EVERYBODY’S LOOKING AT YOU!

GIRLS NEGOTIATING THE ‘FEMININITY DEFICIT’
THEY INCUR IN PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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degree of MA(Ed) by Dissertation through Flexible Study

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I would like to express my gratitude to all those who have helped me in the completion of this study.

To all the girls involved in the research for giving up their time and energy, for without their valuable contributions the enquiry would not have been possible. Also to the teachers who enabled this project to go ahead. Thanks to Proctor and Gamble and Leo Burnett Advertising Limited for their kind permission to reproduce the Tampax advertisement (Figure 1). To Pat for her assistance in the typing of numerous drafts and in the final stages of proof-reading. Special thanks to Gill Clarke, to whom I am deeply indebted for her continuous professional advice, guidance and rigorous constructive criticism.

Finally, I would like to thank my dear dogs, friends and family – especially Cynthia - for their constant support, endless patience and at times much needed words of encouragement throughout the whole research process.
There is a growing awareness of the complex and largely negative attitudes many girls hold towards physical activity in general and Physical Education (PE) in particular. Many girls and young women are missing out on their rights to education, health, fun and physical empowerment as they learn life-long lessons and develop attitudes that physical exertion is ‘not for them.’ This research focuses on six Year 9 girls’ experiences and motivations in PE.

Reflexive interpretation and biographical analysis of in-depth interviews are utilized to explore the themes of the relationship between ‘sportiness’ and heterosexual desirability; and the polarized images of ‘tomboy’ and ‘girlie’. Work by Connell (1987) on ‘the gender order’, hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity is drawn on in order to make sense of the girls’ narratives. Also utilised are theories arising from the cultural analysis tradition on teenage girls’ subcultures and identity formation; and feminist writing on resistance and transformative change.

The findings of the research reveal that images of teenage girls and young women being physically active are non-congruous with the traditional ideologies of acceptable femininity in the dominant culture in British society (hence many girls resist PE). These contradictions force girls into uncomfortable situations and difficult decisions regarding their sense of self and identity formation. Yet, it was also found that girls often resist such normative gender regimes by participating in sport and PE in spite of the contradictions. Running through this thesis is the theme of tension which results as girls try to create an individual ‘sense of self’ and an identity or positioning that satisfies them and those around them. It is revealed how these girls showed great creative strength in coping with the paradoxes they face. Further, that they cope with this femininity deficit, often by having ‘double-identities’ and living ‘split lives’.
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

As a teacher of secondary Physical Education (PE) I have become increasingly aware of the complex and largely negative attitudes held by many teenage girls towards physical activity in general and school PE in particular. Traditional sporting structures in the United Kingdom, including PE, have been criticized as inappropriate for the needs of many girls and young women (Scraton 1992; Sports Council 1993). Further, it has been argued that the ideologies inherent in the sporting and PE cultures alienate and demotivate girls in sport and physical activity in general, and PE in particular (see for example Leaman 1986). The consequences are various, but it is widely agreed that these girls and young women are not only missing out on a vital part of their education and experience, but that they also lose out in terms of their rights to access the beneficial aspects of participation in sport such as health, self-esteem and enjoyment (Health Education Authority 1997; Talbot 1986). Importantly this loss takes effect not just at school, but continues to deprive women in terms of life-long learning and physically active post-school life-styles (Deem and Gilroy 1998; Wright and Dewar 1997).

In recent decades many researchers in the field of gender have begun to emphasize the need to ‘give voice’ to those less frequently heard in the research (see Dewar 1991). It is surprising then, that “… there is little data which gives the pupils a voice” (Williams and Woodhouse 1996: 201). I support the view of Barritt et al. (cited in Sparkes 1992: 83) who encourage researchers in education to “… start by talking to children about their experiences”. Haraway (1988: 191) explains helpfully that

Subjugated standpoints are preferred because they seem to promise more adequate, sustained, objective, transforming accounts of the world.

For these reasons I attempt in this study to adopt the often marginalized perspective of teenage girls and young women themselves. Although I recognize the extent to which this is possible as an ‘aged’ researcher may be limited.

I had previously explored the identities offered to, and subcultures portrayed for, females in relation to sport and physical activity by teenage girls’ magazines (Cockburn 1998a). This study revealed stereotypical and mutually exclusive polarized images of two types of female: one aberrantly involved in physical activity, and one, more appropriately involved in the all-consuming vocation of ‘romance’. This research was followed by a quantitative study concerning the attitudes of seventy-five Year 9 girls at provincial comprehensive schools in the south of the UK (Cockburn 1999). This study revealed great variation and diversity in teenage girls’ involvement in, attitudes towards, and needs from, school PE. This led me to realize that more qualitative data were needed in order to ‘unpack’ and better understand some of the emergent issues.
It was also considered appropriate at this point to take advantage of my knowledge
and my experiences of school PE, both as a student and as a teacher of girls’ PE in
London and the Midlands, and to draw upon this as a resource in my inquiries. As
Denzin and Lincoln (1998: xvii) state “All knowledge is always local, situated in a
local culture embedded in organizational sites”. The advantages of this fore-
knowledge are explained by Merton and Kendall (cited in Cohen and Manion 1994:
290) as follows,

Equipped in advance with a content analysis, the interviewer can readily distinguish
the objective facts of the case from the subjective definitions of the situation. …
When the interviewer, through [her] familiarity with the objective situation, is able to
recognize symbolic or functional silences, ‘distortions’, avoidances, or blockings,
[she] is the more prepared to explore their implications.

By conducting in-depth semi-structured interviews I have been able to probe deeper
into the subcultures prevailing among teenage girls and thereby gather more nuanced
information regarding the different ways they positioned themselves within the
various spheres they inhabited. I concur with Evans (1984: 14) that

The ‘problem’ of girls and physical activity is not just a conceptual issue. It crucially
relates to how willing and able we are to appreciate and understand their actions and
to assume that their perspectives are both worth exploring and knowing.

Thus, I chose to analyse six of the girls’ interviews and in doing so was able to engage
with the narratives and take into account the ambiguities and contradictions which
have since proven crucial to my understanding of the data (see Erben 1998). In this
way I was able to make carefully considered and detailed analyses of the girls’ unique
attitudes and experiences. I concur with Denzin (1998: xiv) that “To study the
particular is to study the general”. It follows that the research subjects in this study
being ‘unremarkable’ girls attending ‘unremarkable’ schools, are arguably
representative of many girls at secondary school in the UK today. As Denzin and
Lincoln (1998: xiv) drawing on Sartre comment “… no individual or case is ever just
an individual or case”. In this way I reveal and problematize some of the relations
and dynamics involved in these girls’ lives and represent at once a particular ‘view
from somewhere’ as well as the subjugated standpoint of many.

I brought with me to this study several ideas (or theories or ‘hunches’). Firstly, that
girls who disengage with PE do so for different reasons – even in their collective
negativity there is a need to recognize their heterogeneity as individuals. Also, that
‘disengaging’ with PE does not mean ‘drop out’ or non-participation alone. Many
girls bring their kit, and ‘toe-the-line’ by appearing to take part. Yet, experience and
closer analysis show that in actual fact many such girls are unenthusiastic, are not
fully engaged, do not enjoy it and gain little from the PE experience. Simultaneously,
but at another level, ‘disengagement’ may take the form, for example, of a teenage
girl who, whilst still motivated in PE lessons, chooses not to take up an invitation to
county trials in an extra-curricular sport. However, the most influential ‘hunch’ I
brought with me to this research is that no matter what their levels of enjoyment,
enthusiasm or commitment, all girls will have stories to tell that can contribute to our
understanding of other girls’ relationships to sport and PE. For example, Evans
(1984: 14) writes,
there are girls who are successful in physical education, who like the subject and support even its conventional forms of organization. Yet we know very little of these or of the basis and persistence of their commitment.

The aims of this research were to explore the cultural and subcultural aspects of teenage girls’ and young women’s lives which influence their involvement in sport and PE. By doing so I aimed to investigate the constraints and complications involved in their identity formation as physically active and competent teenage girls and young women in a world of such cogent normative imagery. Whilst my focus is on girls, they are not my sole concern and much of what is learnt regarding the gender regimes of sport and PE could also be applied to benefit the many boys and men who are also marginalized by the constraining ideologies involved. It should also be noted that whilst my main concern is school PE I also refer to ‘sport’ because the issues surrounding the gendered ideologies and structures of the institutions of sport are central for teachers and researchers in the PE profession. Humberstone (1990: 202) argues that this is because the

… complex web of interconnections between cultural values, gender identity development, and gender stereotypes surrounding sport is mediated through the PE curriculum. (Emphases added)

In the next chapter I review the literature that has enabled me to make sense of my data and build upon my ‘hunches’. In Chapter Three I provide an explanation of the methodological approach and the research techniques used to gather and analyse the data. Further, I reflect on some of the considerations arising from the research process. In Chapter Four I blend theoretical discussion with actual case material to present the findings of the study. In Chapter Five I conclude the thesis by summarizing the findings and considering some of the limitations of the study. I close by considering ways forward for physical educators of girls and make some key challenges to the PE profession.
The literature that problematizes the positioning of girls and young women in education is potentially large. Although PE has been notoriously absent from such discussions the exceptions have made a sound contribution to the understanding of girls’ experiences and attitudes in PE (e.g. Paechter 1998; Scraton 1992; Talbot 1993; Wright 1997). Important contributions have also been made to the problematizing of girls in PE by authors in the fields of ‘gender and sport’ (e.g. Costa and Guthrie 1994; Messner and Sabo 1990); teenage girls’ subcultures (e.g. Lees 1986; McRobbie 1978); and the ‘sociology of the body’ (e.g. Gilroy 1989; M. A. Hall 1996). As well as these areas of literature I have found useful recent theories of ‘masculinity and femininity’ especially with regard to the ‘gender order,’ male power and the ‘othering’ of females (e.g. Connell 1987; de Beauvoir 1949); writing on the notion of ‘compulsory heterosexuality’ (e.g. Clarke 1998; Rich 1980); and work developing the concepts of ‘resistance’ strategies and ‘transformative change’ (e.g. Theberge and Birrell 1994).

The intention in this literature review is three-fold. Firstly, I highlight the significance and importance of powerful ‘commonsense’ assumptions which hold authority over and influence the behaviour of teenage girls and young women, especially with regard to their participation in sport and PE. Secondly, I consider the contradictions and tensions arising between the culture of ‘emphasized femininity’ and the cultures of sport and PE. Finally, I foreground, within the worlds of teenage girls and young women with regard to sport and PE participation, both the notion of ‘resistance’, and the argument for challenging the present dichotomies.

**GENDER ORDER AND GENDER REGIMES**

The phenomenon of men’s global domination of women provides a framework for the study of discriminatory practice and gendered power relations in Western industrialized cultures structured by class relations. Power differentials in these societies are based on the dominant/subordinate relationships between the genders, between the social classes, between ethnicities and so forth. Connell (1987) conceptualizes this social system of male dominance as a ‘gender order’ expressed locally in gender regimes with various expressions of masculinity and femininity. He emphasizes the tendency of the prevailing form of masculinity to be not only hegemonic over other forms (e.g. homosexuality) but over all forms of femininity as well. The concept of ‘hegemony’ I use here in relation to gender order and gender regimes derives from its development by Gramsci (1971) and others such as Laclau and Mouffe (1985). I use it to mean the mobilization of consent to a given order, or of opposition to it, through cultural processes rather than through fixed structures or through force. Hegemonic masculinity is, as a system, so successful that it has become accepted as ‘natural’ and thereby maintains the status quo.

Connell (1987) demonstrates how at the level of mass social relations there are clearly defined forms of femininity that ‘dovetail’ with this hegemonic masculinity. This concept is based on compliance with the gender power differential, i.e. a femininity that accommodates the interests and desires of men, which he calls ‘emphasized
femininity’. It is apparent, he argues, in all aspects of society. The hegemony of the
dominant form of masculinity does not depend on physical force (although it is
contended that they often work in association), nor does it mean total cultural
domination i.e. the obliteration of alternatives. Rather it is a ‘state of play’, a balance
of forces, (powerful) coercion (Connell 1987). This cultural and ideological support
invites certain behaviours and suggests certain images of masculinity and femininity
to be used in the formation of individuals’ identity. Social, structural and
organizational factors, or ‘discourses’, support and reinforce this process. (For the
purposes of this writing I use the term ‘discourse’ after Weedon (1987) to mean the
channels and media through which ideologies are portrayed. These channels include
social structures and processes that are organized through institutions and practices
such as the law, the political system, the church, the family, the education system and
the media. I use the term ‘popular discourse’ to refer to a discursive field which
offers the dominant ideologies of the gender order through popularized media such as
television, newspapers, magazines, advertising and the entertainments industries and
so forth.)

It has been well documented that popular discourses reinforce stereotypes for teenage
girls and young women by helping to “… keep in circulation established stereotypes
and uncontroversial notions of what it is to be feminine and teenaged” (Hudson 1984:
51). The stereotypes portrayed by these discourses are often presented to consumers –
in this case teenage girls and young women – as highly commercialized and totally
packaged cultural commodities through magazines, television and so forth (McRobbie
and Garber 1991). A further example of the way stereotypes are portrayed and
normalized is through the ‘hidden curriculum’ in schools (see Bain 1985; 1990). In
this case powerful covert (and often arguably overt) messages are transmitted to
students portraying emphasized femininity as the only socially sanctioned option for
teenage girls and young women. It is widely recognized that popular discourses such
as these offer only limited identities and invite only strictly conforming and
traditionally acceptable behaviour (Scraton 1992).

In this way, argues Foucault, public discursive practice “… disperses the apparatus of
social control through dominant ideologies” (cited in Connell 1987: 127). Further,
this practice ensures that the “… centrality and privileging of heterosexuality is
always assumed” (Winship 1985: 41). The findings of Budgeon and Currie (1995),
Lees (1993) and my own earlier research on teenage girls’ magazines (Cockburn
1998a) reflect these conclusions. However, it is important to account for the vested
interests in sexual politics and to recognize that these popular discourses, such as the
media, form part of the public promotion of ideologies which is largely controlled by
men, and for their benefit. Writers, such as Connell (1987) criticize Foucault’s work
for failing to acknowledge this concept of ‘interest’. They stress the importance of
recognizing that it is almost always white, middle class, heterosexual males who stand
to gain by this institutionalization and maintenance of hegemonic masculinity.

As a result of these processes teenage girls and young women in the process of
constructing their identities are liable to be coerced into compliance based on the
dominant assumptions of the gender order (Connell 1987; Theberge 1991). The fact
that identity formation is based on such narrow definitions however, means that the
ideals that teenage girls and young women strive for are rarely achievable. Clearly
these ideological (as well as the structural) constraints faced by young females with
regard to public discourse severely limit their opportunities for behaviour outside the
norm of emphasized femininity (Hudson 1984; Scraton 1992; Winship 1985).
THE ‘OTHERING’ OF FEMALES IN SPORT AND PE

Central to the processes of both identity formation and power relations is the concept of the ‘other’ who by being different both defines, and is defined by, the boundaries for inclusion in and exclusion from the dominant group (Connolly 1991; Paechter 1998; Rutherford 1990). One part of the feminist argument is that male power operates through a process of inferiorizing women and the feminine, and that one way this is achieved is through a continual process of creating and maintaining differentiation between the sexes/genders. In this way gendered identities are established “… in relation to a series of differences that have become socially recognized” (Connolly 1991: 64). Indeed, de Beauvoir (1949: 15-16) considers woman to be

… defined and differentiated with reference to a man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute – she is the Other.

Central to these differences are the concepts of male physical power and female compliance and physical weakness. As a consequence of this difference females become ‘othered’ in the domains of sport and PE.

The Gender of Sport is Male

Just as sport and PE are important sites of female subordination and the reinforcement of female physical weakness, so too they are important sites for the social construction of the physical and social power of the dominant forms of masculinity (Messner and Sabo 1990). Theorists have identified the need for hegemonic masculinity to constantly substantiate and re-confirm itself as well as highlighting its need for arenas such as sport and PE in which to do so (Mac an Ghaill 1994; Theberge 1987). Because the dominant form of masculinity is always constructed in polarized relation to, and superior to femininity, it relies on the existence of hierarchies to create power. These hierarchies, as explained above, are facilitated by the establishment of differences and a “… language of polarity and material structures of inequality and discrimination” (Rutherford 1990: 10). Thus, physical activity remains an area of western culture dominated by males in which females and their activities are inferiorized.

In connection with these notions of sport being male Thorne (1993) points out that girls who are ‘tomboys’ are generally acceptable in social terms until the age of about eleven. Indeed, they may even be commended insofar as they portray attributes and qualities such as strength and vigour that gain a generalized value from their association with men. However, on entering adolescence girls become ‘the other sex’ and are expected to succumb to emphasized femininity and its traits and activities. Talbot (1986: 122) describes how this alienation of teenage girls and young women from sport increases as adulthood approaches, such that,

… female participation in physical activities is seen as legitimate for girls, but only tolerated, at best, for women. (Emphases added).

