Tackling gender: girls, football and gender identity construction

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Tackling Gender: Girls, football and gender identity construction

by

Ruth Jeanes

A Doctoral Thesis
Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements
for the Award of Doctor of Philosophy of
Loughborough University

October 2006

School of Sport and Exercise Science

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Abstract

This thesis examines the construction of young girls' gender identity and the influence participation in football can have on this process. Increasing numbers of girls are now participating in football, a sport which has traditionally been connected with extreme forms of masculinity. The thesis examines the influence participation in football by girls can have on altering dominant and traditional gender assumptions and breaking down the construction of football as a masculine sport.

The thesis utilises a feminist post-structural theoretical positioning to enable an understanding of girls' identities as diverse and multiple. The literature reviewed firstly provides an examination of identity theory, girl culture and the influence on global discourses and local mechanisms on girls' gender identity construction. The second phase of the review examines the relevance of sport to the dominant gender order, girls' participation in sport and the potential of sport and football to offer a space in which girls and women can engage in alternative discourses to contest dominant gender values. The methodological approach draws on feminism and the sociology of childhood. A six-month ethnographic study was undertaken in a single school site with thirteen 10 and 11 year old girls. A multi-method, child friendly approach was used to encourage full and direct communication for the girls involved.

The study illustrated the diversity and complexity of young girls' gender identities. Global discourses influenced their belief and assumptions surrounding their visual identities, while their friends provided key sources of information about how these should be interpreted in their everyday lives. Football fitted into the girls' feminine gender identities fairly smoothly. Although some of the girls used football to construct 'alternative' identities, their participation had little impact on altering either dominant belief surrounding football or reshaping restrictive elements of feminine identities. Despite this the girls' experiences of football were positive, allowing them an open space where contestation of their own negative views about themselves occurs and extend the scripts regarding their own sports abilities and the
meaning of football to them. Even when appearing to contest the masculine construction of sport though, the girls’ experiences remained highly constrained by gender discourses.
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I cannot thank enough the school I worked with during this study, the teachers there and of course the girls themselves. I could not have produced this without you and you were a wonderful group of young people to spend time with.

At a more personal level I would like to use this opportunity to recognise the unflagging and continuous support of my parents. You have both always been there providing emotional and practical support. I’d also like to thank my girls, Rachel, Jen and Ruth for their continued support and keeping me sane and normal when I was in danger of sinking into an academic mire. More recently Shane and Laura have continued this role closer to home. Thanks girls I could not have survived without your kindness, generosity and laughter. Most of all thanks to Rob, you’ve always supported and believed in me, encouraged me and kept me calm as well as all the practical proof reading support you’ve given.

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Chapter 1
Introduction

1.1 Tackling gender: Girls, football and gender identity construction

Karen: “If you want to play football you should be able to, it shouldn’t matter that you are a girl”
Kathy: “Yes she should be able to play if she wants”
Ruth: “How about the ways the boys treat her?”
Alison: “Well they think it is their sport don’t they? They think girls shouldn’t be playing.
Sarah: “They don’t believe us when we say we play football, they say we don’t”
Alison: “They don’t like girls being able to do it because we might be better than them and they like football because it helps their masculinity”.
Ruth: “If it helps boys be masculine what does it do for you?”
Alison: “I become the girly girl who likes playing football but getting dressed up as well”
Ellie: “And me, when I want to be girly and wear skirt I am but I also like playing football as well and doing boyish things sometimes. It just depends how I feel and what I want to be like.”

