maintain that the inclusion of social class in my analysis is valuable, if not conclusive.

### **Social Class and Education:**

The above skeletal outline of Marxist conceptions of class struggle and more recent arguments concerned with macro changes in society are by no means uncontroversial. These arguments do, however, form the backdrop for the development of the sociology of education. The site of my examination of social class is the schools in which I collected the data, and the sociology of education provides a set of contested perspectives that focus on schools as institutions.

Discussion within the sociology of education is primarily concerned with the process of cultural transmission. Those in a Marxist tradition maintain that culture is imparted to children through macro phenomena such as market forces. Cultural transmission, in this view, is accomplished through social institutions such as the family and schools. Until recently, this model has entirely defined the sociology of education (Wexler, 1987). However, other social scientists caution that this equation of cause and effect is far too simple. Critiques emanating from linguistic structuralism focus on the individual's ordering of meaning rather than the 'objective' referent of the school. The argument is that the school has become an essentially de-politicised entity; the ruling class employs the school as only one site amongst many to achieve its reproduction. These liberals argue that the Marxist, radical sociology of education appears essentially too late, after schools have become largely egalitarian. Research from this theoretical perspective provides both historical accounts of the egalitarianism of schools and new interpretations of pupils', teachers' and school

administrators' active negotiation of the school system whilst effectively absorbing radical Marxist critiques. More recently theorising from the right has highlighted the debate of the capitalist school ideology, albeit from the opposite end of the continuum. The sociology of education to emerge from this critical theoretical debate recognises that the process of labour identity formation and production is a far more subtle process than first envisaged. There is no simple system of rewards and punishments that produces working-, middle- and upper-class individuals. As Wexler (1987) notes, while school pedagogy remains modelled on an older mode of production, adolescent pupils are reacting to present and future forms of production.

The sociology of education is, at present, centrally concerned with the debate about the degree to which education equalises or reproduces the effects of capitalist labour division. Some authors, such as Bowles (1976) argue that institutions of education function to reproduce a classed (and unequal) labour force. Bowles investigates the ways in which educational devices such as grading systems appear to be "objective measures of intellectual capacities"(pg.37). Grading, and other forms of reward appear to pupils and their parents to be a 'fair' assessment of the intellectual capability of the pupil. The relationship between educational attainment and occupational success thus appears to be based on a system of meritocracy. Bowles asserts that educational reform will always be limited by the requirements of a capitalist society. Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) extend this analysis to the family. Bourdieu and Passeron view the family, like schools, as an important site of subtle transmission (through the passing on of particular skills) of their own social class. This passing on of 'cultural capital' would, for example, include the transmission of attitudes and beliefs for the successful manipulation of public resources such as the school, theatre and bureaucracies (Halsey, Heath and Ridge, 1980).

This theory has been mitigated, somewhat, by empirical investigations such as that which produced Origins and Destinations. In an exhaustive study of school

attendance, school leavers, type of school attended, grades at school, family climate and family background, Halsey, Heath and Ridge found that the material and cultural background of the family was a very strong indicator of the advancement of children through school and their later occupational attainment. These authors do concede, however, that the equation is not a simple one: class differentials widen at each level of education and movement between social classes is not fluid, despite educational attainment.

Paul Willis's seminal work Learning To Labour (1977) is an excellent example of the recognition of this process of cultural reproduction. Willis investigated a group of working-class boys, their progress through school and preparation for employment. Willis concludes that the employment requirements of capitalist society (for a majority of working-class and a minority of service-class jobs) do not in any *direct* way determine the cultural reproduction of working-class culture. Willis maintains that "macro determinants need to pass through the cultural milieu to reproduce themselves at all"(pg.171). The necessary focus then becomes the mechanisms by which culture accomplishes a society segregated by class. Willis outlines three characteristics of culture involved in this process: "varieties of symbolic systems and articulations" which comprise language, physical interaction and behaviour; the generation of a meaningful account of the world through material production such as a distinctive style of clothing; and finally, culture provides the context in which self-identity is constructed. This author notes that the school provides an "outside" structure of symbolic and conceptual relations, integrated by the individual. These frameworks of relations in turn provide the basis for choices made by the individual. Cultural forms, in this way, cannot be reduced to mean the mere expression of macro economic structure.

Central to the discussion of cultural transmission is the recognition that the process is not accomplished without tension or dissent. Willis recognises that the

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working-class boys in his study in many ways actively negotiated and resisted cultural prescriptions. Instances of challenging cultural reproduction were an important feature of my own research findings and will be discussed in greater detail in the later section 'Divergent Discourses'.

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***Goldthorpe's Schema:***

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In his book, Social Mobility and Class Structure in Modern Britain (1987), John Goldthorpe developed a social class scheme based on the economic market and the work situations of particular occupations. That is, a man's classification within a particular class is based on two broad aspects of his occupation: its relative standing in the market economy; and the degree of autonomy and control the occupation allows. The scheme is divided into service, intermediate and working classes. Within each of these broad divisions, further delineations of individual classes are made:

**Service:**

- I Higher-grade professionals, administrators, and officials; managers in large establishments; large proprietors.
- II Lower-grade professionals, administrators, and officials; higher-grade technicians; managers in small business and industrial establishments; supervisors of non-manual employees.

**Intermediate:**

- IIIa Routine non-manual employees in administration and commerce.
- IIIb Personal service workers
- IVa Small proprietors, artisans, etc. with employees
- IVb Small proprietors, artisans, etc. without employees
- IVc Farmers and smallholders; self-employed fishermen
- V Lower-grade technicians, supervisors of manual workers

**Working:**

- VI Skilled manual workers
- VIIa Semi-skilled and unskilled manual workers (not in agriculture)
- VIIb Agricultural workers

Whilst these divisions have been criticised for their over-simplification of boundaries which are in reality quite fluid and for their focus on labour as opposed to the processes of production, the scheme nevertheless provides a useful broad categorisation of class differences from which my examination of discourse may begin.

One aspect of Goldthorpe's theoretical rationale that I will address concerns the inclusion of women's social class. Goldthorpe defines women's social class through their husband's class. Two assumptions are made with this classification: the women's status is the same as their husband's and that women's unequal treatment in society compared with men is irrelevant to social class structure. In my research I have chosen to include the social class of the mother as well as the father. This decision emanates from my contention that social relations are fundamentally gendered and that ignoring half of the population necessarily fails to provide adequate data. Secondly, as the discourse employed by female and male adolescents is informed by the social relationships they experience in their families, differences in social class between mothers and fathers is of central concern. Thirdly, the large number of separations and divorces in these adolescents' families complicates an understanding of any adolescent's lifestyle. For instance, for Donna, a girl who studied at Chiswick, the strong difference in social class between her divorced mother and father informed her experience of social class. Whilst her father was an executive in the British Museum, her mother was an unemployed social worker. Donna lived with her mother

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in a life-style more similar to some pupils at Parsons, as Donna's social class was based more relevantly on her mother's social class than her father's.

*The Division of Parsons and Chiswick by Class:*

The transcripts from the focus groups revealed significant differences in the discourse of pupils at Parsons and Chiswick schools. There are many possible explanations for these differences; one consistent feature of the differences being social class. My assessment of Chiswick as broadly middle-class and Parsons as working-class was based on two sources of information: my questionnaire asking pupils to report their mother’s and father’s occupations and information garnered from pupil postcodes linked with the 1991 Census Data. Crosstabulations in Chapter 5 revealed that there was a significant association between parent’s social class and the school attended by the pupil.

| Class | Mother’s Class |               | Father’s Class |               |
|-------|----------------|---------------|----------------|---------------|
|       | Parsons<br>%   | Chiswick<br>% | Parsons<br>%   | Chiswick<br>% |
| 1     | 5.4            | 16            | 11.3           | 46.7          |
| 2     | 17.9           | 42            | 6.2            | 21.1          |
| 3     | 16.8           | 12.3          | 4.8            | 2.2           |
| 4     | 1.1            | 2.5           | 5.8            | 6.7           |
| 5     | 2.5            | 1.2           | 13.4           | 5.6           |
| 6     | 6.4            | 4.9           | 17.1           | 7.8           |
| 7     | 50             | 21            | 41.4           | 10            |

At Parsons School, 56.4% of pupils had mothers in Goldthorpe’s “working class” (classes six and seven), compared with only 25.9% of pupils at Chiswick School with mothers in these classes. Comparing father’s social class, 46.3% of Parsons pupils had fathers in classes six and seven compared with only 17.8% of pupils at Chiswick. Examining the top “service” end of the social class scale, 23.3% of pupils at Parsons had mothers in this class compared with 58% of pupils at Chiswick. Regarding father’s social class, 17.5% of pupils at Parsons compared with 67.8% of pupils at



Chiswick had fathers in this top class. Clearly a greater proportion of pupils at Parsons come from families in which their mothers and fathers have working-class jobs and a greater proportion of pupils at Chiswick come from upper-class families.

Information garnered from the use of postcodes and Census Data proved a more complicated process. Since the Census was based on 1991 data, the postcodes I received from the schools needed to be matched with the appropriate ages. This was accomplished by matching each school year, at each school, with the corresponding age group in the Census data. Matching postcodes to enumeration districts, I was able to derive a reasonable assessment of the areas in which pupils lived. It is important to point out that my findings apply to pupils in general. Since I did not ask individual pupils their postcodes and each enumeration district refers to approximately 480 people (there are a total of 235 enumeration districts in Oxford), I am not able to make any statements regarding individual pupil's social class from these sources of data. The following variables were examined as indicators of social class: ownership of occupied dwelling, council home tenancy, economic inactivity and income support. With regard to ownership of housing, more pupils at Chiswick school lived in houses owned by their parents, as opposed to rented accommodation. More pupils at Parsons school lived in council homes or other rented accommodation. A greater proportion of Parsons pupils lived in homes in which one or more parent was economically inactive - more specifically, unemployed. Finally, a greater number of pupils at Parsons lived in areas in which parents were on income support. From this data and the interviews I was able to obtain a profile of the pupils' general social classes. I relied largely on the transcriptions to gain an understanding of the association between social class and relevant aspects of pupil's lives such as future plans and perceptions of pupils from different social classes than their own.

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***Profiles of Social Class -- The Pupils:***

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Profiling the pupils at Chiswick and Parsons involved examining group and individual discussions. These discussions focused on education, future plans with regard to career, marriage, having children, political beliefs, perceptions of class, and discussions of feminism. I asked all of the pupils in the groups to write down and discuss the 'class system in Britain'. This exercise led to discussions about pupils' classification of their own social class. I also asked pupils to discuss the importance of social class and on what they based the classification of their own social class. Perhaps because these pupils were aware that I was conducting the same research in two schools, I was often asked what I thought of the other school. I was able, in most cases, to re-frame the question and gain valuable insights from the pupils regarding their perceptions of pupils at the other school.

**Future Plans:**

In her seminal book, Just Like A Girl (1994), Sue Sharpe compared discussions she had with girls at Ealing School in 1972 and 1991 concerning their career aspirations. Compared with pupils in the 1970's, Sharpe observed that most girls in the 1990's expressed the desire to have a career. The use of the term 'career' delineated a job that required at least some higher education. The conviction that they would have a career was mitigated by two factors: negotiating of career and family and unwillingness to identify themselves as 'full-time career women'. While the majority of girls in Sharpe's study expected to work outside the home, they recognised that combining careers and a family was difficult. Some of the girls observed their mothers and the difficulties these women had in maintaining two full-time jobs. The unwillingness to identify with 'career women' seemed to have more to

do with the girls' ambivalence regarding perceptions of career women as unfeminine. The very strong influence of boys, love and romance during adolescence in their thoughts and conversations served to temper career aspirations.

Sharpe also uncovered strong differences in the ways in which working-class and middle-class girls described their future plans. Working-class girls in the 1970's, according to this author, were encouraged into a tradition of early marriage and child-bearing and work outside of the home as a complement to their husband's job. Men's work was more likely to be skilled, whilst women were more likely to work in offices, factories, shops or in the home. Sharpe contends that this pattern persists in the 1990's, the only exception being the decline in British manufacturing industries with a resultant higher male unemployment. Working-class girls, then, remain limited by their experience through schools, families and community to have lower career aspirations. I will return to the influence of parents, school and community later in the chapter.

In *Sugar and Spice* (1993), Sue Lees observes that socio-economic trends serve as a background to gender relations. Lees found that all girls, regardless of social class, realistically assessed the limitations of marriage. Although most girls wanted to get married, they also realised that a significant amount of their "freedom" would be taken away. Lees noted that several girls spoke of "having a life" and "travelling" *before* they got married (pg.118). After marriage, caring for children and a husband, as well as working to maintain a family, would consume their time and energy. Although middle-class girls seemed to believe that men were more involved in family responsibilities such as childcare and housework, the evidence suggests that women remain primarily responsible in the 'private' sphere. Like Sharpe's girls, these adolescents recognised the conflict between preparing for a career outside the home and concentrating on boyfriends, dating and reputations. This conflict remained largely unresolved. Interestingly, Lees found that some of the middle-class girls in her study reported that marriage was not necessary unless children were involved.

Middle-class girls were also more likely to reject the occupation of homemaker. Although the focus of both authors' work was adolescent girls, both propose that marriage and children do not pose the same restrictions on men as they do on women. One might expect that boys would not talk about marriage and children in as disparaging terms. However, my research revealed that boys were much more likely to speak of marriage in terms of the restriction of freedom and autonomy. In my study, boys talked with at least as much conviction that they must "live" before becoming "tied" to marriage and family.

I usually broached the subject of social class by asking pupils about their plans after leaving school. At Chiswick school, without exception, all of the pupils in the nine groups said they intended to go to university at some point in the future. Most of the pupils intended to attend university directly after secondary school. Many of the pupils said they intended to take a year off to travel outside of Britain, and then go to university the following year. Some of the pupils were very clear about their career goals, whilst others intended to take a variety of courses within a given area and then choose a specialisation in the course of their first year. However, the pupils at Chiswick generally possessed a very high level of knowledge concerning the process of higher education. I asked Cathy what she thought she would be doing at twenty:

I want to go to Med school. It's four years and then you do your doctorate and if you pass your exams you are a junior doctor for two years and that's the nightmare part and then you do a residency for a year and then you take your exams in whatever discipline you are in. In my year off I would like to work for half the year and then go around the world and travel. I've got an Aunt in Peru and she's a doctor and she's the only medical person where she is and I might go and work with her. I'll probably end up with my own practice.

