Resisting Dominant Discourses of Femininity in a Working-Class Junior School

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Abstract

This paper describes different types of femininity within one working class UK junior school. The fieldwork took place between 1998-99 and the data come from observations and a series of interviews with twelve 10-11-year-old girls. The paper attempts to go beyond using typologies and argues that femininities are more nuanced and malleable, and also temporal and situated. Although all the forms of femininity were constructed through the heterosexual matrix, the findings differ from the work of other researchers in that only two girls attempted to perform Connell's (1987) 'emphasised' form of femininity, and the others were able to resist this dominant discourse.

Key words: Dominant Discourses; Sociology; Gender; Education

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

This paper is about different forms of femininity in one UK junior school, and is based on my doctoral thesis (2001). The three schools that I worked in during my doctoral research were differentiated by social class, and the data for this paper come from the school, which I categorised as being working class. Although there is a growing field of research known as 'Girlhood Studies' (Read *et al.,* 2011), and Renold (2006) reminds us that there is a long history of ethnographic feminist research that has used the school setting to explore girls' gendered experiences, some feminist researchers (see, for example, Weaver-Hightower, 2003; Francis & Skelton 2005; Jackson, 2006; Archer *et al.,* 2007) have pointed out that, since the time I finished my thesis, research into girls' schooling and femininities has been largely marginalised in preference to issues around masculinities, underachieving boys' and their school work, and this is particular true for girls in the primary or junior school (pupils aged 7-11 years- old). There is earlier research in this sector in the late 1980s and 1990s: see, for example, Davies (1989), Thorne (1993), Connolly (1998), Hey (1997) and Francis (1998); and, more recently, since 2000, from Renold (2001, 2002, 2005), Skelton and Francis (2003), Robinson (2005) Clark and Paechter (2007), Paechter and Clark (2007, 2010) Allan (2009), Francis (2009), Francis *et al.* (2009), Hauge (2009), and Jackson *et al.* (2010).

After a section setting out the theories of femininity and identity that I am drawing on, the paper describes the sample and sets out my methodological position; the main themes that the paper discusses are friendships and peer group interactions, the need to 'play safe' by not working too hard, and the forms of femininity that were found. The main argument is that Connell's (1987) 'emphasised' form of femininity (see below) is not an inevitably powerful discourse in all school settings, and that dominant versions of femininity differ according to context.

1. THEORETICAL INFLUENCES

The theories of femininity and identity that I drew on at the time of my research were from Connell (1987, 2002) and Hall (1990, 1992) but I have since also embraced the work of more up-to-date authors such as Paetcher (2006, 2006b, 2007) and Francis (1998, 2010) and also included

some elements of post-structuralist theories.. I have also found the ideas of Giddens' (1984, 1991) stucturation useful for my arguments around structure and agency.

Femininity, like masculinity, is an active state; it is not just what we are but what we do, how we appear, how we act, what we think of ourselves in different times and places (Paechter, 2007). Being a girl (or a woman) is a question of becoming (Hall, 1990; Connell, 2002), and girls, like boys, are active participants in the continual negotiation and production of their gender identities. Femininities are constructed relationally, with respect to other local femininities, and, in particular, in opposition to peer constructions of masculinity, for above all, they need to maintain differences and distinctions from masculinity. Paecheter also maintains that this is not in a symmetrical relationship and femininity is defined as a lack, or absence of masculinity.

Connell (1987) maintains that the major difference between femininity and masculinity is that all forms of femininity are constructed in the context of the global subordination of women to (heterosexual) men, and that the process is likely to coalesce around a choice between resistance or compliance to this dominance. The two main consequences of this are that femininity has no equivalent to the hegemonic masculinity held by some men, and that it has no urgent imperative or need to subordinate its other forms. For Connell, at least, this makes it likely that femininities will be more heterogeneous and more diverse. Connell (1987) calls the contemporary pattern of femininity that has the most ideological support, 'emphasised femininity', which is based around compliance to men, and is performed essentially to men. He also points out that its cultural construction has a very high public profile in the mass media that far exceeds that found for any type of masculinity, although of course this does not mean that because many women support, and even desire it, this is the type of gendered identity that they actually perform as they go about their daily lives.

Along with Paechter and Clark (2007), this paper starts from the premise that children construct their gendered identities within localised communities of femininity and masculinity practice, and that one of the main influences in the school setting is their community of peers, which establish and organise the ways that enable or constrain particular activities and ways of being (Hey, 1997; Renold, 2000, 2001; Read *et al*., 2011). Multiple forms of femininities are constructed collectively; they are performed both to self and to others and successful performance matters. The girls have to learn both the visible and spoken, as well as the invisible and unspoken group rules, codes and norms of their peer group, which set the agenda about the kind of person a girl is supposed to be at a particular time and in a particular context (Hey, 1997). Thus it is her peer group that establishes and organises the ways that enable or constrain particular activities and ways of being.

