Chapter 6: Gender and Individualism

In this chapter, and the following one, a number of theoretical approaches which examine how individuals conceptualise and construct their sense of self and identity are reviewed alongside the participants' *own* interpretations of their collages. This chapter begins by outlining the work of Anthony Giddens which establishes how individuals living in late modern Western societies shape and understand their self-identity and reflexively create an ongoing narrative of the self. Therefore, the chapter moves on to look at how these narratives of the self were formulated and articulated by participants in terms of their gendered identities. In relation to masculinity concepts of 'hegemonic masculinity' and 'policing masculinity' are explored as well as research which identifies that a range of masculinities exist, and considered through the male participants' discussions of 'active' masculinity and sport. The chapter then turns to a variety of studies that highlight the notion of femininity as performance and evaluates more recent debates about the impact of 'girl power' discourse on girls' subjectivities. As such, ideas about the performative nature of femininity and girl power rhetoric are used to analyse the female participants' responses. Despite the focus on gendered identities, the chapter concludes with a discussion which foregrounds the notion that the principle of individualism in late modern societies prioritises the construction of a unique and successful self, and for participants this was understood as an equally important facet of their sense of self.

6.1 Giddens: Late Modernity

In order to facilitate a more comprehensive understanding of how individuals construct and perceive their identities, Anthony Giddens (1984) has provided a useful framework which establishes the significant role played by self-identity in modern Western societies. This approach is grounded in his theory of structuration which conflates the work of Emile Durkheim ([1895] 1938) and Max Weber (1978), arguing that both macro-level forces (social structure) and micro-level activity (human agency) are interrelated. As such, Giddens importantly identified that although a social structure – including institutions, moral systems, and traditions – does exist,

this is reproduced through the repetition of acts by individual actors and, therefore liable to change in response to shifting patterns of attitudes and behaviours. However, as he notes, an individual's actions are moderated by social protocols in a process Giddens suggests is analogous with language use (Giddens and Pierson, 1998, pp. 10-12). In this formulation he claims that although language only exists in moments of communication, those who deviate from the set rules of grammar are met with strong resistance. Comparably, although the rules of social order are solely grounded in convention, people who do not comply with these codes and defy social expectations are met with similar hostility. Thus, according to Giddens, the behaviour of individual actors actively reproduces and reinforces a repertoire of expectations held by others, which constitutes the basis of social forces and in turn, determines social structure. As he explains, 'Society only has form, and that form only has effects on people, in so far as structure is produced and reproduced in what people do' (*ibid*., p. 77). Developing this point, Giddens (1991) argues that the maintenance of shared conventions enables people to preserve 'a "faith" in the coherence of everyday life' (p. 38) and arguably explains why aberrant behaviour is regarded as a threat to an individual's sense of stability within society.

Expanding on this theme, Giddens claims that in contrast to pre-modern (traditional) societies, where individual roles and codes of behaviour are considered 'given' – being assigned by the rules of a specific culture – post-traditional societies prevail under the condition of late modernity in which all aspects of society, from government to intimate relationships, have become increasingly subject to reflection and examination. As a consequence, he asserts that post-traditional societies are marked by a heightened reflexivity and become conscious of their own construction. By doing so, 'in the post-traditional age, responsibilities and expectations become more fluid and subject to negotiation' (Gauntlett, 2007, p. 9; see Giddens, 1991, 1992). Significantly then, the centrality of reflexivity within post-traditional societies results in individuals having to confront how they conceptualise their own identities:

> What to do? How to act? Who to be? These are focal questions for everyone living in the circumstances of late modernity – and ones which, on some level or another, all of us answer, either discursively or through day-to-day social behaviour (1991, p. 70).

In consideration of these factors Giddens proposes that self-identity is not composed of set characteristics, rather the individual reflexively creates an understanding of their own biography in the form of an ongoing narrative which aims to provide the social actor with a consistent sense of self, and yet may be revised in response to circumstance. Furthermore, he states that pride and self-esteem are grounded in 'confidence in the integrity and value of the narrative of self-identity' (p. 66), whilst shame originates from insecurity regarding the narrative's legitimacy:

> The existential question of self-identity is bound up with the fragile nature of the biography which the individual 'supplies' about herself. A person's identity is not found in behaviour, nor – important though this is – in the reactions of others, but in the capacity *to keep a particular narrative going*. The individual's biography, if she is to maintain regular interaction with others in the day-to-day world, cannot be wholly fictive. It must continually integrate events which occur in the external world, and sort them out into the on-going 'story' about the self (p. 54, original emphasis).

It should be noted, however, that the conditions of late modernity do not offer the individual a limitless set of possible identities from which they may select and adopt. Instead, Giddens states that the impact of capitalism has consequences for how individuals construct the project of the self. As Giddens says, 'Modernity opens up the project of the self, but under conditions strongly influenced by the standardising effects of commodity capitalism' (p. 96). Thus, whilst capitalism appears to provide a vast diversity of products through which individuality may be expressed and attained, the available options are dictated by market forces resulting in the project of the self being reduced to a limited range of consumer choices. This situation he regards as a subversion of the true quest for self. In addition, although Giddens acknowledges that people have the potential to respond creatively in their acts of consumption, he maintains that the reflexive project of the self 'is in some part necessarily a struggle against commodified influences' (p. 200), since identities available to 'purchase' under capitalism parallel notions of fixed identities within traditional societies and, therefore, become the object of questioning by reflexive individuals.

In the above discussion the role of consumerism highlights ways in which individuals living in late modernity are able to develop and articulate a *lifestyle*. For Giddens,

concepts of lifestyle are integral to the post-traditional era as individuals are compelled to make choices – albeit limited – in the absence of prescribed (traditional) roles: 'The more post-traditional the settings in which an individual moves, the more lifestyle concerns the very core of self-identity, its making and remaking' (p. 81). Importantly, he asserts that 'lifestyle choices' are not exclusive to realms of the privileged elite; rather *all* social actors must create and adopt a lifestyle – even though some possibilities may be restricted due to social positioning. Furthermore, Giddens stresses that the term 'lifestyle' extends beyond professional status and conspicuous consumption to encompass wider options, behaviours, attitudes and beliefs. Hence, lifestyles can be seen to function as patterns for guiding the narrative of self-identity, but do not determine specific life outcomes. In this sense then, lifestyle choices enable individuals to consolidate their personal narrative in a recognisable manner, helping them to establish ties with wider networks of similar people. Giddens' position therefore foregrounds that questions regarding identity and lifestyle become an inescapable issue for the reflexive citizen living in late modern Western societies, and these concerns are augmented and reinforced by contemporary media.

The above concerns regarding identity and lifestyle choices are most prevalent in the articulation and understanding of gender roles. This discussion will therefore move onto examining changing conceptualisations of gender and identity, and how these were exemplified by the participants themselves.

6.2 Masculinity

In the previous section Giddens states that the transition from traditional to post-traditional societies has led to the questioning of social roles which were previously prescribed and taken-for-granted. This is particularly pertinent in the case of masculinity, where the changing nature of gender roles has resulted in what some commentators have termed a 'crisis of masculinity' (e.g. Faludi, 1999; Clare, 2000), characterised by changes in the labour market; changing family patterns; increased levels of violence, abusive behaviour and crime; higher rates of depression and suicide; as well as the impact of feminism and gay movements in popular discourse (Beynon, 2002, pp. 76-79). Whilst it is arguable whether such a 'crisis' actually

exists (*ibid*., pp. 93-97), the evident instability of male identity within modern cultures, as Stephen Frosh, Ann Phoenix and Rob Pattman (2002) describe, 'both reflects and contributes to the production of a parallel developmental "crisis" for boys, engaged in the process of identity construction in a context in which there are few clear role models and in which the surrounding images of masculinity are complex and confused' (p. 1). However, before the issue of young men's constructions of masculine identities is explored further, it would be useful to first examine the mechanisms through which masculinity is established and perpetuated.

6.2.1 Hegemonic Masculinity

It has come to be recognised that early accounts of masculinity within sociological research tended to focus on men's position in relation to women, prioritising gender dynamics *between* these groups, with men being afforded power at the expense of women's subordination (Connell, 2000). However, in more recent years, an ever increasing body of research on men and masculinities has indicated that masculinity can no longer be conceptualised as a fixed monolithic category, rather the concept is complex, fluid and subject to change (Whitehead and Barrett, 2001; Kimmel, Hearn and Connell, 2005). In acknowledgement of this, contemporary theorists have argued that instead of considering masculinity, a range of *masculinities* actually exists, each offering insights into the multifarious ways in which men 'do male' (Connell, 2000; Whitehead, 2002). Furthermore, a significant theme that has arisen in this work is the interplay of gender with other structural influences – such as class, 'race'/ethnicity and sexuality – and how this impacts upon constructions of masculinity (Mac an Ghaill, 1994; Sewell, 1997; Connell, 2000; O'Donnell and Sharpe, 2000; Frosh, Phoenix and Pattman, 2002). In doing so, discriminations between dominant and subordinate forms of masculinity have been highlighted (Connell, 2000). As a result, the notion of hegemonic masculinity has emerged to help define how processes of masculinity and femininity are located and maintained within ideological frameworks. With regards to modern Western societies, ideals associated with hegemonic masculinity include whiteness, heterosexuality, economic success, 'toughness, power and authority, competitiveness [as well as] the subordination of gay men' (Frosh, Phoenix and Pattman, 2002, pp. 75-76), and it is the possession of such attributes

which comes to be perceived as 'successful ways of "being a man"' (Beynon, 2002, p. 116).

In his influential text *Masculinities* (2000), R. W. Connell raises these specific points claiming that masculinities not only differ, but are in conflict and opposition within relations of power. Drawing upon Antonio Gramsci's (1971) concept of hegemony – that describes the cultural processes by which a certain group in society is able to assert and maintain its dominance over others – he argues 'At any given time, one form of masculinity rather than others is culturally exalted' (2000, p. 77). However, Connell further suggests that '"Hegemonic masculinity" is not a fixed character type … It is, rather, the masculinity that occupies the hegemonic position in a given pattern of gender relations, a position always contestable' (p. 76). In consideration of this, he states that current constructions of hegemonic masculine ideals have led to the marginalisation and/or subordination of ethnic minority, homosexual and working-class masculinities. Moreover, for those groups of men who are unlikely to ever meet set hegemonic standards, he introduces the notion of *complicity* (p. 79) which suggests that these individuals recognise the doctrines of hegemony in order to profit from its structural inequalities 'without the tensions or risks of being the frontline troops of patriarchy' (*ibid*.). Thus, although Connell's analysis acknowledges that men as a collective are afforded social, political and economic advantages due to the dominant position of their gender – benefits termed the 'patriarchal dividend' (*ibid*.) – he importantly identified that these advantages are not equal for all: '… in the United States, particular black athletes may be exemplars for hegemonic masculinity. But the fame and wealth of individual stars has no trickle-down effect; it does not yield social authority to black men generally' (p. 81). In agreement with the principles proposed by Connell, a significant body of work has demonstrated how hegemonic masculinity asserts its authority and control over 'alternative' masculinities (Nayak and Kehily, 1996; Haywood and Mac an Ghaill, 1997; Epstein and Johnson, 1998). These studies suggest that patriarchy *expects* men to reject any behaviour deemed 'feminine' or aberrant to established masculine traits, and coerces them to behave within strict limitations or suffer social punishment. Furthermore, men are not only required to monitor their own behaviour, but to *police* the actions of others.

6.2.2 Policing Masculinity

The issue of 'policing' masculinity is central to a study conducted by David Buckingham (1993c), in which small groups of boys aged between 8 and 12 were interviewed about a number of films and television programmes in order to explore their relationship with these media.[35] In this work he notes that talk produced by the participants did not directly reveal data on this matter, rather it highlighted how the boys negotiated and articulated their own sense of masculine identity within a social context. That is to say, the interviews demonstrated how young men *performed* masculinity in the presence of, and for, others. In light of this, Buckingham suggests that: 'Rather than regarding talk as a transparent reflection of what goes on in peoples' heads, I have attempted to analyse talk as a *social act* which serves specific functions and purposes' (p. 92, original emphasis). For example, during their conversations about 'scary' films (p. 99) he observes that individuals were inclined to discuss these in a bold and confident manner so they would be perceived positively by other boys. In addition, if participants displayed any supposed 'feminine' attitudes or asserted sexual sentiments, this behaviour would be regarded as a source of humiliation, and therefore subject to 'policing' by peers. To elaborate, any statements about identification with and/or admiration for female characters were ridiculed as expressions of inappropriate effeminacy, whilst appearing to 'fancy' them was considered a greater taboo. Thus, boys' comments on such subjects were never fully expanded upon due to the ongoing process of 'policing' which prevented this, as Buckingham says, 'there is a sense in which the boys are constantly putting themselves at risk – primarily of humiliation or ridicule by each other – and then rapidly withdrawing' (p. 103). Hence, by foregrounding the discursive strategies through which masculinity is policed and enforced he concludes:

> [M]asculinity is actively produced and sustained through talk. Far from being unitary or fixed, it is subject to negotiation and redefinition as the talk proceeds. Masculinity, we might say, is achieved rather than given. It is something boys *do* rather than something that is done to them – although, equally, it is something they can attempt to do to each other (p. 97, original emphasis).

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[35] These interviews were originally conducted as part of a larger study which sought to explore children's relationships with television (see Buckingham, 1993b).

6.2.3 Young Masculinities

More recently notions about how masculinity is *achieved* have become fundamental to considerations of young men's identities. For example, in their analysis *Uncertain Masculinities: Youth, Ethnicity and Class in Contemporary Britain* (2000) Mike O'Donnell and Sue Sharpe were concerned with exploring masculinity within the context of a changing social landscape, focusing on '[the way] boy's attitudes are gendered, and, in particular, how they come to think and behave as "masculine"' (p. 2). Furthermore their study importantly acknowledged, through reference to Connell's (2000) work, the influence of class and 'race'/ethnicity in informing conceptions of masculinity. In doing so, O'Donnell and Sharpe specifically aimed to understand how boys perceived themselves in relation to society's 'gender order' – 'that is, to the structure and culture of gender inequality at a macro level' (2000, pp. 9-10) – by questioning them about their views on a wide range of issues including school; families and relationships; work; and leisure. To achieve this, research was conducted during the mid 1990s with boys aged between 15 and 16 from four London schools.[36] In total, 262 boys completed questionnaires, from which 44 were interviewed along with three senior members of teaching staff. Moreover, the largest ethnic groups to participate were white, African Caribbean and Asians (mainly Indian and Pakistani from Sikh and Muslim faiths). Within these groups participants further represented diverse social classes, although patterns of class formations became apparent: African Caribbean boys tended to come from working-class backgrounds whereas African boys were predominantly middle-class (pp. 2-3).

A significant finding revealed in this study was that whilst many of the boys articulated statements about gender equality and anti-racist discourse, as promoted through school policies, this rhetoric was not necessarily supported by their everyday actions. This was most evident in the boys' engagement with sexist and racist jokes. Thus, the researchers identified that the boys were capable of maintaining contradictory attitudes and, in doing so, this reflected the *uncertain* nature of masculinity itself. In addition, their analysis also demonstrated that despite ideas pertaining to masculinity appearing cross cultural, such as interests in sport and

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[36] Three of these schools had participated in a previous study conducted by Sharpe (1976) which explored teenage girls' thoughts and reactions on varying aspects of their lives.

music, ethnicity remained a powerful structural influence on constructions of masculine identities in the 1990s. As O'Donnell and Sharpe explained:

> [W]hite English boys identified with the England national football team and even local football teams to an extent that the African-Caribbean boys rarely did. The African-Caribbean boys were much more likely to identify with individual black music or sports stars, or with American basketball in which there is a substantial black presence. For the Pakistani boys it was their internationally successful cricket team that was the favoured source of heroes. Indian boys were probably the most eclectic among the minority ethnic groups in the range of people and cultural practices and symbols with which they found some degree of expression and identity (p. 6).