There was not always an obvious correspondence between the attendance of university and career aspirations. Gillian reported:

I've got a lot of time now. Four years of university. Who knows. I may end up

getting married. I want to do that eventually and stay home and have lots of babies.

Similarly, Jeff described his future plans as “I want to go into the Marines after university”. Gillian and Jeff reflected a common theme of the pupils at Chiswick; that attending university was effectively pre-determined and did not necessarily have a direct relationship with an eventual career. When questioned about their intention to attend university, all of the pupils I spoke with reported that attending university was important because education was desirable. Pupils perceived university as a place in which they would accrue information of benefit to their lives and, interestingly, where they would meet their future husband or wife. A salient factor in these pupil’s intention to attend university was their parents. All of the pupils I spoke with at Chiswick school, whether in group discussions, individual interviews or casually in the sixth form common room reported that their parents wanted them to attend university. Many of the pupils reported receiving strong pressure from their parents to attend university. Even pupils who were very unclear about what their future career goals were, talked about parents who urged them attend university and make their minds up later. Parental attitudes, according to pupils’ reports, will be discussed in a later section.

Chiswick pupils generally possessed quite a significant level of knowledge concerning university. Most of the pupils I talked with in the sixth form knew which university they wanted to attend. Some had already been to ‘open days’ at the university and some had attended interviews. Other pupils brought in university handouts to elicit my opinion concerning courses of study. Some of the pupils reported that they wanted to attend Cambridge University. None of the pupils I spoke with wanted to attend Oxford University and when questioned about this, most pupils reported that they did not want to attend a university that their parent(s) lectured at or did not want to live at home whilst attending university. Some of the pupils I spoke with already articulated plans for post-graduate study.

Like the girls at Chiswick, most of the girls I spoke with at Parsons reported a desire to obtain higher qualifications beyond secondary school. A few girls said their priority was to find full-time employment upon leaving school and these girls seemed very occupied with either finding a long-term partner or maintaining a current relationship. For instance, Cathy intended to get married as soon as her GCSE's were completed and was engaged at the time I spoke with her. Cathy's fiancé worked at Quick Save convenience store, within the local community of Blackbird Leys. Cathy was working in the same store part-time whilst at school and intended to work there full-time at the end of year eleven. Cathy seemed very interested in "getting married and settling down with a family". Although her parents were concerned that she was too young (seventeen) to be making this commitment, Cathy said that both her parents had followed a similar route at her age and accepted her decision.

Cathy's goals of leaving school, working full-time in the service industry and starting a family as soon as possible were not shared by most of the girls at Parsons whom I spoke with. However, most of these girls revealed a significant ambivalence with regard to their futures. Most girls had a female friend with one or more children. Often girls talked about their own mothers getting married and having children whilst in their late teens or early twenties. Rose expressed her ambivalence in this way:

I am getting to the stage now where like two of my friends have actually had kids now and I am nineteen and I think that could be me. It's quite hard to go one way than another. I know I am young but the urge is there.

Similarly, Beth expressed ambivalence with regard to future career goals and recognised that marriage and family could represent a viable alternative:

Beth: One of our friends left school last year and she got married and had a baby and she's nineteen.

MH And how do you feel about that?

Beth: Happy. I'm happy for her. She come from a bad family background.

Viv: And if that's what she wants.

Beth: She was beaten a lot by her Dad. She was beat up by her Dad a lot and

they said she'd be a loser. Really she is a loser. And she ain't made nothing of herself but she's got a baby and that made her happy and if it made her happy then I'm all for her. She was called names for years.

A lot of the girls at Parsons intended to progress to higher education. However, the difference between the girls at this school and those at Chiswick was that more of the Parsons girls were interested in vocational training for employment as secretaries, nurses, teachers and other lower middle-class jobs. The other major difference was the Parsons girls' knowledge that to attend university meant leaving the working-class culture in which they had been raised. Some girls talked about wanting to go to university in order to have more opportunities and choices than their mothers had had. Working-class mothers employed in low-paid service jobs with children and often male partners to support seemed to offer as powerful an incentive to daughters to escape from such a life as to emulate it. Some girls understood that a university education was now (at least technically) possible for working-class women and were eager to maximise their career opportunities. All of the girls I spoke with recognised their intended departure from their working-class culture. In one group, Krista and Rose described their ambivalence concerning the intention to attend university:

Krista: I'm sort of doing something different. I am expected to be a conventional female but I want to stay in school and go to university.

MH: Do you think it will affect you in any way?

Rose: I doubt I'll have changed much. Probably a bit more of a snob. Especially when you come from a school where there are a lot of under-achievers like here. Somewhere like Chiswick they've set it up so that university is the target and they are kind of typically middle-class anyway. Not a horrible snob.

The ambivalence about careers surfaced in discussions about the importance of not 'going over the top' with a career and wanting to have a 'normal family'. And

as much as girls talked about careers, they talked about getting and keeping boyfriends. Like the girls in Sharpe's study, the girls at Parsons understood the constraints of a family. When I asked Sarah what she wanted to do in the future her response was common:

I would like to get married when I am older and do all the things I have wanted to do with that time. Like travel, or have a boat or all the things you want to do in life because when it comes to having kids and maybe have them quite late in life like twenty-five then you don't actually grudge giving them everything you've got. It's so expensive to bring up a child...there are two sides to me. I would like to start a family but then I want to live too.

Although the topic of feminine identities will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter, it is helpful to understand another important negotiation that the girls at Parsons faced more often than the girls at Chiswick: boyfriends. Many girls I spoke with described boyfriends who were uncomfortable with the girls' desire to attend university or gain non-manual employment. In this interchange, Amy summarised the pressure she felt from her boyfriend to give up her plans to attend university:

(talking about studying for A-level finals)

Amy: And my boyfriend's not helping.

MH: In what way?

Amy: He's just not interested in education. He never has been. It's so hard explaining it to him. Like he says "why are you going to university?". I'm going to university cause I want to do maths. "Well what are you going to do after that?" I want to do research but he doesn't understand that. And if we quit what are we going to do? Work in a factory, work as a waitress?

Karen: And we are already doing that anyway. We have to juggle the two.

Amy: It really gets me. And sometimes I have used words by accident that he doesn't know and he gets really mad at me. And if he comes over on a weekend and I'm studying he doesn't think I should be studying. I've got a Saturday job too. And Peter comes round and he's still in my room and I know that he doesn't think I should be doing homework or thinking about work when he's there. And I don't want him to think that. I want him to think "oh, she should be working".



Mac An Ghaill, in his recent book The Making of Men (1994), investigated secondary school boys' vocational aspirations. This author observed that school and university remain the main vehicle of social mobility for working-class boys. Middle- and upper-class boys have the tremendous advantage of being the children of top members of society. For these boys, then, there are alternate routes to employment and they are not wholly reliant on schools and training schemes. Indeed Eggleston's (1986) investigation of the relationship between education and employment revealed that educational qualifications were quite insignificant in the determination of employment. Eggleston suggests that a network of middle-class parental connections provide at least a starting employment for pupils.

Mac An Ghaill identified several groups of boys within the school that he studied (pgs.56-67). The "macho lads" comprised working class boys who were low academic achievers and sought largely working class, manual labour jobs. The "real Englishmen" group consisted of middle- and upper-class boys who valued "individualism, intensified peer competition, sporting excellence, personal ambition and overt careerism". These boys possessed considerable advantage over other groups in that they had professional, well educated parents to advise them, and had been taught middle-class behaviours such as ability to converse with adults which corresponded most positively with the middle-class ethos of the school. A third group, the "academic achievers" represented a fairly new group of working-class and high-achieving pupils. This group represented the greatest chance of pupil upward social mobility as these boys dominated the high-status technological and commercial subject areas such as business and computer science.

At Parsons school, I easily identified these general groupings. The largest proportion of boys identified strongly with their working-class parents and reported that they would seek low-status vocational employment. A very small group

composed “real Englishmen” and were known by pupils and teachers alike since they were in such a minority. For instance, one of my focus groups contained the son of the Headmaster of Parsons School. Tim clearly identified with a middle-class culture in many respects. Both of his parents were professionals and his two older sisters were currently studying at universities away from home. His working-class peers perceived Tim to live in a large house with two cars and a family that took vacations each summer. Tim described the very strong value that his parents placed on academic achievement. Tim’s career goals included taking a year out to work in the developing world within an organisation such as Oxfam and then study Zoology at university. Tim and a few boys like him comprised a small enclave of middle-class pupils. Finally, a small but significant group (Mac An Ghail’s “academic achievers”) were emerging at Parsons. These boys had distinctly working-class backgrounds and were pursuing mainly low-middle class employment such as teaching, computer studies, technology and design.

In my focus groups, these “academic achievers” talked of middle-class “real Englishmen” with derision and scorn. The discomfort of Tim, as a middle-class boy amongst his working-class friends, is clear:

David: They think they’re better than everyone else.

Arnold: What I don’t like about them is that they dress up as working-class when they get out of school.

David: Yeah. That’s the thing that really gets on my nerves.

Arnold: Scruffy hair...

David: Yeah, that’s definitely true. You get guys with loads of money and they are wearing clothes that make them look like they are standing on Bond Square.

MH: If I asked these students about social class, what do you think they would say?

Arnold: They would avoid the topic. They’re embarrassed.

Joal: Nobody want to admit...

Tim: No one, no matter what class you are, wants to admit what class you are because you get the piss taken out of you. Like I do for being middle-class here ‘cause everyone’s working class.

This interchange highlights the disapproval and irritation that these working-class boys felt towards middle-class boys who they perceived were appropriating their (working-class) clothes, behaviours and culture. The anger stemmed from a clear knowledge that middle-class boys borrowed these cultural representations through choice, whilst maintaining the advantages of middle-class parental and societal support. These boys understood that middle-class boys could imitate their culture more easily and with fewer repercussions than these working-class boys could join the ranks of the middle-class.

Another interesting theme to emerge from the boys' focus groups was the stated intention of most of the boys to get married and have children in the future. And boys talked about marriage and children in much the same way as did the girls. The boys talked about wanting to 'have a life' before marriage and a family. Perhaps the boys from Parsons were more forthright in their reasons for wanting marriage:

Joal: I want to get married. I think it's cause I've got a really old fashioned view of like coming home and seeing my wife waiting there for me with the dinner. It's the image I see. It's not the image I like. I actually want that, it's not my right to want that.

Some of the boys said that they intended to eventually marry their current girlfriends, whilst other boys were not sure that they would not meet someone they liked more. The boys at Chiswick generally espoused more liberal views of marriage. However, when I questioned these boys about how they would manage a full-time paid career and having children, they would eventually articulate the assumption of a wife maintaining primary responsibility for childcare and homemaking.

Whilst plans to attend university and move away from home fit comfortably with the middle-class girls' and boys' culture, this was not the case for many of the working-class pupils I spoke with. All of the middle-class pupils I spoke with at

Chiswick defined university attendance as an inevitable aspect of their future lives. Some pupils expressed considerable angst about not really wanting to go to university but receiving strong pressure from parents and teachers to gear their secondary school course choice and exam performance to university entrance. This was not the case for the majority of the pupils at Parsons. For these girls and boys, university or college attendance was not a standard goal. Most of the pupils I spoke with did not have a parent who had attended university. These adolescents were reliant on teachers, usually, as their sole informants about university and college. A consistent theme to emerge in group discussions was again the acknowledgement that the intention to attend university necessarily alienated pupils from friends and sometimes family. Nancy described this alienation:

Nancy: I mean both my friends I used to go out with are pregnant. One's had a baby, one's you know, just about to have one. And they're on the dole, you know, they're not doing anything and I had to, I had to change really.

MH: That must have been really difficult.

Nancy: It was really hard because...I used to cry a lot actually, because of you know, leaving my relationship with my girlfriend. I've known her since my first school. We were about six. I've known her, I've been friends with her for about twelve years, and it was just so hard, because in a way I've left her behind.

Nancy was describing her movement from working-class to middle-class culture. This was a tremendously difficult task, as Nancy lacked knowledge about middle-class lifestyle. Indeed, her understanding of what it is to be 'middle-class' was based wholly on the viewpoint of an outsider looking in. This young woman lived in an environment in which parents, friends and parents of friends had not attended university or college. Rose described a similar experience:

MH: What do you want to do when you leave Parsons?

Rose: Well, I'm taking a year off next year in order to earn some money but I'd like to go on to university and do Maths.

MH: How do people react when you say that?

Rose: What, outside? I don't really like...I don't end up talking about it. None of the people out of school are interested. My friends outside of school don't really understand it.

This discussion raised several salient themes. First, Rose must take a year off in order to earn enough money to attend university for a year. Grants to students from the British government do not cover all of the costs of university and student's income must be supplemented. In discussions with pupils from Chiswick, the source of that supplement was usually parents. My interchange with Mark at Chiswick illustrates this difference:

MH: How will you afford to go to university?

Mark: My Dad. My sisters get grants but I really don't know how I would survive going to university without my Dad. He pays for their (the sisters') rent and he gives them money every week because their students grant is just not enough.

MH: Do you think most parents help their kids out here?

Mark: Oh yes, I'm sure.

For pupils at Parsons, lack of financial support was a serious concern and most pupils were already in part-time employment. Usually manual or service, these jobs were often not so much used to afford luxury items but to supplement the family income. Affording university was a grave concern.

