The continuing reproduction of gendered subject choice at post-16.

Pinch, Rebecca

THE CONTINUING REPRODUCTION OF GENDERED SUBJECT CHOICE AT POST-16

Thesis submitted for M.Phil Examination

Rebecca Pinch

University of Wales Swansea

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DECLARATION AND STATEMENTS

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This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree

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This thesis is the result of my own investigation, except where otherwise stated. Other sources are acknowledged in brackets and by footnotes giving explicit references. A bibliography is appended.

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Chapter One

Introductory Chapter

This chapter aims to 'set the scene' for my research on gendered subject choice at post-16, first by discussing the 'problem' of gendered subject choice at this educational stage, then by providing some background information on the research – the college where the research took place, my role within the college at that time and a brief overview of what the research actually consisted of.

Education is cited by many, as a 'success story for women' (Walby, 1997), due to the fact that girls in schools are now passing more exams than boys. Thus, two questions are raised: is it really possible for us to describe education as a 'success' as far as women are concerned? Secondly, if indeed we can describe it as 'success', why does the success fail to translate into wider society, for example, at work, where gender segregation prevails and women who work continue to earn 20% less on average than their male counterparts and are very much constrained by their sexuality and the expectations associated with that sexuality? It is possibly at this crucial stage, when male and female students opt for subjects at post-16 level and for the first time in their educational careers have complete freedom of choice, that a direct link between education and the workplace becomes completely clear. So what is it that seems to propel students towards subjects of a gendered nature?

The persistent problem of gendered subject choice at post-16 was an issue that might have been tackled as a by-product of Curriculum 2000 – a scrapping of the old system of the traditional two-year A levels, now to be replaced with two separate qualifications, the A/S level and the A2 level. The A/S level was said to be easier than the old A-level, (thus enabling the students to opt for four or five subjects at A/S level), and the A2 exam was then supposed to be more difficult than the legacy A level

exams, an aim of the system being that A/S levels would provide the students with a more manageable introduction to further education after GCSE's than the old A-level courses did. As far as gender was concerned, Curriculum 2000 was constructed in a way that it might continue the work that the National Curriculum had hopefully started in compulsory education and eliminate (or at least attempt to remove) gender divisions in subject choice at post-16. The implementation of the National Curriculum in 1988 had ensured that all students male or female followed a number of *core* subjects through to GCSE level. Thus all students studied English, maths and science, at least one modern foreign language and all students had to study subjects such as history, geography, technology, music, physical education and art at foundation level. This, it was hoped, would then feed into post-16 choice with the new Curriculum 2000. It was asserted that giving students the ability to choose a wider programme of study in their first year of further education would allow both males and females to opt for a combination of both 'traditional' and 'non-traditional' subjects; girls who might previously have felt a certain pressure to opt for three 'feminine' or at least 'gender-suitable' subjects under the old A-level system were now encouraged to opt for additional A/S levels that would provide a contrast to their other choices, for example, a girl who might have opted for English, French and sociology as A-level subjects under the old system could now choose these subjects but also continue with maths and a science for at least a year under the new system, and who knows, might end up opting for one of the latter choices at A2 level. In other words, under Curriculum 2000, students would be able to keep their options slightly more open by studying four or five A/S levels for one year and then in their second year choosing the three or four subjects that they enjoyed the most and taking those through to the rather more 'taxing' A2 levels. It was suggested that students who would usually take three sciences would now be able to have a 'taste' of something

different, perhaps a language; students who enjoyed humanities subjects would be able to dabble in Maths for a while longer; students could perhaps try something 'new', something they might never have opted for under the old system. At least this is how it was supposed to work on paper. This would also hopefully have an effect on the traditional gendering of subject choices for males and females.

Unfortunately, although some might say rather predictably, what you actually found was most students continued to opt for all sciences or all humanities with only a few students 'broadening' their subject bases. What also happened was that students quickly became overloaded with the pressure of undertaking four or five subjects; teachers were very unsure of the standard required by the new A/S levels and were frightened of 'under-teaching', thus tended to continue teaching to old A-level standards. Teachers of several subjects found that even though the A/S levels were less demanding as far as standards of work were concerned, the amount of work that had to be covered by the A/S June exams was vast and therefore very difficult to teach satisfactorily. (This has become even more of a problem with most A/S exams now taking place in the middle of May.) A large number of students dropped their fourth subject much more quickly than had been anticipated and many weaker students found that taking just three A/S levels was a struggle.

Therefore, we appear to be as far as we ever were from solving problems of gendered subject choices and attempting to 'ease' pupils in gently to the world of post-16 education; Curriculum 2000 would not appear to have been successful in broadening the subject options of students, particularly when gender is considered, and the perennial problem of gendered subject choice at post-16 continues.

My research aims to investigate why this is the case, drawing on social/cultural reproduction theory to look at the lives of a number of students at a British, Catholic

place of further education. Issues of sexuality, life in the college classroom, and influences of home and family will all be explored in an attempt to make sense of the continuing practice of males and females opting for 'traditional' and gendered subject choices at post-16.

About the College

The college is situated in a very affluent area, towards the bottom of an avenue lined with some of the most magnificent and expensive properties in the area. There are approximately 1,050 students on the attendance roll with male students making up 47% of the college population, female students, 53%. Despite the 'glamorous', wealthy location of the college and generally as a result of the religious orientation of the college (and also due to the fact that one of the area's most prestigious school sixth forms is situated nearby), students that attended the college were from a variety of backgrounds, mainly drawn from the Catholic community in the area, though containing a small minority of other religious groups and an additional minority of non-Catholic, non-religious students from the local catchment area.

The college offers a number of different courses to its students on three different levels (1-3). Level one programmes include foundation level vocational and basic skills courses. Level two courses include several GCSE programmes and intermediate level vocational and technical qualifications; many students who enrol on level one and two programmes and who are successful continue their studies at the college and enrol on level three programmes. Level three courses include the A/S and A2 level programmes and advanced vocational programmes. Most students at the college are enrolled on level three programmes and at present the college offers thirty-eight subjects at level three, although certain of these subjects are only available via

partnership with the Area Collegium (thus are not actually taught on the college site e.g. Arabic) and others are only available to A/S level e.g. Italian, which may of course affect student enrolment on such programmes.

There are four main Catholic feeder schools to which the college is required to give open access and priority, and these schools differ greatly in terms of their social class intake and in terms of their success as far as national league tables are concerned. They are:

'St Matthew's' - An overwhelmingly affluent Catholic comprehensive school situated close to the college. Most students from 'St Matthew's' go on to the college to continue their education. The largest percentage of students at the college, that is, approximately 25% of students, are from 'St Matthew's' and a very high percentage of these students enrol on the higher (level 3) A/S and A2 courses that are available at the college. As a result, due to the main focus of my study being on subject choice on level 3 courses, most of the students that took part in the study were students who had come to the college from 'St Matthew's'.

'St Mark's' - Providing a sharp contrast to 'St Matthew's', 'St Mark's' is a Catholic comprehensive situated in an area characterised by decline and deprivation in line with FEFC postcode data. Approx 8% of the students at the college are bussed in from this area each day. These students tend to enrol on the level 2 and level 3 vocational courses (e.g. GNVQ's, BTEC's etc.) that the college has to offer.

'St Luke's' - Again, a Catholic school situated in a socio-economically deprived area, provides 8% of the students at the college.

'St John's' - Another Catholic school serving relatively deprived areas, makes up 9% of the college population, and again overwhelmingly opting for level 2 and level 3 vocational course options.

Most students from both 'St Luke's' and 'St John's' schools tend to leave education at 16 and the college is particularly interested in targeting these schools to increase future participation rates, both as a contribution to economic prosperity in the area, but also of widening participation within the Catholic community. Those minority of students who do go on to attend the college tend to enrol on the level 2/3 vocational courses and so the college is looking at increasing and improving this type of provision.

The college exists as a result of its distinctive nature as Catholic, and thus the mission statement of the college encompasses this; "...the colleges exist to provide a distinctive post-16 catholic education as an integral part of the Church's pastoral and evangelising mission in society. This distinctive nature and character of our Catholic provision inspires every aspect of college activity."(The College's Strategic Plan, 2000-2004) This being said, it was very difficult to note this 'distinctive nature' when at the college the majority of the time, the only real tell-tale signs being the outward displays of Catholicism; the college had its own chapel, many crucifixes were visible around the college, it was required that all students attended a compulsory RE lesson every week (although most students rarely attended these sessions in practice) and the students were asked to take part in masses on specific Holy days.

Equal Opportunities is not a high priority at the college. There is, as required by law, an Equal Opportunities Policy and Race Relations policy, however there is no equal opportunities officer. The Associate Vice-Principal is the 'named person' for Equal opportunities and Race relations. All students however, have a personal tutor, assigned to them at the beginning of their study at the college and it is within the pastoral programme of the college that equal opportunities are to be addressed, although the policy refers solely to 'race and cultural diversity issues' - gender is not mentioned.

The college is certainly run more along the organisational lines of a school than of an FE college. The students were given very little freedom, in fact one student described it as being, "Just like school but without the uniform". The college day began at 9:15 and finished at 4:00 with five one hour and five minute lessons and students were not expected to leave the site during that time unless it was one of their 'pre-arranged' free periods. Students were encouraged to fill up their timetables by taking extra lessons, for example, Key Skills, general studies etc. and parents' evenings, reports to parents, ringing home were still very much a part of the college life.

As for staff, there were clear demarcations as to what was and was not acceptable applying to all areas of college life – dress code, time spent in staff room, teaching methods, ways of talking to the students etc. – all had unwritten rules attached to them that all staff were (very quickly) made aware of. As a member of staff at the college for a number of years I noted that the relationship between senior management, particularly the principal, and the staff was incredibly formal and sometimes problematic. What this did mean however was that generally, although there was rather a high turnover of staff, there was a high level of camaraderie and mutual support between the staff that remained. The overall feeling about the college was that it was a 'good college', with an excellent staff, however, there was a belief that it was slowly degenerating into a 'technical college' and losing its reputation for academia, and many of the most able students in the area, including those from 'St Matthew's', were opting to attend a local school sixth form that excelled in the area of level 3 provision.

My role at the college

I was employed by the College in September 1999 as a full-time teacher of sociology. Sociology was a very popular subject with 116 students following the A-level syllabus when I started teaching at the college. It was notable that the vast majority of these

students were female – one class in the lower sixth was entirely female, tending to suggest that sociology was perceived as a 'feminine' subject. At the end of the 1999/2000 school year I was given the opportunity to become head of the subjects of both sociology and psychology at the college, ready to implement the Labour government's upheaval of the post-16 education system with the introduction of Curriculum 2000; as discussed earlier, the old A-levels were to be phased out and be replaced by a new system of one year A/S levels with the option of being carried on to one year A/2 levels.

As a teacher at the college, when it came to undertaking the research, I enjoyed uninhibited access to any reports, figures, student histories etc. that were available. There were always people who were willing to give up their time to help me, be it searching for documents, or trying to bring together students etc. Most of the staff showed an interest in what I was doing, and I had little trouble in getting members of staff to give interviews, in fact, I found myself to be privy to many a conversation or comment about the college in the staff room that I might perhaps otherwise not have been aware of, and certain members of staff even briefed me on news stories that they had seen, brought in news paper cuttings that they thought might be of use, and so on. Staff of the subjects that I was studying were also very helpful in getting their students to come forward and take part in focus groups and interviews, something that I believe would have been much more difficult without their cooperation. Several male members of staff joked about me being, "One of those liberal sociology teachers with nothing better to do", but on the whole the staff were very helpful. I discuss how I feel my position as a teacher at the college may have affected my research in the methodology chapter.

The Research

For the purposes of this research it was necessary to select a sample of level three subjects that would be taught on the college site at both A/S and A2 level, and that would be representative (albeit subjectively) of subjects considered to be 'masculine', 'feminine' and 'gender-neutral'. The students who took part in the research were drawn from two year-groups, the first group being those students who enrolled in the college in the academic year 1999/2000 (the last year of the 'old' A-level), the second being those students who joined the college in the academic year 2000/2001 for the inception of Curriculum 2000 and the new A/S level examinations, thus any immediate effect that the new system might have had on gendered subject choice could be noted and compared. The nine subjects that were chosen were as follows:

- 'Masculine' – Physics, Computer studies and Maths.
- 'Feminine' – Sociology, French and Advanced GNVQ Health and Social Care.
- 'Gender-neutral' – Biology, History and Geography.

These subjects were selected as a result of previous sociological literature that indicates them to be 'gendered' subjects in some way (in the cases of the 'masculine' and 'feminine' subjects) and in terms of the numbers of students of each gender who had opted for the subject over the two years.

Table 1

The population of these particular classes as far as gender is concerned in the academic year 99/00 (legacy A-level classes) were as follows:

Subject	No. of boys	No. of girls
Physics	43	3
Computer studies	37	5
Maths	43	21
Sociology	11	57
French	2	15
Health GNVQ (Double award)	1	20
Geography	30	19
History	23	36
Biology	32	37

In certain subjects there is an incredible imbalance toward one gender, in particular the subjects of physics, computer studies, sociology, French and health and social care. Other subjects do have striking imbalances although they appear to be less marked, (maths is the main subject in this category with roughly twice as many males having opted for the subject than females). Other subjects, for example geography, history and biology seem to attract a more equal number of students of both genders that perhaps indicates a sense of gender-neutrality in the way in which these subjects are perceived.

Table 2

The gender population of these particular classes in the academic year 2000/2001 (new curriculum 2000) were as follows:

Subject	No. of boys	No. of girls
Physics	56	5
Computer studies	42	5
Maths	62	36
Sociology	8	45
French	2	18
Health GNVQ (Double award)	1	21
Geography	32	23
History	28	42
Biology	37	44

It is clear to see that although all numbers, male and female, have increased slightly (with the exception of sociology which probably lost out slightly to psychology which was offered by the college for the first time this year) in terms of options for all subjects, in proportionate terms there has been very little change in 'gendered' option choice.

The gender of teaching staff in these areas 1999/2001 is reported in the following table:

Table 3

Gender of teaching staff at the college in the academic year 2000/2001

Subject	No. of male teachers	No. of female teachers
Physics	1	0
Computer Studies	1	0
Maths	2	2
Sociology	0	2
French	0	1
Health GNVQ (Double award)	0	2
Geography	1	1
History	2	1
Biology	1	1

The information in the above tables convey the very gendered nature of subject choice in the college and this pattern can also be seen to be reflected in the teaching staff of the college. Maths can be noted as an exception here, there being equal numbers of both male and female teachers of the subject and it might be argued that there is something of an improvement in female participation in the subject resulting from the implementation of the national curriculum.

Single-sex focus groups were carried out with both genders in each of the subject areas where numbers allowed: with physics and computer studies it was only possible to have male focus groups, and with French and Health and Social care it was only possible to have female focus groups. Semi-structured interviews then took place

with a male and female student from each of the subject areas and with male and female members of staff from each of the subject areas; again in certain subjects this was not possible, namely physics, computer studies, sociology, French, and Health and Social Care as teachers of only one gender were available.

Participant observation was also a non-formalised part of the research. As a teacher at the college I felt it would be both useful and interesting to include my observations, thoughts and feelings, though with a reflexive awareness of such an approach and the problems it might entail. Again, the use of this method and of both focus groups and interviews is discussed further in the methodology.

My interest in this topic was ignited when I was a sociology student studying education and gendered subject choice. I had no idea what to opt for at A-level, not really knowing what I wanted to do as a career. I remember thinking that I would quite like to do maths but that I would probably find it too hard at A-level, despite achieving an 'A' in the subject at GCSE. (My brother incidentally, had no problem opting for maths three years later even though he had only achieved a 'B' at GCSE!) Eventually I opted for English, French and Sociology (even though I wasn't really that keen on languages) believing a modern foreign language would be useful to me in my future career. Studying sociology then made me question my choices and the reasons why I had opted for the subjects that I did. Going to University, doing teacher training and finally teaching a gendered subject myself continued to compound the question, why, in the twenty-first century do students continue to opt for gendered subjects at post-16?

Chapter 2

Literature Review – Introduction

My study intends to examine reasons why students persist in making 'gendered' subject choices at post-16, thus preparing themselves for gendered jobs in the labour market, and playing an important part in the process of social reproduction whereby a 'gender gap' continues to exist. This process continues despite the establishment of a national curriculum whereby all students, male and female, are required to pursue certain subjects to GCSE level, despite improving rates of achievement for both sexes, and despite the current focus on education emphasising male disadvantage. A situation prevails in our society:

> "...where men who are white, middle-class and heterosexual predominate in positions of power" (Charles, 2002, p-43).

This chapter aims to place this research within the context of existing literature on gender and education. First, to examine gendered education from an historical perspective, second to discuss empirical studies that have focussed on various issues in gender and education that are relevant to my research, and third, to look at research into sexuality in education and the workplace. Finally, the aim is to critically assess the different ways sociologists have attempted to theorise education and specifically gender and education, looking particularly at cultural reproduction theory as providing a useful framework for my research.

The historical situation

As a starting point, it is vital that the relationship of gender and education be examined in terms of history and culture. Cultural attitudes, meanings and beliefs, though constantly changing and fluid, are partly and inevitably shaped and reproduced according to prevailing discourses of gender in particular time periods. W. Gareth Evans argues

that it is necessary to look at gendered education from an historical and cultural perspective in order to contextualise the inequality and discrimination still evident in contemporary educational settings:

> "...educational developments do not occur in a social and political vacuum... The study of the gendering of the school curriculum in Victorian and early twentieth century Wales offers new perspectives on the experience of girls in...schools" (Evans, 1996, p-81).

Evans underlines the powerful social forces that affected the education of women in Victorian Wales in particular a society characterised by patriarchy. Evans usefully refers to patriarchy as a system based on male construction of society and social relations in a way that enables them to hold power over and control women.

> "Patriarchal domination of women was well established. The forces of tradition, conservatism and prejudice from many directions, including the churches and chapels, the law and medical professions, projected an image of the women as the 'weaker sex' both physically and intellectually" (ibid p-81).

As a result of such patriarchal domination the feminine ideal at this time was defined by the 'cult of domesticity', that is the belief that women should be concerned only with the domestic/privacy of the home and have nothing to do with the 'public', the outside world. Such an ideal was highly regarded by those men wielding power in Wales at this time and thus strongly influenced 'separate spheres' of education for boys and girls. Furthermore, social class meant that the education of middle-class girls and working-class girls was further differentiated.

> "With schooling merely a brief interlude in the lives of working-class pupils, teaching focused on the basic skills of literacy and numeracy. There was also recognition of the need to educate the girl for her later role of wife or domestic servant" (ibid p-82/83).

Evans describes how needlework was seen as an important skill for working-class girls to acquire for it represented femininity and thrift. He contends that women's education was perceived as being of great importance, for girls were eventually to be

responsible for the caring and nurturing of a nation and thus required the domestic skills that made such a task possible.

> "In a detailed survey of education in parts of Meirioneth, Neath and Merthyr Tydfil in 1859 for the Newcastle commission, the Assistant commissioner, John Jenkins concluded that insufficient attention was given...to the special requirements of the female. This was seen as a serious defect because the female's potential was thereby not effectively harnessed" (ibid p-84).

For middle-class girls whose destiny was marriage and home making, education was the learning of ladylike subjects. This stood in stark contrast to the academic educational training of middle class boys. Education prepared the population for their adult roles, according to both class and gender.

Simone Clarke's study of the daughters of the Welsh gentry in the 17th and 18th centuries offers an alternative examination of how girls' education differed from that of boys in three ways. First, that boys were taught by professionals, girls by a variety of people usually family, friends and relatives;

> "As the daughters of the Welsh gentry were not destined for the public life of politics and business, the resources, both financial and human, bestowed upon their instruction were limited" (Clarke, 1996, p-63).

Second, boys often went to a formal educational setting whereas girls were educated mostly within the home. Third, for the most part, academic subjects were only taught to boys, with girls learning:

> "...the traditional female accomplishments of dancing, music, needlework and housewifery as well as reading, writing, religious catechism and French" (ibid p-66).

Jane Purvis illustrates how the power of 'domestic ideology", that is, the belief that women were 'ideally located' within the home as 'full-time wives and mothers', in addition to other economic, social and cultural factors, affected the forms and content of education for both working-class and middle-class women in her analysis of the history of women's education in 19th century Britain. Purvis demonstrates how domestic ideology was premised on three main assumptions. First the biological sexual division of labour of

the sexes and the notion of separate spheres, whereby the pursuit of knowledge was seen as a man's prerogative. Second, women were not regarded as individuals but rather were defined in relation to men and children.

> "Ruskin (1865) claimed that a woman should know a language or science only in so far as it enabled her to sympathise in her husband's pleasure and in those of his best friends" (Purvis, 1987, p-254).

Third, it was believed that women were inferior to men both intellectually and in a more general sense. It was believed that women had smaller brains and therefore should not receive the same education as men for they would simply not be able to cope. In the late 19th century the London examination board finally allowed women to sit examinations although these women had to be chaperoned in case of excess strain and buckets of cold water were kept at hand should they faint under such stressful conditions. (Taylor, 1995, p-301)

The ideal type 'good woman' necessarily varied for the working-class and the middle-class; it was simply not possible for a working-class woman to adhere to the 'lady-like behaviour' prescribed for the middle-classes and thus the working-class ideal placed more emphasis on practical, domestic skills.

Purvis asserts that bourgeois domestic ideology heavily influenced the education of women during this period;

> "...women who sought some form of education had to struggle against the exhaustive demands made upon their time for family responsibilities and endless childbearing in patriarchal society which facilitated the entry of their husbands and brothers, rather than themselves, into a variety of forms of adult education" (Purvis, 1987, p-258).

The pressure on women to conform to cultural expectations was such that their experience of education was both limited and gender-specific.

It is evident then, that during these periods of history, formal (and some informal) education in Britain was a clearly gendered process, with boys and girls having very

different gendered experiences. Gender identities and sexuality had very definite boundaries and education starkly reflected these limitations.

The provision of schooling proceeded very slowly and selectively. Notions of the vulnerability of children did not prevent their employment on a wide scale in heavy, dangerous industrial work. In Britain as late as 1870, only 2% of children aged 14, and 40% of those aged 10, were receiving full-time education. It was not until the implementation of the 1944 Education act that all boys and girls were entitled to a secondary education and yet still influencing post-war education policy discussions was the same gender ideology, that is, an ideology that highlghted distinctly separate spheres for males and females. There was an emphasis at this time on equality of opportunity (with focus on access rather than outcome), however this 'equality' was defined as class inequality, and more specifically a class inequality concerning boys. The curriculum continued to be split rigidly along gender lines;

> "Girls were to be educated to become wives and mothers and to take up appropriately gendered paid employment once their children were old enough, boys to become husbands and fathers, providing for their dependants, and working full time in a man's job" (Charles, 2002, p-87/88).

It was not until the 1960s, which saw the emergence of a number of movements, including the civil rights movement in the United States and the 'second wave of feminism' in the developed world, that ideas on schooling were reassessed, mainly due to the fact that the system as it stood had failed to challenge inequality, particularly in terms of social class. Within such a climate the comprehensive system was introduced, based on the principle of equality of opportunity (in terms of class at least) and one type of secondary school for everyone. Additionally, social inequality in terms of gender and race were placed firmly on the political agenda, with the successful passage of the Sex Discrimination Act (1975) and the Race Relations Act (1976) giving added impetus to the struggles against inequality. Education and its relationship with society as a whole

became the focus of much sociological analysis. By the late 1970s gender inequality in education was becoming increasingly researched, with a focus on female disadvantage and the introduction of anti-sexism in schools. With an emphasis on outcome, feminist sociologists were keen to investigate reasons for female underachievement, for example, looking at socialisation factors, classroom behaviour and teacher attitudes among other things.

In contemporary Britain however, with girls outperforming boys at nearly every level of the education process, the focus has shifted to male disadvantage, with questions now being asked as to why boys are 'underachieving'. Murphy and Elwood suggest, that such concern needs to be set alongside the fact "...that similarities in males' and females' performance far outweigh any differences observed" (Murphy and Elwood, 1998 p-162/3) and we should also acknowledge that perhaps girls have always outperformed boys and that male 'underachievement' is not a new phenomenon. Charles points to the old 11+ exam which sorted children into grammar and secondary modern schools;

> "...girls outperformed boys but, in order to maintain an equal balance in grammar schools, girls had to achieve better results than boys to gain a grammar school place" (Charles, 2002, p-91).

It should also be noted at this juncture, that there is a continuing gender imbalance in subject choice, particularly at post-16, where students *actually choose* their subjects. Charles writes:

> "...in the early twenty-first century the curriculum is still gendered although there have been significant changes since the 1950s and 1960s" (ibid p-90).

Evidently, the legacy of such a powerful, historical and cultural gender ideology has helped shape our persistently gendered education system. It is in light of this history that recent empirical studies of gender and education should be examined and that we should bear in mind how girls' achievements in education continue to "fit them for

gendered jobs rather than posing a threat to men's position in the labour market" (ibid p-94).

Recent empirical studies of gender issues and education

This section of the chapter will begin with a look at education policy in order to place the sociological studies within a political context. Then a number of research studies pertinent to my own will be examined. These studies include one of higher education which has been discussed in order to demonstrate how, as we progress further through the education system, women face increasing amounts of discrimination. Research on subject choices and why certain subjects are gendered will also be attended to.

An examination of Equal Opportunities Policy and Practice in Colleges of Further Education carried out by the Further Education Unit (FEU) highlighted the following areas of concern: sex differentiation in choice of subject, under-representation in key subjects, underrepresentation of women in senior academic or administrative and management posts and lack of provision for mature women (FEU, 1989). A research report written for the Equal Opportunities Commission in 1996 by Arnot, David and Weiner found that although female performance had improved in all subjects, subject choice and entry at A level remained sex-stereotyped. In vocational courses sex stereotyping retains a particular stronghold. In terms of equal opportunities policy-making a wide variation exists regarding the awareness of gender inequality and how it is dealt with, and in the interpretation of equal opportunities and prioritisation of equality issues. Other findings showed that the management of schools and LEAs was overwhelmingly male, however, they concluded that pupils and students appeared less stereotyped in their views on gender relations. Underachieving groups were found to be working class boys and Asian girls (Arnot, David and Weiner, 1996). Such research is

intended to suggest implications for social policy and does not attempt to explain why such discrepancies and inequalities persist in education. Therefore, it would be sensible to consider the following sociological studies of education within this political framework.

Research carried out by Jannette Elwood and Chris Comber focused on gender differences in A-level examinations. Like myself, they highlight the gender segregation that continues to exist in subject choice and question the notion that females are ahead at all stages of examining. Likewise they take issue with the suggestion that it is the underachievement of boys we should all now be concerned about. Their evidence shows that:

> "... patterns of performance, especially at A-level, are more complex than is generally assumed [for example, gender differences in outcomes must be interpreted with reference to entry patterns] and at one of the most important stages of schooling and examining, males are still ahead" (Elwood and Comber, 1996, p-26).

Performance at A-level will have a direct influence on higher education of course, and when we look at higher education, issues of gendering become even more marked. By examining higher education we gain further evidence as to why the positions of power and high-status in society are invariably held by men.

In their article, 'The Trouble with Equal Opportunities: the Case of Women Academics,' West and Lyon discuss the shortcomings of the equality legislation in the 1970s with an examination of the inequality that remains in the world of higher education and academia. They contend that a combination of cultural and other institutional barriers continue to inhibit a movement towards equality. Certainly women are entering higher education in higher numbers than ever before, however women are still very much underrepresented as postgraduate students and "...gender differences in subject remain marked" (West and Lyon, 1995, p-52).

In university employment, West and Lyon indicate that despite improvements, the under-representation of women is still very evident.

> "In 1989 women formed only 20% of all academic staff in polytechnics and a mere 14% in universities" (ibid, p-52),

and furthermore women are concentrated in the lower grades and thus receive lower pay. Women are barely visible in any position in some disciplines such as engineering, physics and mathematics. A lack of representation of women at senior levels means there is a lack of 'mentors' or 'models' for other women to aspire to.

Using the University of Bristol as a case study West and Lyon examine equal opportunities within an academic setting. They suggest that as certain exceptions to the rule exist and a few women do make their way to the top, it is assumed by many that there are no barriers specific to women in academic life. Thus, they contend that explanations for women's under-representation fall into two broad categories. First, "... that women are simply not of the academic calibre of their male colleagues" (ibid p-62), and second that "... women give priority to their family and domestic commitments... partly as a result of gender socialisation, and partly from choice" (ibid p-62).

Both women and men perceive women to be the primary caregivers; women are the ones who have to juggle between 'public' and 'private' spheres.

> "Only women have to demonstrate that they are 'coping' with the pressure, since for men work must always come first, a priority uncluttered by the competing discourse of domesticity" (ibid p-63).

West and Lyon also discuss how women are excluded from the culture of male' collegiality' within these institutions. This has repercussions socially, but more importantly women:

> "... are also excluded from the useful networks that their male colleagues establish, and this in turn can mean exclusion from career opportunities: research contracts, new jobs and fruitful discussion" (ibid p-64).

West and Lyon state that there appear to be three main barriers to equality in universities. First, 'the nature of the academic environment', second, 'a lack of willingness to invest in equal opportunity' and third, those in favoured positions rarely relinquish their power to allow for marginalised groups to become fully incorporated. They conclude:

> "Liberal policies do...provide a procedural framework and also a cultural space within which it becomes possible to take issue with academic convention and practices...They do signal a commitment to change, albeit that the direction and force of this has continually to be contested" (ibid p-66).

These research findings are important in that they highlight the key inconsistency in recent policy-making and discussion in education, namely, that although females still appear to be losing out at key stages in their education and are continuing to prepare themselves for a gendered position in the labour market, it is boys' education that is being focused upon as 'problematic'. Elwood and Comber in particular have highlighted the problem of gendered subject choice at post-16 that my research has sought to investigate.

One of the subjects at post-16 selected for study in my research is that of maths. Maths has traditionally been thought of as a 'male' subject, associated with the 'masculine' traits of logic and reason, a subject not suited to women. As Walkerdine writes:

> "Women, after all, are clearly irrational, illogical and too close to their emotions to be good at Mathematics. Or so the story goes" (Walkerdine, 1989, p-1).

Maths is of particular interest to my research due to the reason that, as all girls are now required to study maths to age 16 as it is required by the National Curriculum, it is interesting to see whether this affects female participation in the subject at post-16.

Valerie Walkerdine uses a post-structuralist framework in her study, "Counting Girls Out", investigating taken-for-granted assumptions linked to the idea that girls are no

good at maths. As the previous quotation demonstrates, girls are considered ill-equipped to cope with the rational, logical and non-emotional world of mathematics. Walkerdine claims that it is necessary to conduct a:

> "...'history of the present'- Foucault's term for an examination of the conditions which produced our taken-for-granted practices so that they come to seem obvious and unchallenged facts. This requires an examination of the evolution of certain practices and discourses concerning mathematics, gender and sexuality" (ibid p-20).

Walkerdine asserts that patriarchal, capitalist society has constructed the notion that to be 'good at maths', or mathematically minded at the highest levels is to be a logical, rational being, separated from emotion, and has been constructed in opposition to what it means to be 'feminine' in our society.

Jones and Smart discuss the relationship between confidence and mathematics in terms of gender. There is still a widely held belief in our society that girls are considered unable to do mathematics in the same competent manner as their male counterparts, however girls are continuing to opt out of mathematics which is still considered to be "...masculine, Eurocentric and divorced from social issues" (Jones and Smart, 1995, p-157).

Susan E. Sanders shows that in Wales, despite the implementation of the National Curriculum, fewer females choose to take mathematics than males at A level (Sanders, 1992). Jones and Smart argue that one of the reasons for girls' opting out of mathematics is their perception of their own ability and a negative attitude towards the subject. Secondly, as with Alison Kelly's (1987) research into why girls do not do science, Jones and Smart contend that mathematics is regarded as a cold, 'masculine' subject; "...mathematics research has historically been intimately linked with the military and destruction" (1995, Jones and Smart, p-158). Mary Harris writes that, "The idea of mathematics as a male enterprise has always been fundamental to our education" (1998, Harris, p-3).

Jones and Smart suggest that more efforts should be made to introduce new contexts for applying mathematics, for there is considerable evidence to show that the relative achievement of boys and girls is significantly altered according to context, again say the writers, a question of confidence.

Another reason given for girls' lack of confidence in the subject is the use of technology within it:

> "Men are widely seen as the people with the technological know-how, both in school and outside" (1995, Jones and Smart, p-159).

Jones and Smart also underline the idea of 'learned helplessness,' which they argue we might perhaps consider to be 'taught helplessness.' Overconfidence can be seen as an 'unfeminine' characteristic and:

> "...as women and girls we are taught to seek reassurance, particularly in specific areas of our life, such as academia" (ibid p- 161).

The writers additionally comment on the importance of teachers' styles, attitudes and perceptions. Jones and Smart come up with several strategies designed to help girls' confidence: mathematics conferences for 17 year olds, classes introducing new technology and involving girls in research to demonstrate their own confidence levels. They conclude:

> "We have studied the issue of confidence as we consider it a major factor affecting girls' levels of participation in mathematics. This is a political issue as mathematics is a 'gatekeeper' allowing access to a range of opportunities. Girls are excluding themselves from these opportunities by choosing not to continue with their mathematics studies" (ibid p-164).

French is another of the subjects focused on in my research due to its 'notoriety' as a feminine subject. Clark and Trafford examine the reverse notion of boys' underachievement and lack of confidence in the traditionally 'feminine' modern languages at GCSE level. Again, the factors for gender differentiation highlighted include both pupils' perspectives and attitudes and the practices and attitudes of the

teachers. Their conclusion as to how boys 'underachievement' can be explained is that many variables must be taken into account including gender, intelligence, aptitude and memory, parental support, socio-economic grouping and teacher-pupil interaction.

For my research project, I also believe it is extremely important to examine the attitudes of young people who are opting for the different subjects at post-16 as they may provide answers as to why subject choice remains so gendered at this educational stage. Hilary Lloyd Yewlett's research, "Marriage, Family and Career Aspirations of Adolescent Girls," investigating the attitudes and opinions of adolescent girls in Wales, found that the girls questioned traditional sex stereotypes, particularly on the subject of marriage. Yewlett writes, "They provide evidence of changing attitudes and changing roles" (Lloyd Yewlett, 1996, p-256). She does however note that the girl's career aspirations were somewhat predictable:

> "It seemed that many of the girls interviewed aspired to careers that were likely to reproduce not only their class position, but also their subservient gender position" (ibid p-255).

Yewlett concedes that such attitudes may simply be realistic as far as the girls are concerned. She concludes:

> "Perhaps the current deep economic recession has restricted their job opportunities and aspirations but these Welsh daughters nevertheless provide us with grounds for much optimism for the future" (ibid p-256).

I believe that here, Yewlett's optimism is gleaned from the way in which the young girls questioned traditional sexual stereotypes and believed that women could do anything as well as any man. However, their *actual* position and traditional 'feminine aspirations' might in fact be regarded as anything but positive.

Research into sexuality in schools and at work

Since the interest into 'failing boys' has been so fiercely ignited, many studies have sought to explain how the differing definitions of masculinity that are apparent in educational environments affect male peer-group relations and dynamics within schools. Many writers have entered a discussion of what comprises a 'dominant masculinity' and of documenting the existence of compulsory heterosexuality within an educational context, using these to explain both the underachievement of males in secondary schools and the change in focus and achievement levels of males in further and higher education (Connell, 1989, Mac an Ghaill, 1994, Martino, 1999). As far as my research is concerned, issues of sexuality including definitions of both masculinity and femininity were a key factor for the 16-18 year olds involved and thus it is interesting to look at the research in this area, however, for the reasons stated above, the major focus for many writers is on masculinity rather than femininity.

Martino in "'Cool Boys', 'Party animals', 'Squids' and 'Poofters': interrogating the dynamics and politics of adolescent masculinities in school", uses a Foucauldian interpretive framework as a way of analysing the formation of masculinities in the 'heteronormative' site of a comprehensive school, that is, a place where heterosexuality is the accepted norm. Martino carried out 40 minute interviews with 25 adolescent boys aged 15-16 in a co-educational Catholic high school in Australia. Martino discusses the ways in which these boys define what it is to be 'cool' within this particular school (in other words the dominant masculinity within the school); how the characteristics of a 'cool boy' are determined by normative heterosexuality and thus constructed in opposition to characteristics such as 'femininity' and homosexuality; and how this prevailing dominant form of masculinity is used by students to 'police' other definitions of masculinity that are apparent within the school. Martino explains how boys use

derogatory labels such as 'wuss' or 'poof' as a means of asserting the dominant form of masculinity as 'standard'. "Those boys who do not fit the dominant heterosexual model are harassed" (Martino, 1999, p-245).

Clearly, teenage boys at this particular school are pressurised into accepting certain boundaries as to what is acceptable masculinity or face having their own masculinity questioned. In such a clearly demarcated environment, Martino's interviews with the boys provide evidence to show how homophobia is used to 'police' the pupils of the school; homophobic comments are used by the 'cool boys' to insult and harass those boys who do not 'fit' the prescribed model of masculinity. Very similar behaviour was evident at the college where my research took place; boys (and to a certain extent girls) defined as 'cool' set out to 'police' the college in terms of what was considered acceptable/unacceptable sexuality.

Martino explains how the establishment of boundaries as to what is and is not acceptable masculinity includes the compartmentalisation of certain practices or behaviours as acceptable/non-acceptable. High educational achievement, reading, studying, showing emotions, having female friends and not playing sport are all rejected in this cultural context, regarded as undesirable and 'un-masculine'. The ability to play sport, in particular the 'tough' sport of football, offers a particularly high status and even allows for a negotiation whereby a boy might retain a 'cool' label, despite being good academically, as long as he demonstrates sporting prowess (although it would appear that this can be a very difficult 'balancing act' for these particular boys). This again fits well with my research findings at the college.

Martino's paper highlights how normative heterosexuality ties into the notion of what is regarded as 'acceptable masculinity' and how this can affect power relations between male pupils within a school. However, as with many such studies on masculinities

he neglects to examine the position of female pupils in relation to the males of the school and the ways in which they too are affected by these compelling sexual dynamics.

Mac an Ghaill's, "The Making of Men - Masculinities, sexualities and schooling," also examines the, "processes involved in the interplay between schooling, masculinities and sexualities" (Mac an Ghaill, 1994, p-3). Mac an Ghaill's study is of particular interest to me, as it was carried out in Parnell comprehensive school where he was a teacher, in the same way that I was a teacher in the college where I carried out my research. He aimed in part to investigate the 'making of masculinities' within the heterosexist context of the school and in order to do this, discusses the masculinities of both staff and students. He examines heterosexuality, the 'importance' of being a heterosexual within the school and the 'policing' of heterosexual boundaries. Although the main focus of the study is the production of masculinities, Mac an Ghaill also studies young women at the school and they provide accounts of how the masculinities of both staff and students affect them:

> "...clearly identifying and articulating the institutional power that is articulated to male teachers and students" (ibid p-152).

Mac an Ghaill also investigates the particular foci of young male gay students in this heterosexist environment.

He utilises the concept of the 'gender regime' as a very useful means of describing the way in which sexualities are constructed within a particular environment. A gender regime is defined by Kessler *et al* as:

> "...the pattern of practices that constructs various kinds of masculinity and femininity among staff and students, orders them in terms of prestige and power, and constructs a sexual division of labour within the institution. The gender regime is a state of play rather than a permanent condition. It can be changed, deliberately or otherwise, but is no less powerful in its effects on the pupils for that. It confronts them as a social fact, which they have to come to terms with somehow" (Kessler et al. 1987, p-232).

Mac an Ghaill concludes that:

> "...sex/gender regimes are a fundamental organisational principle within schools, which underpins the individual and collective construction of student and teacher identities...[yet]...in response to these structural conditions, which are further shaped by relations of class, 'race'/ethnicity, age and disability, there are no predetermined outcomes" (Mac an Ghaill, 1994, p-168).

Sheila Riddell's (1992) "Gender and the Politics of the curriculum" examines the importance of sexuality of both males and females within a school environment, in the production of a workforce that is sharply divided along lines of gender and class. She focuses:

> "...on the interrelationship between the curriculum and the process of gender identity construction which ultimately leads to unequal roles for women and men in both the private and the public spheres" (Riddell, 1992, p-2).