Therefore by foregrounding the ways in which gender intersects with class and ethnicity, their work established no single dominant definition of masculinity, but rather numerous conceptualisations of masculinities and, as they suggested, is perhaps, 'an indication … that traditional patriarchy is fragmenting' (p. 13). Consequently, this study helps illustrate how young men in contemporary Western society are negotiating their positions in a cultural climate where traditional male privileges are subject to challenge, but simultaneously, change is not occurring as rapidly as some might believe.

On a similar theme Frosh, Phoenix and Pattman (2002) aimed to provide an in depth examination into the 'emerging masculinities' (p. 5) of young men in contemporary society. In order to investigate this notion, 245 boys and 27 girls aged between 11 and 14 were drawn from 12 London secondary schools. These consisted of both private and state schools, four being single-sex (for boys) and eight co-educational. Initially, 45 group interviews (36 single-sex and 9 mixed-sex) were conducted with participants to establish their thoughts and opinions on the subject of 'growing up as a man' (p. 8). From this process, 71 boys[37] participated in unstructured individual interviews undertaken in two stages. In the first interview, boys were encouraged to reflect and expand upon issues raised within the group discussions by providing narrative accounts of their lives. The second interview, as the researchers explain,

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[37] Within this study 78 boys were originally offered the opportunity to participate in a one-to-one interview. The discrepancy was due to student absenteeism or suspension (2002, p. 7).

'explored repetition, contradictions and gaps in the material from the first interview … and offered the respondent the opportunity to reflect and comment on the research process itself' (*ibid*.). Furthermore, 24 girls were interviewed once individually regarding their views on boys, masculinity and gender relations. In doing so, this specifically enabled Frosh, Phoenix and Pattman to not only compare responses provided by boys and girls, but also avoid assuming that certain issues were of exclusive interest to boys. Thus, their use of this multi-method strategy helped facilitate a more holistic exploration of the ways in which masculine identities are constructed through social interaction by employing a 'boy-centred' (p. 4) approach – that is, it granted participants a voice within the research process, thereby attributing them with an active role. However, as Frosh, Phoenix and Pattman stress, the boys' statements were not accepted uncritically as 'transparent' representations of themselves, instead they were analysed using psychoanalytic and social constructionist techniques to reveal how the boys skilfully navigated through 'the gaps of discourse, the contradictions, silences and other absences' (p. 5); and by doing so overcome limitations of more traditional methods which analyse talk as (conscious) articulations of latent conceptualisations of the self.

Within the study a wide range of topics were explored including how boys negotiate the limitations of hegemonic masculinity; boys talking about girls, and girls about boys; the racialisation of masculinity; policing masculinities through homophobia; the construction of masculinities in schooling; and boy's relationships with their parents. The principal findings concerning the manner in which boys performed and structured their masculinities concurred with previous research (Mac an Ghaill, 1994; Connell, 2000), in that it suggested:

1. Boys must maintain their difference from girls (and so avoid doing anything that is seen as the kind of thing girls do).
2. Popular masculinity involves 'hardness', sporting prowess, 'coolness', casual treatment of schoolwork and being adept as 'cussing'.
3. Some boys are 'more masculine' than others. This involves both the racialised and class consciousness (2002, p. 10).

Importantly however, Frosh, Phoenix and Pattman's analysis was able to develop more nuanced understandings on this matter by maintaining, in accordance with O'Donnell and Sharpe (2000), that masculinity must be considered in relation to other structural influences (such as ethnicity and class), which therefore allowed multiple conceptualisations of *masculinities* to emerge. Moreover, by emphasising the performative nature of identity construction (see Butler, 1990), and its production within conflicts between hegemonic forces and personal anxieties, their study helped highlight ellipses and ambiguities seated in formations of masculine identities. As such, Frosh, Phoenix and Pattman were able to infer a number of propositions that contrasted with conventional thinking on boys, including:

1. Boys struggle to find a forum in which they can try out masculine identities which can be differentiated from the 'hegemonic' codes of macho behaviour;
2. Boys often have considerable fun together and on the whole have good relationships with parents;
3. Boys are very aware of their standing as socially and educationally problematic and resent this; and
4. Some boys suffer especially badly from the narrowness of conventional masculinities (2002, pp. 259-260).

In addition they observed that the participants performed different aspects of their masculinity within group and individual contexts. For example, in same-sex group interviews boys presented themselves as loud, humorous and misogynistic, positioning 'girls as weak, pathetic and immature' (p. 111), whereas in mixed group interviews they demonstrated identification with girls' concerns, an example being complaining about competitive sport (p. 138). Furthermore, in the individual interviews boys claimed that they could discuss personal issues 'seriously' (p. 32), such as their relationships with girlfriends, or anxieties about home, pets and bullying. This the researchers claimed produced '"softer" versions of masculinity' (p. 83), in which boys could speak freely about feelings and relations thereby '[refuting] popular notions of boys being emotionally illiterate' (p. 47). Thus, Frosh, Phoenix and Pattman argue 'simply talking about experiences helped many boys to consider what alternative ways of "doing boy" could be available to them' (p. 49).

6.3 Boys' Talk

6.3.1 Heterosexuality, Homophobia and Geeks

The notion that there are multiple ways in which young men 'do male' is evident within the present study, as reflected through boys' diverse conceptualisations of their own identities (see Appendix B). However, in line with previous findings (Connell, 2000; O'Donnell and Sharpe, 2000; Frosh, Phoenix and Pattman, 2002), hegemonic ideals of masculinity remain prevalent throughout these accounts. This is most apparent in statements relating to sexuality, whereby boys had specifically utilised images of women (often naked or scantily dressed) as a means of asserting their heterosexuality[38]:

Interviewer: Let's start with how I see myself …

Brian T1:   Yeah … I like girls [word 'girl' and image of girl in a bikini].

Interviewer: You've also got a picture of a girl there [how I see myself], why did you do that?

Oscar O: Because I fancy her.

Interviewer: Well, the first thing that strikes me is the picture of the girl and you've put 'straight' next to it [how I see myself].

Martin W: Yeah.

Interviewer: Would you like to explain why you put that there and what you are trying to say?

Martin W: That I like girls.

Interviewer: That you like girls?

Martin W: Yeah. Not all girls but most.

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[38] Within the interview extracts participants' names are accompanied by an abbreviation to indicate which school they attend: C (Cantell School, Southampton); K (Kelmscott School, London); M (Millbrook Community School, Southampton), O (Oaklands Community School, Southampton); R (Regents Park Girls' School, Southampton); T1 (Twynham School, Dorset, Group One); T2 (Twynham School, Dorset, Group Two); and W (Willowfield School, London).

Martin's work is of significant interest as during the collage-making task itself, he had explicitly stated insecurity regarding his own sense of self-identity and expressed concerns about exposing this.[39] As a consequence, Martin delayed engaging with the exercise and on commencing, used it as an opportunity to 'have a laugh': deliberately seeking images that he believed would gain other boys' acceptance (for example, cars, music, women and sport). Therefore, within this context, Martin's overemphasis of his heterosexuality can be read as a *performance*, in which he ultimately seeks to win approval of others through allowing his behaviour to be policed by peers (Buckingham, 1993c). Furthermore, his comment stating he likes 'Not all girls but most' importantly indicates the exclusionary nature of patriarchal ideals, in its suggestion that only certain women are deemed an appropriate focus for desire – these (mainly) being white, slim, blonde-haired and blue-eyed (see also Appendix A.4.7; A.6.3; A.8.3). This point is also exemplified in the case of Joel – a white participant – who represents his heterosexuality by conforming to such notions (Appendix A.7.2), and yet paradoxically articulates a sexual preference for non-white women:

Interviewer:	OK and the other thing is women [how I see myself]. Now you've used women who are not wearing an awful lot//
Joel T2:	//yeah.
Interviewer:	Is it women and girls in general that you like, or can you give me an example of any women that you think are particularly nice?
Joel T2:	It's not just any group because you can get proper ugly people, like attractive women.
Interviewer:	So who do you class as an attractive woman?
Joel T2:	Jennifer Lopez and people like that.
Interviewer:	Can you give me a couple of other names maybe?
Joel T2:	I don't know loads of people.
Interviewer:	Like?
Joel T2:	Mariah Carey. I don't know people like that.
Interviewer:	What is it about them that you think makes them attractive and appealing to you?
Joel T2:	The way they look.
Interviewer:	Who do you think isn't attractive?

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[39] These concerns were expressed to the teacher and researcher. Both parties reassured Martin and encouraged him to have an attempt at the task.

Joel T2:	I don't know, er well it just, not like fat people, er.
Interviewer:	Or are there any famous people that are described as pretty that you think, no they're not, I don't think they are//
Joel T2:	//yeah Madonna I don't reckon.
Interviewer:	What about Paris Hilton?
Joel T2:	Yeah she's alright I guess.
Interviewer:	She's alright but she's not on the same level as Jennifer Lopez or Mariah Carey?
Joel T2:	Yeah yeah.
Interviewer:	What about Beyonce//
Joel T2:	//yeah she's good looking.

Thus, Joel's position arguably remains grounded in the fetishisation of the 'Other' as sexual object predominant within hegemonic discourse (see Hall, 1997). However, this mode of thinking was not solely restricted to women, but noticeable in the racialisation of black boys' masculinities as 'sexy' and 'cool' (Majors and Billson, 1992; Back, 1994; Sewell, 1997). These ideas are evident in the following comments made by a black participant:

Interviewer:	What about these pictures [images of Beyonce and Lucy Pinder] here? Why have you placed these here [how I think other people see me]?
Andre W:	Because that's how my friends say they see me. Someone who, like if they've got a magazine with girls in it then they'll call me and show me because they say that one day I'm going to grow up to be a porn star or something like that.
Interviewer:	Is that how you feel?
Andre W:	I'm not sure.

For another white boy, the imposition of an active sexuality prompted an equally ambivalent response:

Interviewer:	And what about the picture of this girl [how I think other people see me]?
Jason C:	Richard my best mate he says I'm obsessed by girls.
Interviewer:	You're obsessed?

Jason C:	Yeah he says.
Interviewer:	And are you?
Jason C:	Um, I don't know, I'm not sure.

Indeed, for many boys discussions about girls or sexuality resulted in feelings of discomfort and uncertainty and, as Buckingham (1993c) has suggested, were never fully expanded upon due to the perceived threat of 'putting themselves at risk' (p. 103). Instead, a common strategy employed to disrupt and halt these conversations was laughter:

Interviewer:	Can you explain what pictures you've used and what the pictures mean to you?
Alfie W:	… I done this picture of people kissing and stuff because I thought (starts laughing).
	…
Alfie W:	And again I've just put another woman on it with a laptop.
Interviewer:	Why is the woman there?
Alfie W:	Everyone was doing it (laughing).

Interviewer:	And you've got the word 'sexy' and the picture of the woman//
Mark O:	//don't know just put it there.
Interviewer:	You just put it there. So if you were going to use some words to describe//
Mark O:	//I think I'm sexy, that's how I see myself, as sexy boy (laughing).
Interviewer:	So if you were going to use some words to describe how you see yourself, what words would you use apart from sexy?
Mark O:	I don't know (laughing).
Interviewer:	What type of person do you think you are? How do you see yourself?
Mark O:	Don't know (laughing).

Similarly, the use of humour as a method for deflecting embarrassment and awkwardness about such issues emerged:

Interviewer:	You've also got a picture of a girl here, why have you put her there?

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Adrian O:	I don't know, 'cause I thought that was quite funny and plus I fancy her.
Interviewer:	And what about, you've got a picture of boobs there, what does that represent?
Jake T1:	I just thought I'd be pretty funny, I put it on.
Interviewer:	Is that the only reason you put them on there, because you thought it would be funny?
Jake T1:	Yeah.

Whilst it is important to acknowledge that humour and laughter were utilised strategically as a means of obstructing dialogue on sensitive matters then, the possibility further motives may actually lie behind these responses should not be dismissed. For example, boys could have been deliberately engaging with the task in a playful and ironic way, using it as an opportunity to mock the activity, situation and/or researcher. Moreover, the inclusion of certain images – such as women's breasts – may imply a *knowingness* by boys who aimed to indicate their awareness regarding objectifying women in a problematic manner, and thus the exercise was transformed into a 'joke'.

Despite a number of participants arguably demonstrating an ironic awareness concerning attitudes towards women, this playfulness did not extend beyond heterosexual discourse. This point is best illustrated by Carl, who parodies his own 'blokeishness' and recognises ambiguities in his relations with women (fearing he may be seen as 'a perv'), but reverts to highlighting the validity of possessing hegemonic masculine attributes:

Carl W:	I used the word 'bloke' because I'm quite like, I speak in a cockney way.
Interviewer:	That's alright I speak in a cockney way.
Carl W:	Yeah, that's why I used it (laughing).
Interviewer:	Now, I've noticed on this [how I see myself] you've also got 'blimey she's fit' next to a nude woman. What does that mean and represent?

Carl W:	Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes. Because, well the blimey bit was supposed to be added to the body bit, the cockney bit, and the words are supposed to be because, that's something I like (laughing).
Interviewer:	Do you think that the 'bloke' thing and the nude woman, if other people see you that way do you think they see that as positive or negative?
	…
Carl W:	Other people would see it as positive and other people would see it as negative, it's like 50/50 really.
Interviewer:	What would influence what they thought; whether they thought it was a good thing or a bad thing? What do you think?
Carl W:	People might see it as a bad thing because like, I don't know, they might take it the wrong way as if I'm a perv maybe, but in some other way people would see it as me being straight, so that's the positive.

Hence, for some boys the centrality of heterosexuality remained fundamental to their constructions of masculine identities, and whereas no overt hostility towards homosexuality was manifested, undercurrents of homophobia prevailed:

Interviewer:	OK let's move onto this side, how I think other people see me …
Richard M:	… I also have a picture of Dafydd Thomas [*Little Britain* character] because he's gay and people sometimes see me as gay.
Interviewer:	Do you think people don't really see who you are, or how you really feel about yourself?
Keith T1:	Um, I don't know really because, well, the reason these two sides are different is because how people think and see me, I just sometimes act and talk to people, whenever I do a few things that they either decry me as one of those things [weird and freaky].
Interviewer:	Does that upset you?
Keith T1:	Not really because I know everybody is different and that doesn't worry me, but sometimes it does tick me off when other people call me gay because I'm not gay and it just really annoys me.
Interviewer:	So they mean gay as in homosexual?
Keith T1:	Yeah.

In the above instances, derogatory usages of the word 'gay' were levelled against boys who came to be perceived as not conforming to hegemonic masculine ideals: Richard for being overweight and unfashionable, and Keith for being a 'loner', disliking football and distancing himself from classmates (see Duncan, 1999). Importantly however, Keith problematises this notion in the following statement:

Interviewer: Do you think being gay is a negative thing?

Keith T1:   No because it doesn't matter if you're gay or not, you're just normal and it's basically your choice.