This thesis examines the relationship between girls’ involvement in football and their construction of gender identity. It does so at a time when the rapid pace of growth in female football participation is considered by many to challenge the complex gendered constraints that have traditionally restricted women’s sports participation. Over the last 15 years, female participation in football has witnessed an exponential rise. In 1993 there were 80 affiliated girls teams, in 2004-2005 there were over 8000. More women and girls take part in affiliated competitions regulated by the governing body in football than any other sport (House of Commons, July 2006). According to the FA, 1.6 million women and girls now take part in recreational football (Evidence submitted to the House of Commons, July 2006) with particularly rapid increases among girls and young women of primary and secondary school age. Women and girls are therefore becoming more prominent in football, and football is becoming a more normalised part of many girls’ lives. It is simplistic however to assume that these developments mean the power of the masculine sports establishment is diminishing: girls remain a small minority
More fundamentally, changes within football are occurring within a cultural context within which femininity itself is strongly contested as problematic and the term ‘girl’ is increasingly diversifying. Traditionally ‘girl’ has been associated with weakness, vulnerability, gentleness and to some extent invisibility (Valentine, 2004). The contemporary western girl constructed by the media has deviated somewhat to incorporate a rebellious, independent ‘new breed’ of girl who knows what she wants and has the means to ruthlessly pursue it (Harris, 2004). Girls are more visible than ever before and they are able to present multiple identities which contest and challenge the restrictive, submissive, traditional version of girl. The image of the educated, professional young women with a consumer lifestyle is now a powerful stereotype that girls aspire to (Harris, 2004). Set against this and providing an alternative pathway is an aggressive non-conformist identity displayed by many girls and highlighted in research as an alternative new ‘bad girl’ (Simmons, 2002). This image is far removed from the ‘sugar and spice’ construction of girl in the past.

However, the new autonomous versions of girls are still underpinned by many of the traditional feminine ideologies. Girls can be independent and adventurous, rebellious and aggressive but they are still expected to look good and appear visually feminine whilst they are being so. Although the meaning of femininity is extending and acceptable feminine behaviours are diversifying, discourses governing female body image and appearance appear to be strengthening. As Butler (1993) suggests the norms of femininity are now largely aesthetic and corporeal. Furthermore, the age at which girls are paying attention to these discourses is falling: today “the commercial perception seems to be that women are never too young to be self conscious about their bodily appearance and to define their identity in relation to a relatively narrow set of social and cultural reference points” (Russell and Tyler, 2002: 628). In contemporary society the pinnacle girls should aspire to
is a thin, muscular, hardened body shape. This is represented by a myriad of female celebrities who portray the thin, svelte, usually unobtainable image, as the ideal girls should aspire to. Through this girls continue, although subtly, to be controlled and restricted. However, this control is presented through rigorous marketing as a choice for girls, an opportunity to be the modern woman and ‘have it all’, control their own destiny (Bordo, 1983). Through the influence of lifestyle and fashion magazines, the internet and television, young girls seem to be taking carefully planned routes into appropriate feminine consumer culture (Russell and Tyler, 2002). The pressure to make this choice and construct the appropriate image is evident in the increasing number of girls developing eating disorders (tripling between 1988 to 1993, Hoek and Van Hoeken, 2003). In order to generate the correct look, most girls have to restrict their diet somewhat whilst others take this to an extreme with little regard for the consequences to their health. Juxtaposed to this is the increasing rise of childhood obesity affecting both boys and girls. Ironically whilst the number of girls with eating disorders rises, there is a belief within society that the majority are actually eating more and exercising less than ever before leading to the fear of a health crisis when this generation of girls move into adulthood.

Contemporary girlhood is therefore a shifting and continually diversifying concept. Restrictions on girls’ identities are still evident but they are being framed by the media as underpinned by choice and autonomy. In ‘reality’ there are more choices for girls, femininity is broadening. However, the broader notions of girl are still restricted by certain limiting gender discourses. Girls have a wider range of discourses to drawn on when constituting themselves but to be successful they must work most closely within those that appears to be heavily underpinned by traditional stereotypes.

This research locates girls’ experiences within this context. It examines at a local level how girls construct their identities, the influences within their lives and how football participation can affect this process. Girls continue to have a problematic relationship with sport. Despite rising number of female participants, sport continues to play a significant role in creating and
legitimising dominant forms of masculinity but holds no significance in dominant notions of femininity. Football, in particular, embodies and reinforces the image of sport as an exclusively male domain. Football is one of the most popular sports in the world (Sudgen and Tomlinson 1994, Brown, A. 1998). It has enormous cultural and economic influences (Sklair 1991, Sugden and Tomlinson, 1998) but has generally been viewed as a male orientated sport with very strong links to masculinity and male identity (Mean, 2001). The huge numbers of women becoming involved in the sport presents something of a problem for football's continued masculine identity. However, although the challenge female participation presents is influential in questioning what constitutes femininity and masculinity in modern culture, it is unclear whether it has significantly changed dominant gender beliefs or football as a masculine sport. Previous research suggests that the rise in female participants actually presents minimal challenge to breaking down either the gender order or the construction of football as masculine, (Scraton, Fasting, Pfister, and Bunuel, 1999). Other research examining the influence of women participants into traditionally masculine sports has also illustrated a dichotomy of results. Most prominent of these is research examining female body builders (Heywood, 1998; Lowe, M. 1998;) that highlights the contradictory effects participation in sport has on female gender images. Notions of females as weak and helpless are challenged through the enhancement of muscles to proportions exceeding those of the average male. In contrast, images of femininity are adhered to and reinforced by the sexualisation of the sport with competitors wearing 'skimpy' bikinis, dying their hair and having breast implants to reassure us they are still ‘female’ (Guthrie and Castelnuovo, 1999). Using sport to contest and challenge restrictive gender regulations is therefore a highly difficult and complex area.