As a consequence young women face discontinuity as they find what has been acceptable behaviour is then abruptly restricted in adolescence – the alternative is being seen to be childish and immature (see Williams and Bedward 1999).
The Analysis of Gender in PE

Scraton’s (1992) work on girls’ PE is underpinned by radical feminist theory that challenges the institutions and ideologies of the gender order and its regimes. She addresses two important and related concepts: physicality and its power relations; and sexuality and its cultural significance in the subordination of women in relation to girls’ secondary PE. Scraton raises the issue of curriculum organization and its resulting restrictions on girls in PE. Her research (1992: 48) reveals that

Powerful attitudes remain which centre on girls’ physical ability and capacity based on the assumptions that girls are physically less capable than boys.

Further, Scraton illustrates how these differences whether attributed to biology or culture are accepted as ‘natural’ and inevitable. Thus, she argues, a specifically ‘female physicality’ is produced and reproduced in PE. She demonstrates how girls in her study were timetabled for indoor lessons while the boys went outdoors; and how ‘standards’ (of behaviour, dress and appearance) were prioritized in teachers’ aims over physical fitness and skill. Further, she points out that one PE department was even running a course called ‘Health and Beauty’. Scraton uses this evidence to illustrate the centrality of physical power relations to the gender order. Further, she argues that this gender order is so internalized through institutions and social practice that its ideologies are clear even in an area exclusive to women such as single sex PE lessons.

Talbot (1986) blames the polarization of sex roles for producing an elitist hierarchy within sport that provides a framework for the type of stereotyping discussed above. Talbot regards sexuality and physicality as being central to an analysis of gender in PE. Her analysis relates directly to Wright’s (1996) theories on the polarization of male and female bodies which found girls and boys described by interviewees as antithetical to each other. Boys were seen as strong, independent, tough and physically skilled. Girls on the other hand, were seen to primarily lack these valued attributes, and secondarily to be fragile, nurturant and physically less able. In short, certain attributes and behaviours are often presupposed in accordance with the dominant expectations of hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity. Wright (1996: 76) cites Gatens who suggests that these “interdefinitions” make the accepted gender definitions appear “… natural, necessary and immutable”. In this way, girls are locked into and alienated by,

... an opposition which forces them to compare themselves to a male standard of skill in activities valued within patriarchal discourses of sport [and of UK society at large]. (Wright 1996: 77)

Talbot (1986) argues that a major factor in this ideology of constraint in girls’ PE has been the increased masculinization of the teaching of the subject over the last forty to fifty years. She also highlights negative influences from the world of sport which leave sexual divisions unchallenged – particularly in professional sport.

THE NON-CONGRUOUS CULTURES OF FEMININITY AND SPORT/PE

As Scraton (1992) points out ‘the body’ has been a neglected factor in feminist analysis and it becomes clear that we need to recognize how often social practices and assumed differences are reduced to biology. Female sexuality is based on proving
desirability whilst denying availability or sexual activity. So girls and young women are taught to “…look good and be presentable, particularly to men” (Scraton 1992: 101). Similarly the notion of woman-as-object illustrates how girls are encouraged to become ‘young ladies’ and how this teaches them to dis-value their bodies as active and to reject any assumption of functionality or physical capability (Lenskyj 1986).

Scraton (1992) concludes that the result of these forces is an economical and emotional imperative for young women to be seen as sexually attractive, which overshadows any desire to be healthy or fit. This power differentiation teaches girls and women never to be satisfied with their bodies unless (and often in spite of the fact that) they conform to the ‘desired shape’. These ideologies of femininity are reproduced within the gender regimes of organizations, popular discourses and the attitudes of individuals. The effect is to cause girls to shy away from exposing their (natural and ‘unbeautified’) bodies to public view, even to other females. Hendry et al. (1993) highlight the importance of ‘the reflected self’ for adolescents. They draw attention to the way that dramatic bodily changes at this time exacerbate problems for teenage girls and young women in PE. Kaplan (cited in Hendry et al. 1993) argues that many girls feel it necessary to abandon or disguise individual ‘masculine’ traits such as competitiveness in order to be acceptable and accepted. Cockerill and Hardy (1987) investigated this contention amongst teenage girls and found that the disjunctures between the ‘cult of femininity’ and the cultures of sport and PE often led girls to reject many aspects of PE. Accordingly, argue Hendry et al. (1993), girls develop strategies to deal with such threatening situations including reduced effort, easily obtainable goals set, and non-participation.

Compulsory Heterosexuality in Sport and PE

Hegemonic masculinity is not only constructed in polarized relation to emphasized femininity, but it also marginalizes all other forms of sexual identity. One of the mechanisms hegemonic masculinity uses to maintain its dominance is ‘compulsory heterosexuality’ (Rich 1980). Young people learn to accept compulsory heterosexuality through the ideals of normalized and approved heterosexual romance (Clarke 1998). This is the case whether or not they are in fact heterosexual, lesbian, gay, unsure or even have yet to consider their own adult sexual identity.

As proving grounds for (hegemonic) masculinity, sport and PE reinforce the dominant assumptions that link the physical with the ‘macho’. Thus a teenage boy can prove his ‘manhood’, and thereby his maturity and heterosexual desirability, through (certain types of) physical activity – a continuation of the childhood norm. In contrast, teenage girls would appear to actively deconstruct, or at least be in fear of tainting, their maturing and heterosexual, socially sanctioned sexual identity through participation in sport. Since,

... the stereotype of ‘female athlete’ and ‘lesbian’ share so-called masculine traits such as aggression and independence, the association between sport and lesbianism has frequently been made. (Lenskyj 1991: 49)

Adolescence being the period during which identity formation is at its height, sexual identity thereby becomes central to the lives of teenage girls and young women. As a result, girls’ (‘sexual’) reputation becomes a key factor in a girls’ gender identity. It follows that because of the extreme negative stigma attached to homosexuality in
western mainstream culture, that being seen to be heterosexual is of paramount importance to girls. To be called a ‘lezzie’ is worse than the condemning labels of ‘slag’ or ‘drag’ (Lees 1986). As Clarke (1998: 150) points out, “The power and stigma of the ‘L’ word to threaten and intimidate is clear…”.

Therefore, the often assumed doubt surrounding a physically active female’s (hetero-) sexuality is one of the major penalties teenage girls pay for resisting the dominant cultural forces through participation in sport and even PE. Talbot (1986) concludes that as a result of these factors PE is a school subject which becomes irrelevant for many girls and young women.

WAYS FORWARD

Several authors emphasize the need for action to bring about transformative change. For instance Talbot (1993) stresses that the liberal feminist approach - that gave us ‘equal opportunities’ – fails to challenge the sexual differentiation on the grounds of biological differences and so leaves unquestioned the ideologies of the gender order that disadvantage. Ramazanoglu (cited in Sparkes 1992: 42) points out that change is fundamental to feminist research because

Feminism constitutes attempts to transform the bases of current social, economic and political relationships between men and women.

(Emphasis added)

It is important to find ways in which the PE profession and its structures can be radically deconstructed to make for a less oppressive way to physically educate girls and young women. Below I discuss some of the suggestions made in the literature concerning resistance, negotiation and change, which arise from their critical cultural approaches.

The Recognition of Resistance

Developments in social analysis in the 1950s and 1960s led to ‘sex role socialization theory’ which became an important framework for analyzing the social structure as it problematized constraints caused by stereotyped ideologies and interpersonal assumptions. Sex role theory identified non-conformity, disparity and change as things that ‘happen to’ sex roles and impinge on them. However, developments in the 1970s, such as the work of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, led sociologists to shift their approach to ‘deviance’. Sex role theory has since been criticized by writers such as Connell (1987), Gruneau (1983), and S. Hall (1996) for failing to recognize and address ‘agency’ or ‘social struggle’. According to sex role theory deviance was merely ‘unsuccessful role learning’, a minority or eccentric behaviour. The tradition of ‘cultural analysis’ emerged and along with it suggestions that deviance should no longer be seen in negative terms, something to be skipped over or ignored. Scraton (1986: 72) claims that “… the transmission of stereotypes is by no means simplistic, absolute or uncontested”. Theberge and Birrell (1994) expand on this theme of contestation in suggesting that individuals are not ‘passive victims’ or ‘cultural dopes’, but ‘active agents’ who demonstrate resistance within the spheres they inhabit. In S. Hall and Jefferson’s Resisting through Rituals (1976) young people were shown to be active in choosing to resist. McRobbie and Garber (1976: 216 & 221) in the same volume describe how

… a whole alternative network of responses and activities through which girls negotiate their relation to the subcultures or even make positive moves away from the subcultural option … girls can be seen to
be negotiating a different space, offering a different type of resistance to what can at least in part be viewed as their sexual subordination.

Writers such as Connell (1987), Gruneau (1983) and Talbot (1993) see a dialectical relationship between agency and constraint. Davies (1984) argues that ‘deviance’ is a misrepresentation of resistance and that change and variation arise from within gender relations. These interpretations have been developed by the likes of Haug (1992) who argues against the use of the ‘subject-object’ metaphor which sees females as either ‘active agents’ or ‘passive victims’ (see also McDermott 1996).

Sociologists’ views on girls’ social behaviour have changed over the last two or three decades, but girls’ behaviour itself is also changing. For example Sharpe, in the research to update Just Like A Girl (1994) found girls to be less willing to conform to a conventional feminine role than they were in the 1970s. Further, she highlighted the importance of conflict and resistance and individuals’ impact on (every) social action. Change is vital for feminism and interpretations that recognize resistance are central to this change. Moreover, it is crucial that girls can now be seen to be resisting as this is “… the process by which disempowered groups or persons refuse to submit fully to their disempowerment” (Theberge and Birrell 1994: 363).

The Costs of Resistance

Theberge and Birrell (1994) point out that females who choose to go against the general expectations and assumptions of the gender order have to pay a price. In short, a girl who chooses to participate in PE or in extra curricular physical activity (particularly a traditionally ‘masculine’ sport) will risk alienation from many of the people around her and those most important to her such as friends, boys and parents. Additionally, she risks alienation from her collective identity of ‘teenage girl’ as portrayed by the popular discourses that pervade her everyday life. As a result, physically active teenage girls and young women risk the effects of having a less secure ‘sense of self’ at a time in life when such ‘belonging’ takes on paramount importance (Hendry et al. 1993; Rutherford 1990).

In the same vein, girls who resist PE by disengaging with, or ‘dropping out’ of, the subject can also expect to pay a high price. Those girls who do little or no physical activity may well disadvantage their formal education, career chances, self-confidence and solidarity with other females; these components of their lives are often fragmented or missing altogether (see Young 1980). As well as losing out on physical capital in this way (see Shilling 1993) girls are deprived of the advantages of using their physicality as a medium for identity construction as “… embodiment is a prerequisite for discovering who one is” (Arnold cited in McDermott 1996: 20).

Further, girls are also likely to miss out on the important part physical activity plays in forming interpersonal relations. Rathzel’s (1992: 26) collective memory work exposed “… the extent to which attitudes to the world are at least partially molded by our relations to our bodies”. There is a relatively small but important field of study which has further developed pro-feminist theories in relation to the centrality of the body to the gender order (see for example Bartky 1988; Gilroy 1989; M. A. Hall (1996); and Theberge (1991) on Foucault). It becomes clear that resistance, both to dominant cultural ideologies and to sport and PE cultures “… is hard won” (Theberge and Birrell 1994: 371).
Acknowledging Girls as Heterogeneous Individuals

Theories of resistance emerged in the late 1970s and early 1980s out of the cultural analysis tradition. Alongside these concepts grew theories of ‘subcultures’ which began to emphasize the differences between groups and the subcultures they inhabit. For instance S. Hall (1996: 4) describes how

Identification is constructed on the back of a recognition of some common origin or shared characteristics with another person or group, or with an ideal, and with the natural closure of solidarity and allegiance established on this foundation.

However, this approach has subsequently been criticized because it assumes homogeneity at the expense of individual diversity within these subcultural groups (Marshall 1998). There does exist a ‘general’ teenage girl subculture (as offered for example by magazines); and teenage girls may be identified by what they are not, i.e. they are not boys, nor are they adults and so on (see S. Hall 1996). Nevertheless, it is crucial to recognize that there is no generic teenage girl (Dewar 1993); and that further, this notion forms a crucial aspect of the study of adolescent girls’ involvement in PE.

The application of theories of heterogeneity (Dewar 1993; Klein 1946; and Phelan 1994), combined with an attentiveness to what girls are saying through biographical analyses such as this study, makes it clear that we cannot categorize, and should not treat, “This Sex Which Is Not One” as a single homogeneous group (Irigaray 1981). It is widely argued by the likes of these authors, and my earlier questionnaire survey (Cockburn 1999) verifies, that teenage girls and young women are individually and uniquely positioned within this broad category - their subcultures are plural. It follows that girls will have multiple and varying needs, wants, and attitudes towards PE (Fox 1994; Klein cited in Connell 1987; Williams 1993; Young 1997). By respecting the diversity of human experience, Costa and Guthrie (1994: 251) stress that “… we will likely gain a better understanding of sporting women and the significance of sport itself”. Yet, in schools there is a tendency to categorize ‘girls’ as a homogeneous group. For instance, I am often told by teachers that “girls (on the whole) don’t like …” so and so, or asked by them, “what do girls (as a group) want?” In this way, argue the likes of Rutherford (1990), categories such as ‘girls’ and ‘boys’ become established and polarized due to the importance of the boundaries and differences between them.

The Need to Challenge Dichotomies

As Rutherford (1990) explains, polarized dichotomies are damaging because they force the polarisation of images and the creation of hierarchies, in doing so these dichotomies provide a basis for inequality, discrimination and oppression. The results include non-congruous images that force choices between unsatisfactory alternatives. For instance, Scraton stresses that future work needs to explore ways to help teachers break down the dichotomy that leaves them a choice between the two unsatisfactory alternatives of ‘feminized’ or ‘masculinized’ approaches to teaching PE. She adds that future work needs to help teachers feel empowered to interrupt this cycle of reproduction and reinforcement. Earlier work on teenage girls’ magazines (Cockburn 1998a) exposed a further, and equally damaging polarized dichotomy presented, this time to girls, of ‘sporty tomboy’/’non-sporty young woman’ (see for example, the Tampax advertisement in Figure 1, page 17; and Thorne 1993). Again, non-congruous images are offered that, in this case, leave teenage girls and young women...
a choice between two unsatisfactory alternatives – a masculinized ‘doer’ of PE or a feminized ‘drop out’ of PE.

**SUMMARY AND ISSUES FOR THIS RESEARCH**

This exploration of the effects of the gender regimes and their resultant dichotomies in sport and PE leads me to conclude with Talbot (1986: 122) that

Cultural conditioning teaches women and adolescent girls to value their bodies only in so far as they are sexually attractive. It has been argued that this is economically and emotionally important to young women. Thus they learn to dis-value their bodies as functional parts of themselves and to accept low expectations of health and fitness.

Nevertheless, it is crucial to recognize and respect girls’ behaviour in relation to these theories as *active* and not *passive*. For these purposes, the acknowledgement of, and further inquiry into, the diverse nature of ‘teenage girls’ is needed.

Several authors claim that change is most likely to come through increases in teacher awareness of the existing inequities in PE; teachers’ awareness of their own contributions to gender power relations; and teachers’ ability to challenge the inequalities (Groves and Laws 1999; Wright 1997). What is needed is for teachers to ‘unlearn’ their largely stereotyped attitudes and to confront the power structures in schools which traditionally keep ‘politics’ out of everyday life (Talbot 1986). Scraton (1992) stresses that in order to do this it is necessary to locate physicality and *physical power relations* as central to the analysis of gender relations, with the aim of improving girls’ confidence in their bodies (see also Lees 1986).

However, teachers should not and cannot, be solely responsible for such transformative change and some responsibility clearly lies within the field of research. Talbot (1993) identifies the understanding of context through research – how decisions are made, how people resist, accommodate, implement or drive change – as crucial in potentially enabling the PE profession to recognize the possibilities for change. Thus, it is of great concern that the traditional ’scientific’ research paradigm has in the main, been so dominant in educational research, that it has overlooked “… the lifeworld of physical education in all its experiential complexity” (Smith 1992: 61) and overshadowed critical research and its potential awareness of context.

It is for these reasons that the literature inspired me to design and pursue a research project which is qualitative in nature and uses a feminist methodology. I hoped to question the ready interpretation of girls’ behaviour in PE by employing an approach described by Sparkes (1992: 83) as

… an attitude of attentiveness to the things of immediate experience. For the pedagogically minded, it is an attentiveness to the things that matter to children, to that which brings us in touch with the experiences of children, and ultimately, to the good [and the bad] contained within such experience.

In the following chapter I discuss the research methodology and the methods used for this study. I also consider some of the problems encountered during the research process.
CHAPTER THREE

METHOD AND METHODOLOGY

In order for research to question the predominant assumptions surrounding girls’ behaviour in and attitudes towards sport and PE the subjects of the research need a ‘platform’ from which their voices may be heard. Via careful and sensitive interpretation of what the researched say qualitative inquiry may not only enable voices to be heard by a wider audience, but also promote a better understanding of what that audience hears. Meanwhile, it must be acknowledged that it is definitely *I*, as researcher, who is the interpreter and conceptualizer – the intermediary between the girls’ narratives and the reader.