Different groups of femininities are suffused with power relations, so that some girls are more able to influence the dominant view of femininity than others. While the majority of girls construct their femininities in ways that more or less conform to the dominant conceptions of femininity within their particular location, many girls do not. As we shall see in this paper, not all girls will have either the resources or the desire to construct the same ideal-type femininity in any one setting. This may be because they are unable to do so (personal circumstances, physical attributes), and they may also actively construct oppositional meanings. The other possibility is that there may not be an ideal-type of girl in every setting embodying the dominant discourse that girls aspire to or try to emulate, and this was the case in this particular school.

Although it may be possible to have a localised form of femininity that is hegemonic in the sense that it acts as the blueprint, which the rest of the girls try and follow, many writers such as Paechter (2006a, 2007) strongly argue against this concept and a hegemonic form was not evident at Westmoor Abbey.

The different practices of femininity are, above all, contextualised constructions and where some will be dominant in one setting, the same forms will be marginalised in another. Femininities are not only different between different people but within the same individual because people change according to where they are, what they are doing and whom they are with at particular times. However, the girls at the school involved in this research could not somehow choose their own identity or subject position for it was not as if they existed in conditions of their own choosing (Giddens, 1984), and while there are myriad of femininities and masculinities available this is not to suggest that they can be chosen like clothes from a wardrobe as they get dressed in the morning. However, over the year of fieldwork, some of the girls experimented with and engaged with different forms of femininity showing the possibility of agency and change.

A common strategy in ethnographic studies of children's school cultures is to identify typologies of cultural groups, (see, for example, Kenway & Willis, 1998; Reay, 2001; Renold, 2001; Robinson, 2005; Paechter & Clark, 2010). Over a decade ago, some writers such as Francis (2000), Mac an Ghail (1994) and Kerfoot and Whitehead (1998), and more recently, Francis (2010), critiqued the use of these typologies arguing that, although they highlight that children construct femininity (and masculinity) in very different ways, they also tend to reify gender in fixed unitary categories which are too static, and do not seem to allow for much movement between them or the chance to change. I have also found that typologies are too reductionist and are, essentially, arbitrary boundaries, which only take us so far. Although I have not rejected their use completely, I found that, ultimately, they diminish the complexities and nuances of the group's interactions.

2. SAMPLE

The research was set in a junior school, which I have called Westmoor Abbey[1,2]. This was a tough school situated on the outskirts of London in the middle of a series of Local Authority housing estates, which were almost exclusively 'White'. Although I had no access to economic data of parents' occupation or income even if I had wanted to pursue it I categorised the school as 'working class' based on the poor level of surrounding housing and parental dispositions. The headteacher, told me it was 'a very difficult area to work in', and that there had been an increase in the number of disadvantaged and perceived dysfunctional families within the last 10 years. Bullying in the school was prevalent and the threat of physical violence seemed to be a taken-for-granted component of everyday school life. Much of the time for the teachers consisted of dealing with, and trying to contain, pupil (mis) behaviour, and the promotion of high academic standards was of secondary importance. Miss Morris, the class teacher in this research (and also the deputy head), estimated that only about 5 percent of visits from parents were concerned with schoolwork and/or the curriculum. The school had a three-form entry, and the class I was researching, 6M, consisted of 24 pupils, (12 girls and 12 boys) aged 10-11-years in Year 6 (the final year of English primary and junior school).

3. METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

The fieldwork took place between October 1998 and July 1999: about 35 days in total, spread out over three terms. I carried out 12 in-depth interviews using a semi-structured schedule with small groups of girls (2-3), each lasting between 30-60 minutes, and each girl was interviewed at least twice. I also used different forms of observation, where sometimes I stood back and observed (for example, in the playground and/or assemblies) or where I took more of an active role (for example, participating in class lessons and eating lunch together in the school canteen).

Drawing on the work of Giddens, although I am viewing the girls as skilled and knowledgeable agents' (Giddens, 1984), this is not to say they were free human agents, for they were living within powerful structures outside their control and which shaped, and continue to shape, their lives. I looked at how the girls' identities were constructed through the project of the 'reflexive self' (Giddens, 1991, p.32), that is where the girls are continuously working and reflecting on their identities, and where agency and structures act through each other.