Therefore, in acknowledging homosexuality as a legitimate 'lifestyle choice', Keith arguably manages to subvert both the currency of gay as an insult and the dominance of hegemonic masculinity, through electing not to be as rigorously policed by his peers (Buckingham, 1993c). On a similar theme, some boys who displayed an interest in academic work were targeted for not complying with conventional conceptions of masculinity and categorised as 'geeks'. These boys however refuted negative connotations associated with the term, rather they subverted 'geekiness' by equating it with cleverness, enabling them to construct an alternative masculinity through their assertion of intellectual 'superiority' over other boys (see Redman and Mac an Ghaill, 1997):

Interviewer: Do you think that people are right to call you geeky?

Jack M: Yeah.

Interviewer: They are?

Jack M: Because I like to read.

Interviewer: So you think reading is geeky?

Jack M: No I don't think reading is geeky, I think it's for smart people.

6.3.2 Sport

A pervasive theme to emerge in boys' discussions, similar to previous studies' findings (O'Donnell and Sharpe, 2000; Frosh, Phoenix and Pattman, 2002), was the integral role sport played within their everyday lives. For the boys, football in particular came to function as a cultural resource through which they constructed their

masculine identities; this was achieved not only through physical engagement with the sport itself, but also by participating in associated discourses. At its most apparent level, sport was used to signify ideas regarding activeness, and in doing so, aimed to denote the concept of an *active* masculinity[40]:

Interviewer:	What are you trying to express about how you see yourself?
Zak K:	Well over there [image of trainers]//
Interviewer:	//the trainers//
Zak K:	//yeah I'm trying to express that I'm a sporty kind of person, I love sports (pointing to image of a football).

Interviewer:	Do you want to start with how I see myself?
Azhar K:	… I like to play football and sporty, I like boxing and I'm sporty type of person, I like sports so I watch sports people.

Furthermore, for some boys the display of activeness was literally taken to an 'extreme':

Interviewer:	What about this image of a person windsurfing?
Carl W:	Well, I do a lot of extreme sports. I go down the skate park a lot to do skateboarding, and when it's summertime I go down to Swanage to do a bit of surfing and weight boarding and stuff like that.

Interviewer:	Do you want to go through the pictures?
Christopher T2:	OK well I've got lots of like sporty type like skiing and roller-skating and stuff 'cause I like to do a lot of activities, and not just mainly football and cricket, like extreme sports, and this the 'Danger Rocks' sign that's sort of like the surfy style but I'm quite dangerous, I'm willing to do anything if you know what I mean.

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[40] Notions of active masculinity were further represented by many boys through the use of images from action films and computer games (e.g. Appendix A.1.4; A.1.9; A.4.15; A.7.12; A.8.4).

In emphasising this notion, boys demonstrated the importance and personal value they placed upon this ideal, as sporting prowess was considered to be rewarded with individual esteem:

Interviewer: Going back to how you think other people see you, what do you think others think when they look at you and see someone who is really into football?

Andrew O: They see me and my mates and they think 'oh they like football' because sometimes they see me and my mates playing.

Interviewer: Do you think other people think that's a good thing or a bad thing that you are into football?

Andrew O: Good thing.

Interviewer: Why?

Andrew O: Because you're out playing sports.

Interviewer: So that's a good thing?

Andrew O: Yeah.

Thus, discussions about sport appeared to provide the boys with an arena in which they could exhibit positive facets of their identities:

Malik K: … and the football, I like football I like playing it, the football and the ball are together, and I see myself as a good football player.

Mark O: I've used this goalie 'cause everyone sees me as a goalie and I'm good and this one [image of a goalkeeper attempting to save a shot] is another goalie because I'm good at saving penalties.
…

Interviewer: And you've got some basketball players there//

Mark O: //because I like basketball and like another reason of how I see myself, too good, not quite good.

Interviewer: OK, so let's start with how I see myself.

Darren O: Yeah. People think I'm good at football [images of football players].

Interviewer: Who is that [picture of a football player]?

Darren O: Fowler.

Interviewer:	Robbie?
Darren O:	Yeah, yeah.
Interviewer:	And he plays for?
Darren O:	The man plays for Man City.
Interviewer:	Is that the team you support?
Darren O:	No.
Interviewer:	Why have you chosen Robbie Fowler?
Darren O:	'Cause he's a good football player.
Interviewer:	Are there any qualities that he has as a person that you share//
Darren O:	//he's got skills.
Interviewer:	What skills?
Darren O:	The best football skills.

Interestingly, boys from middle-class schools attributed a further dimension to active masculinity, which focused on the principle of competitiveness. This may stem from the behaviour of these boys being more strictly regulated within classroom environments due to an onus on academic achievement (Connell, 1989), whilst sport in such schools, as James Messerschmidt (1994) observes, provides 'an environment for the construction of masculinity that celebrates toughness and endurance' (p. 87):

Interviewer:	And then you've got these trainers and the basketball player and is that a sports logo?
Jake T1:	Yeah.
Interviewer:	What do they represent?
Jake T1:	Well I like sport a lot, just saying that I like it a lot really.
Interviewer:	Right and what is it about sport that you like?
Jake T1:	Um like the competition and the physical side of it.
Interviewer:	So you like competition?
Jake T1:	Yeah.
Interviewer:	Is that because, is it more the taking part or is it about the winning for you?
Jake T1:	Um, it's good; I like it if I win.

Interviewer:	What is it about football that you like?
Joel T2:	I don't know, I just support football really and I just like playing in a team.

…

Interviewer:	When you play football is it the taking part that's important or is it the winning that is important to you?
Joel T2:	The taking part, it's not just about winning is it really, but yeah, it's good to win.

In contrast to the ethos of competitiveness held by middle-class boys, one participant from a socially and economically disadvantaged background saw sport as offering opportunities for personal development through empowerment (an issue that was latent in similar boys' accounts). Jason's attraction to boxing was motivated by his belief that the sport would enable him to control and release frustrations as well as anxieties in a positive context. Boxing, therefore, constituted a constructive strategy which allowed this boy to negotiate his masculinity within the framework of sporting aspirations:

Interviewer:	OK, what about this picture of the boxer?
Jason C:	Because I like boxing and I've always wanted to be a boxer.
Interviewer:	What is it about boxing that you like?
Jason C:	To just take all your anger out and like respond powerfully, it's really good, and then afterwards you're really calm.
Interviewer:	But is it taking your anger out on a person or just being able to take your anger out that you like?
Jason C:	Just get my anger out that's better.
Interviewer:	Just get your anger out?
Jason C:	Yeah.

Sports' ability to provide aspirations for boys is further illustrated by Steve, whose identification with wrestlers as role models indicates his desire to conform to hegemonic ideals of masculinity – a point reinforced by him rejecting the 'feminine' sport of gymnastics:

Interviewer:	What is it about wrestling that you like?
Steve O:	I just like all the moves and some of the wrestlers.
Interviewer:	What wrestlers do you like?
Steve O:	Triple H I used to like The Rock, Ray Mistro.

Interviewer:	What is it about them though that you like?
Steve O:	Because Ray Mistro, because he's athletic and that's what I would like to be.
Interviewer:	So do you think that you are athletic?
Steve O:	In some stuff, not gymnastics.
Interviewer:	So do you aspire to be like them?
Steve O:	Yeah.

Developing this theme, and in accordance with O'Donnell and Sharpe (2000), ethnicity appeared to exert a degree of influence on sources of identification for some ethnic minority boys:

Interviewer:	I just want to go back to the sports people, you've used Amir Khan [how I see myself], do you think there are any qualities about him that you share?
Azhar K:	Yeah he's Asian and a boxer and that's what he does so, I like boxing yeah.

Interviewer:	Are there any qualities about Jermaine Defoe that you think are similar to how you see yourself?
Andre W:	I think we both score, I don't know, goals and we're both black.
Interviewer:	Do you identify with him because he is black?
Andre W:	Yeah, but it's not just that.

Significantly though, it should be noted that within ethnic minority boys' discussions about sport, the role of ethnicity in shaping masculinities was not as prevalent as some commentators (O'Donnell and Sharpe, 2000; Frosh, Phoenix and Pattman, 2002) have suggested – implied by Andre's qualifier 'Yeah, but it's not just that'. Therefore, despite being given the opportunity to represent and articulate such concerns, the majority of ethnic minority boys chose not to.[41] In doing so, this raises the problematic issue about whether ethnicity impacts upon ethnic minority children's constructions of their identities in manners previously conceptualised (a notion that will be discussed further in Chapter 7). Nevertheless, a wide body of research has

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[41] Within this study, the examples provided are the only instances in which this took place.

observed how 'blackness' is perceived as indicating a form of 'super-masculinity' by many white boys (Majors and Billson, 1992; Back, 1994; Sewell, 1997). For example, in his study which explored 'how black boys survive modern schooling', Tony Sewell (1997) states that black males are visualised in popular discourse as the exemplar bearers of 'masculine' traits, possessing toughness, sexual attractiveness, style and 'authenticity'. Thus, he notes the contradiction that black boys are seen to embody all the key attributes of hegemonic masculinity, whilst at the same time, being positioned as a threat to these same norms:

> Black boys are Angels and Devils in British (and American) schools. They are the heroes of a street fashion culture that dominates most of our inner cities. On the other hand they experience a disproportionate amount of punishment in our schools compared to all other groups (p. ix).

Expanding upon this dual positioning of black males, O'Donnell and Sharpe (2000) further claim that boys 'borrow' elements of other ethnic groups they construe as attractive, and to which they aspire:

> Where heroes and style icons are 'borrowed' from another ethnic group, it is usually because the borrowing group itself aspires to possess the qualities expressed by them. Thus, elements in the related styles of 'black macho' (being hard), 'black flash' (being at the cutting edge of fashion – 'sharp') and 'black cool' (being 'laid back' – in effortless control) have been adopted widely by other ethnic young. The motive for imitation is more appropriation than admiration or identification, though these do sometimes occur (p. 3).

These points are clearly demonstrated by Aaron (a white participant), whose appropriations are made exclusively from black culture – in terms of fashion, music and sport – through which he aims to construct his own masculinity in terms of a 'super-masculinity' that, for him, is to be found in 'blackness'[42]:

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[42] Indeed, within this study a number of white boys utilised images of 'blackness' to exploit the notion of 'super-masculinity' (e.g. Appendix A.1.4; A.1.11; A.4.2; A.6.6; A.7.2). Interestingly, no white or black boys used images relating to Asian culture. This therefore arguably appears to support previous work (Cohen, 1997; Connolly, 1998) which has suggested that white and black boys do not draw upon such representations as they associate 'Asianess' with effeminacy and weakness. However, more recent shifts in the representation

Interviewer:	Do you want to start with how I see myself?
Aaron O:	I play basketball a lot, I'm quite good at it, I love like rap Sean Paul music sort of thing.
Interviewer:	What is it about rap music and Sean Paul that you like?
Aaron O:	It's just its good.
Interviewer:	Is there anything about Sean Paul, apart from his music that you like? Is there anything about his personality//
Aaron O:	//yeah like I like clothes they wear and all that with their clothes and stuff like that.
Interviewer:	So you like their fashion?
Aaron O:	Yeah.
Interviewer:	What about on the other side, on how you think other people see you?
Aaron O:	This is good basketball player, people see me as a good basketball player.
Interviewer:	You've got basketball on both sides, what does basketball represent? Apart from being a good player, is there anything else about the sport that//
Aaron O:	//well they wear like the stuff for trainers and all that and clothes they wear shorts they wear.
Interviewer:	So do you think that's quite a fashionable look?
Aaron O:	Yeah.

This same issue is less overtly illustrated by Keith, who is ostracised (being labelled 'gay', see pp. 117-118) for his dislike of football – a principal arena for the construction of hegemonic masculinity – despite his interest in some sports. In this instance, he 'borrows' from Chinese culture in order to construct an 'alternative' masculinity: representing his even-temperedness through the 'yin-yang' symbol and actively participating in martial arts. For Keith, this sport provides him with a physical means of protection against bullies and, as with other boys, a metaphorical defence for his own conception of masculinity:

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of Asian boys from passive and hard-working to militant, aggressive religious fundamentalists (Saeed, 2004) may further account for why the white and black boys did not utilise images of 'Asianess', and might demonstrate their desire to disassociate themselves from these negative (Asian) attributes.

Interviewer:	So let's start with how I see myself.
Keith T1:	Well I used the yin-yang sign for balanced because most people would punch other people for insulting them but I don't, I keep my temper under control so that's why I'm balanced.
Interviewer:	And you've also put here that you do martial arts.
Keith T1:	Yeah, I do karate and self-defence so if anybody tries to attack me I can defend myself.

6.3.2.1 Girls and Sport

Within the interviews, although girls did not engage in discussions about sport to any great depth, some of their comments warrant a brief mention here. Ostensibly, for many girls the use of sporting images appeared to reflect their romantic associations with individual players as well as women's function in 'supportive' roles, and thereby promoted, in contrast to the boys' activeness, ideas of a passive femininity:

Interviewer:	Who is this picture of?
Polly R:	Theirry Henry.
Interviewer:	Is it because you like Arsenal that you used him?
Polly R:	No, I like him as well.
Interviewer:	In what way?
Polly R:	In another way.

Interviewer:	OK and what is 'Beattie' [word]?
Jackie M:	A football player.
Interviewer:	And what is it about him?
Jackie M:	I just like him.

Michelle C:	I've used a picture of a Liverpool football team because I see myself as quite a supportive person towards the team.

However, many of these girls were also adamant about emphasising their active participation in sport:

Lorna O: … in this picture [image of a cricket player] I see myself as a sporty sort of person always playing sport.

Interviewer: … you've got two girls playing//
Kendra C: //yeah 'cause I like playing sport …

Lucy T1:   I'm also I'm sporty so I put a sports person on to show that.

Helen T2:   OK, I put sport on there 'cause I like play sport and I like sport.

In addition, and similar to the boys, some girls found sources of identification and aspiration in sport:

Carmel O: … I've got Ronaldo and a couple of pictures of other footballers I look up to because I always see myself as inspirational trying to get my own goals and because I love football … I've got Sean Wright-Phillips because I think that sometimes I want to be like him 'cause he's done so much with his life, he got adopted and he doesn't really know his other dad and like I don't see my dad often and he's been with other people and I'm with someone now different like my mum and her boyfriend, so I've been with quite a bit of people in my life.

Interviewer: You've also got a picture here of a lady playing football.
Ellie T2:   Yeah that's Hope Powell the manager of the girls' England team.
Interviewer: Why have you used her?
Ellie T2:   Because I like to play football and I want to be in the England team.
Interviewer: So do you identify or respect her, or see her as a role model?
Ellie T2:   Yeah.
Interviewer: What about this [image of the Olympic symbol]?
Ellie T2:   I put a picture of the Olympics, I drew that because I like sport and I want to be in the Olympics one day.

The above discussions therefore suggest that the girls did not embrace prescribed notions of passive femininity, but actively challenged these assumptions through their involvement with sport. This position is clearly articulated by the following

participants who recognise gender inequalities and reject the imposition of such passivity:

Interviewer: Do you want to go through the images?

Keira T1:   Um yeah well it's not very girlie obviously but a lot of it is like, I do a lot of motor sport and that and I play a lot of games and I'm also in the army cadets.

Sadie T1:   … I did that image [image of a female footballer] 'cause I love football, I think that girls who do football are really trying sort of thing, 'cause the girls are going round doing football even though the boys sort of say 'oh no you can't do that 'cause it's a boys' sport'.