Again, like myself, Riddell was a teacher and her research, began with the question:

> "Why do girls, and working-class girls in particular, continue to opt for a school curriculum which is likely to lead to their long-term disadvantage in the labour market?" (ibid p-9)

Riddell's theoretical background then stems from the desire to analyse how option choices might play a part in the cultural reproduction of gender and class. She attempts to combine aspects of both social reproduction and social action perspectives, that is, she seeks to:

> "...explore the nature of actors' rational decisions and the context within which these are made, whilst acknowledging the very powerful constraints on their actions" (ibid p-11/12).

Riddell is evidently interested in individuals' personal accounts and interpretations of their experiences but goes beyond this to seek to show how the powerful effects of both gender and class might influence these experiences.

Riddell carried out her research in two schools in the South West of England: the first, Millbridge, where she had worked as a teacher, and the second, Greenhill, where she was unknown, in order that she might draw comparisons between the two. Riddell explains that despite many differences between the schools they were very similar as

regards what she describes as, 'the predominant gender code', and thus saw it unnecessary to entirely separate the schools when writing up her research (ibid p-16). She found that her status as either a teacher or a non-teacher was extremely influential on the relationships she made with staff and pupils in each school. An examination of the way in which my role as a teacher affected my role as a researcher at the college can be found in the methodology chapter.

Riddell examines the various ways in which the school- its organisation, staffing, curriculum, and notions of appropriate forms of masculinity and femininity that abound might influence and reproduce gender divisions. First she looks at option choice in the two schools; she discusses how:

> "...option choice was managed by the schools in order to promote an ideology of free choice and open access whilst at the same time selecting pupils onto particular courses on the basis of sex, class and achievement" (ibid p-37).

She describes how subjects are presented to students in gendered ways thus continuing to maintain gender boundaries. She also demonstrates how the ideology of free choice works in practice – teachers either encouraged or discouraged pupils in a 'process of selection' based on the 'suitability' of the pupil's choices according to their sex and achievement. As far as teacher attitudes to the gendered option choices made by students were concerned and the ideologies that underpinned these attitudes, Riddell found that differences existed according to sex, age and position in the school hierarchy. For example:

> "...As beneficiaries of male supremacy in the home and the school, there was little incentive for male teachers to reappraise their own attitudes" (ibid p-88).

Riddell also discusses sexuality in the school including an examination of how both male and female pupils make use of their particular sexualities in the classroom situation both in interactions with one another and also with staff, and also how staff use notions of sexuality as a means of coping with pupils. She concludes that:

"...The culture of the schools...was generally unhelpful in encouraging feminist ideas to flourish" (ibid p-225).

She also investigates how the cultural background of the families of the pupils construct attitudes towards gender, how the pupils themselves define their identities and their futures and how these fit with the gender codes of the school. Riddell found that parents varied in their support for traditional gender divisions and in their opposition to change although most parents seemed to convey:

"...extremely sex-stereotyped ideas to their children about the value of different subjects in their future lives" (ibid p-201).

Riddell also found that the majority of pupils themselves were to be found strictly adhering to traditional gender codes, even those pupils who 'deliberately rejected the conventional notion of femininity'; Riddell argues that both confrontational and conformist behaviours in school tended to strengthen gender divisions. She suggests that the:

"...girls who endorsed at least some of the school's aims but were challenging male domination in particular areas of activity within the school, were probably offering more resistance to traditional gender ideology...,"

than those girls who, in their rejection of traditional femininity were,

"...strengthening gender divisions by uncritically adopting male modes of behaviour and sometimes oppressing other women" (ibid p-162).

Again the conclusion is mixed:

"...The picture, then is both of stagnation and pressure for change in parents' and pupils' gender codes" (ibid p-229).

It is evident that changes are taking place both in certain schools and within certain families, however, these changes are perhaps not so 'rapid' or 'far-reaching' as some researchers might suggest.

My research question is very similar to that of Riddell's, however, my focus is rather different in that post-16 option choice (still persistently gendered) is discussed, rather

than subject choice at age 14 (which is guided greatly by the National Curriculum). Choosing A/S and A level options is the first time students opt for subjects that they supposedly *want* to do, as education is no longer compulsory for them, they have chosen to stay on. Additionally, it is interesting to see whether or not certain subjects made compulsory under the National Curriculum had an affect on subject choice when the compulsory element was removed.

Sexual Harassment

It is also important to discuss sexual harassment in the workplace, for it is not only the students who face sexual harassment. The college is a place of work for many women who face sexual harassment of varying degrees from both staff and students on a daily basis. Cynthia Cockburn provides a definition of sexual harassment:

> "...all those actions and practices by a person or group of people at work which are directed at one or more workers and which: are repeated and unwanted; may be deliberate or done unconsciously; cause humiliation, offence or distress; may interfere with job performance or create an unpleasant working environment; comprise remarks or actions associated with a person's sex; emphasize a person's sexuality over her role as a worker" (Hadjifoutiou, 1983 in Cockburn, 1991, p-139).

Using a 'historical, materialist, feminist tradition', (discussed later), Cockburn interviewed more than 200 people from four different places of work in order to examine women's equality and oppression in the workplace. She found that the majority of women that she interviewed had experienced some form of sexual harassment in the workplace and that, to a certain extent women:

> "...often took for granted that sexual discomfort is an unavoidable fact of organisational life" (Cockburn, 1991, p-144).

Cockburn discusses how men use sexual humour as a form of control, making the entire working environment, 'sexualised'. She also highlights the way in which men deride feminism and feminists, preventing women from making free choices:

> "The anti-feminist discourse of men has to be seen as a policing of women's consciousness and an important mechanism in the reproduction of male power" (ibid p-168).

She describes these processes in terms of 'hegemony', that is:

> "...masculine sway exerted over women and men alike, not by legal coercion or economic compulsion but by cultural means, by a force of ideas" (ibid p-168).

Cockburn concludes by explaining how such a powerful 'patriarchal discourse' allows incidents of sexual harassment to go unchallenged, even accepted:

> "At the interpersonal level it is not a conspiracy among men that they impose on women. It is a complementary social process between women and men. Women are complicit in the social practices of their silence" (Smith, 1987 in Cockburn, 1991, p-170).

Riddell discusses sexual harassment in schools. Of particular interest to my research is the attention she pays to sexual joking by male teachers. This, she argues, creates an 'ethos of masculinity', with some of this joking, "specifically [involving] the derogation of women" (Riddell, 1992, p-151). My research also found evidence of the existence of an 'exclusionary gendered culture' created by male staff and students at the college, and this will be examined in Chapter 5.

Riddell also examines the way in which male students and teachers can make female students uncomfortable with sexual name-calling or sexual references, creating an "atmosphere of underlying sexuality" (ibid p-110). My discussion of 'flirting' in the classroom, also in Chapter 5 strongly reflects these findings.

All of the studies discussed thus far have provided an outline of the context in which my research has taken place. It is however necessary to attempt to find a unifying theoretical framework for the purposes of my own work.

Theorising Gender and Education

In my research into gender differences in further education the decision on a theoretical framework has proved to be difficult. In order to construct a theoretical framework suitable for the presentation and analysis of my own research, it is necessary to examine the different ways that sociologists have theorised the education system, particularly where it interlinks with gender.

One of the first attempts to theorise the modern educational system sociologically came from the functionalist school of thought. From a functionalist perspective, formal education in schools functions towards the meeting of various 'functional prerequisites', needs that must be met if modern, industrial society is to function effectively and coherently and the status quo maintained. Talcott Parsons argues the importance of education as an agency of socialisation, preparing pupils for life in society as a whole by disseminating the values of achievement and equality of opportunity, and thereby priming children for their adult roles. Parsons gives a functionalist account of how, in meritocratic society, the education system functions in relation to the economic system. He argues that education at elementary (primary) level classifies pupils according to their general ability. In secondary schools this process is taken a step further as pupils are directed into work or on to further education according to their more specific abilities.

> "Very broadly we may say that the elementary school phase is concerned with the internalisation in children of motivation of achievement. The focus is on the level of capacity...In approaching the question of the types of capacity differentiated, it should be kept in mind that secondary school is the principal spring-board from which lower-status persons will enter the labor force, whereas those achieving higher status will continue their formal education in college, and some of them beyond" (O'Donnell, 1992, p-82).

Thus, functionalists describe how meritocratic systems succeed in producing workers from the age of 16 and how the 'ideology of meritocracy' legitimates the differentiation

between those leaving school at 16 and those who continue into further and higher education.

The notion of the sex-role, a type of social role for men and women, also originated with the functionalist school of thought. Via socialisation, the instrumental, breadwinning male role is constructed to complement the expressive, caring female role, providing a 'script' of a normative pattern of behaviour for both males and females to follow.

Functionalists have been heavily criticised for their failure to acknowledge the effect of power relations on the way society operates and for describing a society characterised by consensus. In terms of gender-roles Charles describes this as a failure to:

> "conceptualise gender relations in terms of power, seeing gender roles as complementary rather than involving hierarchy and as changeable through interventions in the socialization process" (Charles, 2002, p-3).

Gender roles might also be seen as being derived from biological differences between men and women, a basis for the cultural definitions of those differences:

> "Culture elaborates on a foundation that is provided by nature; this elaboration is not pre-determined, however, so intervention in the process of gender socialization can affect the outcome" (ibid p-3).

For Marxists, education in capitalist society is also seen as a tool that assists in the reproduction of labour power, however, unlike the functionalist explanation, this process does not exist for the benefit of the whole of society, but rather education is organised in a way that ensures the maintenance of capitalist society and the continued rule of the upper class. Bowles and Gintis in 'Schooling in Capitalist America', contend that the education system mirrors the way production is organised in capitalist society. Students have to be prepared for (and willing to accept) the exploitation and alienation of capitalist society and the major role of the education system is to provide "attitudes and behavior consonant with participation in the labor force" (Bowles and Gintis, 1976).

Through a 'hidden curriculum' then, schooling produces an obedient, passive, hard-working workforce. This 'hidden curriculum' in schools incorporates the fostering of:

> "...types of personal development compatible with the relationships of dominance and subordinacy in the economic sphere" (ibid);

the acceptance of a hierarchy and alienation, motivation by extrinsic rewards and the fragmentation of work.

It is further argued by Bowles and Gintis that schooling is not organised in a way that every child shares the same patterned experience. Schools mould students for the roles required of them in the capitalist economy.

> "But schools do different things to different children. Boys and girls, blacks and whites, rich and poor are treated differently. Affluent suburban schools, working-class schools, and ghetto schools all exhibit a distinctive pattern" (ibid)

They also contend that the education system provides justification for the inequalities of capitalist society by disguising those inequalities under a 'myth of meritocracy'. They believe that the class background of a student is essentially what influences educational attainment and therefore their future position in the economic system.

Like Parsons, the role of the school is emphasised in terms of preparing young people for the world of work in terms of both their personalities and attitudes as well as relevant skills. However, unlike Parsons, Bowles and Gintis do not regard this process as a 'good' thing, but rather see it as a result of ruling-class ideology;

> "...to reproduce the social relations of production, the system must try to teach people to be properly subordinate and render them sufficiently fragmented in consciousness to preclude them getting together to shape their own material existence" (ibid p-130).

The use of the concept of schools and colleges as sites pervaded by ideology is certainly useful in part in attempting to explain the continual reproduction of a labour force which is structured along lines of race, class and gender. However critics of Bowles and Gintis have suggested that the powerful ways in which they suggest the

school moulds the pupil is somewhat exaggerated. Sandra Acker underlines certain of the dilemmas that feminists must face that takes account of this problem;

> "One of these dilemmas is the relationship between *structure* and *agency*. Should women be seen as immobilized by reproductive social and economic structures, by tradition-bound institutions, by discrimination, by men? Or are they active agents, struggling to control and change their lives?" (Acker, 1994, p-53)

It is without doubt that one of the major flaws in such theories was their failure to account for social action, the fact that human beings, male and female, to some extent, shape their world. Bowles and Gintis contend that pupils accept everything they are taught without question and that their behaviour is entirely determined by capitalism in a robotic-like fashion.

The approach of symbolic interactionists has sought to overcome this emphasis on structure determining action and their aim has been not so much to analyse the role of education but to attempt to share and understand the life of the participants. Based upon detailed empirical evidence from numerous studies, symbolic interactionism has provided many insights into the day-to-day life of schools, attempting to understand the subjective meanings attached to classroom interaction and the relationships that develop. It allows us to take into account the subjective states of individuals and the ways in which different individuals react to or define their situation. The interactionist approach then, with an emphasis on the 'day-to-day reality' of schools, helps to highlight any processes within the education system that might affect inequalities in levels of achievement and particularly in terms of 'agency' for the focus is on the ways in which individuals interpret or make sense of their world.

It might be argued however, that symbolic interactionism takes the view of human 'agency' a step further than is perhaps useful, arguing that any explanation of human behaviour must take into account the subjective meanings attached to interaction situations by individuals. Although such perspectives may be useful in providing detailed

empirical evidence describing classroom dynamics, they can be criticised for their failure to acknowledge the existence of wider structural factors such as class, 'race' or ethnicity and gender as having effects upon education. Attempting to combine the two aspects of structure and agency, rather than seeing them as dichotomous is perhaps a more useful way of theorising education.

Paul Willis's study, "Learning to Labour", examines how pupils shape their own experiences within a school environment and are not simply 'brainwashed' by the education system. That is, Willis sees individuals as active agents, who to some extent, shape their own existence. He thus provides us with a link between structure and agency. He examines the way in which pupils are prepared for the workforce by the education system and is interested to show how cultural forms fit with patterns of social reproduction. He uses a Marxist framework, stressing the importance of "....macro determinations such as class location, region and educational background" (Willis, 1977, p-171) yet he asserts that we must not assume that cultural forms are automatically determined by these 'macro determinations', nor that individuals unproblematically accept their influence and conform to them. He states:

> "...Although it is a simplification for our purposes here, and ignoring important forms and forces such as the state, ideology, and various institutions, we can say that macro determinants need to pass through the cultural milieu to reproduce themselves at all" (ibid p-171).

Cultural forms cannot be easily separated from the structural determinations that seek to constrain our behaviour yet Willis argues it is misleading to view the cultural in structural terms. According to Willis:

> "Culture is not static, or composed of a set of invariant categories which can be read off at the same level in any kind of society. The essence of the cultural and of cultural forms in our capitalist society is their contribution towards the creative, uncertain and tense social reproduction of distinctive kinds of relationships. Cultural reproduction in particular, always carries with it the *possibility* of producing...alternative outcomes" (ibid p-172).

Thus culture cannot be reduced to a simple reflection of structural influences but plays an active role whereby the 'structural determinations' in society are conceptualised on a cultural level and then become understood and reproduced in those terms. Willis argues that such a view of cultural reproduction can be viewed both negatively and positively;

> "It is pessimistic in suggesting the irony that is in the form of creative penetrations that cultures live their own damnation,...it is optimistic however, in showing that there is no inevitability of outcomes" (ibid p-174).

His study of the 12 working-class 'lads' then did not find that they accepted uncritically the education system, or indeed, inequality in society as a whole, as might be the pattern suggested by Bowles and Gintis. Instead Willis demonstrates how these lads rejected school and created their own 'counter-school culture' and Willis is able to show a number of similarities between the attitudes and behaviour developed by the lads in school and those on the shop floor. He contends that this response was not directly produced by the school; the 'lads' are active in shaping and defining their own realities, translating structural influences via their own cultural forms.

Willis identifies several areas where the 'lads' are able to 'penetrate' or see through the ideology of the capitalist system. They are aware that the capitalist system is not meritocratic; they recognise that individual action is limited in its scope to improve their lot in life and that collective action is the only way to accomplish such a task; they do not trust the careers advice they receive; and they acknowledge the importance of manual labour power. However Willis suggests that in the case of the lads we are able to see the pessimistic nature of such cultural evaluation and reproduction; the lads'

> "...cultural penetrations of the special nature of labour in modern capitalism has become a strangled, muted celebration of masculinity in labour power. Cultural penetrations stop short of any concrete resistance or construction of political alternatives in an unillusioned acceptance of available work roles and a mystified use of them for a certain cultural advantage and resonance – especially concerning sexism and male expressivity" (ibid p-174).

It is the 'counter-school culture' of the lads, their rejection of the norms and values of the school and their particular 'cultural penetrations' that prepare them for the low skill, low status jobs they are destined to take.

It is also useful to look at Willis's use of method, as he argues they are particularly useful for studying what he describes as his "interest in 'the cultural'" (ibid p-3). Willis used a number of qualitative methods – observation and participant observation, group discussions, informal interviews and diaries, and presents his findings in an ethnographic format as he believes that such techniques:

> "...have a sensitivity to meanings and values as well as an ability to represent and interpret symbolic articulations, practices and form of cultural production",

which he sees as vital where,

> "the cultural [is viewed] not simply as a set of transferred internal structures...nor as the passive result of the action of dominant ideology downwards (as in certain kinds of Marxism), but at least in part as the product of collective human praxis" (ibid p-3/4).

This study is particularly important to my own for Willis presents a useful way of uniting structure and action as he recognises that pupils actively shape their own education. The lads did not passively accept the norms and values of the school, in fact, they resented them, and actively sought to fight against them. It is Willis's theory of culture that seeks to explain the relationship between human agency and structure and his use of methodology is testament to that. His theory of cultural reproduction then, explains how individuals, via their culture, shape their existence and reproduce the structures that surround them, in a continuous, fluid process.

> "...cultural form is not produced by simple outside determination. It is produced also from the activities and struggles of each new generation. We are dealing with a collective, if not consciously directed, will and action as they overlay, and themselves take up 'creative' positions with respect to finally reproduce what we call 'outside determinations.' It is these cultural and subjective processes, and actions which flow from them, which actually produce and reproduce what we think of as aspects of structure" (ibid p-120/121).

Willis's sample has been criticised as being too small for generalisation about working-class education and similarly, unrepresentative; he has been accused of largely ignoring the existence of a wide variety of subcultures within the school. Certainly, there is very little reference to women and he has failed to examine any female subcultures, however, his theory of cultural reproduction provides a very useful starting point to examine gendered subject choice at post-16.

"Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture" by the French sociologists Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron is strongly influenced by Marxism and like Willis, also provides a cultural explanation for differential educational achievement. Bourdieu's theory of 'cultural capital', though applied to theorising the reproduction of class inequality might also be useful for explaining ongoing gender inequality. His analysis starts with the idea that there is a 'dominant culture' in society and that this culture, the culture of the dominant class in society, though not intrinsically superior to any other class culture, is imposed on others as a result of the power of the dominant class. The dominant classes have the power to 'impose meanings and to impose them as legitimate'. This process, Bourdieu refers to as 'symbolic violence', which he defines as, "the violence which is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity"(Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p-167). Thus, the dominant class is able to maintain their power by creating an illusion of natural superiority. Schools are a key agent in this process as they reproduce the dominant culture, "contributing thereby to the reproduction of the structure of power relations within a social formation in which the dominant system of education tends to secure a monopoly of legitimate symbolic violence."(Bourdieu, 1977, p-6) Bourdieu also uses the concept of 'cultural capital' to explain the social reproduction of the dominant class. By 'cultural capital' Bourdieu refers to particular cultural skills and knowledge that an individual requires in order to 'understand' or 'appreciate' those

cultural products that are held in high esteem. He argues that cultural capital is largely the reason why educational achievement differs as a result of class, as those from the upper classes who have been socialised into the dominant culture find themselves at a huge advantage in education where the dominant culture prevails. Bourdieu claims that,

> "The success of all school education...depends fundamentally on the education previously accomplished in the earliest years of life" (Bourdieu, 1977, p-43).

The skills and knowledge of children from the dominant classes that are already established before they enter school provide them with the means of educational success; they possess the 'code of the message'. Therefore, schools allow the "possessors of the prerequisite cultural capital to continue to monopolize that capital" (ibid p-47).

Each class then, has their own cultural framework, which is imbibed first via socialisation in the family. In addition he develops the concept of 'habitus' arguing that an individual's 'habitus' influences each area of their lives. 'Habitus' refers to the way of life of particular social groups including values, beliefs, dispositions and expectations. The 'habitus' of different social groups is different due to the variety of experiences and life chances accorded to them. Each individual absorbs the values, attitudes, behaviours and so on of their particular social group thereby constituting a particular habitus which has a great influence on their engagement with the education system and society more generally. Individuals are not totally controlled by their habitus, however certain ways of thinking and acting become 'normalised' and thus individuals tend to learn to react to given situations in ways they regard to be "common-sense" and "reasonable". Bourdieu therefore argues that:

> "...the habitus is a product of conditionings which tends to reproduce the objective logic of those conditionings while transforming it. It's a kind of transforming machine that leads us to 'reproduce' the social conditions of our own production, but in a relatively unpredictable way" (Bourdieu, 1993, p-86).

The transition to schooling where the dominant culture defines what is legitimate, appropriate and worthwhile knowledge, witnesses the progressive elimination of those children not hailing from the dominant culture which Bourdieu describes as the "social function of elimination." Those children whose 'habitus' provides them with a suitable cultural background or 'cultural capital', can translate this into academic success. These children will appear as naturally gifted in such a situation, for the education system is structured so as to appear to provide equality of opportunity. Bourdieu writes:

> "Thus, in a society in which the obtaining of social privileges depends more and more closely on possession of academic credentials, the school does not only have the function of ensuring discreet succession to a bourgeois estate which can no longer be transmitted directly and openly. This privileged instrument of the bourgeois sociodicy which confers on the privileged the supreme privilege of not seeing themselves as privileged manages the more easily to convince the disinherited that they owe their scholastic and social destiny to their lack of gifts or merits, because in matters of culture absolute, dispossession excludes awareness of being dispossessed" (Bourdieu, 1977, p-210).

Thus, education plays a major role in social reproduction, the reproduction and legitimation of social inequality.

Using the concepts of 'symbolic violence', 'habitus' and 'cultural capital' it is possible to apply this analysis to gender. Bourdieu refers to the 'logic of gender domination' which he describes as "the paradigmatic form of symbolic violence"(Bourdieu and Waquant, 1992). He argues that male domination is so 'deeply grounded' that it 'needs no justification' and that it "imposes itself as self-evident" (ibid p-171). Bourdieu argues;

> "The case of gender domination shows better than any other that symbolic violence accomplishes itself through an act of cognition and of misrecognition that lies beyond – or beneath – the controls of consciousness and will, in the obscurities of the schemata of habitus that are at once gendered and gendering" (ibid p-171/172).

As far as 'cultural capital' is concerned, it can be argued that those from disadvantaged social groups, be it as a result of social class, gender or ethnicity, are

associated with 'negative capital'. According to this theory then, inequality will persist as those from more privileged social groups (in particular white, middle-class males) have a considerable advantage, "because of the cultural and social capital to which they have access" (Charles, 2002, p-17). Due to their access to large amounts of 'cultural capital', these privileged groups do not necessarily require large amounts of 'educational capital' in order to succeed, whereas those from disadvantaged groups are required to 'accumulate' as much 'educational capital' as possible in order to compensate for their negative capital. Charles argues;

> "Such a theorization may help to explain the fact that the same qualifications have different outcomes for women and men...It also suggests that relatively better educational achievement for girls than boys will not necessarily mean that the gendering of paid employment is going to be transformed in women's favour. However, even if being female is associated with negative capital, this can be countered by access to high amounts of social or cultural capital" (Charles, 2002, p-17).

Negative capital does not mean that an individual will not 'succeed' in society, however, it does place its possessors at a distinct disadvantage to those in more privileged positions.

Bourdieu's theory of 'cultural capital' can be viewed as very similar to Willis' theory of cultural reproduction and works extremely well in explaining how gendered subject choice at post-16 prevails. It is possible to see Willis's theory of culture in terms of Bourdieu's habitus, that is, that an individual's own set of personal circumstances, set of beliefs, attitudes and so on, is used to shape their existence and to define the world around them. Bourdieu states that;

> "The habitus is not only a structuring structure, which organizes practices and the perception of practices, but also a structured structure: the principle of division into logical classes which organizes the perception of the social world is itself the product of internalisation of the division into social classes" (Bourdieu, 1984, p-170).

Willis's notion of 'culture' discussed earlier would seem to fit within this framework. Both Bourdieu and Willis argue that any outcome for an individual is possible, however, it

is heavily influenced by this interaction of 'culture' and 'structure' and will thus be affected by class, gender and ethnicity.

The concepts that are important for my research are cultural reproduction, 'cultural capital' (and 'negative capital'), 'habitus', particularly as they relate to gender. Also of importance to my research is the link between structure and agency. As such, I do not intend to use the concept of 'gender regime' as utilised by Mac an Ghaill, due to its apparent failure to link the construction of these 'gender regimes' to structure.

In the next section I intend to examine feminist analyses of education and how issues of gender in education specifically have been theorised.

Feminist Analyses of Education

Until the late 1970's however, mainstream sociology of education, for the most part was restricted to the study of the experience of white males. Negligible attention was paid to the educational experiences and opportunities of women. However, it was abundantly clear that, even following the passage of the Sex Discrimination Act in 1975, the main focus of which was education system, the education received by males and females differed both in content and outcome, and perhaps most importantly of all, channelled (as it continues to do) males and females towards different occupations in the economic system. Education thus became a target for feminists both politically and academically, who proclaimed that the institution played an essential role in the maintenance of patriarchal relations in society. A variety of different theoretical feminist critiques of the education system emerged, each seeking to redress the balance of sociology of education hitherto and to examine the 'problems' faced by females in education. Sandra Acker, has described the different perspectives as "liberal feminist, radical feminist,

Marxist or Socialist feminist, and black feminist" (Arnot and Weiner, 1987, p-13), and these categorisations, though regarded by many as too simplistic, are useful for deciding which 'elements' of feminism will be useful to me in the framing of my own research.

First then, liberal feminists are concerned with equal opportunity for males and females in education and are concerned with the removal of barriers that deny women the same educational opportunities as men.

> "Liberal feminists were the first to focus on the considerable divergence between the educational routes taken by girls and boys, particularly evident in the choices of subject areas at secondary level. They exposed these patterns of gender differentiation (or sex differences) and their consequences for male and female training, access to higher education and the professions, and to work opportunities. The attention of educational policy-makers was drawn to the continuation of male and female occupational patterns within a sex-segregated labour market, which placed women at a distinct disadvantage compared with men" (ibid p-13).

To a liberal feminist, both men and women are discriminated against by socialisation into prescriptive gender roles ('gender roles' as mentioned earlier is a concept 'borrowed' from functionalism). Discrimination is regarded as cultural rather than structural, 'passed on' via the socialisation process, and thus discrimination can be challenged within our existing political system. Like functionalism, liberal feminists can be criticised for failing to acknowledge the power relations that are tied in with these gender roles and for believing that such roles can be altered via the process of socialisation.

Eileen M. Byrne's article, "Education for equality," can be considered as liberal feminist in that she believes gender inequality can be eradicated within our existing political system. Byrne contends that there are a range of factors in society that cause inequality and that these factors can be compounded. She lists "five major indices of potential inequality": sex, lower social class, lower range of intelligence, residence in certain regions with a history of under-achievement and residence in rural areas. Byrne suggests that underachievement caused by these factors, particularly where two or more are in combination:

> "... can only be overcome by positive, affirmative, interventionist programmes aimed at increasing resources, counteracting cultural and social barriers, and adding to the skills and experience" (Byrne, 1987, p-26).

She emphasises the need for female access to all spheres of employment via equality of opportunity, therefore the need to eliminate prejudice and gender stereotyping. She concludes:

> "The clarity with which we expose the illogicality of under-investment in girls when the country needs more skilled labour and more economic productivity will not shake the deeply hostile; but it will almost certainly help to mobilize the more receptive and adaptable, to call the bluff and to monitor what we actually do in schools and colleges to give (and to encourage) real freedom of curricular choice and of aspiration" (ibid p- 33).

Such an argument demonstrates the incrementalist approach of liberal feminism. Byrne implies that the elimination of inequality in society is eventually possible if certain anti-discriminatory actions in schools and other such institutions are undertaken. Certainly it is important to continue with anti-sexist policies in schools and to continually challenge sexism in all areas of society, however, Byrne fails to address the question of power and that certain groups in society dominate others and therefore wish to maintain their superior position in society. As a result, challenging sexism through such 'affirmative action' is only superficial; sexism in society is surely embedded much more deeply than liberal feminists suggest.

Radical and Marxist or socialist feminists insist that a more critical analysis of society is required than that forwarded by the liberal feminists. Wolpe asserts that liberal feminism:

> "...can merely give a description of an unequal system of material and status rewards which is said to attach to occupations, but it does not in any way tell us how that system of inequality is itself produced...That is to say, since it does not deal with the conditions of the inequality, it can only concern itself with a redistribution of actors while retaining an unequal system" (Wolpe, 1978, in Middleton, 1987, p- 78).

Radical feminists contend that the main enemy of women is patriarchy, defined by Cockburn as:

> "...'a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women'. Or we could emphasise the apparent persistence of men's domination of each other and call it 'a set of social relations which has a material base and in which there are hierarchical relations between men, and solidarity among them, which enable them to control women'" (Cockburn, 1991, p-6/7).

In other words, men use their collective power to see that society and all its various institutions, are run in their interests and this power is reproduced and legitimated by the process of schooling, amongst other things; thus, in this way, the social system ensures male domination of women.

In her article, "Education: the Patriarchal Paradigm and the Response to Feminism", Dale Spender looks at the education system from a radical feminist perspective, that is, she summarises the way in which men dominate the education system and how they use their power to perpetuate this dominance.

> "The model of education which passes as the society's model is the model generated by men, based on men's experience of the world, and women are required to be educated in a manner devised by men as befitting men" (Spender, 1987, p-144).

Within such a framework it is argued that women are excluded from:

> "...the making of what becomes treated as our culture...from a full share in the making of what becomes our education" (ibid p-145).

Katherine Clarricoates' study, "Dinosaurs in the Classroom - the 'Hidden' Curriculum in Primary Schools"', looks at the many different ways the 'hidden curriculum' is at work in primary schools, in terms of both classroom structure and classroom organisation. She notes the upholding of gender stereotypes in the primary school and lends support to the radical feminist perspective by arguing that this is the result of a 'hidden curriculum', legitimated by the dominance of patriarchy in our society, whereby men control women via a combination of systems – cultural, social, economic - to ensure their own continued dominance. She points to the role of the teacher, the differences in boys' and girls' behaviour, the use of sexist resources and 'linguistic sexism' as examples of

the way in which gender stereotypes are encouraged and reproduced in a classroom situation. She maintains:

> "'Children are selected and treated differently on a gender and class basis. It is understandable that their responses should be different: it is, however, nothing short of a tragedy that this should be passed off as the 'natural order'" (Clarricoates, 1987, p-164).

Men's control over cultural attitudes and the institutionalisation of sexism means male domination is seen as 'the way things are' and this is reflected throughout society, including the primary classroom and throughout the education system, including post-16 subject choice.

Michelle Stanworth's study, "Gender and Schooling", now rather dated, looks at similar processes as they occur in a college of further education and these are reflected in my own research. She examines gender stereotyped choices of subject, the transmission of gender differences via the 'hidden curriculum', teachers' different reactions and attitudes towards male and female students and the ways in which the male and female students themselves interact. Stanworth comes to the conclusion that despite the apparent equality of opportunity offered by schools and colleges, patterns of gender differentiation retain a stronghold and males and females are continually reminded of their dominant and subordinate positions in society. This again suggests that liberal feminism does not provide us with sufficient explanation as to why gender inequalities are continually reproduced and that radical feminism offers a more useful account.

> "Girls may follow the same curriculum as boys - may sit side by side with boys in classes taught by the same teachers - and yet emerge from school with the implicit understanding that the world is a man's world, in which women can and should take second place" (Stanworth, 1983, p-58).

Marxist or socialist feminists criticise the radical feminists for their failure to recognise the importance of class relations in society. Barrett looks at education from a Marxist feminist perspective, that is:

> "...an attempt to consider systematically the place of gender in an analysis of the educational system as a principal agent in the reproduction of capitalism" (Barrett, 1987, p-51).

Drawing on the work of Marxists such as Bowles and Gintis, she argues that gender ideology can be used to explain the continuing gender division of labour. She draws on the theoretical work of AnnMarie Wolpe who puts forward the argument that the sexual division of labour within the family is parallel to the sexual division of labour in employment and that the education system is linked to both in its function as:

> "... a key means of the production and reproduction of the ideological structure and that it embodies the dominant ideology in its organisation. Within the system two processes can be isolated: basic training in the skills and qualifications appropriate to the concrete division of labour, and the transmission of ideologies" (Barrett, 1980, p-117/118).

Thus we witness a gender ideology that is transmitted via both the structure and the culture of the educational system, both legitimating and reproducing gender divisions. Barrett links this argument to the work of Bourdieu and Passeron, who, as mentioned earlier:

> "argue that the ideology of democracy insists that class privilege be legitimated by certification from an apparently neutral education system. Legitimation *by* the school rests on social recognition of the legitimacy and neutrality *of* the school" (Barrett, 1987, p-53).

Barrett also highlights the problematic nature of the relationship between class and gender. She discusses women's 'dual relationship' to the class structure.

> "The education and training that a woman receives by virtue of her class background provide a highly significant contribution to the position she will occupy in the labour force. Yet it is equally clear that the relationship she has to the class structure by virtue of her wage-labour (or her ownership of the means of production) will be substantially influenced by the mediation of this direct relationship through dependence on men and responsibility for domestic labour and childcare" (Barrett, 1987, p-58).

Barrett's theory could be related to cultural capital theory; 'negative capital', as discussed earlier in the chapter, might be used to explain women's education and training and how they are prepared for their positions in the labour force.

> "However, even if being female is associated with negative capital, this can be countered by access to high amounts of social or cultural capital" (Charles, 2002, p-17).

Barrett goes on to examine the processes that exist within schools whereby "...masculinity and femininity are defined and constructed" (Barrett, 1987, p-59), for example through stereotypes in children's books, teachers' attitudes and behaviour. She also looks at the division of labour within education, e.g. the use of gender as a tool for organisation, the staffing of schools and subject 'channelling'. Barrett concludes that it is difficult to integrate theoretically the processes by which the education system reproduces a work force divided by gender and by which class division is reproduced and that there must be further examination of the relationship between class and gender. However, 'cultural reproduction' theory and Bourdieu's concept of 'cultural capital' can be used to combine relationships of class and gender. The 'habitus' of any individual that will 'predispose' the actions of that individual will necessarily take gender, class and ethnicity into account.

Like Willis, Linda Valli subscribes to cultural reproduction theory as opposed to what she calls 'ideological reproduction theory[1]' as it:

> "... identifies culture rather than ideology as the principle determinant of properly trained labour power ...[and]...that the labour process itself (and the practices, relations, ideologies and cultures produced in that process) is sufficient for the maintenance of capitalist relations" (Valli, 1987, p-189).

The development of culture and the way in which gender differences and ideas about sexuality have been constructed and have become familiar to us shape the way in which

[1] Ideological reproduction theory according to Valli stresses the ideological dimension of work preparation as emphasized in the work of Bowles and Gintis.

society is structured and thus continue the maintenance of gendered social relations whereby men are advantaged, women disadvantaged. She acknowledges that schools cannot be regarded as 'ideologically-neutral' institutions, however as far as 'ideological reproduction theory' is concerned, she argues, like Willis:

> "...while ideological processes are real and pervasive, they are not necessarily internalised and do not themselves constitute working-class identities. They are negotiated, contested and reworked; they are transmitted through 'social and cultural dialectics, mediations and struggle" (ibid p-190).

Therefore, we can take 'cultural reproduction' as being the more useful concept, for it is via our culture, that we make sense of all else, including ideology, as Willis's study of the 'lads' highlights.

Feminism has been criticised for its failure to acknowledge issues of race and ethnicity. Black feminist groups developed as a result of dissatisfaction with other types of feminism and recognised the importance of race and ethnicity as well as gender in the study of education.

> "While liberal, radical and Marxist theories of gender and education concentrated on identifying and changing differential patterns of female education, they did not to any extent, explore the impact of 'race' on gender relations. As black feminists demonstrated, each perspective had framed the 'problem' of sex inequality around the concerns of white (and often middle-class) women" (Arnot and Weiner, 1987, p-13).

As feminists then, we are faced with the problematic issue of *universality* and *diversity,* one of the 'paradoxes of feminism' (Acker, 1994, p-53). This issue of universality and diversity is, as Acker suggests, highly problematic. Acker quotes Cott to demonstrate the dilemma;

> "...rooted in women's actual situation, being the same (in a species sense) as men; being different, with respect to reproductive biology and gender construction, from men. In another complication, all women may be said to be 'the same', as distinct from all men with respect to reproductive biology, and yet 'not the same', with respect to the variance of gender construction. Both theory and practice in feminism historically have had to deal with the fact that women are the same as and different from men, and the fact that women's gender identity is not separable from the

other factors that make up our selves: race, religion, culture, class, age" (Cott in Acker, 1994, p-53).

It is important in research that we acknowledge women's differences as well as our similarities. In "Black Feminism and the Boundaries of Sisterhood," Hazel V. Carby writes that:

> "The black woman's critique of *history* has not only involved us in coming to terms with 'absences'; we have also been outraged by the ways in which it has made us visible, when it has chosen to see us" (Carby, 1987, p-64).

She writes of the "...triple oppression of gender, race and class" (ibid p- 64), and how it affects the lives of black women. Carby challenges three concepts, integral to white feminist argument, 'the family', 'patriarchy' and 'reproduction,' when applied to the lives of black women. She suggests that these 'concepts' do not have the same meanings in such a context;

> "The *herstory* of black women is interwoven with that of white women but this does not mean that they are the same story" (ibid p- 74).

Clearly 'race' and ethnicity as well as gender and class must be taken into account as factors that affect the education process; from a 'cultural reproduction' perspective however, this does not prove to be problematic, as the culture or 'habitus' of the individual takes all factors into account.

In Heidi Safia Mirza's book "Young, female and Black," she investigates the experience of schooling of 62 female African Caribbean pupils and how it affects their future in the workplace. She argues that a focus on subculture has failed to explain the position of young, black women in the labour market and that a more structural emphasis is needed. Mirza poses the question, Why is it that young black women:

> "...do well at school, contribute to society, are good, efficient workers yet, as a group, they consistently fail to secure the economic status and occupational prestige they deserve?" (Mirza, 1992, p-189)

Mirza describes her approach as an attempt:

> "...to combine a longitudinal survey approach, with what can be described as essentially a school-based ethnographic study" (Mirza, 1992, p-3).

Her study was based in two schools, one, St Hilda's, Catholic and co-educational, the other, St Theresa's, Church of England and single-sex. Both schools had sixth forms and the sample was taken at random from fifth and sixth form pupils at each school. Ethnic origin of pupils was taken as the mother's place of birth and social class was established by taking the earner of highest social class in the household be they male or female. Mirza's main sample totalled 198 black and white, male and female students aged 15-19 who were interviewed and observed both in school and at home. Mirza also found a case-study approach to be extremely useful in "...supplementing and illuminating data and observations made in other situations" (ibid p-8).

Mirza had been a pupil at one of the schools and worked as a teacher (though not in either of the schools in the study) and found both these statuses awarded her, on balance, excellent access to school records and reports and meant that she received high levels of cooperation from those involved in the study.

Mirza questions why it is the case that the relatively high achievement of black girls had not really been discussed and that a 'myth of underachievement' prevailed as the dominant concern of those investigating the relationship between 'race' and education. She also indicates that many of those who have attempted to explain the relative academic success of black females have done so by utilising a misconceived and naïve ideological premise, pathologising the black female as a 'superwoman' matriarch. Mirza argues that such a perspective, though apparently 'progressive' on the surface, serves in fact to suggest that:

> "...in one of the few instances where black women are highlighted as a central force, their success...[is]...manipulated to undermine the position of the black male" (ibid p-16).

Black women become scapegoats for structural male unemployment and educational success of black women can be seen as a self-perpetuating negative phenomenon rather than something positive to be celebrated. Mirza believes that it is necessary to seek an understanding of the girls' own experiences of education and family life, but also:

> "...it must be shown how the ideology of sexually structured racism, as a dynamic and politically constructed ideology, maintains disadvantage by its effect on economic assumptions and values. Thus it is important to investigate the mechanisms of racial discrimination beyond a mere discussion of the dominant ideology and the subsequent creation of 'cultures of resistance' and to include an explanation of its operation through the various agencies, such as the school, the careers service, youth schemes and other institutions" (ibid p-23).

These black females clearly have the capacity for action and the ability to exert influence on their own social reality, however it is also evident that they are constrained by a number of structural influences, in particular those of class, 'race' and gender.

Mirza examines how young black women tend to have high aspirations as far as their careers are concerned. These aspirations are partly accounted for by positive attitudes of parents towards education and also a 'cultural construction of femininity' distinct from those formed by their white counterparts.