The girls' narratives from the interviews are to be regarded as a series of presentations of constructed accounts that allows myself, and other researchers, partial access into the girls' interpretations of their worlds as they saw them at that particular time and in that particular place. I could also have interviewed the girls individually; however, it is difficult to say whether public accounts are any truer or less true than more private, individual ones (Frosh *et al.*, 2002). The methodologies I used provided evidence of the many ways that the girls construct their identities and *do* girl, and these social interactions within the small interview groups can mimic and illuminate the everyday practices and norms of 'naturally occurring groups' (Hyde *et al.*, 2005), which of course I also observed, and against which I could compare. Although my analysis is based on the girls' views, it is ultimately my own interpretations, based on my theories, and on the data collected through the interviews and observations.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Friendship Groups and Peer Interactions

I began each interview by asking the girls if they could tell me the friendship groups in the class (for both girls and boys), which I drew out on a piece of paper. I then asked them to say how they categorised their own group, and what they thought made each group distinct from each other. Many of the girls had difficulty distinguishing either the girls' or boys' groupings, and this was in contrast to the boys, who found it easier to define or categorise their own groups (which were generally larger), although they, too, struggled to group some of the girls. This was not surprising as, out of the 12 girls in the class, there seemed to have been three firm friendship groups or pairs of six girls. (Figure 1)

Figure 1
Friendship Groups in 6M

> Lillian/Holly

> Kati/Leah

Estelle

> Jenny/Amber

Kerry

Lisa
Carmen
Lydia
Alice
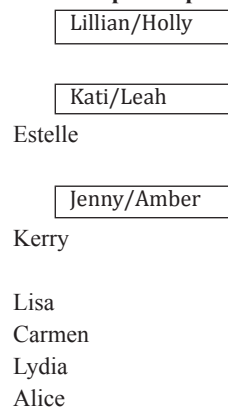
The other girls were more fluid in their friendships and social relations. As the year progressed Estelle became friends with Leah, and this caused a rivalry with Kati, most clearly manifested in their intense sporting rivalry; Kerry, who was very hardworking, often joined in with Jenny's group, and the following girls had no single great friend: Lisa, Carmen, Lydia and Alice.

Many researchers have pointed out the importance of friendship and its connection to popularity and status (see, for example, Merten, 1997; Renold, 2000; Read *et al.,* 2011). As Adler et al maintain, '…having someone as a friend is a form of power, which those without close friendships do not have' (1992, p.162).

When I asked girls to name the most popular girl in the class, or say if there was a leader, they were unable to cite one girl in particular, and this was in contrast to the boys who all knew the small group of ideal, and therefore, popular, boys. Most of the girls could also name the leading group of boys, which exhibited the hegemonic form of masculinity[3], and which was symbolized or embodied in the ideal type of boy who was sporty, tough, a good fighter, wore the latest fashionable clothes, back-chatted the teachers, and who only concentrated on his school work sporadically (see Name of author and date).

In many ways, the boys' hegemonic form set and defined the local cultural agenda of the class, which also fitted in with the ethos of the school as a whole. Many of the girls actually liked the leading group of boys, and some referred to them as being both 'horrible but also kind'. Some girls also understood how the boys needed to show off to gain attention, and although most could name whom the leading boys were and define some of their characteristics, this did not mean that they were unduly influenced by them, and, as we shall see later, only two girls attempted to imitate the hegemonic features.

Unlike the boys, many of the girls spent their free time talking, which was a source of status and shared identity. Sometimes, at playtime, a few girls played with younger children, possibly when they could not find a playmate amongst their own group. Although about five of the girls played games like 'Runouts' and 'Bulldog' with the boys, the boys controlled the game and defined the rules, and only one girl, Kati, was 'allowed' to play football with the leading group of boys on a regular basis.

In class, the 12 girls and 12 boys sat at tables in places designated by Miss Morris, differentiated by sex, although no girl said they minded sitting next to a boy. Although, overall, the girls showed more positive dispositions towards school than the boys, and more girls than boys tended to show a great application to their schoolwork, some boys in 6M worked harder than some girls. However, the girls were in general more orderly and compliant than the boys, they were quieter, worked harder, less disruptive and there were far fewer challenges to teachers' authority. During the period of fieldwork I only saw one girl in 6M receive the sanction of a yellow card[4].

4.2 Playing Safe in the Middle

Pollard (1985) maintains that the two major sources of support for pupils comes from their peers and their teachers, and to enjoy their time at school pupils need to negotiate and manage skilfully 'a satisfactory balance between the expectations of these two sources' (Pollard & Filer, 1996, p.309) which often exert contradictory pressures. Woods (1990, p.131) points out that this can involve a delicate balance of affiliation or 'knife-edging', but in the final analysis a pupil's options and strategies in their relations to the formal school authority are actually quite restricted: they can either conform and comply, challenge and resist, or they can pragmatically negotiate a path which best satisfies their interests.