6.4 Femininity

The preceding analysis begins to highlight that conceptions of masculinity and femininity within modern Western societies have been constructed in contrary ways. This point is succinctly summarised by David Gauntlett (2002) who explains that 'Masculinity is seen as the state of "being a man", which is currently somewhat in flux [whereas] femininity … is not necessarily seen as the state of "being a woman"; instead, it's perceived more as a stereotype of a woman's role from the past' (pp. 9-10). He states that whilst men continue to invest their identities within a framework of masculinity – despite the term adapting in response to social changes – women are less inclined to locate their identities in accordance with conventional notions of femininity. Gauntlett suggests that for women this position may be attributable to a feminist agenda which did not specifically seek to redefine femininity but disavowed the concept, as it connoted passivity. Hence he claims traditional 'femininity is not a core value for women today' (p. 10)[43], rather enacting the 'feminine' constitutes a *performance* which women can adopt – possibly in order to achieve an objective, or perhaps in their pursuit of pleasure. Importantly however, Gauntlett asserts this does

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[43] Gauntlett supports this notion by noting that school girls are no longer perceived as docile within education, due to them out-performing boys in terms of academic success; declining sales of Barbie dolls indicates that such a compliant image of women only appeals to very young girls; whilst the advent and success of assertive 'girl power' role models in popular culture signals a decisive move away from traditional femininity (2002, p. 10).

not imply that orthodox modes of thinking about femininity are redundant in contemporary society, as exemplified through assertions such as 'she exudes femininity'; instead, he observes that these usages of the term acknowledge 'the broadly "optional" role which femininity has today' (*ibid.*). To demonstrate this point further, Gauntlett refers to discussions on Madonna (e.g. Lloyd, 1993; Schwichtenberg, 1993) which have illustrated how she foregrounds the performative nature of femininity as 'masquerade'. For example, E. Ann Kaplan (1993) proposed that '[Madonna's] image usefully adopts one mask after another to expose the fact that there is no "essential" self and therefore no essential feminine but only cultural constructions' (p. 160). In consideration of these factors, he therefore maintains that traditional femininity is not an essential characteristic of the modern female subject, but one strategy employed amongst many within their everyday lives.

Developing this theme Beverley Skeggs (1997) conducted a longitudinal ethnographic study over twelve years with 83 British working-class women from North West England, in order to reinstate the importance of class analysis within discussions of gender, identity and power (see also Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody, 2001). Significantly in this work she identified that her participants' relationship with femininity was highly complex, as whilst they rejected notions of passivity associated with the feminine role, these women aspired to the 'respectability' it afforded. Furthermore, as Skeggs states, the principle of women's 'divine composure' was discarded in favour of them 'having a laugh': 'They had knowledge and competencies to construct feminine performances but this was far removed from *being* feminine. They usually "did" femininity when they thought it was necessary' (1997, p. 116, original emphasis). Indeed she explains, in the absence of alternatives these women felt compelled to adopt femininity as a means of attaining economic and cultural advantage. As such, for the female participants, femininity proved to be a locus of both pleasure and distress:

> Their forays into femininity were immensely contradictory. Femininity offered a space for hedonism, autonomy, camaraderie, pleasure and fun whilst simultaneously regulating and generating insecurities. The women simulated and dissimulated but did not regard themselves as feminine … Aspects of femininity are, however, something

which they have learnt to perform and from which they can sometimes take pleasure (*ibid*.).

6.4.1 New Sexualities and Popular Feminism

Within feminist research the issue of pleasure has been fundamental to reconceptualising popular culture in new ways (e.g. Modleski, 1984; Ang, 1985; Radway, 1987; Geraghty, 1991). This is particularly evident in studies relating to women's magazines (e.g. Winship, 1987; Hermes, 1995), where notions about femininity and the construction of (new) female subjectivities have been explored, most prominently by Angela McRobbie (1982, 1991, 1994, 1999, 2000). In contrast with her early work on *Jackie* magazine (1982) – which suggested that its content functioned to generate 'an ideology which deals with the construction of teenage femininity' (1991, p. 82)[44] – McRobbie reformulated this position in response to subsequent work that has demonstrated readers do not accept and/or produce meanings from magazines in a straightforward and simplistic manner (e.g. Frazer, 1987; Hermes, 1995; Currie 1999). As McRobbie states 'Frazer (1987) demonstrated (as did Beezer *et al*. 1986) my own earlier work about *Jackie* magazine wrongly assumed that ideology actually worked in a mechanical, even automatic kind of way' (1999, p. 50). In acknowledgement of this, she observes that early relations between academic feminism and popular women's genres have been marked by a polarisation of feminism on the one hand, and femininity on the other (p. 47; see also Stuart, 1990; Brunsdon, 1991). Moreover, although McRobbie notes that such standpoints continue to have theoretical currency (e.g. Walkerdine, 1990; Jackson, 1996) she maintains this opposition has 'loosened' in more recent years, as exemplified through women's magazines exhibiting an engagement with feminist values and ideas. According to McRobbie this became most apparent within magazines for older teenage girls during the late 1980s and early 1990s, when the demise of romance signalled a seismic shift away from conceptions of a docile femininity and superseded by 'a much more

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[44] McRobbie's (1982) study of the teenage girls' magazine *Jackie* aimed to reveal the latent ideological agenda and content that she believed lay behind its innocent façade. Within her analysis, McRobbie highlighted that the magazine's content focused girls' attention on personal and emotional areas, and discussed relations between boys in romantic and depoliticised terms. Thus, for McRobbie, *Jackie* was significant as it was perceived as preparing girls for their adult roles and, in doing so, she claimed that the magazine had a shaping effect on girls' development into women.

assertive and "fun-seeking" female subjectivity (1999, p. 50). Thus, she introduced the concept of 'new sexualities' to refer to 'images and texts which break discursively with the conventions of feminine behaviour by representing girls as crudely lustful young women' (*ibid.*).

In her analysis McRobbie identifies that the editorial style of teenage girls' magazines deliberately parodies tabloids and are therefore steeped in irony; for example, punning headlines such as 'Yabba Dabba Drool: Men to Make Your Bed Rock' (p. 53). As a consequence, she suggests that readers' engagement with the content of such texts is taken lightly and not too seriously. For McRobbie then, this strategy facilitates the production of a 'new form of ironic femininity' (*ibid.*), which importantly enables readers to engage playfully with conventional feminine customs, whilst avoiding the subordinate status imposed by orthodox gender roles. Hence, by highlighting the extensive use of irony, parody and self-mockery, she argues that 'the whole culture of femininity becomes more transparently self-reflexive' (*ibid.*) within the pages of teenage girls' magazines. Furthermore, McRobbie claims this issue is compounded as these magazines have assimilated feminist concepts or, at the very least, address its concerns:

> [T]he place of feminism inside the magazines remains ambiguous. It has presence mostly in the advice columns and in the overall message to girls to be assertive, confident and supportive of each other. It is also present in how girls are encouraged to insist on being treated as equals by men and boyfriends, and on being able to say no when they want to (p. 55).

In addition, although McRobbie accepts that such magazines continue to operate within a heterosexual matrix (p. 57), she vehemently opposes feminist critiques which imply these texts perpetuate the subordination of women (e.g. Walkerdine, 1990; Jackson, 1996). Indeed, McRobbie stresses these arguments neglect that the magazines are not only consumed, but *produced* by women with no intrinsic interest in maintaining patriarchy. Instead, the active dismissal of passive femininity and licence to discuss desire openly constitutes a feminist advancement, as she states:

For writers like Stevi Jackson the magazines only provide girls with the same old staples of heterosexual sex, body anxieties and 'the old idea that girls' sexuality is being attractive and alluring' (Jackson, 1996: 57). So she is saying that there are no great advances here. What I would say in contrast is that feminism exists as a productive tension in these pages (1999, p. 55).

Elaborating on this theme, McRobbie suggests that young women have a 'desire to be provocative to feminism' (*ibid.*) since it has come to be recognised as 'both common sense and a sign of female adult authority' (p. 56). In doing so, she observes 'Young women want to prove that they can do without feminism as a political movement while enjoying the rewards of its success in culture and in everyday life' (*ibid.*). Moreover, she asserts that 'This dynamic of generational antagonism has been overlooked by professional feminists, particularly those in the academy, with the result that the political effectivity of young women is more or less ignored' (p. 126). Importantly however, McRobbie argues that the discourse of contemporary women's magazines can be read as an expression of what she terms 'popular feminism':

To these young women official feminism is something that belongs to their mothers' generation. They have to develop their own language for dealing with sexual inequality, and if they do this through a raunchy language of 'shagging, snogging and having a good time', then perhaps the role this plays is not unlike the sexually explicit manifestoes found in the early writing of figures like Germaine Greer and Sheila Rowbotham. The key difference here is that this language is now found in the mainstream of commercial culture – not out there in the margins of the 'political underground' (*ibid.*).

In view of these factors McRobbie raises a number of propositions that feminism must consider in order to establish a more productive dialogue with 'ordinary' women (p. 56), and stresses 'The danger for feminism is that it remains unwilling to recognise that there are now many ways of being a woman or girl in contemporary society' (p. 131). [45]

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[45] McRobbie's (1999) position has been criticised by a number of feminist commentators including Whelehan (2000) who states 'There may well be power in the use of irony and playfulness to argue a "feminist" position, but once the rebellion is over, there is a need to identify what connects or separates different wings of feminism' (p. 80). However,

6.4.2 Girl Power and Postfeminism

During the 1990s the prominence of 'popular feminism' within contemporary culture was made manifest by the emergence of a new discourse, most famously identified in the Spice Girls' catchphrase 'girl power'. For writers such as Sheila Whiteley (2000) the Spice Girls represented a significant 'challenge to the dominance of lad culture … [by introducing] the language of independence to a willing audience of pre- and teenage girls' (p. 215).[46] She further suggests that although feminist rhetoric was familiar throughout society in the 1990s, the image of feminism was demonised within mainstream media and constructed as a militant movement hostile towards men and sex (see Faludi, 1991). Importantly Whiteley claims that this position was contested by the Spice Girls, who turned it on its head[47]:

> The impact of the Spice Girls … was to provide a new twist to the feminist discourse of power and subjectivity. By telling their fans that feminism is necessary and fun, that it is part of everydayness, and that girls should challenge rather than accept traditional constraints – 'What you looking at boy? Can you handle a Spice Girl?' – they sold the 1990s as 'a girl's world' and presented the 'future as female' (2000, pp. 216-217).

The girl power ethos, as Christine Griffin (2004) explains, was a celebration of independence, self-belief, valuing female friendships (above and beyond the pressure to get, or be concerned about, a boyfriend) and 'appeared to promise an all-female world of fun, sassiness and dressing up to please your (girl) self' (p. 33). In this formulation she states that the concept of girl power exploits and reiterates facets of earlier feminist discourse and, in doing so, has come to be situated as 'postfeminist'. For Griffin, girl power rests on the assumption that girls are boys' equals, and should therefore be regarded as such. However, she asserts that this supposition *assumes* that

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Whelehan's claim appears to be based on a fundamental misreading of McRobbie's argument as it ignores her calls for feminism establishing a greater dialogue with women.

[46] This 'language of independence' was most clearly articulated by Destiny's Child in their song 'Independent Women Part 1', which stressed the importance of women's financial self-sufficiency: 'All the honeys makin' money, I depend on me'.

[47] The importance of feminism was expressed by the Spice Girls (1997) themselves, who stated (albeit problematically) that 'feminism has become a dirty word. Girl Power is just a nineties way of saying it. We can give feminism a kick up the arse. Women can be so powerful when they show solidarity' (p. 48).

girls are *already* equal to boys. Thus Griffin maintains that the world itself is instantaneously configured as intrinsically 'postfeminist' (Wilkinson, 1999), in which feminism may be considered redundant and outmoded, and where overt political challenges to boys or patriarchal systems is no longer required of girls (Sharpe, 2001). Consequently, she concludes:

> It is not so much a question of whether Girl Power is or is not feminist, but that the discourse(s) through which 'girl power' is constituted operates to represent feminism as simultaneously self-evident and redundant, thereby silencing feminist voices through a discourse that appears as 'pro-feminist' (2004, p. 33).

Griffin's work therefore highlights contradictions inherent in girl power/postfeminist discourse (see also McRobbie, 2000, 2001, 2004), and such issues within feminist circles have become the focus of more vociferous attacks. For example, in her discussion of the Spice Girls Imelda Whelehan (2000) states '*Girl Power!* is a "manifesto" in the loosest sense in that although it contains nothing resembling a political programme, it encourages young women to follow their own aspirations and seek self-definition by example' (p. 48, original emphasis). Nevertheless, her analysis reduces the notion of girl power to a capitalist enterprise in which young girls are encouraged to imitate their role models through the consumption of commercial products. In doing so, she suggests the rhetoric of 'individualism' and 'diversity' expressed by the band is not disseminated to their fans. Furthermore, for Whelehan, the Spice Girls promoted an image of femininity located in (sexual) attractiveness, as she states:

> Role models are normally those who inspire to excel in their chosen field; but this homage that manifests itself as imitation does nothing to dismantle the association of female success with a very rigid definition of femininity. Worse still, it does nothing to reassure young girls about their bodies; perversely, starvation becomes a message of empowerment to these young people as they make the association between stardom and skinniness (p. 49).

In light of the issues raised by Griffin (2004) and Whelehan (2000), it would appear that feminism has cause for concern. However, Ann Brooks (1997) problematises

such propositions arguing that postfeminism is not apolitical, claiming that it 'is about the conceptual shift within feminism from debates around equality to a focus on debates around difference. It is fundamentally about, not a depoliticisation of feminism, but a political shift in feminism's conceptual and theoretical agenda' (p. 4). These debates around difference, she explains, importantly acknowledge that the category 'woman' is not a homogenous group, but divided along class, culture, 'race' and sexuality lines. As such, Brooks notes that the collective 'woman' as an identity becomes destablised.

The criticisms raised specifically by Whelehan (2000), mentioned above, are contradicted in the work of Bettina Fritzsche (2004), whose analysis sought to investigate whether 'pop feminist' bands – such as the Spice Girls – could provide forms of empowerment for teenage women and young girls. To facilitate this she conducted interviews with girls aged between 10 and 17 years old from a number of rural and urban locations in Germany, focusing 'not on the girls' reflections about the band, but rather on their actions as fans' (p. 156). Importantly, Fritzsche discovered that her participants identified with the Spice Girls for a variety of reasons including: imitating band members allowed girls 'to negotiate social expectations about the way girls are expected to move and display their bodies' (p. 157); the promotion of self-confidence was appealing to shy girls (*ibid.*); the discourse of self-assertiveness helped girls reject conventional social norms (p. 159); and the band enabled girls to mediate their relationships with boys (pp. 158-159). Furthermore, she states that a majority of girls stressed no desire to emulate their icons; instead they aimed to develop their *own* individual style. Fritzsche therefore claims that the Spice Girls did not constitute either positive or negative role models for the promotion of feminist perspectives in young girls, but operated as a 'toolbox' from which fans can draw upon to construct their own identity:

> Fan culture offers them the opportunity to take a playful approach toward questions of self-representation, self-confidence, and heterosexuality, which can be, but does not necessarily have to be, used for resistance. In this respect the Spice Girls can be regarded as a source of empowerment for their fans. They are very much associated with the subject position of a strong, self-confident, and successful female teenager, and offer an attractive point of reference for their cultural activities (p. 160).