In the passage above, Rose also highlighted that her friends did not understand her intention to attend university. Rose did not discuss her plans in any detail with her parents, boyfriend or friends, all of whom explicitly attempted to dissuade her from these plans. This strong source of support was not available to her. Interestingly, Rose differentiated between friends outside of school and those she associated with inside of school. For many pupils at Parsons, the only time in which higher education was discussed with any seriousness from informed sources was at school. This

contrasted sharply with pupils at Chiswick, who relied very heavily on their parents' knowledge of higher education. Indeed, some pupils at Chiswick informed me that their teachers were not the best sources of information since some of them had not completed post-graduate work. Support was not limited to knowledge of university and the transcripts reveal a strong tension in the adolescents at Parsons in having to choose (in effect) between friends. In concurrence with the findings of Mac An Ghaill and Sharpe, a common theme to emerge from my transcripts concerned losing friends and being considered a "snob" in developing a middle-class identity. In this way, I did not uncover many differences in the boys', as opposed to the girls', experience of alienation. I would argue that the girls faced greater barriers as definitions of femininity less often incorporate higher education and professional careers than do definitions of masculinity. Also, by achieving these goals, the girls would obviously surpass their fathers' and brothers' occupational status.

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***Profiles of Social Class -- The Parents:***

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The information I gained concerning parent's attitudes was based largely on informal discussion I had with some parents', and mainly the perceptions of their children. Since I did not formally interview the parents, my information is necessarily limited. Data from the questionnaires and group discussions revealed that the parents of the pupils at Chiswick were predominantly from the upper three classes of Goldthorpe's schema. Most of the pupils lived in North Oxford. Often the parents were professionals, including Fellows of Oxford University colleges, Heads of private secondary schools, executives of large businesses, local politicians and owners of local businesses. Most often these pupils lived in houses rather than flats and their parents most likely owned these houses. Many of the adolescents I met with had divorced parents and either lived predominantly with one parent or shared their time between parents. Pupils at Chiswick were most likely to have university educated parents.

Questionnaire and post-code data revealed that the parents of pupils at Parsons predominantly conformed to Goldthorpe's lower three classes. Typical occupations of these parents included blue-collar work such as line work at Rover car factory and service work such as cleaning. These families were more likely to rent the family dwelling. Often the flats or houses were Council owned. Most of the pupils lived in the Blackbird Leys area. Few of the pupils I spoke with at Parsons had gone on holiday with their families, fewer still had travelled abroad. Many of the pupils supplemented the family income through part-time work after school and on weekends.

Chiswick pupils reported that their parents strongly urged them to attend university. Some parents took a more active involvement in their children's career path than others. A salient theme to emerge concerned family discussions. In my

discussions with pupils at both schools, I became increasingly aware that the focus groups at Chiswick often seemed to require less effort on my part. That is, the adolescents in these groups seemed more familiar with the discussion of diverse topics and I was often able to minimally participate in the groups as the members 'took over'. These pupils reported that family discussions were common. Often parents would engage their children in academic discussions about diverse topics such as politics, social issues and economics. Pupils at Parsons reported that they were much less likely to have family discussions. A discussion with Krista and Rose illustrated this point. Rose described both her realisation and discomfort in talking with her middle-class boyfriend's family at dinner time:

Rose: They (his parents) talk to him on a different level. They are all really intelligent, like the whole family. In that sense he just has such a head start than I do. Like I have to work so hard just to catch up to him. Just to sit down with them and talk about current affairs and I do not have a clue. Like what's the conversation like in your family?

Krista: Horse racing. Football.

MH: What were you saying about using words that your boyfriend didn't understand?

Krista: Yeah. Sometimes I've said words that I learned here (at Parsons) and he doesn't understand them. I get in so much trouble. I just don't say them around him now.

Rose discussed having to "learn" how to converse with her boyfriend's family, as she had not learned these skills in her own family. The pupils at Chiswick, then, gain tremendous advantage in learning in their families a crucial element of middle-class identity; engaging in critical discussion.

Sharpe (1994) highlights the economic constraints placed on working-class families. Many parents in these families simply do not have the time or energy to engage in academic discussions as they are more likely to have time-consuming occupations. Often these parents have not themselves been exposed to this form of middle-class discourse. However, perhaps a stronger influence on the pupils at Parsons was their parents' limited knowledge of available careers and the suitability of



these careers. At best, several pupils described the 'passive' support they received from parents in such statements as "if you want to be successful, it's up to you to do it". From a working-class perspective, years of university education and the postponement of income are not necessarily economically viable alternatives. Sandra described her father's attitude:

My dad thinks it's a waste of time me going to university because "what's the point in just working and doing science and algebra" and I don't know if it's got anything to do with me being female but he wants me to be a check-out girl at Safeway and get married and have kids.

Most of the pupils from Parsons in the sixth form (years twelve and thirteen) I spoke with recognised that middle-class children receive the advantage of parents who "know the system". This advantage consists of parents who understand the process of getting into university and securing a professional occupation. The advantage also includes being able to identify with middle-class culture, discourse and behaviour. So although their parents may well desire higher education and professional careers for their children, negotiating the system is left largely up to their children to accomplish on their own. Some of the adolescents at Chiswick with whom I discussed this thesis had not considered that working-class children might not have the same advantages as they did. Several pupils were able to identify differences between themselves and pupils at working-class schools such as Parsons, but the origins of these differences remained opaque. Some Chiswick pupils had direct contact with Parsons pupils through the attendance of certain courses such as Sociology which were not offered at either school. Martin described his experience of attending this Sociology class with pupils from Parsons:

We have people from St. Arnolds and Chancery and Parsons. Parsons are the worst...every time we say something in class they just laugh. And they sit there whispering. But I don't care. From what I've seen the girls aren't allowed to be as outgoing with their heads. They are less independent...as they are here. When the teacher asks them a question they just say 'I don't know'. It is really

weird.

Cathy, too, had a similar experience attending class with pupils from Parsons:

In a way I know that I am well educated, not just from school and things like that but from conversations and things like that and I know that makes me more confident when I talk to people. I'm quite confident about expressing my opinion on something and about saying 'no, I don't agree with you on this'. I don't know if that's class but I think it has something to do with it. I think I have been encouraged to think about things and work things out for myself. I have always been taught to think about things rationally as well as how I feel about it. In class I just speak out and everyone at Parsons stares at me but I think if you know the answer then why wouldn't you say it?

Another reality for working-class girls is participation in the family's domestic chores. Whilst middle-class girls are more likely to be able to devote their full attention to study, working-class girls are responsible for household chores and caring for younger siblings at the expense of homework. And whilst there is little evidence to suggest that middle-class mothers are actually doing an equal amount of housework as their partners, they are more likely than working-class mothers to be able to afford paid domestic labour. For working-class mothers, most of whom work outside the home, their daughters provide essential assistance with this responsibility. Pupil's part-time employment was also more likely to be needed by working-class families to supplement the family income. This was illustrated very honestly in one focus group at Parsons in which I had asked (as an opening exercise) what their happiest moment that day was. One of the girls replied it was when she had realised that it was pay day at her job and her mother would be happy that they could pay one of their household bills. The middle-class pupils at Chiswick were much less likely to be employed. Those pupils I spoke with who did work part-time most often used that money for personal luxuries such as films and music. A corollary of part-time employment, household and childcare responsibilities was a greater onus on working-class adolescents to organise their time. Although the middle-class pupils were more likely

to be engaged in extra-curricular activities such as choir singing, aerobics, modelling and acting, these activities did not constitute necessary activities like paid work and childcare.

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*Profiles of Social Class--The Schools:*

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My knowledge of the schools' ethos was based on my working in both schools for a year, data garnered from the transcripts and any school literature that I could obtain. My knowledge of the schools, in other words, was fairly limited to my own observations and the accounts of the pupils at each school. From these sources it seemed as though Chiswick operated, to a large extent, under an explicitly middle-class ethos. Pupils at this school were strongly urged to adopt a middle-class identity which consisted of high valuation of education and career, skills in academic discourse and the appearance of self-confidence in their abilities. The organising of knowledge hierarchically, identified by Mac An Ghaill, was a salient feature of Chiswick school's goals. Whilst most pupils were attending Chiswick because of their parent's priority on a 'good education', the school nevertheless further differentiated between pupils on academic performance. Academic 'successes' were identified at GCSE (year eleven) level and streamlined for the sixth form. Some pupils I spoke with listed friends at the school who, according to these pupils, had been encouraged to re-consider attending Chiswick for the sixth form. The pupils at Chiswick reported that they had been given considerable information by the school concerning its national standing:

Tasha: Well here they've always had good secondary exam results. The school's in the top 100 schools in Britain and they want to keep that image and I can't stand it here. It does my head in.

Mark: Chiswick is one of the only state schools that places like Oxford and Cambridge actually accept. So they take 50% of their input from state schools but like in Oxford (city) they will take from one state school.

The most common statement concerning Chiswick school I garnered from pupils was the enormous pressure they felt to perform well on their exams. These pupils were

taught to define success in terms of academic performance. My informal discussions with teachers and parents supported the view that the main function of the school was to identify “high achievers” and coach them for Oxbridge entrance. Several pupils received extra tuition from teachers within the school. Other pupils had parents who paid for their children to receive private tuition from Oxford University students.

At Parsons, wanting “the best” for its pupils often seemed to translate into a different meaning from that at Chiswick. An informal streamlining operated at Parsons, as it did at Chiswick. This process began from very different starting points in the two schools, however. As Chiswick’s academic record was so strong, many more pupils applied to the school than could be accepted. Chiswick administrators were thus able to choose pupils judged to perform better academically. The fact that Chiswick was a high-achieving state school also encouraged applicants from parents who wanted a strong academic environment for their children whilst not paying public school fees. Parson’s academic record was not very strong. Most pupils I questioned reported that they attended Parsons because it was the closest school to their home. In many months of lengthy discussions with school administrators and teachers at this school I understood that teachers were very aware of the constraints placed on pupils from working-class backgrounds. Many teachers focused on pupil acquisition of basic reading and writing skills and work placements were organised around stereotyped working-class occupations such as factory technician and childcare worker.

Teacher perceptions of pupil potential formed an important source of information. Without exception, every teacher I spoke with at Parsons described pupil performance in terms of what “could be expected” from working-class pupils. In an important respect, I would argue that the middle-class assumptions of the teachers informed this discourse. In a society in which middle-class identity is accepted as the norm, often these middle-class teachers viewed the language and social background of the pupils as ‘culturally deprived’. The teacher’s function was to introduce middle-

class preferences of expression in order to 'compensate' for the 'deprivation' experienced by these pupils.

My impressions of both schools was mitigated to a large extent by my recognition that a simple equation of school ethos did not offer any kind of complete explanation. Merton's (1957) differentiation between manifest and latent functions of social institutions operated, in fact, in much more subtle, disjointed and conflictual way. According to Merton, manifest functions encompass the explicit goals of the institution and are usually expressed within that institution's mandate. Latent functions comprise the unstated purposes of the institution. I had approached both schools with the assumption that both manifest and latent functions were in operation. Manifest functions of education include the formal education of children and the socialisation of future full members of society. My actual observations, however, concurred to a large degree with work by Willis (1977). This author suggests that school institutions must be studied at three levels. At the official level, schools must be accountable to society at large and assuming that schools function in an obvious way to benefit the dominant class would be wrong. Willis argues here that the official direction of school policy has been to converge educational provision for children of divergent educational backgrounds. At a pragmatic level, the official aims and goals are handed over to school administrators and teachers to actualise. Willis maintains that teachers and administrators are largely interested in their own occupational survival. Official policies will only be adopted (on more than a superficial level) when they are deemed to actually offer some help to teachers and other school staff. Finally, at the cultural level, the intersection of the child's class experience outside the school

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with their class experience inside the school is a powerful source of social reproduction. The informal culture, according to Willis, may actually serve to reproduce the forms of social and economic relations which the official policies are trying to change. My analysis of Chiswick and Parsons schools demonstrated most relevantly that at least these three levels of cultural reproduction were in operation and that the sites of cultural transmission were many and varied.

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*Classed and Gendered Discourses:*

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My discussion of discourse on social class follows from the broader discussion of gender and discourse in Chapter 3. At the most fundamental level, this discussion involves the question of whether class and gender can be usefully deconstructed in discussions of the educational system, and analysed separately; or whether they are so inextricably intertwined as to make their separation artificial.

A central concern for feminist scholars is the understanding of gender divisions and class divisions as separate or inseparable. In Women's Oppression Today (1988), Michelle Barrett outlines the two opposing perspectives. The first perspective maintains that gender and class cannot be separated in any discussion of social relations. What is immediately important about this basically Marxist perspective is that gender is viewed to be usefully *subsumed* within a larger discussion of class. As Barrett points out, this perspective depends on the assumption that the family, rather than individual females and males, is the basic unit of class composition. This perspective has been widely criticised as I have discussed earlier in this chapter.

At the opposite end of the debate, is the perspective that gender and class operate absolutely independently. Gender represents a fundamental division through which females' oppression is actualised. Proponents of this argument point to compelling findings of girls' oppression in the classroom, harassment in the school ground and streamlining into subordinate occupations. Spender and Sarah (1980) examined the ways in which girls are discriminated against in schools. Lees (1993) and Sharpe (1994) describe girls' sexual harassment, bullying and discouragement from certain courses and occupational paths. Along these lines, a related theory is that females represent an identifiable social class in their own right. Evidence of this proposal comes from looking at womens' and mens' pay scales for different jobs. Moving from the top to the bottom of the occupational class structure widens the



differences in pay between women and men. The mere fact of stark differences in pay (within the same occupations) between females and males suggests that these differences are influenced by both gender and class.

Elizabeth Spelman embraces this debate in her book Inessential Woman (1988). In her expose of scholars such as Plato, Aristotle, Chodorow and deBeauvoir, Spelman examines the ways in which the category of 'woman' has, simultaneously, assumed to include all women and exclude large numbers of women. This author severely criticises feminist theory for its assumptions about women. She recognises that the "problem of difference" (pg. 4) for feminists is not so much how the commonalities of women should be weighed against the differences, but how the conditions of one group of women have been assumed to be the conditions of all women. In fact Spelman parallels the process by which men have excluded women from Western philosophical thought to the way in which feminists have excluded non-white, non-middle class women from Western feminism. And so feminist theory has assumed that gender (as a variable) is independent of class, race and ethnicity. The assumption is also that sexism is distinct from racism and classism.