The masculine nature of the football culture can be problematic for girl participants. They must accommodate female gender within the football subculture that has been deliberately coded as male. Previous research has illustrated that high numbers of girls drop out of sport in their teenage years because it is incompatible with a feminine identity. In particular PE has been highlighted as instrumental in discouraging girls from continuing to participate
because they have such poor experiences in this area which is heavily laden with gendered traditions and stereotypes (Williams and Bedward, 1999). Girls have been shown to dislike the participation experiences they gain from mixed settings, the clothes they are required to wear in PE, the requirement for getting sweaty and muddy and the subsequent showers and generally feel PE holds limited purpose for them as they move into an adult feminine identity (Choi, 2000; Scraton, 1992; Williams, 1993; Williams and Bedward, 1999; Wright, 1997; 1999; 2004;). Within this context, female participation in football is growing nonetheless.

1.2 The study

This study examines girls' football participation within this complex and contradictory context. It analyses the influence participation in football can have on pre-adolescent girls and their gender identity construction. It provides an ethnographic study of thirteen 10 and 11 year old girls who took part in an after-school girls coaching club. Utilising the girls' perspectives the research seeks to understand girls' experiences. The aims underpinning the study are:

- To examine the experiences of girls participating in football.
- To assess how football experiences contribute to the construction of girls' gender identities.

The associated objectives are:

1) To examine how pre-adolescent girls construct their gender identity.
2) To identify the influences on girls' gender identity construction.
3) To examine girls' experiences of participating in football.
4) To examine whether participating in football impacts on girls' gender identity construction and in what way.
5) Through the research process, develop a methodology that allows girls to engage and express their experiences in ways most suitable for them.

This study has a number of contributions to make to existing knowledge examining girls and sport. At a general level there is limited research available examining either the sports experience or gender identity construction of girls of this age. The majority of sports research focuses on
adolescent girls as this is shown to be the age where most become disengaged from sport and drop out. The current study provides an examination of girls' views and beliefs about sport prior to the period where they are most likely to become uninterested in it.

The research has taken place at a local level, engaging directly with girls about their experiences, and has used this to develop an understanding of how they construct their identities and the place of football within this. There is limited information in sports research directly from girls, with researchers tending to focus on the opinions of practitioners, teachers and other professionals because they are easier to access and their views are generally considered more valid. Information that is available, (e.g. Renold, 1997; Skelton, 2000; Swain, 2000 Williams and Bedward, 1999; Wright, 1999) tends to focus on girls' experiences within the formal setting of physical education whereas this study focuses on relatively informal participation experiences outside the curriculum and places this within the context of girls' wider cultural experiences and lives. In this way it examines how girls' broader experiences provide the platform for how they view and integrate sport into their lives. It aims to identify girls' attitudes and beliefs at this age, as a step to understanding how these compare to those held by girls if and when they become disaffected with sport.

Research focusing on girls' gender identity construction tends to examine either early childhood (Davies, 2003; Francis, 1998), or adolescence, as this is when girls are perceived to be attempting to establish the identity that will take them through into womanhood (Bloustien, 2003; Harris, 2004; Proweller, 1998). Both identity construction and sports participation is often viewed as relatively unproblematic for the pre teen age group. This life period rather than being researched with children directly is often recounted in research by adult participants and is viewed with adult hindsight as being something of a untroubled 'golden era' when girls can if they wish enact 'tomboy' identities unquestioningly and engage continually in masculine pursuits (Scraton et al, 1999; Cox and Thompson, 2000; Mennesson, 2000). This study uses a feminist post-structural approach and the identity construction theories of
Butler (1990) and Paechter, (2003) to examine the complexity and multiplicity of girls' identities at this age. Post-structuralism focuses on deconstructing the concept of the 'subject' and moving away from a fixed and static notion of identity. Rather than a humanist perspective, which sees identity conceptualised as a stable and relatively fixed entity, poststructuralist thinking views identity as being achieved through interactions with multiple discourses (Davies, 1993). It has provided feminist theory with a range of critical concepts including discourse, deconstruction and difference (Weedon 1987) all of which have been relevant for the current research. Feminist post-structuralism enables the recognition that gender discourses constructed at a global level and interpreted through local structures and systems shape and guide girls' behaviours and attitudes long before they reach the supposed 'defining' period of adolescence.