In this chapter I explain how I provided a platform for six teenage girls, and how I attempted, through the interpretation of their ‘stories’, to increase our understanding of girls’ experiences in PE. Firstly, I foreground the notions of ‘reflexivity’ and ‘grounded theory’ as being amongst the aspects of qualitative methodology which have made the greatest impacts on the reasoning behind my approach to this research. Secondly, I describe my research techniques together with some of the problems and ethical issues which arose during the process. Finally, I reflect on the research process and consider some of the influences that helped me with the “… art of interpretation” (Denzin and Lincoln 1994: 500).

MY APPROACH TO THIS RESEARCH

Reflexivity

… women’s lives involve a continual reality disjuncture … there is a continual contradiction between women’s involvement in everyday experience and the ‘language of theory’. (Stanley and Wise 1983: 164)

In order to make meaningful connections between experience and theory, many feminist researchers, amongst others, have adopted a strategy of *reflexivity*. This allows the researcher’s relationships to her work, and to those researched within it, to become central to the research *process*. Reflexivity also involves critical examination and analytical exploration of this process (Cook and Fonow, cited in Grace 1997). Thus, as Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) emphasize, in the same way that we
analyse the subjects and cultures of our research, we should examine and account for our own activities as researchers. As a former teacher of secondary PE who is now researching the theoretical work developed around gender and physical education, I experience the disjuncture between what I know as a teacher and what I learn from theories in books. I have been encouraged in my efforts to make connections between these two worlds by other feminist writers such as Clarke and Humberstone (1997), Maynard and Purvis (1994) and Stanley and Wise (1983); also to reflect on the research process in which I am involved.

Locating myself: the researcher

Feminist researchers argue that one aspect of reflexivity is the need for a researcher to ‘locate’ herself within her work, to clarify and acknowledge what she brings to it – ‘where she is coming from’ – and what influence that may bear on the findings. This opposes the tradition of ‘scientific method’ in which the researcher is supposed to remain detached and uninfluential in the process, and therefore in the findings, of the research. Stanley and Wise (1983: 162) illustrate well how ‘Personhood cannot be left behind’. They argue that we must, as researchers, “… make ourselves vulnerable, not hide behind what [we] are supposed to think and feel” (1983: 168).

As a female who has attended a state secondary school in the UK and has been a teacher of PE, I began this work feeling relatively well positioned to empathize with Year 9 girls. However, as the research developed it became clear that my own particular and unique life experiences actually positioned me at a substantial distance from the girls. For example, I had been exceptional in my love of sport as a teenager, I had trained as a teacher of PE and then I had taught it for five years. This reflection also made it seem a long time ago that I had the worries, interests and motivations of a thirteen-year-old girl. Further, as my research into teenage girls’ magazines revealed, being thirteen in 1979 was quite different from being thirteen in 1999!

Although I was relatively well positioned to empathize there was a need to be aware of the potential differences in my and their standpoints in relation to the research questions. For these reasons I sought to be rigorous in listening to, understanding and portraying what Year 9 girls had to say. In doing so I aimed to convey the students’ perspectives in a sensitive and respectful way whilst bearing in mind my position as
an inevitably “… biographically situated researcher” (Denzin and Lincoln 1998: 23). I explained my positioning to each of the interviewees so as to encourage them to relax and ‘open up’ - whilst aware of the potential for abuse of the girls’ trust. By doing so I found that this involved them more in the research process. The girls were able to comment on such things as my apparent nervousness, or the fact that they had enjoyed talking to me, for example.

**Grounded Theory**

Such reflexivity required constant adaptations and flexibility as the research progressed. These changes were supported by the concept of ‘grounded theory’ which advocates movement between data and theoretical thinking. Scraton and Flintoff (1992) argue that this allows theory to grow out of the experience of doing the research and in doing so helps to develop feminist theoretical thinking. Also valuable was the advice of Strauss and Corbin (1990: 199) to use memos and diagrams to “… assist your movement away from the data to abstract thinking, then in returning to the data ground these abstractions in reality”.

Janesick (1998: 53) comments that “… things change as you go along in qualitative research” and I often found I was making changes to my thoughts and procedures during the processes of design, data collection, and writing up. Having begun from a position which, as discussed above, provided me with an informed starting point for this investigation, my ‘hunches’ were regularly re-formed and re-directed. I was encouraged by others’ writing on critical analysis to constantly question what I was doing, how I was doing it, and what sense I was making of what I found (see for example Scraton and Flintoff 1992). Frequent returns were made to others’ theories and I reflected on their relevance to my work as I followed my “… path of discovery” (Denzin and Lincoln 1998: xii). This more often than not led me to shift slightly in my thinking and my approach to subsequent interviews.

In this way the interpretation process began long before the tapes were transcribed and official ‘data analysis’ began. I was enabled to return to my empirical work with increased curiosity and appetite for (often unexpected) data. In the following section I describe my methods of design, conduct and analysis. I also provide a summary of the background information on schools and PE departments visited in order to contextualise the research.

**RESEARCH TECHNIQUES**

**Design of the Interview Schedule**

The challenge was to understand how these girls make sense of the world they inhabit and to understand just what it is like to be – to empathize with – a thirteen or fourteen year old girl at secondary school. McRobbie (1978: 97) claims that in order to empathize it is necessary in such work to
... situate the girls from the start within the pre-existent culture of femininity which they, as females in a patriarchal society, are born into and which is continually transmitted to them over the years by their mothers, sisters, aunts, grandmothers, neighbours and so on.

I would add that this pre-existent culture is also transmitted, often more powerfully, by males in these girls’ lives such as their fathers, brothers, uncles, teachers and classmates. In addition, there exists a promotion of these dominant ideologies in popular discourse. Thus it is necessary to explore teenage girls’ interpersonal relationships with, and within, their world/s. Hence, I sought to design questions which would investigate their experiences not only in sport and PE but in other aspects of their worlds such as the people they know and the magazines they read. I kept mainly to the subjects of sport and PE and was thus able to encourage the girls to begin to analyse their experiences and their resultant approaches to sport and PE in-depth.

The areas covered by the schedule included the following. (Although not all questions were asked in every interview the comprehensive schedule provided a ready guide as to what was/had been covered.)

- PE activities and girls’/boys’ abilities in them
- The classifications of girls’ sports/boys’ sports
- Girls’ and boys’ traits of ‘desirability’
- ‘Sporty’/‘non-sporty’ people
- Changes in attitude since primary school
- PE department rules such as PE kit and changing
- Images of femininity and of sport as portrayed in popular discourse such as teenage girls’ magazines and television
- Mixed/single sex grouping for PE lessons
- The significances of keeping fit

(For a full version of the schedule see Appendix I.)

Using this schedule and the lists of ‘prompt’ questions within it I was able to conduct ‘focused’ or ‘semi-structured’ interviews (see Cohen and Manion 1994). This allowed for an atmosphere of “conversation with a purpose” whilst retaining a certain amount of control over the topics covered (Robson 1993: 228).

**Pilot study**

A pilot study was conducted in three stages, each time with girls from schools not involved in the study. Firstly, a group of girls listened to a list of questions covering the areas I wished to explore. Rather than actually answering the questions, they were to stop me each time there was a question they did not understand, that they felt was badly worded, or that they would feel ‘uncomfortable’ answering. Their frank comments assisted me in adjusting the questions accordingly. The girls also aided me in constructing a verbal introduction to the interview which laid out what I hoped we would achieve in each interview, the topics we were likely to cover, and how long the interview was going to take. Secondly, I ‘interviewed’ two girls using the draft copy of the agreement and the schedule. In this way I gained some idea of how much girls might have to say on these topics, and how long the interviews ‘proper’ might take. Robson (1993: 242) argues that
You don’t become a good interviewer just by reading about it. Skills are involved which require practice, preferably under ‘low risk’ conditions where it is possible to receive feedback on your performance.

With this in mind, I discussed the questions and the whole experience with the girls after each of these two sessions. Again they were able to contribute constructively to discussions about my own presentation as ‘the interviewer’, the ethics of the interview process, and the suitability of the questions in the schedule. Thirdly, I conducted an ‘official’ forty-five minute interview and made final adjustments to both the interview schedule and verbal introduction (see Appendices I & II).

Access
Head teachers from the schools involved in the earlier questionnaire study (Cockburn 1999) had each given permission to subsequently interview the girls who had answered the questionnaire. Following telephone conversations with each contact teacher they were requested to distribute letters to the girls I had chosen to interview (see Appendices III & IV). The girls involved were selected using various criteria, based on their responses to the questionnaire in the earlier study (see Appendix V). Firstly, their willingness and ability to express themselves well. Secondly, their demonstration of strong opinions and sound arguments. And thirdly, I was careful to select a sample of girls who, according to the answers on their questionnaires from the earlier survey, demonstrated a range of attitudes towards and experiences in PE, such as ‘enjoyment of lessons’ (see Appendix VI). Two girls from each of the five schools were selected (n10) and a further two from each school were requested to stand by as ‘reserves’ in case of absences on the day of the interviews.

The Sample
Pseudonyms have been used for both the schools and the students involved in order to retain their anonymity.

The schools
Five state run schools were chosen in provincial towns of Hampshire and Cambridgeshire for the original questionnaire survey. The schools were considered to share indices (size, pupil backgrounds, co-ed, etc) with, and thereby to a certain extent be representative of, many British secondary schools. The aim was not to compare schools as institutions with differing PE departments, rather to include girls from a range of schools, each with a slightly different background and atmosphere. These schools were chosen because they are unexceptional – they do not stand out in any particular way – yet within that range they do show some differences. In this way, the girls selected could arguably be considered to reflect the population of Year 9 girls at state schools in the UK today (see Cohen and Manion 1994).

Each school varied slightly in terms of intake and socio-economic composition. All the schools in the survey have an intake of predominantly white students with small numbers of students from Asian backgrounds – largely second generation Muslim immigrants from Pakistan in particular - but very few from Afro-Caribbean or other ethnic minority families.

The PE departments
Each PE department followed the National Curriculum for PE, offered extra-curricular activities and had departmental codes and regulations for PE lessons
regarding kit, jewellery removal, hair tying and so forth. The facilities available for use in PE lessons varied greatly between the departments, from only one indoor space to exclusive use of a large sports hall. (For a more detailed description of the PE departments involved see Appendix VII.)

The girls: Lisa, Jo, Marie, Shamsa, Rebecca, and Nicola
All the girls selected were present apart from at one school where both the interviewees and the ‘reserves’ were absent! In this case the contact teacher offered three volunteer replacements and so shorter but equally constructive sessions were held. All eleven tapes were transcribed; six were selected on the grounds of their utility and subjected to further rigorous analysis. Again, the girls’ willingness and ability to form and communicate an opinion, (this time in the interview situation) were foremost in this selection procedure. I deliberately did not select the final six girls on the grounds of what they were saying, rather on how well they expressed themselves.

All the girls participated (to a lesser or greater degree) in PE and other physical activity. Five of the girls were white Caucasian, and Shamsa was from the second generation of a Muslim family who emigrated from Pakistan. All the girls were able-bodied and none had classified learning or behavioural difficulties. They came from varying socio-economic backgrounds but in each case their families could be described as upper working class or middle class. (See Appendix VIII for short profiles of the girls involved.)

The Interview Process
Although I had considered interviewing girls in groups, I decided against it. Kinchin, in his (1998) case study, found a more “sophisticated level of thinking” in private journals kept by his subjects, than in the public presentations they gave. Following this and my experience with young people as a teacher, I chose to increase the interviewees’ anonymity and promote open and honest conversation by interviewing girls on their own.

I reintroduced myself to each girl and reminded her of the background of my work. I gave them each the verbal introduction to the interview and encouraged the girls to stop me to ask questions at any time. I did my best to create an informal atmosphere and the girls were given the option of turning off the tape recorder at any time (none of them chose to).

The interview questions were arranged in sections under general headings and printed on separate pieces of paper so that I could move them around according to the direction our talk took us. This allowed me to let the ‘conversation’ run and not be bound to a certain order for the topics, whilst maintaining thematic links and being aware of areas not yet covered with each individual.

Analysis of the Data
There are many text books on ‘how to do qualitative research’ but it is difficult to find one which actually tells you how to go about the practical process of organizing data into a form in which it can be written up and make sense to a third party reader (Burgess pers. comm. 1999). Having carefully considered the best way to organize the data without losing a ‘holistic’ sense of each individual’s narrative I began a process with which I was content in terms of representing the girls fairly and justly, and also in terms of the ethics of my situation as a researcher.
I made substantive, methodological and analytical notes immediately after each session (Burgess 1984). Further, following Hammersley and Atkinson’s (1983) advice I listened to each interview tape at least once as soon after the interview as possible in an effort to become as familiar as possible with the data. This was important because, as Delamont (1998: 15) points out, “… the processes of reflection and analysis are … grounded in our active interactions with those materials”. The tapes were copied and sent for professional transcription. Meanwhile, I listened again to the tapes and wrote ‘vignettes’ on each girl’s ‘story’. This helped me to keep a clear picture of the entire session not just the parts I was most likely to remember. The next stage was to listen again to the tapes, this time correcting any mistakes made during transcription.

Finally, I went through each interview searching for significant data. I marked the margins of the transcripts with codes devised for each topic or area of the research questions to which it applied (see Appendix IX for a full list of these codes). Parts of the transcripts were then re-organized under the headings I intended to use for the writing process, which were: ‘The Gender Order’, ‘The Counter Hegemony of PE’, ‘Resistance’ and ‘Double Identities’.

REFLECTIONS ON METHOD

Whilst content with the progress and results of the research I was left with many thoughts and reservations over the procedures I adopted. There remained many unanswered questions concerning how I had conducted my study and why I had conducted it in these ways.

Qualitative Subjectivity

One contradiction that became apparent in this research was that whilst I had asked all respondents the same questions in similar conditions, I began to realize that I was varying how I asked them. As Hammersley and Atkinson (1983: 7) point out “… the same physical stimulus can mean different things to different people and, indeed to the same person at different times”. These girls’ understandings and interpretations are open to question, as are my own, because moods, feelings, values and involvements vary (Skeggs 1997). I began to look past a ‘value free’ analysis as I realized it could not provide a “… single picture of the truth” (Skeggs 1994: 4). I saw a need for the subtleties and the paradoxes to become clearer and began to foreground them both in the interviews and in my thinking. This nuanced information allowed me to begin to recognize the respondents as subjects not objects, with their own agency and volition. But it also caused me to question whether I would really be able to understand what it might be like for them (see Stanley and Wise 1983).

This thought process presented me with many ‘why?’ questions that influenced subsequent interviews and further reduced the uniformity of the data collection process. I was now feeling I was abandoning my attempted position as a ‘fly on the wall’ and during later interviews found myself going beyond the mere recording of
the girls’ responses. In an effort to go some way to better understanding them I was now beginning to locate them and *problematize* the responses. I was encouraged by Walkerdine’s (1997: 59) belief that

> It is an impossible task to avoid the place of the subjective in research, and that, instead of making futile attempts to avoid something which cannot be avoided, we should think more carefully about how to utilize our subjectivity as a feature of the research process.

I found further support in Maynard and Purvis’s (1994) comment that, by exposing this vulnerability to the reader the difficulties and compensations involved in the research process can contribute to rich and dynamic discussions about ‘what is research’?

**Breaking Down Barriers in Research**

I was excited about breaking down the social barriers that exist in schools between adults and students. I introduced myself using (if rather sheepishly at first) my first name as well as my surname and wore smart but casual clothes – not the tracksuit and trainers in which I am accustomed to presenting myself in school scenarios. I felt liberated by this shift of social position, yet simultaneously restricted: I was still very much in control of the situation and telling girls what to do! However, as I progressed through the eleven interview sessions I found my ‘location’ changed slightly each time.

My manner with the girls developed from the rather formal approach of “I would like to ask you some questions” to a more personal and reciprocal approach saying “You can really help me with my work”. This happened for several reasons and had various effects on the investigation which I have since explored and tried to rationalize. Firstly, as I saw the interview schedule was ‘working’ I began to relax and became braver about being less directive in the interview process, thus breaking down the usual teacher/student form of interaction to some degree. Secondly, I realized I might get better quality, richer answers if the girls felt encouraged by me in some way. Similarly, it occurred to me that the girls themselves might gain more from the interview experience if I changed my manner a little. Consequently, I began to portray myself in a more friendly, and eventually humorous, way. Thirdly, I realized and learned to accept that not every interview would be ‘good’ but that I would learn from it nevertheless.
Questions of power in the research situation

Another important realization was that being alone with the students provided a valuable opportunity to distance myself from the girls’ teachers and imply that I was on the students ‘side’. During these times I emphasized to the girls that I too had been a thirteen-year old school student who had strong feelings about PE. I explained that I thought I understood something about ‘where they were coming from’ and that I would appreciate their honest opinions whether that meant responding positively or negatively about their teacher or PE department. In this way I located myself not only as a teacher and as a mature student, but also as a once 13 year old girl thus identifying myself more strongly with them than with their teachers.

However, this ‘allegiance’ played on my mind. It aroused in me feelings of disloyalty to the teachers (see Simmons 1981). They were friends and (ex-)colleagues of mine who had been approachable and generous enough to open up their departments and devote time and energy to this project. I felt uneasy at the prospect of alienating them within it as I strived to gain ‘good’ responses from the students. What right had I to take the students’ side and imply that they may have ‘bad’ things to say about people who liked and trusted me? Further, could/should I expect the students to trust me as an outsider, a non-collaborator (with the teacher) and tell me their real opinions and possibly sensitive feelings?