Feminist theory investigating the ways in which girls and boys are differentially socialised amply demonstrates the multitude of ways in which girls and boys learn to become heterosexual, gendered adults. The purpose of this process for society is to "lead to the assimilation and internal organisation of generalised capacities for participation in a hierarchical and differentiated social world" (Chodorow, 1978:32). The sites of this socialisation are primarily the family and school. However, nowhere in these discussions is the acknowledgement that families and schools *also* prepare children to live in a classed and raced society. There is a serious problem of logic to the argument of the ways in which boys learn that society views them as superior to females. That boys learn all males are superior to all females is straightforward. But all whites also learn that they are superior to all non-whites. All upper- and middle-

class people learn that they are superior to all working-class people. What this simple equation does not explain is how the hierarchy of, say gender, is translated into hierarchy based on class or race. Moreover, the class grounds on which some men are different from some women are confoundingly the same grounds on which some women are more similar to some men than to other women. As Spelman recognises, sexism insists on differences between women and men that classism requires as similarity. This problem has significant consequences, and I return to it in the section 'Divergent Discourses'. What is important, here, is to acknowledge that sorting women and men into categories is a complicated business and depends, essentially, on who is sorting. The obvious question is whether there are any sortings that are fundamental as opposed to superficial. A wealth of literature by such authors as bell hooks (1984) and Audre Lorde (1984) strongly suggest that if gender is fundamental, so too are class and race. If a woman is sorted along the dimension of gender, then, her experiences will still be different from the women she has been sorted with, primarily because she has not been sorted with other women along a different dimension: "all women are women, but there is no being who is only a woman" (pg.102).

The point here is basically that there is no essentiality about 'womanness' or 'Blackness' or 'working-classness'. Individuals are not made up of distinct units of identity that can be added together to make up a person. This type of conflation is dangerous in that if there is an essential 'classness' or 'womanness' then there is no need to investigate the experiences or reality of any class or woman in particular. The 'story' of woman or working-class can be told by the experiences of *any* woman or *any* working-class person.

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*Perceptions of Class:*

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Describing the adolescents' talk about social class and gender, is to acknowledge that the primary location of this discourse was the formal educational system. It is, therefore, at this point that I must directly address the British educational system as a primary site of social class and gender. We must first examine the relationship of the educational system to the state. A Marxist analysis of capitalism requires that workers' relationship to production be primarily one of dominance (in the case of the bourgeois) or subordination (for the proletariat). According to Althusser (1977), the educational system (as well as the family, law, the political system and cultural institutions), subordinates individuals through ideology. Basically, schools remove children from their families at the age of five (earlier in some cases) and subject them to the ideology of the bourgeois dominant ideology. At sixteen most of these individuals are dismissed from the system to form the working class; some individuals go on in school to form the bourgeois class; and a minority continue on still further into higher education to eventually form the upper classes or "agents of exploitation". As an institution which accomplishes this task through means of ideology, the educational system must convince pupils, parents, teachers and the general public that the emergent class division is legitimate. That is, by assigning qualifications along the educational ladder, the appearance of 'neutrality' in the class system (i.e. that individuals with few educational qualifications 'should' hold manual jobs whilst individuals with many educational certifications be amongst the top classes) is maintained. It is not that education transcends class; rather that class *operates through education* in each generation.

In examining the discourse used by the girls and boys in my various groups, I was interested in how the experience of class transforms the experience of gender. This experience consists of the social and cultural discourses to which each adolescent

has been exposed. I was also interested in the ways in which the educational system influenced both the discourses chosen by the pupils at each school. My assumption that within any capitalist institution there exists a hierarchy of discourses led to my further investigation of the pupils' awareness and understanding of the class system as a function of capitalist relations.

I shall also attempt in this discussion to address the issue of identity formation with regard to both class and gender. What I am interested in here is the tension between the social order and the social actor. I propose the educational system, as social order, is mainly subtle in its reproduction of individual identity. As Macdonnell (1986) points out, it is not that individuals are so much "amputated and repressed" by the social order as "fabricated in it". Society is invested in producing "specific sorts of persons with specific social identities, and particular rights and needs"(pg.108). The social actor must negotiate her/his understanding of social relations through a variety of social identities. These social identities are available, on the one hand, from the dominant cultural ideologies. On the other hand, social identity (in this case focused on class and gender) will always involve contradiction as discourse and experience often diverge. For instance, there is nothing natural about girls performing more household chores than their brothers and girls are aware that their experience of housework does not fit with its cultural prescriptions.

Returning to the discussion of education, a corollary of the latter perspective is that class and gender intersect within the education system to reproduce capitalist production. That is to say, the education that a girl receives due to her class and sex will largely determine her position as a woman in the labour force. Her education will be based on both her sex and her class. More broadly, education will reproduce both class and gender identities. It is this process that I turn to my research now.

**Knowledge of Social Class:**

I shall begin to answer these questions by examining the ways in which the adolescents understood the concept of social class as well as the extent to which they placed themselves within this system. As I discussed earlier in this thesis, I asked the girls and boys in all of the groups to write down on a piece of paper the “class system in Britain”. For the focus groups at Parsons, this request usually needed to be followed by further explanation on my part as most of these adolescents seemed quite unsure about this task. One group interpreted my task assignment as my wanting them to write down all of the school classes they attended. I interpreted this reaction in a number of ways. First, the pupils at Chiswick seemed more used to having written assignments given to them. Second, nearly all of the pupils in the focus groups at Chiswick had specifically been taught “British social class” in an English course.

Once the ambiguity of the question was straightened out, the focus groups at Parsons usually outlined a class system based on loosely defined lower-, middle- and upper-classes. Broadly, lower class was defined as very poor people who do not work, are on social benefits and have no property or goods. Some pupils differentiated between lower working- and upper working-class people. Lower working-class people have no money, income, housing or security. Upper working-class people, on the other hand, have manual labour or service (such as cashier) jobs, live in Council accommodation, and receive enough income to just survive from one pay cheque to the next. All the pupils at Parsons defined the working-class category as the largest category, containing most members of society. Middle-class people own their own home and car. The parents are not divorced and either the father works in a well-paid professional job such as a doctor or both father and mother work in professional occupations. Some pupils differentiated between lower middle- and upper middle-classes. The difference was attributed to the amount of money and luxury items the family unit had. Finally, upper-class people were defined as having

inherited a large amount of money and not needing to work in order to economically survive. The adolescents at Parsons most often described members of the royal family as upper-class people. Some pupils did not agree with their group members about dividing the classes beyond lower, middle and upper. As David said:

I've got three stages. I've got lower class, working class and upper class. Cause all this lower, middle, upper stuff: they are either one or the other, they are not a bit of each. They can't be working with a bit of posh.

Out of the six groups at Parsons, all but one considered themselves to be working-class. They based this categorisation on their parent's occupation, the money earned by their parents and the commodities owned by their families. The group that defined themselves as middle-class did so because they interpreted working-class people as having absolutely no money or accommodation. They considered themselves to be middle-class because "I haven't got no money but haven't got loads of it either". Also, Tim, in one of the boys groups, defined himself as middle-class. His father was the Head teacher at Parsons and his mother was a counsellor. He lived in a house owned (as opposed to rented) by his parents who also owned two cars and went abroad on holiday in the summer.

When I asked members of the focus groups at Parsons on what they based their own placement in the class system, they all replied that the salient features of class placement were parent's occupation and amount of money in the family. Only two of the six groups spontaneously remarked that attending higher education would potentially place them in a higher class than their parents and siblings. This lack of acknowledgement was despite the fact that many of the groups' members had already surpassed their parent's level of education.

At Chiswick school, reaction to my request for a description of the class system was met with considerably fewer queries and most of the groups' members seemed to interpret my request as a school 'assignment'. One pupil responded to my

request by saying “yeah, this is just like what we have to do in school”. Another pupil asked me if I wanted her to provide a Marxist analysis and quoted “each according to his ability to each according to his need” in her description. The class system that the pupils at Chiswick generally outlined involved more categories and sub-categories. The outline usually began with an under-class, consisting of individuals who live on the street with no job, income or housing. The groups considered members of the under-class to be below the poverty line. These people were described several times as being “socially unacceptable” and “tramps”. One girl described members of this class as “scummy people”. Working-class membership involved completing A-levels and then working in manual labour employment such as factory worker. Middle-class people worked in occupations requiring a high degree of education. Middle-class was usually further delineated into lower-middle class, middle-middle class and upper-middle class. Placement within these categories depended on level of education and skill-level of employment. For instance, the groups often defined Fellows and Masters of Oxford Colleges as upper-middle class. Some pupils defined a “nouveaux riche” class of uneducated people who had made a lot of money through business involvement. Interestingly, all of the pupils in the groups at Chiswick defined the middle-class as the largest category, containing the largest segment of the population. Finally, upper-class people were defined similarly to the groups at Parsons, as members of the aristocracy who do not need to “work” for a living.

The pupils at Chiswick in the nine groups nearly always defined themselves as lower-middle or middle-middle class. They based this categorisation, as did the pupils at Parsons, on their parent’s occupation. Chiswick pupils emphasised their parent’s high level of education and strong work ethic as the main reasons for their economic success. They seemed to minimise the amount of money their parents earned, typically expressing such statements as “they make enough to be comfortable”. None of the pupils (including the majority whose parents were Fellows of Oxford Colleges,

business executives or Heads of private schools) defined themselves as upper-middle class or upper-class, despite their clear membership in these categories.

The next set of questions I asked the pupils at each school consisted of how important they viewed class, in terms of life chances and treatment by others. Pupils at both schools reported that they understood social class to be very important in British society. Members of the groups at Parsons spoke of class influencing the chances of securing a good job. Some group members talked about the middle-class as a semi-exclusive 'club' in which members assisted each other and their children. Not surprisingly, the pupils at Parsons spoke of working-class people as friendlier, more helpful towards others and generally "nicer" people. They perceived middle-class people as "snobs", who treated them somewhat dismissively. Krista worked among the catering staff at a prominent Oxford College and described her perception of the ways in which she and her female co-workers were treated. Krista reported that the College students were very demanding regarding the service of meals. She also reported that several male College students would attempt to go out with female members of the catering staff whom they perceived as being sexually "loose" and "easy". Whilst some of the catering girls did go out with the College students, there was a general feeling amongst the staff that these young men and women were "snobs". It was common practice amongst the catering staff, according to Krista, to serve the food on dirty plates and to spit in the food being served. Other pupils at Parsons reported that their lives were not that effected by class since they lived, went to school and worked within a predominantly working-class community. They reported very little exposure to middle- or upper-class people. Whilst these pupils said that middle-class people "looked down on them", the *effect* on their lives only manifested during direct contact with members of the upper classes. Since there was little direct contact, these pupils described little discrimination.



Pupils in the groups at Chiswick reported with much greater conviction the importance of social class. To the majority of these pupils social class affected “everything”. This category referred to type of occupation, level of education and amount of money. It did not seem to refer to attitudes, however. That is, these pupils reported that middle-class negative attitudes towards working-class people were uncommon. Chiswick pupils almost invariably invested some time in assuring me that they did not harbour any negative stereotypes about working-class people; the pupils at Parsons by contrast rarely engaged with me concerning prejudices they had about middle- or upper-class people.

Pupils I talked with at Chiswick invariably reported that their parents enjoyed an affluent life-style (my interpretation) through “very hard work”. I questioned these pupils about what this implied about working-class parents work effort. The most common reply consisted of statements such as “oh, yeah, they work hard too”. So how, then, did working-class parents not make as much money as their own parents did, if success was based on effort? Pupils at Chiswick then differentiated their parents work as involving more complex decision-making and responsibility. Some pupils stated that they actually thought that working-class people were generally “lazier” than middle-class people. Jeff and Martin’s comments were quite representative:

MH: How do you think your outlook on life is affected by the class you come from?

Jeff: I suppose we are going to go to university and get a decent job. And make a large sum of money every year and get like quite a respectable job. I don’t know maybe some of them (Parsons pupils) look down on university and end up working on Cowley Road in a shop or something.

Martin: I think middle-class parents have aspirations of their children going on to university whereas there might be some working-class parents who have those aspirations for their children and work hard to give their children that education.

Jeff: I think the child goes a lot on the parents. Like if the parents have jacked off then they won’t be too bothered about their kids. If they

(the parents) want to better themselves then they'll want better for their kids. I think the child's aspirations come from the parents...People who have aspirations go to Chiswick. Whereas for Parsons you just sort of go there.

### **Parsons and Chiswick Perceptions of Each Other's Class:**

During group sessions I asked a series of questions about how each school perceived the other school. Often I did not have to initiate this discussion. Each set of groups were very aware that I was conducting research at the “other” school and pupils often voiced curiosity concerning what the “other kids” were telling me. This seemed to be particularly the case for the pupils at Chiswick. It was at this time that pupils’ perceptions of my own social class entered the discussion. Pupils at both schools identified me as middle-class for two main reasons: my membership to Oxford University and my North American accent. Conclusions about my socio-economic status based on my accent were interesting because the pupils invariably reported that “Americans are rich”. My assertion that I am Canadian made no difference, as Canadians were perceived as “just as rich as Americans”. They seemed to have arrived at this conclusion based on media depictions of American wealth.

For Chiswick pupils, my inclusion in the middle-class seemed to provide the basis for the perception of a shared experience of Parsons. There was a basic assumption made that I would ‘relate’ more to the pupils at Chiswick. This assumption led to perhaps a greater honesty in their responses, as they perceived that I was ‘on their side’. Chiswick pupils generally described pupils at Parsons as more aggressive (this will be discussed at length in the next section), less academically motivated and as prejudiced against middle-class adolescents. Mark, for instance, described the pupils at Parsons as perceiving Chiswick pupils as “snobs”. This pupil reported that Parsons school did not emphasise the need to concentrate on academic work: Parsons was a place where “you’re not allowed to be smart”:

MH: Supposing tomorrow you had to transfer to Parsons. What do you think that would be like?

Mark: It would be a nightmare. Really, I couldn't think of anything worse.