Reputation is a powerful regulator, and girls' gendered identity, their schoolwork and peer group popularity needs to be carefully negotiated. Although more girls were prepared to take the risk of the working hard, thereby showing conformity to the official school regime, this was still a risky business, and the girls understood this only too well. Many of the pupils (both girls and boys) lived under the threat of the pathologising sign of being called a 'Boff' ('Boffin'), which was used as a marker to categorise pupils as a particular type of person and position them amongst the class hierarchy.

Many girls told me they felt too embarrassed to ask a teacher questions in front of the class, not so much because they did not want to be seen as stupid, but, again, because it showed alignment with the school regime. The majority of girls chose the path of playing safe by being in the middle group of attainers, and in the extract below, Estelle and Lisa state why they are not prepared to take the risk of their work being too neat and tidy and being seen to be working too hard.

JS: Would you [Estelle] like to have neat handwriting like Jenny?

Estelle: Well, I've got quite neat handwriting, but I wouldn't like *that* neat because…I mean… when she rushes it's not neat JS: I would have thought it was nice to have neat handwriting?

Estelle: Yeah, well it is nice…most of us have got neat handwriting now we're in Year 6 […]

JS: Lisa, you have got really nice handwriting haven't you, but that is a good thing isn't it?

Lisa: It's good, because then people can read your work but it's not the best thing in the world

JS: OK, but do you want to work hard or not?

Estelle: No, not really, we just want to be like in the middle not really working hard or not really down

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[3]There were a range of masculinities in the class, including those that were subordinated by the hegemonic form.

[4]For misbehaviour, there was a sanction system based on a three-step approach of a verbal warning, a yellow card (whereby a pupil's name was written in a class book), and a red card which meant that

the pupil was sent to Mr Lane (the headteacher) and given a letter to take home to their parents. Mr Lane thought that (mis) behaviour was gendered, and in fact only one girl had ever received a red card since they had been introduced in November 1997. When I interviewed him in November 1998 he told me that there had been 54 yellow and red cards given out so far that term, 48 to boys and 6 to girls.

JS: Why is that then, why do you want to be just in the middle?

Estelle: Because then you won't get teased as much as if you really worked hard

Lisa: Cos if you really work hard people will just call you boffs sometimes and/

Estelle: And they'll tease you

JS: So does that affect you, you know, when people call you boffs?

Estelle: Yeah

Lisa: Yeah

However, not all of the girls saw working hard as being in tension with popularity and some girls appeared to have had sufficient self confidence, or were able to draw on other resources such as the ability to invoke humour, to be able to ignore or play down this particular term. Therefore, it does not necessarily mean that high achieving pupils will always necessarily jeopardise their social standing with their peers (Francis, 2009). Some girls in the class had realised the links between educational qualifications and better life employment outcomes (see Francis *et al.,* 2009), although it seems likely that these views came and been reinforced by their parents.

JS: Do you mind being called a boff?

Kerry: No, not really, 'cos I want to learn

Jenny: 'Cos then you get better life really, like you get an education and get a better job […]

JS: When you work hard, do you do this because you like it or because you want to get and pass your exams?

Kerry: Both really

4.3 Types of Femininities

In many ways, the different types of being a girl represented the different types, or possible patterns, of femininity that were on show. They were not fixed, but fluid, and if I asked the girls themselves to list the different features and types it very much depended on who you asked.

JS: What would an ideal popular girl be like?

Lisa: Friendly

JS: Nice?

Estelle: Yeah, nice and friendly

JS: Nice, friendly and kind, is that important?

Estelle: Yeah

JS: What else?

Lisa: For the boys, a popular girl would have to have like brand names and things and be sporty, stand up for herself

Estelle: Not wear skirts and stuff

Lisa: Trousers and trainers

JS: What about working?

Estelle: Don't work

Lisa: Be in the middle of everything, not be the best or be really stupid

Estelle: Be right in the middle

JS: So what would an ideal girl be to the girls?

Lisa: Well, it's different 'cos, for Lillian and ideal girl would be short skirts

Estelle: Tarty

Lisa: Tarty

Estelle: Not very good in sports, more like her [*pointing at the name of Holly*]

JS: Well that's absolutely right she'll like different things but for you two, what would an ideal girl be like then?

Lisa: To me, an ideal girl would have to be a bit sporty, kind….erm

JS: Middle of the road workwise

Estelle/Lisa: Yeah

JS: What about clothes

Estelle: Just normal clothes

JS: Nothing too flashy and bright, don't have to wear designer clothes

Estelle: No

For the two girls above the main characteristics of popularity were being friendly and nice (also found by Read *et al.,* 2011) and not working too hard, but for some girls it would be being sporty, for others, it was wearing short skirts. And then there would also be some of the boys' point of view, interpreted through these girls' eyes, which would also vary, and display more of the characteristics of the hegemonic masculine form.