> "In the black definition...few distinctions were made between male and female abilities and attributes with regard to work and the labour market" (ibid p-191).

The girls themselves were focussed on full-time, high status careers. Constraining these girls and their aspirations, Mirza points to several 'forces'. First:

> "...the existence of a racially and sexually segregated labour market which ensured limited occupational opportunities open to young black women" (ibid p-191).

The girls were aware as to what jobs were available to them as black women. Second, Mirza suggests that the girls' experience of schooling, including racist teachers and negative labelling and poor careers advice also limited the girls' opportunities. Mirza concludes that:

> "Inequalities based on race, gender and class remain an integral feature of this society in spite of its ideology of meritocracy" (ibid p-194).

These black, female students, despite their relative academic success and their high aspirations find themselves limited by an economy and an educational system characterised by inequality.

The need to acknowledge women's differences in feminism and the emergence of post-modernism and post-structuralism as theories has perhaps encouraged a development in feminist theoretical discourse; there is a reluctance to apply all-encompassing labels to different concepts. Barrett and Phillips contend that the consensus of feminism that existed in the 1970's, that "...feminists united in the importance they attached to establishing the fundamentals of social causation" (Barrett and Phillips, 1992, p-4) has since broken up. Barrett and Phillips suggest three key reasons as to why this has occurred. First, the influence of the black feminist critique on white feminist theory; major difficulties arose in the attempt to revise existing theories in accommodating the concepts of 'race' and ethnicity. Second, "...the impulse toward denying sexual difference came to be viewed as capitulation to a masculine mould" (ibid p-5). Third is the:

> "... appropriation and development by feminists of post-structuralist and post-modernist ideas whose impulse was not first found in feminism, but whose impact has been outstanding" (ibid p-5).

Michael Foucault's theory has influenced many feminists, and is seen as particularly useful in theorising sexuality due to its use of the concept of 'discourse'. A 'discourse' is in a sense a body of knowledge, ideas, beliefs and practices which define subjectivity and within which subjectivities are constructed. The Foucauldian concept of 'discourse' can be seen to parallel the ideas about culture and 'dominant culture' developed by Bourdieu. Foucault also discusses how 'discourse' is based in institutions and is part of how social reality is organised. However, by focusing on the ways in which individuals construct their identities within discourses, there is a;

> "tendency towards voluntarism and a failure to link gender identities and subjectivities to social structure, however conceptualised" (Charles, 2002, p-11).

As with Mac an Ghaill discussed earlier, many theorists who use Foucault's approach tend to focus solely on discourse, without linking the reproduction of these discourses to structural inequality. Discourses are seen as 'free-floating' and relationships of power are neglected. A discussion of Henwood's article demonstrates the limitations of such an approach.

In her article, "Engineering Difference: Discourses on Gender, Sexuality and Work in a College of Technology," Flis Henwood draws upon the post-structuralist approach to examine the relationship between gender, sexuality and work to attempt to offer a new understanding of women in engineering. This might be seen as important to my research as it follows on the continuum of reproduction, from education. Engineering is regarded as a traditionally 'male' domain and is dominated by males. This has implications for both males and females who work in engineering in terms of sexuality, which might be seen as a reflection of what goes on in a college in terms of subjects and subject choices. Henwood suggests that a strict adherence to 'dualistic frameworks', whereby either individual or structural factors are emphasised has resulted in a failure to comprehensively understand the lives of women. She writes:

> "In post-structuralist theories, individuals are not understood as unitary subjects (as in liberal-humanist discourse) and neither is their relative power position understood as being derived solely or essentially from their material or institutional position (as in classical Marxist and Marxist-feminist approaches). Rather, subjectivities are understood as constituted through a complex interconnection of discourses, which have been defined as the interrelationship of themes, statements, forms of knowledge and positions held by individuals in relation to these" (Henwood, 1998, p-39).

In her study of a college of technology where she analysed different discourses, Henwood highlights the contradiction of the dominant discourse; women in engineering are seen as being different from men and yet in the era of 'equal opportunity' they are

also seen as being different from women; "... the discourse says both 'engineering is man's work' and 'women can be engineer's too'" (ibid p-46/47).

This discourse then, places such women in a very difficult, paradoxical position. Henwood writes;

> "Difference, in dominant discourses of gender, has always meant 'different from men', associated with the 'feminine' and therefore somehow inferior to men and all things masculine. Rather than engage with this construction and offer new understandings and meanings (i.e. 'disidentify', in Pecheux's terms), women have largely bought into it, denying their difference rather than redefining it" (ibid, p-41).

By denying their difference from men these women are unwittingly reinforcing the idea that male is superior to female. Henwood continues;

> "It is this contradiction which can help explain the limited nature of many equal opportunities initiatives, the confusion and conflict experienced by many women studying in non-traditional subject areas and the reluctance of these women to discuss the problems they face. Furthermore this blurring of gender difference is perceived as a threat to many and leads to the constant reassertion of difference in discourse" (ibid p-47).

Henwood then calls for a 'disidentification' with the dominant discourse and the development of a feminist discourse that offers alternative definitions of difference. She concludes that such an alternative discourse will enable a transformation of existing gendered power relations, but that such a 'position of disidentification':

> "... requires a willingness to countenance a real change in relations between the sexes, even where this might mean undermining the dominance of conventional heterosexuality" (ibid p-47).

Henwood claims she has utilised aspects of the post-structuralist approach in her work, yet her use of 'discourse theory' and her acknowledgement of the idea that there exists a 'dominant discourse' rather suggests the existence of some form of power 'structure'. Although we must acknowledge that people construct their own realities, part of that construction involves the creation of structures that reflect 'dominant' gender discourses, which in turn react back on the individual. Therefore, such discourses

are not created in a vacuum but are subject to social and historical factors and we cannot ignore that in our society 'dominant discourses' must reflect the systematic construction of male advantage and female disadvantage. Sylvia Walby argues:

> "While gender relations could potentially take an infinite number of forms, in actuality there are some widely repeated features and considerable historical continuity" (Walby, 1992, p-36).

The idea that culture is not dependent on social structure, but rather, on ideology and discourse prevents us from theorising gender. As Barrett and Phillips point out:

> "The fear now expressed by many feminists is that the changing theoretical fashions will lead us towards abdicating the goal of accurate and systematic knowledge" (Barrett and Phillips, 1992, p-6).

Sylvia Walby, argues that modernism can still be considered useful and must not be abandoned in favour of post-modernist perspectives. She claims that within sociology, as a result of the post-modernist critique:

> "... the fragmentation has gone too far, resulting in a denial of significant structuring of power" and leading towards mere empiricism" (Walby, 1992, p-31).

Walby contends that it remains possible to theorise the complexities of society in terms of patriarchy, racism and capitalism and that these aspects of 'class', 'race' and 'gender' must be understood from an 'international perspective.' She agrees that much modernist theory oversimplifies social inequalities and that few successfully theorise the mutual interaction of 'gender,' 'race' and 'class'. She concludes:

> "...rather than abandoning the modernist project of explaining the world, we should be developing the concepts and theories to explain gender, ethnicity and class" (ibid p-48).

Cynthia Cockburn attempts to theorise the lives of women in terms of gender, ethnicity and class. She draws on insights from several strands of feminism, (liberal, socialist and radical) and stresses how:

> "patriarchal relations operate throughout society, including production. Everywhere they are in interaction with economic class relations and relations of racial domination. Likewise patriarchy is not the sole determinant of reproduction and

sexual relations, since relations of class and race also in turn structure these" (Cockburn, 1991, p-7).

Cockburn describes the theoretical context of 'a historical, materialist feminist tradition.' She writes:

> "Their work is historical in the sense of examining the changes and the continuities over time in the relationship between women and men. It is materialist in going beyond ideology or discourse to analyse the economic, social and political and bodily specificity of women's lives. It acknowledges the significance of the mode of production and of relations of racial domination as well as the sex/gender system in structuring women's experience. This historical materialist feminist tradition, together with an openness about definitions and validities in feminist practice, enable us to transcend the contradiction of equality... we can... be both the same and different from each other" (Ibid p-l0).

Cockburn's theory of materialist feminism relates to cultural reproduction theory, in that it attempts to theorise gender, ethnicity and class simultaneously. Additionally, there is a focus on the importance of culture and human agency, but also on social structure and the power relations that exist in society.

The research I have discussed in this chapter points to the occurrence of a certain level of economic, social and cultural reproduction that is carried out by the process of schooling and it is an understanding of this process that I believe must be central to an analysis of gendered subject choices in further education. Bourdieu's cultural reproduction theory allows for the interaction of human agency with structure. Culture is seen as a means by which individuals shape their own lives and yet it is constructed within a particular socio-historical context, which when established, is able to place constraints on the individual. However, as Willis argues, no outcome can ever be guaranteed. The theory accepts difference without ignoring commonality; different social groups and individuals have access to differing amounts of cultural capital and every individual develops their own particular 'habitus' which will shape their existence. Yet it is possible to note patterns of consistency in those who have systematic privileged

access to resources or 'cultural capital' in society and to note that these inequalities continue to be reproduced. The concept of 'symbolic violence' can be used to explain how inequality, be it class, gender or 'race', becomes accepted as 'natural'. It is also possible then, to account for class, gender and ethnicity within the theory, avoiding the confusion of treating them as entirely separate entities, as every individual's habitus and their access to cultural capital is inevitably shaped by each of these factors. Change can also be accounted for in that culture is considered as something fluid, not fixed or static and as such, is continuously being redefined. The reproduction of gender inequalities in Further Education relating specifically to gendered subject choices at post-16, their production and reproduction, can thus be examined within this framework.

In the next chapter the methodology employed to carry out the research will be examined. Chapter four explores the nature of sexuality and gender identity within the hetero-normative confines of the college. Chapter five then looks at life in the classroom, including a discussion of student and teacher attitudes, classroom practices and interactions. In chapter six, the influence of home background is considered, taking into account parental attitudes, social class and religion, in particular, Roman Catholicism. Finally, chapter seven discusses the research conclusions and includes the raising of certain questions for further research as well as presenting some suggestions for educational change.

Chapter Three

Methodology Chapter

This chapter aims to examine the idea of a distinct feminist methodology; does such a separate, distinct, methodology exist and if so, what are the criteria for such a methodology? Additionally it will examine how my research methodology 'fits' in light of this criteria and ascertain whether or not my research might be labelled as feminist research. The chapter will also examine reflexively the methods used to undertake my research, including an account of how my position as a teacher at the college might have affected the research, the sample included in the research and an outline of the research procedures.

A feminist methodology?

Cook and Fonow argue that there is such a thing as a distinct feminist methodology and identify five 'basic epistemological assumptions' that underlie this methodology. These include i) an acknowledgement of the pervasive influence of gender; ii) a focus on consciousness raising; iii) a rejection of the subject/object separation; iv) an examination of ethical concerns and; v) an emphasis on empowerment and transformation. Their theory suggests that research not underpinned by each of the above assumptions cannot be 'feminist'; my research does not subscribe entirely to each of the criteria Cook and Fonow prescribe for research to be considered 'feminist' and yet I would argue that having undertaken the research from a feminist theoretical standpoint should qualify it as feminist research. The idea that there is a specific feminist method of conducting social research has increasingly come under criticism. However, it is interesting to examine the different criteria that have

become associated with 'feminist methodology' and to look at ways that these ideas can be employed (whether feminist research or not) to benefit research.

Feminist Research – 'on', 'by' and 'for' women?

Gender is clearly an essential factor in feminist research and Cook and Fonow list a number of ways in which 'feminist research practice' can acknowledge the significant influence of gender as a basic fact of social existence. First, they argue, it is women and their specific experiences as women that are the focus of the research. They quote Bernard as part of their argument;

> "...investigations employing feminist methodology view women through a 'female prism' in 'research devoted to a description, analysis, explanation, and interpretation of the female world"' (Cook and Fonow, 1986, p-5).

Certainly it is true that for the most part, 'social science' has focussed on the male experience and the 'public' world of the 'man.' However, such an interpretation of what 'feminist research' should entail presents me with something of a dilemma, in that my research intends to look at both men and women and their particular experiences as 'gendered beings,' and not to focus solely on those of women. Why a young man has opted to take A-level physics is as of much interest to my 'feminist research' as why the modern language classrooms are overwhelmingly female. Maynard states that;

> "Stanley and Wise have always maintained that a concern with gender necessarily means being prepared to focus on men and masculinity, with the intention of researching the powerful as well as the powerless" (Maynard and Purvis, 1994, p-15).

In response to those feminists who contend that 'feminist research' requires a focus solely on women, Stanley and Wise retort, "Women do not inhabit a single-sexed

universe; the real world involves not only 'actual men', but also the ideologically founded but materially practised discourses by which some men, individually and collectively, actively construct the category 'woman/women' and also thereby construct the category 'man/men' as well" (Stanley and Wise, 1990, p-44). To separate out the experience of the female students from the rest of the college would be both impossible and extremely problematic as individuals do not act in isolation, women without men; surely the same processes that propel females to opt for certain subjects at post-16 are operating on males. As a feminist, I am not solely interested in women, but in how the lives of both men and women are directed in certain ways, producing certain outcomes.

In her research on gay men and masculinity, Joyce Layland found herself in conflict as to whether her chosen topic could be considered 'feminist research' due to its lack of focus on the oppression of women. In her conclusion she writes;

"Perhaps the course of my research...will help to explain what I experience as the central paradox of being a feminist involved with gay men. This is that the very feminist awareness which makes me aware of their misogyny and phallocentricity also allows me, through my understanding of the processes of oppression, to identify with them on several levels. Many of the oppressive mechanisms within society which affect women so drastically also affect gay men, even while they are busy adding to and reinforcing them" (Layland in Stanley, 1990).

For Layland then, the key to this problem lies in her feminist awareness and therefore her feminist analysis of her research; her research is feminist, in that she is writing from a feminist standpoint. Layland attempts to understand the processes that affect gay men in society by aligning them to the position of women.

Such a 'feminist awareness' can be seen as fitting with another of Cook and Fonow's ways of attending to gender for the purposes of 'feminist research practice,' that is;

> "...to locate the researcher as a gendered being in the web of social relations that simultaneously influences the analytical and interpretive procedures of sociology and shapes the life experiences of the researcher" (Cook and Fonow, 1986, p-6).

In other words, the feminist researcher must be reflexive and conscientiously attend to the significance of gender at all times. Again however, this is not just a requirement of 'feminist' research; whatever your research, whomever you are, you will have some effect on the research process and it is essential that you demonstrate an awareness of these effects, and make people aware of your biases. Charlotte Aull Davies explains the necessity for reflexivity in all types of research;

> "All researchers are to some degree connected to, a part of, the object of their research, And, depending on the extent and nature of these connections, questions arise as to whether the results of research are artefacts of the researcher's presence and inevitable influence on the research process" (Aull Davies, 1999, p-3).

Sasha Roseneil writes about her commitment to reflexivity in her study, "Greenham Revisited: Researching Myself and My Sisters";

> "...feminist methodology aims to highlight and examine the role of the researcher, and demands that research work be unalienated labour. Based on an epistemology that considers all knowledge to be socially constructed, it begins with the acknowledgement that the identity of the researcher matters, she is unavoidably present in the research process, and her work is shaped by her social location and personal experiences" (Roseneil, 1993, p-180).

Roseneil believes that without reflexivity, an examination of her own experiences and an exploration of the role of her subjectivity within the research project, her research at Greenham would not have been possible as she felt comfortable and open

about herself and what she was researching with those around her. Reflexivity places the researcher in a similar position to the researched;

> "...we exploit our subjectivities and personal experiences and locate ourselves and our research practices on the same critical plane as the overt subject of study" (ibid p-181).

Thus within my research project I will make no attempt to objectify the research situation but to acknowledge that within the context of social interaction, "...the specificity and individuality of the observer are ever present and must therefore be acknowledged, explored and put to creative use" (Okely 1996, in Aull Davies, 1999, p-8) From its inception through to the writing-up stage, the researcher is always present and therefore always influencing the research process, and this must be attended to by the researcher. Due to my particular position of teacher within the college where the research took place, I believe this need for reflexivity to be all the more important and later discuss at length what I believe to be the key issues that arose a result of my role as teacher.

However, the researcher's centrality within the research process and the resulting, constant need for reflexivity as an integral part of a feminist research practice, can itself become problematic. Charlotte Aull Davies explains how when taken to its logical conclusion;

> "...reflexivity, in spite of its unavoidable and essentially desirable presence in social research, becomes destructive of the process of doing such research; as researchers we are 'led to reflect on our own subjectivities, and then to reflect upon the reflection in an infinitude of self- reflexive iterations"' (Gergen and Gergen 1991, in Aull Davies, 1999, p-7).

Thus we must ask the question, "Is knowledge of anything other than knowledge of reflexivity possible?" (ibid p-10) Related to this point, although perhaps a more

relevant concern with the practice of reflexivity as far as my research project is concerned, is that such self-examination can quickly become;

> "...a form of self- absorption...in which boundaries between subject and object disappear, the one becomes the other, a process that effectively denies the possibility of social research" (ibid p-5).

Charlotte Aull Davies points out that both good and bad research practice is possible and that;

> "The purpose of research is to mediate between different constructions of reality, and doing research means increasing understanding of these varying constructions, among which is included the anthropologist's [or researcher's] own constructions. Ideally the research is a conduit that allows interpretations and influences to pass in both directions. Final products thus may take a variety of forms and be addressed to different audiences" (ibid p-5).

In a similar vein, Narayan asserts;

> "... the view of a perspectival view of knowledge (that is, that who you are, and where you are situated, does make a difference to the knowledge you produce), but that we then have to assess the best ways of seeking to communicate this knowledge to someone else, situated differently" (Narayan 1989, in Ribbens and Edwards, 1998, p-4).

It is not necessary to take a totally relativist stance and that;

> "...rather than relativistic despair, we need high standards of reflexivity and openness about the choices made throughout any empirical study, considering the implications of practical choices for the knowledge being produced" (ibid p-4).

As long as we are clear as researchers about the person we are (in terms of our particular standpoint), then we should feel confident about trying to convey the 'reality' of others, to others. Reflexivity allows others to see exactly how the research has been constructed by the researcher.

Power Relationships in Feminist Research – challenging traditional research practice

In a discussion of feminist criticisms of research, Tim May writes;

> "Theories of the social world and practices of research are *androcentric.* What we call science is not based upon universal criteria which are value-free, but upon male norms and, in particular, the mythical separation of reason (men) and emotion (women)" (May, 1993, p-13).

He continues, "...women are excluded from scientific practices by virtue of men saying they are incapable of 'reason'...we then base science upon reason and reason is based upon truth" (ibid p-13). Ann Oakley explains that, "Through the prism of our technological and rationalistic culture, we are led to perceive and feel emotions as some irrelevancy or impediment to 'getting things done"' (Oakley, 1981, p-40). Traditional, 'scientific' method therefore makes an understanding of the lives of women impossible and a 'feminist research process' necessarily rejects this separation of reason and emotion. We need to try to understand people as emotional beings, look at their thoughts and feelings etc. and it is impossible to do this in a value-free way. In "Another Voice," Marcia Millman and Rosabeth Moss Kanter state that, "...most of what we have formerly known as the study of society is only the male study of male society" (Harding, 1987, p-30); social science, like the natural sciences, has hitherto been perceived as being value-free, objective, reasonable and therefore, masculine. Feminists have therefore criticised the 'normative structure of science' as 'ideological', with a tendency "to ignore gender differences, gender relationships and the problems and possibilities of each" (Letherby, 2003, p-67). Letherby uses the following argument to highlight this point;

> "Masculine ideologies are the creation of masculine subjectivity; they are neither objective nor value-free nor inclusively 'human'. Feminism implies that we recognize fully the inadequacy for us, the distortion, of male-centred ideologies and that we proceed to think and act out of that recognition" (Stanley and Wise, 1993, in Letherby, 2003)

In a rejection of traditional 'scientific' method, Cook and Fonow assert that a chief concern for feminists is;

> "...the rigid dichotomy between the researcher and the researched and the resulting objectification of women and tendency to equate quantification with value neutrality" (Cook and Fonow, 1986, p-9).

Feminists see research as a two-way process whereby objectification of the researched should be avoided. Detachment and objectivity to the feminist researcher, "...disguises the myriad of ways in which the researcher is affected by the context of the research or the people who are a part of it" (May, 1993, p-14),

In "Interviewing women: a contradiction in terms," Ann Oakley examines the problems that arise for feminists when adhering to traditional criteria for interviewing, Oakley writes that;

> "...the paradigm of the 'proper' interview appeals to such values as objectivity, detachment, hierarchy and 'science' as an important cultural activity which takes priority over people's more individualised concerns" (Oakley, 1981, p-38).

Interviewing according to such criteria then, clearly rests in the domain of men for;

> "Women are characterised as sensitive, intuitive, incapable of objectivity and emotional detachment and as immersed in the business of making and sustaining personal relationships" (ibid p-38).

Oakley has interviewed several hundred women over a number of years and found it exceedingly problematic to carry out these interviews in relation to the textbook paradigm. She is of the opinion that when a feminist interviews women;

> "...it becomes clear that, in most cases, the goal of finding out about people through interviewing is best achieved when the relationship of interviewer and interviewee is non-hierarchical and when the interviewer is prepared to invest his or her own personal identity in the relationship" (ibid p-41).

Oakley found it unproductive not to answer questions asked of her and additionally befriended a number of her respondents. She concludes by requesting that;

> "...the mythology of 'hygienic' research with its accompanying mystification of the researcher and the researched as objective instruments of data production be replaced by the recognition that personal involvement is more than dangerous bias - it is the condition under which people come to know each other and to admit others into their lives" (ibid p-58).

More recently, Cotterill and Letherby have written that the;

> "...'conscious subjectivity' of much feminist (and other) research which has replaced the 'value-free objectivity' of traditional research is not only more honest, but helps to break down the power relationship between researcher and researched" (Cotterill and Letherby, 1993, p-72).

However, they contend that debate continues over such issues as;

> "...unequal benefits to the researcher and the researched, inevitable objectification of the researched, responsibility of the researcher to the research and about writing research" (ibid p-72).

The need to 'place' the researcher within the research process must therefore be considered when addressing the argument of whether or not the subject and object of research can be separated from one another.

Cook and Fonow also maintain that for the purpose of 'feminist research practice', it is necessary to recognise that;

> "...much of what masquerades as sociological knowledge about human behavior is in fact knowledge about male behaviour" (Cook and Fonow, 1986, p-5).

As Stanley and Wise comment, "'Mainstreams' in disciplines are best seen as 'malestreams"' (Stanley and Wise, 1990, p-44). Rosalina Edwards and Jane Ribbens write that;

> "...the theoretical, conceptual and formal traditions in which we are located are predominantly 'public' and 'malestream'" (Ribbens and Edwards, 1998, p-1).

but additionally such traditions can be criticised as being overwhelmingly middle-class, white and ethnocentric.

Edwards and Ribbens highlight how;

> "there is a danger that the voices of particular groups, or particular forms of knowledge, may be drowned out, systematically silenced or misunderstood as research and researchers engage with dominant academic and public concerns and discourses" (Ribbens and Edwards, 1998, p-2).

It is therefore essential that 'feminist research practice' demonstrates an awareness not only of gender but also of class, race and ethnicity. Lorde (1992) is of the belief that;

> "The oppression of women knows no ethnic nor racial boundaries, true, but that does not mean it is identical within those differences. Nor do the reservoirs of our ancient power know those boundaries. To deal with one without ever alluding to the other is to distort our commonality as well as our difference" (May, 1993, p -17-18).

Marcia Rice (1990) argues that feminist researchers must avoid ethnocentrism as well as androcentrism if we are to provide an accurate representation of the social world. According to May, she contends that;

> "...there should be an increase in research which examines the way in which 'gender roles and differential opportunity structures are affected by racism as well as sexism'"

and that,

> "...an increase in comparative studies of the dimensions of race, class and gender would assist in our understanding of the operation of power and discrimination within society" (ibid p-18).

Ann Phoenix demonstrates how race, class and gender positions of both researcher and researched affect the interview situation. She contends;

> "The interview relationship is partly dependent on the relative positions of investigators and informants in the social formation. Simply being women, discussing 'women's issues' in the context of a research interview is not sufficient for the establishment of rapport and the seamless flow of an interview" (Phoenix, 1994, p-50).

Phoenix gives two reasons as to why it is important that, for the purposes of feminist research practice, in an interview situation, a friendly rapport is established; first, that there exists a more equal balance of power and that a less exploitative situation exists as the researcher opens themselves up to scrutiny from the interviewee, and second, that the interviewee feels sufficiently at ease to answer any questions put to them. Phoenix also highlights several of the problems that can arise where the dynamics of class, gender and race are intertwined. She talks of negative responses to the interviewer and also the reverse. My research involved both interviews and focus groups with male students and interviews with male teachers and they certainly proved to be less comfortable than those carried out with female students/members of staff – again this is discussed later in the chapter.

Phoenix talks of offending interviewees (using the example of a white woman who was offended when it was suggested to her that her baby was black) and furthermore, of how the particular circumstances under which an interview takes place can prove to be problematic. In her study of Mothers Under Twenty, many of the interviewees lived in poverty and this occasionally made interviews physically uncomfortable. Phoenix writes;

> "The emptiness of food cupboards, the absence of meals at lunchtime in many households, lack of milk for tea and sometimes the wintry cold in a flat all underlined the fact that the comfort of being women together in an interview situation is partly dependent on comfortable material circumstances" (ibid p-59).

Phoenix's examination of the interviewing process within feminist research emphasises the importance of the relationship and balance of power between researcher and researched; a situation where a woman interviews another woman is not necessarily one which will be conducive to successful interviewing in terms of 'feminist research practice.' Phoenix concludes;

> "... there are a number of factors which may have an impact on whether potential respondents participate in a study and, if they do, how they feel about their participation. These include other people, women's living circumstances, the topic of research, their concerns about what the research will mean for the groups to which they belong as well as the colour, gender, social class and age of interviewers in comparison with those of interviewees...It is [also] important to recognise differences and commonalities between people who are socially constructed as belonging to the same group as well as across groups, a project which is consonant with feminist concerns over the last decade" (ibid p-70).

My research has tried to take account of such issues; I realise that there may have been factors (especially my being a teacher, but also issues of colour, gender, social class and age) that might have affected whether or not students chose to take part in the research and how they felt about taking part if that is what they chose to do. There were conscious efforts made to treat those who took part in the research in terms of both 'differences and commonalities' and, as I discuss later in the chapter, attempts were made to reduce my power and control as a researcher and wherever possible, to listen to the 'silenced voices' of particular groups and individuals.

Using Auto/biography in feminist research

Linked to the critique concerning the relationship between the researcher and the researched, and a rejection of positivism and 'scientific' method, is an examination of the use of autobiography and biography as a research tool.

"Impersonal approaches perpetuate the myth of abstract, disembodied knowledge, strip understanding from its social and biographical roots, and obscure the agency of the knower and their ways of knowing" (Wilkins, 1993, p-93).

However, according to the norms of traditional 'scientific' research, personal, subjective experience is devalued -science should be objective.

In her article, "Towards a Methodology for Feminist research." Maria Mies criticises the notion of 'value -free research', of scientific neutrality and objectivity, as discussed earlier. She contends that such value free research within which the researched are objectified beings goes against the grain of the feminist movement and therefore must be replaced by what she terms as 'conscious partiality'. She describes this 'conscious partiality' as a partial identification on the part of the researcher that;

> "...not only conceives of the research objects as parts of a bigger social whole but also of the research subjects. i.e. the researchers themselves" (Hammersley, 1993 p-68).

In a discussion of autobiographical writing in sociology Jane Ribbens writes of a;

> "'double subjectivity' between researcher and researched to refer to the way in which sociological autobiographies involve '...a subjective view of their own subjective view'" (Ribbens, 1998, p-86).

This argument concerning the issue of the role of autobiography in research can be linked to the call for continuous reflexivity in feminist research as discussed previously. Liz Stanley quotes Robert Merton's definition of 'sociological autobiography.'

> "The sociological autobiography utilizes sociological perspectives, ideas, concepts, findings, and analytical procedures to construct and interpret a narrative text that purports to tell one's own history within the larger history of one's times...autobiographers are the ultimate participants in a dual

> participant- observer role, having privileged access - in some cases, monopolistic access - to their own inner experience" (Stanley, 1992, p-43).

Merton combines autobiography with biography within sociology and is concerned not only with the interpretation of such texts, but also with their construction. Stanley highlights the strong similarities between Merton's ideas on autobiography and biography with those concerning reflexivity in the feminist research process. From a feminist viewpoint, both 'personal life' and 'ideas' are social products and must be treated as such; "the social and the individual, the personal and the political" (ibid p-44) cannot be separated, and reflexivity must recognise this dual relationship. Stanley brings the two positions together with the notion of 'sociological autobiography', whereby;

> "...the autobiographical I is an inquiring analytic sociological - here feminist sociological - agent who is concerned in constructing, rather than 'discovering' social reality and sociological knowledge. The use of 'I' explicitly recognises that such knowledge is contextual, situational, and specific, and that it will differ systematically according to the social location (as a gendered, raced, classed, sexualitied [sic] person) of the particular knowledge-producer" (ibid p-49).

Attention must therefore be paid to what autobiography means for all sociological research, particularly that carried out from a feminist perspective. There is perhaps a need however, to make a distinction between intellectual and personal autobiography, the former perhaps relating more to the practice of reflexivity in the research process.

For Pamela Cotterill and Gayle Letherby;

> "All research contains elements of autobiography and biography, both intellectual and personal. Autobiographies and biographies not only record the life of one individual, they are in a very real sense documents of many lives" (Cotterill and Letherby, 1993, p-68).

These writers are concerned to show how the lives of researchers and researched interweave as part of any sociological research. Cotterill and Letherby acknowledge that each research process is different, and that 'balancing', or weighting amounts of autobiography and biography within a particular piece of research is an individual decision. Feminist research necessitates a complete detachment from what Stanley and Wise describe as "'hygienic research' in which no problems occur, no emotions are involved."(ibid p-76) Gayle Letherby uses her research on the experience of miscarriage as an example of her commitment to feminist research, whereby she intended to include her own thoughts and experiences throughout the research process. She believed that Klein's description of 'action research', which;

> "... [permits] the researcher constantly to compare her own experiences as a woman and scientist and to share with the researched, who then will add their opinions to the research, which in turn might change it" (ibid p-72),

was ideal for her project. However, Letherby felt dissatisfied with her finished research in that there is, "nothing of 'her' in the piece" (ibid p-72). Despite having talked and answered questions at length with the women she 'researched' about her own experience, she did not include this experience in her final account and with retrospect believes it to be 'deficient' as a result.

Ribbens points out that one criticism of autobiography is that it is 'self-indulgent navel-gazing'. Clearly, the personal autobiographical input of the researcher will not always be as relevant as it was for Cotterill and Letherby, however it is evident that some autobiography can always have purpose in the feminist research process. Like Stanley, Ribbens supports the use of autobiography in sociology and answers the criticism of self-indulgence by referring to the dualism between the

'individual' and the 'social'; "...a critical form of autobiography can help to shed light on how the self is intrinsically social" (Ribbens, 1992).

Ruth Wilkins looks at the consideration of emotion and autobiography in sociological research. She lists two ways in which it is important for us to understand our emotional responses.

> "Firstly, the researcher needs to understand the emotional context of the research; to reflect upon and be attuned to it in order to understand sources of 'insight' (or ignorance); to appreciate the emotional significance of the research for them, for this will influence its direction; and to assess its impact in the research setting" (Wilkins, 1992, p-94).

Wilkins gives examples from her own research on childbirth of how her emotions 'physically' affected her research, such as differences in the quality of interviews according to how secure a mood she was in. She also describes how she learned from these experiences for example, not forming instant conclusions about people and reacting accordingly: one interviewee who appeared 'difficult' at first actually became an interested and interesting interviewee. Wilkins continues;

> "Secondly, the researcher needs to consider emotional resources from an existential perspective, for our emotional responses constitute key cognitive and analytic resources in the 'here and now' of the research setting and are capable of yielding important sociological insights" (ibid p-94).

Wilkins discloses how the emotions she experienced and understood during her research gave her insight into her project by both 'alerting her' to the 'meanings and behaviours of others' and also in an interpretive sense. She writes, "...it remains important to appreciate how our personal biography creates and situates us vis-a-vis the research" (ibid p-97). Thus again we are made aware of the importance of the need for the researcher to 'place' themselves within the research process alluding to both intellectual and personal auto/biographies.

I feel that in a situation such as my own, where I spent a number of years situated amongst those I was studying, teaching students, chatting to both staff and students informally and formally, sharing ideas, thoughts and feelings with them, in using autobiography, I am able to describe my position in the research process quite literally and that in doing this I am being both reflexive and adding to an understanding of life at the college that I have attempted to portray.

Ethical Issues

In their article, Cook and Fonow summarise what they see as the ethical issues that arise within a 'feminist research process', though again we need not see these issues as specific to feminism. They refer to;

> "...the use of language as a means of subordination, the fairness of gatekeeping practices, intervention in respondent's lives and withholding needed information from women subjects" (Cook and Fonow, 1986, p-10).

Cook and Fonow present the ways in which language can be regarded as oppressive and as a means of social control, thus sexist or oppressive language of any nature is necessarily to be avoided within 'feminist research practice';

> "The generic use of masculine pronouns, application of offensive adjectives to women's experiences, and subsumption of women under male category labels (e.g., considering lesbian issues as part of the topic of [male] homosexuality) are just some of the ways language is used for social control" (ibid p-11).

Use of language then, becomes an ethical issue when it harms or simply misrepresents those being portrayed by that language. In addition Cook and Fonow point to how the feminist researcher needs to be aware of how gatekeeping is practised, that is how certain feminist issues do not filter through into mainstream sociology and the influence of gatekeeping on the selection of topics and the funding of research.

Judith Dilorio was faced with an ethical dilemma, as a feminist whilst carrying out her fieldwork, a participant-observation study of automotive van clubs – she found that to alert the women she studied to what she saw as their plight, or by 'raising their consciousness' to what she saw as an exploitative situation for them would result in more harm to them than was necessary. Cook and Fonow comment;

> "Interpretation of the feminist goal of social change becomes problematic when the researcher seeks to intervene in the lives of those she is trying to understand. Because much of feminist politics involves the personal and intimate lives of women and men, any intervention risks the possibility of disrupting relationships that are personally satisfying to the participants and perhaps materially necessary for survival" (Cook and Fonow, 1986, p-11).

Dilorio contended that to raise the consciousness' of the working- class women she studied to their exploitative personal relationships without providing them with any alternative options to their present material situation would be potentially damaging to them and would be of virtually no benefit to anyone. Clearly as researchers, we must be aware of doing harm to those who take part in our research. Fortunately, such a dilemma did not occur in the context of my research, however I tried to remain constantly aware of any problems or harm that might occur as far as those being researched were concerned, throughout the process, particularly if any sensitive issues were raised during the interviews and focus groups.

Clara Greed's study, "The Professional and the Personal, A study of women quantity surveyors," demonstrates certain of the ethical issues that can arise in the instance of a researcher examining the lives of 'real' women with whom she has both professional and personal contact and amongst whom she eventually intends to live and work. Such a situation, (that is, "...studying a world of which I myself am part" (Stanley, 1990, p-146), mirrors my own to a certain extent, and therefore the points

made by Greed are particularly relevant to my feminist research. Greed's three main approaches to her research are;

> "i) selective ethnographic observation of the educational setting of [her] own department; ii) retrospective ethnography...and; iii) dispersed ethnography - that is, going out and about...and holding informal group interviews with women surveyors" (ibid p- 146-7).

Such a methodology challenges traditional, 'scientific' and objective research practices, for Greed is focused on subjectivities – meanings, thoughts and feelings. First Greed highlights her inability to, "...keep [her] surveyors at arm's length and do research 'on' them as [her] subjects whilst maintaining a dominant position" (ibid p-145), which would perhaps apply when following the traditional norms of 'objective' scientific research. Rather, she insists upon 'egalitarian' relationships with her 'subjects' (work colleagues and friends), acknowledging that the researcher/researched relationship is one of 'give and take'. Accordingly, Greed allows herself to become as vulnerable a part of the research process as her 'subjects'. She explains;

> "If I expect women to tell me what their lives are really like at a personal level, they expect that in return I will share with them information about my personal life and feelings. If I pretend that I have authority to do research because I myself have superior understanding, and have no problems in my life, I would get nowhere because the empathy based on similar life experiences between researcher and researched would no longer exist" (ibid p-145).

Greed admits that her research unearthed 'insoluble issues' in the lives of some of her respondents and also uncovered weaknesses in her own life. Additionally, she discusses the difficulty of having to 'objectify' the innermost thoughts of those respondents who had put their trust in her, befriended her. For Greed then, it might be said that the position of 'interpreter' proved to be problematic; in processing her

research information, she felt that on some levels she was exploiting the trust of those she researched (ibid p-149). Greed believes that the research methods she employed, that is researcher/researched relationships based on trust and evenly balanced in terms of power, brought to light information that "...researchers (especially men) using conventional interview methods," might never reveal (ibid p-149). As I discuss further on in the chapter, for myself, when researching students, as a teacher I did not wish to make myself too vulnerable as that may have been detrimental to my future teaching at the college. However, attempts were made to try and reduce the stark nature of the student-teacher relationship by making the focus group sessions and interviews as informal as possible and by trying to distance the sessions (with myself included in that) as far as possible from being part of college, that is, not to think of the research as being connected to the college in any formal way and attempting to convince them that what was said during these sessions was completely confidential and that there would be no repercussions to anything people wished to say. Obviously this would only have so much impact, because the sessions were still student-teacher, and nothing could change that; I do feel however that assurances of anonymity and confidentiality together with allowing myself some vulnerability when carrying out the research, did allow for more 'valid' responses than had these measures not been taken. Also important is the way I then convey the responses of those who took part, trying to ensure that I represent each individual fairly and as they intended themselves to be portrayed.

This point links to the work of Janet Holland and Caroline Ramazanoglu, who discuss the ethical issues that arose from their research, "Coming to Conclusions:

Power and Interpretation in Researching Young Women's sexuality". Their particular concern is that any knowledge produced by their research, does not incriminate or damage the reputations of those they researched. Similar to the guilt and embarrassment occasionally felt by Clara Greed during her research, Judith Stacey argues that;

> "...ethnography is potentially the most exploitative method, creating a particular contradiction between feminist ethics and methods: 'I find myself wondering whether the appearance of greater respect for and equality with research subjects in the ethnographic approach masks a deeper, more dangerous form of exploitation.' At the extreme she sees the problem in terms of betrayal; the researcher is freer than the researched to leave the system of relationships within which the ethnography has been conducted, and constructs her own version of the experiences of the researched" (Holland and Ramazanoglu, 1994, p-142).

Students and work colleagues have shared innermost thoughts and feelings with me, said things that perhaps they might not have said had I not questioned them, and put their trust in me to report what they have said - a position that could so easily be exploited. To try and establish some kind of trust, I never pushed either staff or students to say anything they were not ready/did not want to say. Hopefully, my own construction of their world at the college is one that is as close as possible to the one they tried to convey. Holland and Ramazanoglu conclude that;

> "Feminism plays methodological, moral and political roles in struggling to ensure that as much of women's experience as possible can be grasped, and that appropriate policy recommendations can be drawn from this experience" (ibid p-143).

Sasha Roseneil faced similar ethical dilemmas in her research on Greenham women, particularly concerning the power relationships between researcher and researched. She writes;

> "I was extremely concerned not to objectify and exploit the women I was researching in the way that the media had so often done, removing all control over what was said about us" (Roseneil, 1993, p-203).

Researching as an insider, Roseneil tried to involve those she researched throughout the research process and coupled this with a commitment to reflexivity. However, Roseneil agrees with Stacey when she comments;

> "...the problems of objectification and exploitation do not just disappear because of the researcher and the researched's shared experiences. Indeed it is probable that my insider status, which encouraged women to be exceptionally open with me, has given me much more power to exploit and manipulate the women whom I have interviewed than an outsider could ever have achieved" (ibid p-203/4).

Furthermore, Roseneil acknowledges that despite all her efforts to involve her research participants through each of the stages of the research process, the final analysis was her analysis;

> "It is my version of Greenham, albeit based on interviews with three-dozen other women, that will be published as authoritative" (ibid p-204).

Such a concern is unavoidable, however, in order to avoid the 'abuse' of 'the power of authorship' Roseneil, like myself, again employs reflexivity, ensures she obtains 'informed consent' to the research and aims to reflect each of the different voices involved in her research project.