The research is conducted using a methodology guided by methodological principles from feminist and childhood studies. The use of a feminist approach recognises that female knowledge has been silenced in research and indicates a commitment to ensuring this is resolved. Adopting an approach reflecting theories developed in childhood studies has ensured a commitment to using methods which enable young people to communicate effectively and their viewpoints be heard (James, Jenks and Prout, 1998). This approach complements the overarching feminist theoretical framework. Girls, when examined through both a feminist and childhood sociological lens are subordinated by both male/female and adult/child binaries. They lack power as females and as children. The research looks to ensure the girls' opinions are at the forefront as they have been silenced and marginalised within the research process by both dominant gender and adult discourses.

The research process allows the girls' voices to be heard continually and their experiences to guide the understanding of the research objectives. Until recently there has been limited work undertaken in sport and leisure research employing sensitive methodologies to enable child participants to express their views (MacPhail, 2001; MacPhail, Kinchin and Kirk, 2003; Oliver and Lalik, 2001). An ethnographic approach has been used working in a single
An after-school girls football club provided the mechanism through which the ethnography took place. Research has been undertaken in the school for a six month period. Some research initially took place during the football club sessions but as the relationship developed between the researcher and the girls this was extended to meetings at lunchtimes. Initially interviews were conducted with girls in ones or twos but it proved to be more beneficial to speak to them in small friendship groups. The girls felt more secure in this setting and generated conversations through one another. Over the course of the six months the researcher worked with a group of girls nearly every lunchtime and became firmly embedded as a constant part of the girls’ lives. The researcher has been able to observe the girls in their ‘normal’ every day setting, see first hand the key individuals within their lives and observe their interactions with friends and peers. The ethnographic approach has also assisted with understanding the daily operations and organisation of the school where the research took place in. The researcher attended numerous school functions to develop a familiarity with teachers, pupils and parents and allow them to view the researcher as another adult in the school as opposed to a strange visitor. Working with the girls as their coach as well as a researcher has been a further way to improve the relationships with the girls. It allowed the development of a trusting partnership with them and one that they felt comfortable communicating in. A rough outline was developed for each meeting but each was very responsive to what the girls wanted to do in terms of how the session was structured and what methods were used. The ethnographic approach has enabled time for experimentation with methods. A multi-method approach has been adopted and the ethnography allowed different methods to be used with the girls without the pressure of always needing data to be collected. As a result the methods have been refined throughout the research process. Certain techniques were used continually whereas others were found to be beneficial for one or two sessions.

1.3 Structure of the thesis
The thesis is structured to reflect the diverse aims and objectives examined. When analysing both gender identity and football the interplay between global discourses and their dissemination through local structures is continually evident. The thesis is structured according to this. Chapter two examines the theoretical framework used in the research, feminist post-structuralism. As this has been developed building on preceding feminist theories these are also examined to understand what in particular feminist post-structuralism is able to offer to the current research. The chapter provides an examination of the global construction of western women and girlhood, what is understood by dominant gender discourses before analysing how gender identity construction is conceptualised using a post-structuralist framework. Utilising Paechter’s (2003) global and local framework the review examines how gender discourses are constructed and perpetuated through mediums such as the mass media and celebrity culture which persuade women that they should be constructing their identity in particular ways. The relevance of the body to this process is given particular attention. Chapter two also provides an review of literature assessing the local influences affecting young girls’ gender identity construction. The influence of family, school systems and peers are all examined to understand how these contribute to girls’ individual interpretations of gender identity and how they use these to construct their sense of selves. The chapter highlights the delicate balancing act girls face between adhering to and resisting gender norms to construct complex and multiple gender identities.