As I have already written, unlike amongst the boys, there was no single most popular, or ideal, girl, and, more interestingly, no dominant type of femininity that the girls aspired to. The girls were not seen jostling for a place in any hierarchy, and there were none of Hey's (1997) 'All-Star' girls who were deemed to 'have it all'. Unlike the forms of masculinity, there were no apparent hierarchies of femininity. Although some girls did try and gain status in order to become popular amongst both the girls and the boys, for most of the time the groups of femininity coexisted and were not engaged in a constant struggle for dominance.

There were five main types of group that the majority of girls categorised themselves: tom boy (or ladette), hardworking (and nice) girl, girly-girl (synonymous with tarty girl), sporty girl, as well as a subordinated form (discussed below).

4.3.1 Tomboys or Ladettes

For myself, and many of the girls, the tom boy was one of the easier types of femininity to define due to its high visibility. Although Paechter and Clark write that, although definitions of a tomboy are nebulous, these girls can generally be defined as a girl who spends a large proportion of her time 'participating in activities that are usually associated with masculinity, and who rejects some of the conventional trappings of femininity' (2007, p.318).

Two girls, Kati and Leah, exemplified this type although I have called them 'ladettes', which, although is generally applied more to adolescent girls, has also

generally begun to be associated with a girl who behaves boisterously and assertively (Jackson, 2006 & 2007). Although Kati and Leah often played with the boys, I have already stated that only Kati played football with them in the main playground games, and neither of them were wholly accepted by the boys.

The two girls defined themselves as non-conformist, anti-school rebels who were hard and tough, and so exhibited many of the features of the hegemonic masculinity. Kati was also sporty and a particularly good medium distance runner and a great personal rivalry developed over the year between herself and Estelle, who won the school cross-country competition.

Kati: Me and her [Leah] are like the strongest in the class

JS: Strongest in what way?

Kati: If we have like a row and go 'come on, have a fight'

JS: So girls have fights do they

Kati: Yeah, and with the boys as well [….] I had a fight yesterday because we was having a race and she [Estelle} stopped half way through it and she was going, 'No that's not fair', 'cos I won and she started hitting me, she whacked me in the mouth so…

JS: You hit her back and

Kati: I won

JS: And that was it

Kati: No, she went off like a baby

JS: There were no teachers around

Kati: No, I was looking at her but she was like a baby, she just walked off

Despite the great element of performativity in front of me as the interviewer in this exchange I am arguing that it still important to see how Kati chose to present and define herself at this particular time.

4.3.2 Hardworking and 'Nice', and 'Personalised' Femininities

The most common type of femininity was the group of girls who can be grouped under the twin epithets of 'hard working' and 'nice', meaning friendly, personable, well behaved and conformist. However, I also interpreted other, more 'personalised' femininities, similar to those 'personalised' masculinities that I have written about elsewhere (Name of author and date), and these are similar to 'inclusive' masculinities (Frosh *et al*., 2002; Anderson, 2005, 2008), which were centred or constructed around a series of personal interests such as TV, dance, music, magazines, playground games and so on. Whilst individual girls had particular interests like horse riding, there were other interests that gave opportunities for the girls to share a commonality and a friendship.

JS: You are more kind of the girls who like pop music and magazines

Holly/Lillian: Yeah, we like those

JS: Skipping games

Holly: No

Lillian: No, I like doing sports and all of that, squash but I like magazines and TV […]

JS: Are Soaps quite important to you?

Holly: East Enders, East Enders is my main one

JS: And do you like pop music?

Holly/Lillian: Yeah

JS: And your favourite groups are?

Holly: Steps

Lillian: I like Steps but I like Brittany Spears as well

These personalised forms were clearly evident in the hardworking/nice girls group but also overlapped, or were a subset, of the other categories or classifications (such as girly-girl). Indeed, it seems likely that all the girls performed types of a personalised femininity at various times, it was just that this form seemed to be more visible with some girls.

There was also a type of paaive femininity that was pathologised and subordinated by some of the other forms, particularly by the ladette and sporty girls.

4.3.3 Subordinated Types

Kehily *et al.* (2002) found that girls' friendship groups policed other femininities by defining transgressors as different and subordinate. Although this was not generally the case at Westmoor Abbey, where other groups were defined as different but not necessarily subordinate, there were two girls, Alice and Lydia, who exemplified a subordinate type of femininity. Read *et al.* (2011) found that the most common characteristic of the girls in their study deemed to be the most unpopular was being quiet or shy, and although this was also the case with Alice and Lydia, their derogation was based more on their perceived immaturity (poor levels of worldy-wise knowledge) and, in particular, a lack of cognitive ability. Both Alice and Lydia generally found learning difficult and a series of malicious stories were repeated on a regular basis throughout my fieldwork, such as the one where Lydia was supposed to have nits.