Is feminist research necessarily action research?

Cook and Fonow believe that one important aspect of feminist methodology is;

> "... the notion that the purpose of knowledge is to change or transform patriarchy" (Cook and Fonow, 1986, p-12).

They quote Westcott (1979) who states that for feminist researchers, "...producing a 'doleful catalogue of the facts of patriarchy' is not enough" (Westcott, 1979, in Cook

and Fonow, 1986, p-12). They suggest that feminist methodology is essentially (or should be) political, if not revolutionary, that research carried out by feminists is a means to an end, a weapon with which to attack patriarchy. They summarise their position as follows;

> "...an assumption of feminist methodology is that knowledge must be elicited and analysed in a way that can be used by women to alter oppressive and exploitative conditions in their society. This means that research must be designed to provide a vision of the future as well as a structural picture of the present...Finally, feminist methodology endorses the assumption that the most thorough kind of knowledge and understanding comes through efforts to change social phenomena" (ibid p-13).

In, "Towards a Feminist methodology for feminist research," Maria Mies, like Cook and Fonow, argues that feminist research must be a tool in the active struggle for women's emancipation. She believes that 'Women's Studies' must not be restricted to the academic world but must be closely linked to the Women's Liberation Movement. Mies writes;

> "Participation in social action and struggles and the integration of research into these processes...implies that the change of the status quo becomes the starting point for a scientific quest" (Mies, 1993, p-70).

She applies a motto of Mao Tse-Tung, "If you want to know a thing, you must change it" (ibid p-70), to her view of what the study of women should entail. She contends;

> "...we have to start fighting against women's exploitation and oppression in order to be able to understand the extent, the dimensions, the forms and causes of the patriarchal system...In the 'experience of crises' and rupture with normalcy, women are confronted with the real social relationships in which they had unconsciously been submerged as objects without being able to distance themselves from them. As long as normalcy is not disrupted they are not able to admit even to themselves that these relationships are oppressive or exploitive" (ibid p-71).

Thus for Mies, research is not 'feminist' if it does not embark upon a physical challenge to existing patriarchal relations. She dismisses much empirical research

then, as 'superficial', arguing that women's 'true consciousness' cannot be obtained under 'normal' circumstances; it is only when immersed in a struggle against women's oppression that such 'true consciousness' is realised.

> "Feminist research is, thus, not research about women but research for women to be used in transforming their sexist society" (Cook and Fonow, 1986, p-13).

Such an understanding of what constitutes feminist methodology must therefore necessarily reject a vast amount of research (including my own research project) as being 'non-feminist,' in that its intentions are sociological, rather than endeavouring to be some political enterprise that sets out to overthrow patriarchy. According to Mies and Cook and Fonow, research for research's sake, or to set out to answer a question/problem that is of interest to the researcher is not sufficient if you are to label your research 'feminist' or as Maynard contends, such an argument "...implies...that studies which cannot be directly linked to transformational politics are not feminist" (Maynard, 1994, p17). Maynard also points to the question;

> "...as to how far the researcher is in control of the extent and direction of any change which her research might bring about" (ibid p-17).

I believe that it is necessary here to distinguish between feminist research and feminist political practice. Certainly, action research is the option taken by many feminist researchers and directly attempts to transform society, however, it could be argued however that in order to 'transform' a 'sexist society', it is necessary to have some understanding of what it is that requires transformation. Such an understanding requires research into women's lives and does not necessarily begin with a revolutionary mission as Mies suggests. In the case of my research, such an 'understanding' of gender differences in society is sought via examination of the

processes that take place within a college of further education, including research into the attitudes of students and teachers, 'superficial, surface phenomena', as far as Mies is concerned. This research then, despite lacking revolutionary intent surely might still be considered feminist due to its gender specificity and its provision of knowledge necessary for change. Thus we might note a difference between feminist research and feminist politics.

Consciousness raising in feminist research

One way in which feminist research might be regarded as 'making a difference' to those involved in the research can be examined via a discussion of consciousness raising that may be brought about by a research project. Research may raise the consciousness of the researcher, the researched and those that read the research. Maynard discusses the concept of 'empowerment' for women via feminist research, that is, "...literally helping to give people knowledge, energy and authority in order that they might act" (Maynard, 1994, p-17). She employs the work of Anne Opie to describe at least three ways in which empowerment of an individual may take place through their participation in a research project.

> "These are through their contribution to making visible a social issue, the therapeutic effect of being able to reflect on and re-evaluate their experience as part of the process of being interviewed, and the generally subversive outcome that these first two consequences may generate. It is also possible of course, that the researcher may be empowered in these ways as well" (ibid p-17).

Maynard notes however that;

> "...even if research has little impact on the lives of those included in it, it may be important for the category of persons they are taken to represent" (ibid p-17).

She gives the examples of studies carried out on victims of rape and domestic violence; although the research is probably too late to help these victims, it can help others facing similar situations on a more long-term basis. Maynard also points out that not all effects of research are positive and can have extreme personal consequences for both researcher and researched. She gives the example of Stanley and Wise who believe that;

> "their consciousnesses as feminists were raised in such a profound way, as a result of their work on obscene telephone calls, that it affected their views of men, patriarchy and feminism" (ibid p-17).

Certainly, the whole research process served to raise my own consciousness as a feminist, particularly when looking at issues of sexuality and sexual harassment. Cook and Fonow believe 'consciousness-raising' to be an important aspect of feminist research practice, although to suggest such a concept is exclusively feminist would be foolish; all research to some extent aims to raise consciousness, even if it is only that of the researcher. Cook and Fonow argue however, that as part of a feminist methodology, the idea of consciousness-raising works on several levels.

> "The feminist consciousness of the researcher (and the researched), the use of consciousness-raising techniques as a research method, and the consciousness-raising potential of the research are the three most salient features of this aspect of epistemology" (Cook and Fonow, 1986, p-6).

Certainly, if research is labelled 'feminist' it generally follows that the researcher sees the world with a 'double vision of reality' that is part of their feminist consciousness (Stanley and Wise, 1983). Through this double vision;

> "...women's understandings of our lives are transformed so that we see, understand and feel them in a new and quite different way' at the same time that we see them in the 'old way' enabling us 'to understand the seemingly endless contradictions present within life.' This ability to penetrate official

> interpretations of reality and apprehend contrary forces places feminists in a position to name, describe and define women's experiences, in essence to conceptualize or in some cases reconceptualize social reality" (Cook and Fonow, 1986, p-6/7).

This 'double vision of reality' then becomes a 'way of seeing' and would also then be indicated by the writer's theoretical perspective. Such a 'double vision of reality' is made clear in the research of Sasha Roseneil at Greenham common. She discusses how women's experiences at Greenham transformed consciousnesses from 'old' to 'new' in a number of profound ways. First, the experience of being part of Greenham both as 'insiders' developing a situation where;

> "...many women experienced, often for the first time in their lives, a sense of real participation in decision-making and social life, a feeling that their opinions mattered, deserved expression and would be taken seriously" (Roseneil, 1996, p-93).

And also as 'outsiders' where the women were responded to as feminists as a result of their action. Second, she discusses a 'woman-centred ethos' that emerged as a result of living and working in a woman-centred environment. Third, Roseneil explains how lesbianism became a norm and something positive, challenging the thinking of heterosexual women. Women also had their consciousness raised concerning environmental issues and many women's perspectives were made global by their experience. Roseneil concludes that:

> "Greenham was a place of change. At Greenham and through Greenham, women created for themselves new forms of consciousness and new identities" (ibid p-106).

Evidently, consciousness raising to such levels resulted from women at Greenham being given the opportunity and environment in which they could 'reconstruct'

themselves and their ways of thinking. The students who took part in my research were not presented with such opportunities, although, for female students, both in the focus groups and interviews, a women-only atmosphere meant that they were able to think about things and challenge each other in a way that might not have been possible otherwise. Certainly in interviews with the female members of staff there were occasions when they were talking about themselves or their husbands and then would take a step back, realise what they had said and question what they were saying. However, the majority of the consciousness raising that has occurred thus far I would argue is my own and hopefully, the consciousness of others will be raised should they choose to read the research.

Feminist methods *or* a feminist *use* of method?

A number of writers, including Cook and Fonow, are of the opinion that a rejection of 'masculine', 'scientific' method is another essential element of a feminist methodology. As such, it is necessary to understand what is meant by 'malestream', 'masculine' methodology in order to assess its usefulness for feminist research. Letherby defines what this scientific research process entails;

> "Those that aim for 'scientific' social science would argue that research is linear and is characterised in terms of the objectivity of its method and the value-neutrality of the 'scientist'. A single unseamed reality exists 'out there' which the researcher can investigate and explain as it 'really' is, independent of observer effects. The research process is value-free, coherent and orderly – in fact 'hygienic'– and all that a researcher has to do is follow the rules" (Letherby, 2003, p-64).

Letherby writes that this approach has traditionally be referred to as 'positivism' and that we must be careful not to confuse this version of 'positivism' with quantitative methods as they do not necessarily amount to the same thing. She comments;

> "While there are some quantitative social scientists who regard themselves as neutral observers producing objective and value-free 'facts', others do not and acknowledge that all methods (including those that involve figures and numbers) constitute a construction" (ibid p-65).

Thus we are returning to the argument that the method itself is not what is important, but rather, how a particular method is used.

In a similar vein, it would be erroneous to suggest that qualitative methods of research are methods that have been developed by or are utilised exclusively by feminists or that all feminists believe such methods are in fact 'feminist' and that quantitative methods are bad practice.

Mary Maynard points to certain of the ways in which the idea of a discrete feminist methodology must be treated with caution.

> "First there is the need to acknowledge that the qualitative techniques they have tended to favour are not in and of themselves specific to feminism. Indeed, they are all an integral part of social science research and have their own histories of development and change outside and independent of feminism" (Maynard, 1994, p-14).

The appropriation and modification of these qualitative research techniques by feminists does not mean that they are (or ever were) exclusive to feminism. My research has relied solely on the use of qualitative techniques: focus groups, interviews and participant observation/autobiography as I felt they were the most appropriate methods to find out about the student's thoughts and feelings about life in the college. Certainly it would be foolish to claim that such techniques are in any

way exclusive to feminism, Paul Willis' study of 'the lads' was dependent on such techniques; qualitative research was selected on the basis of it being more pertinent to my study, by the need to gather in-depth thoughts and feelings, meanings and definitions from groups and individuals, that would not have been available to me via the use of quantitative methods.

Second, Maynard argues that;

> "...the polarization of quantitative versus qualitative impoverishes research, and there have been calls for the use of multiple methods to be used in a complementary rather than a competitive way" (ibid p-14).

A number of researchers have questioned the assumption that quantitative methods should not be used in feminist research. Maynard uses as an example the research into child sexual abuse carried out by Kelly, Burton and Regan. They contend that the quantitative method of the questionnaire considered by some writers to be 'non-feminist' was more beneficial to them than the qualitative method of interviewing; "...it allowed respondents anonymity in revealing distressing and sensitive experiences" (ibid p- 14). Such evidence clearly highlights that quantitative methods cannot simply be ruled out of a 'feminist methodology' if indeed such a thing exists. Kelly has put forward the term 'feminist research practice' rather than referring to a distinct feminist methodology.

> "Kelly argues that what distinguishes feminist research from other forms of research is 'the questions we have asked, the way we locate ourselves within our questions, and the purpose of our work"' (ibid p-14/15).

For Kelly, what is important are the issues raised by the topic of research, issues other than those relating to method must be considered. It is not necessary to look at what methods have been used, but rather the ways in which they have been used to

deal with a particular research problem, for example, my use of interviews as a method is not really of interest, but rather how the interviews were carried out and the data that resulted that is of importance to the feminist.

Maynard highlights that;

> "...many who have written about feminist research practice have indicated that a theoretical perspective acknowledging the pervasive influence of gender divisions on social life is one of its most important defining characteristics" (ibid p-15).

Maynard continues however by acknowledging that not only are there a number of different theoretical perspectives which;

> "...are likely to lead to the posing of different sorts of questions and to the production of different kinds of knowledge and analysis" (ibid p-15),

but additionally, that a focus on 'gender' can be interpreted in a number of ways, that is, whether writers should concentrate solely on women or whether they should attend to the relationships between men and women in society. Certainly in the case of my research, what makes it 'feminist', if indeed anything does, is its gender-conscious theoretical underpinning. However, even sociological theory has for some writers become linked with 'masculinity' and 'science' and is therefore somehow 'anti-feminist'. Some 'post-feminist' researchers, intent on adhering to a 'feminist methodology' by rejecting all things 'scientific', go so far as not attempting to understand the processes and practices that govern women's collective experience. They argue that there is no such thing as a collective women's experience and thus they reject theory and seek only to understand each individual woman, as an individual. Maynard disagrees with this view and contends;

> "To repeat and describe what women say, while important, can lead to individuation and fragmentation, instead of analysis. Feminism has an obligation

> to go beyond citing experience in order to make connections which may not be visible from the purely experiential level alone. When researching women's [and men's] lives we need to take their experience seriously, but we also, as Maureen Cain argues, need 'to take our own theory seriously' and 'use the theory to make sense of... the experience'. This is an interpretive and synthesizing process which connects experience to understanding" (Maynard, 1994, p-23/24).

Surely it is to achieve an 'understanding' of 'experience' that is the purpose of research and therefore some theory should frame all sociological inquiry.

In, "Method, methodology and Epistemology," Stanley and Wise describe the argument put forward by Michele Barrett (1987) that a feminist methodology is separatist. Barrett argues;

> "...that proponents of feminist methodology have not only 'hijacked feminism' in the name of separatism but are thereby responsible for the rest of the discipline of sociology failing to take gender seriously" (Barrett in Stanley and Wise, 1990, p-37).

Stanley and Wise contend that for Barrett;

> "...'separatism' is...an epistemological position which necessarily translates into entirely different 'male' and 'female' methods (that is, separatism at the level of research technique) and thus a completely bifurcated discipline" (Stanley and Wise, 1990, p-37).

Barrett therefore rejects the concept of a 'feminist methodology' and shows concern for the discipline of sociology as a whole should such a concept be adopted. Maynard concludes that the most important issue for feminist writers, is not to work religiously to an elusive, problematic concept labelled 'feminist methodology', but;

> "...the soundness and reliability of feminist research. Feminist work needs to be rigorous if it is to be regarded as intellectually compelling, politically persuasive, policy-relevant and meaningful to anyone other than feminists themselves...At the very least this call for rigour involves being clear about one's theoretical assumptions, the nature of the research process, the criteria against which 'good' knowledge can be judged and the strategies used for interpretation and analysis" (ibid p-24/25).

However, as a feminist, it is evident that there are ways of utilising all methods that might be considered as being more appropriate for feminist research. Letherby states, "...my central concern as a feminist researcher is not what I do but how I do it and the implications of this for what I get" (Letherby, 2003, p-97).

Feminist Standpoint Theory

A problematic issue for feminists carrying out research has been attending to the relationship between theory and practice. In "Feminist Practices; Identity, difference, power," Nickie Charles discusses theoretical developments that have occurred since the emergence of the women's liberation movement and that have presented a challenge to feminism. Charles first describes how an, "...uncomfortable acknowledgement of differences between women," necessitated a movement away from a 'united sisterhood';

> "...western women's liberation movements had been based on a very specific identity, that of white, middle-class, young, highly educated and often heterosexual women, and the demands and goals of such movements had been in their interests rather than in the interests of all women" (Charles, 1996, p-2).

It was evident that, "All women did not share an identity nor did they share political interests in any pre-given way" (ibid p-4). Thus, a shift towards 'identity politics' for feminists ensued and the women's liberation movement splintered into a number of different identities. The emphasis on identity was underpinned epistemologically by empiricism, that is, "Knowledge is given directly by experience and, if you do not have the experience, your knowledge is less valid" (ibid p-8).

Charles poses a question that highlights the problems for feminism that arise from such a viewpoint;

> "...if all women are different and do not share the same experience of subordination, and if some women oppress other women because of 'race', class, sexuality, nationality, etc., how can there be a politics of women's liberation?...Or has the fragmentation of identity pulled the rug out from under the political project of feminism?" (ibid p-6)

Consequently, as a 'feminist researcher', it also follows that 'valid' feminist research possibilities are limited to the spheres of your own experience, that is, as a white, working-class, heterosexual woman it would be pointless for me to research black women, gay women, women from different classes or even men as I am not able to directly experience what they do. Certainly, in many ways, research interests are directed by who you are anyway, your identity, experiences etc.; for me, it was being a teacher of sixth form pupils, faced with sociology classes of girls only and still annoyed with myself for not opting to study maths at A level, that stimulated my research into the topic of gendered subject choice at post-16. However, I am interested in all students views and ideas on the subject, not just those students with whom I am able to identify (if that is indeed any of them). What I believe to be important is acknowledging who I am and my part in the research process before attempting to convey the knowledge of the research participants with the most valid representation that I am able to produce.

It might be argued that an epistemological position suitable for adaptation to my own research project can be found in feminist standpoint theory. Feminist standpoint theory contends that, "starting from the standpoint of women can lead to a more complete knowledge" (Charles, 1996, p-24). However, feminist standpoint

theorists can be seen to differ from feminist empiricists in that they believe in order to achieve knowledge it is necessary to "...go beyond women's experiences" (ibid p-25). Standpoint theory can mean different things to different feminists. Maynard presents Harding's argument that;

> "...understanding women's lives from a committed feminist exploration of their experiences of oppression produces more complete and less distorted knowledge than that produced by men. Women lead lives that have significantly different contours and patterns to those of men, and their subjugated position provides the possibility of more complete and less perverse understandings. Thus, adopting a feminist standpoint can reveal the existence of forms of human relationships which may not be visible from the position of the ruling gender" (Maynard, 1994, p-19).

Such a definition might be criticised for the implication that women's experiences are more 'valid' than those of men. Second, it might also be construed from such an argument that, resulting from men's domination of women, there is only one feminist standpoint position shared by all women which would clearly be far too simplistic given the vast range of lives and experiences that exist. However, as a feminist I am concerned with exploring gender as an issue, that as women we do occupy a particular position in society in relation to men that feminist research should seek to highlight. Dorothy Smith proposes a feminist sociology that will explore the 'everyday worlds of women.' Women's standpoints, personal experiences are used as 'starting blocks', "...but...other resources mainly theoretical [are used] to explain and situate" (Charles, 1996, p-27) these experiences. She also discusses what she does not mean by the standpoint of women:

> "A sociology for women should not be mistaken for an ideological position that represents women's oppression as having a determinate character and takes up analysis of social forms with a view to discovering in them the lineaments of what the ideologist already supposes that she knows. The standpoint of

> women...cannot be equated with perspective or worldview. It does not universalise a particular experience. It is rather a method that, at the outset of inquiry, creates the space for an absent subject, and an absent experience that is to be filled with the presence and spoken experience of actual women speaking of and in the actualities of their everyday worlds" (Smith, 1987, p-107).

Thus feminist standpoint theory allows us to acknowledge that in our society women are different from men and have different experiences to those of men without overlooking the differences between women. Feminist research should aim to reflexively explore these differences and experiences from our individual feminist standpoints.

Stanley and Wise discuss feminist standpoint positions and conclude that their aim is for;

> "co-existent feminisms inside and outside of the academic arena, different and often disagreeing but also mutually appreciating and supporting. The main barrier to this...is not a censoring malestream establishment. Rather it is that some versions of feminism, or rather particular proponents of these, appear to be in the process of trying to establish a hegemonic position vis-a-vis 'Other' feminists" (Stanley and Wise, 1990, p-45).

That is, being a feminist means different things to different people and as such we should not strive for one 'all-encompassing feminism', for this would be both impossible, given the many standpoints women take, and counterproductive, in that women are wasting time and energy locked in battles to proclaim themselves as 'the most important, or most correct' whereas further exploring the 'everyday worlds of women is what is important. Stanley and Wise then, do not support the idea of a distinct feminist methodology. They;

> "...emphasise that there is no need for feminists to assign ourselves to one 'end' or another of the dichotomies...which have resurfaced in feminist discussions of methodology. We reject the disguised hegemonic claims of some forms of feminism, and actively promote academic pluralism" (ibid p-47).

So, how 'feminist' is my research?

My research project should be regarded as 'feminist research practice' then, for a number of reasons. First and most important is the use of a feminist theoretical standpoint as a means of attempting to better understand the material the research has produced; the persistence of gender divisions and their reproduction and an examination of gender relationships, has been central to the entire process, thus shaping all aspects of the research. This standpoint is acknowledged via the use of critical reflexivity throughout the research.

Second, as far as method is concerned, although I would argue that there is no such thing as a specifically 'feminist method', with the different qualitative methods that I have employed during the research, I have attempted to move towards a less hierarchical, subject/object approach wherever possible (though I have conceded that this was not that easy due to the teacher/pupil relationship) and similarly towards a more contextual approach, (particularly through the use of focus groups and observation) whereby individuals are studied in a social context rather than cut off from the rest of society and studied in isolation.

Third, and again far from being uniquely feminist, though I would argue important for feminist research practice, attention has been paid to ethical issues such as exploitation of the researched and issues of trust. The issue of consciousness-raising as part of the research process has also been discussed.

Finally, as far as 'transforming patriarchal society' is concerned, this is not an example of action research, however, it is intended to produce something of an

understanding of gender divisions in our society. Such an understanding might be considered an essential means of empowerment if such a transformation is to occur, and as such might be considered feminist research, if not feminist politics. As Letherby states:

> "I hope that my work is grounded in the realities of women's (and men's) lives. I also hope that it challenges traditional research practices and my aim is to provide 'accountable knowledge' in which the reader has access to details of the contextually located reasoning process which gives rise to our 'findings'" (Letherby, 2003, p-160).

My research

One of my main methods of research was the use of focus groups. As discussed in the introductory chapter, for each of the nine subject areas included in the study, where possible (that is where there were sufficient students of each gender available), both a male and female focus group was selected. Each focus group was made up of six to eight male or female students and each of the sessions took place in my classroom at the college during lunchtimes. In their work on the 'challenge and promise of focus groups', Kitzinger and Barbour discuss when they believe that it is appropriate to use focus groups and their ideas would seem to reinforce my choice of focus groups as a suitable method in my research;

> "Focus groups are ideal for exploring people's experiences, opinions, wishes and concerns. The method is particularly useful for allowing participants to generate their own questions, frames and concepts and to pursue their own priorities on their own terms, in their own vocabulary" (Kitzinger and Barbour, 1999, p-5).

My research aims to explore the lives of 16-18 year olds from their own particular viewpoints in order that by expressing themselves and discussing their lives in their

language, some insight might be gained into the continuing practice of gendered subject choice post-16. Kitzinger and Barbour continue;

> "Focus groups also enable researchers to examine people's different perspectives as they operate within the social network. Crucially, group work explores how accounts are articulated, censured, opposed and changed through social interaction and how this relates to peer communication and group norms" (ibid p-5).

The world of the 16-18 year old is very much a social world, characterised by interaction with others in numerous situations and learning to situate oneself and establish one's identity within such a world. Researching these students via focus groups introduces a group dynamic which might on some levels be seen as reflecting the social world of the sixth form college and beyond, providing the social context within which most people form their opinions.

As a venue, my classroom was easily accessible, known to the majority of the students and reasonably comfortable. It was not however ideally situated in terms of being completely quiet (the classroom was temporary and set next to the yard) and, as with any classroom, was subject to occasional interruptions, usually from students looking for somewhere to put their bags for the lunchtime. A classroom is certainly not a 'neutral setting', although Kitzinger and Barbour argue that there can be "no such place" as a neutral setting anyway (ibid p-11). In an examination of the impact of context on data when using focus groups based on their research using discussion groups of young children aged 7-11, Judith Green and Laura Hart discuss the difference between formal and informal contexts and the effects 'formality' has on focus group research including the relationship between the facilitator and the participants and how explicit the 'rules' of conversation were; in the more formal

setting of the school as opposed to the informal setting of a play scheme, they found the research relationships were much more formal, 'teacher-pupil' in nature and that rules for conversation were much more explicit, e.g. taking turns and so on (Green and Hart, 1999, p-26/27). In the sixth form college such an extreme form of 'formality' does not really exist anyway, however, seating was arranged so as to avoid any sense of a classroom situation, focus group members were invited to bring their lunch and as far as I was concerned, I explained that during that lunchtime they were not to think of me as a teacher, but were to speak as openly and honestly as possible with no fear of any repercussions. Thus an attempt was made to make the context as informal and relaxed as possible.

As far as obtaining a sample was concerned, students were first asked by their subject teachers about taking part in the research project, then I visited the different classes to further explain the purpose of the focus groups and to take names of those willing to take part. As a sampling method, asking students to volunteer themselves for focus groups is clearly problematic in that issues of representation have to be questioned – are the students who volunteered themselves for the focus group sessions representative of those who declined to take part? Certain individuals will instantly shy away from the prospect of such an 'ordeal', whereas others might enjoy being part of a group discussion. This is perhaps even more pertinent an issue due to the fact that I was known as a teacher in the college; it might be a particular type of student who is willing to give up a lunchtime and spend it 'helping a teacher' or at least, to spend a lunchtime in the company of a teacher – clearly this is something I have to be aware of as it may result in my having a biased

sample. Students who do not wish to spend a lunchtime chatting to a teacher, taking part in a research project may have a very different outlook on life to those who volunteer themselves for such a project.

The nature of the sampling method, by recruiting from subject classes, also means that the focus groups will be 'pre-existing groups', that is, people who are used to spending time together, several times a week within the context of the classroom, and some who see each other on a more frequent basis as friends. Despite market research texts calling for strangers in focus groups, Kitzinger and Barbour believe that pre-existing groups can be useful for focus group research;

> "These are, after all, the networks in which people might normally discuss (or evade) the sorts of issues likely to be raised in the research session and the 'naturally-occurring' group is one of the most important contexts in which ideas are formed and decisions are made" (ibid p-8/9).

The fact that many of the focus groups exhibited some imbalance towards certain members and tended to establish certain group norms then, need not be criticised too heavily, though there must be an awareness of the nature of the group (that is that individuals are in an interaction situation with their peers and will react accordingly) and to ensure that quieter members of the group are provided with ways of communicating their views. With my research it seemed to make sense to target for interview those who were less likely to get involved with the focus groups. The combination of focus groups with individual interviews will be discussed later.

As far as the methodology of focus group research itself is concerned, a number of issues are raised. Sue Wilkinson's study, "How useful are focus groups in feminist research?" looks at focus groups in terms of them being a contextual method, avoiding the separation of the individual from a social context and of focus

groups as being a relatively non-hierarchical method, shifting the balance of power away from the researcher and towards the research participants in opposition to traditional research methods that are criticised by feminists for being 'decontextualised' and 'rigidly hierarchical' in nature (Wilkinson, 1999, p-64/65). She also points out that;

> "Other advantages of focus groups for feminist research include: their use with minority groups; their potential as a tool for action research; and their value as a form of 'consciousness-raising'" (ibid p-64/65).

In terms of my research I am particularly interested in the discussion of focus groups as being non-hierarchical. Being a teacher and researcher means it is important that there is some attempt made to address the balance of power between myself and my respondents - also my students.

As mentioned previously in the chapter, feminists have criticised traditional research methods, "...in which people are transformed into 'object-like subjects', with the interests and concerns of research participants completely subordinated to those of the researcher" (ibid p-66). It might be argued that by using focus groups, traditional hierarchies are disrupted and that the researcher inevitably loses some power and control simply by virtue of the fact that the research participants outnumber the researcher. As a teacher in the college where I was carrying out my research, trying to even the balance of power was always going to be an extremely difficult (if not an impossible) task. However, the use of focus groups did ensure that it was clear participants' interaction and points of view were of the utmost importance and that they could develop their discussions as they saw fit, and in their own way. On many occasions, conversations between the focus group members would just 'take off'

as it were, and my only role then was to listen to their varying points of view. As far as focus groups being a non-hierarchical method is concerned, Wilkinson concludes;

> "...this reduction in the relative power of the researcher also allows the researcher better to access, understand and take account of the opinions and conceptual worlds of research participants, in line with the suggested principles of feminist research" (ibid p-73).

I believe that it is necessary to take issue with the certainty with which Wilkinson seems to hold in stating that focus groups are a non-hierarchical method. In certain of the focus groups it was evident that the research participants felt comfortable and had the confidence to challenge one another's views, discuss their feelings in front of me and so on. However, the fact remained that I held the position of teacher at the college and they were students at the college and thus an unequal relationship *did* exist between us which was impossible to eradicate and which therefore must have affected the social interactions of the focus groups. For certain students, my presence as a 'teacher' would mean they could not be themselves, speak and behave as they would do normally. For example, very little swearing was used during the focus group sessions or during the interviews and yet if you ever took a stroll around college grounds and listened to conversations between students, 'bad language' was quite commonplace.

Wilkinson states that feminists have similarly criticised;

> "the 'context-stripping' nature of traditional methods (such as surveys, questionnaires, psychological tests and experiments, and even interviews), as a result of which, as Janis Bohan says, 'the reality of human experience - namely that it always occurs in context...is lost'. Feminists have consistently emphasised the importance of social context, insisting that feminist methods should be *contextual* - that is, avoid focusing on the individual in isolation, cut off from interactions and relationships with other people" (ibid p-65).

It is certainly the case that within a focus group, individuals are placed within a social context, interact with other members of the group and therefore act as a group member, rather than as an individual.

> "The social context of the focus group provides an opportunity to examine how people engage in...meaning-generation, how opinions are formed, expressed and (sometimes) modified within the context of discussion and debate with others" (ibid p-67).

Thus, as a researcher I was able to observe the social interaction of the group, pick up on the nuances between members, see how individuals construct themselves in relation to others and witness how group meanings and definitions are established, something that would not have been possible outside of a group situation. Wilkinson argues that;

> "...the social context of the focus group offers the opportunity to observe the co-construction of meaning and the elaboration of identities through interaction. The interactive nature of focus group data produces insights that would not be available outside the group context...[and] makes the focus group an ideal method for feminists who see the self as relational, or as socially constructed, and who argue, therefore, that feminist methods should be contextual" (ibid p-69/70).

Perhaps a downside to celebrating this group dynamic however is that by accepting the group meanings and identities that are negotiated in a particular interaction situation, certain individuals, who tend not to feel as comfortable in a group situation and who would perhaps behave/think/speak quite differently in other circumstances (or even in other groups) may be neglected, overlooked as individuals with possibly totally contradictory opinions to what might have been established as 'normal' by the focus group. The use of interviews together with the focus groups goes some way to remedy this problem. However, it is almost inevitable that certain individual's values, beliefs and opinions will be lost, drowned out by the group.

Lynn Michell has written about combining the methods of interview and focus group in her longitudinal study of teenage lifestyles. In a similar vein to my research, Michell noted a well-established, clearly mapped out hierarchy that existed in the school and the neighbourhood of the teens she studied and found that;

> "Focus groups were thus a rich and productive way of gaining access to well rehearsed 'public knowledge' and highlighting the way in which social exchange reinforced such hierarchies" (Michell, 1999, p-36).

In the focus groups that I carried out, everyone seemed to form a consensus as to who was 'cool' and 'popular' in the college and just as evident were who the outsiders were, a theme that recurred throughout the focus group sessions. However, as I have mentioned, focus groups did not allow all the young people involved to share their opinions. In the case of Michell's research she found;

> "...some aspects of young people's experiences were excluded from the focus group discussions, in particular, the experiences of the lowest-status girls" (ibid p-36).

This was reflected in my own research; those students who did not necessarily 'fit' neatly into or hold favour with the prescribed, acceptable dominant forms of masculinity and femininity of the college tended to be silenced (if indeed they were present) during the focus groups. It was these students that I attempted to target for interview. Michell, who targeted the low-status girls for her interviews, continues;

> "These girls were mute and withdrawn in focus groups but, in interview, revealed feelings and personal information which helped to develop a deeper understanding of bullying and victimization" (ibid p-36).

Although my research, unlike Michell's, did not reveal such a notable difference between the conversation in focus groups and interviews, it is certainly the case that certain students only felt comfortable talking to me in interview, and as with Michell, that;

> "It was only in the interviews that pupils revealed certain feelings and experiences which would have remained untold had they only taken part in the focus groups" (ibid p-45).

However, even with the combination of focus groups and interviews, I still can not be confident of having 'heard' each of the 'silenced voices' due to a voluntary method of sampling, whereby many such students, particularly those from subjects where I had very few means of persuading them otherwise, may simply have refused to take part in my research project in the first place.

Green and Hart discuss the idea that social interaction in focus groups might be more 'naturalistic' than other methods, with free-flowing, 'naturalistic' conversation between members of the group and the ability to "...tap into a process of social knowledge formation, rather than fixed attitudes" (Green and Hart, 1999, p-26). This is perhaps more applicable to the younger age-group that Green and Hart were working with and even they agree that focus groups are artificial situations in that they have been constructed by the researcher and the 'focus' of the discussion is also artificial. In the case of my research there was always an awareness of the 'artificiality' of the situation, that is groups of all male or all female students, sitting in a classroom with a teacher discussing their college lives was never going to be regarded as 'natural' by anyone. It was however the case that in many of the focus groups, a relaxed atmosphere prevailed and some 'naturalistic' conversation flowed. Like Green and Hart, on several occasions I had a problem with transcription when the discussion became so animated that it was difficult to distinguish between the voices and sounds (ibid p-25).

Green and Hart point to another danger of using data from focus groups, namely;

> "...that fragments of discussion can readily be reified, separated out from the surrounding discussion as 'opinions' or 'views', and used merely to illustrate a 'theme' in the final report...To do this...undervalues and even distorts the data produced by discussion groups" (ibid p-25).

To this end, in the reporting of my data, I have tried to contextualise as many of the comments made as possible. Many of the excerpts I have used are of conversations rather than stand-alone comments made by individuals, although I believe that presented in the correct way, (that is, as I believe the speaker intended them), these comments can also be of use and of interest.

It will also be necessary that I take on a reflexive stance in order that I am;

> "...positioned as [an] active [agent] within the sets of social and cultural relations involved in the research process" (Cunningham-Burley, Kerr and Pavis, 1999, p-198).

This is particularly important in my case due to my being a teacher in the college where the research took place.

Another of the methods I used for my research project is the interview and I interviewed individuals of both sexes, my being interested in what influences both males and females to make gendered post-16 subject choices. Tim May uses Ackroyd and Hughes' definition of what interviews actually are;

> "...encounters between a researcher and a respondent in which the latter is asked a series of questions relevant to the subject of the research. The respondent's answers constitute the raw data analysed at a later point in time by the researcher" (May, 1993, p-91).

Such an encounter, "...can yield rich sources of data on people's experiences, opinions, aspirations and feelings" (ibid p-91). The researcher must however be aware of the strengths and weaknesses of interviewing as a method, and as in the instance of my

own research project, must be aware of how interviewing slots into 'feminist research practice'.

Most of the literature pertaining to 'how to carry out feminist research,' however tends to emphasise interviewing women, for, as discussed earlier in the chapter, some writers believe that 'feminist research' should be about women only; "...women and their experiences...are the focus of enquiry" (Cook and Fonow, 1986, p-5). As referred to previously in the chapter, Ann Oakley's "Interviewing women: a contradiction in terms," puts forward the argument that interviewing for research purposes following "...traditional criteria for interviewing," has evolved from a "... predominantly masculine model of sociology and society", and therefore;

> "...creates problems for feminist interviewers whose primary orientation is towards the validation of women's subjective experiences as women and as people" (Oakley, 1981, p-30).

She puts forward a list of issues that research reports do not usually refer to, but for 'feminist research practice' might be seen as essential;

> "...social/personal characteristics of those doing the interviewing; interviewees' feelings about being interviewed and about the interview; interviewers' feelings about interviewees; and quality of interviewer/interviewee interaction; hospitality offered by interviewees to interviewers; attempts by interviewees to use interviewers as sources of information; and the extension of interviewer-interviewee encounters into more broadly-based social relationships" (ibid p-31).

Certainly, with my research my own social/personal characteristics were referred to and also I believe that the social/personal characteristics of the respondents are essential so they too are discussed later in the chapter. Without referral to these characteristics as a starting point, I feel it would be problematic to assume anything of the relationship between interviewee and interviewer. I was certainly prepared to

answer questions put to me by my respondents (if I was able to, of course) feeling that impersonal relationships with my respondents would be detrimental to the research process and that taking such a stance would appear more personal. However, as I discuss later in the chapter, answering the students questions was not always possible due to my position as a teacher and needing to preserve some 'professional distance'. I certainly feel that a relaxed, informal, friendly atmosphere is more conducive to eliciting information or to people 'opening up' as it were. As mentioned earlier, like Oakley I believe that it is important for an interview and interviewee to have a relationship that is as non-hierarchical as possible, and that the interviewer should prepare to share information about themselves with the respondent. However, as discussed earlier in relation to the work of Clara Greed, due to my position as college lecturer, a non-hierarchical relationship was impossible, as was total personal investment on my part. I hoped that combining the two roles of college lecturer and 'feminist researcher' would not prove to be too contradictory.

Clara Greed talks about her research as;

"...a two-way process of interaction and sharing between [herself] and the other women...I need to be willing to give as well as take. If I expect women to tell me what their lives are really like at a personal level, they expect that in return I will share with them information about my personal life and feelings...I am not attempting to 'control' my 'subjects' by keeping off topics that might affect me personally and which might reduce my credibility in the eyes of my 'subjects'...I am, albeit reluctantly, willing to take the risk of making myself vulnerable in the process of doing research" (Greed, 1990, p-145/146).

Clearly such an approach to interviewing is ideal as far as 'feminist research process' is concerned, however it was not an entirely suitable approach for my own study due to my professional position and the responsibilities such a position carries.

Janet Finch's study of clergyman's wives provides another example of qualitative research based on interviews in addition to observation, although again her respondents were all women. Finch was influenced by Oakley's discussion of the interview and thus based her study on;

> "...less-structured research strategies which avoid creating a hierarchical relationship between interviewer and interviewee" (Finch, 1993, p-166).

Finch talks of how the women she interviewed almost automatically spoke freely to her, 'woman to woman';

> "Women are almost always enthusiastic about talking to a woman researcher, even if they have some initial anxieties about the purpose of the research or their own 'performance' in the interview situation" (ibid p-167).

The nature of my research project however, did not yield such totally forthcoming attitudes from respondents simply because I am a woman researcher interviewing women (and men). I believe that both the age of the majority of my respondents, (that is sixteen to eighteen years of age), coupled with the fact that I was a teacher at the college will have, in certain instances and particularly at first, affected the freedom of the responses I received. I expected to have to, "...work at something called rapport" (ibid p-167), especially where my respondents were not known to me previously, e.g. physics students, or where they were male. None of the criteria discussed by Finch as to what makes an interview effective for the most part, unfortunately applies to my research. First about half of my respondents were men. Second, it was not possible (mainly for legal reasons) for any of the interviews (much as I would have liked them to), to take place in the homes of my respondents. Finally third, Finch argues that due to;

> "... the structural position of women, and in particular their consignment to the privatized, domestic sphere, makes it particularly likely that they will welcome the opportunity to talk to a sympathetic listener" (ibid p-169).

She suggests that women, as women are always ready to talk about their experiences with someone who is ready to listen. This is a position that was not wholly applicable to my student respondents, although I did feel as though the female members of staff were particularly keen to 'give their side of the story' as it were. I do not feel however, at a loss, despite the fact that Finch's 'special situation' for interviewing was unsuitable for my own purposes. I required some kind of compromise as far as interviewing for my own research project went, that is, I needed to seek a balance between the two-way, non-hierarchical, personal, empathetic interview (which was not desirable for me professionally) and disengagement. Such a compromise became apparent as I actually carried out the research, and I learned where to 'draw lines', where to share personal information, topics to 'avoid', and how vulnerable I allowed myself to be. For example, students often start asking what you think about other members of staff and also ask personal questions about sexuality and I felt that to enter into any such discussions would have been unnecessary and wrong.

> My research is comparable with that of Clara Greed in the respect that;
>
> "...I have already lived what I am researching...My past experience enables me to develop 'sensitising concepts' more readily, because I already have an awareness and empathy with the issues that an outsider would not be able to develop so effectively in the time available. However, I am very aware of accusations that I am desensitised by over-familiarity" (Greed, 1990, p-147).

It is certainly my intention to use my past, as well as present experiences of teaching as data;

> "...the idea is that I look back on events from my past life and observe and analyse them giving them the same research treatment as the events that happen today, almost like an 'action replay'" (ibid p-147).