The research has a dual foci, examining both girl culture and girls’ experience of sport. The literature review is structured to reflect this. Chapter three provides a specific examination of research into women and girls’ experiences in sport. Again the global/local framework is used to guide the organisation of the chapter. The participation of girls and women in sport is first considered demonstrating the gap between male and female participation as well as the noticeable decreases in participation that occur when girls move from childhood to adolescence and into womanhood. This supplies the context for the remainder of the chapter which seeks to explore at a global and local level why this is the case. The chapter examines how sport is constructed as
masculine through its organisation and administration and is then magnified
and disseminated through the sports media. The role the media plays in
constructing restrictive sexuality discourses to control female participation is
examined and the influence this has on how women develop their sporting
bodies and display themselves within the sporting arena are considered. The
literature examined demonstrates how sport provides an arena for reinforcing
and extending dominant assumptions regarding male superiority and strength.
The second half of the chapter uses a global understanding of sport to
contextualise girls' sports participation experiences. Girls are shown to
generally have a negative experience within school PE which is heavily laden
with restrictive gender beliefs and values. Reflecting global discourses the
contradictions between the feminine body are shown to be important to girls at
an individual level in affecting how they view sport as sitting within their
identities. The chapter finishes by examining the potential of sport to provide
an arena for resistance and challenge of dominant gender discourses. As
illustrated, sport is a highly masculinised anti-feminine arena yet huge
numbers of girls are contesting this assumption through participation in the
most masculine of sporting domains. The chapter considers how girls and
women can potentially contest gender values through sport, the impact this
has on the dominant gender order and how females reconcile this process
within their identity. The balancing process required to achieve this is again
evident. The chapter highlights the need for understanding the relationship
between girls' identity and sport particularly in relation to girls' participation in
'masculine' sports. It also demonstrates that limited research has been
undertaken in this area to date particularly with pre-adolescent girls.

Chapter four provides a description of the methodological framework and
approach used in the research. The focus has been on developing a flexible
methodology that will suit the needs of the young girls involved in the
research, break down the complexities of discussing abstract concepts such
as gender identity but still providing in depth quality information on the
research objectives. The chapter examines the benefits of utilising a feminist
methodology for the current, research alongside positioning drawn from
childhood sociology. The chapter demonstrates the similarities between the
two areas with both seeking to give voices to minority repressed groups who are not often heard within public knowledge domains. The chapter outlines the benefits of an ethnographic approach for this type of research as it enables the researcher to build and develop trusting relationships where children feel comfortable as well as understand the research participants within their own worlds. The methodology is outlined and the underpinning behind the range of diverse methods adopted before providing an explanation of how the data collected from the multi-method approach will be analysed. The chapter concludes by offering an indication of how the methods are anticipated to work in practice.

Reflecting this the first of the results chapters, Chapter 5 initially provides a dialogue discussing the practicalities of the research process, how it was undertaken and how the methods were delivered and the response of the girls to these. The results chapters are structured to reflect the organisation of the literature review. The first chapter examines the girls’ understanding of identity, how this is affected by global discourses before examining how local influences, the school and family, affect girls’ identity construction and gendered values and beliefs. Chapter 6 examines how these values affect girls’ perceptions of sport. The chapter explores at a general level girls’ views on sport and how these are influenced by media constructions. It then moves on to examine girls’ views of football as a global game before examining their experiences of the sport at a local level and their own participation in the coaching sessions.

Chapter 7 draws the two results chapter together to analyse the data provided in the context of the research objectives, the post-structural theoretical framework and the literature examined. It investigates the complexities of girls’ gender identities and how they are influenced by the intersection of global discourses and structures. It examines the influences of girls’ friendship groups for affecting and shaping their identity construction. The girls relationship with sport is assessed and their experiences of participating in the football coaching sessions.
The final chapter provides the overarching conclusions for the research. It examines the contributions made to the research objectives and how it has extended knowledge in the anticipated areas highlighted earlier. The implications for policy and practice are considered, with particular attention to the relevance of the research for strategies to encourage non-sporty girls to be active. The thesis concludes with recommendations for the development of future research into the relationship between sport and young people's gender identity.
Chapter 2
Girls and Gender Identity Construction