I was experiencing the position of power that a researcher inevitably holds and the confusions and tensions that arise from it (see Humberstone 1997; Maynard and Purvis 1994; Ramazanoglu 1989; Scraton 1997; Skeggs 1997). I was aware of hooks’ (1989: 43) warnings that

… when we write about the experiences of a group to which we do not belong, we should think about the ethics of our action …

Although I believed I had gone some way to shedding the power I had as a teacher in relation to these girls, I had had bestowed upon me a different – yet still unwelcome – power as a researcher. Further, I had assumed some form of power in relation to the teachers involved, as I was no longer identifiable simply as ‘one of them’. This double, or multiple, identity is not unfamiliar to many of us who, as females, learn to live with the “… self-estrangement which lies close to the heart of the feminine condition itself” (Bartky cited in Wright and Dewar 1997: 94).
Other Influences on my Approach to This Research

There are many other issues raised by discussions of qualitative research that have borne influence and indeed radically changed my approach to this study. For reasons of space I cannot reflect here on my ‘journey’ in full. Nevertheless, it is important to draw attention to some sources of freedom and support – call it ‘inspiration’ – that has helped me confront the ambiguities caused by the disjunctures between empirical and theoretical research. The writing of others has also helped me make significant and relevant connections between the practice of teaching and the process of research.

Firstly, I found reassurance in the discussions of Stanley and Wise (1983) that feminist beliefs, such as I had held as a practising teacher, can and should be taken seriously in academic feminism by integrating them within the research. Thus, feminist principles became an integral part of the process of researching and writing up this project. Secondly, the work of Garfinkel (1984: 9), amongst others, encouraged me to value ‘everyday actions’ (in this case the responses by the girls on the questionnaires) and to make them accessible and interesting to study by treating their properties as “anthropologically strange”. This gave added emphasis to the ‘voices’ of the girls themselves as it allowed me to see every response as important and useful whether or not it fitted with my previous beliefs, explanations, or hunches. I sought to avoid the “dismissal” of the researched that hooks (1989:43) speaks of below.

Even if perceived ‘authorities’ writing about a group to which they do not belong and/or over which they wield power, are progressive, caring and right-on in every way, as long as their authority is constituted by either the absence of the voices of the individuals whose experiences they seek to address, or the dismissal of those voices as unimportant, the subject-object dichotomy is maintained and domination is reinforced.

For the above reasons, and as a result of conducting this research, I support the arguments of feminist ethnographers who, amongst others, by foregrounding ‘intellectual’ autobiographical analyses of what it is actually like to do research, provide useful insights into issues often ignored in conventional methodology textbooks.

In the next chapter I present and discuss my interpretation of the results of this study. By reading the transcriptions as text rather than as the source of facts, I have focussed on the meanings and explanations of the girls’ narratives. With Harstock (cited in Lees 1986: 158) I believe that “… theory is always implicit in our activity and goes so deep as to include our very understanding of reality …”. In order to make sense of what these girls said I examined the powerful forces acting on them in order to better understand the constraints they experience, how these may be resisted, and how that resistance could in turn become ‘transformative change’.

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CHAPTER FOUR
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents, analyses and discusses the findings of the research. As established in the previous chapter, the girls involved in this study are unexceptional girls who go to unexceptional schools and could arguably be considered to be representative of many girls at secondary school in the UK today. In this chapter I explore firstly, the dominant forces of the gender order acting on teenage girls and young women in the gender regimes of the (‘national’) culture in which they live. This includes discussions of the notions of a ‘femininity deficit’ and of the ‘othering’ of girls in the sporting and PE domains. Secondly, I investigate the forces acting non-congruously to these, that is, those acting on girls in the localized culture of school PE. Thirdly, I consider girls’ resistance to both sets of forces, and the potential costs of that resistance to these girls. Finally, I point out the resulting paradoxes and tensions for teenage girls each of whom is individually positioned, and seeking to create an individual sense of self within the various cultures they inhabit.

DOMINANT FORCES OF THE GENDER ORDER IN ‘NATIONAL’ CULTURE

As discussed in the review of literature, there is a dominant set of assumptions which consort with hegemonic masculinity and which reinforce stereotypes and uncontroversial, socially sanctioned images of and for teenage girls and young women. This was reflected in some of the girls’ comments on teenage girls’ magazines such as Sugar and Bliss:

I think they sort of like stereotype you know, you’ve got to be sort of this ‘perfect’ sort of girl …
Marie

...it’s all like … fluffy pink outfits … that is how everything is. Jo

The institutions of heterosexuality, marriage and the nuclear family are crucial to the maintenance of patriarchal social relations and alternatives which threaten that status quo such as lesbians, manual workers and single mothers, are considered deviant, evil or abnormal (Griffin 1982). At times it would seem appropriate to add to these ‘threats’ girls who enjoy sport and PE. Connell (1987) confirms that emphasized femininity, whilst not being hegemonic itself, serves to aid hegemonic masculinity by marginalizing these other forms of femininity. In connection with this Lisa, interviewed for this study, described the pressure to be feminine and how a girl who played basketball (as opposed to netball) was likely to be marginalized and seen as
having “… an attitude problem”. This pressure operates not only through popular discourses such as television and magazines, but also through domestic discourses in the home. For example, Nicola explained

… my Mum won’t do [sport] ’cos she just, like stays home doing housework and dinner and the washing up and all that lot.

A Femininity Deficit

Emphasized femininity draws on, but does not necessarily correspond to, lived femininities in that it offers “… ‘magical’ (as opposed to real) solutions to inherent social contradictions” (Varpalotai 1987: 416). De Beauvoir (1952: 314) highlights the differences between a female adolescent’s “… status as a real human being and her vocation as a female”. For reinforcement as a gender regime, emphasized femininity relies therefore on cultural construction and coercive representations in the media and so forth. My own experience as a female growing up and as a teacher of girls’ PE is reflected in these and others’ research findings - that there exists a powerful ‘pull’ on girls to conform (Griffin 1982; Lees 1986; McRobbie 1978; Walkerdine 1997). Girls learn to position themselves as feminine and to comply to conventional standards of femininity, beauty and sexuality in order to belong to their collective ‘teenage girl’ identity (see Cockerill and Hardy 1987). Jo, for instance, described how stereotypical images in magazines “… make you feel like you have to be perfect all the time for anyone to like you”. This culture-wide disjuncture between normative ideologies and the actualities of lived lives leaves teenage girls and young women in/with a ‘femininity deficit’ which they become obliged to attempt to compensate for.

There appears to be little or no account in popular discursive practice of what it is really like to be a teenage girl, or indeed what girls themselves may want as an identity. It is for this reason that the tradition of ‘cultural analysis’ begun by ethnographers in the 1970s such as Angela McRobbie became so important for the study of girls’ lives. The cultural analysis of subcultures stresses the importance of ‘lived experience’, this allows researchers to recognize teenage girls’ and young women’s positions, and to make them visible and vocal as individuals in research such as this. In this way we can begin to problematize the differences between the normative (‘standard case’) and the normality actually lived, and often wanted and created, by girls. It is important here to recognize the multiple processes which adolescents go through, the dynamic relationships between these changes, and the stresses the latter may cause (Measor et al. 1995). Adolescents go through the
processes of gender socialization, sexual socialization and pubertal bodily changes within a relatively short period of time, and often simultaneously. The girls interviewed portrayed some of the ‘changes’ since primary school that they had experienced as follows.

… it was different ’cos we was younger and … we didn't really care … We was young but now we’ve sort of grown up and we know the facts of life now… Marie

You get older and your views change and you’re like, yeah, you never used to be into boys in primary school but now you are … It's just that your mind changes and your views and everything as you grow up … It's like, you know, you don’t care about your appearance in primary school do you? … and as soon as you come in higher school you like start putting lipstick on and everything like this and to do my hair properly and have jewellery, rings and everything. Shamsa

… when I was primary school I just used to go out there and I’d do anything … I wouldn’t care what other people thought, I’d just go out and enjoy it … Now it’s more, “Oh my god can I do this?” And you know, like everybody’s looking at you, everybody’s seeing if you can do it … I hate it … Jo

These changes often cause complex reactions which may be difficult to understand, including both positive and negative reactions to, and behaviour in PE. In attempting to make sense of this behaviour, it also becomes evident that attitudes and reactions are by no means uniform. Indeed, the girls in this study each positioned themselves varyingly with regard to the formation of their gender identities as teenage girls/young women. Consequently, following Dewar (1993) I began to question the homogeneity of the collective identity of ‘the teenage girl’ as portrayed by images in the media and so forth.

**Teenage Girls as Heterogeneous Individuals**

Each of the girls in this study was unique in their attitudes and motivations towards PE. Rebecca, for example, hated anything physical or competitive and her favourite PE activity was table tennis because “… I don’t like running about”. Whereas Nicola loved to exert herself physically, “… I like playing games … I wanna be out there like, running or doing something”. Further, each talked about the girls they knew as having a wide range of attitudes and feelings towards physical activity. When asked how other girls felt about doing PE, Jo replied “…well I think there’s always a top, middle, and bottom”. Marie in commenting on mixed sex grouping for PE stated,
... it all depends what sort of girls they are ... some of the girls in my class, they can be funny, but there are some girls that ... don’t mind at all.

Many teenage girls and young women do not to ‘fit into’ the ready-made, static, collective identity or category of ‘teenage girl’ made obligatory by the gender order and, indeed, do not want to fit. All the girls in this study described vividly the manner and the extent to which they did not want to fit, of these Nicola was the most outspoken:

I don’t like being like that ... I don’t really wanna wear any of that stuff and that lot because I’m not comfortable in it.

Rebecca did not feel that she fitted into the socially sanctioned version of the ‘teenage girl’ category as her interests were “more academic” and she was not interested in boyfriends etc. Lisa, who played basketball, recognized the disjuncture between what she lived and what was expected of her. She enjoyed playing for the basketball team but she

... wouldn’t want them thinking I’m too hard, that they don’t wanna be my friend.

Lisa

Such tensions as portrayed by these girls are described by Laplanche and Pontalis (cited in S. Hall 1996: 3) who propose that “… the ego-ideal is composed of identifications with cultural ideals that are not necessarily harmonious”. Popular discourses such as teenage girls’ magazines and other media, create tensions which make it difficult for girls to recognize themselves as individuals. The forces of the dominant nationwide culture make teenage girls and young women feel that in order to ‘belong’ they must emphasize their femininity - an identity which may not be what they would otherwise have chosen and that does not lie easily with their ‘sense of self’. Cynthia Cockburn (1998b: 216) describes these tensions well:

Many (sometimes it seems most) identity processes are coercive. We are labelled, named, known by identities that confine us, regulate us and reduce our complexity. The subtleties in our sense of self are difficult to convey in the terms available to us. We often feel misunderstood and misrepresented. And these processes are the more painful because they exploit our irreducible need to belong, our happiness in belonging.

Accordingly, individual teenage girls are obliged to devote their time and energies to competing in – and succeeding in – a collective romance market by compensating for their (perceived) ‘femininity deficit’. The girls in this study described these pressures to conform.

If you wake up and you think, ah, I can’t be bothered to put up my hair really high and like you think, well I have to because if I go in, like, feeling how I wanna look then they’re all just gonna completely bombard you!   Jo
... you like put on lipstick and everything like this and to do my hair properly and have jewellery, rings and everything ... yeah, you think about what people are going to think about you, so that’s what makes you do it.  Shamsa

The ‘Othering’ of Girls in Sport and PE
It became clear that the girls in this study were made to feel different and inferior from boys by this gender order that makes emphasized femininity obligatory. Further, that this differentiation and consequent subordination appears to be intensified in the arenas of sport and PE. This notion of ‘difference’ which is central to male power and female subordination is exemplified in language use. By constantly reinforcing the differentiation between girls and boys language can contribute to the creation and maintenance of the female inferiorization. For example, Rutherford (1990) and Wright (1996) identify the polarity of language used to ‘other’ females and the examples given by the girls in this study were striking. Nicola, for example, described the language boys in her class might use:

We wanna do football or something and [the boys] go “No, you’re not allowed to join in, you’re a girl”…

Jo gave another example of this language of polarity:

... they’ve got this set thing that, you know, “Boys are hard, boys can do the rough stuff, you can just go and have cream teas and stuff!”

By examining issues such as language use we can begin to better understand the ways in which hegemonic masculinity ‘others’ teenage girls in PE.

According to theorists such as Mac an Ghaill (1994) hegemonic masculinity has an ongoing need to ‘prove’ itself. To these ends sport and PE are used to furnish and reinforce gender regimes (Theberge 1987). Indeed, the girls in this study discussed how boys use their PE lessons to establish and celebrate their manhood. For instance, Marie supposed that boys get hurt as well as girls in mixed (contact) rugby lessons and that boys actually appeared to like that

... ’cos … it’s rough and I think they think that they can handle it … they may hide the way they are, but you know, they don’t show it. But you know, I bet inside it hurts really.

Marie

One way in which physical activity aids the accomplishment or verification of ‘manliness’ is by promoting (hetero-)sexually desirable images constructed around certain stereotypes of male sporting physique. Lisa provided a clear example of what boys have to do to be seen as “cool” or “fanciable”.

... they've usually gotta be the really sporty ones ... like in their sports gear and everything. But ... if they’re like the ones that don’t play sports and they’re like quite either ‘weedy’, or you know, don’t really have much to do with sport then people just think “Oh ... they’re not very fit”. And then there’s the fit boys who do football and they think “Oh ... muscley legs” and everything.
Notions of male physical power consequently become central to the cults of sport and PE which themselves become crucial ‘proving grounds’ for the dominant form of masculinity.

**Dis-enablement of girls in PE**

Central to the overall process of ‘othering’ females in sport, and therefore girls in PE, are four important factors. Firstly, ‘motor-elitism’ which, it is often argued, is based on deeply entrenched masculine traits such as aggression, competition, skilled performance and pride (Dodds 1993). Secondly, achievement in sport and PE is usually measured in terms of male norms (Paechter 1998). Thirdly, Western culture places a disproportionate amount of value on ‘male’ physical activities and their associated components, requirements, and ‘qualities’. Fourthly, the format within which people tend to participate in sport is also value-laden i.e. to compete on an official basis carries more social value than to play ‘for fun’ or recreationally. Some of these issues were reflected by Lisa when she commented on boys’ typical reactions to a girls’ team winning a match against another school. She explained that if it were the girls’ basketball team the reactions would be positive, even respectful. However, she continued by stressing that

… if you … won a netball game, because there’s not a boys’ team … they don’t really bother.

Lisa

The commonsense understandings of success in PE (see Humberstone 1997) are defined in such narrow terms that many students (boys as well as girls) are set up to be unsuccessful (Scranton 1986; Sparkes 1992; Talbot 1995; Willis 1982). It is therefore useful at this point to consider some of the issues raised by writers on ‘disability’ in PE since disability is a social and political category that, like femininity, encounters regulation and struggles for empowerment, opportunities and choice. Begum (cited in Barton 1993: 45) discusses how “… women with disabilities are perennial outsiders … one of the most powerless groups in society”. This claim can be extended to stress that females are rendered especially powerless in being ‘dis-enabled’ by the ideologies that dominate sporting and PE cultures within a western patriarchal society. Young (1980: 152) suggests that

Women in sexist society are physically handicapped. In so far as we learn to live out our existence in accordance with the definition that patriarchal culture assigns to us, we are physically inhibited, confined, positioned and objectified. As lived bodies we are not open and unambiguous transcendences which move out to master a world that belongs to us, a world constituted by our own intentions and projections.

Since girls are generally perceived to have lower skill and fitness levels in PE than boys (Shropshire et al. 1998; Van Wersch et al. 1992; Williams and Woodhouse 1996), their oppression in the PE culture is further intensified in a way similar to that
which it would be for any less able students. The assumption that boys are more able than girls in PE is exemplified by Rebecca’s comments on boys’ reactions to mixed sex teams in PE.

... they’d just make you feel like you’d let them down ... If a girl wanted to do sport and she was good at it, but she wanted to do like boys’ sports, like football and rugby, then the boys would probably just not include her because they think that girls aren’t very good at that kind of sport.

Jo’s asthma significantly exacerbated this effect leaving her feeling dis-enabled, immature and ashamed.

... it makes me feel so stupid because I look like a little kid, struggling for air and like all the other girls are running in front of me ... the boys are like laughing ...

Barton (1993) illustrates how disability in PE needs to be understood as a form of oppression which “… assaults upon self-identity and emotional well-being”. Earl and Stennett (1987) for instance, highlight their finding that girls more often than boys gave ‘embarrassment about skill levels’ as a reason for not liking PE. In my earlier questionnaire survey one of the most common reasons given for ‘not enjoying PE’ was the girls’ own (perceived) poor ability and/or fitness (Cockburn 1999). In subsequent interviews the girls foregrounded ‘ability’ and ‘fitness’, or rather the lack of them, as the main subject for boys “taking the mickey” in mixed sex PE classes (see also Bennett et al. 1987). The main reason given by the girls for ‘not enjoying’ mixed PE was “getting shown up” or “…boys making fun of you when you get it wrong” (Rebecca). All emphasized that it would not be nearly so much of a problem if they were ‘good at’ PE. Marie also gave an example of how a girl she knew has managed to achieve a positive image with the more critical boys by virtue of the recognized esteem of playing for a team.