I feel that my first-hand knowledge of the further education system was of enormous use to my research. It is, however also true that I am aware of the problems presented by being a 'part' of the 'field' that I am researching. Being a teacher at the college whilst carrying out my research had both positive and negative effects on the research although on balance I believe it provided me with a more constructive experience. One of the most beneficial things about working at the college was my general knowledge of the place - knowing the layout of the school, the timetable, knowing who taught what and where I could find them, having an awareness of general atmosphere of the college, and having a very helpful friend in admin who did her utmost to supply me with any background information I required. Riddell, who also started her research at a school where she had taught, speaks of these advantages;

> "...I brought with me a knowledge of the layout, timetables and key personalities, thus it was possible to avoid the frustration, experienced by many researchers, of spending a whole lesson in a corridor having failed to locate a particular class" (Riddell, 1992, p-18).

It saved a great deal of time and work knowing who to ask for what and, like Riddell, knowing who the 'key personalities' were, or at least those individuals/staff who would be able to take part, or lead me to others, (mainly students), who would participate in the research. Mirza, who had been a pupil at one of the schools she studied some six years previously conveys similar positive thoughts and feelings about her position of familiarity and the advantages that allowed her;

> "Any subjective bias arising from my familiarity with the school, the staff, and my experiences while a pupil there must to some degree be recognised. However, it was felt that the introduction of bias this situation might

> encourage was far outweighed by the positive aspects of access and confidentiality that I enjoyed" (Mirza, 1992, p-8).

Certainly, it has to be acknowledged that by carrying out research whilst working at the college, bias *will* occur; there were certain members of staff with whom I had formed close friendships, others who I found more difficult to get along with, and similarly these staff will all have formed judgements about me and about my research (if they were involved with it). However, I was still 'a member of staff' to these people, an accepted part of the staffroom and thus awarded more-or-less immediate access to any information, classes, groups of students etc. that were available to them; there never seemed to be any suspicion or mistrust from any of the other members of the staff as my status as a researcher was always secondary to my position of staff member. Only in two of the interviews that I carried out with members of staff, one with a man, the other with a woman, both of whom I barely knew, did I feel some 'awkwardness' during the discussion and sensed an unwillingness to share thoughts and feelings.

This position as staff member then, probably had more effect on the students that I was researching, as there nearly always exists an 'us' and 'them' mentality where students and teachers are involved. Riddell reports the difficulties she faced with pupils at the school where she had taught;

> "Relationships with pupils at Millbridge proved more problematic, since most remembered me as a teacher. They were still inclined to address me rather suspiciously as 'Miss' and I quickly realised that attempts to chat with them in social areas at lunch time would not be welcomed" (Riddell, 1992, p-18).

As my research took place in a sixth form college, my experience with the students was not so difficult as this. The college does, in theory at least, attempt to situate

itself at some distance from a school-type atmosphere, to move away from the 'us' and 'them' mentality, and yet this attempt at a more 'relaxed' atmosphere sits very uncomfortably with certain members of staff (particularly those whose training has been in schools) and so there remains an overwhelmingly 'school-like' atmosphere in many respects, for example, the vast majority of teachers are still addressed as 'Sir' or 'Miss'. In saying that, as a young teacher, with what I believed to be a 'good' relationship with most of my students, I was perhaps not regarded as an unfriendly, distant, difficult-to-approach teacher, but as someone who students felt comfortable in talking to and felt able to relate to, although a teacher nevertheless. Mac an Ghaill discusses how certain of the sixth form students involved in the study at Parnell School, 'strongly identified' with him and came to him to talk about their feelings and emotions where they felt they could not talk with their families (Mac an Ghaill, 1994, p-174). I certainly never achieved this level of rapport with any of the students that took part in the research, however, it was probably the case that I was viewed as a more 'sympathetic type' of teacher. In one of the interviews, a male sociology student (who I taught) made a distinction between old and young teachers that perhaps illustrates the difference between those teachers at the college who wanted to make it distinct from a school, more of a transition between school and university, and those teachers who believed a strict, school-like regime was essential for the smooth-running of the college:

> CH m sociology "With older teachers everything is done by the book, younger teachers are more, with the pupils, rather than a different entity – You teach in a different way, talk our language."

Thus, although I was very definitely seen as a teacher by the students at the college, it was perhaps less of a problem for those students that I taught and who were aware of what I was like than for those students from subjects with whom I had had no contact and who simply regarded me as a 'teacher'. As a teacher chatting to other teachers, you notice that there does appear to be a divide between older, more traditional teachers and younger teachers, reasonably new to the profession (although clearly this is not always the case), and the students seem to be aware of this difference. Many of the older teachers at the college were school-trained and thus school teaching techniques were often applied in the college classroom. Younger teachers in particular tended to have a more 'laid-back' approach that attempted to treat the students more as adults responsible for their own learning rather than as children that need to sit quietly behind their desks in the classroom and be taught. Thus interviews and focus groups with the students I taught were generally a little 'easier' as far as the teacher/student relationship was concerned. Presumably they were more aware of my 'boundaries', and my attitude to the students as being young adults rather than children. Those students who were taught by other members of staff with different 'boundaries' and attitudes to the students may have been less inclined to speak freely to me due to their definitions of what a student/teacher relationship should mean.

Riddell found that;

> "In general...relationships with girls and women were more open than with boys and men, which confirms what other feminist researchers have reported about their experience of interviewing women" (Riddell, 1992, p-20).

Again I would have to agree that this was the case during my research, particularly as far as the students were concerned and particularly during the interviews, where women appeared to be more comfortable in my presence and as a result much more willing to discuss their thoughts and feelings at length. I would however argue that using the male focus groups was excellent in this respect and did produce a great deal of discussion and useful data as they allowed the male students to gain confidence and support from their peers; the downside to this of course is that occasionally the males felt it necessary to 'show-off' to one another and to me, and were perhaps influenced more by the situation and their peers than was warranted.

Other methods that I utilised in my research then, were observation and participant observation. Tim May writes;

> "Ethnographers gather data by their active participation in the social world; they enter a social universe in which people are already busy interpreting and understanding their environments...It does not then follow that researchers comprehend the situation as though it were 'uncontaminated' by their social presence... the aim of understanding is actually enhanced by considering how they are affected by the social scene, what goes on within it and how people, including themselves, act and interpret within their social situations - hence the term participant observation" (May, 1993, p-116).

'Access', as mentioned previously, was not an issue as a result of my teaching position in the college. In my own classes, I myself, completely became a part of the researched; May indicates that in such a situation, "Our own cultural equipment is thereby used reflexively to understand social action in context" (ibid p-117). Charlotte Aull Davies writes of the importance of selecting informants and highlights that this selection is not a one-way process, respondents must also accept the researcher;

> "...ethnographers must interrogate and explore not just the information being obtained but also the social dynamics that lead to certain individuals becoming central to their study and others not" (Aull-Davies, 1999, p-79).

For the purposes of my study, this again underlines the importance of taking into consideration the social/personal characteristics of everyone involved, including those of the researcher.

Observation and Participant observation are criticised for their lack of 'reliability', however this criticism has tended to hail from those who adhere to the traditional 'masculine' norms of 'scientific research', As with interviewing, my research project rejects the idea of 'disengagement' as far as the researcher and the researched are concerned and stresses the need for continuous reflexivity. Although I was not be able to carry out research that was totally subjective, personal, and non-hierarchical, which might have been desirable as 'feminist, research practice', I intended for my research to follow such criteria as closely as possible. Where it was not possible, my intention was to highlight the reasons why this was the case and hopefully these explanations will compensate for any difficulties I experienced as a teacher/researcher.

The Sample

The research began in May 1999 with two pilot focus groups, one male and one female, and two pilot interviews, again one male and one female. These were carried out with sociology students for the sake of ease, due to my having contact with these students every day. Although I did not carry out a formal pilot study of the staff interview, I did run through the interview with a colleague of mine who taught English at the college. These 'trial runs' took place in order to check whether or not the students understood what I was getting at with my questions, if all the questions were suitable

and/or relevant, if the order of the questions/discussion topics made sense and if I would be able to get the information I required to answer my research question. Several changes were made as a result of the piloting of the research instruments, particularly as far as question order was concerned, and also with wording changes to questions which seemed to draw a blank from the students.

The research project then took place over the course of the following academic year, that is, between September 2000 to July 2001.

I began with the focus groups which were the most difficult to organise as a result of the sheer numbers involved and due to my not having 'access' to many of the students in other subjects. As mentioned earlier, getting these groups together was really only made possible with the co-operation of other members of staff at the college. Different classes were told about the research by their subject teachers and these teachers then allowed me to enter their classes to enlist volunteers.

Fifty-five male students and 56 female students took part in the research and all of the students were aged between 16 and 18 years. Nine female and nine male students were interviewed; the others took part in the focus groups. Fifty-two of the males were white, 3 were British-born Asian. Of the 55 male students, before enrolling in the college, 48 had attended the more middle-class feeder school, St Matthew's, 4 had attended St Luke's, 2 St John's and one student had attended a non-Catholic school in the area. 52 of the male students came from Catholic homes (though these considerably varied in terms of religiosity), 2 came from Muslim homes and 1 stated that he had a non-religious background.

Forty-nine of the females were white, 6 were British-born Asian and one was British-born Chinese. 50 of the female students had attended St Matthew's, 3 had attended St Mark's, 2 St Luke's and 1 St John's. 50 of these students reported being Catholic, again in varying degrees of how strictly the faith was practiced, and 6 of the female students were Muslim.

There were 14 single-sex focus groups carried out altogether, with numbers in the focus groups of between six and eight. As mentioned in the introductory chapter, the subjects of French, Health and Social Care, Physics and Computer studies had such severe gender imbalances that there were simply not enough students to carry out focus groups of both genders. Interviews were then carried out with individual male and female students from each of the nine subject areas. Whereas the focus group sample was drawn for the most part from students volunteering to take part, the students who took part in the interviews were more likely to have been approached by myself or their subject teachers and personally invited to take part, in an attempt to give certain 'silenced voices' something of a forum to put forward their opinions. This was not always successful and a number of these 'targetted' students refused to take part, however, I do believe that the interview samples were, in the main, complementary to the volunteer samples of the focus groups.

Finally, thirteen interviews were carried out with staff members. In the majority of cases, the staff that were interviewed happened to be the only teachers of a particular gender that taught their subject at the college. In the instances where two members of staff of the same gender taught the same subject, the interview was carried out with the member of staff who was most happy to take part.

As with the focus groups, and again as mentioned in the introductory chapter, staff interviews were not possible in certain subjects due to the lack of teachers of a particular gender teaching those subjects at the college. All of the 13 teachers that took part in the interviews were white, 6 were male, 7 were female and their ages ranged from 25 to 54 years. Seven of the staff said they were practicing Catholics, 3 stated they were 'lapsed Catholic', one teacher considered themselves to be Christian but not Catholic and 2 stated that they were non-religious.

Each of the student focus groups and student interviews took place in my classroom. The teacher interviews either took place in my classroom or in the classroom of the teacher involved, according to their preference.

All of the interviews and focus groups were taped and then transcribed verbatim.

Many of my own observations were drawn from memory, others were jotted down on odd bits of paper over the course of several years. Where I have used autobiography, it is clearly stated.

In order to ensure the confidentiality of those who took part in the research the college has not been named. Each of the feeder schools has been given a different name and the initials of each of the participants are also false to preserve anonymity.

And finally, to situate myself, at the time of writing I am 29 years of age. I am a white, Welsh female. My mother is English, a consultant social worker, my father is a Welsh retired police officer who continues to keep himself very busy as a member of various committees, boards etc. I consider myself to be working-class, however, possibly a result of growing up in a small, mainly working-class, Welsh community. I

have been brought up to be Christian, but do not consider myself to be religious. I have detailed the reasons for my interest in gendered subject choice at post-16 in the introductory chapter.

The following chapter is the first of the data chapters and is concerned with the issue of hetero/sexuality and gender identity in the college.

Chapter Four

Sexuality and post-16 subject choice

This chapter will examine the nature of sexuality within the college and how that appears to affect the choice of subjects for these post-16 students. Several writers (see for example, Riddell 1992, Mac an Ghaill 1994, Martino 1999) have focused on issues of sexuality within an educational context, for example, how dominant sexualities are constructed and then policed within an educational establishment. The first part of this chapter then, focuses on the dominant masculinities and femininities that co-exist within the college. This will provide a suitable framework for the analysis of students' subject choice and what would seem to be the extremely influential nature of heterosexual, boundaries that are policed by staff and students alike. Having worked in such an environment, the chapter will also make reference to my own observations as a classroom teacher in the college on the topic of sexuality and feminism.

'Growing Up'

One of the key issues that emerged from both the focus groups and interviews was the students' perception of 'growing up'. The students were asked about what they thought of both life at the college and about life at the schools they had left behind. Many of the students appeared to articulate the idea that they had, by leaving school, almost 'left childhood behind' and made a transition to adulthood.

When students arrive at Sixth-form college they are leaving behind them the caring, nurturing institution of the school and moving into unknown, 'grown-up' territory; they are losing the label 'child' and acquiring the label 'young adult'.

> JW m maths "I came to college to get away from school, like. Teachers in school do your head in after a while and you get sick of being treated like a kid."

RL f Health and Social Care "If we'd stayed in school it's as if we wouldn't be allowed to grow up. When you come to college you're more on your own, more responsible, so you have to be more grown up in a way."

So becoming a young adult within the context of a sixth-form college involves shedding the label of the child at school and thus the learning of a new role for most college students. This new role is particularly concerned with 'being mature' and moving away from the 'childish antics' of the school. What is 'cool' or the 'done thing' at college becomes something quite different to what was considered to be 'cool' within the context of the school (or at least on a superficial level as far as the students themselves were concerned this appeared to be the case). Without exception, the members of the focus-groups were keen to highlight their new found 'maturity' and to distinguish and distance themselves from the school pupils they once were.

PM m geography "Once you get to our age you've got to realise that mucking about and being childish is pointless. It's time to settle down and be a bit more mature about things."

RC m history "School was a brilliant laugh, all we used to do was muck about and wind up the teachers (laughter). I suppose you've just got to realise you can't act that like that for the rest of your life, you've got to just get on with it and grow up."

MR f sociology "I hated school there was always someone breathing down your neck. It was just so strict, like. You've got a bit more freedom here like and you're treated more like an adult."

Individuals in several focus groups, both male and female, went as far as taking the line that college life was still too much like school life and they felt stifled. This appeared to indicate to others in the focus group (and to me) their new-found wisdom and further underlined the importance of being 'mature' within the college setting. When asked the question, "What do you think about college life at [*this establishment*]?", some of the replies indicate this train of thought:

JC m sociology "It's too much like High School...They're always giving you reports, putting you on report – it's supposed to be your own choice to come to lessons so

why do they put you on report if you miss a couple? We're not kids any more, they should let us make up our own minds."

GM f biology "It's really dull and really strict, no different from school really." TW f biology "Yeah, we're monitored really closely and loads of the teachers still treat us like we're in school. It's pathetic."

However, such a feeling was not shared by all of the students questioned. Other focus groups focussed on how different the college was from school and how it was a more relaxed, adult environment. These groups then were still keen to demonstrate that they had 'matured' since school but believed that the college assisted, rather than hindered them in this process. In answering the same question, "What do you think about college life at [*this establishment*]?", other replies were:

PT m physics "I think it's much better than school. This place has got *frees*[1] and everything, really laid back and friendly. You can talk to teachers on their level, like an adult."

HK f French "There's a really good atmosphere and you feel as though everyone is here for the same reason. It's not like in school when there were some people who really didn't want to be there. Here, everyone has chosen to be here and it's much better."

It was evident from the focus groups that whatever the individual views on college-life itself, what was really important was the re-definition of these students as 'mature beings' and 'young adults' as oppose to being 'childish kids'. Certainly as far as boys are concerned, this provides support for changes noted by several writers in terms of hegemonic masculinity within education. That is, how for male students in schools, up to the age of 16, taking schoolwork seriously is seen as effeminate, calling boys' heterosexuality into question, whereas post-16, the adoption of a more intellectual persona by male students becomes perfectly acceptable (Epstein 1998; Martino 1999; Charles 2002). Intellectualism, rationality and educational achievement become the 'mature' thing to do, demonstrating manhood and moving away from all that is 'silly' and

[1] Frees are free periods or study periods when the student has no timetabled lessons.

'childlike'. It is important to note that the literature has mainly focused on male students and that perhaps for female students the change in maturity is less 'obvious', immaturity of course being one of the reasons cited for male underachievement in schools.

Interviews with the students would appear to support such a difference between male and female students. They indicate a strong sense of 'change' from being a school pupil to being a college student, however interviews with the boys showed that they were more vehement in stressing this point than the girls in their interviews. This possibly indicates a more radical change in persona for the boys than the girls in my sample. Again this would support the prevailing literature on masculinities in education, that is, that boys are making a very definite change as far as attitude to school is concerned with an almost complete redefinition of what is to be considered 'cool' and 'masculine'. In interviews with the boys it would seem they were very quick to demonstrate that they had left the 'boy' behind them and that they had now become 'man,' making clear distinctions between the two.

> JM m history "I really didn't take anything seriously in school but I suppose I've just got older and wiser. You just go past wanting to muck about and realise it's more important to put a bit effort in."
>
> RM m computer science "Coming to college makes you see what you've got to do if you want to get on in life. You can't be a bum forever."

As Epstein notes, part of this change in boys' position links to the fact that by the time students get to the sixth form, the majority of the working class 'macho lads' who espouse 'anti-school' ideas will have left the education system (Epstein, 1998; Charles, 2002). This point was clearly identified by the male interviewee who was taking sociology:

> CH m sociology "In school there was no work ethic whatsoever – very few people wanted to learn and would have been happy with careers in a local electronics

company/factory probably...there were certain individuals who were against anyone who tried to work...thankfully that's not the case here. Those kids have gone."

Girls on the other hand are perhaps not faced with such a radical overhaul of position as far as acceptable levels of femininity are concerned, although later I will examine some evidence that suggests some change in this area does occur. References to becoming more mature were still evident in the female interviews however and several girls made comments on the laid-back nature of the college:

> TS f maths "It really feels like you're an adult here. You've got much more responsibility for your own learning and you just have to be mature and rise to it."

> EI f sociology "It's a lot less regulated here than in school, it's really easy to miss lessons... (laughs) ...too easy really."

Other girls however viewed the college as overbearing:

> TB f biology "Sometimes you still feel as though you're a kid, we choose to be here but they still send letters home and ring our parents if we don't turn up to lessons."

> FH f history "I wish they'd just let us get on with what we've chosen to do and forget about all the other crap [meaning registration, assemblies, general R.E. lessons, monitoring etc.]. I thought we would have left that behind in school."

The transition then from school to college links to the transition from child to adult for many of these young people.

Becoming a 'sexual being'

The new label of 'young mature adult' clearly carries with it some very strong sexual overtones; this is the time that adolescents seek to make their mark as a sexual being and a time when seeking approval from your peers and from the opposite sex is absolutely crucial. Another of the themes arising from the research was the apparent 'need' of many of the youngsters to define themselves as a 'sexual being', linking to the new-found maturity that being a college student brings with it.

The focus groups in particular were saturated with comments of a sexual nature that might indicate to us the importance of sex and sexuality at this stage in the students' lives. When asked about what they enjoyed most about college life, these were some of the replies:

> RT m history "Going out on the pull, you can't beat it!"
>
> MR m sociology "Going down the [pub], and lower sixth girls (makes the noise made by Homer Simpson when drooling)." (Everyone bursts into laughter)
>
> OL m biology "Watching the girls sunbathing out on the grass while I'm in class."
> PD m biology "Oh yes, some of them are fine – it really helps pass the time."
>
> TR f history "Meeting new boys – there are some really sexy ones about."
> (general giggling)
>
> PT f Health and Social Care "[Matthew Thomas'] bum." (Everyone laughs)

Comments made in the interviews with the students tended to be more subtle, perhaps as a result of them being in a one-to-one situation with a teacher and feeling less inclined (and more embarrassed) to discuss issues of a sexual nature in the absence of supportive peers. However both boys and girls spoke about the opposite sex in a sexual way, for example:

> JM m history "It's great meeting new people, especially new girls – plenty of new opportunity – know what I mean?"
>
> DE f geography "The social side of things is great – the talent is much better here too."
>
> LT f French "There are some decent boys around the place, some are particularly easy on the eye. It makes life a little more interesting."

It would appear that both males and females in the sample were keen to emphasise their sexuality and their desire for members of the opposite sex. It is necessary then to examine the nature of sexuality within the college at this juncture, for the research also highlighted how differing masculinities, femininities, and the continuing dominance of heterosexuality pervaded the lives of the students at the

college. It is then possible to discuss how this sexuality might have affected the subject choices of these students at post-16.

Compulsory heterosexuality and dominant femininities and masculinities at the college

All the evidence suggests that heterosexuality is compulsory at the college and possibly more so than elsewhere - it would probably be important at this stage to remember that the college is Catholic and the teachings of the Catholic Church declare homosexuality to be unnatural and sinful. Many more modern-thinking Catholics do not subscribe to this belief of course, however several students and teachers that I spoke to were of this opinion. Students 'coming out' were almost unheard of and of course derogatory terms such as 'poof', 'gay-boy', and 'bender' were bandied around by many (again both students and teachers) for fun. Within such a climate then, marking out one's heterosexuality was of utmost importance for the students.

In order to be considered masculine within the college males had to demonstrate that they were unwaveringly heterosexual. As several studies of educational establishments have shown, there are a number of ways that this heterosexual masculinity can be proven. As I have already discussed, to show contempt for education and a work ethic was no longer a pre-requisite for the males of the college, in fact, although being seen to be intelligent and performing well in classes was not a necessity in being considered 'acceptably masculine', it was apparently a key factor for many male students. It has been argued that this shift in what hegemonic masculinity comprises allows professional, middle-class males in particular to prepare for the labour market, which for them should follow a path via higher education. Demonstrating intellectual ability must therefore become an acceptable side of masculinity (Mac an Ghaill 1994;

Epstein 1998; Charles 2002). The males in the majority of the focus groups often consciously made this connection in their comments.

> GD m biology "I've got to start making a bit of effort if I want to get a decent job. The time comes I suppose when you've just got to knuckle down."
>
> RP m computer studies "I'm going to be an architect which means going to university and that means I'll actually have to do some work."
>
> TS m geography "At school you just don't think about the future, all you care about is having a laugh and being with your mates. It's different now, you start to realise that if you want a nice house, nice car you have to have a career and that means getting the grades you need to go to university."
>
> PF m physics "If you worked in school people used to make fun of you, even bully you, but now people realise you've got to work if you want a future."

There were however several exceptions to this generally agreed upon rule, a few boys in one focus group who continued to ridicule the appearance of working and who thought time was far better spent pursuing more enjoyable goals. The focus group in question was the male sociology focus group, a subject that I have labelled 'feminine' for the purpose of this study. Here are some of the comments made:

> NH m sociology "The only reason I came to college was to play rugby and avoid getting a job."(laughter)
> LE m sociology "I just can't be bothered to work – there's plenty of time for that when we're older. I'd rather enjoy myself while I'm young."
> JM m sociology "I know what you mean, it's like, there's loads of new opportunities around and you've got to be gay to just stay in and work. Life is for living, that's what I say."(several of the boys nod their heads and mumble agreement)

It is evident then, that certain boys at the college still subscribe to the belief that 'real boys don't work' (Epstein, 1998) and that there is a link between masculinity and homophobia whereby studious boys are condemned as 'feminine' or 'gay'.

I do not believe that it is a coincidence that these opinions were aired by males taking one of the 'feminine subjects'. These boys were popular around the college and aware of their popularity. These are Martino's 'cool boys', who have strongly asserted their masculinity via another avenue, that of the 'sportsman' (Martino, 1999). Being good

at sport in the college, (a college that prides itself on its sporting prowess) particularly at football or rugby gave certain students elevated status within the college (with staff and students alike). Certainly within the confines of the college, hegemonic masculinity was strongly identified with physical aggression and sportsmanship. Thus these are the boys principally involved with the policing of masculinity around the college. As a result of their position at the peak of the 'pecking order' (Martino, 1999) these students were able to take the 'feminine' subject of sociology without negative consequence to themselves. I will refer back to the choice of sociology by these boys later in the chapter when I discuss subject perception and sexuality.

Several comments were made during both male and female focus groups about boys who take part in sport in the college, and in one female focus group – the history students, playing sport was clearly connected with a rejection of a work ethic:

> TH f history "Some of the rugby boys think that they can do anything they like and get away with it."
> SW f history "I know that, it's really annoying because the teachers don't seem to care – they chat to them about sport and ignore the fact that they don't do any work.
> TH f history "It's like, you go to every lesson, do your homework and get on with it and if you don't go by the rules you expect to get told off – these boys just do whatever they like, miss lessons, don't do homework and nothing's said."
>
> PD m maths "If you play sport it's respected, like."
>
> NR m geography "It's a good college for sport and if you're good at sport you're respected."
> PT m geography "Especially if you play rugby here."

Several of the interviews with the students also produced some interesting comments:

> CH m sociology "Some of the rugby lads can be a bit annoying – they think they're better than everyone and they look down on people who don't play sport."
>
> FH f history "One or two teachers let the rugby lads get away with murder. It's like, they say 'Why haven't you done your homework?' or 'Where were you yesterday?' and all the boys have to say is 'Rugby', and that's it, the teacher doesn't do anything – it's not fair."

An interview with a female teacher also supplied comment on the 'sporting lads':

> MD f neutral-identified subject "A few of the boys that I teach that tend to be a bit more arrogant and tend to try and push me are the ones that play sport. Unfortunately the college makes a lot of concessions for these boys - we do like to win - and the boys realise this and use it to their advantage. When you try to come down on them for whatever reason, there's always someone senior ready to make excuses for them. It puts you in a very difficult position."

It is evident then that masculinity in the college can be demonstrated either with intellectual or sporting prowess, however a third strand of hegemonic masculinity can be gleaned from the results of the focus groups and has again been noted in other studies, that is the ability to be perceived as being 'cool'. Obviously the three categories are not mutually exclusive (particularly those of sporting prowess and being cool), however, the 'cool' category does allow a number of other males who do not fit into the first two categories, access to being considered as acceptably 'masculine' within the college. In this instance my definition of 'cool' (or rather the students' definition of 'cool') is not necessarily that of Martino, "i.e. not making an effort to achieve" (Martino 1999 in Charles, 2002 p-105) although this may be part of the equation, but rather, certain males are labelled 'cool' as a result of 'success' (where success is defined as frequent 'pulling' of females as opposed to having meaningful relationships or friendships) with the opposite sex. Several of the male focus groups unearthed a genuine respect for male students considered to have this 'ability.'

> RM m geography "Carl's amazing! I don't know how he does it, but when we're out all the girls just flock to him."
> PT m geography "I know that, if you stick with him you can't go wrong!" (laughter)
>
> MD m physics "Have you seen Stumpy on the pull? He pulls about five girls a night and they're usually smart!"
> NL m physics "He should give Paul lessons!" (laughter)
>
> SD m biology "I'd like to be able to improve my pulling power; any tips Gar?"
> GD m biology "Just a gift boys, sorry." (laughter)

As one might expect from a one-to-one situation, the interviews were, on the whole, less crude, however several comments were made on the subject of the importance of male sexual prowess.

> LT m maths "I really enjoy going out, drinking, clubbing – and if you don't pull it's like, you've failed."
>
> GR m geography "One of the best things about being in college is meeting new people, especially meeting new girls. When you go out with your mates then you try your best to chat them up. If the girls tell you where to go the boys really rib you – I'm pretty good though."

Forms of dominant masculinity at the college, that is, intellectual, sporting and sexual prowess and heterosexuality are all extremely important in shaping the world of students' lives at this sensitive time and the evidence suggests they are highly influential as far as post-16 subject choice is concerned. In such a climate students are going to want to choose subjects that sit comfortably with their chosen sexual identity, or at least to attempt to keep in with the acceptable form of sexual identity that has been foisted upon them.

It is also necessary then to examine the ways in which girls are expected to behave within this college environment; how heterosexuality and the desire for peers' approval push forward certain acceptable forms of femininity that provide a stark contrast with these dominant forms of masculinity. Acceptable identities for females in the college, as with acceptable masculine identities, appear to take a number of forms. Perhaps the most revered form of femininity was that of being sexually attractive. Females considered by many to be sexually attractive to the opposite sex appear to be most 'acceptable' and as with the males at the top of the 'pecking order', these were the students who appeared to be in control of the 'policing' of other students in the college. A number of the focus groups both male and female made references to this group:

LD f French "I think it's really important to look good and dress well. Some of the students here especially the *Goths*[2] could really do with a make-over. It's just so unattractive."
ST f French "Some girls just aren't interested though, it's like, do yourself a favour, get on a sun-bed, pluck your eyebrows and take those things out of your face, it's just not normal."

PD f geography "Some girls here are really bitchy. If you don't wear the right sort of clothes or hang around with the right people they look down on you like you're scum or something."
SR f geography "I know that. Some of them get so dressed up to come to college - they're always in the toilets putting make-up on. It's like they think it's a fashion show and they look you up and down if you don't do the same."

MD m history "Some girls here are really smart but they've all got boyfriends. They know they're good looking and you can't really talk to them."
RC m history "Of course you can talk to them, they don't bite, you arse!" (laughter)
MD m history "They might talk to you 'cause you're in with that lot. They don't bother with anyone else."

These girls were often associated with the boys at the top of the pecking order ('sporty' or 'cool') or alternatively had older boyfriends from outside of the college. For these girls, 'maturity' often meant distancing yourselves from the boys in college, who they often dismissed as being 'immature', 'childish' and 'not worth bothering with'. Two girls in the sociology focus group clearly made this point.

NW f sociology "My boyfriend goes to the university. I can't be bothered with the boys here, they really need to grow up a bit."
HS f sociology "Some of them are alright, it's just, I think girls mature faster than boys."

Even one of the boys during his interview commented on the apparent maturity of girls compared to boys in the college:

ME m physics "The girls here don't really give us a second look, they seem a lot older and tend to mix with older blokes. Quite a few of the boys in college go out with girls who are still in school. It's like, they are at our level of maturity."

[2] Goths are a subculture distinguishable by their taste in new 'punk' music and an alternative style of dress, for example, the artist Marilyn Mansun.

This developed sense of 'feminine maturity' that seemed to be associated with these 'attractive girls', also appeared to have an effect on attitude to work as far as these girls are concerned; whereas in school it has often been noted that girls tend to see themselves as more mature, as more likely to embrace a work ethic and more likely to distance themselves from what they see as the childish behaviour of boys by applying themselves intellectually, in college it would appear that these girls believe they have 'outgrown' the need to work and that other things (men and relationships, mobile phones, looking attractive, social events, paid work) are now much more important. Evidence from several of the focus groups where these girls were present suggests such a shift:

> NW f sociology "Sometimes I really can't be bothered with college, it's a real hassle, teachers nagging you all the time. It's like, leave me alone, there's more to life..."
> HS f sociology "The thing is, you've got so much going on in your life that college just seems to get in the way."
>
> LD f French "I've thought about leaving college to get a job, but I really want to go to uni, it seems like such a laugh. I suppose I'll just have to put up with it for one more year."
>
> NT f History "It's not that I don't enjoy college, it's just there's always somewhere else I'd rather be. I miss quite a lot of lessons really, I don't plan to, it just happens."

Like the 'cool boys' who had opted for 'sociology' as an easy option, many girls also viewed certain subjects as easy in comparison to others, opting for them as a result. Again, this will be discussed later in the chapter.

Most of the female focus groups however did not subscribe to such a shift in attitude and indicated that getting on with one's work at college was a perfectly acceptable pursuit for girls. It might also be worth noting here that many students and teachers listed girls as being the best students in their classes, perhaps indicating that female students continue to present themselves as studious, willing to work hard and

wishing to achieve academically. One example of how working hard was regarded as a 'norm' for females can be noted from the girls' biology focus group:

> ST f biology "Girls definitely seem to take work more seriously, they don't mess around and just get on with it."
> KE f biology "If teachers give out homework, it's always the boys who won't do it, or make a fuss; girls seem to concentrate better."

It would appear however that what tends to happen as a result of the acceptance of the idea that for females working hard and 'getting down to it' is a normal and accepted state of affairs feeds into the long since noted, commonly held belief that girls are not more intelligent than boys, they just work harder. As one boy from the sociology focus group said:

> LE m sociology "I definitely don't think that the girls are more intelligent it's just that they pay attention for longer and pay attention to everything. With us, we only listen to whatever we like."

Interestingly, such a belief came across as particularly strong in interviews with several of the male teachers:

> SV m neutral-identified subject "Girls are achieving better because they always tend to be more motivated. They are much more willing to put in the hard slog whereas boys don't pick up a book from one lesson to the next."
>
> IE m masculine-identified subject "The girls in the class are much more organised than the boys. They've got their nice little pencil cases and note-pads, they hang on every word you say – you're lucky if the boys turn up with so much as a pen. It's no wonder girls are doing better nowadays."
>
> JQ m neutral-identified subject "It's not a question of intelligence, it all boils down to who does the work, and in my experience that's usually the girls in the class."

Girls then could be accepted as feminine and regarded as academic achievers, but only in the sense that they really put the effort in; nowhere in my research did I come across the opinion that girls were more intelligent than boys, whereas the reverse was mentioned as being the case on more than one occasion. Quietness and serenity, which one might link to the female work ethic, were also regarded as feminine traits and loud,

boisterous or noisy girls (an uncommon phenomenon at the college) came in for some quite derisory comments from students and teachers, males and females alike. A female teacher seems to sum up this apparently shared sentiment perfectly:

> LR f feminine-identified subject "There's really nothing worse than students showing off and being loud and I find that the loud girls are worst of all, it just doesn't suit them somehow, you're not prepared for it. There's one girl in my A-level class who just can't be quiet - she irritates everyone and I really find her difficult."

Instances then when girls were seen to be doing exceptionally well were usually attributed to quiet perseverance and so were rarely commented on. The only girls' names bandied about the staff-room and often referred to in the focus groups and interviews as 'clever' were those girls noted by Riddell (1992), the 'Susan Burton's' who made a point of dressing stylishly in order that they might then confound the expectations of the teachers and particularly those of the male teachers (Riddell, 1992, p-158). These girls appeared to have the confidence of knowing that they were attractive and therefore that they were 'acceptably feminine' and so were able to use this to their advantage, that is, having automatically been elevated to a certain status as a result of their attractiveness, these girls could then challenge other existing ideas about gender boundaries i.e. concerning intelligence. The marriage of these different attributes in female students (that is, attractiveness and intelligence) which must still present some surprise to certain individuals, meant that these were the girls who did not go unnoticed. This extract from an interview with a male teacher provides a neat illustration:

> SV m neutral-identified subject "There's one girl SA, who is clearly very intelligent, the only problem is she's always wearing short skirts and low-cut tops which means I find it quite difficult to work with her. She was someone that I wasn't expecting to be bright which just goes to show how wrong you can be."

It was interesting to see that certain other students in the sample believed that these girls 'used' their sexuality with male teachers and thus dismissed their academic

success as favouritism. A boy from the history focus group comments on the same female student:

> RC m history "Some of the male teachers are all over the girls and the girls really flirt back. I bet I'd get all A's if I dressed like SA!" (laughter)

It is interesting to note that such a combination of opposed gender roles (that of the sexual woman and the clever, studious woman) are still perceived as being 'difficult' to deal with and continues to stand out as being 'odd' and in some cases even 'unnatural'. It is also of interest that high achievement on the part of this female student can be explained via the attention she receives as a result of her sexuality and thus undermines her as an intelligent woman. This can be linked back to the idea that women are not intelligent they just work hard; it would seem that there is always an alternative explanation of a woman who appears to be intelligent!

Although there were many different groups of males and female students in the college, many of whom dress differently, have different interests, and consider themselves to be 'different', there were still clear demarcations as to what was acceptable and what was unacceptable as far as gender was concerned within the college. Even the majority of the '*Goths*', despite their alternative choice of appearance and their obvious statement of non-conformity, tended to fall within boundaries of what was considered acceptable gender-wise, for example, very few of the male students wore make-up (something that might be expected with an adherence to 'Goth' culture). These students were however, often set apart as targets for ridicule or 'policing' by other more conformist sections of the college community.

Sexuality and the perception of subjects

Having examined the dominant forms of masculinity and femininity within the college and in order to see how these ideas might affect students' subject choice at

post-16 it is necessary to discuss how these students actually perceive different subjects and how these perceptions are bound up with sexuality. It has already been noted that subject choice will need to sit comfortably with an individuals' sexuality, at least as far as the imposed heterosexuality of the college is concerned. Thus, if we take this a step further and we look at students' perceptions of different subjects we might conclude that subject choice serves to support or even confirm the sexuality of an individual. Some subjects are considered to be masculine, others feminine, others more neutral and so adolescent students, in order that they assist the assertion of their mark as a sexual being both within the college and at large, must choose a combination of subjects that reflects the 'correct' sexual signals and thus, might go some of the way to explaining the huge disparities in post-16 subject choice as far as gender is concerned. This process can be seen in schools; Riddell (1992) notes how pupils translate dominant forms of femininity and masculinity into 'school-based' forms, for example, school subjects. (Riddell, 1992, p-102) Here are some initial examples taken from the focus groups that reflect just how strongly sexuality and gender continues to be associated with particular subjects:

> JM m Sociology "Boys who do child development, they get bullied like."
> Me "Why?"
> JM m Sociology "Because you've got to study a child, an infant like, and boys just don't do that do they? If they do it's a bit worrying"
> LE m Sociology "Boys do traditional subjects so that they don't get bullied - you don't see a lot of girls doing *D. T.*[3] and you don't see boys doing textiles. Child development, childcare whatever, textiles, they're girls' subjects."
> CR m Sociology "Here's an example - you never see a guy being a nursery school teacher, you never see any - even in primary school. Blokes who do girls' subjects, well, it's just plain dodgy."
> LE m Sociology "It is right, that if you get a bloke doing a girls' subject, they're usually gay." (several nod in agreement)
>
> EM f Health and Social Care "Health and Social Care is about caring for different types of people, looking after people, children, childcare, old people, it's definitely more for girls."

[3] D+T is Design and Technology, formerly known as 'metalwork'.

CH f Health and Social Care "It's like, there's nearly all girls doing the subject and only one boy and he's weird."
NM f Health and Social Care "He's not weird, he's just quiet, not laddish."
CH f Health and Social Care "No, he's weird. He hasn't got any friends. He's creepy."

SB m Computer Studies "Hardly any girls do computers, probably because it doesn't suit them. It's more for blokes. It's the same with the sciences, more logic, less feelings. Girls do the subjects where they can put more feelings into it, like, I dunno, drama or something, something with loads of writing, English maybe."
BD m Computer Studies "It's hard to explain, but it's just the way things are. Computers is a boys' subject, and that's why there's no girls in our class."
LM m Computer Studies "Yeah there is, she sits over behind Craig."
PR m Computer Studies "If you can call her a girl!" (laughter)

NT f History "You definitely think of some subjects as being for boys and some for girls, don't you."
SW f History "Yeah, like maths and science and stuff – it's not that girls can't do them or anything, they just wouldn't want to do them."
SN f History "I couldn't wait to drop science - it's just so boring. I think men prefer things like that. This is wrong and this is right – they don't have to think for themselves then." (laughter)
NT f History "And also, it would look pretty stupid wouldn't it, boys doing all needlework and cookery and childcare and stuff."

The focus group with the boys from Computer Studies and to some extent the focus group with the girls from Health and Social care demonstrates not only how strongly certain subjects are perceived as being gendered, but also how students who then opt for subjects that are declared to be 'gender-unsuitable' find themselves to be the targets of derisory comments. Interviews with many of the students produced similar results:

ME m Physics "It's like, when you come to choose your subjects you find out that somehow you've been steered in a certain direction and the direction totally depends on what sex you are. Hardly anyone goes against their sex and if they do they get beaten up or bullied or something. If a bloke does a subject that most people think is a girls' subject then he's going to be called gay an' that."

LT f French "I think you can quite easily divide subjects up by sex; things like chemistry and physics, DT, engineering, they are all quite masculine aren't they, and things like French, English, Sociology are more for girls. It suits your personality better, do you know what I mean? Like for most girls, you want to express yourself, express your feelings and you can't do that in science subjects.

Boys then are the opposite, they can't express their feelings and so they do sciences."