One of the most common complaints that Chiswick pupils made of Parsons pupils was the assumption that Chiswick pupils had an "easy life". Chiswick pupils reported that pupils at Parsons thought that because their parents were "well-off" this meant that Chiswick pupils did not need to expend very much effort in school and work. In fact, most of the pupils I spoke with at Chiswick did not have paid work. Some pupils did volunteer work in order to expand their Curriculum Vitae or as "charity work". None of the pupils I spoke with contributed to their parent's income or worked in order to afford luxuries. Jeff's comments were fairly typical:

MH: What kinds of things do you do in your leisure time?

Jeff: I hang out a lot with my friends, go to parties.

MH: And how do you get your money?

Jeff: My parents help me out. Yeah, if I need anything my parents get it for me. I've never really thought about it.

MH: How did you get your outfits for the Ball?

Jeff: I got it for about one hundred quid and it's quite good quality. My Mum bought it.

MH: How do you think your lives differ from students at Parsons?

Jeff: I don't know. I suppose we get into more creative things. Like dance, art...

Chiswick pupils described Parsons as a "rougher" school, with more bullying, theft and general aggression. Their impression of pupils at Parsons was that the boys were "lads" meaning that they were invested in a macho identity. Girls at Parsons were described as being less willing to "use their minds" by engaging in intellectual discussion, more likely to have sex at a younger age than girls at Chiswick, "rougher", and more likely to "settle" for marriage and family.

Pupils at Parsons also engaged in lively discussions about pupils at Chiswick. Some pupils were initially reluctant to discuss this topic. However, once I described the secondary school that I attended in Canada (which resembled Parsons in many more respects than Chiswick) the discussion continued without much prompting on my part. Pupils at Parsons generally described their contemporaries at Chiswick as having a much greater disposable income; that is, more money given to them by their parents to spend on luxury items. Chiswick pupils were mainly described as “snobs” who were no smarter than pupils at Parsons but who received greater support in terms of not having to divide their time between school and work and having private tutoring. Krista talked about her experience of having a friend at Chiswick:

I used to get invited to her friend's parties and they live in huge big posh houses...The conversation there is more education-orientated as well. Even families where the parents weren't together...but also they have got a lot more money and their parents let them smoke anything in their houses and like loads of people can go round to their houses and their parents don't mind. And like loads of times we would be at their places and the parents would come in home they were smoking and the parents just wouldn't care and I think that just makes it loads easier because the parents are just so much more relaxed.

Pupils at Parsons correctly assessed that they were perceived as being less interested in higher education, less comfortable with middle-class culture including language and social skills. Rose encapsulated this impression when she said in one group discussion:

I just think they think we're common. You try to tell them that you don't see a fight everyday at school and like hardly anyone bullies at Parsons but because you do have your North Oxford types who go to Chiswick there is a class difference there.

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Pupils at Parsons also generally assessed that Chiswick pupils had a greater disposable income for such things as going to films and buying clothes, makeup and music.

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*Divergent Discourses:*

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Two topics on which the adolescents talk at the two schools particularly diverged were feminism and politics. An article by Elizabeth Frazer (1988) discusses her research with working-class and middle-/upper-class girls. A central focus of this research was to investigate the various discourses employed by both groups of girls to describe their experiences of being female. My research supports Frazer's findings in several ways. First of all, I found middle-class girls at Chiswick were more familiar with feminism as a discourse than girls at Parsons. Chiswick girls were able to use feminist 'vocabulary' such as "oppression" and "empowerment". One girl, Elicia, described a hierarchical class system clearly informed by a feminist analysis of class:

Rich powerful white men at the top. Then middle class men followed quite closely by middle-class women. Working-class men. Working-class women. Other races and children.

Girls at Chiswick were much more comfortable with identifying themselves as feminist. They defined feminism as working for "equal rights" between women and men. Often discussions with their mothers about feminism were referred to when they discussed being feminist. Many of the girls had a lot to say about feminism and its effect on their understanding of their experiences. Most girls reported that being feminist made them "stronger" in that it helped them to interpret life events more accurately. For instance, two girls described themselves as feminists and Christians. Both girls discussed at length how their understanding of feminism had helped shape their experience of Christianity. These girls adamantly supported the Catholic and Protestant ordination of women and expressed very strong statements about the importance of women's roles generally in the Christian church.

A small minority of the Chiswick girls I spoke with reported that they did not want to be “radical feminists” who they understood to be “unfeminine” and “hating men”. However, most often a lively discussion resulted from the expression of these ideas:

- Reeta: The thing I have about really strong feminists is that they scare me...  
Emma: But they are supporting you.  
Reeta: I don't feel supported by it.  
Emma: Are you a feminist?  
Reeta: I don't know. Am I?  
Emma: If you believe that women should be striving for equality.  
Reeta: Yeah, but I do believe there are some differences that are overlooked because of some feminists.  
Elicia: I think it makes me feel quite proud actually. Women are standing up for themselves.  
Emma: The way I feel about extreme feminists is like yes I am proud of them in a way. They are standing up for themselves but I also think in a way they are as bad as the blokes they are trying to beat.  
Elicia: Some girls are anti-feminist.  
MH: Why do you think that is?  
Elicia: Because of the stereotype of the feminist is so unattractive. Because society makes women feel that what they are there for is to be attractive to men. And the two don't go together. Being a strong person means being someone who is threatening to men. And it threatens your ideas of femininity especially when you are quite young and you want a certain image and you want to be attractive and someone that doesn't always involve being independent.

The boys at Chiswick offered the consistent response that they did not “have anything against feminism” as long as it did not “go over the top”. Further discussion with these boys suggested that what these statements referred to was the concern that strong feminists actively discriminated against men. Some boys complained that the girls at Chiswick made feminist statements that were unnecessarily assertive. That is, the boys generally reported that equality between males and females had largely been achieved and that the girls at Chiswick had little to complain about.

At Parsons I found no transcript or record in my field notes in which the girls or boys raised feminism as a topic without my prompting. Since the girls at Chiswick often referred to feminism I wanted to ask pupils at Parsons about their understanding of this topic. None of the girls in any of the groups identified themselves as feminists and the talk about feminism consisted of girls outlining stereotypes such as unattractiveness and aggressiveness. All the girls at some point in the discussion reported they did not want to be associated with this stereotype.

The second topic on which marked differences in the ways in which the pupils at the two schools talked was about politics. Most girls and boys at Parsons did not discuss politics with me. During the time of my focus groups the leader of the Labour Party, Mr. John Smith died. Some pupils I spoke with at Parsons did not know who John Smith was. At Chiswick, most pupils did speak about politics and informed me that they discussed politics with their parents, teachers and friends. Interestingly, all the pupils I spoke with at Chiswick about politics maintained that they had “liberal” political beliefs:

Elicia: We have quite close political beliefs.

Reena: We’re all Labour.

Elicia: No we’re more left-wing than that.

Reena: Okay, we’re all incredibly left-wing.

These girls told me that it was middle-class people who vote Labour, whilst working-class people vote Conservative. None of the girls of voting age at either Chiswick or Parsons that I spoke with actually did vote. However, the girls at Chiswick were adamant that their parents were, as they said, “liberal” in their politics and attitudes about society.

The differences in working-class and middle-class use of feminist and politics discourses empirically supports Spelman’s theory of the self-identity variables as inseparable. It is clear from the data that these boys and girls are learning what it is to



be men and women *of their class and race*. The working-class boys at Parsons are learning that male superiority is mitigated by class and race. The girls at Chiswick are learning that 'being female' does not necessarily include that any woman is inferior to any man. Parsons girls are learning that all women are not inferior to all men in just the same way. Girls and boys clearly do not learn simply what it is to be girls and boys. They learn what it is to be working-class, Black girls; middle-class white boys; working-class white boys and so on. The question for examination is less how boys come to understand that they are superior to females and how girls learn that they are inferior to males; and more how all boys and girls learn that male superiority is the prerogative of certain men and that some females are superior to some women and men.

My data also supports Willis's (1977) work on school 'sub-culture'. The conflict, resistance and rejection of these divergent discourses suggests that cultural reproduction at the school site is neither simple nor straightforward. Just as Willis's working-class boys talked in many ways which resisted a middle-class identity, so did several of the pupils at Parsons and Chiswick. It is very clear that cultural reproduction is both process and incomplete achievement.

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***Social Class and Aggression:***

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Not surprisingly pupils at each school reported that they thought there was more violence at the other school. Chiswick pupils reasoned that pupils at Parsons had less money and would therefore turn to crimes such as theft in order to acquire luxury items. Chiswick pupils also reported that they thought there would be more violence:

Middle-class adolescent relationships you don't really get violence whereas in lower class adolescent relationships you are likely to get violence because in lower-class families their parents are more likely to have violent fights than middle-class families. In lower-class families the kids are more likely to see the violence whereas in middle-class they are less likely to see it because in middle-class homes they have this thing about keeping things away from the kids, staying together for the kids, protecting the kids from anything that might corrupt them and anything that might make them unpopular.

Violence in working-class adolescent relationships was assumed to take place with greater frequency because marital violence was assumed to take place more frequently within this class. Violence in adolescent relationships was seen to reflect the violence in adult relationships. Chiswick pupils reported that pupils at Parsons were more "used to" a violent community in which gang violence and racial violence was frequent. One male pupil said that he could imagine a "drunken lagerlout from Parsons doing that (abusing his girlfriend) but not someone from here".

Pupils I spoke with at Parsons reported that they thought there was more violence in Chiswick adolescent relationships because the privileged lifestyle that Chiswick pupils led made them less willing to "stick with" a relationship. The general sentiment seemed to be that pupils at Chiswick had less patience in maintaining a relationship and would resort to violence more quickly than working-class adolescents would.

One exception to this finding was my discussion with Rose who had been physically abused by her boyfriend. She maintained that one of the primary reasons her boyfriend had abused her at the end of the relationship was because he could not reconcile her superior education and career aspirations:

Rose: Towards the end he got very aggressive sometimes. I think he was just so frustrated that he wasn't going anywhere and he knew it.

MH: Do you think that he sensed that you were leaving him?

Rose: Yeah, I think so, because he knew that I had long-term plans, that I had to do A-levels, that I wanted to go to university and I don't think he liked it.

MH: Why?

Rose: Because it meant that I'd be leaving him, I suppose, and becoming independent.

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***Conclusions:***

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Two main conclusions may be drawn from this discussion. First of all, it is clear that there is no single category of 'woman' or 'girl'. Shared membership as universal denies the centrality of social class as a very real cultural variable. This does not mean that gender and race may be usefully separated and their effects on a phenomenon such as violence be evaluated in such a discrete way. The results of my analysis strongly suggest that being a middle-class girl is *different* from being a working-class girl. Indeed, the discourse employed by the girls and boys in my study was very clearly informed by, amongst other variables, their gender and class. And whilst differences such as gender and social class are usually discussed as discrete categories, they are lived by these adolescents as inextricably enmeshed; that is relationally. Simply 'adding on' class means talking about girls and boys who are not middle-class. In this way the focus of the discussion becomes how classism is experienced by some groups as opposed to how it is perpetuated by others.

## Chapter 10: CONCLUSIONS

A society without power relations can only be an abstraction...[However,] to say that there cannot be a society without power relations is not to say either that those which are established are necessary, or, in any case, that power constitutes a fatality at the heart of societies, such that it cannot be undermined. Instead I would say that the analysis, elaboration, and bringing into question of power relations and the 'antagonism' between power relations and the intransitivity of freedom is a permanent political task inherent in all social existence.

(Foucault, 1982:222-3)

Cathy: So what is the solution then?

Harriet: Yeah, Myra, how do we stop all of this violence?

MH: I wish I knew. Then I would be teaching *that* in schools.

### ***Introduction:***

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The major project of this thesis has been to examine the phenomenon of female and male adolescent violence within intimate 'dating' relationships. I have been concerned to discover the incidence and prevalence of violence within a population of pupils at two schools in the Oxford area. The data consisted of a questionnaire administered to nearly five hundred pupils, seventeen focus groups that met weekly for several months and twenty individual interviews.

From the focus groups and individual interviews I have been largely interested in gaining insight into the various discourses that girls and boys have available to them and choose to use in various contexts involving violence. The theoretical perspective that I have developed in this thesis begins with several assumptions. First, violence must be viewed as social action. Analysis at this level involves accounting for both the individual and the action. This starting point does not allow violence to be subsumed under such vague analyses as 'risk factors' and the 'transmission of violence' from parents to children. My review of literature highlights the fact that the majority of projects on this topic have concentrated on such themes at the expense of understanding the complexity of social relations. My second assumption is that gender and social class must take prominent positions in any analysis of violence between (and within) gender relations. I have examined the impact of social class as both an active force and set of social relations through which discourse is structured.

However, the primary goal of this thesis has been the deconstruction of the notion of gender. I have theorised that the concepts of 'gender' and 'sex' involve separate sets of assumptions about social relations. The means by which I have examined gender was discourse. Through adolescent talk I have analysed at great length the cultural origins of gender which consist primarily of biological explanations and vague references to socialisation. I have proposed a theory of multiple femininities and masculinities as an alternative to current conceptions of gender which see certain traits as 'belonging to' one gender or the other.

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A third assumption in the research is that aggression and violence are not necessarily 'bad'. That is, I did not approach this project with the notion that all acts of violence described to me must be conceptualised as negative acts. On this point later gender theorists such as Kappeler (1995), Moore (1994) and Connell (1987, 1995) agree. Connell, for instance, describes at length acts of resistance which attempt to foil the ascendant structure of gender practice. Within this context, violence may not necessarily constitute a wrong or evil action. I also needed to recognise that the girls and boys whom I interviewed did not define violence as necessarily negative. What I was essentially trying to achieve was an understanding of the contexts in which these adolescents talked about violence as wrong and the contexts in which violence was discussed as legitimate.

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*Summary of Findings:*

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The findings from the questionnaire suggest that intimate violence is, in fact, a significant problem for adolescents. A first reading of these findings suggest that female violence is as serious and as prevalent as male violence. I found that girls were as likely as boys to approve of the use of violence and employ violent actions. I also discovered that less serious forms of violence are more common than more serious violence. Social class, ethnicity and the use of alcohol were not found to be significantly associated with instances of violence.