... one girl’s on the team for rugby so that … they know, but they don’t mind. They don’t mind that she does that and they say “Oh you go to rugby, you can show us some moves can’t you?”

So ‘ability’ and ‘success’ in a PE activity gain the respect of the most vociferous of critics – the boys; whilst effort or enthusiasm alone bait harassment. Girls are thus left in a ‘double bind’, where they often have to be very good to be approved of by boys, other girls, teachers, parents and so forth but not so involved that they might threaten the boys’ collective position as ‘better at sport’. This no-win situation is also revealed in research on young women entering the sciences (Birke and Vines 1987) and male manual trades (Walshok 1981). A girl then becomes ‘one of the lads’, a ‘tomboy’, and by definition jeopardizes her reputation and image as an identifiable and socially acceptable (hetero-)sexually desirable girl/young woman.

The fact that adolescents’ motivations tend to centre on ‘romance’ (Griffin 1982) compounds the effects of the femininity deficit to such an extent that girls often use
avoidance tactics with regard to mixed PE lessons in particular. Rebecca described how, if a boy she ‘liked’ were present in PE she would

… probably try and not run around as much or something … in case I got the ball and looked like an idiot.

This evasive position may become positively attractive to teenage girls eager to establish a secure place in their world through an unambiguous, feminine, and socially sanctioned heterosexual image. Nicola confirmed that many girls she knows are

… shy ‘cos they’re with the boys, just in case they run around and they, like, fall over …

It is worth noting here, that such discriminatory judgements as illustrated above, may be (often inadvertently) reinforced by the ideologies and assumptions of PE teachers. Research findings have shown that many PE teachers (both male and female) encourage more, and pay more attention to, the most able and successful students - usually boys (e.g. Wright 1993). Jo and Lisa both described how male teachers of theirs had labelled girls as less able through their teaching or coaching behaviour.

He was alright but he doesn’t encourage the girls as much and … if we all had to show something in PE he’d just ask the boys and not the girls … if we fell over or something he’d laugh …

Lisa

… he was just laughing at us, saying “Ah you feeble women”, you know, “That’s over there silly girl” and all that. And with the boys he’d just say, “No, over there” you know. [‘Serious’ voice] … he would just … tell them what was what; but with us he’d laugh and call us names…‘silly girl’, and like, ‘stupid woman’ …

Jo

Blaming the individual or the gender, but not the system

Paechter (1998) like Barton, argues for the removal of blame from the individual and their personal limitations, and for the re-location of the ‘problems’ to within the system. In connection with this Hahn (cited in Barton 1993: 44) describes the socio-political approach to disability which argues that

… disability stems from the failure of a structured social environment to adjust to the needs and aspirations of citizens with disabilities rather than from the inability of a disabled individual to adapt to the demands of society.

Again, I contend that the use of this concept facilitates a better understanding of many girls’ positioning in PE. In other words, girls’ failure in PE should be seen not as a failure of the girls themselves, but rather as a failure produced by the contradictions between the wider culture’s expectations of teenage girls, and those of the PE culture. Rebecca’s comment below on the unfairness of the ‘system’ at Jaydean School lends support to my contention. She explained that whilst gymnastics and other ‘girls’

¹ There is a lively and ongoing debate over the respective benefits of mixed sex and single sex groupings in education in general (see Deem 1984; Paechter 1998) and in PE in particular (see Evans et al. 1987; Scraton 1987).
activities are taught to single sex groups, ‘boys’ sports are taught to mixed sex groups. And that she felt this was not fair because

… it’s just not right that the boys should have the girls in stuff that they’re good at and the girls shouldn’t get the chance to show the boys that they’re good at certain things as well.

Rebecca

As a result girls endure “looking stupid” in front of the boys whilst doing badly at ‘boys’ sports’. Further, the boys do not learn to place any value on girls’ sports because they remain for ‘others’ i.e. girls, consequently perpetuating their diminished value in the gender regime of sport and PE.

Whilst current dominant ideologies continue to blame boys as individuals for failure in sport and PE (and in other ‘macho’ areas); girls escape such personal reproach. The value judgement is attached to their sex rather than their behaviour and it is the feminine gender that is blamed (Spender 1982). Whilst individual girls are allowed to fail, for example by ‘throwing like a girl’, boys who fail suffer on a more personal level (Askew and Ross 1988). Girls such as Lisa, Jo, Marie, Shamsa, Rebecca and Nicola face PE then, as ‘others’ who ‘fail’ more often than not. However, this ‘failure’ is socially sanctioned and they are ironically “… saved by their femininity” (McRobbie 1978: 108).

On the other hand, if they strive not to fail but to achieve in PE they are likely to fail at being socially acceptable, sexually desirable, mature and popular young women. Indeed, the girls in the study all know and recognize girls who “... try and get out of PE” in an effort to preserve their feminine image.

… some of them do ’cos … there’s always like the group of like really popular people and then middle and … Well the like really popular people, they all say “No, no I’m not doing that! No, no I’m not ruining my reputation”, and all that … You’ve got to force them to do stuff but even then they feel that they look stupid …

Jo

Lisa suggested that such a girl would be seen as more desirable by boys because

… they think she’s more bothered about herself … what she looks like and that, than being involved in all the sports.

By failing in this way in PE it becomes evident that adolescent girls may well achieve some reinforcement of the feminine image they are striving for (see McRobbie 1978). Thus, the relationship between a girl’s ‘failure’/underachievement in PE and her social success is interdependent. She needs to appear feminine and so disengages with PE; likewise, her ‘failure’ in PE promotes for her a socially acceptable (heterosexual) ‘feminine’ image.

As a consequence some (often female) PE teachers set up ideologies which counter emphasized femininity in an attempt to enable more girls to succeed in PE. Paradoxically, teachers may do this by stressing the need for girls to renounce their femininity (albeit locally and temporarily) and become ‘one of the lads’, or at least ‘like one of the lads’. The following section examines the extent to which school PE
culture contradicts the more ubiquitous teenage gender culture as previously discussed.

THE LOCALIZED COUNTER HEGEMONY OF PE CULTURE

It is crucial at this point to recognize that these girls did not want to fail. It is evident from these interviews as well as from the research of others (e.g. Woodhouse 1997) that they want to learn and achieve at school, and that that includes achievement in PE. The girls in this study were clearly concerned with their schools’ assessment of ‘achievement’ and ‘effort’. Shamsa stressed the importance she places on grades given in lessons.

… you get ‘effort’, you get these reports at the end of every term. They’re out of 5 and I got 3 last time and I want to get a 4.

However, following the above contention, in order to achieve in sport and therefore in PE, girls have to undo much of the ‘identity work’ (see Brittan 1989) they have been compelled to do in order to please in other spheres. Sherlock (1987: 447-448) in her work with student teachers found many young women presented a ‘macho’ image.

… female physical educators behave in ways which are close to expected stereotypes for males … [learning] to transmit the values of masculinity and thus to go against the accepted female role.

As PE teachers we perpetuate this image by, for example, asking teenage girls and young women to wear unflattering, unfeminine and unfashionable clothes for lessons. Marie described the requirements at Rutherford Community College.

… they’re really strict on the kit, we’ve got to have white socks and black shorts, white t-shirt, so everything’s black, no logos and that.

The problems of exposure created for girls by the requirement to wear shorts at Hollyoak Community School was criticized by Jo.

… I was climbing up the bars and the boy beneath me goes “Oh, I can see your knickers”! I was like “Nooo”!

PE also requires girls to remove adornments of ‘the feminine body’ such as jewellery, and to allow their hair to appear unkempt or tie it back in a way they would not choose to. Shamsa disagreed with the jewellery rules; Nicola revealed that she felt “bare” without her ring on; and Rebecca said that she disliked tying her hair back because she felt it did not suit her.

PE also makes obligatory the demonstration of physical vigour. Further, girls may be asked to sweat and to get dirty which, argues Evans (1984), goes against the wishes of many girls. Marie agreed, “… I don’t like getting dirty and muddy and that …”.

Many of these rituals in PE go against the notion of acceptable/desirable ‘appearance’ within the teenage feminine culture and cause conflict for girls (Cockerill and Hardy 1987; Scraton 1987). Further, these rituals are performed in public, not just in front of other girls and their teachers, but often in front of boys and their teachers. Nicola pointed out that this can be embarrassing.
I don’t like playing with the boys anyway because when you have to run … your boobs come up and down [laughs]. I didn’t like it, they like stare at you like that [gesture] see when you run past, don’t like it.

Rebecca felt the same about performing in front of others in dance, “… I don’t like it when we have to show it …”. And Shamsa commented on her attitude towards swimming, “I don’t ‘not like’ it; I just don’t want to do it in public”.

Sometimes this exposure of girls’ femininity deficit through physical activity takes place in sight of the rest of the school and even members of the public depending on the location of outdoor facilities. The problems can be intensified in the case of Jo’s overweight friend, and presumably many others like her, when they have to do PE outside.

She said when she’s outside she knows the whole school can see her … the field’s there and like all of ‘S block’ and everything’s like watching out the windows and that … She feels, I don’t know, she doesn’t do her best though. When I’m at home with her she’s out there and she’s doing it and she’s getting, she’s really good, she’s brilliant at sport. But then when she’s out there she’s all huddled up and like “No I can’t do that, no”.

As Aldridge rightly comments, girls in PE are not only “vulnerable” but are made more so by being put “on display” (1998: title page).

Connell (1987: 186) states that since there is “no hegemonic femininity” women are less likely to create power relations over other women. Nevertheless, I would argue that the female PE culture demonstrates a form of localized hegemony as female teachers have a definite power differential over the teenage girls and young women who are their students and girls are requested to comply to a particular regime (see Clarke 1992; Dewar 1991). This situation can be viewed as a ‘counter hegemony’ which whilst not representing a total challenge to the dominant gender order, is non-congruous with the ideologies of the national culture and its gender order as discussed earlier. Lisa’s story below exemplifies the power that teachers’ authority provides them and the influence they hold in this localized culture.

… once … I didn’t do … PE at lunchtime and [my teacher] come looking for me and I said “I’ve hurt my arm”. And she said “You’re not turning girly on me are you?”, just because I’d hurt my arm. … My PE teacher doesn’t like any of us being ‘girly’ at all … I used to have long nails and she cut them off to make me … less ‘girly’… It puts me off a bit …

Teenage girls and young women at school, as well as those who pursue physical activities outside or post-school, consequently find themselves facing a second, although less ubiquitous, set of notions to do with the structure and ideologies of the sporting/PE culture. As Sherlock (1987: 443) points out, we teach young people that “‘sport makes a man of you’ whatever your sex” (and it would appear that these counter forces may be (again locally and temporarily) vindicated by boys. As previously demonstrated, girls who play basketball well are seen as ‘hard’ and therefore respected within the school sporting environment. Paradoxically, outside the PE scenario to be ‘hard’ is not desirable for a girl; in fact a girl who plays netball
instead is more likely to be regarded as “a gentler and nicer kind of person” (Lisa), “… doing what she should be doing” (Jo). This evidence supports Boutilier and San Giovanni’s (1983: 111) comment that

… roles take shape and are activated in specific social contexts, as the contexts change so do the role demands and the potential for conflict.

Hence, teenage girls and young women attempting to construct an identity acceptable within the existing gender order i.e. an emphasized femininity, will, at best, not find much opportunity to do so when actively involved in sport or PE. At worst they are likely to experience conflict and tension with regard to their sense of self. The way forward for many girls is to refuse the choices that these polarized dichotomies offer (see Cockburn 1998a). Indeed it is widely agreed that

… sport and physical education (PE) are significant domains in which these dominant forms of masculinity are reproduced, but they may also be sites of contestation. (Humberstone 1990) (Emphasis added)

In the next section I consider how this contestation is manifested as girls move between the general and more local spheres they inhabit and negotiate the conflicting and confusing demands made of them in their daily lives.

RESISTANCE AND ITS COSTS
Resisting the Dominant Forces of the Gender Order Through Participation in PE
Definite signs of challenge and resistance to masculine superiority were revealed in the interviews held with the girls in this study. As Scraton (1992: 124) rightly states PE is not “… a straightforward process of gender ideology and identity reproduction”. Indeed, my findings support the notion that there are teenage girls and young women who not infrequently refuse the choices forced upon them by enthusiastically taking part in sport - both in PE and in other physical activity.

The girls told me how they, and other girls they knew, often violate the expectations of femininity by participating in vigorous physical activity, sometimes in competition or in public. They run, they sweat, they exhibit strength and skill, and in doing so they show their legs, allow their hair to become untidy and so forth. As such, sporting girls may find cultural space to “… deliberately flaunt cultural values and engage in … non-conformist behaviour” (Donnelly nd). Each of the girls challenged stereotypes and ‘commonsense assumptions’ in differing ways and to differing extents. Rebecca for example, challenged emphasized femininity not through sport but through her casual attitude towards her own feminine appearance and her lack of interest in boyfriends. While Shamsa stressed that the attention she paid to her appearance was not for boys but for herself. Nicola put up with the teasing incurred by her playing football and her image as a ‘tomboy’ because she felt passionately about both. She stated that

… nothing would stop me playing football … it’ll hurt in my inside but on the outside I wouldn’t let it show …
Nicola

As well as regular participation in PE lessons (excepting Shamsa’s swimming), Nicola played football, Rebecca did aerobics, Marie played hockey, Jo danced and
Lisa played basketball – because they enjoyed it. All stated that girls can, should, and do participate in sport, including ‘boys’ sports’. Shamsa claimed “… there are no rules to being girls”. They also gave numerous examples of other teenage girls or young women who were physically active and challenged stereotyped femininity. Jo described a girl in her class for instance,

… she’s always she’s out there, she’s doing everything, she’s all ‘muscley’ and everything, so she’s like really sporty, she’ll go for it.

Nicola remarked,

… my auntie’s [a tomboy]. She’s about 18 and she plays football, she plays everything what boys play … just boys’ … She has her hair short, really short like a boy …

The application and extension of Foucault’s work to feminism has highlighted the body as a central locus of the construction of femininity and masculinity (Diamond and Quinby 1988). This has been a significant development because it allows us to view these girls’ behaviour as firstly, taking control of their own bodies; and secondly, changing their bodies from a site of oppression into a site of resistance. It is this resistance (or struggle) that forms the basis of the potentially empowering ‘transformative change’ that feminism strives for in order to challenge the sexist status quo that is reproduced in society at large.

According to Bartky (1988) and Theberge (1991) sources of resistance include a recognition of the dominant forces that prevail but also an awareness of the ‘incoherence’ and ‘contradiction’ in current practice. As has been illustrated throughout this chapter, and in contrast to the findings of Coakley and White (1999) these girls demonstrated a high level of perception and understanding of both the structural and the ideological constraints they face. They are also well aware of the double standards and contradictions they, as girls, are presented within their everyday lives. As Marie summed up “… I suppose it’s stereotyping”.

The costs of maintaining resistance to the dominant forces through participation in PE

Resistance must be constantly “shored up” because dominant forces “resist resistance” (Theberge and Birrell 1994: 365). Girls who resist the forces of the gender order by ‘getting on with’ PE or ‘doing sport in spite of the hassle’ have a constant struggle to maintain this attitude and behaviour because the influence of the
dominant forces that shape emphasized femininity are so powerful, compelling and menacing. This is especially so during adolescence when identities are experienced as precarious, definitions of ‘male’ and ‘female’ become more salient (Hendry et al. 1993; Measor et al. 1995), and girls are expected to grow out of any ‘tomboy’ tendencies. In connection with this Nicola described people’s reactions to her ‘tomboy’ image.

… nasty people don’t really like it and they just like say, “Oh you’re a tomboy”. Like if I wanted to go see my mate and my mate’s in a gang of girls (and some girls are stupid and that lot) they go “Oh she can’t come over here ’cos she’s not got a skirt on” or stuff like that, “She’s got trousers on, she wears them nearly every day”.

Jo revealed the way she was treated when she used to play football.

They were saying that … football’s a boys sport and … that I was really good at it. And they said ‘cos I was playing a boys sport and I was really good at it I must be a boy!

It is pertinent to note here, that both Nicola and Lisa seemed to be accepted by others as ‘tomboys’ or ‘sporty girls’ and that the teasing comes when they challenge the dichotomy by stepping out of that image into a more feminine one. Lisa told me that being a female basketball player was a bad thing when

… you wanna break away from being like [sporty] … ’cos some people seem to think that you’re a tomboy if you play basketball and if you like wanna go dressed in a dress or something they’ll think “Oh god she’s changed …”.

Nicola concurred that she was most often teased for her ‘tomboy’ image when people who knew her saw her dressed up in a feminine way to go to a restaurant for example.

These girls’ experiences exemplify Theberge and Birrell’s (1994: 371) claims that “resistance is hard won”. Girls who resist the gender regime face alienation from the people around them and those most important to them such as friends, boys, parents and neighbours. Nicola revealed how her female friends who knew she played football thought that she was “silly”. She also said her ‘tomboy’ aunt was teased by girls who “took the mick” when they walked past her house.