In the extract below, two girls are discussing the fact that, although Alice tries hard to join in with their group of friends she has not got the resources (including the interpersonal skills) to enable her to do so, and later in the interview there is also a suggestion that she tries too hard to join in with the other groups and remains an outsider.

Estelle: Alice wants to be a proper person but she can't

Lisa: She wants to be like everyone else but it's not her fault she can't.

Estelle: She doesn't fit in

Lisa: I find Alice really annoying 'cos when you walk around always tries to get closer and hold your arm and things/

Estelle: Yeah, she stares at me, all she just stares

Lisa: She's stupid

My own interpretations of the types of femininity in the class are presented below in Table 1.

Table 1
The Forms of Femininity in 6M

Name	Features displayed
Lillian	**Girly-girl form (emphasised femininity),** wears skirts **Personalised form** Mainly conformist Mainly hardworking Mainly passive Non-sporty
Holly	**Girly-girl form (emphasised femininity),** wears skirts **Personalised form** Mainly conformist Mainly hardworking Mainly passive Non-sporty
Kati	**Ladette form, sporty girl form** Mainly anti-conformist Not hardworking Active, loud Sporty Plays sport with boys
Leah	**Ladette form** Mainly anti-conformist Generally hardworking Active, loud A little sporty
Estelle	**Sporty girl form** Mainly hardworking Mainly conformist Active
Jenny	**Hardworking and 'nice'** **Personalised form** Conformist Passive, quiet Enjoys sport
Amber	**Hardworking and 'nice'** **Personalised form** Conformist Passive, quiet Non-sporty
Kerry	**Hardworking and 'nice'** **Personalised form** Conformist Passive, quiet Non-sporty
Lisa	**Personalised form** **Mainly hardworking and 'nice'** Mainly conformist Mainly passive Non-sporty
Carmen	**Mainly hardworking and 'nice'** **Personalised form** Mainly conformist Mainly passive Non-sporty
Lydia	**Subordinated form** by perceived lack of cognitive ability Hardworking Conformist Passive, quiet Non-sporty
Alice	**Subordinated form** by perceived lack of cognitive ability Hardworking Conformist Passive, quiet Non-sporty

The main point that I am making is that, although I am able to recognise different types of femininity, no one single girl in the class inhabited one particular type. Most girls moved between the different patterns at different times and different place, and this also depended on whom they were with and what they were doing. According to my interpretations, I have classified two girls as exhibiting girly-girl or an emphasised form of femininity; two as ladettes; two a sporty form; five hardworking and nice; two subordinated forms; and seven as more personalised forms but which were subsets of different types. Some of these forms of femininity were based around the friendship groups: Lillian and Holly (girly-girls); Kati and Leah (Ladettes) and Jenny, Amber and Kerry (hardworking/nice forms), although the friendship groupings were also malleable. Indeed, it is essential to reiterate that these patterns overlapped, and that they were situated and temporal performances: thus the classifications refer to for *most of the time*, or *in general*

For example, as well as being a ladette, Kati was also sporty but could also conform and get on with her schoolwork for long periods of time; she had also had her ears pierced and was the only girl in the class to have a boyfriend (from another class) throughout the year, although I never saw them together. Another example is Jenny, who was hardworking and generally quiet, but also liked to be active outside class and play sport, and was one of the few girls to wear earrings.

There are of course a number of ways of dividing these patterns. If we use the binary of active and passive we get nine passive forms and three more active forms of femininity. If we choose to use another binary of conformist/non-conformist we get five girls who are classified as conformist, five as mainly/usually conformist and two were only partly and mainly anti-conformist. Two or three girls were sporty and around five regularly interacted with boys (Table 2).

4.3.4 Emphasised Femininity
Perhaps one of the most striking features of my classifications is that only two of the 12 girls in 6M, Holly and Lillian, fitted into Connell's description of emphasised femininity. Renold (2005, p.40) writes that 'recent research on upper junior school femininities suggests that one of the most popular and dominant ways of 'doing girl' is accessing and projecting a heterosexualised femininity' (see also, Ali 2000; Reay, 2001; Kerry *et al*, 2005) In her own research into gendered and sexual identities in two junior schools, Renold concluded that the girls only had two choices, which was to be or not to be girly, or, to align themselves with, or against, the dominant 'emphasised' femininity of the 'girly' heterosexual girl. Renold (2005, p.95) writes that she was struck by the girls' 'preoccupation with all things feminine and (hetero)sexual', and found that over two-thirds of all the girls in her study enrolled to the heterosexualised 'girly' femininity, regardless of their social class, academic orientation or body shape.