Jessica Taft (2004) has further examined notions of girl power in order to understand its relationship with young girls' political selves. In her analysis she suggests that although the discourse of girl power originated in politically motivated movements – most notably 'riot grrrl' and third wave feminism – its appropriation and commercialisation by mainstream culture throughout the 1990s resulted in a formulation of girlhood which precluded girls' political subjectivity. Despite these reworkings of girl power discourse impeding on girls' political engagement, Taft asserts that 'organisations for girls were constructing their own meanings of Girl Power and challenging these barriers to girls' social and political engagement' (p. 69). For example, in her discussion on the Girl Scouts' 'Camp Ashema' (New England, USA) she identified that the group actively encouraged an interrogation of gendered power relations within their course programmes. One method employed to achieve this, as Taft explains, was the policy of daily 'cool chats' (p. 75), in which small groups of girls accompanied by a staff member discussed 'girl focused' topics such as gender stereotyping with the aim of '[encouraging] girls to think critically about the ways social forces influence their own lives' (*ibid*.). Moreover, to inspire girls' activism the camp promoted 'collective girl-decision-making' (*ibid*.) when establishing agendas for their group. This she states granted girls power within the decision-making process and, by doing so, situated them 'as capable and active decision-makers rather than passive consumers of the camp experience' (p. 76). Thus, Taft's work successfully demonstrates that girl power can both function as a means of depoliticising young women, and a strategy for facilitating new modes of resistance to dominant feminine ideals.

6.4.3 The New Female Subject

In the second edition of her book *Feminism and Youth Culture* (2000; see also 2001) McRobbie asserts that 'young women in Britain today have replaced youth as a metaphor for social change … [and] are now recognised as one of the stakes upon which the future depends' (2000, pp. 200-201). This she argues is attributable to New Labour rhetoric, in which young women's educational success has been proclaimed to indicate the establishment of a new meritocratic society, whilst a continued emphasis on the relationship between femininity and consumption brands young women as

exemplars of consumer choice. Furthermore, McRobbie states the increased advocacy of female (competitive) individualism signifies a 'new gender regime' that proposes to liberate women from traditional gender restraints and afford them new modes of agency. As she explains:

> [S]liding into place almost unnoticed … is a New Right vocabulary which celebrates female success in the marketplace, which punishes failure as individual weakness, and which boldly advocates competitive individualism as the mark of modern young womanhood. This discourse appeals to young women by connecting success in work with traditional success in body and appearance. Indeed the former promises to lead to the latter, since a good job brings girls into the heartland of consumer culture and all its bodily benefits (2001, p. 371).

Developing these ideas, in more recent years, McRobbie (2004) has considered 'new ways of being young woman' within a postfeminist context. In this work she claims that 'through a complex array of machinations, elements of contemporary culture are perniciously effective in regard to the undoing of feminism' (p. 3). Moreover, McRobbie adds, 'by means of the tropes of freedom and choice which are now inextricably connected with the category of young women, feminism is aged and made to seem redundant' (*ibid*.; see also Griffin, 2004). To demonstrate this she offers a critical reading of the film *Bridget Jones's Diary* (2001), and suggests 'it marks the emergence of a new cultural norm, which can be understood in terms of postfeminism' (2004, p. 3). Significantly then, for McRobbie, postfeminism comes to be constituted as a notion which utilises feminist principles by taking 'feminism into account' and yet, at the same time, constructs feminism 'as having already passed away' (p. 4). For example, in her discussion of a Wonderbra advertisement – which (in)famously featured model Eva Herzigova looking down at her enhanced cleavage accompanied by the text 'Hello Boys' – she states that the image and text work 'by provocatively enacting sexism' whilst simultaneously 'playing with those debates in film theory about women as the object of the gaze (Mulvey, 1975), and even female desire (De Laurentis, 1987; Coward, 1994)' (2004, p. 7). By doing so, McRobbie maintains that such representations have produced generational differences amongst women, as young girls, along with their male peers, are now conversant with the use of irony and understand the 'joke' rather than becoming angered by these types of

imagery (see also McRobbie, 1999). Her analysis therefore proposes that postfeminism demands young women to be 'free' (2004, p. 8), and although 'the new female subject' is 'gender aware', she becomes 'despite her freedom, called upon to be silent, to withhold critique in order to count as a modern, sophisticated girl' (p. 9).

On a similar theme Anita Harris (2004a) examines girls in relation to key areas of their lives – including consumption, power, school and work – in order to explore how 'young women are being constructed as a vanguard of new subjectivity' (p. 1). Within this work, and in agreement with McRobbie (2004), she maintains that:

> [T]his new interest in looking at and hearing from girls is not just celebratory, but is, in part, regulatory as well. There is a process of creation and control at work in the act of regarding young women as the winners in a new world. In holding them up as the exemplars of a new possibility, we also actively construct them to perform this role (2004a, p.1).

For Harris then, young women living in late modern societies have become constructed as ideal models for a new form of subjectivity. This, she states, has resulted for two principal reasons: firstly, 'changed economic and work conditions combined with the goals achieved by feminism have created new possibilities for young women'; and secondly, 'new ideologies about individual responsibility and choices also dovetail with some broad feminist notions about opportunities for young women, making them the most likely candidates for performing a new kind of self-made subjectivity' (p. 6). These ideas are clearly evidenced by Harris in her analysis of what she terms the 'can-do' and 'at-risk' girls, in which these contrasting discourses come to focus on girls' power, or concerns over the troubles they experience. To illustrate this notion she discusses the spheres of work, consumption and motherhood, which she identifies as significant sites for young girls' identity work, and demonstrates how young women are coerced into being self-disciplining and -regulating; for example, through the promotion of delaying motherhood (pp. 23-25). Thus, Harris argues, in such a formulation young women are compelled to take responsibility for their own successes or failures.

6.5 Girls' Talk

6.5.1 Traditional Femininity

Within the present study issues pertaining to femininity were prevalent throughout girls' accounts. For example, when discussing conceptions of their own identities, many girls ostensibly demonstrated that they invested heavily in traditional notions of femininity. This theme was typically articulated by utilising a recurring series of tropes – including animals/nature, colours, fashion imagery as well as conventional metaphoric representations for the 'feminine', such as 'angels', 'love hearts' and 'princesses' – and appeared to reflect the assumption that 'girlie' femininity is an innate characteristic of their selves:

> Interviewer: Right and what about the D&G and the [perfume]//
>
> Karen K: //to show that I'm girlie and the biscuit is to show that I'm sweet.

> Kate O: … I chose a really colourful bird because I'm colourful, I chose a glass of champagne because I think myself very bubbly and I chose like the necklace with an 'A' on it because I think I'm an angel and I chose that one, the one with the two frogs, because its got loads of colours and colourful like me.

Indeed, within girls' discussions a number of principal concepts emerged which came to be regarded as conveying quintessential components of their 'feminine' properties, these being: cute; nice; kind; loving; and caring:

> Interviewer: Who is this a picture of?
>
> Amelia W: Dougie from McFly, because he's cute and so am I.

> Interviewer: Do you think there's anything about her character that you think you share with her [Kelly Clarkson]?
>
> Sheila R: She's a nice person.

Michelle C: … And like the horse actually, um resembles me because I'm a kind person by whole.

Interviewer: Is there anything about these animals that you think you share?

May R: I think dolphins and manatees are very like, they give lots of love, they love their families and they have special ways to greet their families and stuff and I'm similar, you know.

Sarah M: Like the heart is for a lot of loving, and that's [image of flowers] for, that's like loving.

Significantly one participant when expressing a caring attribute foregrounds her belief that this is an essential characteristic ascribed by gender:

Christina T1:   I think I'm, I can be quite horrible and quite nasty and stuff but people say I'm not like that but they say I'm like nice and stuff and I always try and help people and stuff and all that and all the teachers say I try and help people but that just comes naturally to me and I don't do it just to do it, I do it 'cause it just comes to me to do that maybe 'cause I'm a girl.

Interviewer: So it's just in your nature?

Christina T1:   Yeah yeah.

The issue of caring is notable, as a majority of girls chose to represent this notion by utilising images of babies and children. In doing so, this arguably reinforces commonly held convictions that women aspire to fulfil a maternal role:

Interviewer: … I'd like to start with this picture of the young black girl. Why is that there?

Lisa M: Because I love little kids and just like little babies and everything and it just shows that I care about all the younger ones.

Interviewer: … You've used a picture of a little baby, a black child, a little boy. Why is that there?

Sarah M:	Just to show I'm caring and I love children and other people think that I'm good with children.
Interviewer:	Other people think you're good with children?
Sarah M:	Yeah they think I'm caring.
Daniya K:	Well that one, the top one//
Interviewer:	//the baby//
Daniya K:	//the baby means I'm caring.
Sadie T1:	Also that one, I love that picture//
Interviewer:	//babies//
Sadie T1:	//and I love little kids and I love having my little cousins around …
Interviewer:	And we've got another kid's picture.
Sadie T1:	And that's another thing 'cause I enjoy looking after my brothers and teaching them and stuff and telling them about what I know and stuff.

This focus on girls emphasising the relationship between caring and children would appear to reflect wider trends observed by Sue Sharpe (1994). Within this work, a development of her previous analysis (1976), she sought to explore teenage girls' attitudes and expectations regarding various aspects of their lives. In relation to careers, Sharpe notes that a well represented choice for young women during the 1970s were occupations which entailed working with children, and adds that this 'was even more popular nearly twenty years later' (1994, p. 297). Therefore, despite the 1990s being marked by an ethos of individualism (see McRobbie, 2000, 2001, 2004) Sharpe's participants' motivations, as girls in the previous era, remained grounded in altruism, as she explains 'the reasons they gave for choosing a possible job or career tended to endorse non-material values such as helping or meeting people, rather than earning money' (1994, p. 301). However, Sharpe further states that as caring careers are still predominantly undertaken by women this continues to support the 'traditional feminine stereotype' (p. 297). This notion is evident within the present study, as demonstrated by the participants' responses, quoted above, about caring for children.

Although the girls' statements may appear to enforce orthodox understandings of 'feminine' attributes, Maryum's collage specifically indicates that these conceptions are not as clear-cut as an initial reading might presume:

Maryum K: These two people [image of two men] is for friendship, that is for calm [image of a man sitting] sitting there is for calm, that's for kind [image of a man's face], that's for gentle [image of a man's face], that's for quiet [image of a man with head tilting], and that's a little cat for cute, that's for princess [word], that's for gentle [image of Winne the Pooh], that's for pretty [image of a toy duck], that's for angel baby [word], and that's another one for cute [image of a kitten], that's for angel and for cuddly [image of a care bear].

Despite establishing her identity through continual references to traits associated with femininity, Maryum illustrates a number of these elements using images conventionally interpreted as masculine. This idea is clearly exemplified by her visually depicting kindness, gentleness and quietness with pictures of men. Thus, Maryum's work helps highlight that, for the participants, femininity is an ambiguous concept, a point further evidenced by Debbie's comment:

Interviewer: And what about this [image of pink colours] because you've used//

Debbie T2:   //oh, I was thinking about being in the army for a while but then I don't want to because you have to wear green and you get shot.

Whilst it is possible to suggest that her use of pink and motives for rejecting a career in the army are affirmations of a passive feminine self, this remark remains problematic for two reasons. Firstly, Debbie's statement may have been made with ironic intent, enabling her to engage with notions of traditional femininity in a playful way (McRobbie, 1999); secondly, the decision not to pursue a violent military occupation, generally considered a male preserve, may constitute a deflation of masculinity itself, and can arguably be considered an expression of female assertion. However, when discussing the various facets of their identities in relation to femininity, some girls experienced greater difficulty than others. Interestingly, these girls felt able to articulate characteristics associated with conventional notions of

femininity freely, but appeared to initially resist elaborating on any factors that deviated from these norms. For example, Anna is willing to reveal her emotional vulnerability and neglects detailing a contrary image in her work. Furthermore, in this instance, Anna's intentions are only clarified through the intervention of a third party who assists in verbalising her thoughts:

Anna O: … I've got a picture of Little Mo from *EastEnders* because she's very emotional, I've got a picture of Shelley from *Coronation Street* because she's emotional and easily hurt and I've got a picture of a little princess because I think I'm a little princess.

Interviewer: You've also got a little devil there as well, what does that mean?

Anna O: Um (long pause), I don't know.

Lorna O: Maybe 'cause you're like quite naughty sometimes at home? You see yourself as quite naughty at school and that?

Anna O: Sometimes, yeah yeah.

It should be noted that Anna's reluctance to identify herself as 'naughty' may be attributable to her viewing the researcher as an authority figure, and therefore not wanting to present her identity in a 'negative' light. However, the fact that this image was included in the collage arguably implies that she considers this an integral element of her character and wanted to communicate this. In addition, although it might be suggested that Anna is merely complying with her friend's explanations, her emphatic agreement would appear to contradict this. Nevertheless, Anna's desire to focus on 'acceptable' feminine conventions possibly illustrates the pressure on girls to conform to such norms. Thus, in contrast to the emphasis placed upon femininity as a core quality of identity within numerous girls' accounts, only one boy explicitly acknowledges possessing a 'feminine' side:

Interviewer: Let's move onto how you think other people see you. You've only got a couple of pictures here, one of E.T. and one of My Little Pony, why have you used them?

Oscar O: Because people, I think people might see me as an alien because sometimes I'm a bit weird or that's what other people think and I don't know, the little pony it's just pink, and people think I have a feminine side.

Interviewer:	Why do you think other people think you're weird?
Oscar O:	I don't know sometimes how I act really.
Interviewer:	Do you think you act weird?
Oscar O:	No.
Interviewer:	What about the feminine side, do you think you've got a feminine side?
Oscar O:	Well a little bit, but most of the time I just wanna laugh really and it's, and like try and make everybody laugh.
Interviewer:	Do you think other people see that, the feminine side, as a good thing or a bad thing?
Oscar O:	Well in-between.
Interviewer:	When might it be a good thing and when might it be a bad thing?
Oscar O:	Well, well like, like I said it might cheer people up because it's funny but like a bad thing, they might not want to be around me because like, like they just want to do that bully stuff all that stuff.

For Oscar then, being perceived as feminine comes to be fundamentally tied to his 'alien' status and behaviour being labelled 'weird', therefore locating him as aberrant. Moreover, Oscar problematises this situation further, as he himself somewhat trivialises femininity by rendering it as a source of humour. Nevertheless, the recognition of this trait by others leads Oscar to conclude that he may be socially excluded and victimised, with specific reference to bullying indicating that this behaviour is being 'policed' by peers (Buckingham, 1993c). This policing of boy's behaviour could explain why many of the male participants did not articulate any supposed 'feminine' characteristics in relation to their identities. Indeed, when these ideas were broached within a few boys' discussions, the participants employed evasive strategies. These boys either rejected conforming to such notions outright, or juxtaposed them by immediately asserting their masculinity, arguably demonstrating their possession of masculine hegemonic ideals:

Steve O:	Yeah, *Madagascar* [animated film] because my mum says I'm cute.
Interviewer:	Do you think you're cute//
Steve O:	//no, not really.