Further to this harassment girls who do not ‘fit’ into the socially sanctioned category of ‘teenage girl’ encounter the loneliness of ‘not belonging’ to the collective identity assigned to them. They often lack encouragement and role models in pervasive popular culture such as teenage girls’ magazines, the rest of the school curriculum and so forth. Jo explained how this affected her.

… even now I feel quite small in the group that I’m in because I go out and I do what I want most of the time. And like, all of them they’re just sitting there going “Oh my god how could she do that … it’s not natural”.

Lisa described wanting to “break away” from her “hard” basketballing image in order to better ‘belong’. Rebecca, who resisted emphasized femininity through academic
work rather than sport, also found that there was no one with whom to identify in popular discourses such as magazines. She remarked,

... I know I’m never gonna be like that, it’s just not me ... I know there are people like me, it’s just that they’re not in the magazines...

Rebecca

Nicola stressed that boys get offered sport (particularly football) in the magazines but not girls. The only time she had seen a girl portrayed as ‘sporty’ was to advertise sports clothes as fashionwear. Yet, at best these media ignore or trivialize girls’ sporting interests, at worst they label girls as ‘weird’ or ‘tomboyish’ and marginalize them as “those sporty types” (Cockburn 1998a: 15).

Embarrassment as a cost of participating in PE

The girls frequently raised the issues of ‘embarrassment’ in PE. At first glance this would appear to be a type of risk distinct from the risk to someone’s feminine image, yet the girls even reported embarrassment in gymnastics – traditionally a so called ‘girlie’ sport. For instance Jo revealed both physical and emotional discomfort in gymnastics.

When you’re in shorts and that you can’t do much, like rolling around and that when there’s boys in the class as well.

Girls’ natural bodies and everyday behaviour rarely match up to the ideal image presented in popular media and they are only too aware of this deficit due to their “… internalized patriarchal standards of bodily acceptability” (Bartky 1988: 77). Further, it is not infrequently reinforced by frequent harassment from men and boys (Brackenridge 1997; Scraton 1992) – and sometimes other girls. This is compounded when girls’ bodies do not conform exactly to the size and shape required by emphasized femininity. Jo explained how a choice over PE kit, for example, would help someone like her friend who is overweight.

Yeah like if she got to choose what she could wear she could look better and she could feel better and she could do what she wanted. It’s just she doesn’t like doing things in front of other people because she gets the mick taken out of her … I’ve found her in tears so many times like ‘cos of the PE kit and everything ...

The resulting anxieties are made more acute by the increased necessity for self-esteem during early adolescence. In striving to achieve the ideal image it is of paramount importance to many girls that the real person, the natural unmodified body, remain either hidden, disguised or ignored. It is ironic then, that “… traditionally physical education has provided the context in which physical differences have been unmasked and made public” (Scraton 1992: 102). In this way the chances, for many girls, of achieving in the subject are decreased. Jo, for example, explained how being allowed to wear tracksuit bottoms or leggings would make a difference to girls’ performance in PE,

... you’d feel more comfortable so you could do what you want and then you could get higher marks ....

Lisa agreed,
… sometimes girls feel uncomfortable like rolling around and everything … if you walk in and you have bare feet and everything like that, not everyone likes that.

The physical nature of PE and the exposure created by wearing kit reveals the real person and makes visible and public her femininity deficit, her failure to measure up. Embarrassment about the body in PE is not merely vanity but a self-defence mechanism against the ‘gaze’ that threatens to expose the disjuncture between a teenage girls’ feminine image and her lived self (see Berger 1972). Hendry et al. (1993) identify the egocentrism that adolescents suffer from due to a preoccupation with thoughts that others are as critical or admiring of them as they are themselves. Shamsa demonstrated this preoccupation with “the reflected self”.

… because everyone’s watching and they...
gender order and ‘drop out’ of, or disengage with, PE and physical activity in general (Milosevic 1995; Scraton 1992). It is easy to see how girls seeking to identify themselves with a compelling, emphasized femininity are coerced into physical passivity; why they actively avoid participating or displaying any physical competence in order to ‘belong’ (see Rutherford 1990).

What became evident during the course of the research though, is that the girls who ‘comply’ with emphasized femininity would appear to be no more ‘passive victims’ than those who comply with the demands of sporting and PE culture. The girls interviewed indicated that such behaviour is a further example of active resistance; this time against the localized counter hegemonic forces of the PE culture. Shamsa described her active resistance to swimming lessons which she happily avoids using the excuse of her Islamic religion.

… I made that decision actually, because I told my dad I don’t wanna do it anyway.
Shamsa

The girls’ comments supported the notion that by resisting PE, many girls are actually attempting to conform to the dominant expectations held of them in the gender order at large, and thereby achieve a more secure “feminine performance” (Paechter 1998: 100). As Jo confirmed

… there are girls that are like “No I can’t do that, I'll mess up my make-up” and that kind of thing … they’re a bit … fussy … they just like sit there and go “No no I can’t do it”.

Lisa explained how tempting such non-participation is as a ‘solution’ because it is so difficult to be simultaneously physically active and feel ‘feminine’. She described how being physically active in front of boys made her feel uncomfortable.

Griffin (1982: 11) also stresses the importance of seeing disengagement with school in general as “… active creations of femininity … not as reactive responses to externally imposed dominant images of female”. Girls often find themselves in a more powerful position (and therefore more able to resist the forces) in PE lessons than they do in the rest of their daily lives (Sharpe 1994). And Skeggs (1997: 11) rightly points out, “different arenas have different powers”. Clearly the culture of PE, as a hegemony, is relatively easy for these girls to resist in particular ways. By simply being less active, refusing to participate, not bringing kit, or even not turning up to a lesson, girls have the power to defy the wishes of a teacher seeking active and enthusiastic participation in physical tasks and behaviour. For example, Shamsa wrote on her questionnaire (Cockburn 1999),

I didn’t want to do trampolining in front of the boys so I sat down, and wasn’t here on two lessons.

As Scraton (1992: 108) comments, and my experience as a teacher has shown, this form of ‘opting out’ is “… inordinately difficult to manage in the PE setting”.

As described in the introduction to this thesis the forms that resistance to the PE culture takes, exist in a spectrum. It is important to remember that whilst girls may be
seen to be ‘participating’ in PE they may not be achieving their full potential. By ‘toe-ing the line’ girls avoid many of the costs of resisting PE but still forego any real or valuable participation. In order to do so, argues Povey (1998: 134), girls use an “invisibility strategy” in class to avoid any real interaction with the activity. In a similar vein Scraton (1992) identifies some girls’ sullen, silent ‘participation’ in PE. Griffin (1982) identifies how such apparently acquiescent methods are often successfully employed and allow girls to become anonymous, faceless and therefore unobserved in the classroom. Rebecca referred to this invisibility as one of the reasons why she preferred aerobics to, and shied away from, competitive activities.

... because aerobics isn’t the kind of thing where you can show that your particularly … unfit … Running … is very competitive because if you don’t come first … if you come last you know it’s not very good. But in aerobics it’s not so obvious if your not doing so well.

Rebecca also expressed similar feelings about being able to become ‘lost in the crowd’ due to the format in which table tennis is taught at Jaydean,

It’s just … fun … because … there are lots of us all playing at the same time … and you’re not being watched all the time when you’re doing table tennis.

All the girls in this study expressed a dislike of performing in front of others, as did over half the girls in the earlier questionnaire survey.

Often the most successful forms of resistance to the localized hegemony of the PE culture appear to be gender-based behaviour. Teenage girls and young women may emphasize their feminine appearance (e.g. refusing to wear kit or remove jewellery); they may also use gender-based language to challenge the authority of male PE teachers (Wright 1993). Jo provided an example of this exaggerated use of ‘feminine’ behaviour.

Jo: Yeah, there’s [girls] like, … “Oh, I might break a nail playing tennis!” … That did actually happen. This girl went crying off, “Oh, broke my nail”. [Funny voice, laughs].

CC: And she wasn’t crying because it hurt presumably?

Jo: No she was crying because … she’d just broke her nail.

CC: And what was so important about her nail?

Jo: Image I guess … We were all laughing at her and she was crying. The teacher was going “Shut up, shut up!”

By resisting the physical activity we ask of them, these girls have behind them (and it would seem that PE teachers have against them) the weight of dominant, culture-wide ideologies as well as the invested interests of many. The consequent assumptions and
expectations of this gender order legitimate girls’ passivity, inactivity and disinterest in physical activity (Griffin 1982; Scraton 1982). Girls can then use this ideology to disengage themselves from an often bewildering and uncomfortable situation and even become “paradoxically successful” by developing and sharing an oppositional stance (McRobbie 1978: 104). This approach uses, plays into, and thereby reifies, the polarized dichotomy offered by popular discourse of ‘sporty tomboy’/‘non-sporty young woman’. By emphasizing their (traditional) femininity as an identity that resists the PE/sporting culture, girls contribute to the marginalization of this culture. In doing so they ‘succeed’ in their attempts to appear inactive, recipient and a therefore mature and desirable young woman – “… a proper girl” (Lisa). In this way the power and influence of the gender regime provides a platform for girls’ resistance to PE. For the girls concerned there remains less value in the localized counter hegemony than in the dominant one. As Bartky (1988: 82) astutely concludes,

The harshness of a regimen alone does not guarantee its rejection, for hardships can be endured if they are thought to be necessary or inevitable.

The costs of maintaining resistance to PE

However, this mode of resistance is also “hard won” in that girls consequently forego the many benefits of physical activity. These penalties, in turn, contribute to the maintenance, reinforcement and reproduction of a subordinate form of femininity which silences girls and positions them “… on the margins of classroom life” (Griffin 1982: 13). Importantly for the PE profession girls are also encouraged to remain out of sport altogether or only in those sports where heterosexual femininity can be appropriately displayed.

DOUBLE IDENTITIES

I have argued in this chapter that girls’ physical activity can, and should, be interpreted as active resistance to the dominant forces of society-wide (hetero-)sexism. Similarly, that girls who disengage with PE are actively resisting in that localized ‘counter hegemony’. Further, it becomes evident that resistance to both sets of ideologies takes many forms and is enacted to varying degrees depending on the individual girls in question. Indeed, many comments from the girls exposed a huge diversity in their feelings and attitudes towards sport and PE.

Diversity is also apparent with respect to the ideologies bearing on girls’ participation or disengagement with physical activity. As a result of these the treatment girls receive from the people they deal with on a daily basis such as teachers, parents, friends and boys often leaves them feeling confused, lonely and misrepresented.

However, what became clear as a consistent and commanding under-lying theme to these interviews was the pressing and constant need girls felt to compensate for any ‘deviations’ they might make from what the gender order requires of them as young females. Jo for example, recounted her experiences of such ‘deviations’ playing extra-curricular football at primary school.

*Then* I didn’t wear make-up and like I just used to get dressed and just brush my hair quick. And I used to walk out and all the boys used to say, ‘Ehh look at you, you look like a bloke, have you brushed your hair?’… So I felt that I had to put some make-up on … you know, to
look good … Because all the girls and all the boys were saying, you know, just taking the mick out of your personal image … Because I’m doing sport … because like when we’re out in the fields or doing rounders or something, you come in and you’re completely windswept, completely sweaty and out of breath … You can’t look perfect.

Lisa explained how she would compensate for her basketball participation in the presence of boys she “fancied”.

… I won’t talk about [sport] too much to show that I know everything about it and that I’m a tomboy and that.

These girls were well aware of the costs and expected to pay for their resistance and the pleasures it brings. Lisa and Jo reflected on the compelling need to ‘reconstruct’ their feminine selves after participation and to maintain that image for the rest of the day in order to compensate for their physical activity/‘sporty’ behaviour.

… I do change … One day I’ll be being really sporty and I … won’t worry about my hair. But then the next day I’ll make sure that I look alright and I make sure my hair looks fine … I have to change so people don’t think that [laughs].

Lisa

Jo described the scene of femininity ‘reconstruction’ after a PE lesson:

I just feel like I need to get dressed, put my jewellery on … and I just need to brush my hair quickly ‘cos like you know, you’re out there windswept completely. Like all the girls are in the bathroom putting their make-up on, they don’t get time to put their clothes on ‘cos like we’re only in there for like 2 minutes.

Many teenage girls and young women avoid these costs by ‘participating’ in PE in a way that allows them to remain fundamentally disengaged and thereby retain their feminine image. Yet there are many girls, such as Jo and Lisa, who engage whole-heartedly in PE and other sport and thereby temporarily loosen their ties to emphasized femininity. In this way they feel forced to live a ‘split life’ and have a ‘double identity’ which creates tension and conflict for girls as they negotiate their worlds and search for their sense of self within it. Sharpe (1994) suggests that people change how they are feminine, even in one day; and evidence from these girls’ narratives confirms such rapid and dramatic changes in assumed identity and image.
CHAPTER
FIVE

CONCLUSION

In this chapter I summarize the interpretation of the findings and the arguments made in this study. I continue by commenting on some of the limitations of the study and reflecting on my methodology. Finally, I discuss the implications arising from the research for ways forward in girls’ PE and in doing so present various challenges to the PE profession.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS
The (British) society we live in teaches girls to polarize (heterosexual) masculinity and (heterosexual) femininity and their associated collective identities. Within the framework of this gender order females who do sport are consigned to the ‘deviant’ or ‘maladjusted’ category (Connell 1987; M. A. Hall 1996; Messner and Sabo 1990). The findings reported here show that by playing masculine sports (or indeed playing sport at all) teenage girls and young women are likely to create for themselves a large ‘femininity deficit’. Through demonstrating such individuality and non-conformity they will inevitably face powerful cultural limitations and take social risks with regard to their perceived femininity. As a result their confidence and happiness are jeopardized. Evans (1984: 13) notes that girls are thus warned off physical activity as

… conventional conceptions of femininity vividly contrast the kinds of images which girls normally associate with involvement in sport; images of muscle, sweat and showers.

The very same society simultaneously supports a contrary regime within the education system which requires that all females do PE at school until the age of sixteen; and complaints are frequently heard that teenage girls are unfit due to lack of physical exercise (Health Education Authority 1997).

The combined effect of the two influential but non-congruent ideologies discussed in this thesis give rise to two polarized identities for teenage girls in PE. A girl can identify herself as a masculinized ‘doer’ of PE (a ‘tomboy’), or a feminized (‘girlie’) ‘non-doer’ of sport and physical activity. It is highly unlikely that girls can achieve being both physically active and (heterosexually) desirable so they are then obliged to choose between these images. The result is a paradoxical double standard that teenage girls and young women are subjected to. The girls in this study described their’s as a ‘no win’ situation, “I don’t think you can do anything right” (Jo); “… it’s not really fair” (Nicola). Hudson (1984: 31) too supports the notion that as women, “Whatever we do we’re wrong”. Thus girls appear to be offered two unsatisfactory and non-congruous identities. The resulting role conflict is difficult to cope with.

Either girls resist the dominant forces of the gender order and its hegemonic masculinity like Nicola’s aunt who was described as ‘a tomboy’ and who almost totally rejected conventional emphasized femininity. Or they resist the more localized forces of PE like those who are described by Rebecca as being “into boys”, by disengaging with sport and PE altogether. In this way teenage girls and young women either jeopardize their comfortable ‘belonging’ in the collective (‘girlie’).
feminine identity. Or they risk their positions both as successful students, and as autonomous individuals with the life-long benefits and enjoyment of physical activity.

However, careful consideration of my experiences in PE and of the research data underpin my grounded theory that most girls compromise. The girls in this study described how they have developed a practical knowledge of coping skills and strategies that centre on what Varpalotai calls “compensatory femininity” (1987: 418). They live a ‘split life’ and have ‘double identities’ which inevitably results in confusion, tension and conflict with regard to their ‘sense of self’ (Hendry et al. 1993). The process of identification and the identities on offer, are never simplistic, but usually contradictory and always problematic. As Connelly (1991: 64) points out, identity formation is a “… slippery, insecure experience”. Because adolescence is such a crucial time for identity formation this is a highly unsatisfactory and soul-destroying situation for these girls and for others like them. Hence it becomes clear why

… girls tend to reject physical education [and sport in general] as an aspect of the curriculum [and life in general] which is unfeminine, irrelevant and childish. (Leaman 1986: 123)

As long as sport and PE are proving grounds for (hegemonic) masculinity, and a females’ assignment as ‘other’ is to prove her (emphasized) femininity by behaving in a way different from, and contrary to males, then sport and PE are likely to remain extraneous and inappropriate territory for teenage girls and young women. Lisa poignantly concluded that her PE teacher, by encouraging her to be less ‘girlie’, was “… transforming me into something I don’t wanna be …”

It has been painful to hear these girls struggle between the two authoritative powers and their sets of injunctions. But it has also been impressive to see the passionate and imaginative creativity they use to search for a sense of self that satisfies them.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The time and word limits of this study have not allowed me to do justice to the full width of the data gathered. My major consideration is that I have had to limit the extent to which I have told these girls’ stories. This is important to me because their narratives have proven both revealing and educative. This work has revolutionized my thinking on girls’ PE insofar as I have been enabled to acknowledge the complexity of the thinking and actions of these girls (Evans 1992).