So, in the twenty-first century, the familiar and very clear pattern emerges that categorises certain subjects as being either masculine or feminine. What we may also note from the above examples is the way in which these students use their definitions of subjects to 'police' the choices of others, making assumptions as to why students have made certain choices. If we look further into the way subject choices are 'policed' it is evident that subject choice, especially choice of non-traditional subjects are also linked with sexuality, in this instance with negative connotations, thus feeding into the hegemonic heterosexuality of the college and, I would argue, making it very difficult for certain students to select 'alternative', non-traditional subject choices to pursue post-16. Many of the males in the sample in particular tended to define traditionally non-masculine subjects as 'gay'[4], 'easy' and 'not proper', the reverse being true for traditional masculine subjects. In the main, the female students did not tend to use all of these definitions of non-masculine subjects other than regarding certain subjects as 'easy'. Traditional masculine subjects were viewed by the girls in much the same way as the males, and, again in a similar vein to the boys, several of the females in the sample made comments about the sexuality of students who made non-traditional choices. The focus groups were littered with comments of this nature:

PE m maths "Maths is a really good subject to do, you know, like the sciences - they're harder than other subjects but it is worth it in the end, it's a really good qualification to have."
SL m maths "Yeah, 'cause there's loads of like, 'Mickey-mouse' subjects about nowadays, you could take the easy option and do them."

HS f sociology "It's like, when I tell people , people say what A-levels are you doing and I say I'm doing Drama and Sociology and they laugh and say, 'Oh, you chose the easiest ones then', you know, 'couldn't get much easier than that', whereas you'd ask another person and they say they're doing maths and physics and people say 'Oh my God, what are you doing them for, they're so hard."

[4] 'Gay' is now used as a derogatory adjective and can be applied to anything.

SR f sociology "Most people think of sociology as a drop-out subject."
HS f sociology "Yeah, and drama as well."
RW f sociology "It's not an easy subject though."
SR f sociology "My Business Studies teacher, *Mr Evans,* even said to me sociology and media are the easiest subjects going."

RE f French "I just wouldn't want to do things like science or engineering, it just wouldn't be right. Girls who do those kind of boys' subjects are different, not not-feminine, it's hard to explain."
CE f French "No, I do know what you mean, they're not as 'girly' as us – we are 'girly-girls."
RE f French "Yeah, I suppose, and they're probably much brainier too." (laughter)

It really was almost shocking how widespread these stereotypes about subjects seemed to be. Even in several of the interviews with students who had actually opted to do non-traditional subjects, subjects were still labelled in similar ways:

AN male Health and Social Care "I'm the only boy in the class – the rest of the class is girls 'cause girls are more likely to want to be nurses, or work with children and stuff – it's more expected. Boys do other stuff, you know, other subjects an' that, like maths or whatever. I'm rubbish at them type of subjects 'cause I'm dyslexic; with this subject I can do all of my work on the computer an' that. I think boys are definitely better at things like computers and science an' that."

PG male French "Not many boys do French, it's not considered a very 'male' thing to do. I suppose if I was a 'real man' I'd do physics and chemistry but, to be honest, science, maths just don't interest me; I do just seem to enjoy the more feminine subjects."

RB female Physics "Most people associate science and maths and stuff with boys, innit, but I couldn't see myself doing all those girly subjects - they're just not me. I think it's because I've been brought up surrounded by boys; I've got three older brothers see."

KR female Computer Studies "I.T. is definitely thought of as a male subject, in fact anything technological is. I'm the only girl in the class and I would consider myself to be a bit of a tomboy. My other subjects are more girls' subjects though, sociology and English."

In almost every instance, students in the college appeared to label subjects as masculine, feminine or neutral and these perceptions were then extended to which students might be considered suitable to take these subjects on the basis of both their gender identity and sexuality (which of course should be heterosexual). Traditional male

subjects such as science, chemistry, maths, physics, computer science, technology and engineering were considered as "hard", "difficult" or "proper subjects". These labels sit very well with the dominant masculinities of the school, particularly as far as those males who are 'newly-matured, serious academics' are concerned and of course with more competitive, aggressive males (who might be found in the sporty/cool categories). As a male then, taking these traditional 'male' subjects post-16 reinforces your heterosexuality and masculinity and removes some of the pressure of presenting yourself as a sexual being, part of the job is done for you; your subjects tell people that you are a 'heterosexual man'. A similar situation can be noted for female students taking traditional female subjects such as childcare, sociology and languages; the evident belief that these subjects were "more for girls" meant that girls who opted for those particular subjects did not have their sexuality brought into question. For the group of girls at the college who considered themselves to be 'very mature' and 'can't be bothered with college', subjects often labelled as "easy", "not proper" and even "Mickey mouse" might be regarded as extremely suitable, slotting in with their image perfectly.

For students taking neutral subjects then, their choices would not present any problems as far as questioning their sexual status is concerned, but might not perhaps make as much of a statement about one's sexuality as opting for a traditional subject. It is perhaps interesting then that such subjects tend to be evenly populated by the genders in quite substantial numbers at the college. For many males who are perhaps a little daunted by the "difficult" label attached to so many of the traditional male subjects, neutral subjects such as history and geography provide the ideal choice and masculinity remains unchallenged. Similarly for girls who wish to take 'proper subjects' but without losing any of their femininity, gender-neutral subjects are just the ticket.

So what of those small minorities of students who do opt for the non-traditional subjects? Many of these students face prejudice from their fellow students as part of the policing process that takes place at the college and it is often in the form of questioning normality, gender identity and sexuality. Extracts from the focus groups noted earlier demonstrate how students that opt for subjects that are considered 'gender-unsuitable' have both their gender identity and sexuality called into question by other members of the student community. Boys are referred to as 'gay' or 'weird', and girls are described as lacking femininity. We even see that the students taking the 'non-traditional', 'gender-unsuitable' subjects, in their interviews, tended to make excuses for their behaviour using lines such as:

> KR female Computer Studies "I'm the only girl in the class and I would consider myself to be a bit of a tomboy."
>
> AN male Health and Social Care "Boys do other stuff, you know, other subjects an' that, like maths or whatever. I'm rubbish at them type of subjects 'cause I'm dyslexic."
>
> RB female Physics "I think it's because I've been brought up surrounded by boys; I've got three older brothers see."

Throughout the focus groups and interviews with students it was commented on about how "quiet" the students were who had opted for non-traditional subjects. It would seem that a strategy employed by many of these students is to get your head down and get out; drawing attention to yourself is unnecessary. In her interview, KR makes reference to how the computer studies lessons tend to go:

> KR f computer studies "I don't really talk to anyone in class, I find it easier to just go in, do the lesson and leave. Sometimes I don't even think that the teacher realises I'm there."

Teachers interviews would seem to support that comment:

> CC m masculine-identified subject: "I only teach one girl and she's like a little mouse. It's almost like she's not there."

EO f feminine-identified subject: "There's one lad in the class and he wouldn't say boo to a goose; I think he's scared of all those girls!"

However there would appear to be one major exception to the patterns that have been noted, that being, the 'cool' or 'sporty' boy who opted to do the non-traditional subject, namely, sociology. It would seem that these boys, who are often responsible for 'policing' the college from anything or anyone who does not fall neatly into the 'nice, normal, heterosexual scheme of things' are themselves able to take 'feminine' subjects and retain their macho image. As discussed earlier, these boys rejected any work ethic and were much more interested in enjoying the social aspects that the college had to offer; perhaps choosing the "easy" option of sociology would allow these boys to do just that. These findings might also suggest that there is an ambivalence as far as the perception of sociology is concerned. I chose sociology as a 'feminine subject' based on the imbalanced ratio of female to male students opting for the subject, however, the fact that these 'cool lads' find themselves in a position where they are able to opt for the subject and yet continue to 'police' other students in the college, might suggest that sociology is not regarded as 'feminine' after all. It may be that sociology is regarded as being of lower status, rather than as being more suited to girls (low-status and feminine being two variables that are often linked). These 'laddish', overtly heterosexual males were able to slot into the non-traditional subject of sociology by playing the 'sociology is easy' card, thus implying their masculinity via a demonstration of the rejection of a work ethic and a desire to 'play'. During the focus group, when asked "What made you choose sociology?" I got the following reply:

JC m sociology "I'll be honest, there was nothing else left, nothing else I could do with geography."
LE m sociology "I took it because I thought it was a bit of a bum course, like, an easy ride. It isn't but that's what I thought."
MR m sociology "I heard it was an easy course as well."

These males then, confident of their position in the college hierarchy and of their perceived masculinity, were able to opt for sociology and even use that to reinforce their nonchalant brand of masculinity and continue to 'police' the actions of other members of the college without raising so much as a hair.

For girls it would seem that being considered 'feminine' was almost contradicted by taking a traditionally 'male' subject, however again there are what appear to be 'loopholes.' As mentioned earlier, 'attractiveness' to the opposite sex figured extremely highly in definitions of femininity and thus provided several girls in the college with the means of taking non-traditional subjects whilst retaining their status as sexual beings. There were, however, very few female students in this category and it might even be the case that although certain 'masculine' subjects could be taken by this group, others perhaps were seen as 'a step too far', (which possibly was also the case for the 'cool' or 'sporty' males in sociology who had dismissed 'childcare' or any male that took that subject as "gay"). One female student, SA, mentioned previously, discusses her subject choices within the history focus group:

> SA f history "I actually really enjoy maths, I always have, in fact, in school I liked science too but I thought maths would be enough for me at A-level. I don't know, maths and science just would have been too much somehow, I wanted to balance them out."

Sexuality and in particular, the dominance of heterosexuality is perhaps a very potent driving force behind the actions of many of these students guiding their perceptions and steering them in the direction of gender-suitable subjects.

Sexuality and Teen Magazines

Another area highlighted by the research as having links to sexuality and compulsory heterosexuality was students' (both male and female) reading of magazines. The magazines I am referring to are the general interest men's and women's magazines

targeted at the aged 16-30 readership, for example *FHM* and *Loaded* for men, *Company*, *Bliss* and *Mizz* for women. It was interesting to observe that almost every student when asked, both male and female, reported reading magazines (many of them brought them into lessons); males said that they read men's magazines and read women's magazines for a laugh whereas the females only really reported reading women's magazines. In such magazines, issues of sexuality are of utmost importance, with all denoting the need to be viewed in a particular way, that is, as either masculine or feminine and unequivocally heterosexual. Thus the reading of such magazines could be seen as confirming one's sexual identity, hence the parading round college with them on show, and showing them off to the opposite sex. In the female focus groups many of the students referred to their enjoyment of magazines; here are some of the responses girls gave when asked about what influenced their lives:

> NW f sociology "Magazines, *Cosmopolitan*, I will not go anywhere without it!" (giggling)
> HS f sociology "She's not lying, I've never seen her without a magazine of some sort."
> NW f sociology "There really is so much in them, fashion, make-up, problems, stories - serious most of them. There's a lot more in them than you might expect."
> HS f sociology "It's really interesting to bring them in and show them to the boys, find out what type of girls they fancy, that kind of thing."
>
> EM f Health and Social Care "I buy a lot of magazines, to find out what's in fashion an' that. There's nothing like collapsing on the settee with a hot chocolate and a magazine."
>
> RE f French "I love magazines, just to flick through; if ever I'm feeling down I go and buy a copy of *Bliss* or *Company* or something."
> ST f French "The quizzes are good, you know, like 'Is he the right bloke for you?'- *Miss R* does them with us in class sometimes."

It transpired that the French teacher used the magazines in her lessons in order to get the students interested - translating articles, quizzes and so on.

Although magazines then are regarded by many as a 'bit of fun', or 'light relief', these girls actually cite them as **big** influences on their lives. There were no mentions of

the magazines in the male focus groups - the only question where the topic of magazines might have been raised was when asked about influences and evidently men's magazines did not spring to mind here. However, the interviews asked specifically about reading of magazines and what students thought of them - in this instance every student who was interviewed professed to reading them and enjoying them and in some cases used this information to reinforce their sexual identities. Here are some extracts taken from interviews with both male and female students:

> CH m sociology "I read *FHM*[5] for entertainment; I don't take it too seriously but there's usually some good stuff in them - half-naked women for example." (laughs)
>
> GR m geography "*Loaded, FHM*, they're all worth a read. Plenty of gorgeous women in bikinis."
>
> RM m computer studies "Loads of the boys bring men's magazines into school - not dirty ones now, proper men's magazines. There are women in them like, but they have got some clothes on. They have jokes in them and health stuff as well, not just women."
>
> TS f maths "I do read quite a few magazines - they're really good for fashion, you know, what's in, what's out. I like *Hello* and *OK* as well, finding out all the celebrity gossip - that's a really girly thing to do isn't it."

It would seem that these highly sexually charged magazines are held in high esteem by many of the students at the college and that they may be used as part of the individual's establishment of sexual identity.

Sexuality, femininity and Feminism

It might be of interest to note at this point a number of my observations as a sociology teacher in relation to how the students and in particular the female students view 'feminism'. These observations are noted from memory and are therefore open to criticism, however, it is something that has interested and surprised me since I started

[5] FHM is For Him Magazine, a magazine targeted at young males aged 16-30.

at the college, and having discussed it with my colleagues, have discovered it is not an isolated phenomenon. The reason I feel it is worthy of mention here is that I believe it all ties in to the strength of dominant heterosexuality at the college and the importance of adolescents asserting themselves as either 'masculine' or 'feminine'. One male student announced in class when discussing different feminist theories of the family:

> JH "My mother has told me never to marry a feminist. They won't do any washing, cleaning or cooking."

This simple statement may seem silly but it expresses JH's belief (or his mother's) that he is a 'masculine' male who will not and more importantly should not do any housework. A feminist would clearly act in an emasculating capacity as far as JH and his mother are concerned. Epstein, Elwood, Hey and Maw (1998) discuss how feminism has been scapegoated by many for the 'failing boys' in our schools. That all feminists are 'men-hating lesbians' is actually a commonly held belief of many of the students that I have taught in the college. The backlash against feminism that Faludi alerted us to, has certainly swept through the grounds of the college and its environs. Girls are very reluctant to admit to being feminists to the point that most of them openly condemn feminism, making statements such as 'I do believe in equality but I'm definitely not a feminist'; to 'admit' to being a feminist or sympathising with feminist beliefs (equality for women!) would call into question their sexuality. Once I explained the reason why I chose to call myself Ms, rather than Miss and received the response:

> "So are you a lesbian, miss?"

Such a shockingly personal question highlights the way in which the students label feminism and feminists. They interpreted my answer as feminist and therefore lesbian.

Male students doing sociology often bemoaned the fact that all we talked about was 'women' and that it should be called 'women's studies' not sociology. When studying feminism, boys consistently made reference to 'dykes', 'lesbians' and how feminists were

in need of a 'real man' to 'sort them out' and 'stop their whingeing'. I believe that such reactions on the part of both male and female students highlight once again the huge importance of sexual identity to these students and how taking this anti-feminist stance feeds into both dominant forms of masculinity and femininity within the college. It is easy to see how students just seem to 'slip into' gendered subject choices in such a climate.

This chapter has examined the importance of gender identity and sexuality in relation to post-16 subject choice. It was found that college is regarded by many students as part of a transition into 'maturity' which corresponds with a desire to be regarded as a mature, 'heterosexual' being. Dominant forms of masculinity and femininity are constructed within this heterosexual framework and used by some students (and staff) as a means of 'policing' others in the college. Perceptions of subjects as 'gendered' appear to reflect these dominant ideas about gender identity and sexuality and are then often reproduced in post-16 subject choices.

Chapter five is concerned with a number of processes, particularly those that occur within the college classroom, which may also affect gender and gendered subject choice within the college. In other words, the college's hidden curriculum will be examined, looking at factors such as classroom behaviour, teacher attitudes and sexual harassment.

Chapter Five

Within College Walls

This chapter will look at the reported differences between the genders in the classroom. First, whether males and females display different behaviours in the classroom, for example, do males tend to be more disruptive in the classroom. Tied into this are the different attitudes of males and females towards behaviour in the classroom. The chapter will also examine the differential treatment of students of different genders by teachers of both sexes. The different perceptions of male and female teachers will be examined and also how traditional sex stereotypes continue to be fuelled by staff and students alike. The chapter will also discuss perceptions of how the National Curriculum has affected post-16 education and subject choice, how careers advice (or lack of it) impacts upon students' decisions and look at the issue of sexual harassment within the college. This chapter then, is trying to investigate ways in which life within the college reproduces gender divisions that will in turn heavily influence student subject choice, post-16, that is to uncover the college's hidden-curriculum.

'Gendered' behaviour of students

First then I will look at 'life in the classroom' as perceived by both students and teachers, starting with classroom behaviour. The differential behaviour of male and female students at all levels of the education system has been reported by various sociologists over a period of many years, for example, Stanworth (1981) where boys are said to be more boisterous, disruptive and demanding than girls. It is a behaviour that has been used to explain underachievement of female pupils due to the lack of attention they receive as a consequence (Stanworth 1981, Spender 1985) and also, more recently, to explain male underachievement as part of the 'boys will be boys' discourse. The

literature review documents historical evidence about gender and achievement, both male and female.

The evidence gathered from the college suggests that differential behaviour continues, males and females behave differently in the sixth form classroom, with certain male students (whatever the male/female ratio in the classroom) continually creating situations whereby they demand and usurp teachers' attention and often disrupt the education of others. If we look initially at the results from the focus groups of the question that asked about whether or not boys and girls behave differently in class it is possible to paint a very clear picture of this type of classroom behaviour.

> HS f sociology "Well in our class, *Gareth's* the sort of main naughty one, always asking stupid questions and that, then there's *Carlos, James and Bubble* too who tend to play up. The girls are just there really."
> NW f sociology "In our class *Lee's* the class clown, making funny comments, telling jokes..."
> NE f sociology "...Yeah, and they're never funny, it's just like he craves attention, he's got to say something."
>
> MS m biology "I suppose the girls behave better most of the time - they just sit and chat quietly. Yeah, boys are definitely worse."
> OL m biology "Especially *Sean*!" (laughter)
> SD m biology "All lies!" (more laughter)
> GD m biology "You should see him Miss, you're lucky you don't teach him. He's always playing up."
> SD m biology "Just trying to liven things up, that's all!"
>
> RC m history "There is a definite difference in behaviour between boys and girls, it's the same all through school. It's almost like boys have got a natural tendency to muck about, have a laugh, wind up the teachers."
>
> SP f geography "For some reason in every one of my classes there's a group of lads who are really childish and attention-seeking. Not the same lads, different ones in different classes.
> TE f geography "It's funny really, girls mainly just want to go into lessons, get on with it and go home. It's nearly always boys who have to play about and show off. Sometimes it really gets on your nerves."
> PD f geography "I know that. Sometimes you just want to get on with stuff and you can't because there's a group of idiots mucking about and wasting time. The teachers have to spend all their time trying to shut them up."

The interviews with individual students came up with very similar responses, that is, reporting a tendency for boys to misbehave in class.

> LT m maths "Girls tend to be better behaved than boys I would say. If there's trouble it's usually a boy causing it, messing round or whatever."
>
> CH m sociology "We do act differently [to girls], we have different priorities, it's a male thing to make yourself look big or whatever."
>
> KR f computer studies "There's definitely a difference in the way boys and girls behave in class. Boys are constantly trying to show off to their mates which means they always get into trouble. It's almost as if they can't just go into a classroom and sit down quietly, they have to do something or say something stupid."

Unsurprisingly then, as far as the teachers interviewed were concerned, it was agreed upon unanimously that the boys in the class were much more likely to be disruptive than the girls.

> MD f neutral-identified subject "It definitely seems that it is a male prerogative to misbehave and draw attention to themselves. Obviously this doesn't apply to all boys, but there are always a few who are more interested in messing about than they are in learning. I'm also not saying that all the girls I teach are perfect, in fact some of them are very lazy indeed, but they just don't seem to be as disruptive as the boys – they'll just quietly text their friends under the desk whereas boys would rather disturb the whole class."
>
> SI f neutral-identified subject "The boys in the class are much more likely to misbehave than the girls in the class. Sometimes you wonder if they are genetically programmed. Every group has a class clown and it's always a male. It can be really frustrating sometimes; you feel you have to spend a large proportion of your time trying to discipline these boys so you neglect the students who are there to learn."
>
> IE m masculine-identified subject "You tend to have a certain number of males who like to be the jokers in the class, like to show off in front of the others. Most of the girls I think prefer to come and go unnoticed, although not all. For the most part though it's the boys who like to stir things up."
>
> SV m neutral-identified subject "Boys can definitely be more disruptive than girls. I don't mind having a laugh, don't get me wrong, but there's always a lad who takes it too far. I've got to be honest mind, I think in a way I prefer that kind of behaviour because it's easier to deal with, just shut them up. Some of the girls will just sit there in a world of their own and say nothing so you have no idea that they're not really listening or taking anything in and as I don't realise this they just drift in and out of class without learning anything. At least if my attention is drawn to a student misbehaving I know to keep a continual eye on them."

It is interesting to note the differences in the responses of male and female teachers here, as it would appear that the male teachers prefer the behaviour of the boys to that of the girls, whereas the female teachers report 'frustration' with the boys. This is the first of a number of differences that can be noted between male and female teachers.

This differential behaviour that manifests itself in what would appear to be most classrooms might be linked to the different attitudes towards college-life and learning held by male and female students governed heavily by sexuality that were investigated in the previous chapter. This might be seen as particularly pertinent as far as the girls are concerned; for the 'very feminine girls', assertion of their sexuality was tied up with a rejection of all things childish and with 'being mature'. Messing about in an 'obvious' way in class would clearly contradict this 'maturity'. For some of the girls for whom college had become a 'bit of a bore', 'texting' one's boyfriend or reading a magazine under the desk and paying little attention to what was going on (but without drawing attention to themselves) was a way of demonstrating their 'grown-up' priorities to other students in the class. For the girls in the non-traditional subjects, what appeared to be important to them was 'keeping one's head down', remaining unnoticed. If these girls were able to remain unnoticed in the 'masculine subjects' they had opted for, then their sexuality would not be questioned. Thus, as it was for the 'very feminine girls', staying out of trouble in class would be fundamental to this female group.

As for the boys, we must remember that we are discussing only a minority of male students that might be considered troublemakers in each class and so again this might be explained by the attitudes to college, driven by masculinity, that were discussed previously. It was noted that it was acceptable for males to embrace academia in the context of a post-16 college, and these are perhaps the majority of the college's

male students who for the most part, behave themselves in class and do not cause any trouble. Another group of boys however, the 'cool boys', were in college to have a laugh and to avoid work and it is perhaps these boys who are the source of the attention-seeking, often disruptive behaviour.

Perhaps it is a little more interesting to look at attitudes of both students and teachers in relation to the anomaly of the girl who is disruptive in class. Several of the focus groups and interviews mention such girls and in the majority of cases she is spoken of in extremely derogatory terms. This concurs with Riddell's findings at Millbridge, where girls who 'transgress the boundaries of the accepted code of femininity' are regarded with contempt by certain teachers (Riddell 1992). The focus groups with the students provided the following scathing comments taken from discussions concerned with disruptive female students:

> LD f French "There is one girl in class, I really can't stand her. I don't know who she thinks she is but she just won't shut-up – and it's not like she's got anything interesting to say either."
> RE f French "Yeah, you're right. It's worse then when boys muck about in a way. She's really sad."

> FG m history "One of my pet hates is girls who are really loud and don't shut up. I'd love to put them in Room 101!" (laughter)
> RC m history "Anyone in particular?" (more laughter)
> FG m history "Oh, yes!" (even more laughter)

> PT m geography "You do sometimes get girls who muck about and cause trouble. Sometimes they're worse because they seem bitchier, nastier, do you know what I mean?"
> NR m geography "Yeah, I do. It's not so much like they're having a laugh, they really want to cause trouble."

A similar vehemence against this type of 'unfeminine' behaviour can be noted in a number of the student interviews:

> TB f biology "Sometimes though, the worst kind of behaviour comes from a girl. It's quite a shock when it happens, no one really expects it. I think that's what makes it worse. When it's boys causing trouble all the time you sort of grow to accept it. There's a few girls here I wouldn't want to mess with!"

> LT m maths "There is this one girl who is a real pain in the you-know-what. She's so irritating. She's one of these girls who tries to be different, you know wears stupid clothes, got loads of earrings and pins in her face and she's loud and she's annoying and she questions everything the teacher says. I sometimes think he's [the teacher's] going to hit her. I think I would."

Perhaps most frighteningly, this resentment toward such students seemed to be a sentiment that was shared by several of the teachers that were interviewed:

> LR f feminine-identified subject "There's something distinctly unpleasant about a girl who shows off continuously, it's 'ugly' somehow."

> IE m masculine-identified subject "Occasionally you'll get a girl who's a bit 'laddish' if you know what I mean; a bit rough if you like and likes the sound of her own voice. I do find that sort of behaviour rather difficult to deal with. It's different somehow to when boys are misbehaving, maybe it's because I'm male and find it easier to relate to the boys."

Such vehemence in these responses demonstrates the shock that is still evoked when a female 'breaks role' (Riddell 1992) and confounds expectations of traditional femininity. It is evident that student behaviour in the classroom is strongly guided by sexuality and appropriate gender roles, hence its seemingly highly gendered nature and that, equally, attitudes toward such behaviour are similarly guided. Thus, we see a form of 'policing' come into play when faced with a female student who does not behave in a way that is believed to be suited to her gender.

Perceptions of teacher behaviour

How then do teachers react in the classroom to the differing behaviours of males and females? Do teachers treat male and female students differently? It is now necessary to examine the influence of the teacher in a classroom situation, to see whether or not students believe they are treated differently by staff as a result of their gender and to examine if the staff themselves are aware of any such behaviour on their part. Certainly, most of the students reported differential treatment on the basis of gender from many of their teachers, both male and female alike, and this behaviour appeared to

take many forms, all of which could be perceived as reproducing and exaggerating gender differences in the sixth form classroom. For the most part, the teachers themselves were less likely to admit to such behaviour, although certain teachers were of the opinion that it was almost inevitable that as a gendered being you would have different relationships with males and females. Certainly as far as the majority of the teachers interviewed were concerned, there was an awareness of a gender dynamic within the classroom and, in interview, they discussed how this awareness affected classroom interaction.

The focus groups unearthed some very strong opinions on the subject of certain teachers treating males and females differently, with many of the students feeling that they were being treated unfairly, discriminated against as a result of their gender.

First let us look at the teacher(s) who according to the students, like(s) to be seen as 'one of the lads', thus heavily influencing their behaviour in a classroom situation. This behaviour is viewed both negatively and positively by students in the focus groups:

> PD m biology "I've got a few teachers who act like they're trying to be your mate. They like chat to you about the sport – football, rugby or whatever that happened on the weekend, one of my teachers even asks us [a group of lads] what we did on the weekend, you know, 'did we pull?' an' that. It's a bit embarrassing."
>
> CC m computer studies "Sometimes we have a laugh, 'cause it's like, all the lads together and *Mr C* treats us more like friends sometimes."
> LM m computer studies "That's true, that is. Some days we go in and we just chat, we don't do any work."
> BD m computer studies "Yeah, but because he's like that, we will do our work 'cause it's like we respect him, he's not like a normal teacher."
>
> PM m geography "I miles prefer *Mr Q's* lessons because you can have a laugh with him."
>
> RL f geography "*Mr Q* gets a bit annoying when he spends all his time chatting to the lads."
> TE f geography "I know that. You feel like shouting 'Hello! We're in a lesson!' sometimes."
> PD f geography "I think it's quite good I do, so we don't do as much work and we can just have a chat." (laughter)

RS f sociology "One of my male teachers is all over the lads, they get away with murder most of the time. They're always laughing and joking together, and they're usually things like, 'women got the vote, that was a bit of a stupid idea wasn't it', you know stupid stuff."
HS f sociology "It's not serious though, he only does it jokily."
RS f sociology "I realise that, but it's like, if they've missed lessons and he asks where they were, all they have to say is 'rugby' or 'doctors' and everything's fine."
MR f sociology "Yeah, and then they take up half the lesson talking about the rugby." (laughter)
RS f sociology "And then if a girl misses a lesson, it's not a joke, he has a go at you. It really bugs me."

Riddell (1992) discusses how male teachers use humour as an attempt to "establish an atmosphere of male camaraderie" and that this is often based on "sexual joking" and the "derogation of women" (Riddell, 1992, p-150). The last extract in particular highlights such behaviour; a male teacher making an extremely sexist comment in order to try and get the 'lads' in the class 'on side' as it were. The male-female divide that we see in response to such 'joking' is then perhaps to be expected, although there is evidence that even some of the male students are made to feel uncomfortable by such behaviour.

Several of the focus groups also highlighted the way that certain female teachers acted more like a friend to the female students, although interestingly, this was only the case in the traditionally 'feminine' subjects where female students made up the vast majority of the class (which also in a number of cases consisted of less than ten students in a class).

RL Health and Social Care "In class sometimes we have a really good laugh with Miss P, chatting about other teachers, especially the horrible ones."
PT Health and Social Care "Because we have most of our lessons up here with her and she's young an' that, we really get on well with her."
NM Health and Social Care "I tell her more than I tell my mother!" (laughter)
RL Health and Social Care "Yeah, but it is like that in Health, we all get to be quite close."

HK French "*Miss R* is really lovely because she doesn't treat us like kids. She's on our level."
LD French "Yeah, she chats to us about stuff, not just work. We have a really good gossip sometimes."

TD French "She can be like that 'cause most of us are girls and even *P*, well, let's be honest, *P* may as well be!" (laughter)
ST French "He's worse than us! He's always dishing the dirt on someone - he cracks me up!"

It is interesting to note the way in which gender stereotyping takes place in the last extract. There is apparently a male in the class who is a real 'gossip' and the girls use this fact to suggest he may as well be a girl; this reflects the findings of the last chapter concerning students' perceptions of subject choice and gender identity.

What is also of interest is to make a comparison of these findings to those of the interviews with the students, and most notably with those students who are boys or girls in a 'non-traditional' subject and are therefore in a minority in the classroom. Most of the interviews reported very similar behaviours again from both positive and negative viewpoints, however in three instances (the male Health and Social Care student, the female computer studies student and the female physics student) we are able to appreciate things from a different perspective, one of loneliness and exclusion. The male in the French class however was very positive about his experience of French lessons and of the French teacher:

PG m French "In French we have a really good goss' with *Miss R.* Sometimes we'll have a whole lesson without working 'cause there's something really juicy to talk about, not that we never do any work mind, I'm not saying that! It's just she treats us all like adults, not like some other teachers I could mention."

RM m Computer studies "When you have a male teacher it's easier because they understand you better. That's why I enjoy computers, because *Mr C* has a laugh with us – like one of the lads."

FH f History "My history teacher does get on my nerves sometimes. He really does think he's in with the lads. I don't think he realises how sad he looks sometimes. He tries too hard. Me and a few of my friends just laugh at him."

KR f Computer studies "Computers is the worst actually. Because I'm the only girl sometimes I feel like I'm not even there, like no-one notices me. *Mr C* talks to the boys about everything, sport, girls, and I just sit there in the background not saying a word."

RB f Physics "It's weird being the only girl in the class and not good weird. I don't like it much. Sometimes I just get the feeling *Mr R.* wished I wasn't there, as if it would be easier with just boys to teach. It's not that he's horrible to me or picks on me or anything, I don't know, it's just this feeling I get when I'm in his class."

AN m Health and Social Care "*Miss O* talks with the girls on their level like. She seems really nice....I listen to them – I don't get much choice really, but I don't get involved in their conversations. They have a go at men and stuff and I think they forget that I'm there."

There seems to be evidence of a 'gendered culture' of the classroom, particularly with male teachers and students, which is used to 'push out' those students of the 'wrong gender', making them feel lonely and excluded. It is perhaps worthy of note that the male student taking French feels included in his classroom culture and that it is the female students (not just in traditional 'male' subjects) who tend to be affected by such behaviour. There is further evidence of this 'exclusionary culture' later in the chapter, in a discussion of sexual harassment.

Sexuality in the classroom

The use of sexual behaviour by teachers of both sexes as part of an everyday classroom interaction has previously been documented by both Cunnison (1989) and Riddell (1992); this was another type of behaviour that a number of the students reported certain teachers using that involved differential treatment of students in the classroom depending on their gender, that is, what might only be described as 'flirting' with students of the opposite sex. As far as a number of students in the focus groups were concerned, this behaviour was reported to have taken a number of forms ranging from being more lenient with members of the opposite sex in a variety of instances to openly making flirtatious remarks to students of the opposite sex. The issue of sexual harassment of both students and teachers will be discussed later in the chapter, however such behaviour is also being recognised in this instance as a teacher strategy

based on gender. Thus, here are a number of comments made by students in the focus groups on the subject; both male and female teachers are discussed:

> SL f maths "I find *Mr E* a bit creepy, the way he looks at you and leans over you when you're working."
> FN f maths "I heard he asked Jo to go out for a drink with him."
> CD f maths "And he's always saying stuff like, 'Guess how old I am', wanting you to say twenty-odd, so we always say 'about forty' to shut him up."
>
> GM f biology "*Miss I* really flirts with the boys and is really horrible to the girls."
> KE f biology "It's like, she won't give a boy a row for anything, she'll just sort of giggle really annoyingly..." (laughter) "...but she really lashes out at the girls."
>
> JM m sociology "I've got two male teachers and they let the girls get away with everything. *Mr I* especially – he's always having a 'pop' at the boys and he uses boys as an example more. Even if boys and girls do the same thing then boys are more likely to get the row."
> MR m sociology "Yeah, boys come late, they have a row – girls come late, nothing."
> JM m sociology "Once I said, didn't I, 'How come I got a row and *Sam* didn't?' and he even said 'If you looked like *Sam* you wouldn't have', or something like that."
> RC m sociology "You should see *Mr V* with some of the girls; he's practically drooling. If *SA* murdered someone in class I don't think he'd say anything."
> MD m sociology "I know that, but if one of us even talks to the person next to us for a second, he goes ballistic."

Earlier in the chapter, certain of the female students discussed how the male students who played sport 'get away with murder' as certain male teachers attempt to befriend them and make allowances for them as a result of their sporting prowess. Now we see that certain of the males in the sample view things differently and believe that it is actually the girls who are 'getting away with things' on the basis of their sexuality. In the previous chapter, we saw that such beliefs on the part of the male students were used to explain high female achievement – teachers awarded female students with high grades because they 'fancied' them, thereby undermining female' intelligence.

Similar 'flirtatious' behaviour was also reported in just three of the interviews and only male teachers were referred to. I believe that the answers I received to questions about whether or not boys and girls are treated differently by teachers at the college were probably heavily influenced by my being a teacher there and that the

individual students did not necessarily feel it 'appropriate' to discuss other teachers' sexual behaviour. There were however, a number of comments made:

> JM m history "My history teacher is all over the girls sometimes – it gets a bit embarrassing."
>
> FH f history "There are one or two teachers here who will try and flirt with the female students."
>
> TS f maths "I think that some of the male teachers like to think that they are attractive and so show a bit more favouritism to the girls almost as a way of flirting I suppose."

Gender as a teaching strategy

Many of the students discussed ways in which teachers simply made use of gender and gendered language as a tool within the classroom, be it for punishment or a derogatory comment, as an organisational strategy or even purely for the sake of it, all of which might be seen as continually reproducing gender divisions. We have already seen how male teachers use joking in order to try and forge 'friendships' with the male students. The focus groups highlight many more instances of teachers' usage of gender and gendered language:

> RL f Maths "One of our maths teachers always gets us doing competitions, boys against girls, and there's loads more boys so it's really unfair."
>
> ST f geography "*Mr Q* always lets the girls leave first unless we've been really bad or something. When the buzzer goes he says, 'Ladies, first!' It's quite sweet really."
> SR f geography "I find him really patronising, especially if he says, 'I haven't noticed any ladies here today so the boys had better go first', doesn't that just do your head in!"
>
> KE f biology "If we do group work or practicals it's always into girls and boys. I'd rather that mind."
> ED f biology "And it's quite good because *Mr Q* always lets us get the equipment first!"
>
> DA m history "*Mr V* is always saying things like 'You lot are worse than a bunch of girls!' and that really winds the girls up."

DF m Physics "If *Mr R* wants to have a go at us he calls us 'big girls' blouses'."
PT m Physics "I'm sure that's his favourite saying."

The last two extracts can be connected to the negative comments made about 'loud girls' earlier. Boys are criticised for being like girls and vice-versa; the sexuality of both males and females is heavily policed and teacher 'humour' provides a means of doing this. Interviews also indicate such behaviour from teachers:

LT m maths "Our teacher always gets boys to compete against the girls. It's like being back at school."

GR m geography "In geography at the end of every lesson our teacher lets the girls go first, Ladies first, like and if any of the boys complain he really takes the mick out of them, calls us 'girlies' or whatever."

FH f history "*Mr V*... is constantly telling jokes and a lot of them are sexist. It's like he's trying to wind us up, saying stuff about what a mistake it was to give women the vote, how all we want to do is find ourselves a really nice man and get married and have kids, we should be in the kitchen an' that. He is only joking but it does start to get on your nerves after a while."

RB f physics "When he starts the lesson he says 'morning boys and **girl**', you know so it really stands out."

Thus we have further evidence to demonstrate the ways in which male teachers use 'joking' as a means of denigrating women.

'Gendered Expectations'

In a number of the focus groups and interviews, students discussed the idea that they perceived teachers as having different expectations of males and females. A pattern could be noted here whereby students believed that more was expected of male students in 'traditional male' subjects and more was expected of female students in 'traditional female' subjects. This indicates yet another way in which gender differences and in some instances traditional gender roles are highlighted and thus, reinforced:

HS f sociology (FG) "I think maybe there's a higher expectation of girls, I mean as far as the boys in the class are concerned, it just seems like there's no

expectation of them, if they pass they pass, if they don't come to lessons they don't come to lessons, it's off their own back in a way; whereas if the girls don't come then it's a bigger deal in a way because we've created an expectation for ourselves."
SR f sociology "Yeah, I'd definitely agree with that. It's almost like there's more pressure on you to work if you're a girl because it's expected. If a boy doesn't do anything it's like, well there you are then and nobody really cares."

RL f maths (FG) "With *Mr E* it seems like he doesn't really expect us to do our homework, or to do the work in class so we don't! I think he thinks because we're girls we're not really clever enough to do maths."
KW f maths "We do our work sometimes but he never asks us for our answers anyway, he only asks those two 'spods' down the front."
CD f maths "And if we don't do our homework nothing's ever said – it is like it's 'cause we're *just girls*."

The interviews provided further evidence of this:

AN m Health and Social Care "In some of the subjects that we do, like childcare, I don't think *Miss O* really expects me to take an interest, you know, because I'm a boy, but really it's all the same to me."

RB f Physics "*Mr R* very rarely asks me a question in physics, I think he thinks he's more likely to get an answer from one of the boys."

The evidence would certainly suggest that many teachers do treat boys and girls differently within the classroom or at least make an issue of gender whereby gender differences are reproduced. Perhaps surprisingly, much of the evidence from the interviews with the teachers concurs with that from the students; in many classrooms, teachers report that the phenomenon of the 'invisible girl' continues, as does the awarding of a larger proportion of time to male students, and a number of teachers admit to having different expectations of male and female students. For a few of the teachers interviewed, traditional gender roles were apparently viewed as being the 'correct' roles for males and females in society and, in interview, two of these teachers made blatant sexist and homophobic remarks:

JQ m neutral-identified subject "Women should concentrate their efforts on the home and family. Our society would be in much better shape if that was still the case."

CC m masculine-identified subject "It's not right for a man to be staying at home. I think you'd have to be a bit queer."

Most of the teachers appeared to make a conscious effort to be 'fair' and egalitarian as far as their teaching was concerned, however several admitted that this was difficult in practice, particularly in a traditionally gendered subject. The majority of teachers that I interviewed tended to prefer teaching students of the same gender as themselves. In the gendered subjects where classes were biased in favour of one gender (particularly where there was only one student of the opposite gender and they were quiet), teachers argued that you were almost 'compelled' to teaching the majority. There is evidence of this in the next extracts.

Also of great interest were the answers to the question about star/ favourite/ character pupils: eight of the twelve teachers interviewed gave the name of a male student. Teachers in the college did appear to have different expectations of and attitudes towards students of different genders.

First then, we will examine some of what was said by teachers regarding quiet, female students in the classroom:

DD f feminine-identified subject "I'm ashamed to say it as a sociology teacher, but well into the term there are a number of students whose names I am unsure of and they are almost always girls. I don't know if it's just because we have less boys in sociology or if it's because the boys tend to make more noise, all I know is it always happens to me."

JQ m neutral-identified subject "In every class there tends to be a few little girls who are like mice. They slip into the room and slip out again and you don't know really know that they're there. They are usually my 'C' candidates, they work quietly, just get on with it, but they don't really have the wherewithal to get the 'A's. It's always a bit awkward on parent's evening when the parent comes and sits in front of you, says the child's name and you don't have a clue who they're talking about. That's where the 'C' rule comes in handy: quiet girl – she'll get a 'C'."