However, I employed the Conflict Tactics Scale with an explicit agenda of criticism. Scholars, both feminist and non-feminist, have illuminated the CTS and other such scales for their bias towards the mutuality of violence. I attempted to highlight some of these criticisms through the talk of the adolescents about the questionnaire. My conclusions about the use of such surveys is that the knowledge gained from them regarding intimate violence is quite limited and should never be used as the sole method of inquiry. My talks with the adolescents strongly suggested that they did not accurately complete the questionnaire for a number of reasons. First, some pupils, especially those in the younger years, did not understand all of the questions. Second, some pupils did not feel comfortable in disclosing highly personal information on a survey. This finding contrasts with the general assumption that individuals often prefer to disclose personal



information on 'anonymous' questionnaires rather than in face-to-face interviews. Third, a questionnaire cannot possibly account for the fluidity of an individual's thinking about, and experience of, such a complex phenomenon as violence. The 'attitude' questions regarding the acceptability of an individual slapping their partner's face exemplifies this point. Whilst it appears that a significant number of girls and boys 'approve' of violence, this approval can only have meaning in the context of transcripts which revealed often conflicting discourses about the meaning of violence between intimate partners. Furthermore, the reliability tests at the end of Chapter 5 reveal that the reliability of the respondents' reports about the violence they committed and received was questionable. I found the data from the transcripts to be much more meaningful than the data from the questionnaire in the sense that my understanding of the fluidity of adolescent discourse on violence, as a reflection of their self-identities, attitudes, thoughts and beliefs to be significantly greater.

The bulk of the research data consisted of the large number of transcripts I recorded from the focus groups and individual interviews. In Chapters 7 and 8 I discussed psychological, physical and sexual forms of violence. I found that psychological forms of violence such as put-downs and calling derogatory names to be a frequent occurrence in adolescent conversation. These findings concurred with those of other researchers such as Lees (1993), McRobbie and Nava (1984) and Sharpe (1994) who also concluded that girls as well as boys are involved in the structuring of gender relations on traditional conceptions of gender. For instance, the word 'slag' was used by girls and boys alike to reproduce a discourse in which girls are prescribed by their sexuality. Girls may be either

'slags' meaning sexually promiscuous, or 'frigid' meaning sexually unavailable to males. Girls and boys negotiated these meanings by denying that they referred to a particular girl. The denial or examination of the categories themselves did not occur.

The results of my research also suggest that physical violence, in the forms of holding down, slapping, punching, kicking and pushing were also quite common between boys and girls. Whilst prescriptions against hitting girls pervaded the discourse of the adolescents, the violence nevertheless persisted. Boys and girls alike tended to talk about this form of violence in terms of isolated incidents. Many of the adolescents talked about physical violence in instrumental terms; as accomplishing a particular goal such as getting their partner to do what they wanted them to do. Violence, with this meaning, was often interpreted as 'reasonable'.

The topic of sexual violence elicited the greatest amount of data and produced the most controversial discussions within the groups. These discussions marked a 'turning point' in my relationship with many of the groups' members as they approached me individually to disclose personal stories of abuse, date rape, sexual assault or sexual harassment. The topic of sexual violence produced the greatest divergence between the transcripts of the girls and the boys. For the boys, rape was most likely to be attributed to 'mixed signals' which really translated into the idea that girls do not provide adequate signals that they do not want to have sex. Female responsibility for rape was a theme that surfaced again and again in the boy's transcripts. The girl's transcripts were, not surprisingly, less straightforward and revealed significant levels of conflict about issues

such as mixed signals and a girl's ability to 'lead men on' beyond a male's ability to control himself. These discussions provided the salient data for the theory of gender and gender relations that formed the major part of the thesis. I will discuss the relevance of these findings in the next section.

One of the most significant variables to affect adolescent discourse was social class. The adolescent's social class category was based primarily on the occupational status of their mother and fathers (or guardians). The questionnaire and post code analysis confirmed that Chiswick and Parsons schools were populated primarily by upper/middle-class and working-class children respectively. Discussion of future plans, including educational goals and goals of marriage, family and children revealed strong class differences. Young women and men at Chiswick school were far more likely to have an articulated, detailed career goals, which always included attending university. Their parents were fairly active in their children's education, to the extent of providing private tutorials in several instances. These adolescents were much more likely to enjoy leisure activities involving money such as trips to London and Tae Kwon Do lessons. These pupils were also more likely to underestimate their own social class and their discourse reflects assumptions of class as reflecting hard work and effort rather than an unequal system of wealth distribution.

In contrast, the pupils at Parsons were much less likely to hold professional career aspirations. Those pupils that did espouse such middle-class careers were often quite limited in their understanding of the process of education, university and career

attainment. These pupils were also less likely to enjoy leisure time as their participation in the work force was often necessary to support the family wage. Pupils at Parsons were, however, more likely to understand the limitations placed on themselves by the class system. They were more likely to assess their own social class position accurately and understand the privilege of pupils at Chiswick school.

Female and male pupils at Chiswick were more likely to be familiar with feminist discourses which might offer a greater degree of empowerment for girls. However, comparisons of the actual levels of aggression for these two populations did not reveal any significant differences. It is interesting that the pupils at Chiswick almost invariably supported the view that working-class families and intimate relationships contained higher levels of aggression. This view represents an endorsed societal discourse that prescribes working-class culture as both unitary and its members as less able to maintain self-control.

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***The Concept of Gender Re-visited:***

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I have mainly been concerned in this thesis to gain insight into how girls and boys understand violence in relationships. I only began to 'put the pieces together', that is the fragments of talk on a multitude of topics, when I began to talk with the adolescents about sexual violence. Discussions about sex tended (how to, when to, what to, where to) elicited interest and even, sometimes, laughter. However, it was the discussions about sexuality which elicited the most obvious display of conflict within and between groups, as well as the strongest display of emotions I interpreted as anger, sorrow and fear.

Group talk about sexuality included discussion of what the two sexes have in common with regard to sexuality, what they cannot share, and what they choose not to share. That is, talk about sexuality *really* focused on these adolescents' assumptions about the nature of femininity and masculinity. For example, very lively debates nearly always ensued when a group member made a statement regarding all male's assumed inability to control their sexual drive. Sexual drive was always assumed to mean having sex with a female. The definition never included discussions of males not being able to control when they masturbated or had sex with a male, for example. To a large extent I found the boys employed a discourse which I referred in Chapter 7 to as 'biological explanations'. This discourse pervaded many other areas of talk amongst the groups. It is to this discourse that I now turn.

Biological explanations, as an 'answer' meant providing a certain set of answers to particular questions that the discussions would raise. For instance, when the discussion turned to "why do some men rape" a common answer was that men have a biological need to have sex, the male sex drive is higher than the female sex drive (there was some debate as to whether females have a sex drive at all), and when placed in situations in which females 'lead males on', the natural (i.e. inevitable) corollary will be rape. Here biological explanations were given as answers. However, by the term 'biological explanations' I also mean the set of assumptions necessary to make statements such as "girls lead boys on" and "men can't be expected to control themselves". These assumptions centred around the very definitions of feminine and masculine. The boys focused very much on the differences between themselves and girls. Many sentences began with "girls are like this...", "girls do this" or "girls feel this way...". So girls could 'lead boys on' because they were *different* from boys. Even strategies of flirting were discussed as though girls were almost a different species from boys. Girls, too, often discussed these issues in terms of differences between themselves and boys. However, the girls' talk was also littered with conflicting statements about gender. Some girls talked about boys as separate, others emphasised similarity.

Some of the discourse employed by the boys and girls concurred to a large degree with Connell's (1995) "hegemonic masculinity" and "emphasised femininity". The boys and girls who emphasised difference most often ascribed traditional culture prescriptions of males as strong, rational, emotionally remote and dominant. The male sex drive was

discussed as purely biological, impenetrable and uncontrollable. Girls were talked about as emotional, irrational, caring, interested in marriage and family, manipulative and sensitive. My discussion of the term 'hysterical' as applied frequently to girls and never to boys is one example of the "emphasised femininity" discourse. Some girls, those at Chiswick school, sometimes chose a feminist discourse. Conflict between feminist discourses and those of hegemonic masculinity and emphasised femininity emerged in the many discussions with these girls. Many of these discussions highlighted the real ambivalence within feminism. A great deal of feminist scholarship on violence against women actually subscribes to biological explanation assumptions about males as 'dominant'. Girls who used a feminist discourse often arrived at an impasse when they attempted to de-construct this assumption of male dominance.

That differences within genders, that is differences *between* boys and differences *between* girls, was largely ignored, speaks to discourse as political. Hegemonic masculinity and emphasised femininity reproduce cultural prescriptions meant to maintain a stratified ascendancy of groups in society. These boys and girls clearly received strong messages from media, parents, schools and peers to endorse this 'politics of difference'. Intimate violence, whether psychological, physical or sexual, is understood in terms of natural, immovable differences between females and males. That the ample evidence to suggest that differences within genders and similarities between genders is largely ignored signifies a society in which violence against women will obviously persist. In retrospect I considered that the use of the vignettes may have biased the girls and boys to talking about

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gender as binary categories. Since the vignettes assume discrete categories of gender, this may have itself constituted a framework in which the girls and boys situated their talk. My concern on this point is mitigated by two factors. First, discussion of gender relations only relied on the vignettes in the initial stages of talk. Second, when we discussed the portrayal of the female and male characters I very often challenged the 'stereotypes' that these characters represented (for instance, the girl 'nagging' in one vignette). In this way a repeated opportunity for the girls and boys to consider the challenge to these categorisations was an explicit part of our talk.



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***My Role As Researcher:***

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My role as researcher in this project was made particularly challenging by two factors. These factors consisted of my interest in doing 'feminist research' and the subject matter of the research. I will examine each of these factors in turn, as they permeated every aspect of my research.

**Feminist Research:**

Much has been written on the subject of feminist research, the feminist researcher and the process of feminist research. Feminist research involves the recognition of limitations of traditional positivist empiricism. It also raises questions concerning the possibility of a feminist standpoint epistemology. However, at the outset, feminist research has attempted to give women's experience and reality a voice, and this goal is not largely disputed in feminist scholarship.

Marcia Westkott in the edited Feminist Research Methods (1990) outlines some major feminist criticisms with traditional (positivist) social science. The first criticism concerns the content of social science. The criticism is that social science has largely "concentrate(d) on the distortion and misinterpretation of women's experience" (pg.59). This distortion includes both ignoring and silencing women's experiences and also actively changing the reporting of women's reality for the purpose of serving dominant

prescriptions of gender and femininity. The second criticism concerns method. This involves the presumption that the “knower” (researcher) and the “known” (researched) can be separated to achieve objectivity. Whilst developing a theory of feminist standpoint epistemology, theorists such as Dorothy Smith (1987) and Sandra Harding (1987) criticise the idea that objectivity can be dissected from a research process that emphasises the subject-object dichotomy. Feminists argue that women’s experiences cannot be separated from the research process. On the contrary, the researcher (male or female) is never remote from the researched and the relationship between the two have a lot to do with the knowledge gained from the research. The third criticism focuses on the purpose of social science research on women. This criticism extends beyond the process of the research to its very purpose. Feminist scholars have done much to highlight the myriad ways in which social science research exploits women and women’s experience.

Several corollaries emanate from these criticisms. The first is that researchers must recognise the essentiality of gender in social science research. The second corollary is to understand that what social scientists assume to be sociological ‘knowledge’ is, in fact, male knowledge. What we have been told is human behaviour, human thought, human belief, is actually gendered. Third, the researcher must be understood to be gendered and the interaction between researcher and researched must form a central part of the research. Finally, the feminist researcher must be involved in an interactive relationship with the researched. This relationship includes the idea of consciousness-raising. The goal of feminist research is not only to offer the potential of understanding and insight to the

researcher. The sharing of insight and observation with those researched is a responsibility. For my research, this last feature of feminist research resulted in particular challenges which I will discuss in the next section.

Empowerment, as an approach to the relation between research and researched, is discussed in Researching Language: Issues of Power and Method (1992). Cameron, Frazer, Harvey, Rampton and Richardson propose that empowering research must be “on, for and with subjects”. Empowering research necessarily involves the active co-operation of the researched. Individuals are assumed to have their own needs and agendas. Researchers are obliged to address whatever agendas might exist. Researchers must also undertake to interact with the individuals’ being studied. This interaction includes sharing the goals and procedures of the research with the researched. Empowering research has developed in opposition to traditional methods of inquiry in which the researcher’s agenda remains as opaque as possible in an attempt to ‘not bias’ the researched’s responses. Empowering research pre-supposes that not only do individuals have the right to be ‘informatively involved’ but that the research itself benefits from this involvement.

An important part of feminist research is the debate as to whether a feminist standpoint epistemology exists. Epistemology involves the status of knowledge and what we know. In other words, what ‘counts’ as knowledge. Feminist scholars have begun to suggest that women actually have a different knowledge. That is, women understand the world differently than men. In fact, standpoint epistemology, as suggested by Dorothy Smith (1987), involves not only a different knowledge, but a *more complete* knowledge.

As less powerful members of society, women have a greater potential for understanding reality because they must attend to both their own reality and the reality that the dominant members of society espouse. Cameron and Frazer (1989:28) would refer to this “double consciousness” as having communicative competence in two discourses. The existence of a feminist standpoint epistemology assumes that the reality of the oppressed and the reality of the dominant will be different, if not opposed in many instances. It also assumes that we may talk about a ‘women’s reality’. My thesis has been concerned with this very issue and my findings have by no means demonstrated any evidence for this notion of a unitary gendered experience. I have argued instead that the very concept of gender and its often careless use to signify an infinitely diverse group of people must be further theorised before the notion of a female standpoint epistemology can make sense.

Lorraine Code, in What Can She Know? (1991) also argues this point. Like Smith, this scholar assumes that the knower (the researcher) is important in the research process. Code reasons that if the knower is important, then the researcher’s identity should be included in the knowledge gained from the research. If traditional theories are marked by the gender of the knower as male, then the theories themselves may well be informed by gender. In this discussion, Code articulates the fundamental problem of the gendered knower. But it is surely not only two categories of the knower, female and male, that must concern us:

The diversity of situations and circumstances in which people need to be in a position to know makes it difficult to see how a theory of knowledge, an epistemology, could respond to their questions (pg.315).