A further reservation is that there are likely to be errors, misunderstandings and misinterpretations in what I have done. I have felt concerned throughout this study that these are the versions of the girls’ ‘stories’ that they chose to tell me, on that day. Further, that it is my interpretation of these stories that you read here. I found useful here the way Stanley and Wise (1983: 152) describe mistakes and confusion as being “… an inevitable part of research”. All I can hope is that I have done my job well by establishing a good rapport with the girls, by asking questions in a manner that allowed them maximum freedom to express their views, and by applying a rigorous and reflective framework to the interpretation of the data (see Skeggs 1997). Further, whilst I have no proof otherwise, I have no reason to believe that the responses were

2 Parallels can be drawn here with the experiences of lesbian PE teachers forced to “live two lives” as described by Clarke (1996).
not sincere and well motivated. Finally, I have used my ‘emic’ position as a female with experience in PE, and the “imaginative fidelity” it allows for, to aid rigorous, honest and accountable interpretation (Erben 1998: 11).

WAYS FORWARD
Implications for Future Work
In addition to the richness of this data and its potential usefulness for further consideration, there are several fields of enquiry that would both contribute to, and gain from, the interpretation of girls’ behaviour in and attitudes towards PE. Firstly, there is a need to investigate more thoroughly how boys and men relate to sport and PE in order to better understand the dynamics of the power relations involved (see Measor et al. 1995; Morgan 1981). In addition, it has been suggested by writers in men’s studies that feminism is not only advantageous for women and girls but that it holds potential for liberating men and boys from the limitations of sexism and the gender order as well (Messner and Sabo 1990). With this in mind it is important to recognize that transformative change in the cultures of sport and PE (and in the dominant ideologies of society at large) would benefit many males as well as females.

Secondly, we need to increase awareness of how class, ethnicity and ability, as well as the damaging dichotomy of hetero/homosexuality, affect individual girls’ experiences and needs in PE in particular and sport in general. Connell et al. (1982: 182) explain that

Class and gender don’t just occur jointly in a situation. They abrade, inflame, amplify, twist, negate, dampen and complicate each other. In short, they interact vigorously …

For reasons of the limits imposed on this study I have not been able to consider this interplay between social differences. However, future work that explores girls’ lives outside PE and school, would contribute to increasingly complex, engaging and useful discussions on teenage girls’ positions within sport and PE.

A third area important for future work is that of the younger child both pre-school and at primary school (see Hasbrook 1999; Walkerdine 1997; Williams 1993). Fourthly, it is important to remember the importance of power relations and gender regimes in the school/education system as a whole (Connell et al. 1982; Deem 1984; Paechter 1998; Stanworth 1983). Finally, there is much that could be learned about gender issues in PE and sport from cross-national and cross-cultural research (Scraton 1997).

Transformative Change
Whilst interpreting teenage girls’ physical activity as a positive act of resistance to the dominant forces of hegemonic masculinity, it is also necessary to be wary of uncritical celebration of resistance, the illusion of triumph that the “romance of resistance” can effect (Abu-Lughod cited in Theberge and Birrell 1994: 371). It is vital that we acknowledge the prosaic nature of resistance and continue to recognize it as “… subordinate, non-heroic, everyday, subtle and unrecognized” (Scott cited in Theberge and Birrell 1994: 364). By using such a prosaic basis we can begin to lay the groundwork for more global systemic change. After all, “… the feminist project is to change the world, not merely to describe it” (M. A. Hall 1996: 233).

It is central to this project that we encourage teachers of PE to overcome their
… conservative tendency to see girls’ resistance as irrational, immature, uncommitted and non-physical, when compared against stands of male behaviour and propriety … This is a real danger. (Evans 1984: 14)

Also central to the feminist project is to give meaning to females’ actions from an understanding that originates outside dominant discourses. In this way “… potentially normative principles might emerge from currently non-normative but widespread practices” (Connell 1987: 52). In this light I agree with Theberge (1987: 387) who argues for the need to see resistance as a central component of political change that is consistent with the “… feminist vision of power”, which, they explain, is potentially both physical and organizational.

However, in order to progress beyond costly personal acts of refusal and towards transformative change, resistance needs to be not only conscious but also political, collective and public (Theberge and Birrell 1994). There are many girls who want to do sport and be physically active but who lack a relevant and appropriate feminist movement. Such a movement would need to be strong enough to support and propel them towards a consolidation of their wants and needs through empowerment and change.

The findings of this study demonstrate that girls know they are ‘different from but not equal’ to boys and know that they are expected to remain so. It is also clear that they recognize this as unsatisfactory, unfair and certainly not what they want. However, as Skeggs (1997: 11) points out, “To challenge powerlessness does not mean that one automatically shifts into positions of power”. And it follows that even though girls resist the gender order through participation in physical activity, they remain in a disempowered position in the hierarchy of power and possibilities in sport and PE. If teenage girls are to succeed in developing their struggles into transformative change they will need assistance from the ‘powers that be’. As one such authority, the PE profession needs to provide a platform from which power relations can be analyzed and challenged.

**Challenges to the PE Profession**

The contradictions for teenage girls and young women in sport and PE need to be surpassed, both in theory and in practice, in order to achieve transformative change. In enabling, effecting and supporting this transcendence we may eliminate the damaging expression of ‘commonsense’ assumptions; otherwise essentialist ideologies will continue to produce and reinforce the polarized and gendered dichotomies currently present in sport and PE. Rutherford (1990: 10) rightly stresses the importance of

… breaking these hierarchies and dismantling this language of polarity and its material structures of inequality and discrimination.

In this way girls could be offered multiple and fluid identities that are not positioned as the inferior ‘other’; and sporting identities that are not socially condemned and costly to their sense of security.

At present PE in the UK is based on an inherited legacy of historical dichotomies which devalue the ‘female’, deny teenage girls and young women sporting opportunities, and leave them with “… a pervasive sense of bodily deficiency” (M. A. Hall 1996: 54). The need to “… renew our commitment to social action and to a thoughtful analysis of the political outcomes of our actions” is stressed by Theberge
and Birrell (1994: 374). Additionally, we need to open up the debate within the PE profession by problematizing and confronting the issues that effect teenage girls and young women in PE. It is essential to acknowledge the constraining structures surrounding practising teachers. Therefore, I implicate researchers, policy makers, teacher educators, inspectors, advisers, and INSET providers as well as teachers in the following challenges.

Firstly, it is important to explore alternative ways of conceptualizing and defining physical activity, movement, sport and PE that might “… challenge the hegemony of traditional games and sport” (Wright and Dewar 1997: 94). Rather than allowing ‘sport’ and therefore ‘PE’ to become “dirty words” for girls and young women, we should utilize a “… broader conception of women’s involvement in physical exertion” (Deem and Gilroy 1998: 104). This conception should include Willis’ (1982: 134) vision of

… a form of activity which emphasizes human similarity and not dissimilarity, a form of activity which isn’t competitive and measured, a form of activity which expresses values which are indeed unmeasurable, a form of activity which is concerned with individual well-being and satisfaction rather than with comparison.

Secondly, it is necessary to consider offering (more) choice to students in PE in an effort to acknowledge, respect and teach to the hugely diverse group we call ‘secondary school girls’ (Hendry and Singer 1981; Lyons 1998). Thirdly, as Sparkes (1992: 2) points out, this diversity requires that teachers of PE are enabled and encouraged to adopt “… a different form of pedagogical consciousness”. In a similar vein Woodhouse (1997: 45) warns,

Our broad and balanced programmes will achieve little if pupils merely continue to reinforce their feelings of inadequacy or inferiority.

While increasing pressures of class sizes and time available make this difficult, it is nevertheless crucial to rise to the challenge of increasing awareness of innovative pedagogy and modes of delivery that may enhance girls’ enthusiasm and attainment (Clarke and Nutt 1999). Fourthly, I support Evans and Clarke’s (1988: 140) view that,

The official discourse [of PE] celebrates individualism, power, control and responsibility but remains largely silent on issues of class, race, gender and ability [and sexuality].

Each of these structures of dominance serve as important social controls in sport ensuring that only certain privileged groups have access to the benefits of sport and PE participation and the physical and psychological empowerment this provides (Griffin 1998). As a profession we need to challenge these oppressive gender, ethnic and socio-economic stereotypes and the heterosexual homophobia within sport and PE. Finally, for the above tasks to be achieved it is imperative that opportunities for the PE profession to break away from the influences of institutionalized ‘sport’ are recognized and pursued. In many areas of PE national governing bodies of competitive sport have, for too long held authority and influence over school PE programmes. This a nonsensical situation when the aims of the former are elitist - to
produce top class sportsmen; and the aims of the latter are supposedly inclusive - to physically educate every girl and boy in the nation.

This study has drawn attention to the potential of girls themselves to resist and thereby contribute towards this change. I close by proposing that we help girls resist and change both the culture of femininity in society at large, and the traditional divisive, dis-enabling and discriminatory cultures of sport and PE. It is necessary to recognize that many girls want to do sport and achieve in PE, but that they also want to feel attractive and desirable in a (traditionally or non-traditionally) feminine way. A dialectical approach would allow teenage girls to transcend the polarized stereotypical images they are currently offered and would permit redefinitions of the feminine self which can, as McRobbie emphasizes, “… be endlessly constructed, re-constructed and customized”. By promoting a culture in which girls can do sport and be regarded as feminine –where one does not automatically cancel out the other- we can begin to make PE a less contradictory, (hetero-)sexist and alienating experience not only for girls, but also for some of their male classmates, and their teachers as well.
APPENDIX I

Interview Schedule

YEAR 9 GIRLS’ OPINIONS OF PE AND SURROUNDING TOPICS

DETAILS OF INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWEES AND THEIR INTERVIEWS

Name (pseudonym):
School (pseudonym):
Date of interview:
Time and length of interview:

DESCRIPTION OF THE INTERVIEWEE

KEY FEATURES OF INTERVIEW

Topics not covered:

ANY OTHER COMMENTS:
INTRODUCTORY QUESTIONS
(This sheet was personalised for each interviewee depending on their responses to the earlier questionnaire – as shown in bold type below.)

Which lesson are you missing to be here?
How do you feel about that?
Why?

Have you made your option choices for next year yet?
Is/was PE an option?
Have you/will you choose PE?
Do you think PE is an important subject to do an exam in?

PE is compulsory all through secondary school. Do you think that’s right, or that people should have a choice in some years?

You said on your questionnaire that you sometimes enjoyed PE lessons last term.
The reasons you gave were:
1)
2)
3)

Can you explain more about……………………………………………………………………………………………………

You also said you usually tried hard in PE lessons last term, because…
1)
2)
3)

Can you tell me more about……………………………………………………………………………………………………

You also said on your questionnaire that you always brought your kit to lessons, because…
1)
2)

Can you tell me more about……………………………………………………………………………………………………

You took part in most of the PE lessons last term, because…..
1)
2)

Please say more about……………………………………………………………………………………………………
ACTIVITIES AND ABILITIES

• Which activities do you prefer to do in PE?
(Prompts if needed: dance, netball, hockey, soccer, rugby, lacrosse, cross-country, swimming, gymnastics, trampolining, HRE/H&F, outdoor and adventure, basketball, volleyball, badminton, handball, tennis, rounders, softball, cricket, athletics.)

Can you say why?

• Which activities are you good at?
Why?

• Which activities do you dislike?
Why?

• Which activities are you not so good at?
Why?

• Do you get any choice about the activities you do in PE?
Do you think you should?
Why?
GIRLS’ SPORTS AND BOYS’ SPORTS

- Some people would say that there are such things as ‘girls’’ sports and ‘boys’’ sports. Do you agree with that?
  Why do you think that?/Why do you think people think that?
- Do you think that is because the actual activity is unsuitable for girls/boys, or do you think it’s just in people’s heads/their ideas?
  Are ‘girls’’ and ‘boys’’ sports usually done indoors or outdoors?
- If there are such things: Should girls learn ‘boys’’ sports?
  Should boys learn ‘girls’’ sports?
  Why?
- Should everyone learn the same activities in PE?
  Why?
- Would you enjoy PE more/even more if the activities were ‘feminine’ activities?
  Why?
  Do you think other girls would enjoy that more too or not?
  Why do you think that?
- Are there any activities that aren’t done in PE that you think should be done?
  What?
  Why?
- Are there any sports that are not necessarily ‘girls’’ or ‘boys’’?
  Why is that?
  Does that mean that both girls and boys feel comfortable playing them?
  Why?
DESIRABILITY

- Do you think that girls would be seen by other girls as more attractive or ‘cool’ if it is a girlie sport that she does?

- Would this affect what boys thought of her?

How would she be treated?

Why?

Would her sexuality be questioned?

Why?

- What about boys doing ‘girlie’ sports? What do girls think?

What do other boys think?

How would he be treated?

Why?

Would his sexuality be questioned?

Why?
‘SPORTY’ AND ‘NON-SPORTY’ PEOPLE?

- Do you think people are seen as either ‘sporty’ or not? (Are there two types of person?)

  If so…
  - Let’s talk about girls first of all; how would you describe girls who are sporty?
  And girls who are not sporty?
  - How are their images affected by being ‘sporty’ or not? Is it ‘cool’ or not?

What does a girl need to do to be seen as ‘cool’ by other girls?
Why is that?
And to be seen as ‘cool’ by boys?
Why?

- Is there only one way to be ‘cool’?
Do teachers agree with the way ‘cool’ people are?

- What about boys?
How would you describe boys who are sporty?
Why?
And those who are not?
Why?
- What does a boy need to do to be seen as ‘cool’ by girls?
Why?
And to be seen as ‘cool’ by other boys?
Why?

- Do you think that boys are naturally better at sport than girls?
  If so … Why do you think that is?
  If not … Do you think that some people think that is true?
  If so … Why do you think they say that?
• What sort of things do you need to be good at PE?
Do most girls have those things?
And most boys?

• Is it what girls or boys think that is the most important in your class? Who’s opinions are the most important?
Why do you think that is?

• Is it important to be ‘ladylike’ to get asked out by a boy?
Why/not?

If so…Can a girl do that and do sport?

If not…What is important?
And can a girl do that and do sport?

• Is it hard work being desirable all the time?!
Why?

• Is doing sport or physical activity a good way to meet boys or young men?
Why?

• Do you think teachers take girls and boys equally seriously in PE?
Why?
Does it depend the teacher is male or female?
Why?

Is that any different at school clubs?
Why do you think that is?

• And do people take girls’ and boys’ sport equally seriously outside school?
Why?

• Do you think that girls who do sport are seen as more, or less attractive than girls who don’t?
Why do you think this is?
Do you agree with it?
Does it depend on the sports they do?
Why do you think this is?
CHANGES OVER TIME

• How did you feel about PE when you were younger, for example in Year 7 or in primary school? Why?

• So do you think your attitude towards PE has changed over time? Why?

• How many of your friends do you think will carry on doing sport or physical activity once they have left school?

What sorts of things do you think they will do?

What do you think their reasons will be? (e.g. being sociable, keeping healthy and fit, enjoyment of the activity.)

• Do you think you will?

What might you do?

What would your reasons be?

• Do people at home do any sport or physical activity? Who does what? Why do you think they do it?

Does that encourage you, or put you off? Why?

• Do you enjoy watching sport on TV? What and why?

Does it encourage you to do sport or physical activity? Why/not?

• Do you think it encourages other girls to? Why/not?
And do you think boys are encouraged to do sport by watching it on the TV? Why/not?
• Can you describe your PE kit for me?
Do you feel happy about wearing it?
Why/why not?
Is there anything you would like to change about it?
• Do you think other girls feel happy about wearing it?
Why/why not?
• If it was possible, do you think it would encourage people if there was a vote on what their PE kit was?
Why?
Do you think there should be a choice of not wearing the compulsory PE kit?
• Do you think most girls worry about their body shape?
Why do they/not?
• Do you think boys do?
Why/not?
• What are the rules in PE lessons about
  ☐ Hair
  ☐ Jewellery
  ☐ Laces
Do you agree with these rules?
Why/not?
• Do you get enough time to change?
If not what would you do with more time?
• Are all these rules the same for the boys?
Do you think that is fair?
• What are your changing rooms like?
GROUPING

• Are you taught PE in mixed sex groups or single sex groups?
  Why do you think that is?

Do you prefer doing PE with boys or just girls?
  Why?

• Does it make a difference *what* the activity is?
  Why?

• Does it make a difference where you are doing it?
  Why?

• Does it make a difference if you are *good* at it?
  Why?

• Does it embarrass you when you can’t do something in PE?
  Why?

Is that more or less with boys in the class?
  Why?

• How do you feel when you do something better than the others in an all girls’
  class?
  Why?

And if you do something better than the others and there are boys in the class?
  Why?

• What about if you are fitter than the others in the class?
  And *not* as fit?

• Do you think most girls in your class feel like that too?
  Why do you think they feel like that?

• How do you think *boys* feel about mixed/single sex groupings for PE?
  Why?

• Do you think there are certain activities that are better taught in mixed/single sex
  groups?
  Why?

• Does working with your best friends encourage you in PE or does it put you off?
  Why?
  • Some girls ‘skive’ PE either completely or by bringing a note or forgetting their
    kit on purpose. Have you ever done that?
    *If so*…What were your reasons?
    *If not*…Do you know anyone who has done that?
    What do you think her reasons were?
KEEPING FIT

- Do you think most girls worry about keeping fit?