SI f neutral-identified subject "I teach one or two girls who don't say anything from one lesson to the next, and to be honest, I find it too much like hard work to try and get them to participate, so that's the way it stays."

SV m neutral-identified subject "Sometimes you'll get a student or a group of students taking history who are so quiet it gets to be a bit disconcerting. In my experience, history seems to attract girls like that – you end up just ignoring them because you tend not to get anywhere by having a go at them. By the way when I say ignoring them I mean in class or whatever I tend not to pick on them or focus on them. The classes are quite large which means it's very difficult to involve everyone in a lesson anyway, especially those who are really reluctant to take part."

CC m masculine-identified subject "It's funny really, I only teach the one lass but I still find it difficult to remember her name; she's so quiet you see."

Several of these comments, particularly from the male teachers reveal a great deal of contempt towards certain of their female students. These comments also contrast quite strongly with those from many of the teachers about the amount of their attention that is directed at male students. Almost every teacher interviewed (with the exception of the Health and Social Care teacher and the French teacher) described how males tended to dominate lessons and thus absorbed the majority of teachers' attention. Such behaviour would explain the 'invisible girl' phenomenon – gender dynamics in the classroom continue to allow girls to be marginalized (Charles 2002) whilst male students are provided with further opportunities to feel important and to practise the 'art of domination' as it were. Here are some of the comments made by teachers on this subject:

MD f neutral-identified subject "The boys in the classroom are very definitely more vocal than the girls. They seem to crave attention and will continually ask me silly questions; they seem to find it very difficult to do anything on their own. The girls in the class will just get on with it usually, in fact, sometimes you know that they are sometimes thinking 'God, I wish those boys would just shut up!' It's probably a question of maturity. I also have to spend quite a lot of my time telling boys off which again is something I don't usually have to do with girls."

LQ m neutral-identified subject "I would say that in most of my classes it's the boys who take up more of my attention. They make more noise for a start and so you have to keep on at them in order to keep the lessons going. I do also find that boys are more likely to ask questions when they don't understand things – I suppose that's a good thing."

DD f feminine-identified subject "Although there's only a few boys in the class they certainly make up for it in noise. I bet if you taped my class you'd say there were more boys there than girls and I do then have to spend a hell of a lot of time trying to shut them up. I'm not saying it's all the boys, just a couple of arrogant individuals who've always got something to say, and for some reason, feel the need to say it in a louder voice than everyone else."

IE m masculine-identified subject "I suppose you would have to say that boys dominate the lessons; they tend to be in a majority in most of the classes I teach and I don't know if the girls find that intimidating, but you do find that it's the boys who, yeah, dominate I guess."

Certainly, from my own experience it is the case that certain male students are particularly adept at usurping teaching time as a result of their behaviour and that a great deal of time and attention is wasted on 'crowd control' when it should be focussed on learning.

When the teachers were asked about the best/star pupils in their classes the majority of them gave the names of male students which again reflects gendered expectations of life after school, especially when we note that the only four teachers who named girls, were the teachers of Health and Social Care, French and Sociology, that is, the teachers of the subjects regarded as 'traditionally feminine'. The following are responses from teachers when asked about the best students in the class:

FR m masculine-identified subject "It's between two, a *Mr SL* and a *Mr PT;* both very intelligent young men and both Oxbridge candidates I believe. No doubt they'll both do very well for themselves in the world of medicine or research or whatever it is they choose to do." (Just as a point of interest, RB f Physics was also an Oxbridge candidate).

IE m masculine-identified subject "There's one kid who really stands out this year, *PR,* he's an absolute whiz as far as maths is concerned, a real natural."

MD f neutral-identified subject "I wouldn't say there's a huge amount of choice with the students we've got taking geography this year. I have got one boy though *TG* who's a real sweetie and seems to be fairly bright. No, not the easiest of choices this year I'm afraid."

SV m neutral-identified subject "Hmm, quite a tricky one. We do get some of the real high-flyers taking history here, so to choose one student as the best is quite a difficult task. I suppose if we're looking at all-round ability, you know,

> intelligence, the ability to articulate well, form sensible arguments and so on, I would have to say *OE.* There are others, but I would say he's probably the cream of the crop."

When students were asked a similar question all manner of names were thrown at me, however, on close examination, the majority of names given were those of male students. What I found particularly interesting as a sociology teacher and is perhaps worthy of comment was that several of the names given by the sociology students in both the focus groups and interviews were of students who I knew to be the more vocal members of the different classes and not necessarily the more 'able' students.

Teachers were also asked about who they thought might be unsuccessful in years to come: again more male students were listed than female students. It would seem that good or bad, it is the male students that tend to be at the forefront of many teacher's minds and that this will inevitably affect their interaction with the students in the classroom:

> JQ m neutral-identified subject "I teach this one idiot, *Ozzy*, who'll be lucky if he ends up sweeping the streets as far as I can see."
>
> SV m neutral-identified subject "There's a lad called *Lee*, a real 'drongo', I can't imagine he's going to go far."

If such beliefs related to achievement, it should be the case that some boys do very well while others do very badly while girls' achievement is more evenly spread. This would also tally with the idea that boys are, at present, underachieving. However, it is not my experience that this is the case, male achievement is not this clearly demarcated. I would argue that the reason for the previous comments is due to the fact that boys take up more of teachers' time and attention and therefore they are the students that teachers think of first.

In order to investigate teacher attitudes further, teachers were asked what they thought about their subject, whether or not they believed it to be gendered and if

so why, and whether or not they believed that a particular sex was better suited to their subject and why. Responses to certain of these questions were astonishing - discriminatory and offensive; others were more predictable. For example, all of the teachers were enthusiastic about their own particular subject, several bemoaning the fact that the students in their classes describe their subject as 'boring'. Each of the teachers from traditionally gendered subject areas (with the exception of the French teacher) spoke of the general perception of their subject as being either traditionally 'masculine' or 'feminine', some apparently believing that such a tag is justified, others believing that times are changing:

> EO f feminine-identified subject "I think I'd be naïve to believe that Health isn't more of a girls' subject. Year in, year out we get 99% girls and I can't see that changing somehow. People think 'Health and Social Care', that's a subject that's more suited to girls. I'd love to see more boys take it up but I'm afraid that just won't happen."
>
> DS f masculine-identified subject "Maths is seen as more of a male subject, it's scientific isn't it, but I think, *I hope* that's changing."
>
> DD f feminine-identified subject "It's seen as a subject for girls, in fact, in this college, it's seen as a subject for the 'not-so-bright' girls too. If a student comes to us with a string of A's or A*s for their GCSE's then they're actually dissuaded from doing sociology by some people and told to do something more 'worthy', like RE or history. It's very frustrating. We are getting more males taking the subject now, but unfortunately it's the type of boys that you could really live without."
>
> CC m masculine-identified subject "Computer technology is regarded as a male domain I would say. It's a very logical subject, very technical too – things that have always been associated with men if you like. This is why we get mainly male students I expect; I think the lasses would rather go and do something more creative, a humanities subject or whatever."
>
> FR m masculine-identified subject "Well it's a male subject isn't it, studying the kind of things that really interest boys from a young age. If girls want to do a science they do biology, but let's be honest, usually they don't want to do anything scientific. You don't get very many girls at all doing physics because girls and science very rarely mix!" (laughs) "I daresay Marie Curie would disagree with me,.." (laughs again) "..but I do think in most instances that's the case. Leave science to the men!"

Again, we can see a difference between the responses of the male and female teachers. The female teachers are aware of the perceptions of their subject as gendered but do not appear to subscribe to them and seem to crave a change in those perceptions. On the other hand, the male teachers here actually subscribe to the gendered beliefs about their subjects and are quite blatant about the reproducing of stereotypes.

The comments of the sociology teacher further highlight a possibility that sociology is perceived as ambivalent as mentioned in the previous chapter. The suggestion is that sociology is defined in two ways, both as a subject for girls, and also for those who are 'not so bright'. The French teacher did not consider her subject to be gendered, however, she did comment on the reason why she believed more female students opt for the subject than males:

> LR f feminine-identified subject "You can't really say that French or German or Spanish or any language for that matter are more suited to one sex but for some reason it is overwhelmingly girls who take them. I think it's to do with what students want to do when they leave college – lots of the girls are interested in doing something with languages for a career, like being an interpreter, working abroad, something like that, but for boys I think they don't see languages as a career option, they tend to be more insular than girls somehow."

Following on from these perceptions about subjects, there were also some very interesting responses from the teachers of the non-gendered subjects regarding their subjects and what they thought about the aptitudes of boys and girls. Several of the teachers were of the belief that talent as far as any subject is concerned, is an individual thing and should not have to be affected by gender, however, again some very traditional constructions of what constitutes 'proper' masculinity and femininity are evident in the language of certain teachers and this clearly influences their attitudes about gender:

> MD f neutral-identified subject "Geography is one of those subjects that appeals to both of the sexes, isn't it. It's got a human side, a scientific side and it can be really interesting as it tends to be relevant to our lives. You certainly

don't get boys or girls doing better at it as a whole, it totally depends on the individual student and the amount of interest they have in the subject."

JQ m neutral-identified subject "The numbers of girls and boys that take [geography] tend to be roughly about the same, in fact, I'd say that on balance, we might even get a few more girls. I would certainly say that boys are suited to some things and girls to others, that's the way nature intended and that's the way the world works. Even in certain areas of geography; you'll go on a field trip say, and there'll be girls who'll turn up in their best clothes, high heels with all their hair and make-up done, it really is unbelievable. I mean, it's not that they don't look nice, but that's not something a lad would even think about."

SV m neutral-identified subject "As far as history goes, it's a unisex subject really, but I don't necessarily think that about all subjects. I think it would be wonderful to think that we were all equal, that we could all do anything if we put our mind to it, but realistically there is a difference between men and women and you can't get away from that. Women are certainly more emotional, more caring and so that means they are going to be more suited to certain things. I'm certainly not saying women should stay at home and look after the kids, and I think men are just as capable of looking after children as women, but that said, I do feel that there are some things best done by a man, others by a woman."

Once again, we can note a stark difference between the male and female responses whereby the male teachers are much more traditional in their beliefs about appropriate gender roles than the female teachers in the sample.

Equal Opportunities

Teachers' ideas on gender were made especially clear when discussing whether or not they believed males and females were treated differently in society generally and in discussing equal opportunities. All of the teachers were of the opinion that there was a difference between the way men and women were treated (even if very small according to some), however, their beliefs on *how* they are treated differently, *why* this is the case and whether or not men and women should have equal opportunities gave rise to a wide variety of answers, again with certain teachers holding very traditional views on gender:

JQ m neutral-identified subject "Well of course [men and women] are treated differently; we are different. Women would have enough to say if men stopped

treating women differently, they really need to just stop moaning and get on with life. I'm all for women going out to work and getting equal pay, but I do think that these equal opportunities people take things a bit far. It's as Billy Connolly once said about 'man-hole' covers, 'They can start calling them people-covers when women are willing to get into them and be knee-deep in shit.'" (laughs) "You know what I'm trying to say, don't you."

MD f neutral-identified subject "Women are still treated like second-class citizens in loads of instances. Everyone claims that we've got equal opportunities now but that's bollocks really, pardon my French. I'm supposed to be a senior manager in this place but basically I'm just used as a 'skivvy'. In meetings, I'll say something, have an idea or whatever and [the college principal] will just ignore me. Then [the director of curriculum] will say exactly what I've just said and [the college principal] says 'What a good idea!' It makes me sick. It's like they've put me on senior management so they can say they're being fair, giving the position to a woman, but basically I've got no sway whatsoever."

SI f neutral-identified subject "I'd say that men and women are more or less equal these days. It is down to the individual now – you do what you want to do. Although I would say I think a lot of men still think that women should do the housework and look after the kids. When I get in from work it's down to me to make tea for the kids and usually for my husband, and if the kids are off school ill it's always down to me to look after them. I don't think my husband even considers that maybe he should stay with them now and again. But then I'm the stupid one because I'll do it every time without saying anything."

Again we can note the female teachers' awareness of sexism and a desire for change and compare it to the sexism of the male teachers and their resistance to change. This is further reinforced by the responses given on the subject of equal opportunities. As far as equal opportunities in the college were concerned, the majority of the teachers were blasé about any policy that might or might not exist and certainly did not think about it in terms of their subject. Again the male teachers are particularly dismissive:

IE m masculine-identified subject "There's probably a policy in place so the college is covered for inspections or whatever."

FR m masculine-identified subject "I don't know if we've got an equal opportunities policy – we probably have, they're everywhere these days. Anyway, if there is one I don't know about it and it wouldn't affect physics anyway, we only really get boys doing it."

This comment clearly reflects the way in which the female physics student describes the way she is treated by this teacher, that she believes the teacher wishes she wasn't there and that he would rather have a class of just boys.

Other teachers who were perhaps more 'aware' as far as equal opportunities were concerned reflected on the college's lack of commitment towards equal opportunities, particularly in the area of gender:

> EO f feminine-identified subject "In Health and Social Care there's actually a unit on equal opps., and in my last school I was able to use all the material from the school's equal opportunities officer who was brilliant. Funnily enough we did have a few more boys on the course too. Here it's very poor – obviously there is a policy, but it's not enforced. The person in charge of equal opportunities is a man and he's also in charge of careers here. It's bums on seats that count here I'm afraid and not much else. I think the management probably think, 'we've got an equal opportunities policy and an equal opps. officer so that's fine'. They don't think that it should actually mean something."
>
> MD f neutral-identified subject "Equal opportunities isn't something that's very high on the agenda here. It's not promoted at all – I doubt most people even realise there's a policy. We do get students from different religious backgrounds coming here because it's a 'religious' college but we don't even do much with them. We probably pay lip-service to the idea in one of the assemblies during the year."
>
> DD f feminine-identified subject "The only attention that the SMT[1] have given to equal opportunities as far as I'm aware, is to join in the moral panic about male underachievement and to make sure '*boys get a fair deal in the college*'. It's laughable."

Again we are provided with yet another display of the difference in attitude of male and female teachers at the college.

'Equal opportunities' then, was not really at the forefront of college policy, and yet part of the college's 'strategic plan' (a lengthy document to say the least) was to try and achieve a better gender balance in the classroom at post-16. The National Curriculum, implemented in 1988, was thought to have had some success in this area as all students up to age 16 had to study the core subjects of maths, English and science

[1] SMT – Senior Management Team

and also had to select a modern language. As discussed in the introductory chapter, it was hoped that 'forcing' students to continue with subjects that they might otherwise have 'dropped' would eliminate some of the traditional gender bias associated with certain subjects and would allow students the opportunity to then pursue these subjects to a higher level. Together with the implementation of Curriculum 2000, where Students were now able to choose four one-year A/S levels and thus keep their options open before deciding to choose three to pursue to full A level (A2 as it is now called), it was hoped by both politicians and educationalists that a better gender balance in subject choice would occur post-16. However, in the college, the figures of male and female students opting for non-traditional subjects (see Tables 1 and 2 in the introductory chapter) do not appear to illustrate any such trend, and the teachers interviewed gave very little suggestion that anything much was happening to the contrary.

> LR f feminine-identified subject "No, the National Curriculum hasn't made a blind bit of difference, we still get overwhelmed with girls. Most boys just seem to want to drop French as soon as they can."
>
> FR m masculine-identified subject "Whatever policies you implement, you can't make people do things they don't want to do and that's the case of girls choosing physics – they don't!"
>
> DD f feminine-identified subject "The problem with Curriculum 2000 is that you don't have to choose a broad base of subjects and so what you find is the girls will choose their four humanities subjects and the boys choose their four sciences. It hasn't worked the way it was intended to."

The only subject where perhaps we could note a 'glimmer of hope' as it were, was Maths; both of the maths teachers reported a slight increase in the number of girls choosing the subject in the college and believed this to be the result of the national curriculum, though neither were convinced that the subject was gender-neutral.

> DS f masculine-identified subject "I think we are getting more girls through these days and it probably is all tied up with the idea that girls are now thinking that they are just as good as boys and so can 'take them on at their own game',

sort of thing. What you do get are quite a few female maths teachers these days. I think that might help."

IE m masculine-identified subject "Maths is attracting a few more girls now than it used to certainly. Maybe it's because they want to be stuck in a classroom with all those boys." (laughs) "Only joking!"

Yet again, we have evidence of 'joking'; certain of the male teachers would appear to have an excellent ability to employ 'humour' in order to deride women.

Staff at the college had very little to do with promoting their subject to prospective students. Each subject had to provide a leaflet based on the same pro-forma and basically only contained information on course content and on possible career opportunities. The college's beautiful, glossy brochure contained only a very small blurb on each subject and then once a year there was an open evening at the college where young people and their parents who were thinking about the college as an option would flood in and flood out again, only entering those classrooms that were of interest to them. Thus, if you were teaching a gendered subject, for example, chemistry, and you were visited by only boys on open evening, then so be it. In their interviews, teachers indicated that they had very little control over the promotion of their courses, or over the registration of students to particular courses.

LR f feminine-identified subject "We don't get a chance to get out there and sell our subject. Basically we just have to take whoever turns up in September and get on with it."

CC m masculine-identified subject "Teachers don't get involved in the actual registration of students in case of bias. You'd be turning away the ones you didn't like the look of. In the end, I think most students have got a pretty clear idea of what they're going to do anyway, and a fancy spiel from us won't make any difference."

There is clearly no pro-active movement on the part of the college and its staff to try and eliminate gender bias at post-16. Sadly, it would seem that for several of the teachers interviewed, any gender imbalance in subject choice at post-16 is simply a

reflection of gender divisions in wider society and that these divisions are meant to be reproduced, that is they are both inevitable and desirable. Other teachers who do not hold with such opinions, however, remain caught up (often reluctantly) in their reproduction.

Careers Advice

Several writers (Riddell, 1992, Mirza, 1992) highlight the importance of careers advice given to students in the perpetuation of inequality. Students at the college however did not appear to have received a great deal of advice of any kind as far as their futures were concerned. Careers advice was not a primary concern; as mentioned earlier, the male teacher who was the college's careers adviser was also the equal opportunities officer and a part-time pastoral tutor. The college did have visits from a number of members of the Careers service and from representatives of a number of professions, and there was also a reasonable careers section in the College library, however the onus was on the students to find things out for themselves and so the service was underused. Careers talks were not compulsory and most of the students complained about the focus being on 'going to university'. It would appear that it was assumed all students would be going (or at least intended to go) to university and careers time seemed to be more of a recruitment drive by universities. As such then, careers advice in the college did little to influence the decisions of students about their futures. One student in an interview remarked:

> EI f sociology "We haven't had any careers guidance since school. In school we had to do some thing on the computers and it printed off a huge list of jobs, practically every job you could think of. Here, I don't go to any of the careers talks because it's really only for people who want to go to university. It's pointless me sitting for an hour being told how to fill in my UCAS form when I won't be using it."

Sexual harassment

One issue that is strongly tied in with this reproduction of gender divisions within the college is sexual harassment. There is evidence that sexual harassment is encountered daily in the college by both students and teachers alike; results from the student focus groups and interviews and from interviews with teachers indicate that sexual harassment is an issue in the classroom, around the college and in the staff-room. Using 'flirting' as a teaching strategy was examined earlier in the chapter and might be defined as sexual harassment if we take the definition (see literature review) given by Hadjifoutiou (1983) whereby a 'person's sexuality is emphasised over her role as a worker', or in this case student. Other examples of sexual harassment discussed were sexual and sexist joking by students and teachers, male students acting both aggressively and sexually towards female teachers and male teachers behaving inappropriately towards their students. Riddell (1992) has examined different forms of sexual harassment that occur within an educational setting; she discusses the use of sexual humour by teachers in the classroom and the staff-room, although she indicates that Cunnison (1989) suggests that it is not always appropriate to use the term 'sexual harassment' as women may play along, or use it for their own ends (Riddell 1992, p-151). However Cockburn (1991) stresses how sexual joking is part of a "heightened heterosexual and sexist culture generated by men..." which "...includes women but marginalizes and controls them" (Cockburn, 1991, p-153). Such behaviour might be regarded as an extension of the 'gendered culture' of male staff and students. Riddell also highlighted instances where male students swore at female teachers and where boys made use of sexually suggestive behaviour to challenge a female teachers' authority (ibid, p-156/157). Comparable behaviour was evident at the college as we can see first from extracts taken from the focus groups:

SA f history "We've got two male history teachers and when they get together it's just like some really awful double act. Their lessons are brimming with sexual innuendo."
TH f history "Yeah, and you really get the feeling that they're staring at you sometimes – and I don't mean into your eyes!" (laughter)
SA f history "It's not really very funny, sometimes you can feel a bit uncomfortable. Especially if some of the boys join in and start making comments."

JM m sociology "Sometimes we have a laugh winding up the female teachers – having a joke with them an' that. They can get really embarrassed, can't you miss?" (laughter)
LE m sociology "You know we're only messing though, don't you miss."

Certain student interviews revealed similar information:

RM m computer studies "*Mr C* tells some really dirty jokes sometimes – ones I wouldn't even repeat! He's mad."

FH f history "I wouldn't say that I'm affected by really serious sexual harassment, it's just the usual stuff, you know, boys pinching your bum, making comments, that kind of thing. You just get used to telling them to 'eff' off."

Teachers' interviews also produced interesting answers, including the response from a male teacher, belittling the issue:

SV m neutral-identified subject "I wish someone would come and sexually harass me!"

Women teachers had serious complaints:

LC f geography "The students are becoming so forward now, they make sexual suggestions, ask you about your sex-life and things. It's really hard to know how to handle it, and they love to see that they've made you uncomfortable."

EE f sociology "Some of the male teachers will take things a bit too far in the staff room. They are continuously talking about sex (clearly deprived of any if you ask me) and they see it as perfectly acceptable to make comments about you. On Monday, for example, TW came into the staff-room and said 'Did you have a good shagging this weekend?' Of course, everyone around you is laughing so you feel you should laugh it off or come up with some witty retort."

As a teacher in the college I found staff-room life to be sexually charged; certain teachers had no concept of 'personal space', several male teachers talked in a sexual way about female students (two teachers were actually secretly dating students while I was there), sex was a favourite topic of conversation and to certain male teachers, it was a

constant source of amusement to refer to women as 'bits of stuff', 'chicks', 'birds' etc. and then shout, 'Oops! I forgot I can't say that in front of you sociology birds!' It put the female members of staff in a difficult situation; many of us felt angry and humiliated (although it was a while before we realised this) and yet did not want to be regarded as 'humourless' by other members of staff so felt obliged to 'put up with' this behaviour. It was not until a few of the female members of staff discussed the matter privately that it was realised that we were all feeling the same way and felt able to complain about such comments (although complaints were never made formally).

Thus we can envisage an atmosphere around the college and within the classroom where gender divisions are consistently reproduced and reinforced. Male and female students were reported as behaving differently, with males taking up more 'teacher time' as a result of disruptive behaviour. Clear differences were apparent between male and females teachers in terms of their attitudes to students, perception of subjects and equal opportunities. Male teachers and students also were reported as creating 'gendered cultures' whereby female students, particularly in the traditional 'male' subject areas, felt awkward and unwelcome. Sexual harassment also was reported as featuring daily in the lives of female staff and students. In surroundings such as these it is perhaps no wonder that students opt for post-16 subjects that sit comfortably with their gender and pose little or no challenge to existing gender roles.

The next chapter looks 'behind the scenes' as it were, away from the college and into the home backgrounds of the staff and students. It examines the views of the students' parents on a number of issues, including gender roles, subject choice and equal opportunities. It also discusses Catholicism and the influence of the Catholic Church on the lives of the staff and students at the college.

Chapter Six

Family Matters

This chapter will examine the apparently powerful influence of the home on students in the college and their subject choices at post-16. It is a generally widespread belief that British society is slowly moving towards one of equal opportunities for men and women and that the majority of people in society welcome this shift (at least this is what the media tells us, what we learn in school etc.). Young people entering post-16 education are clearly aware of this 'belief' and many of the students that I have spoken to subscribe to it, at least superficially. However, a large number of the students in the study spoke of how their parents were the main influence on their lives and an investigation of how the students interpret their parents' views suggests a deeply entrenched sexism that continues to be reproduced in the majority of households. This chapter then highlights the students' perceptions of their parents' outlooks on life, in particular gender, subject choice and equal opportunities. Most of the students' parents fell into stereotypical categories of what is masculine and feminine and (according to their children) believed strongly in different genders being suited to different tasks. Catholicism is also a strong influence in the homes of many of the students and staff at the college and this aspect will also be looked at here together with a look at the lives of some of the staff outside of the college.

The importance of parental influence

All of the students were asked about who or what influenced their lives. In every focus group, a core of the students named their parents as being the biggest influence, with fathers being particularly revered. It is important to note again here that the majority

of students who took part in the research were from middle-class backgrounds. The male sociology focus group had the following conversation:

> JC m sociology "My dad is brilliant. He's got a great job so we've got a lovely house and a nice lifestyle. He's someone you can really look up to."
> LE m sociology "That's the same with my dad – he's got his own business, he's always playing golf an' that, but he's worked hard."
> CR m sociology "My mum and my dad have both influenced me in different ways – they were divorced when I was about three and my mum's given up her life to look after us. My dad's done really well for himself and really me and my brother have had all we've ever wanted. I've just got so much respect for them both."

All other focus groups also mentioned one or both parents as strong influences:

> RL f geography "I'd have to say my parents. They've both been so supportive and taught me so much."
> NE f geography "Mine too, especially my mum 'cause she's really the one that I'm closest to – I think girls are closer to their mums."

> MD m physics "My father's a surgeon and I think that's really made me want to go into medicine. He's always encouraged us to do well in school and stuff."
> NL m physics "Yeah, both of my parents have given me so much encouragement – even though I don't see my dad that often 'cause my parents are divorced."

> ST f biology "I think your parents are bound to have a huge influence on your life – they mould you really, don't they."

Interviews contained similar sentiments although there were one or two exceptions, neither the male French student nor the male biology student named their parents as influences. However in most interviews, again, parents were popularly referred to by their children as being the strongest influences on their lives:

> TS f maths "I'd have to say my parents are the biggest influence on my life. They're both very different types of people and so have had different effects. My dad's sort of the 'strong, silent type' if you know what I mean and my mum's more of a friend. It's really important to me that I make them both proud of me – hopefully I will."

> SM f health and social care "My mum is fantastic. She's had to bring me and my brothers and sisters up single-handed. She's worked so hard to support us. She's a really strong woman and I hope that when I have a family of my own I can cope as well as she has."

> RM m computer studies "I think my dad has been the biggest influence. Ever since I was little he's always spent time with me, taken me places, played with me. I've always looked up to him."

Even the majority of the staff interviewed cited parents as having been the greatest influence on their lives, although many also referred to their partners as being of most importance now:

> MD f neutral-identified subject "My parents are amazing people. They've given my brother and myself everything we could have wanted including a huge amount of love and support. They are both from an older generation and so they both have very traditional beliefs, my mother has never worked for example, but that's not to say they're narrow-minded. They both want what's best for their children and support us in whatever we do. It's nice now to be in a position to give something back to them."

> SV m neutral-identified subject "My father is a brilliant man. I've always aspired to be like him – he's had a particularly strong influence on my life."

> DS f masculine-identified subject "Both of my parents have been a strong influence and a guide for me throughout my life. My mother is a strong, Welsh valleys' woman who has been the lynchpin of the family while my father has inspired me as far as work is concerned. I feel I'm a real mixture of both of them and that's something to be proud of."

Family organisation and outlook

It is evident that parents are held in high regard by a large number of the individuals who took part in the study, therefore it is important to investigate the attitudes and beliefs of these family members (as perceived by their children) in order that we might see the ways in which they can affect the lives of their children, including the decision of what subjects to opt for post-16. The focus group schedule did not focus on detailed questioning in this area; in the focus groups the students were asked about influences on their lives and it was really only in response to this that any discussion of parents emerged. Therefore, the majority of the information in this section is taken from interviews with the students and staff.

First, it is interesting to examine how the households of the students and the staff are organised, for example, how is the housework divided, who makes what decisions in the household etc. This would ascertain whether or not these individuals are accustomed to a traditional, patriarchal family set-up or if a more egalitarian household or an alternative to the nuclear family is what they are used to and also whether or not this family set-up may influence their beliefs and attitudes. Perhaps as a result of the Catholic nature of the college (which will be discussed later in the chapter), most of the students and staff reported living in nuclear families, the majority with dual-income earners reflecting the mainly middle-class catchment area of the college. However, several of the interviewees reported a family set-up that conformed to the very traditional male breadwinner/female dependant plus dependant children 'norm'. As far as the domestic division of labour was concerned, with one exception, it was reported that women were mainly responsible for most domestic tasks with men generously 'helping' out on occasions. This would support much of the evidence in this area, i.e. as Charles (2002) reports, "Even at the end of the twentieth century, 'Women spend almost twice as long on household chores as men' (Guardian, 7 October 1997)" (Charles, 2002). Here are some extracts from interviews with the students:

> EI f sociology "My mother is a housewife and my father goes out to work – he's a salesman, selling floors...Mum does everything around the house, nobody else does anything. She cooks, cleans, she looked after us when we were young - it's what she does. My father is the one that earns the money."
>
> ME m physics "My mother only works part-time so she does the housework."
>
> SD m biology "Although both of my parents work, I'd definitely say that it's my mother who does most of the work around the house. Dad does help sometimes, on weekends and that, or if there's visitors coming or something, but usually it's down to mum."
>
> KR f computer studies "I'd say that my mother's the one who does most of the housework. She cooks the tea every night when she gets in from work, and she does most of the cleaning. Dad helps with the washing up and that's about it – he's too busy up on his computer."

From these reports, a traditional picture of women being responsible for domestic labour emerges with men just 'helping out' occasionally. Interviews with teachers also appeared to conform to this pattern, although from a variety of perspectives:

> FR m masculine-identified subject "Of course my wife does most of the housework. It's something that women do and do very well I might add. I wouldn't know where to begin to be honest with you."
>
> SV m neutral-identified subject "I suppose I should probably be saying that I'm a 'new man' and that I do just as much work around the house as my wife, but I'm afraid that simply isn't the case. I do help out with the kids, I have done since they were babies, but I'll admit, [my wife] does the majority of the cleaning."
>
> DS f masculine-identified subject "I actually believe that it's a woman's prerogative to keep things in order, which includes cleaning, looking after the kids, preparing meals, all that sort of thing. If you left things like that to men nothing in this life would ever get done. Women have the ability to multi-task, men don't."

DS's comment is an example of how gender stereotypes and ideas about sexuality can be reproduced in a way that allows men to be 'excused' from domestic labour in that it is assumed their gender prevents them from being able to perform such tasks.

Even female teachers with a strong belief in equality for men and women (and in paid employment) said that they carried out the majority of the housework:

> MD f neutral-identified subject "I just end up doing the housework because if I didn't it just wouldn't get done and I can't bear to live in a mess. The problem is, his mother's always done everything for him and I get fed up with nagging him all the time. It's just easier to do it myself. He really wants to start a family but I know that it will disrupt my life far more than his. He can't seem to see that. I'd love to be able to afford a cleaner."
>
> NT f feminine-identified It's a no-win situation with me as far as housework is concerned. If [my husband] does anything around the house he usually messes it up and I have to do it all again anyway. He does cook though, he likes cooking – but everything else is left to me – including the washing up, and somehow when he cooks, he manages to use every pot in the house"
>
> EO f feminine-identified subject "I think it's assumed that women will do the housework and most women, including myself, are stupid enough to do it. If [my partner] does the hoovering or cooks a meal or something he expects eternal

> gratitude. You have to keep saying, 'Mmm, there's delicious'; it doesn't make a difference that nine times out of ten *you* do the work."

Charles (2002) discusses a resistance to change that Oakley has argued stems from "women's sense of self and their feminine identity being bound up with the housewife role and domesticity" (Oakley in Charles, 2002). Although women are working full-time they seem attached to their housewife role. Domesticity is an integral part of female gender identity and thus both males and females are resistant to change. For several of the women in the sample, it would seem that performing domestic chores is simply the 'easy' thing to do; it avoids hassle and possible argument.

Responses discussing the decision-making and distribution of resources in the household also suggested that men made the majority of decisions, however, this should not be overstated, and there was evidence of the existence of some egalitarian households. Here are some extracts from interviews with the students discussing their perceptions of who makes the decisions in their particular households:

> AN m Health and Social Care "Well they both make decisions really, it depends what decisions although I suppose it's dad who has to have the final say on everything, especially if there's money involved. When you go shopping with mum, she's always buying stuff and saying, 'Now don't tell your father.'"

> EI f Sociology "It's definitely my father who makes the decisions in our house. My mum's useless – she won't do anything without dad."

Several of the teachers' interviews followed a similar pattern, whereby the men of the household were apparently 'in control':

> JQ m neutral-identified subject "If it's an important decision I'll make it, if it's not, I'm not bothered about which one of us decides."

> SV m neutral-identified subject "My wife would like to think that she makes the decisions in our house and as long as I allow her to believe that she'll be happy and so will I."

However, in certain of the interviews with teachers, there was some evidence of a perception of equality, at least as far as decision-making was concerned:

CC m masculine-identified subject "We've got a bit of give and take in our house – my wife wouldn't stand for it if I made every single decision, especially if it's to do with the house or the kids, but there's absolutely no way I'd let her loose on every decision. We'd be bankrupt!"

MD f neutral-identified subject "We tend to make major decisions together."

The interview with the female maths teacher was of particular interest as she claimed that she was in control of the decision-making within the household and yet allowed her husband to feel that he was in control:

DS f masculine-identified subject "Now the secret to decision making is making the man think that your decisions are actually his brilliant ideas. That way you basically make the decisions but he thinks he is – brilliant eh?!"

Once again we see DS convey a very traditional view of men and women – seeing herself as 'the power behind the throne' as it were.

As well as discussing the way domestic labour and decision making and resources were divided within households, the students who were interviewed also discussed elements of their upbringing and the expression of gender roles as a part of that primary socialisation process. The students were asked about the games that they played, the activities that they enjoyed when they were younger and to note any gendered aspects of that play. Once again the results overwhelmingly demonstrate a clear demarcation of gender roles in the young lives of most of these students:

EI f sociology "I loved to do all the usual 'girly' things. I adored playing with dolls, especially 'Barbies', dressing them in all the different clothes – I had bagfulls of clothes. I used to cut their hair and put make-up on them an' stuff. I had all the stuff that went with Barbie too, like the doll's house, the beach buggy – I even had a 'Ken' for her to have as a boyfriend. I also made quite a lot of dolls' clothes, not just for Barbies, for any dolls really. Mum would spend hours by the sewing machine with me – I loved it. I think that's why I'm really interested in textiles now."

JM m history "Sport, sport and more sport. Anything too, but especially rugby and football and then in the summer, cricket. My dad actually played rugby professionally so he was rugby-mad. In the house, there are pictures of me when I'm about two dressed up in a rugby kit with one of those kiddies' rugby balls – I don't think I had much of a choice, play rugby or play rugby! I don't remember

being interested in much else as a kid to be honest, just playing and watching loads of sport!"

RM m computer studies "My brother was into Star Wars and space and stuff and that was what I was into first. Then, I absolutely loved computer games – I was landed when the 'Nintendos' and the 'playstations' came out, me and a few friends just used to go round each other's houses and play these games for hours and hours. Sounds a bit sad really, especially as we still do! Still, it keeps us off the streets as my dad says!"

LT f French "When you think about, when you're little, everything you have, all your toys and books and everything are for girls. I had stuff like a plastic cooker, a tea-set and even an ironing board when I was really young, and you have dolls then. I had one of those life-like baby dolls – you had to feed it and change its nappies and everything; it was quite gross really! Then you start getting into clothes and hair and make-up and stuff. It's mad really!"

GR m geography "I had a real obsession with guns when I was really young. I used to have those ones that fired caps; you could get them abroad and we always used be stopped at customs in Spanish airports. Me and my brother used to play armies all the time too. Then as I got older I really got into cars, anything to do with cars really, models, toy cars, 'scalectrix'. I can't wait 'til I can drive and have a car of my own."

Even the female physics student who describes herself as a 'tomboy', growing up amongst brothers shows little if any deviation from traditional gendered play:

RB f physics "When I was younger I used to love playing outside with my brothers. We all had bikes and we used to ride all around the area together, and because I was their little sister they used to look after me. I had a 'Barbie' bike and I loved it. It was pink and I had these dangly things coming out of the handlebars. I did love playing with dolls too – my brothers would play with their action men, and I'd have my dolls, and they like, went round together in a gang."

Only one of the students confessed to not really being interested in 'gender-suitable' play, one of the students who has opted for a non-traditional subject at post-16.

PG m French "I know that my father would have loved me to be into sport. He tried so hard, taking me to football matches, buying me footballs and rugby balls an' all that, but I just wasn't interested. I was quite a sad child really, I didn't used to go out, I just used to stay in and read or draw or paint or whatever. All the other kids would be out playing in the street and I'd be sat inside – it brings a tear to your eye doesn't it!" (laughs)

The majority of the evidence then, points to a very traditional, patriarchal set-up in the families and households of many of the students and staff at the college, with

most students apparently having been raised in conventionally gender-stereotyped ways. Where family life is cited as having such an influential role on the lives of so many of the students (and also the staff), such a conventional and gendered family set-up may well have affected the beliefs and attitudes of the students and thus fed into the post-16 subject choices of students.

As far as the respondents were concerned, in addition to living within such very traditional families with a gendered division of labour, and having such gender stereotyped upbringings, it was also evident that many of the parents of the students held very traditional beliefs, especially in the area of gender. Interviews with the students concerning how they perceived their parents' attitudes, values and beliefs revealed an incredibly stereotypical notion of gender roles. Every student interviewed reported their parents as believing that men and women are suited to different tasks in life and these ideas (which were astonishingly similar in content) are highlighted in the following extracts from a number of interviews with the students:

> RB f physics "My parents definitely have some fixed ideas as to what they think men and women are capable of and the ways they think men and women should behave. They let my brothers do loads of stuff – go out all the time with their mates, play football, stay out late, but because I'm a girl I can't do any of it. They want me to be 'feminine', help my mum around the house, all that kind of stuff – they don't ask my brothers to do anything. It's unbelievable. I feel as though I'm living in the dark ages sometimes."
>
> EI f sociology "[My parents] would definitely agree that men and women should do different things. My mum isn't so bad, at least she believes it's OK for a woman to go out to work, but my dad and one of my brothers especially believe that men should go out to work and that women should stay at home. I mean, most of the time they really put it on, but they do agree with that."
>
> JM m history "Both of my parents are quite traditional in some ways. I mean they don't think women should be chained to the kitchen sink or anything like that, but they would definitely agree that men are better at some things and women at others. It's like, men are usually stronger than women, so men should do jobs that need strength."
>
> GR m geography "My dad would think that [men and women are suited to different tasks] more than my mum although even she thinks that there are

> some things that men should do and some things that women should do. Like for example, I know that both my parents think you should only have men in the army – at least only men fighting, they don't think it's suitable for a woman, but my father even thinks that women shouldn't be in the police and my mother disagrees with him there."

It is of interest that fathers are reported as being more conservative in their views than mothers.

Even the two students who thought their parents believed in equality for the sexes still alluded to certain areas where they conceded their parents had some gendered ideas. However, there is evidence, even within this small, that not all homes are rigidly patriarchal and traditional. It is perhaps interesting to note that both of these students are following post-16 subjects that are considered non-traditional:

> TS f maths "I think that both of my parents believe that men and women should be equal, you know that men and women are both equally capable of doing certain jobs, both should be able to go out to work and both are able to do housework. The only thing perhaps they might not agree with, especially dad, is like, a woman who walks out and leaves her children – I think they both see that as wrong. I mean, they do think that a child needs both parents, but they think that a mother is especially important."

> PG m French "I would say that my mother and my father are pretty modern in their thinking about men and women. They both go out to work and respect each other. I suppose they might think that some things are a bit strange, like women bodybuilders, ugh! And I suppose they do think that some things men are better at than women, and the other way round. But other than a few things like that they're pretty sound."