2.1 Introduction

The objectives of this research address several broad areas including girls, identity and sport. The literature review chapters reflect these broad themes. Chapter two conceptualises gender and identity and examines the mechanisms through which identity is constructed, before discussing the influences on this process. It focuses on the generic feminist literature available in this area. The third chapter explores the significance of sport as both a gendered and a gendering arena. It examines how sport can provide a site for perpetuating gender regulations evident in wider society but can also be used by women to contest and challenge these norms. In both chapters two and three the general research topics are examined before focusing more closely on how the issues discussed relate to girls. In chapter two identity and identity construction is theorised before examining the influences specifically affecting young girls’ identity construction. In the third chapter the position of women in sport is discussed before illustrating the implications of this on girls’ understanding, participation and experiences within sport. The structure of the literature review, therefore, mirrors the focus of the study. Chapter two reflects the research aim to contribute more generally to the understanding of girls’ gender identity construction, whereas chapter three provides the literature which can assist with understanding the role of football participation in this process.

The purpose of chapter two is therefore two fold. Its first function is to examine the theoretical positioning of the research, explaining how the gendered focus has directed the research towards a theoretical framework underpinned by feminist thinking. This is done in the first half of the chapter, which reviews different strands of feminist theorising and considers how these have developed over the previous two decades. This analysis identifies the
theoretical perspective most appropriate for the current research feminist post-structuralism. This underpins the current study although feminist cultural studies has also been used to a lesser extent to provide some understanding of the role of sport in gender identity construction. The section discusses how the concepts provided by these theoretical approaches are relevant to the research, while also acknowledging a number of limitations in applying these theories for analysing girls, identity and football.

The second part of the chapter moves on to focus on the study’s specific key research themes of femininity, identity and gender discourses. It draws on theoretical research conceptualising the abstract concepts of gender and identity. The review examines how masculinity and femininity have been constructed as different, and considers the influence this has on our assumptions regarding men and women. Using the work of Foucault (1972, 1980) and Bourdieu (1977, 1990), the importance of the body within the construction of an ideal feminine identity is explored. The literature review examines the changing nature of femininity and the ways in which multiple feminine discourses are constructed and perpetuated in society. The review demonstrates, however, that there continues to be an idealised ‘hegemonic’ version of femininity. Girls and women learn the rules and regulations of this version of femininity through the global mediums of the mass media and popular culture. The influence of these cultural vehicles is assessed before examining the explicit structures and setting which transmit gender identities to girls. The review discusses research examining the influence of local networks, including schools, peers and parents, on girls’ gender identity construction. The theoretical assumptions adopted within the research highlight the potential for girls and women to contest dominant gender discourses. The review examines how girls and women can achieve this and develop alternative feminine identities. The section concludes by summarising the numerous discourses created by both global and local structures and settings. Interacting with these and ‘doing girl’ in contemporary society is an extremely complex process.
2.2 Theoretical framework

Feminism, with its focus on the experience and existence of women, offers an obvious starting point to guide the theoretical framework of this study. Over the last three decades feminist analysis has increasingly been applied to the analysis of sport, reflecting the wider development of feminist theorising throughout the second half of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century. Feminist theory is today a complex area in which multiple theoretical approaches have emerged, often building on each other and with close overlaps between them. Each different strand can be therefore viewed as a wave, building on the knowledge and findings supplied by the previous theory. Scraton and Flintoff (2002) stress the importance of recognising this incremental development, stressing that there are no distinct boundaries between each framework. Understanding from one should not be discarded simply because knowledge has expanded further.

It is evident, therefore, that while this study principally utilises feminist post-structuralism, this in turn draws on the legacies of preceding waves of theory. This section of the chapter therefore initially examines the key theoretical positions preceding feminist post-structuralism to show how these have influenced the development of concepts within the framework used in the study. Feminist post-structuralism is then examined, and the role that it performs within this research is outlined.

2.2.1 Liberal and Radical feminism

Liberal feminism is based on the assumption that women are disadvantaged by constraining institutional and structural barriers that need to be removed if women are to achieve equality in society (Hargreaves, 1994). Liberal feminists believe women will gain equality if discriminatory laws are challenged and changed, socialisation practices altered and individual consciousness raised (Scraton, 1990). Within sport, the liberal feminist approach has been influential in research that has focused on women’s lower participation rates that has used socialisation into and through sport as
explanations for female under-representation (Greendorfer and Lewko, 1978, Greendorfer, 1981; 1983; Greendorfer, 1981; Synder and Spreitzer, 1989). Sport policy has responded, making public bodies openly acknowledge that women should be considered as a participant target group. The value of these early theorisations has been in dispelling the myth that women's lower involvement in sport was resultant from biological rather than cultural shortcomings. However, liberal feminism has been extensively criticised for failing to acknowledge the complexities of gender relations. In sport, while liberal feminism acknowledges the discrepancy between women and men's participation, it fails to adequately address why this exists and how it is enforced by structures and beliefs within society.