Noah C:	Well that's to show that I'm caring [image of a tiger] and I've got a gun.
Interviewer:	You're caring, OK, but why have you got a gun?
Noah C:	Well I can get a little bit violent.
Interviewer:	You've also got loving here, is loving on this side [how I see myself]?
Jack M:	Yeah.
Interviewer:	So you see yourself as//
Jack M:	//loving, and I've got a hurricane 'cause hurricanes are destructive and when I'm angry I'm like a destructive path, like kick everything out like.

In spite of the preceding argument offering a credible explanation of the boys' responses, it is also possible to suggest that such juxtapositioning signifies they feel more able to express – albeit visually, in most cases – their contradictory characteristics with greater ease than girls.[48]

6.5.2 Consumption and Independence

A prevailing theme to emerge within girls' discussions was the important role consumption played in constructions of their identities. For the girls, fashion specifically came to function as a means of asserting an independent sense of self:

Interviewer:	And what about these images [images of fashion items]?
Pamela W:	I like going out shopping and thing and buying clothes for me.
Daniya K:	The ring and watch means that I like shopping for things that suit me and I'm fashionable and yet I'm also into fashion, and the make-up I like wearing make-up kind of thing.

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[48] This position would appear to support Frosh, Phoenix and Pattman's (2002) assertion that boys can articulate '"softer" versions of masculinity' (p. 83) and are emotionally literate.

Michelle C:	… I've used this woman [Kelly Rowland] because she's quite fashionable and I see myself as a fashionable person.
	…
Interviewer:	Now on this side [how I think other people see me] you've used a picture of Cat Deeley … and the New Look logo …
Michelle C:	I think other people see me as a trendy and fashionable person so they know that I like to go and buy clothes and things like that.

Rose T1:	… I really like fashion and shoes so that was the basis between them two [image of a female model and boots] …
Interviewer:	… Let's start with the girl in the coat [how I think other people see me].
Rose T1:	Well people always tell me that I have a cool like dress sense and I thought that was quite cool.

The issue of young women as consumers has been explored by Harris (2004b) who suggests, in agreement with principles proposed by McRobbie (2000, 2001), that 'it is primarily as consumer citizens that youth are offered a place in contemporary social life, and it is girls above all who are held up as the exemplars of this new citizenship' (2004b, p. 163). In her analysis she highlights that this situation has resulted due to a problematic meshing together of feminist and neoliberal ideologies concerning individualism and individual choice. Furthermore, Harris notes that the discourse of girl power has come to represent itself as reflecting 'young women's citizenship status and entitlements' through advocating notions of independence, agency, equality and power, and yet 'teaches that rights and power, that is, citizenship, are best enacted through individual choices in the market' (p. 167). Thus, she argues empowerment and consumption are perceived by young women as being inextricably linked, and 'Young women are thereby constructed as powerful actors in the marketplace who enact their new opportunities for independence and control by purchasing products and displaying a consumer lifestyle' (p. 166). This point is best illustrated by Saira whose emphasis on, and appropriation of, designer brands not only functions to exhibit her independence, but also articulates future intended career plans:

Saira R:	… I've got Burberry, Estee Lauder, Chanel and Dior which means I'm a fashion mark, so I'm really fashionable and I buy like this kind

	of stuff. I like make-up and stuff and I like to be fashionable and be myself and that's why I put some marks, fashion marks on there.
Interviewer:	Are designer labels important to you? Is the name of a product important to you?
Saira R:	Well it depends; it depends if it's good or not because sometimes you can just buy cheap ones.
Interviewer:	As in?
Saira R:	You know just cheap fashion marks but//
Interviewer:	//what is cheap fashion to you?
Saira R:	I don't know, if you buy from Primark and stuff but everybody shops from Primark like, but anyway I just like them [designer brands] because that's what I am about, yeah.
Interviewer:	So it's just purely for the name?
Saira R:	Yeah. I'm planning to be a fashion designer and that's why I like them.

Hence, for some girls fashion was integral to conceptions of their identities, by enabling them to convey notions of independence and individuality; whilst for others fashion heightened their own sense of 'powerlessness' and remained an aspiration, the attainment of which signified 'success' (Harris, 2004a):

Interviewer:	What about this picture of lots of magazines?
Claire O:	Yeah every time I go shopping I have to buy a magazine especially the soap ones.
	…
Interviewer:	Have you got a favourite character that you identify with?
Claire O:	What I'm more really actually doing is I see the young like girls my age on the programmes and I'd like to be fashionable like them sort of thing.
Interviewer:	So you'd like to be fashionable. Do you think that you are fashionable?
Claire O:	Some of my stuff is but not really.
	…
Interviewer:	So you think other people see you as fashionable, and although you've put fashionable on how you see yourself, you don't think that you maybe are as fashionable as//

Claire O:	//other people//
Interviewer:	//other people see you.
Claire O:	That's because I've got some nicer clothes in how other people see me but I see myself as a bit dull really.
Interviewer:	So you see yourself as a bit dull?
Claire O:	Yeah.

Therefore, despite the impact and pervasiveness that girl power discourse exerts on girls' construction of their identities, its influence was not totalising. For example, Balqis – who identifies herself as Muslim – adheres to girl power ideals, but is importantly able to negotiate these alongside her religious beliefs (Fritzsche, 2004):

Interviewer:	So you've got the woman to show you wear a hijab [headscarf]. What about this, the woman [image of a model]?
Balqis K:	Because I like going out and shopping 'cause I'm like fashionable and I like jewellery and I like, I like being me.

Indeed, within the interviews a number of Muslim girls raised fashion and by association notions of independence as a significant facet of their identities, whilst *also* articulating the centrality of religion in their conceptions of self:

Saira R:	The first one is my religion [image of Arabic text] which is, it's got my god's name on which means I'm Muslim and that's the most important thing my religion … … … I like to be fashionable and be myself and that's why I put some marks, fashion marks on there.

Jamila K:	… I done Islamic writing, Arabic writing, which represents I'm a Muslim … and clothes which represents I'm fashionable and individual and like to do my own thing.

Interviewer:	So which side is 'Muslim' [word] on?
Zahra W:	It's in the middle [of the collage] because I'm Muslim. …

Interviewer:	Are there any pictures that you would have liked to have put on your collage that you didn't have a chance to get?
Zahra W:	… I would have put Beyonce 'cause she's fashionable and independent and so am I.

Thus, the above comments importantly appear to problematise claims which suggest that Muslim youth create 'psychological distance' between themselves and non-Muslims through their religious practices (Jacobson, 1998) and/or are caught between two cultures (Anwar, 1976, 1998; Watson, 1977) experiencing a 'culture clash' (Pugh, 2001); instead these participants arguably demonstrate that they are able to navigate their identities between two seemingly contrary discourses.

6.5.3 Beauty and Confidence

The centrality attributed to fashion within girls' conceptualisations of their identities, as discussed above, was paralleled by a marked interest in notions of physical beauty. These concepts have been interrogated by McRobbie (1991, 1994) in relation to teenage girls' magazines who notes, in contrast to other feminist writers (Walkerdine, 1990; Jackson, 1996), that such texts do not directly compel women into a normative feminine ideal. Rather, readers purchase magazines which correspond with how they perceive themselves, and the ideas and values they possess. In spite of this, her analysis identifies that physical attractiveness – and the means by which it can be achieved – have constituted an ever increasing (rather than decreasing) focus of contemporary girls' magazines: 'There is more of the self in this new vocabulary of femininity, much more self-esteem, more autonomy, but still the pressure to adhere to the perfect body image as a prerequisite for the success in love which is equated with happiness' (1994, p. 165). Although McRobbie acknowledges that there is 'a greater "fun" element' (1991, p. 175) within beauty and fashion features compared to similar magazines of the past, she also recognises 'There is of course an undeniable element of regulation' which remains visible through 'the implicit assumption that beauty routines are a normal and inevitable part of being female' (*ibid*.). In doing so, McRobbie states that this 'pave[s] the way for a woman's status and identity to become synonymous with her physical attractiveness' (*ibid*.). Furthermore, she claims that the process of selling women idealised versions of themselves through

consumption both paradoxically 'anchors femininity' whilst 'unsettling and undermining' it simultaneously: 'If there is always another better look to be achieved or improvement to be made then there is no better way of doing it than introducing a note of uncertainty and dissatisfaction' (p. 176).

These ideas are evident within the present study, in which issues about beauty were a predominant feature of many girls' discussions. In the following extract Zakirah demonstrates this point explicitly by not only foregrounding appearance as a fundamental aspect of her identity, but stresses its significance through highlighting beauty as an obsession:

Zakirah K:	… With the mirror I was trying to express how obsessive sometimes I can be.
Interviewer:	Obsessive about?
Zakirah K:	Like my hair and stuff.
Interviewer:	So your looks or is it everything?
Zakirah K:	Just my looks.

Whilst Zakirah's comments may denote the importance of beauty, this same statement could also be seen to express her own bodily anxieties by placing an onus on 'looks'. Indeed, anxieties in relation to attractiveness surfaced repeatedly throughout the girls' accounts:

Interviewer:	… Is there anything else about Mariah Carey and Kelly Clarkson that you like?
Diana R:	They're pretty.
Interviewer:	They're pretty. And is that how you see yourself as well?
Diana R:	Um, I'm not sure.

This feeling of uncertainty, seemingly generated by anxieties over conceptions of beauty, was evident both in how girls perceived their own identities as well as perceptions they believed others held. For example, although the following participants are able to articulate that they see themselves as 'pretty' and 'beautiful',

possibly expressing a sense of inner confidence, their responses become somewhat stifled when asked to elaborate on what other people might think:

Jasmine K:	… I think I'm pretty.
Interviewer:	You've used Mariah Carey for that?
Jasmine K:	Yeah.
	…
Interviewer:	You've put Mariah Carey there do you think other people think you're pretty?
Jasmine K:	Some people.
Interviewer:	Like who?
Jasmine K:	Um (long pause, no response given).

Rachel W:	This means [image of a black model] I think I'm sexy, this one [image of a black girl] Rachel is beautiful so I think that I'm beautiful.
	…
Interviewer:	Are there any things here that you think you are that you think other people don't?
Rachel W:	Yeah (pointing to image of a black model).
Interviewer:	So you think you're beautiful and you don't think other people think you're beautiful?
Rachel W:	Some people do.
Interviwer:	Some people do?
Rachel W:	Yeah.
Interviewer:	But not most people?
Rachel W:	Um, no.

For some girls, however, considering the issue of beauty revealed deeper anxieties about appearance made manifest by their denial of possessing such attributes:

Interviewer:	When wouldn't they be the same [how I see myself and how I think other people see me]?
Sheila R:	Like the star and the beauty and it's on there and stuff like that.
Interviewer:	So you don't see yourself as a star and beautiful?
Sheila R:	No.

Interviewer:	What does the flower mean to you?
Alison O:	It represents like pretty and stuff but I don't, I don't think that I'm pretty so I kind of like that stuff but I'm not.
Interviewer:	So you like the prettiness but you don't see yourself as pretty?
Alison O:	No.

Interviewer:	What about those pictures [how I think other people see me]?
Amanda R:	Some people say I'm like very pretty and some friends say I'm good enough to be a model kind of thing so I put that down …
Interviewer:	So you've put that you think other people see you as pretty, good enough to be a model. Do you think in how you see yourself that you feel you are good enough to be a model?
Amanda R:	No//
Polly R:	//well you should.
Amanda R:	I don't, I just put it down because that's what other people say but I don't think I am.

Amanda's comments are of particular interest, as although she recognises that other people view her as physically attractive – emphasised by Polly's interjection 'well you should' – she does not acknowledge this quality within herself. This position may be clarified with reference to her previous remarks:

Amanda R:	… I'm just about fashion really and I like also see myself as the best sometimes really so.
Interviewer:	You see yourself as the best sometimes, when wouldn't you see yourself as the best?
Amanda R:	I don't know, when someone else is better than me, I don't know. I see myself as the best sometimes just, I don't know, I'm confused now.

Despite demonstrating a degree of confidence about herself, as indicated through her statement 'I like also see myself as the best sometimes', Amanda's emphasis on 'sometimes' illustrates that this is thrown into question when she feels 'someone else is better than me'. For Amanda then it is arguably fashion which comes to define these boundaries, and in doing so would appear to correlate with McRobbie's (1991)

argument that the attainment of a 'better look' is motivated by 'uncertainty and dissatisfaction' (p. 176). Nevertheless, whilst anxieties regarding physical attractiveness remained prevalent within girls' responses, it is important to note that, at the same time, they also articulated notions of confidence in relation to their identities:

Interviewer: What is it about them [images of Beyonce, Lemar and Mario] that you identify with?

Saira R: I like their character, they're very confident and they've tried very hard to get to this point so I think yeah they've tried best very hard in life to get this yeah, and I just think she's [Beyonce] very pretty and yeah.

Interviewer: And so her [Beyonce] prettiness, do you think that's something you share with her?

Saira R: Well I do have self-confidence; I do think I'm a bit pretty but not that much.

The assertion of confidence is later reiterated by Saira more forcefully, who interestingly uses a female celebrity's image that she admits to disliking, but specifically identifies with for symbolising this value:

Interviewer: Who is this person here?

Saira R: That's a girl from the Pussycat Dolls [Melody Thornton].

Interviewer: And why is she there?

Saira R: I don't like her but I just put her there because she's got this like self-confidence and I think people see me as I've got self-confidence really.

An image of the same band member is also employed by another participant to demonstrate that whilst ostensibly she may appear to display a passive feminine attribute, this convention becomes undermined when she asserts her confidence:

Interviewer: And who is this [image of Melody Thornton from the Pussycat Dolls]?

Polly R: I don't know.

Interviewer:	What is it about her that you identify with?
Polly R:	She looks quiet but she's not, that's what, that's what people say about me.
Interviewer:	She looks quiet but she's not?
Polly R:	Yeah.
Interviewer:	Do you think that's a good thing or a bad thing?
Polly R:	That's a good thing.
Interviewer:	Why?
Polly R:	Because you need to be loud.
Interviewer:	Why would you need to be loud?
Polly R:	So people can hear you, shows like you're confident and stuff.
Interviewer:	Shows that you're confident?
Polly R:	Yeah.

Thus, the articulation of confidence arguably enables Polly to feel that she has a valid 'voice' and highlights her awareness – through playing with conventions – that femininity is a performance (Skeggs, 1997; Gauntlett, 2002). Hence, in keeping with Fritzsche's (2004) position, Saira and Polly's responses would seem to indicate that girls, on the whole, did not want to imitate successful female celebrities, instead these figures functioned as cultural resources from which they could construct their own identities. Therefore, as discussed previously, although concepts of confidence and independence in young women have been tied to girl power discourse and dismissed for being mere rhetoric (Whelehan, 2000; Griffin, 2004), within this study many girls were adamant about expressing these qualities which appeared to provide them with a sense of autonomy:

Interviewer:	What do all of these different faces mean?
Pamela W:	That one says I'm confident [image of a girl in a yellow top].
Interviewer:	Is that how you think other people see you, as confident?
Pamela W:	Yeah.
Interviewer:	So if you were going to use some words to explain the pictures and how you see yourself, what would you use?
Rose T1:	Arty, daring, chic and confident. Yeah I am confident, I do a lot of drama and acting and stuff so.

Interviewer:	You've got independent [word]//
Debbie T2:	//because I like doing stuff by myself and being independent and I'm confident too.
Carmel O:	I've got Kat Slater [*EastEnders* character] because I'm always feeling confident in myself like she does.
	…
Interviewer:	Do you think there's a difference though between how you see yourself and how you think other people see you?
Carmel O:	Kind of, I don't think people see me as confident all the time.
Interviewer:	But you think you are//
Carmel O:	//yeah, I am.