It would seem to be the case that home background does have some effect on student subject choice. Those students who report to living in more egalitarian households have opted for non-traditional, 'gender-unsuitable' choices. Those students who have been raised in a rather more 'traditional' household students might well have been affected in some way by the often stereotypical, patriarchal views that are supposedly held by their parents. Gendered subject choices at post-16 may be influenced by such attitudes, if not directly, then indirectly. (Teachers' attitudes on gender were explored in the previous chapter.) Such effects on students' subject

choices might be made more apparent if we examine the attitudes of parents to particular subjects; again it is made manifest that the students consider their parents to have, on the whole, very conventional beliefs and values. The results of the student focus groups in both 'gendered' and 'gender-neutral' subjects, demonstrate this orthodox way of thinking:

> LE m sociology "My parents didn't really know what sociology was and really didn't understand why I'd chosen to do it."
> JC m sociology "A lot of my friends are doing sciences and maths and my parents don't get why I did sociology and not do the sciences with my friends. They don't see sociology as a proper subject."
> JM m sociology "I don't think my parents believed me at first when I said I was taking sociology. The problem is everyone thinks it's a drop out subject, a real doss like, and it's not."
> MR m sociology "My parents think it's a bit of a girls' subject and they think I've taken it so I can be surrounded by girls." (laughter)
>
> NL m physics "My parents think physics is a really good subject – they're impressed, they think you've got to be clever to do physics."
> MD m physics "They got that wrong, didn't they!" (laughter)
> SL m physics "No, it's true, my parents are the same. People see science subjects as good subjects, especially physics."
> PF m physics "I know what you mean. There's loads of dodgy subjects about at the moment, you know like 'film studies,' what a doss! – you can even go to college and do a degree in stuff like pop music now! My dad would have freaked if I told him I was going to do 'film studies' or whatever. Basically I was always going to take all sciences – my parents wouldn't have had it any other way."
>
> NM f health and social care "At first, my parents wanted me to do subjects like maths and English – they think that because this is a GNVQ, it's not a real subject."
> EM f health and social care "My mother's dead chuffed. She didn't think I'd ever go to college so she thinks it's brilliant. She wishes she could have chosen something like this when she was younger, but there was nothing like it about."
> CD f health and social care "My parents are chuffed too. They know that because it's like a vocational qualification, I'll be ready to do a job, 'cause we do work experience an' stuff, an' learn about working in a care setting."
>
> KE f biology "[my parents] think it's brilliant that I'm doing biology, 'cause it's a science like. I'd never be able to do physics or chemistry and they know that, they know I'm not really scientific, so they are really pleased that I've gone for one science."
> GM f biology "I don't think that my parents think I'll be able to cope with [biology]. I think they think I would have been better off doing another language, or history or something – something non-scientific anyway."

KE f biology "But it's not really a science like physics and chemistry is it – they're not in the same league."

Similar viewpoints on parents' perceptions of the status of different subjects and notions of why subjects are 'masculine' or 'feminine' can also be witnessed in the interviews with the students:

AN m health and social care "I've got to say my father did really make fun of me at first – he called me a girl and stuff . He said things like, 'what do you want to be doing such a 'nancy' course for' an' that. I mean, he was joking, but I do think he meant what he was saying. The thing is, he knows I want to be a social worker and that this is the best course for me to do. He doesn't make fun of me much any more, but if he tells anyone or if anyone asks what I do he says, 'Oh he's training to be a social worker', he'll never say, 'health and social care'. My mum's just pleased that I'm in college."

FH f history "My parents think that history is a good subject and they know it's something I'll be good at, like English. I've never had any interest in 'sciency' subjects, or practical subjects and so they always knew the type of subjects I'd choose. The only thing they were slightly dodgy about me taking was media studies – I'm not sure that they understood what the subject entailed and thought that it would be irrelevant as far as work was concerned – a bit of a drop-out subject."

RB f physics "Physics is thought of as a 'male' subject, innit, and my parents do see it as more suitable for boys I think, but they know that I'm a bit of a tomboy and that I was always going to choose the science subjects at A-level. I'm basically following my dad and my brothers so they can't really say anything. They know that the sciences are really well thought of too – I don't think dad would have let me take something like woodwork or even PE."

CH m sociology "My dad is warming to the idea [of taking sociology]. At the end of the day he knows the sort of person that I am and he knows that I couldn't cope with sciences. My mum sees how much I enjoy [sociology] and so she's just happy for me."

It is possible to note a distinct difference between the way mothers and fathers are reported to react to the students' subject choices. Fathers would appear to provide more of the drive for their children, supplying them with approval or disapproval as they see fit. Mothers on the other hand appear to be more generally supportive of their children. These two positions might be seen to fit quite well with ideas of masculinity and femininity, and gender roles within the family. Fathers are dominant and have the

ability to take charge whereas mothers are there to look after their family and to provide support for its members.

Interestingly, in the interviews with the girls taking computer studies and maths, supposedly 'masculine' subjects, neither student reported their parents as viewing that particular subject choice negatively, nor as regarding either subject as being 'male'. This might be seen as providing support for the contention that parental influence is a key factor in post-16 subject choice as many of those students who appear to have been pressured by their parents (in particular their fathers) to opt for traditional choices tended to do so; those without such overt pressure were able to make non-traditional choices, although it should be noted that this does not apply in every situation.

> TS f maths "My mum and my dad are really pleased that I've chosen to do the subjects that I have. They are both proud of me and the fact that I'm working towards being a vet. It's something I've always wanted to do and they've supported me all the way. Obviously, if you want to become a vet then you have to do certain subjects at A-level, you don't get a choice, and so it was always known that I'd be opting for these subjects."

As far as TS is concerned there do not appear to be any 'gendered labels' attached by her family to her particular subject choices or chosen career path. Correspondingly, KR, the female computer studies student, despite being a self-confessed 'tomboy', and who states during her interview that technological subjects, including IT, are considered 'masculine', would not appear to share such an appraisal with her parents:

> KR f computer studies "My parents think it's brilliant that I'm taking computers. I think they both think that it's the way forward and that I'm some whiz kid who's going to get a hundred-thousand pounds-a-year job in London or something; they even bought me my own lap-top for Christmas. The thing is I'm not even sure that I want a career in IT, but I mean it's a qualification that will never be wasted. Everyone needs to be able to use a computer nowadays."

Thus we have the majority of students stating that their parents are the most influential power on their lives and that they have been raised within a 'traditional'

preconceived ideas about gender and what is and should be 'masculine' and 'feminine' in society. It is perhaps possible then to argue that these students, as a result of parental influence, find that gender-stereotyped ideas feed into their views on the subject options available to them at post-16. As the figures in the introductory chapter demonstrate, most students at the college opt for gender-appropriate subjects. Where there have been deviations from this quite dominant pattern and we have witnessed students opting for non-traditional subjects it has been noted that parental 'pressure' in these cases did not appear to have been applied. The evidence suggests that for this group of students, the family background plays a key role in their post-16 subject option choices. However, it must be noted that these findings are the result of a small-scale study, with a mainly white, middle-class sample; further research is needed in order to examine whether or not there is a link between family background and subject choice at post-16.

Parental 'interest' in education

Yet, how do we explain those students who opt for non-traditional gendered subjects in spite of their parents' traditional opinions? Surely if parental influence was so powerful, no student whose parents viewed college subjects in a gender-stereotyped way would opt for a non-traditional subject. Perhaps another factor involved with parental influence then, is the 'amount of interest' shown in their children's education, where 'interest' is taken to mean support, questioning about school/college, possible intervention etc, and linked to that 'interest' is the question of how directly parents influence their children's decisions.

Where 'parental interest' is apparently made manifest to the child as far as education is concerned, it would appear that such students are more likely to find themselves taking subjects that their parents believe to be suitable for them. Thus, evidence from the interviews with the students suggest that where they cite 'parental interest' in their education as being particularly strong, they appear to have been more likely to opt for subjects that slot into their parents' ideas as to what is a suitable subject for them. Several students spoke of considerable pressure from their parents:

> EI f sociology "My parents show a huge amount of interest in my education. They buy me everything I need, and every day without fail I get the third degree about everything that happened that day in every lesson. It gets a bit embarrassing, 'cause my mum will actually phone my teachers and check up on me. I try to explain to her that I'm in college now but she couldn't care less."
>
> LT m maths "Both of my parents have always been really interested in how I've been doing in school. I'm sure they'd come with me if they could. I mean they're really supportive but sometimes they do put me under pressure – I don't think they realise."
>
> RM m computer studies "Ever since I was a kid I remember my parents being really interested in my education, especially my father. They do whatever they can to help me, they want me to succeed really badly. They got me a tutor for maths GCSE to make sure I got an 'A', they buy me every revision guide on the planet for all my subjects, they check how much homework I get every day and won't let me go out unless I've done it. It can get on top of you but I know they're only doing it to help."

Others reported far less pressure:

> AN m health and social care "[My parents] are interested in my education, like they'll occasionally ask me how things are going, but they realise that it's down to me now and so they basically just let me get on with it and do my own thing."
>
> PG m French "I wouldn't say that [my parents] show a massive amount of interest in my education – to be fair to them, I'm hardly ever in the house for them to try. My mother especially knows that I'm an independent person and basically I do what I want. It's not that they don't ask me about college mind, but they respect the fact that I'm 18 now and in control of my own life. They don't even look at my reports, I don't see it as their business anymore."
>
> KR f computer studies "My parents are interested in my education, but they're not like 'pushy-parents' or anything. I get on with my own thing and they know that I'll do my homework or revise for exams. I'd hate to have parents who nag, nag, nag all the time about your work. There are the people who get to university

and go totally nuts because they're on their own for the first time and they rebel."

Following on from this idea of 'interest' are findings from several of the focus groups and the interviews that suggest that where parents hold stereotyped beliefs about subjects *and* try to *directly* influence their children's post-16 options it is much less likely that children will opt for non-traditional subjects and, in some instances, it is clear that certain parents have actually put their children off opting for what they believe to be 'unsuitable' subjects. A number of the focus groups highlighted the effects of direct parental influence versus non-direct influence or even non-influence of parents on post-16 subject choice. First we can witness instances of direct parental influence on choice and in each of these cases, parents have suggested/directed their children to take subjects that might be considered 'gender-suitable':

PF m physics "I took physics because I wanted to take it. My parents want me to do well too, so they suggested that I take the sciences and maths - you can't really go wrong then as far as a career is concerned. My dad did all the sciences and he's done really well for himself."
DF m physics "I actually didn't really want to take physics - I might drop it next year. It was my parents who thought taking all the sciences would be a good idea and I didn't know what else to take so I thought I may as well. I wish I'd done something else now though."

ST f French "I wanted to do a language because I want to travel when I've finished in college, hopefully to South America. I want to be a translator or something for a career. I was only going to do Spanish at A/S and maybe do maths or something as my extra subject, but my parents thought that having two languages would be more useful and I'm really glad they did now, 'cause French is my favourite subject."

SA f history "I was always going to choose history, it was my favourite subject at school, the only subject that I wasn't sure about taking was English. I had to choose between Maths and English and my mum said that English would probably go better with the rest of my subjects. Plus she'd heard, and I think it's true, that maths gets much harder at A level, it's not the same as GCSE, she thought I probably wouldn't enjoy it as much as English."
SW f history "Well my parents practically filled in the option form for me! I didn't have much of a choice. I was taking history, law and English whether I liked it or not. I did put my foot down with psychology though because I knew I'd find it really interesting."

There were similar comments made by the students during the interviews:

> GR m geography "I've always loved geography – it was my favourite subject in school because I had a brilliant teacher. I loved art too, and I was pretty good at it but my parents thought I would be wasting an A-level if I'd chosen it. They went on at me for ages about how art was more of a hobby than a career and about how so many struggling artists die penniless and don't sell any paintings until they're dead. I just had to give in in the end."
>
> LT m maths "I haven't really thought about why I chose maths. I think my parents would have been disappointed if I hadn't. When we came to the college open evening, I wanted to go and have a look at some of the different subjects on offer, just to see like, but my mum basically dragged me round all the predictable ones, you know, maths, computers an' that. I do like maths though and I'm alright at it, like."

Also apparent then, were instances in two of the focus groups where students discussed how they did not succumb to pressure from their parents when choosing their subjects or where parents did not attempt to influence decisions. Such conversations occurred amongst students who had opted for 'non-traditional' gendered subjects (ST opted for chemistry as well as biology):

> JM m sociology "I don't really know exactly why I chose sociology. It was something new to try – you get sick of doing English and maths all the time, and I thought it would be easy, I suppose. My parents thought I should stick to the other subjects, but at the end of the day it's my life, my choice."
> JC m sociology "Yeah, my parents would have preferred me to go down the traditional route, study the sciences, become a doctor an' all that, but it's like 'J' said, there's comes a time when your parents have to step aside and let you make your own decisions, only they get really patronising and say stuff to each other like, 'We've got to let him make his own mistakes'. "(laughter)

Several of the interviews with students who had opted for non-traditional gendered subjects also contained suggestions of lack of direct parental pressure on subject choices at post-16:

> PG m French "I just chose the subjects that I knew I would enjoy the most. It's pointless doing something for two years that you don't enjoy. I mean, you speak to some people and they've picked something because they think it'll be good for a career or because their parents think it's a good option, and in the end they end up failing or dropping the subject because they're not enjoying it. More fool them, that's what I say!"

KR f computer studies "I found it really difficult choosing my options. The thing with coming to a college is you don't know any of the teachers so it might be that you choose something and then two months down the line realise that you don't like the teacher, or the course for that matter. A/S levels are much more work compared to GCSE's. My parents were really sweet and didn't want to put any pressure on me, and I had practically the same grade for all my subjects at GCSE so in the end I just went for what I thought would be most useful to me when I leave to get a job."

AN m health and social care "I chose to do the double award health and social care because it's the equivalent to two A-levels and it fits well with becoming a social worker. I know if my father had had his way I would have had to choose something else, but he's got to respect my decision. The thing is if I'd done the subjects that he wanted me to do, I probably wouldn't have enjoyed them so I would have ended up dropping out of college and getting a job – there's a few of my friends who've done that now."

RB f physics "I chose physics 'cause I like it, simple as. At the end of the day you've got to please yourself 'cause it's you who's got to do the work. I think my dad would have liked me maybe to do something different but he couldn't really say anything about it as everyone else in our family has done physics, except mum. It's like a family trait."

Once again we can note from the last two extracts how fathers are cited as being more likely to attempt to exert influence on their children.

Thus we can see that certain parents put pressure on their children when it comes to deciding on which subjects to opt for at the post-16 level and that these students would appear to be more likely to opt for 'gender-suitable' subjects, possibly as a direct result of parents' stereotypical attitudes and beliefs. This is not always the case; some parents give their children more leeway than others, some parents only exert pressure on their children as they want them to be able to get good jobs. However, it would appear that parental, and especially paternal pressure is an important means of reproducing gendered subject choice.

The influence of religion

A major factor that will affect a large number of the staff and students at the college and that is inextricably linked to their homes and families is religion, in particular,

Roman Catholicism, although the college also welcomes students of other religious backgrounds. Religion in Western society, has been cited by many feminists, such as Kate Millet (1970) in her book "Sexual Politics", as part of the patriarchal system that continues to operate in society ensuring women's oppression and inequality; masculine dominance is legitimated by religion and as Millet puts it, "patriarchy has God on its side" (Millet, 1970). Roman Catholicism may be seen as particularly patriarchal in its set-up; Catholics share with other Christians a belief in the divinity of Jesus Christ (male), the son of God (male) made man who came to earth to redeem humanity's sins (after Eve, a woman, tempted Adam, a male, and got that whole ball of human sin rolling) through His death and resurrection. Catholics follow the teachings of Jesus and trust in the promise of eternal life with God. Only male, celibate priests are ordained to the Catholic church as it teaches Jesus himself was male and celibate. Catholicism is very hierarchical in nature, "It is a pyramid with the Pope at the top, followed by the Cardinals, archbishops, bishops, priests and laity" (www.bbc.co.uk, 2003). All positions within the church above the laity can only be held by men. The Catholic church can also be seen as distinct in its devotion to Christ's mother, the Virgin Mary, its opposition to artificial methods of contraception which, it says, interfere with the transmission of human life and the sacred purpose of sex and "in its unflinching condemnation of abortion as the destruction of human life which, it believes, begins at the moment of conception" (ibid). The patriarchal, hierarchical nature of the Catholic church would appear to sit very well with that of the traditional nuclear family and thus it should perhaps be of little surprise to us that families who subscribe readily to such a religion and whose lives are influenced by Catholicism will hold very strict notions as to what is suitable behaviour as far as gender is concerned. Again, as a result of time constraints, this issue was not

discussed in any detail in the focus groups although in one or two instances, Catholicism was raised by the students.

> SN f history "I think I'd have to say that I'm influenced by my religion as well as by my parents. I've been raised to have certain beliefs, you know, to think a certain way, so it must be [an influence]."
> SA f history "You don't accept everything that the church says though do you, I mean you don't believe in stuff like 'not living with someone before marriage, no sex before marriage', all that stuff, do you?"
> SN f history "I do believe in most of it, yeah. I mean, it's not something I've really thought about, I don't really question it; because I've been brought up that way, you just sort of accept it, don't you."
>
> ST f biology "I'd definitely describe myself as religious, I think if you're brought up in a Catholic household it just sort of happens, you get sucked in!"
> KE f biology "I know what you mean; it's like part of your life from when you're really young – all the way through school there were all the nuns and priests 'an that, you have to go to mass all the time, even here they have masses quite regularly."
> GM f biology "And you've got to go to those 'poxy' general RE lessons here and I'm not even Catholic! It's so annoying."
> KE f biology "Well, you did choose to go to a Catholic college!"

The majority of the students interviewed, reported having religious backgrounds, whereby one or both of their parents were described as being particularly religious, although only a few of the students described themselves as strict Catholics. Half of the staff interviewed purported to being practising Catholics with several others admitting to being lapsed Catholics. Here are some of the results from interviews with the students that indicate how religion may also play an influential part in their lives:

> EI f sociology "Both of my parents are Catholic, but really it's only my mother who takes it seriously these days. She goes to mass every week without fail - she even found a church to go when we went to France, and then she makes the rest of us go at Christmas and Easter, you know, special occasions and we can't get out of that. We've all been confirmed an' that, and I suppose I do believe in the basics – I believe in God and Jesus 'an that, but it was someone's stupid idea to have mass on a Saturday night or Sunday morning and so I can never really go to church. I'm either out or recovering from the night before!"
>
> SD m biology "I'm definitely from a religious family, Catholic, obviously. I used to be an altar boy an' everything, although you probably wouldn't guess that now. I must admit I don't go to church half as often as I used to. When I first stopped

going regularly I used to go to confession but I don't even bother doing that anymore; I got fed up with it. Both my parents still go though, they take my Gran."

LT f French "My family are all Catholic. I am a Catholic, but I can't say I'm very strict, although my parents are. A lot of what the church believes is really old fashioned, you know, like not being able to use contraception and not being able to live with someone before you get married. I just think that's stupid, I mean, imagine you got married to someone, moved in with them, then realised that you really couldn't stand them – and then the church won't let you get divorced! They've got it all worked out! I've told my mother that whoever I marry I'll have to live with them first – she wasn't exactly very happy about it, but I pointed out to her that we were living in the twenty-first century!"

DE f geography "When you're brought up a Catholic it's like your whole life revolves around it. All your friends and your parents' friends are Catholic, you go to Catholic schools, Catholic clubs – it's not something to take lightly that's for sure! My mother is church this, church that - sometimes even our summer holidays are spent with people from church. We went to Lourdes last year and it was an amazing experience, it's just sometimes it would be nice to get away from the whole Catholic thing."

One of the other female students interviewed discussed how being a 'not-very-strict'

Muslim affected her life:

RB f physics "Our family is Muslim but we're certainly not strict Muslim; my father tries to be, but he's fighting a losing battle with me and my brothers – it's a bit like in the film *East is East*! Have you seen that? It's hilarious! Nearly all my friends are Muslim mind, not on purpose, it just sort of happened that way – we've all got something in common I suppose and it just makes life easier."

Several of the Catholic teachers at the college also conversed about their beliefs:

DS f masculine-identified subject "I would consider myself to be a devout Catholic and so religion does play quite a large part in my life. It's certainly influenced my beliefs on things – Catholic doctrine becomes embedded in your belief system and having my faith helps me, I think. As someone who's not especially tolerant I find that I force myself to be more accepting and I do work hard in all areas of my life. Perhaps something that's a bit more negative about Catholicism though, is the way that you're made to feel so guilty about everything – no matter how hard you try you just can't escape the guilt!"

MD f neutral-identified subject "I try to have quite a healthy outlook as far as being a Catholic is concerned. I don't subscribe to all of its teachings because, to be quite frank, some of it is outdated rubbish. I do go to mass most Sundays though and I suppose, without wishing to sound crass, I do try to live the best life I can."

> SV m neutral-identified subject "I confess to being a lapsed Catholic. I think when you're brought up a Catholic you have it rammed so far down your throat that you can't help but 'gag' slightly. I mean, when I was young as well everything was so strict; you think about the way the nuns were with the kids and they'd never be able to get away with some of the things they did these days. My wife tells a story of how she had to be scrubbed almost raw in a freezing cold bath because she'd talked to a boy! Very Christian! I will still go to church on the odd, rare occasion and I mean being brought up Catholic would suggest it has had some impact on my life, but nothing more than that really."

Catholicism certainly seems to be a very 'powerful' and somewhat exclusive religion to the 'outsider'; as a non-Catholic teaching in a Catholic college I really did feel like an outsider at times as I observed the many outward displays of Catholicism. All Catholics, it would seem, learn a huge number of prayers by rote clearly from a very young age and as these prayers are never written down anywhere it was always impossible for me to join in with them (thus rendering me speechless and lemon-like at the side of the college hall). Similarly with the hymns - despite having regularly attended a non-Catholic church as a child and having played the organ in the Sunday club, I had never heard of any of the Catholic hymns. Also, although I have been confirmed a Christian in the Anglican Church, I am unable to take bread and wine during a Catholic mass (the same rule does not apply to Catholics in an Anglican Church) and thus had to be blessed by the Priest whilst crossing my arms across my chest, again feeling a little silly and somewhat alienated. There was a definite sense that everyone else had been 'indoctrinated' within this Catholic world; the students that had been raised according to the Catholic Church appeared almost automated on such occasions. Such visible evidence of the influence of the Church on the actions of these students and teachers might be used to suggest that other areas of their lives might also have been influenced by the Church to some extent.

In conclusion then, we are able to witness the strong influence that family life can have on individuals. Where students have been raised in families that are

'traditional', Catholic and patriarchal in form; where parents hold certain gender-stereotyped views and notions of what is 'right and proper' behaviour for a particular gender; and where parents are reported as being major influences on students' lives it may well be the case that students' post-16 subject choice is affected and that gender divisions are reproduced.

Chapter Seven

Conclusions

My research has attempted to shed light on the continuing reproduction of gendered subject choices at post-16 in a college of further education, despite the implementation of the National Curriculum, Curriculum 2000 and the now prevalent ideology of equality of opportunity for men and women in society.

The research is feminist in that gender is my focus and the whole research process has been undertaken from my own individual, feminist standpoint. Although I do not agree that there are such things as distinct and separate 'feminist methods', I have made use of method as a feminist. This includes the use of reflexivity throughout the research process and an examination of the power relationships involved in my research; this is particularly important due to my being a teacher in the college where my research took place. Ethical issues were also considered in light of this position. My research was not intended as a piece of action research, however, it has tried to contribute to the knowledge that is necessary if change is to occur.

The research has highlighted several key agents as having a possible effect on the reproduction of gendered subject choice at post-16. One of the most powerful themes that arose from the research is that of student sexuality and gender identity. Definitions of masculinity and femininity situated within the hetero-normative environment of the college would appear to have a quite powerful influence over the lives of the students and thus may feed in to the reproduction of gendered subject choices for these students.

First, students in the 16-18 age group are keen to see themselves as young adults. Moving away from the controlled, child-like environment of the school into an altogether more free, adult, college environment allows these individuals to demonstrate

their maturity to others, to express their new 'adult' identity. This was the case for both males and females in the sample, although it seemed particularly pertinent for males, as they were able to leave behind the childish behaviour that it would appear was almost expected of them in schools. Certain of the students exhibited their 'maturity' by criticising the college for being 'too much like school', however the majority embraced the new freedoms that the college had to offer.

Tied into the apparent requirement for these students to present themselves as 'young adults' as opposed to children, is the need for them to define themselves as 'sexual beings' or more accurately, 'heterosexual beings' in the eyes of the opposite sex. Discussions of who was 'fit'[1] and 'who fancied who' were central for these students, and it was also important to be seen to be actively seeking relationships with the opposite sex. For both male and female students it appeared that presenting oneself as actively 'sexual' either by being in a relationship or by seeking one out, was a part of college life. For the students, defining themselves as both mature and sexual beings can be seen in terms of the dominant forms of both gender identity and sexuality, that were apparent in the college.

First, it must be noted that sexuality in the college was very much framed by heterosexuality. As a result of the Catholic belief that homosexuality is 'unnatural' and 'sinful', the fact that this was a Catholic college meant that being 'gay' would not be regarded as 'acceptable' by a number of college members (staff and students). Dominant forms of masculinity and femininity were thus established, negotiated and 'policed' in such a climate.

As far as masculinities were concerned, several types were seen as acceptable. Supporting the work of such sociologists as Epstein (1998) and Martino (1999), there

[1] Fit – attractive, 'fanciable'

was evidence to suggest that in a post-16 environment, being studious was now an acceptable form of masculinity, in fact for many of the males in the sample, it was one of the key ways in which they were able to demonstrate their new found 'maturity'. This enables middle-class males to prepare for their position in the labour market via higher education, leaving behind in school the notion that studying is 'feminine'.

However, although being studious was an acceptable form of masculinity at the college, in terms of a 'pecking order', these males were not at the top. This position was held by a group of 'cool lads' some of whom were good at sport, and others who were successful in terms of the positive 'attention' they received from females. In the main, this group continued to dismiss a 'work ethic' and were still in the business of messing around during lessons; their sporting prowess ensured them a privileged position at the college whereby both students and teachers almost glorified them. However, it *was* possible for a studious male to be considered 'cool', if he possessed either sporting ability or was perceived to be 'successful with women'. These 'cool lads' were the males that 'led' the 'policing' of other students' sexuality around the college via systems of verbal and occasionally physical abuse.

Dominant femininity at the college was strongly linked to both 'maturity' and being attractive to the opposite sex. This might be demonstrated by commenting on boys' childish behaviour, 'policing' those girls who did not fit the 'feminine profile', dating the 'cool boys', and for certain students, rejecting college altogether as 'boring' and devoting time to the 'adult world' of older boyfriends, paid work and going out.

Students' perceptions of subjects, (and thus, in the main students' options at A/S and A level) seemed to fit well with the dominant forms of sexuality that were apparent in the college. Scientific subjects and technical subjects such as physics, chemistry, computer studies and maths were seen by many as being more suitable for

males. Subjects perceived by many as being better suited to females were mainly arts and humanities subjects including English, languages, Sociology, Religious studies and Health and Social Care. In terms of subject status, it tended to fit that the subjects perceived to be the more difficult subjects were the male subjects, whereas subjects such as sociology were thought of as being 'easy'. Such a perception ensured that the 'cool boys' were able to take the 'feminine' subject of sociology; opting for an 'easy' subject suitable for 'girls' displayed their lack of commitment to work. The fact that these 'cool boys' did opt for sociology 'unproblematically' however, raised the possibility that sociology is not gendered, as I had first thought, or is perhaps ambivalent. This is might be a problem worthy of further exploration. Male and female students taking subjects considered 'unsuitable' as far as gender is concerned were subject to 'policing' via comment from students and teachers alike.

Also connected to sexuality and gender identity was the reading of particular magazines. Magazines aimed at young men and women that contain quite strict demarcations as to what masculinity and femininity *should* be were read by all students in the sample and were frequently carried around college by both males and females. It might be argued that putting these magazines on display reinforced either the masculinity or the femininity of the student concerned.

Additionally, as a sociology teacher having to discuss feminism, it was noted that feminism has become a 'dirty word' and that girls could not be feminine and feminist. This was demonstrated by hostility from both males and females in class when discussing feminism, even those female students who were clearly aware of gender inequality in society.

Thus it might be argued that students at the college were under considerable pressure to conform in terms of the dominant definitions of sexuality at the college and

that subject choice was very much a part of those definitions. Within such a climate, gendered subject choice would inevitably be reproduced.

As well as sexuality and gender identity, the college's 'hidden curriculum' was noted as a possible factor in influencing student behaviour and thus their choice of subject. Examination of interaction in the classroom between both students and teachers revealed that well-documented patterns of discriminatory behaviour continue as an accepted part of college life.

First, students and teachers alike reported that boys are more badly behaved than girls in the classroom situation and thus usurp more teacher time than their female counterparts. Such behaviour was apparently accepted as normal by all students and teachers ('boys will be 'boys') and certain male teachers even seemed to 'enjoy' such behaviour. Equally, all staff and students appeared to be in agreement about their vehement dislike for 'loud girls'; as Riddell reported, 'breaking role' is generally regarded as unacceptable. The general pattern of behaviour then (where boys were more disruptive) resulted in the majority of male students being 'known' to the teachers whereas certain more quiet, well-behaved students (usually female) often went unnoticed. This 'invisible women' phenomenon as noted by sociologists such as Stanworth (1983) seemed to be evident in most classrooms at the college, but appeared to be surprisingly noticeable in the male-dominated subjects. An exclusionary 'masculine culture' of male staff and students served to ensure the one or two female students opting for such subjects were made to feel like 'outsiders', 'lonely' and 'invisible' at the back of the classroom. Such a 'classroom culture' excluding women might be a key reason for the reproduction of gender-stereotyped subject choices at post-16 as it signals to female students that they are not welcome in certain subjects.

It would appear that such feelings were not experienced by the minority of male students in the female-dominated subjects however, and that female teachers differed quite considerably from their male counterparts in their acceptance and support of these students.

As well as treating the students differently, female and male teachers were notably different in their perceptions and attitudes towards subject choices, equal opportunities and gender roles, where the majority of the male teachers held stereotypical and often sexist beliefs. Several male teachers were extremely dismissive of equal opportunities and held beliefs about gender-suitability for certain subjects. Again, if such beliefs were communicated to female students wishing to opt for 'traditional male' subjects such as physics it may well have affected their decisions.

Sexual harassment was noted as a problem at the college by both female students and staff members and might be seen as an extension of the 'gendered culture' amongst male staff and students at the college discussed earlier. Cockburn (1991) discusses how sexual joking is used in the workplace as a form of control over women and certainly in the college, frequent use of this type of joking particularly by male members of staff caused much discomfort and uneasiness. Thus there is also support for Riddell (1992) and the idea that male teachers create an "ethos of masculinity in the classroom" (Riddell, 1992, p-151); perhaps opting for a subject where this 'gendered culture' prevails is a rather unattractive option for many females and so provides another possible explanation of the reproduction of gendered subject choice at post-16. It also suggests that having women teachers is more important than simply supplying female students with role models; it would appear that they also create a classroom that is more gender-neutral. Many male teachers it would seem create a 'masculine' environment that is often experienced as hostile by girls.

It might be argued then that female students experience 'symbolic violence' within the classroom situation where such an 'ethos of masculinity' is created. Female students feel alienated, excluded, as if they do not belong – male teachers and students ensure that it is male values that are dominant. For these girls, escape is possible by opting for 'feminine subjects' where they feel comfortable and included, thus reproducing gendered subject choices. It is also possible to explain the exclusion of ethnic minority students via the use of 'symbolic violence'. Like working class and female students, ethnic minority students are made to feel unwelcome and 'out of place' by a culture which excludes them for example, the highly practised Catholic rituals are not to be accessed by 'outsiders'.

Careers advice was also highlighted as being problematic by students at the college; students appeared to have received little or no advice and the onus was placed on the students to seek advice in the first instance. Careers advice at the college then does not fall into the same category of gender and ethnicity stereotyped advice received by the students in Mirza's 1992 study. However, lack of appropriate advice and direction that could provide support for students opting for subjects that may not be considered gender-appropriate is perhaps by its absence as 'guilty' of reproducing gendered subject choices as poor advice might be.

Finally, home background was identified as another possible influence on these students' subject choices. The majority of the students and staff referred to their parents as having a major influence on their lives and then went on to describe their parents as having quite traditional, stereotypical beliefs as far as gender was concerned. These beliefs certainly extended to the way in which students reported their parents as viewing subject choices. In many instances it would seem that parents and particularly

fathers, were keen that their children opted for gender-suitable subjects and it would appear that they communicated this desire to them.

It emerged that traditional gender roles were to be found in the bulk of homes belonging to the staff and students and that, in many instances, these roles were accepted as being right and proper. This tied quite neatly into the fact that most individuals in the sample were Roman Catholic, a religion that I have reported as being 'particularly patriarchal' in its set up. For staff and students being raised within such a climate, traditional gender roles would be regarded as normal and expected, as would different expectations of men and women, and what is and should be masculine and feminine in our society. Therefore it might be expected that suitably gendered subject choices are made and reproduced within this framework.

Where an individual's 'habitus' is seen as shaping their very existence, family background is an integral part of that 'habitus' and thus will affect all aspects of an individual's life, including their subject choices. We might remind ourselves here that the majority of students who took part in the research were from middle-class backgrounds. This is important when we look at 'cultural capital'. Parental 'support' or 'pressure' can be seen as having the wherewithal or 'cultural capital' to take advantage of education in pursuit of careers. This might explain why so many parents in the sample were reported as 'taking great interest' in their children's education and 'pressurising' them to opt for particular subjects. This is particularly interesting when we look at the example of the male who opted for Health and Social Care, as he is one of the few individuals in the sample who is working class. Access to 'cultural capital' might provide an explanation as to why he reported that his parents did not put pressure on him in any way as far as his education was concerned and thus why he was able to opt for a 'gender-unsuitable' subject. Also in terms of gender, 'cultural capital' can explain why female

students only feel able to access 'gender-suitable' subjects. The 'negative capital' associated with being female together with 'symbolic violence' serves to prevent female students from feeling that they have either the 'ability' or the 'desire' to opt for the higher-status, 'masculine' subjects and the cultural reproduction of gendered subject choices continues.

I feel as though I am presenting a quite shockingly and somewhat depressingly predictable picture of the reproduction of gendered subject choice at post-16 where very little would appear to have changed in the last thirty or so years. Women are thus prepared for their gendered, segregated position in the job market. However, changes *have* been made and women's position in society *is* slowly improving which might be explained in terms of the fluid nature of culture and the process of its continuous redefinition. There is for example evidence of change in instances where parents are less traditional and less directive towards their children. There are also one or two instances where students have opted for 'gender-unsuitable' subjects apparently despite their parents. Does change occur despite or because of parents? Perhaps it is despite, but in homes where the children are given more freedom? As mentioned in the previous chapter, the sample used in this research was very small, mainly middle-class and for the most part, Catholic and it would be interesting to explore these issues further with a different sample.

As far as implications for change are concerned, several measures might be taken in the education system, both in colleges and the schools that feed them, that would attempt to redefine certain of our cultural beliefs.

First it is essential that subjects are marketed and taught to students in a gender-neutral way and that students of all genders should be given help, support and

confidence in all subjects. This would necessitate a change to the prevailing 'gendered culture of the classroom'.

Equal Opportunities should be given priority in educational establishments with all staff being provided with suitable training to assist them to deliver a gender-neutral curriculum. Students and teachers should be able to enjoy their time in education without being made to feel uncomfortable or not accepted in any way.

A high standard of careers advice must also play an important role in highlighting every opportunity available to students at all stages in their educational careers.

Finally it is important to remember that education does not exist in a vacuum and that, in particular, schools and colleges should work closely with the communities in which they exist in an attempt to promote a situation of *real* equal opportunity for all.

Perhaps then our definitions and redefinitions of what is and is not acceptable in terms of gender roles will begin to change and the reproduction of gendered subject choices will become a thing of the past.

Appendix

Interview schedule for sixth form students

Introductory questions

What do you think about the college?

What do you enjoy about college? What don't you enjoy?

Did you like/dislike school?

What did you enjoy most about school?

What did you least like about school?

Thinking about your earlier education; can you remember if boys and girls were treated differently?

Who were your favourite teachers in school and why?

Questions about subject choice

What subjects do you take here at the college?

How would you describe *subject?*

What made you choose *the subject? E.g. GCSE results, career choice etc.*

Is the *subject* interesting? Do you like it/dislike it? Why?

Do you find subject intimidating/ challenging? Why?

How were subjects marketed to you in school?

Why did you not choose science/arts subjects?

What could be done to make subject more interesting to you? Why?

Do you view particular subjects as masculine/feminine? Why?

Has this affected your decision to take any subjects?

Do you describe subjects/ label subjects in any other ways?

Do you think that boys and girls behave differently in class? In what ways?

Do you think that boys and girls are better or more suited to some subjects than others? If so, why?

Do teachers in college treat boys and girls differently? If so, how?

Is there a difference between male and female teachers? If so, which do you prefer and why?

Do you think that the fact that the college is Catholic affects equal opportunities?

Careers advice

What form did Careers advice take in school? Did you find it useful?

What careers advice have you received at college?

Do you think you will go on to university or will you leave to get a job?

Have you made a career choice?

If yes, When did you make your career choice?

What are your career aspirations? Do you know what else will you have to do to achieve them?

Life Outside College

Who do you consider to be the biggest influence on your life? (friends, family, church etc.)

Are you religious at all? If yes, to what extent and what do your beliefs entail??

Do you watch much TV

How do you think men/women are portrayed on TV?

Do you read women's/men's magazines? If yes, what do you think of them? If no, why not?

What do you do with your time outside of college?

Do you work outside college? Where? do you enjoy your job? Why?

Do you think that men and women are treated equally in society?

Do you think that males/females are treated differently in society? In what way?

Do you think males/females have an equal chance to get on in life?

Do you think sexual harassment is an issue that concerns you? Why/ Why not?

How do you see yourself in five/ ten years time? What do you trunk you will be doing?

Home

What are the occupations of your parents?

Is your family Catholic/religious?

How would you describe your relationship with your parents?

How many brothers and sisters do you have? What do they do? How is your relationship with them?

How is housework divided within your household?

Would your parents/siblings agree or disagree with the idea that men and women are suited to different tasks in life? If so, what are they? Or, why not?

Who makes the decisions in your household?

Would you say your parents have much influence over what you do?

When you were younger, what sort of games did you play?

Do you remember playing games or taking part in activities with your parents? If yes what were they?

What do your friends/parents think about you taking *subject?*

What kind of interest do your parents show towards your education?

Interview Schedule for College Teachers

How long have you been teaching?

How would you describe your subject?

Why do you think subject is predominated by males/females?

Do you think that one particular sex is better suited to this subject? Why?

Do you do anything to encourage girls/boys in your lessons?

Does one gender tend to dominate lessons or is it fairly evenly balanced?

Who are the best students in your class? Why do you think this is?

Which students do you think will be successful/unsuccessful?

What textbooks do you use? How do you find them?

What do you enjoy about your particular subject?
What were your reasons for taking up and teaching your subject?
Has the implementation of the national curriculum improved the sex ratio in your subject?

How do you (if indeed you do) promote your subject to school-leavers?

Is there an equal opportunities policy in the college? How does it affect you?

Do you think equal opportunities policies have had any impact on education?

Does the college's status as Catholic have any effect on equal opportunities?

Do you think that sexual harassment is an issue that concerns you? Why/Why not?

Are you Catholic?

Do you have a partner? If so, what is their occupation?

Do you share domestic duties?

Who makes the decisions in your household?

Do you think that males/females are treated differently in society? If yes, in what way?
What does your partner think?

Focus Group Schedule

What subjects are you studying?
What did you think about college life here?
What are the things you enjoy most about college? Why?
What are the things you enjoy least about college? Why?
What did you think about school?
Were girls and boys treated differently?
Do you think boys and girls are good at the same subjects? Why?
What kinds of things do you associate with particular subjects?
What made you choose *subject?*
What is your opinion on the *subject?*
Has your opinion of the subject changed since you have been here? (if yes why?)
Do you think girls or boys are better at the subject?
Is there anyone who tends to do better in class? Why do you think that is?
Is there a difference in the way boys and girls act in class?
Do teachers tend to treat boys and girls differently?
Do you think that males and females are suited to different subjects? If so, why?
Do you find any difference between male and female teachers? Which are better?
Do you think that the fact that the college is Catholic affects equal opportunities?
What careers advice have you received both in school and here at the college? How useful do you think it has been?

Do you think that men and women are suited to different tasks in life? Why/why not ?
Do you think that men and women are treated differently in society? If yes how?
Does anything have an influence on your lives? Who or what? And in what ways?
If you had a crystal ball to see into the future, what do you think you would see yourselves doing in ten/fifteen years time?

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