Many authors have discussed how dominant versions of femininity (and masculinity) are constructed through the 'heterosexual matrix' (Butler, 1990), and highlighted the centrality of compulsory heterosexuality (see, for example, Thorne, 1993; Epstein & Johnson, 1998; Letts & Sears, 1999; Ali, 2000; Gordon *et al*., 2000; Reay, 2001; Renold, 2001; 2005; Kehily *et al*. 2002; Epstein, *et al*. 2003; Youdell, 2006; Rasmussen, 2006; Allan, 2009; DePalma & Atkinson, 2009; Hauge, 2009). While it is true that every girl at Westmoor Abbey positioned herself as heterosexual, it was only the two girls mentioned above that set out to align themselves with the dominant 'emphasised' femininity of the 'girly' girl.

Although it is possible that many of the girls would have liked to have had a boyfriend, only two had a partner of the opposite sex during the whole year of fieldwork. Lisa, who soon split up with Jack in the first term, and Kati, who was supposed to have a boyfriend in another class.

Despite the fact that low regulation of the official school regime created a space for the pupils to wear pretty much what they liked (including football tops), I was not aware of any girl wearing make-up; girls certainly did not spend breaktimes 'making up' in the toilets, and it was not used as a resource to gain status amongst the girls or boys' groups. Jenny and Amber occasionally wore nail varnish, and three or four sometimes wore earrings (Jenny, Holly, Leah and Estelle). Kati had had her ears pierced but did not wear them because she was worried that it made her look too girly.

A physical appearance that came from wearing fashionable clothes had far less salience for the girls. All the leading boys wore the latest 'makes' emblazoned with logos, which signified a central source of gaining social capital. The girls, however, were not seduced by the popular fashions, nor the media obsession with body size and weight, and most were able to reject the dominant scripts (narratives) of body and fashion. In fact, ten wore school 'colours' of either blue or yellow T-shirts (Table 2).

Despite Renold's findings, perhaps these girls at Westmoor Abbey were not old, or sexualised, enough to be like Valerie Hey's (1997) working-class teenagers who performed their hyper-heterosexual femininities. There was no daily agenda of projecting a heterosexually desirable body, and no girl achieved any sense of power by exhibiting a 'sexy' body. Only Holly and Lillian came to school in wearing skirts on a regular basis (Carmen and Estelle also occasionally also wore one), and the length was relatively short. The leading group of boys did not appear to be interested in Holly and Lillian, and wearing short skirts could prove to be risky rather than a source of attraction or ingratiation.

JS: Are you called a tart if you wear a skirt?

Holly: 'Cos me and Lillian wore a skirt one day and we was sitting at our table and we pulled skirts down, 'cos they had got quite short, and then Jack [*one of the leading boys*] goes, 'Show offs, your tarts' and all of this…

In some ways, Jack's use of the word 'tart' does not refer to any particular sexual activity, but rather to a sexual identity, and is used as a form of social control over the girls (Lees, 1993; Hey, 1997; Renold, 2005). Indeed, just as many of the girls positioned themselves in the middle and played safe by not working too hard because they were worried about being called 'boff', so some were also careful not to fall victim to further abuses by the boys from wearing a skirt, especially if it was worn above a certain height above the knee.

JS: Not many girls wear skirts do they, now why is that?

Estelle: 'Cos they like to be really…/

Alice: They like to be a tart […]

Estelle: They want everyone's attention and they want boys to really to see them….but the only people who really wear really short skirts up to here [*shows a line high up at the top to her leg*] are/

Alice: Lillian and Hanna

Estelle: Are Lillian and Hanna…

JS: So you wouldn't wear your skirt up there?

Estelle: No, I would wear one about here [*shows a line further down her leg*] but that would be my shortest.

Table 2
Further Categorisations of the 12 Girls

Name	Conforms	Works hard	Sporty	Interacts with boys	Has boyfriend	Wears uniform	Active/ Passive type of fem
Lillian	Mainly	Mainly	No	Yes	No	Yes	Passive
Holly	Mainly	Mainly	No	Yes	No	Yes	Passive
Kati	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes, but not observed	No	Active
Leah	No	Mainly	No	Yes	No	No	Active
Jenny	Yes	Yes	Mainly	No	No	Mainly	Passive
Amber	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	Passive
Louisa	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	Passive
Alice	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	Passive
Kerry	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	Passive
Lisa	Mainly	Mainly	No	Sometimes	In autumn term	Yes	Passive
Estelle	Mainly	Mainly	Yes	No	No	Yes	Active
Carmen	Mainly	Mainly	No	Sometimes	No	Yes	Passive
Total Out of 12	5 conform, 5 mainly conform, 2 do not	5 work hard, 6 mainly work hard, 2 do not	2-3 are sporty	About 4-5 interact with boys	Only 1 really had a boyfriend	10 wear 'colours',2 do not	3 active' 9 'passive'

CONCLUSIONS

This paper has reported and discussed findings from research carried out with one class of 10-11 year-old girls in one working class junior school at the very end of the twentieth century, so adding to the growing list of small-scale ethnographic feminist research.