Why is this important to them? (*Prompts if needed: to have a healthy heart and lungs, body shape, appearance, reputation?*)

And why is *that* important to them?

- Do you think boys worry about keeping fit?

Why?

- Do you think that ‘keeping fit’ is seen differently to ‘doing sport’?

- If a girl had a normal figure, was pretty, and a nice personality would she be more likely to be seen as ‘cool’ / desirable / popular / get asked out more often, if she

  a) played basketball because she enjoys it

  b) did aerobics to try and have a good body shape, or

  c) didn’t do any physical activity?

- So is ‘fit’ more or less desirable than ‘sporty’ or the same?
CONCLUDING QUESTIONS

• I did a study on girls’ magazines recently, like Sugar, Just 17. Do you ever read magazines?
  If so…Which ones?
  What do you like about them?
  
  If not…Do any of your friends or family?
  What do they like about them?

• Are the girls in the magazines like you?
  In what way?
  How does that make you feel?

• Who or what in these magazines can you identify with?
  How does that make you feel?

• Is it how you would design a magazine?

• Do they ever have anything about sport in them?
  Do you think they should? (have more?)
  Why/why not?
  
  • Sports clothes are fashionable at the moment.
  Do you usually wear them at home or out with friends?

  Does that encourage you to wear the kit in PE??

  How would you describe the fashion style you like most?

• What else do you think about these magazines?

END

I have really enjoyed listening to you today and I hope it has been interesting for you too. Thank you very much for your time and thoughts.

Is there anything you would like to say or ask me?

How do you feel about the interview? Did you enjoy it at all? Were you nervous?

Can you give me a name I can put on this tape so that you remain anonymous?
Verbal introduction to the interview

Hello, it’s nice to see you again. Just to remind you who I am, my name is Claudi Cockburn. I used to be a PE teacher but I also used to be a girl at school who sometimes enjoyed PE and sometimes didn’t! I left PE teaching because I felt it was important to find out more about what girls think about PE and what we could change to make things better.

So now I’m doing research on girls and PE for a Masters’ degree at the University of Southampton. I have read all the questionnaires your group did for me which were very interesting and have come back to ask some of you in more detail about your opinions on PE and some of the ideas connected with them. I need more information which might help to change things, if not for you then for other girls in the future in PE.

The reason for interviewing is that I think it is important to listen to what people have to say. Sometimes it is easier to express yourself by speaking rather than writing things down like you did with the questionnaire. This interview will be completely anonymous and at no stage will what you say be connected to you personally or to this school; the discussion will go no further than myself so no teachers, parents, friends etc. will know what you have said.

This interview will probably last about thirty minutes but there is more time if we need it. We’ll talk about any topics with regard to PE lessons that you feel are important, and some that you may not have thought about before. These will include:

- What you like and dislike about PE
- The activities you do in PE
- The groups you work in
- Your PE kit etc.

And if we have time we might also talk about:
• Health and fitness
• Extra-curricular sport
• Sport that your friends and family do.
• Your PE teachers

The reason for the tape recorder is that I’m not very good at talking and listening and writing at the same time. Tape recorders are usually used in interviews like this and although it might put you off a bit for a start I’m sure you will soon get used to it. If at any point you would like me to switch it off please say so. Is that alright with you? *TURN TAPE ON!!!*

Feel free to ask me any questions before we begin and at any stage during our talk. Also if you feel uncomfortable or would rather not answer a question please just say so. Similarly, if there is anything you feel you would like to add at any stage, even if it’s not something I have asked, please do so. Is there anything you’d like to say or anything you need before we start? Are you comfortable sitting there?
Dear Mr./Ms.

Thank you very much for your continuing help in this research. I have now selected the students I would like to interview, and enclose letters for them. Please would you be so kind as to pass them on? There is a copy for your information.

I am hoping there will be a positive response, however, in the case of students declining the offer I have selected more then I will eventually interview. I envisage interviewing probably only two or three students from each school if that is alright with you?

I would be grateful if you would keep the reply slips safe for me. I hope the girls won’t need chasing up too much, but I would appreciate a relatively quick return so we can organise dates and times soon. I would like to interview during the second and third weeks of March if that is convenient with you.

I hope this has not brought you too much extra work. I really appreciate your help, please don’t hesitate to get in touch if you have any queries.

Yours,

Ms. Claudia Cockburn
Dear and Parent/Guardian,

I enjoyed reading your responses to the questionnaire and found it very useful for my work on girls and PE. Now I would like very much to talk to you further and find out more about what you have done in PE, and how you feel about it.

If you agree, this will be arranged at a time suitable to you and your teachers sometime during school hours before Easter. Please sign the slip below if you are willing to be involved further in the research, and return it to your PE teacher as soon as possible. Thank you for your co-operation, I look forward to seeing you again soon.

Yours,

Claudia Cockburn

STUDENT: I am willing to be interviewed……………………………

PARENT/GUARDIAN: I am willing for my daughter to be interviewed

……………………………
APPENDIX V

Questionnaire from previous study

How You Feel About PE

- Please answer the following questions as fully and carefully as you can.
- Please answer honestly – your answers will be seen only by me.
- Remember there are no right or wrong answers – I am interested in finding out about your opinions.
- If you have any questions please put up your hand, and I will try to help you.

HAVE YOU BEEN AT THIS SCHOOL SINCE YEAR 7? (please tick) Yes ☐ No ☐

Section A. THINKING ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCE OF ‘PE’ LESSONS LAST TERM

1. How did you feel about PE lessons last term? Please tick one of the following answers:

   I always enjoyed them ☐ I hardly ever enjoyed them ☐
   I nearly always enjoyed them ☐ I never enjoyed them ☐
   I sometimes enjoyed them, sometimes not ☐

2. Why did you feel like this? (You do not have to answer in full sentences).............
   ........................................................................................................................................

3. How hard did you try in your PE lessons last term? Please tick one of the following:

   I always tried hard ☐ I didn’t try hard very often ☐
   I usually tried hard ☐ I didn’t ever try hard ☐
   I sometimes tried hard, sometimes not ☐

4. What were the reasons you did or didn’t try hard? ..........................................................
   ........................................................................................................................................

5. Did you bring your PE kit to every PE lesson last term? Please tick one of these answers:

   I brought my PE kit to every lesson ☐ I didn’t bring it to many lessons ☐
   I brought it to most lessons ☐ I didn’t bring it to one lesson ☐
I brought it to some lessons ☐

6. If you did not bring your PE kit to every lesson, please explain why: ...........................................................

7. How many PE lessons did you take part in last term? Please tick one of the following answers:

   I took part in every PE lesson last term ☐ I did not take part in many lessons ☐
   I took part in most lessons ☐ I did not take part in any lessons ☐
   I took part in about half the lessons ☐

8. If you missed one or more lessons please explain ...................................................

9. Do you have (or have you had) any long term illness or disability e.g. Asthma that has affected your participation in, or enjoyment of PE lessons?
   Yes ☐ No ☐ If yes, please describe below .................................................................

10. Would you say you were good at PE in general?
    Good ☐ Poor ☐ Depends on activity ☐

Section B. THINGS THAT ENCOURAGE YOU OR PUT YOU OFF PE
1. Please tick once for each of the following according to how you feel about them in PE:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Encourages me to do PE</th>
<th>Doesn’t make a difference</th>
<th>Puts me off PE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Working with friends</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working with others (not friends)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working on my own</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting out of breath</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being competitive (trying to win)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being aggressive</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being artistic or creative (e.g. gymnastics or dance)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My PE teacher</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doing sport in front of other people</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being in a class with boys</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being in a class with just girls</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having a female teacher</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Having a **male** teacher

Imagining I am a **famous sportswoman**

My **best friends’ attitudes**

Doing PE **outside** in **cold** weather

Doing PE **outside** in **hot & sunny** weather

Doing PE **inside** in **cold** weather

Doing PE **inside** in **hot & sunny** weather

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wearing the proper PE kit</th>
<th>Encourages me to do PE</th>
<th>Doesn’t make a difference</th>
<th>Puts me off PE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carrying my kit to school</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Following rules about jewellery, hair, laces etc</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playing games</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Having showers (leave blank if you have never had to have them at your school)</th>
<th>Encourages me to do PE</th>
<th>Doesn’t make a difference</th>
<th>Puts me off PE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Please add anything you would like to here about what **encourages you** or **puts you off PE:**

.........................................................................................................................................

.........................................................................................................................................

2. Please state if you agree with, disagree with or don’t know about the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IN PE I THINK I …</th>
<th>I agree</th>
<th>I don’t know</th>
<th>I disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Have fun</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make new friends</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keep fit</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keep healthy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control my body shape</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learn how to keep fit</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learn how to keep healthy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learn how to control my body shape</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learn skills</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Find out about clubs and activities in school</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get ideas for sport to do <strong>outside school</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get <strong>tired</strong> out</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feel <strong>good</strong> because I have done exercise</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feel <strong>bad</strong> because I feel tired</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. Please add anything you would like to here about your **feelings towards** your PE lessons.

4. Are there any activities you do in PE lessons that you especially like? Please list up to three and say why you like them. (Write ‘none’ if you really don’t have any).

Activity ................................................Reason

Activity ................................................Reason

Activity ................................................Reason

5. Are there any activities you do in PE lessons, that you especially **do not like**? Please list up to three and say why you do not like them. (Write ‘none’ if you really don’t have any).

Activity ................................................Reason
Activity ................................................Reason
Activity ................................................Reason

Section C  HOW FEELING TOWARDS PE LESSONS MAY CHANGE OVER TIME

1. You may feel differently about PE now compared to when you were younger. Please tick the boxes that apply to you.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Primary school</th>
<th>Year 7</th>
<th>Year 9</th>
<th>Equally</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I enjoyed PE the most in</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I tried the hardest in PE in</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I brought my PE kit most regularly in</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I took part in PE the most in</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Have you ever been to a lunchtime or after-school sport club at your school? (Tick one). Yes [ ] No [ ]

If you answered ‘yes’, state which activity/ies and whether you still go this year?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Still go in year 9? (tick one)</th>
<th>Yes [ ] No [ ] Sometimes [ ]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If you have been to more lunchtime or after-school sports clubs write them in below:

……………………………………………………………………………………………….

3. GCSE (EXAM) PE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Does your school offer GCSE PE in year 10?</th>
<th>Yes [ ] No [ ] Don’t know [ ]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

If your school does offer GCSE PE will you choose it? Yes [ ] No [ ] Don’t know [ ]

Section D. IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE YOU WOULD LIKE TO ADD ON THE TOPIC OF THIS QUESTIONNAIRE? (If there is, please write it in the section below).

FINALLY …

♦ PLEASE CHECK THAT YOU HAVE ANSWERED ALL THE QUESTIONS AS FAR AS POSSIBLE.
♦ PLEASE CLOSE THE QUESTIONNAIRE PAPER AND SIT QUIETLY UNTIL EVERYONE HAS FINISHED.

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR THE TIME YOU HAVE TAKEN TO DO THIS QUESTIONNAIRE.
APPENDIX VI

Selection criteria for interviewees

Using the information gathered from the questionnaire survey (Cockburn 1999) a range of girls were selected for interview to ensure a variety with regard to the following criteria.

- Enjoyment of PE
- Effort made in PE
- Attendance and participation in PE
- Self-assessed ability and confidence in PE
- Injuries/illnesses e.g. asthma
- Physical traits such as weight/body shape.
- Level of involvement in physical activity outside PE lessons
- Preference for games/gymnastic type activities
- Preference for traditionally feminine/masculine activities
- Preference for mixed/single sex groupings in PE
- Traits such as aggressiveness, competitiveness, creativity etc.
- Attitudes towards PE teacher
- Contentment to work on own/with others
- Contentment to perform in front of others

It should be noted that this range was demonstrated at the original selection stage and was inevitably narrowed by the girls who did not respond or responded negatively to the request for interviewees.
APPENDIX VII

The PE departments

Two of the five departments taught dance as part of the PE programme whilst at the remaining three schools dance was taught by other departments such as ‘Performing Arts’. The activities taught to girls in Years 7, 8 and 9 varied from a wide variety of non-traditional, to a narrower range of more traditional activities. The teaching staff and the grouping systems also varied between departments from mixed sex PE all the way through Key Stage 3 with a male teacher (at Rutherford Community College); to mostly single sex PE with mostly female teachers (at Hollyoak Community School).

Kit requirements generally included a white top (one school had red) and blue or black shorts; none of the schools required a skirt for PE lessons. Three of the schools did not allow tracksuit bottoms or leggings in indoor lessons, and only in outside lessons when the teacher considered the weather conditions to be ‘appropriate’.

Extra curricular activities that had been offered to these groups of girls depended on the type of school. The three ‘community’ schools offered links with a wide range of extra curricular sporting activities provided on the school site. The other two schools offered extra curricular physical activity but on a more restricted scale.
APPENDIX VIII

The girls interviewed

**Lisa** called herself a “tomboy”, “hated” gymnastics and Health Related Exercise but enjoyed games such as badminton and volleyball, and played for Archway School girls’ basketball team. She portrayed a relatively traditional feminine image, had long hair and wore a small amount of eye make-up. She had had a boyfriend in the past.

**Jo** considered herself “middle of the road” with regard to PE – she was “not over keen” but participated and tried hard “most of the time”. She really enjoyed playing football for a team from Years 5 to 7 but had given it up since coming to Hollyoak Community School. She still did hockey, netball and dance outside school. Jo did not wear any make-up but wore a ring. She “sometimes” went out with boys.

**Marie** “didn’t mind” PE – she “just got on with it” and enjoyed hockey, trampolining and athletics in particular. She attended Rutherford Community College where the departmental policy had meant mixed sex grouping and the full range of activities for boys and girls since Year 7 e.g. rugby. She appeared less mature than the other girls and showed less attempt to portray a traditional feminine image. She said she was waiting until after her ‘SAT’s exams to “think about boyfriends”.

**Shamsa** also attended Rutherford Community College where she enjoyed some PE activities such as basketball and cricket but systematically “got out of” swimming. She also “hated” trampolining and long distance running. She was tall and slightly overweight, presenting a mature and relatively traditional feminine image – she wore a sari, had carefully tied back hair but wore no make-up or jewellery to school.

**Rebecca** described her interests as “academic”. She “hated” PE and avoided anything physical or competitive when possible. Although she always took part in PE she “didn’t always try as hard as” she could have. She enjoyed aerobics, which was not taught, at her school - Jaydean. She did not attempt to portray a feminine image and wore no jewellery or make-up. She spoke easily about the possibilities of going out with boys but did not at the time have a boyfriend.

**Nicola** also attended Jaydean School. She “loved” PE, “running around” and being physical; she “lived for” playing football after school in the park with her boyfriend and his friends. She described herself (confidently) as a “tomboy” and following her aunt’s example wore no make-up to school but wore a (unisex) ring out of school.
APPENDIX IX

Codes used for analysis of interview data

❖ THE DOMINANT FORCES OF HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY AND EMPHASISED FEMININITY

❖ THE ‘FEMININITY DEFICIT’

- Deviance
- Magical solutions in popular discourse
- Differences between real life and that portrayed in popular discourse
- Teenage girls’ magazines
- Identity formation, general socialisation and bodily changes all at once
- Changes in attitudes since primary school

❖ HOMOGENEITY/DIVERSITY

- Girls are alike
- Girls are different
- Fitting into a ready-made collective identity
- Pressure to make up the deficit

❖ FEMALES AS ‘OTHERS’ IN SPORT

- Male strength and female weakness
- Polarity and discrimination
- Sport as a proving ground for masculinity
- Masculine traits, values and norms in sport and PE
• Girls as dis-enabled in PE
• Mixed sex grouping
• Unfairness of the ‘system’
• ‘Saved’ by their femininity when failing in PE
• Definitions of reasoning behind ‘girls’ sports’ / ‘boys’ sports’
• Effects of gendered sports activities

LOCALISED COUNTER HEGEMONY OF PE CULTURE

• Teachers want girls to be tough
• Teachers’ power
• Girls want to achieve in PE
RESISTANCE

- Recognize the constraints
- Understand the contradictions
- Costs of resisting the dominant forces by participating in sport/PE
  - Loneliness and not ‘belonging’
  - Questioning of heterosexuality/desirability
  - Lack of role models
  - Treatment from friends
  - ‘Hassle’ from boys
  - Depends if the sport is ‘feminine’/‘masculine’
  - Same for boys in ‘feminine’ sports
  - Embarrassment
- Resisting the localised counter hegemony of PE by disengaging with PE
  - Girls as ‘active’ agents
  - Positively choosing to resist
  - ‘Safer’ option
  - More feminine and therefore desirable
- Costs of resisting PE and other physical activity
  - Estrangement from own body
  - Sanctions imposed by teachers
  - Lack of fitness, skills, fun, involvement

NO WIN SITUATION

OPTIONS FOR THE GIRLS

- Be a ‘tomboy’ and do PE anyway
- Go with emphasised femininity
- Compromise between the two
DOUBLE IDENTITIES

- Reconstructing femininity
- Compensatory femininity
- Who/what am I?
- Confusion, tension and conflict
- Compromise
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