I read this to mean that the gender of the researcher and the researched is important. It also means that there are as wide differences *within* gender, as between genders. So any epistemology that claims to represent the reality of any group such as women, girls, Blacks and working-class, will necessarily be incomplete. Epistemology in this sense is in danger of conflating diverse experience to achieve explanation.

### **A Feminist Researcher:**

I approached the research subject with an interest in adolescent violence garnered from several years of experience as a counsellor. I also approached the project as an explicit feminist, with a knowledge of both feminist research methods and feminist theory. The challenges I faced in completing many aspects of the research are not easily separated by me as a feminist researcher. I shall not focus on the challenge of gaining access to the schools. My primary concern in accomplishing a 'feminist study' was my relationship with the girls and boys in my sample.

In keeping with the purposes of feminist research outlined in the previous section, I was concerned to voice girls' experiences of violence, foster an honest relationship between myself and those I was researching and address any agendas that the pupils might have as an outcome of the process of the research. I met with some degree of success and failure with each of these goals.

challenge with regard to the boys' groups and individual interviews was to somehow engage with boys on the subject of violence against females. The transcripts often revealed sexist remarks within traditional discourses which made many negative assumptions about female sexuality, cognitive ability and rights. At times I was very challenged in determining my response to these talks. On the one hand I wanted to elicit the boys' responses as separated as possible from my interpretations. On the other hand, my commitment to feminism determined that I address discourses that dis-empowered girls. In the final analysis, I judged that my attempts to remain 'neutral' at times only met with limited success. Over the course of several months, the boys and girls became increasingly familiar with me as a researcher and as an individual. The boys and girls alike invariably 'guessed' what my opinion was from various non-verbal signals and verbal comments.

My second goal in attempting to accomplish feminist research involved the type of relationship that I undertook with the girls and boys in my study. I was impressed at both schools by the commitment that most of the adolescents demonstrated in forming and maintaining the groups. I strove to create an interactive relationship between myself and the groups. This relationship required that I listen to much talk that I knew would not become part of the study. It also involved providing as many individual sessions as the pupils asked for that I could possibly schedule. The relationship required that I be as honest with the pupils as I had asked them to be with me. I approached my talks as Ann Oakley's (1979) seminal work on women's first experience of motherhood encouraged. Although I did not often offer information about myself without direct questioning, I did

so when asked. As I gained personal information about the girls and boys, they gained personal information about me, albeit at a much slower rate. The majority of the pupils commented on my honesty in group discussions and individual interviews and reported that this honesty had greatly affected their willingness to disclose.

My third goal concerned the accomplishment of the adolescents' agendas. I had designed the group sessions at the outset to allow the groups to dictate their own topics for discussion towards the end of the set meeting times. The male groups most often wanted to talk about sex and sexuality and I attempted to answer all of their questions honestly. The girls most often wanted to talk about magazines, eating disorders and boyfriends. However, particularly with the girls, I found a steadily increasing number of individual interviews being requested. In these individual meetings, reports of child sexual abuse, alcoholic parents, anorexia nervosa, bulimia, acquaintance rape, stranger rape and boyfriend assault occurred. I was aware that the nature of my research might bring to the foreground recollections of experiences with violence and trauma and I spent several months after collecting my data in meeting with individual pupils. Eventually I successfully referred some of the girls to professional counsellors. I did experience significant problems with closure however, as the agenda of these girls to continue to talk with someone about their problems and my agenda to complete my degree came into conflict. It continues to be my profound experience that eliciting talk with adolescents is not a problem, whilst terminating these talks continues to be a major challenge.

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Age: 13yrs. 14yrs. 15yrs. 16yrs. 17yrs.  
18yrs. 19yrs.

What school year are you in? year 9 10 11 12 13

I am asking you the next two questions in order to identify patterns. Remember that your answers are anonymous.

In what country were you born?

- England
- Scotland
- Wales
- Northern Ireland
- Irish Republic
- Elsewhere

What is your ethnic origin?

- White
- Pakistani
- Black-Caribbean
- Bangladeshi
- Black-African
- Chinese
- Black-Other
- Indian
- Other

Are you religious?

- yes
- no

If yes, what is your religion?

- Sikh
- Buddhist
- Muslim
- Protestant
- Catholic
- Jewish
- other

Who lives in your home with you?

- mother/step-mother
- other relatives
- father/step-father
- friends
- brothers and sisters-how many?
- lodgers
- grandparents
- others (who?)

What paid or unpaid work does your mother do?

What paid or unpaid work does your father do?

Where do you live in Oxford?

NEXT, ARE SOME GENERAL QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR RELATIONSHIP HISTORY. REMEMBER THAT I WILL BE THE ONLY PERSON WHO SEES YOUR RESPONSES.

10. In the last month, how many times have you gone out with a boy alone?

- never
- 1-2
- 3-5
- 6-10
- over 10

11. If you have gone out more than 100 times, how often have you gone out?

- every day
- 5 times a week
- 2-3 times a week
- once a week

12. In the last month, how many times have you gone out with a boy, in a group?

- never
- 1-2
- 3-5
- 6-10
- over 10

13. If you have gone out more than 100 times, how often have you gone out?

- every day
- 5 times a week
- 2-3 times a week
- once a week





IF THERE WAS ANY PHYSICAL CONFLICT BETWEEN YOU AND THE BOY YOU WERE WITH, PLEASE ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS.

20. Try to think back to the very first time there was a physical fight between the two of you. About how long ago was that? \_\_\_\_\_

21. Do you think that physical fighting had anything to do with breaking up with this person or not seeing them again? \_\_\_\_\_

22. Thinking about the most serious physical conflict that you and the boy you were with ever had, if he started the conflict, which of the following describes what you did as a result?

- hit back or threw something \_\_\_\_\_
- cried \_\_\_\_\_
- yelled or swore at him \_\_\_\_\_
- ran to another room \_\_\_\_\_
- ran away from the situation \_\_\_\_\_
- called a friend or relative \_\_\_\_\_
- called the police \_\_\_\_\_
- other \_\_\_\_\_

23. Were either or both of you drinking just before the conflict?

- No, neither was drinking \_\_\_\_\_
- Yes, the person I was with was drinking \_\_\_\_\_
- Yes, I was drinking \_\_\_\_\_
- Yes, we were both drinking \_\_\_\_\_
- Not sure \_\_\_\_\_

24. Everyone that goes out either casually or seriously has their ups and downs and tense moments. Surveys like this have shown that at some time or another, most people wonder about whether they should continue their relationship. What about in your case? How often since the start of your relationship have you wondered whether you should continue your relationship?

Often Sometimes Rarely Never Never

25. On any of the occasions that you have been out with a boy, did that boy ever try to, or force you to, have sexual relations by using physical force, such as holding you down, or hitting you, or threatening to hit you or by pressuring you to get you to agree?

- Attempted to \_\_\_\_\_
- Did force sex \_\_\_\_\_
- No \_\_\_\_\_
- Not sure \_\_\_\_\_

26. How many times has this ever happened to you? \_\_\_\_\_

27. What do you think are the chances that the boy you are seeing will use physical or sexual aggression towards you?

|              |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |    |      |
|--------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|------|
| No chance    | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | Sure |
| 50-50 Chance |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |    |      |

28. Are there situations that you can imagine in which you would approve of a boy or man slapping his girlfriend's face?

- Yes \_\_\_\_\_
- No \_\_\_\_\_
- Not sure \_\_\_\_\_

29. Are there situations that you can imagine in which you would approve of a girl or woman slapping her boyfriend's face?

- Yes \_\_\_\_\_
- No \_\_\_\_\_
- Not sure \_\_\_\_\_

30. Here are 8 things that some girls have used to try to get the boy they were seeing to stop hurting or threatening them. Did you ever try any of these? How effective was it?

|                                                | Did You Ever? |    |                      | How Effective Was It?                                                                                                          |         |         |         |         |             |                        |
|------------------------------------------------|---------------|----|----------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|-------------|------------------------|
|                                                |               |    |                      | Some-<br>Very what Slightly Not Made<br>Effective Effect- Effect- Effect- Effect-<br>ive ive ive ive<br>Not<br>sure<br>Refused |         |         |         |         |             |                        |
| a. Talking him out of it                       | Yes           | No | Not sure/<br>Refused | ive                                                                                                                            | Effect- | Effect- | Effect- | Effect- | It<br>worse | Not<br>sure<br>Refused |
| b. Getting him to promise to stop              | —             | —  | —                    | —                                                                                                                              | —       | —       | —       | —       | —           | —                      |
| c. Avoiding him or avoiding certain topics     | —             | —  | —                    | —                                                                                                                              | —       | —       | —       | —       | —           | —                      |
| d. Hiding or going away when he hurts you      | —             | —  | —                    | —                                                                                                                              | —       | —       | —       | —       | —           | —                      |
| e. Leaving home for two days or more           | —             | —  | —                    | —                                                                                                                              | —       | —       | —       | —       | —           | —                      |
| f. Threatening to call the police              | —             | —  | —                    | —                                                                                                                              | —       | —       | —       | —       | —           | —                      |
| g. Threatening to break up with him            | —             | —  | —                    | —                                                                                                                              | —       | —       | —       | —       | —           | —                      |
| h. Physically fighting back in any way you can | —             | —  | —                    | —                                                                                                                              | —       | —       | —       | —       | —           | —                      |

REMEMBER, I AM THE ONLY PERSON WHO WILL SEE THIS.

27. Do you currently have a boyfriend?  
yes no

in a group? \_\_\_\_\_  
by yourselves? \_\_\_\_\_

29. How long have you been seeing each other? \_\_\_\_\_

30. Before your present boyfriend, have you had any previous boyfriends?

yes                      no

31. How many previous boyfriends have you had? \_\_\_\_\_

32. What is the longest time that you have ever gone out with a previous boyfriend? \_\_\_\_\_

33. Do you and your boyfriend ever argue?

yes                      no

34. Have you ever been so angry with your boyfriend that you felt like hitting him?

yes                      no

35. Have you ever hit your boyfriend?

yes                      no

36. Has your boyfriend ever hit you?

yes                      no

37. Why do you think that he hit you?

he was angry with me                      \_\_\_\_\_  
I was hitting him and he was defending himself                      \_\_\_\_\_  
We were playing and he accidentally hit me                      \_\_\_\_\_  
Other reason \_\_\_\_\_

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR ANSWERING MY QUESTIONS.

## APPENDIX B: SESSION 1 GAME QUESTIONS

If you were someone else, who would you want to be?

What scares you the most?

How different are you from your brother?

When was the last time you cried?

What makes you laugh the most?

What embarrasses you?

If you won a 1000 pounds, what would you spend it on/

What has pleased you most today?

What I like most about this school is?

What lie have you told recently?

How different are you from your father?

What do you do best?

Who is/are the most important person/people in your life?

When I leave school I want to...?

What was your happiest moment?

What sort of TV programs do you like?

What do you think you will be doing when you are 25?

What I like least about school is?

Do you want to get married at some point in your life?

I like reading...?

What do you think you will be doing when you are 20?

Who would you most like to spend an evening with?

What will you be doing in ten year's time?

What angered you most in the last week?

## APPENDIX C: VIGNETTES

### Story 1:

Sue is sixteen years old and attends a comprehensive school. She has several girlfriends and they are all interested in going out with boys, although none of them have any experience with boys. Sue has one girlfriend, Jane, who is going out with Tom on a regular basis. Tom has a friend, Mark, who is quite popular at school, but doesn't have a girlfriend. So when Jane and Tom are going out to the skating rink on Friday night, they arrange for Sue and Mark to go along as well. Sue has never been out on a date before and she gets quite nervous. They all have quite a good time together, skating and hanging out. Jane and Tom want to go off together for a while, so they leave Sue and Mark to hang out by themselves. Sue and Mark skate for a while, and Mark reaches for Sue's hand. They hold hands while they are skating. Sue is not really sure that she likes Mark all that much, but since she hasn't been on any dates and feels pressure from her school mates and Mark is popular at school, she goes along with holding hands.

After half an hour, Jane and Tom return and they all have to go home. Mark quickly asks Sue if she will go out again but Sue isn't really interested so she quietly tells Mark that she isn't interested. Mark tries to act cool, but Sue can tell that he is mad and she feels guilty. Tom and Mark leave the rink together and Sue goes back to Jane's house so that they can discuss the evening.

The next lunch-time at school, Sue hears from a friend that Mark is going around telling all of his friends (and anyone else who will hear) how he was "forced" to go out on a date with Sue, whom he describes as a "real dog" and a "slag". Since Mark is popular at school and has many friends, his friends start calling Sue a "slag" when she walks by and in low voices during class. Sue feels terrible and just tries to live it down. Sue tells her friends that she didn't do anything on the date that was wrong and she just tries to ignore the boys who call her names. Nevertheless, since Mark is so popular at school, Sue develops a reputation and doesn't go out on any other dates for quite a while.

### Questions:

1. Why do you think Mark called Sue a "dog" and a "slag"?
2. Why did Sue react to the name calling the way she did? Why didn't she start calling Mark a "slag"?
3. Why did Mark's friends start calling Sue a "slag" even though they didn't know her?
4. What could Sue do to stop Mark and his friends from calling her names?

5. Was it reasonable for Mark to call Sue a “dog” and “slag”?
6. In some way, did Sue deserve to be called these things because she embarrassed Mark by saying that she wouldn’t date him?

## Story 2:

John and Ann have been going out for a year. They go to the same school and they both say that they really like each other. John is eighteen and Ann is seventeen. Neither John nor Ann have ever had sex with anyone before. John would really like to have sex with Ann. Ann is also curious, but she is scared about the whole thing. Both John and Ann have talked about sex with their friends. When John talks to his friends about it, they all make jokes and John knows that all of his friends are also trying to have sex. John’s friend Peter says that all girls want to have sex, but need to be convinced. Since John and Ann have been going out for so long, John’s friends are starting to pressure him to say what sexual things he and Ann have been doing together.