Significantly, in two instances where girls stated that they were not confident, this notion was still represented as a facet of their identities which other people perceived:

Interviewer:	So do you think there's a difference between how you see yourself and how you think other people see you?
Nancy T2:	Yeah.
Interviewer:	What do you think the difference is?
Nancy T2:	I think like some people see me, 'cause I don't obviously like, I think they think I'm quite loud 'cause I do talk quite a lot so I think they think that but I'm not if you know what I mean.
Interviewer:	Do you think it's more, when they hear you express yourself, do you think that maybe they think that you're confident?
Nancy T2:	Oh no, I'm not confident at all.
Interviewer:	But do you think other people think you are?
Nancy T2:	Yeah, but when they get to know me they know I'm not, 'cause I work quite hard and that's why I worry a lot.
Interviewer:	Who is this lady?
Daniya K:	It's just a lady who, who's like, she's sticking her head out kind of like, she's like, I can't explain it well.
Interviewer:	She's quite proud//
Daniya K:	//proud, yeah confident, confident.

Interviewer:	And that's how you think other people see you//
Daniya K:	//other people see me.
Interviewer:	But do you feel proud and confident and like you can speak your own mind?
Daniya K:	No.
Interviewer:	But you think other people see you as quite a confident person?
Daniya K:	Yeah.
	…
Interviewer:	And other people think you're a lot more confident and assertive//
Daniya K:	//yeah//
Interviewer:	//and maybe a stronger person than you actually feel that you are//
Daniya K:	//yeah, yeah, I'm like shy and quiet.

Consequently, whilst these statements can be read as an ultimate failure of girl power discourse for not empowering these girls with self-confidence, it could be argued that they may exploit girl power strategies – such as declarations and performances of independence and assertion – to construct a façade of confidence which is utilised in their interactions with others within their everyday lives.

6.5.4 Gender (In)Equality

The preceding analysis helps demonstrate that for these girls femininity remains an ambiguous concept and their relationship with it is highly complex. Although the girls appear to conform with conventional feminine attributes, they simultaneously articulate assertions of girl power discourse. However, whilst some feminist theorists, such as Griffin (2004), suggest that the notion of girl power *assumes* that girls are *already* equal to boys and should therefore be treated as such, within girls' accounts this belief was not evident. For example, in their discussions relating to sport and activities both Sadie and Keira foreground the pervasive influence of sexism within society. Moreover, despite not explicitly identifying themselves as feminists, their comments clearly engage with feminist criticisms of gendered inequalities and, most importantly, recognise that equality is yet to be achieved (Jowett, 2004):

Sadie T1:	… I did that [image of a female footballer] 'cause I love football, I think that girls who do football are really trying sort of thing, 'cause

the girls are going round doing football, even though the boys sort of say 'oh no you can't do that 'cause it's a boys sport'.

Interviewer:	So do you feel strongly about girls having equal status//
Sadie T1:	//yeah, yeah, very strongly.
Interviewer:	Do you think that girls and women in society now have equal status or do you think there's more that has to be done?
Sadie T1:	There's more that has to be done yeah I think even though it's like they say you have equal rights, but it's just coming into practice.

Interviewer:	Oh and you said you were a member of Army Cadets.
Keira T1:	Yes, yeah yeah.
Interviewer:	Do you think that people find that an acceptable thing for girls to do?
Keira T1:	No they don't. Some of the people at the army don't find it because they're just, out of all sixteen of us there are four girls and the rest of them are boys, and some of the boys they don't involve you because they don't think that you should be there.
Interviewer:	On what basis?
Keira T1:	The fact that you have to run around on a field with a gun and the fact that girls shouldn't do that, they should stay at home and do things like cooking and cleaning and things.
Interviewer:	So do you feel that people are being quite sexist towards women or do you think that's just a bad experience?
Keira T1:	There's a few that think that girls shouldn't be in it, like some give leeway and say well they can try it and if they don't like it then obviously they're gonna quit, but most people just put you down straight away.
Interviewer:	Do you ever have that in any other areas of your life though, where you feel because you're a girl you shouldn't be doing something or you're expected to behave in a certain way//
Keira T1:	//yeah, in like the rally sport that I do, it's you and the services and there's no other girls in my league so you get, if you try and talk to someone like a boy driver they can like step back a bit and think 'mmm do you know anything' kind of thing, and then of course you get to know everyone and then they're alright, but a lot of people don't think yeah should she be in this league and so on and so forth.

Interviewer:	Do you feel you have to prove yourself as a woman; do you feel like you have to work harder?
Keira T1:	Yeah, I do, to get people to understand that, you're not a girlie girl walking around in pink you don't walk around and go to town and think about girlie things which, I normally don't, but when you do something like that [motor sport] you have to persuade people like boys, and that you have to persuade them lots, you're not what they think.

Interestingly, it should be noted that whilst rejecting sexism Keira reiterates sexist stereotypes of 'femininity'. Although this is problematic her discussion does importantly highlight an awareness of, and resistance to, gender inequalities within contemporary society.

6.6 Individualization: Revisiting Late Moderntiy

Within the previous sections, boys' and girls' discussions about their identities would seem to indicate that they conceptualise these in highly gendered ways. However, a focus on articulating notions of 'individualism' did emerge in participants' accounts, which appeared to cut across such gender differences. Before exploring these comments in greater depth it would be useful to revisit issues raised by Giddens (1991) at the beginning of this chapter, and outline how conditions of the late modern era have impacted on young people's experience. As Andy Furlong and Fred Cartmel (1997) claim, 'Young people today are growing up in a different world to that experienced by previous generations – changes which are significant enough to merit a reconceptualization of youth transitions and processes of social reproduction' (p. 6). Developing this point, Harris (2004a) explains that 'This "different world" is marked by both social and economic characteristics that have forced a fundamental reassessment of the material with which young people are able to craft their identities and forge their livelihoods' (p. 3). That is to say, the period of late modernity is defined by its social and economic separation from (industrial) modernity. To elaborate, Harris notes that modernity was distinguished by a number of features, these being manufacturing based capitalism; centralised governmental control; social relationships built upon shared commonalities regarding class, community and

location; and, during the post-war period, the establishment and growth of a welfare state, as well as socially motivated political movements. In contrast to this, she explains that the late modern era is characterised by networks of capitalist global economies and increased privatisation within welfare and public service sectors. As such, the concept of deindustrialisation – 'the contraction of large scale manufacturing and the expansion of global communications, technology and service sectors' (*ibid*.) – becomes central to economic systems in late modernity, as Harris states:

> Across these and other industries, full-time ongoing employment has been replaced by part-time, casual, temporary, and short-term contract work. Markets, corporations, and production are increasingly globalized, a process fueled by the information revolution, the capacity to move capital and information around the world instantaneously, and changes in national regulations about trade, ownership, movement of capital, and offshore production.. Along with this trend nation-states have retreated from industrial regulation of both transnationals and small businesses, and public policy often employs the language of individual responsibility and enterprise bargaining to fill the gap left by deregulation (pp. 3-4).

Furthermore such economic conditions, she explains, have coincided with the emergence of, and move towards, a new ethos of 'competitive individualism' (see also McRobbie, 2000, 2001, 2004) in which people are expected to produce their own opportunities for success within their lives. At the same time, it has been suggested that notions of predictability and stability, which were distinctive elements of modern societies, have come to be superseded by a growing sense of uncertainty and risk (Giddens, 1991; Beck, 1992). Indeed, Ulrich Beck (1992) proposes that the conditions of late modernity create what he terms a 'risk society', whereby people are becoming increasingly conscious of dangers which exist within the world they live in:

> *Risk* may be defined as a *systematic way of dealing with hazards and insecurities induced and introduced by modernization itself*. Risks, as opposed to old dangers, are consequences which relate to the threatening force of modernization and to its globalization of doubt. They are *politically reflexive* (p. 21, original emphasis).

As a consequence, individuals today are more anxious about the avoidance of risks, such as nuclear war or environmental disasters. This situation is further compounded,

as within late modernity social identities and ties have become weakened. Thus these factors may lead to the late modern subject feeling alienated from others; for example, due to the increased diversity of family structures; the ephemeral nature of communities; and the dissolution of social organisations (Harris, 2004a, p. 4).

Expanding on this theme, the collapse of shared social ties and relationships, which previously assisted people in understanding their identity and position within social life, has resulted in risks having to be managed on an individual basis. Therefore, in the absence of traditional structures of support and patterns for living, individuals must become reflexive and make choices as they are compelled to construct their own narratives of self-identity. Hence, in this formulation the process of 'individualization' enables people to determine their own biographies unimpeded by conventional structures of thinking, through proposing to offer opportunities for choice, personal liberty and actual independence. However, these possibilities for achieving autonomy and self-actualization remain grounded within conditions that restrict many individuals, as Beck (1992) explains:

> The individual is indeed removed from traditional commitments and support relationships, but exchanges them for the constraints of existence in the labor market and as a consumer, with the standardizations and controls they contain. The place of *traditional* ties and social forms (social class, nuclear family) is taken by *secondary* agencies and institutions, which stamp the biography of the individual and make that person dependent upon fashions, social policy, economic cycles and markets, contrary to the image of individual control which establishes itself in consciousness (p. 131, original emphasis).

For example, in his discussion of youth lifestyles Steven Miles (2000) states that the image of young people living within late modern societies is:

> … one of increased independence, self-determination and self-realization. But as discussions of risk illustrate, the conditions within which these apparently positive developments are occurring are actually taking place in a world which in some respects is quite possibly less secure than it has ever been before. Young people do not have the sort of support from the more formal youth groups (and indeed subcultures) that they

may once have had, which in itself leaves them increasingly isolated, and such isolation opens them up to the psychological pitfalls of individualization and self-blame (p. 68).

During the traditional era then, as Harris (2004a) explains, young people were constructed as society's dependents who were expected to follow 'experts' instructions, in order to contribute towards a developing framework of national cohesion and prosperity as fully fledged citizens. Thus, the characteristics for an ideal youth were explicitly defined. In contrast to this, she maintains, young people are now expected to achieve success through the establishment of unique, self-made identities by 'making their own choices and plans to accomplish autonomy' (p. 6). Furthermore, Harris argues that youth are not only impelled to control their own biographies, but encouraged to exhibit this for examination by others. In doing so she asserts that 'The obligation of youth to become unique individuals is therefore constructed as a freedom, a freedom best expressed through the display of one's choices and projects of the self' (*ibid*.). Therefore, in consideration of these points, the role played by contemporary media within late modern Western societies comes to be especially pertinent in the lives of young people today, by acting as a cultural resource from which they can negotiate their identities. This issue is clarified by Miles (2000) who states '… the mass media plays a particularly significant role in young people's lives as a resource from which they can structure their lifestyles or at least from which they construct opinions about what lifestyles might be *deemed* to be appropriate' (p. 69, original emphasis).

6.7 Boys' and Girls' Talk

6.7.1 Individualism: I Am What I Am

The notion that youth should work towards achieving success through establishing a 'unique' identity (Harris, 2004a) was clearly evidenced within the present study. For many participants this idea was most forcefully articulated in assertions which maintained that they 'stood out' from others:

Interviewer: And what does that represent [image of a cheetah]?
Carl W: That I stand out in a crowd.

Kashif K: I've used that George Bush picture because he stands out like, you know that's how people see him sort of like how he sees himself, yeah, he stands out more and like me.

Rita R: I chose that one [image of the Eiffel Tower] because it's like the Eiffel Tower stands out and I like to stand out.

Interviewer: And you've also got the words//

Natalie M: //'saucy'//

Interviewer: //'saucy' and 'pussycat'. Why are these words here?

Natalie M: I don't know I just saw them in the paper and they, they kind of stand out from the rest of the writing.

Interviewer: So//

Natalie M: //I like things that stand out like I stand out.

Interviewer: So it's not so much the words and what they mean//

Natalie M: //no. They're the words that are big and bold and they make it stand out.

In Natalie's case specifically, she not only claims to be distinctive, but also draws upon the figure of Charlotte Church as a means by which her own autonomy may find expression:

Interviewer: What about the picture of Charlotte Church?

Natalie M: She's a famous person and some people have their like an idol to look up to.

Interviewer: Do you identify with Charlotte Church?

Natalie M: Yeah. I don't agree with the stuff in the press it's just//

Interviewer: //with what stuff in the press?

Natalie M: Like they say that she's bad and I just like Charlotte Church.

Interviewer: What is it about her that you identify with and look up to?

Natalie M: Her singing.

Interviewer: Just her singing? What about her fashion and the way she looks?

Natalie M: … Yeah, she doesn't want to act like anyone else.

Interviewer: Is that a quality that you like about Charlotte Church? Is that what you see in yourself?

Natalie M:	Yeah. I'm not told to do what anyone else I just do what I want to do.

Natalie's sense of autonomy is made apparent by her highlighting an identification with the singer based on her non-conformist attitudes to looks and behaviour. This perception of Charlotte Church then, for Natalie, comes to embody the ideal that success can be attained through individuality and making her own choices. Similarly, many girls utilised images of female pop stars, who were usually seen as positive role models, to foreground shared attributes which centred upon 'originality' and 'uniqueness':

Interviewer:	What is it about them [Gwen Stefani and Joss Stone] that you identify with?
Fiona T1:	Well Gwen Stefani and Joss Stone are really unique and that's what I thought of me.

Interviewer:	And you've also got a picture of Gwen Stefani. What does she mean to you?
Amelia W:	Original and, original and different but in a good way like me.

Annabel R:	… I picked out that picture [image of Bjork] because it's different and I like to be different, I don't like to be like everybody else.

An emphasis on difference is further expressed by the following participant, who believes it enables her to transcend conventions in matters of music and fashion. Moreover, by stating that friends share similar music tastes with each other she (un)knowingly positions her identity in opposition to mainstream thinking and reiterates her self-made individual status:

Interviewer:	You've got a white zebra standing amongst other zebra's, what does that represent?
Rose T1:	People think that I stand out from the crowd a lot and think I'm different and stuff like that so.
Interviewer:	In what way do they think you're different?

Rose T1: Well, I don't know, they just think like I sort of break the boundaries with like fashion, the way I am and music and all that, because I have quite a lot of friends that are into R&B and hip hop but they don't judge you on what you listen to, I listen to totally different stuff to them like Franz Ferdinand but yeah so, I try to be my own person.

Rose's remarks would appear to presume that her 'unique' sense of self is independent of commercial influence. However she fails to acknowledge that her 'alternative' identity remains grounded within the choices of consumerist lifestyles available, most notably through the media, as demonstrated by Rose's reference to the popular mainstream band, Franz Ferdinand. This suggestion does not imply that young people are unable to engage creatively with products made available to them (see Willis, 1990), but rather that their identities' remain constructed within the confines of consumerism, as Miles (2000) observes:

The paradox lies in the fact that young people often appear to be convinced that they as individuals are able to be unique, they can choose who they are as a person and choose to get out of mainstream culture … Teenage consumers only have personal choices in the context of the parameters laid down for them by cultural industries and thus consumer lifestyles can never be entirely unique (pp. 143-144).