The research has confirmed that one of the main influences on the formation of identities in the school setting is the pupils' peer group. As far as friendship groups went, only six of the 12 girls had a firm friendship with another girl, and it was pairs of girls, rather than larger communities of girls that were found in this particular class. Each pair had its own codes, rules and power relationships, and constructed identities around shared stories and cultural repertoires, which served to draw a boundary between other girls and between girls and the boys. The other girls, who formed no permanent attachments, joined, or attempted to join, other friendship groups throughout the year, although most of them generally aligned themselves with the group of hardworking and 'nice' girls.

The fear of being identified as a 'boff' acted as a deterrent and constrained behaviour, and the girls (and boys) needed to be able to maintain a precarious balance between achievement and sociability. The majority were not prepared to take the risk of being seen conforming too closely to the official school regime by working too hard, and often chose the option of playing safe and 'hiding' in the middle. This goes someway to explaining why many girls did not work particularly hard in this class, and also why they may not in other classes in some other schools in general.

Although there are a number of ways to interpret the different forms of femininity (for example, active/passive; conformist/rebel) these dualisms are too simplistic. This paper has attempted to go beyond research that simply typologises different groupings, which are too discrete and, in many ways, reduces girls' behaviour to being different types of femininity (or boys' behaviour as different types of masculinity). The paper argues that femininities are nuanced and flexible; they are also temporal and change in different contexts when girls are with different people (Francis, 2010).

At Westmoor Abbey, there was no central character (or 'ideal girl') or single, ideal-type of femininity that the girls tried to ascribe to or emulate, although one type was subordinated on the basis of perceived (im)maturity and lack of cognitive ability. The analysis I use seeks to avoid the assumption that gender is automatically conflated with sex, and so selves discursively ascribed 'female' are always 'feminine' and those ascribed 'male 'are necessarily 'masculine'. I argue that the two ladettes, Kati and Leah, performed a type of masculine femininity (Halberstam, 1998), and often tried to imitate many of the characteristics of the boys' hegemonic form.

There were more forms of femininity (or ways of being a girl) for the girls to inhabit, than forms of masculinity, which tended to be narrower. The most common pattern of femininity was conforming (at least up to a point) by being compliant, working hard and also by being nice, which perhaps can be argued is a form of femininity in its own right. There also seemed to be other types, which I have called personalised femininities, within each of the other forms, which coalesced and created friendships around a series of interests. This form was relaxed in that it had no wish to either challenge or derogate other forms but the boundaries were blurred and indistinct. This may be why the friendship groupings were not fixed, but fluid, and why the girls found it difficult to categorise the different types of femininity, and different girls listed different features, depending on which girls were asked. Although all the patterns of femininity were constructed through the heterosexual matrix, and that 'doing girl' was synonymous with 'doing heterosexuality', my findings differ from the work of other researchers in that only two girls attempted to perform Connell's 'emphasised' form of femininity. In particular there were no binaries or the two choices that Renold found when carrying out the ethnographic research around the same time for her own doctoral thesis: that is to be or not to be 'girly'.

Why the girls were able to resist the discourse of emphasised femininity is not clear but is seems that, despite the fieldwork taking place at almost the same time as Renolds' early work, this particular discourse was not as powerful or prevalent in this particular school, at that particular time, and the girls at Westmoor Abbey neither defined themselves by the discourse nor as alternatives to it. The situation at Westmoor Abbey may be different today.

Marx wrote that [people] 'make their own history, but not in circumstances of their own choosing' (Marx, 1963 [1952]), and so the girls found themselves living within wider structural relations (for example, of gender and social class), and were only able to act as far as their structural position allowed them. These structures also included the series of resources, social practices and relations, discourses and cultural repertoires of the school itself, and these provided a unique set of options and opportunities for 'doing' girl at this particular time and place.

However, this does not mean that the girls were without agency, and they can still be viewed as 'skilled and knowledgeable agents' (Giddens, 1984). Just as most were able to resist the powerful discourse of emphasised femininity, (either completely, or at least in part), there were also girls who were able to withstand parts of the cultural classroom agenda set by the boys' hegemonic form of masculinity, and for instance, although many girls played safe by positioning themselves in the middle attainers, others had worked out the link between attainment and employment outcomes and publically work hard at their schoolwork.

KEY TO TRANSCRIPTS

Indicates the moment when an interruption in speech begins;

... a natural pause in the conversation;

[...] extracts edited out of the transcript.

[*italic text*] descriptive text to provide background information;

……a different part of the same interview.

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