Ann has discussed the possibility of having sex with John with her friends. All of her close friends are virgins. Ann’s friends don’t think that she should have sex because they think she should wait until she knows for sure that John is the “one”. Ann is frightened that she will get pregnant and she is too embarrassed to get birth control from the clinic. Actually, Ann is not all that sure how birth control really works anyway. Besides, Ann is sure that her parents would disapprove of her having sex and she knows that she would get into a lot of trouble if her parents ever found out. Nevertheless, Ann really likes John and doesn’t want to lose him as her boyfriend. Ann is curious about sex and feels really attracted to John, but she wants to go very slowly. Whether or not to have sex has come up on dates with John and Ann and Ann knows very clearly that John wants to have sex. So far, John has been nice about it, but Ann gets the feeling that the longer she and John go out together, the more John will feel that Ann should want to have sex with him.

One Saturday night Ann is baby-sitting at a neighbour’s house. As she has done before, Ann arranges for John to come over after she has put the child to bed. John and Ann start fooling around on the couch, as they have done several times before. John takes off Ann’s shirt and his own shirt. John feels Ann’s breasts and Ann feels John’s erection through his trousers. John starts to take off his trousers and climb on top of Ann. Ann tells John that she doesn’t want to go any further. John really loves Ann and he is so frustrated when she keeps stopping him. John remembers what his friends say about girls needing to be convinced, so he holds her down by the arms, takes off her underwear and has intercourse with her. Afterwards, Ann feels confused and hurt, but John tells her that it will be all right, that he loves her and they they will always be together.

**Questions:**

1. To a certain extent, was Ann telling John that she was willing to have sex by fooling around with him?
2. Could Ann have done anything to stop what happened?
3. Did John actually rape Ann?
4. Are John's friends right to say that girls really are curious about sex and need to be convinced by their boyfriends?
5. Was it reasonable for John to think that Ann wanted to have sex by the way she was acting?
6. What do you think will happen next?

**Story 3:**

Paul and Lindy are really in love. They have been dating for six months. They go to the same secondary school and spend lots of time together. Paul has a lot of friends, all of whom are single. Lindy is shy and only has one or two close friends. And although Paul really likes spending time with Lindy, he sometimes feels that he would like to spend more time with his friends. He has told Lindy this in a nice way but she seems to be pretty possessive and hassles him when he sees his friends. Paul is beginning to feel a little trapped in this relationship, but he doesn't say anything to Lindy.

One Friday at school, Paul is invited to go down the pub with his friends and he really wants to go. He tells Lindy that he is going to go out with his friends, but that he and Lindy can go out together the next night. Lindy doesn't like to spend her Friday evenings at home, so she tells Paul that he should change his plans and go out with her instead. Paul explains to Lindy that he needs to spend time with his friends once in a while. But Lindy continues to nag Paul until, finally, Paul is so irritated that he grabs Lindy's shoulders, shakes her and then punches her on the arm, leaving a small bruise. Lindy struggles free and Paul immediately apologises and tells her that sometimes he doesn't know how else to get her to listen to him.

**Questions:**

1. Should Lindy have the right to expect Paul to spend all of his time with her?
2. Do you think that Paul might ever hit Lindy again?
3. Should Lindy break up with Paul because he hit her?
4. Should Lindy try to be more co-operative?
5. Was it reasonable for Paul to hit Lindy?
6. What do you think will happen to Paul and Lindy?

**Story 4:**

Peter and Sarah have been going out together for some time now. They are both fifteen years old. They know each other's family and friends pretty well. Sarah doesn't feel relaxed around Peter's parents because she always gets the feeling that they don't like her very much. On top of that, Peter's father is an alcoholic and Sarah has been over there some times when he has been drunk. Sarah really doesn't know how to deal with it. She knows that Peter is embarrassed about it but he doesn't talk to Sarah about it.

Today Peter and Sarah are hanging around with Peter's friends at lunch-time. Everyone is winding everyone else up, and generally making a lot of jokes. The topic turns to parents and how embarrassing they are. Sarah teases Peter by saying that his family is weird. Peter smiles and tells Sarah that her family is more weird because her father is always playing golf and goes on and on about golf to anyone and everyone who will listen. Sarah replies that at least her father isn't an alcoholic like Peter's dad. Peter goes red with embarrassment and anger and he stares at Sarah. Peter's friends start ribbing him and telling him that Sarah has told him off. Sarah can tell that Peter is mad but she just stares back at him defiantly. Peter knows that all of his friends are watching him to see what he will do so he raises his hand and tells Sarah that she had better watch it or she will get it (Peter means that he will hit her). Peter's friends smile at Sarah and say that she had better watch it. Sarah tries to smile as though she doesn't care and then one of Peter's friends says something that changes the conversation.



**Questions:**

1. Was it reasonable for Sarah to say what she did about Peter's father being an alcoholic?
2. Was it reasonable for Peter to threaten to hit Sarah?
3. Why did Peter's friends start teasing Peter about what Sarah had said?
4. What do you think will happen between Peter and Sarah now?

Appendix D: STATISTICS TABLES

Table G: Estimated Chances That Partner Will Be Physically or Sexually Aggressive  
Towards Respondent

| Year                      |       |      |       |      |        |      |
|---------------------------|-------|------|-------|------|--------|------|
| Estimate<br>of<br>Chances | Nine  |      | Ten   |      | Eleven |      |
|                           | girls | boys | girls | boys | girls  | boys |
| no chance                 | 37    | 22   | 18    | 25   | 14     | 13   |
| 10%                       | 5     | 3    | 6     | 2    | 1      | 3    |
| 20%                       | 2     | 4    | 3     | 4    | 0      | 2    |
| 30%                       | 1     | 3    | 2     | 2    | 1      | 1    |
| 40%                       | 1     | 3    | 1     | 0    | 1      | 1    |
| 50%                       | 3     | 7    | 9     | 9    | 2      | 3    |
| 60%                       | 0     | 1    | 0     | 0    | 0      | 0    |
| 70%                       | 0     | 0    | 0     | 0    | 1      | 1    |
| 80%                       | 0     | 0    | 0     | 0    | 0      | 0    |
| 90%                       | 0     | 0    | 1     | 0    | 0      | 0    |
| sure                      | 0     | 1    | 0     | 0    | 0      | 2    |

Table H: Attempted or Successful Rape

| Year      |       |      |       |      |        |      |
|-----------|-------|------|-------|------|--------|------|
| Rape      | Nine  |      | Ten   |      | Eleven |      |
|           | girls | boys | girls | boys | girls  | boys |
| attempted | 2     | 4    | 4     | 4    | 2      | 3    |
| did force | 0     | 1    | 1     | 1    | 1      | 0    |
| no        | 48    | 42   | 33    | 31   | 17     | 18   |
| not sure  | 3     | 2    | 3     | 3    | 1      | 1    |

Table I: Number of Times Raped

| Year       |       |      |       |      |        |      |
|------------|-------|------|-------|------|--------|------|
| # of times | Nine  |      | Ten   |      | Eleven |      |
|            | girls | boys | girls | boys | girls  | boys |
|            | 1     | 3    | 4     | 2    | 1      | 1    |
| 2          | 2     | 1    | 1     | 3    | 0      | 0    |
| 3          | 0     | 3    | 1     | 1    | 1      | 0    |
| 4          | 0     | 0    | 0     | 0    | 0      | 0    |
| 5          | 1     | 0    | 0     | 0    | 1      | 0    |
| 6          | 0     | 0    | 0     | 0    | 0      | 2    |
| 7          | 0     | 0    | 0     | 1    | 0      | 0    |
| 8          | 0     | 0    | 0     | 0    | 0      | 0    |
| 9 or more  | 0     | 1    | 1     | 2    | 0      | 0    |

Table J: Attitudes Towards a Man Slapping His Girlfriend’s Face

| Year     |          |      |       |      |        |      |    |
|----------|----------|------|-------|------|--------|------|----|
| Approval | Nine     |      | Ten   |      | Eleven |      |    |
|          | girls    | boys | girls | boys | girls  | boys |    |
|          | agree    | 10   | 15    | 18   | 15     | 12   | 12 |
|          | disagree | 38   | 37    | 24   | 31     | 18   | 13 |
| not sure | 16       | 11   | 6     | 17   | 7      | 7    |    |

Table K: Attitude Towards A Woman Slapping Her Boyfriend’s Face

| Year     |          |      |       |      |        |      |    |
|----------|----------|------|-------|------|--------|------|----|
| Approval | Nine     |      | Ten   |      | Eleven |      |    |
|          | girls    | boys | girls | boys | girls  | boys |    |
|          | agree    | 29   | 29    | 28   | 24     | 20   | 17 |
|          | disagree | 21   | 24    | 13   | 24     | 6    | 6  |
| not sure | 13       | 10   | 7     | 15   | 11     | 8    |    |

Table L: Attitude Towards a Man Slapping His Girlfriend’s Face by Sex

| Year     |          |      |          |      |   |
|----------|----------|------|----------|------|---|
| Approval | Twelve   |      | Thirteen |      |   |
|          | girls    | boys | girls    | boys |   |
|          | agree    | 13   | 14       | 6    | 2 |
|          | disagree | 35   | 24       | 3    | 5 |
| not sure | 22       | 7    | 0        | 4    |   |

Table M: Attitude Towards a Woman Slapping Her Boyfriend’s Face by Sex

| Year     |          |      |          |      |   |
|----------|----------|------|----------|------|---|
| Approval | Twelve   |      | Thirteen |      |   |
|          | girls    | boys | girls    | boys |   |
|          | agree    | 38   | 18       | 8    | 4 |
|          | disagree | 11   | 19       | 1    | 4 |
| not sure | 21       | 8    | 0        | 3    |   |

**Table N: Attitude Towards a Man Slapping His Girlfriend’s Face by School**

| Year     |          |          |          |          |   |
|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|---|
| Approval | Twelve   |          | Thirteen |          |   |
|          | Parsons  | Chiswick | Parsons  | Chiswick |   |
|          | agree    | 11       | 16       | 7        | 1 |
|          | disagree | 18       | 41       | 7        | 1 |
| not sure | 12       | 17       | 4        | 0        |   |

**Table O: Attitude Towards a Woman Slapping Her Boyfriend’s Face by School**

| Year     |          |          |          |          |   |
|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|---|
| Approval | Twelve   |          | Thirteen |          |   |
|          | Parsons  | Chiswick | Parsons  | Chiswick |   |
|          | agree    | 23       | 33       | 11       | 1 |
|          | disagree | 9        | 21       | 4        | 1 |
| not sure | 9        | 20       | 3        | 0        |   |

Table P: Re-considering the Relationship:

| Year      |       |      |       |      |        |      |        |      |          |      |
|-----------|-------|------|-------|------|--------|------|--------|------|----------|------|
| Year      |       |      |       |      |        |      |        |      |          |      |
|           | Nine  |      | Ten   |      | Eleven |      | Twelve |      | Thirteen |      |
|           | Girls | Boys | Girls | Boys | Girls  | Boys | Girls  | Boys | Girls    | Boys |
| never     | 8     | 9    | 4     | 8    | 3      | 3    | 4      | 2    | 2        | -    |
| rarely    | 15    | 14   | 8     | 14   | 8      | 6    | 9      | 11   | 3        | -    |
| sometimes | 26    | 16   | 19    | 11   | 7      | 13   | 22     | 12   | 3        | 3    |
| often     | 3     | 6    | 8     | 9    | 5      | -    | 10     | 3    | 1        | 1    |

## **Appendix E: SAMPLE CODE LIST**

abortion  
age of respondent  
being single  
biological explanations  
boyfriend  
boyfriends: breaking up  
boyfriends: communicating with  
boyfriends: previous  
boyfriends: resolving conflict  
boyfriends: when they see each other  
Chiswick  
Christian  
clothes  
commitment  
confidence/liking yourself  
crying  
divorce  
eating disorders  
experience of being female  
female friends  
female talk  
female violence  
feminism  
feminism: anti-  
feminism: male reaction to  
feminism: males as  
feminism: stereotypes of radicals  
film/tv  
flirting  
friends  
future plans  
hobbies  
insecurity  
lying  
magazines  
male friends  
male talk  
marriage  
most important people in their lives  
newspaper articles  
older boyfriends  
parents

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parents occupation  
physical appearance  
political beliefs  
possessiveness  
questionnaire: 14 and 15  
questionnaire: 21  
rape: all men as potential rapists  
rape: as a problem for older people  
rape: awareness of  
rape: being able to tell a rapist  
rape: clothing  
rape: Elisia's experience with Matt  
rape: Emma's personal experience with  
rape: experience of sexual harassment  
rape: fear of  
rape: female masochism  
rape: female responsibility  
rape: females crying it  
rape: having to trust males  
rape: helplessness  
rape: leading men on  
rape: Lord Russell's article  
rape: male responsibility  
rape: marital  
rape: meaning of  
rape: mixed signals  
rape: not easy to say no  
rape: personal experience of  
rape: protecting themselves from  
rape: substance use  
rape: trusting boyfriends  
rape: tv portrayal  
reading  
relationships: emotion  
relationships: seeing versus going out  
relationships: what boys look for in a girl  
reputation  
school subjects  
session 1  
session 10  
session 2  
session 3  
session 4  
session 5  
session 6



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session 7  
session 8  
session 9  
sex: enjoying it  
sex: faking orgasm  
sex: knowing who has and who hasn't  
sex: knowledge of  
sex: meaning more to girls  
sex: pre-marital  
sex: pressure on boys to have  
sex: pressure to have with older boys  
sex: reasons for having  
sex: when couples have it  
sex: where they have it  
sexism  
sexual violence: awareness of  
sibling violence  
siblings  
slag  
social class: based on  
social class: Chiswick versus Parsons  
social class: effect on attitudes  
social class: effect on lives  
social class: effect on relationships  
social class: Elisia's scheme  
social class: Emma's scheme  
social class: exercise  
social class: importance of  
social class: newspapers  
social class: Reeta's scheme  
social class: scummy people  
social class: self-categorisation  
story 1  
story 2  
story 3  
taking care of everyone else/ women as doormats!  
trust  
trusting  
violence in relationships: awareness of  
what scares you  
where lived before  
year in school