Despite this, Miles' work on young people and their consumption habits importantly demonstrated that they were 'fully conversant with both the pervasiveness and the limitations of a consumer lifestyle, and are prepared to live with such limitations for the everyday benefits it provides' (p. 144). This point is illustrated in the cases of Carl and Jimmy who, although somewhat contradictorily seek to assert their individuality through associations with sub-cultural groups, foreground the accessibility of being able to adopt identities by purchasing consumer products:

Carl W: … I used, well, the Gothic 3 monkey from the advert [3 Mobiles] because like, I don't want you like putting names on me, but a lot of people see me as a Goth, but I also see myself as a Goth so I'm pretty much in both spaces.

Interviewer: What does being a Goth mean to you or what does it mean?

Carl W: Well to other people it means you worship the devil, but I don't think that, I just think you wear some clothes and you're automatically a Goth, there you go.

Jimmy W: Mosher is like a, it's a bit like Carl said like a Goth but it's in a different way. It's more of a different style, like electronic rock it's not heavy metal, but it's the way you dress, music you listen to, the way that you sort of style yourself out.

Thus, the above discussion begins to highlight that notions of individualism were integral to how participants conceptualised their own identities, epitomised by Polly's assertion 'I used words "I am what I am" because I am what I am basically'. Such ideas were further demonstrated through statements in which participants appeared to augment their sense of autonomy by promoting concepts relating to assertiveness. This was most commonly articulated by participants placing an onus on their 'freedom' and 'loudness' to indicate that they possessed an independent character and 'voice':

David M: The little tiger means, I don't know, free and loud and you know do what you want to do.
                …
Interviewer: What about the eagle?
David M: The eagle represents freedom.
Interviewer: Freedom?
David M: Yeah and you know same as the tiger really.

Natalie M: I like that picture [image of a dove] most of all because//
Interviewer: //the picture of the dove//
Natalie M: //yeah because I'm a free spirit so I like doing and saying wild things.
Interviewer: Wild things.
Natalie M: Trying new stuff.

Jack M: I've got a dinosaur 'cause they're quite loud and I think people see me as quite loud.

Charlotte T1:	… Chrissie Watts [*EastEnders* character] 'cause she's like a bit of a, she's quite loud ain't she and I feel that I'm loud.

This point is also illustrated within the following accounts, whereby participants' emphasis on exerting autonomous identities arguably comes to enforce their feelings of individuality more overtly:

Interviewer:	And what about Kat Slater [*Eastenders* character]?
Jason C:	Oh she, like she like *EastEnders* if it didn't have someone like Kat Slater it would be really plain, like if I like didn't have a lot of my friends around I think it would be really plain and boring.
Interviewer:	So you think Kat Slater is quite plain?
Jason C:	No, she's really fiery and she's really good 'cause I like that.
Interviewer:	Oh, so she's kind of similar to how you feel. She's quite a fiery person//
Jason C:	//yeah, and like she's not afraid to do anything.
Interviewer:	So you like her assertiveness//
Jason C:	//yeah//
Interviewer:	//and that she's a bit//
Jason C:	//yeah, she's not really quiet she's not afraid to say anything she just comes out with it.

Interviewer:	Who is this woman?
Emily K:	Um, I forgot her name, I can't remember, but Kanye West is my idol because he like speaks his mind and I speak my mind.

Interviewer:	What about 'I'll speak out' [words]?
Carly R:	Because I'm quite opinionated and I say my views, I put my views out straight away.

David M:	I've got a picture of Tony Blair because he's like all powerful like me.
Interviewer:	In what way do you think you're powerful?
David M:	My voice. I'm very opinionated.

The comments made by David are of particular interest here, as he directly equates his assertiveness with power and, in doing so, would therefore seem to support the belief that individualism will grant him greater agency through which success can ultimately be achieved. Indeed the importance of agency was a pervasive theme within many participants' responses, in which they actively asserted their own standpoints over those of others, and consequently served to reinforce the children's status as individuals:

Interviewer: So do you think how you see yourself and how you think other people see you are the same thing?

Annabel R: I think it would be different but I didn't do anything there because I don't really care how other people see me because I think my opinion matters most, and if they don't like how I am then that's just tough really that's how I am.

Natalie M: I don't know what other people think of me.

Interviewer: Does that bother you//

Natalie M: //not really.

Carmel O: … And I don't know what else other people think of me 'cause I don't really care what they think about me, it's what I think about myself.

Nevertheless, in spite of such forceful assertions, some participants went on to express that the influence of family and friends remained fundamental to how they perceived themselves[49]:

Natalie M: … I don't care what other people think sometimes.

Interviewer: Sometimes, you keep saying sometimes. When would you care?

Natalie M: When I most care like, when you're asking what your friends think and they're not giving you an honest opinion and they think it's a joke or if you really ask them if they do care.

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[49] This notion correlates with work conducted by Miles (2000) in which peers 'appear[ed] to be the most fundamental influence on young people's lives [and] friendship plays a key role in how young people perceive themselves' (p. 134).

Carmel O: I care about what my mum says what my family says and like my closest best mate which is only one, I've known her like eleven years I take in what she says.

Importantly however, for the participants, such influences did not detract from the significance of creating an individual successful self, the pursuit of which was displayed through assertions of achievement, ambition and hard work:

Zakirah K: With the award picture what I tried to express was that how I'm always like winning awards and stuff.

Carly R: … I showed the target because I'm, I like to be ambitious and I like to hit my target basically so in school or anything and I did the mountain with a person on top because I'm ambitious and, yeah so I just wanted to show that.

Interviewer: So what else is it about him [Jermaine Dafoe] that you identify with?
Andre W: On the pitch he's hard-working like me.
Interviewer: And is that something you see in yourself as well?
Andre W: Yeah.
Interviewer: If you had more time are there any pictures you would have liked to have put on the collage?
Andre W: Maybe an athlete. Maybe put an athlete on both sides.
Interviewer: What would the athlete mean to you? What would it represent?
Andre W: Hard-working and being good.

6.7.2 Creativity and Aspirations

Within the interviews some participants discussed creative activities and talents, through which they appeared to make manifest a desire to display their conceptions of a unique, self-made and individual identity. Interestingly, in many cases, these conversations focused on participants' engagement in acts of artistic expression which, it is possible to suggest, came to be a metaphorical representation for their own constructions of the (ongoing project of the) self:

Robert O:	I've got a Max Power Great White [car] which is, I think it shows that I can, well I like building stuff and making things, it shows that I can customise and think about things and can create new stuff.
Joe C:	There's various music things like the MP3 player and the guitar and stuff because I'm in a band and I like writing music a lot, I'm doing new songs all the time.
Interviewer:	Why have you used Snoop Doggy Dog?
Amira K:	He's good at rap and stuff and I'm always writing and always like thinking about new stuff to write.
Interviewer:	And what about all this Manga?
India R:	Because I draw Manga I've got a book full of different characters that I like to draw dedicated like a couple of months at the moment to it, then I'm thinking about a story for it which I'm gonna write and which is gonna turn into a book so yeah.
Interviewer:	So what are you trying to express about how you see yourself?
India R:	I don't want to sound big-headed but I'm talented.
Interviewer:	Talented in what way?
India R:	Well I can sing, I can draw, I can play the piano and I've got quite a few friends that think the same as well.

Such considerations pertaining to creativity and its symbolic portrayal of the construction of identity as a self-aware and autonomous process – best illustrated by Robert's remark 'I can customise and think about things and can create new stuff' – helps foreground the increasing significance that reflexivity plays within the children's lives. As noted previously, Giddens (1991) states that the centrality of reflexivity within late modern Western societies results in questions regarding identity and lifestyle becoming an everyday dimension of social life, which are reinforced by contemporary media. Moreover, as traditional roles – which were formerly prescribed and taken-for-granted – begin to diminish, individuals consequently reflect more upon their lives and aspirations. This issue was apparent within participants' discussions, as demonstrated by the following accounts:

Interviewer:	What about the Brad Pitt head?
Richard M:	I think I resemble Brad Pitt in many ways and the body that I have there I think is exactly the same except mine has a few more packs on there (laughter in room).
Interviewer:	Right. Thinking about this side, about how you see yourself, now I know you've been laughing but are these things that you genuinely think you are, or are they things that you aspire to, that you want to be like?
Richard M:	Well David [pupil] told me to say yes to that I think I am, but I think I aspire.
	…
Interviewer:	So inside you aspire to be fashionable and have a body like that and look like Brad Pitt?
Richard M:	Yes.
Interviewer:	Let's go to the picture of Arnold Schwarzenegger, is that how you see yourself?
Oscar O:	Well, well he's like my hero and that's how I see myself like in a few years.
Interviewer:	In a few years?
Oscar O:	Yeah that's what I see myself as.
Interviewer:	And what is it about Christian Ronaldo that you identify with?
Adrian O:	He's skilful and he like moves with the ball and he does skilful tricks.
Interviewer:	So do you think you're quite a skilful person?
Adrian O:	No not really, I try to be but not really.
Interviewer:	So would you like look up to him and aspire to be like him?
Adrian O:	Yeah.
Interviewer:	So one day you would like to be able to say that's how I see myself?
Adrian O:	But not Portuguese.
Interviewer:	So is there part of you that sees yourself as identifying with Mariah Carey, or do you see her somebody that you look up to and aspire to be like?
Sarah M:	Aspire to be like.
Interviewer:	In what ways?

Sarah M: Just like pretty and a singer and things like that.

Interviewer: You've also got a picture here of a lady playing football.

Ellie T2:   Yeah that's Hope Powell the manager of the girls' England team.

Interviewer: Why have you used her?

Ellie T2:   Because I like to play football and I want to be in the England team.

Interviewer: So do you identify or respect her, or see her as a role model?

Ellie T2:   Yeah.

Interviewer: What about this [image of the Olympic symbol]?

Ellie T2:   I put a picture of the Olympics, I drew that because I like sport and I want to be in the Olympics one day.

Significantly, it should be noted that these statements appear to remain delineated along gender lines. For example the boys' aspirations were essentially grounded within notions of physicality, these being masculinity, sporting prowess and toughness, which can therefore be read as their desire to possess hegemonic masculine attributes (Connell, 2000). Indeed as detailed earlier, Richard specifically is perceived as not conforming to such ideals and because of this becomes victimised by his peers (see pp. 117-118). Furthermore, David's influence over Richard's responses ('well David told me to say yes') would indicate that his behaviour is subject to 'policing' by other boys (Buckingham, 1993c). Moreover, the attainment of set hegemonic standards is highlighted by Adrian who, although he aspires to such values, places emphasis on his 'whiteness' and, in doing so, foregrounds this as a precondition of hegemonic masculinity. In the case of girls, aspirations tended to either be directed by traditional 'femininity', or constitute an outright rejection of these principles. This is clearly exemplified within the above extracts in which Sarah utilises the image of Mariah Carey to express that she would 'like [to be] pretty and a singer', whereas Ellie undermines 'feminine' conventions by articulating her aspirations through sport. Interestingly, these same themes also emerged within participants' discussions of their career aspirations:

Interviewer: What do you want to do?

Robert O: I want to be a lawyer.

Interviewer: Why do you want to be a lawyer?

Robert O: It has really good pay and it's got loads of industries involved with to do with it.

Interviewer: And you've//

Dale T2:   //Colin Farrell that's because he does action films and I like action films so I would like to be an action actor.

Interviewer: I've noticed a picture of Trinny and Susannah, why are they there?

India R: Because my friends and myself are a bit like them and we want to be like interior fashion designers when we're older so they're like our idols.

Interviewer: And you've also got some babies here.

Christina T1:   Yeah because I like children and stuff and I'd like to work with children and stuff I think yeah, and like I want to have children when I'm older as well.

For the boys their intended future professions focused on jobs which, once again, seemingly embodied hegemonic masculine ideals. For instance, Robert's goal of being a lawyer is motivated by a desire to achieve power, authority and economic success, and Dale's attraction to becoming an 'action actor' is embedded in notions of physicality. In contrast to this, many girls envisaged careers that are typically associated with 'feminine' interests, as illustrated by India and Christina aspiring to work within the spheres of fashion and childcare. However, not all girls shared such sentiments and articulated aspirations for working within traditionally male dominated professions, such as medicine and science, which possibly reflects, as Sharpe (1994) states, 'the slow pace of movement away from the traditional stereotype of women's work' (p. 298):

Leah T2:   … I chose the doctor because I want to be a doctor when I get older.

May R: … I want to be a marine biologist as I'm interested in water life.

6.7.3 Individualization Failing?: There's Nothing Special About Me

The preceding discussions indicate that for participants within this study, notions of individualism were fundamental to how they conceptualised their own identities. Moreover assertions of autonomy, individuality and aspirations were perceived as a means through which success can ultimately be achieved. However, despite many boys and girls claiming a unique sense of self, some participants specifically chose to identify themselves as 'normal':

Interviewer:	… What type of person would other people think you were?
Randeep C:	I'm just a normal boy.

Interviewer:	What type of person are you trying to say you are then? How do you see your identity, what are you trying to express about it here?
Sabina R:	I'm a normal person.

Although it could be suggested that these comments may indirectly reflect the participants' individuality precisely because they elect not to label themselves as 'distinct', this argument is problematised when considering the actual children who expressed such sentiments. These children were predominantly from areas of economic and social deprivation, and because of this are arguably aware of their identities being positioned 'on the margins'. As a consequence, these participants' articulations of 'normalness' can therefore be read as a negation of their 'outsider' status. For example, Callum maintains that he is 'average' whilst observing that other people view him in a lesser light:

Interviewer:	Do you think there's a difference between how you think other people see you and how you see yourself?
Callum O:	Yeah.
Interviewer:	What's the difference?
Callum O:	I think I'm average.
Interviewer:	You think you're average?
Callum O:	Yeah.
Interviewer:	Do you think other people think that you are average?

Callum O:	No.
Interviewer:	What do they think?
Callum O:	Small.
Interviewer:	Is that below average?
Callum O:	Yeah.
Interviewer:	So they think you're small and you think you're average?
Callum O:	Yeah, I'm average.

Thus, Callum's emphasis on being 'average' may indicate his desire to be recognised as equal to others (the same as, rather than below, their level), a notion also evident within the following participant's account:

Alison O:	… I'm just a normal girl who's just normal, I'm not nothing special.
Interviewer:	Where's the normal girl?
Alison O:	That one [image of Kelly Clarkson].
Interviewer:	Is that Kelly Clarkson?
Alison O:	Yeah but I couldn't find anything else.
Interviewer:	So it's not Kelly Clarkson that you like//
Alison O:	//no but normal//
Interviewer:	//she's a normal girl for you?
Alison O:	Yeah.
Interviewer:	Why is she a normal girl for you?
Alison O:	I don't know she's just, she's just, well there's nothing special about her and there's nothing special about me either so.

Crucially, then, the above comments foreground concerns that the process of individualization, as Miles (2000) stated previously, can result in feelings of isolation and self-blame (p. 68). Consequently, the participants' remarks may indicate that individualization fails to offer equal opportunities and possibilities for all young people living within late modern Western societies.

6.8 Summary

This chapter has highlighted that the decline of tradition in late modern Western societies has resulted in individuals having to confront how they formulate their own

identities. The chapter has outlined a number of critical perspectives on masculinity and femininity and explored the participants' own understandings of their gendered selves. Furthermore, the chapter identified that whilst ideas about gender played an important role in how participants conceptualised and constructed their identities, notions of individualism constituted an equally significant element of their conceptions of self. Therefore, the next chapter moves on to consider in greater detail how the participants understand and negotiate their sense of self through an examination of how they utilise the media in the shaping of their self-identities with a specific focus on role models.