Feminist theorists have therefore turned to other macro frameworks for a more critical approach to women’s experiences and position within the social world. Radical feminism focuses on the influence of male patriarchal power within society and identifies inequalities in the power relationships between men and women as the fundamental cause of women’s oppression. It uses the concept of patriarchy to understand how traditional views of masculinity and femininity are reinforced and accepted. Sexuality is seen as central to this subordination and men’s expectation of female sexuality (Scraton, 1992).

Radical feminism has been used in sports research to demonstrate how sport is a further site of male power over women (Cahn, 1994; Clarke, 1998; Griffin, 1989; Lenskyj, 1987). Radical feminist thinking sees women’s involvement in sport as controlled and restricted, primarily through their clothing and their need to present a heterosexual image (Griffin, 1992; Lenskyj, 1995). The theory has also been applied to raise awareness of the existence of violence and abuse towards women in sport (Brackenridge, 2001; Brackenridge and Kirby, 1997). Radical feminist researchers have also been responsible for contributing to the understanding of lesbianism and homophobia in sport (e.g Cahn (1994), Clarke (1998) and Lenskyj (1991) portrayals of how lesbians in sport and physical education are constructed as deviant, then silenced and stigmatised as abnormal), and the influence of radical feminism can also be seen in the number of women-only sessions created by leisure and sport
providers. The concept of a safe environment, away from men, where women could develop sport and leisure pursuits became accepted and acknowledged, reflects the radical feminist belief that women need to be freed from destructive relationships with men (Hargreaves, 1994).

2.2.2 Marxist and socialist feminism

Analyses of gender relations from a radical feminist perspective were perceived to be limited due to the sole focus on male and female relations. It is argued that viewing the major social divisions to be between men and women ignores the exploitation women face in capitalist societies, particularly through class inequalities (Hargreaves, 1990). Whilst radical feminists claim that male domination and female subordination is a result of the relationship between men and women, Marxist feminists challenge essentialist perceptions of human nature by claiming class is the root cause of women’s oppression and that problems of sexuality are secondary.

Research directed by Marxist feminist traditions (Deem, 1986; Griffin, Hobson, McIntosh and McCabe, 1982), maintains men control the means of production and are also likely to control systems that create dominant ideologies and maintain them (Wearing, 1998). Feminist sports and leisure researchers have applied this framework to sport to illustrate the numerous constraints that prevent women from participating. Deem (1986, 1988, 1992) utilised a Marxist framework to demonstrate how women, outside the work force were severely restricted in their leisure pursuits. A diverse range of women, in terms of ethnicity, class, age and marital status, were interviewed and observed to examine their leisure patterns. The results indicated that despite their diversity, there were common constraints to female participation. This was a result of their ‘obligations’ as a woman to do the housework, fragmented days and the need to define and construct leisure so it fitted in the demands of caring for small children (Deem, 1986). Deem’s work is recognised for using a Marxist framework to link the personal difficulties women face in accessing leisure to gender power relations evident in wider society (Wearing, 1998).
Although significant macro frameworks, which greatly extended the knowledge of issues surrounding gender and sport, both radical and Marxist feminism were criticised for failing to adequately theorise the complex inter-relationship between social structures and ideologies which influence gender relations. They were found to be too over deterministic by suggesting there was little an individual woman could do to make significant changes. (Costa and Guthrie, 1994; Scraton and Flintoff, 2002; Wearing, 1998).

Socialist feminism was developed to overcome the failing of Marxist and radical feminism to offer a holistic theory to understand both capital and patriarchal power sources. Socialist feminism draws on elements of radical feminism and Marxist theory. Gender, rather than being an addition to the analysis of class and culture, is placed centrally alongside class to emphasise a dual system of oppression – patriarchy and capitalism (Scraton, 1990: 11). It is considered that this offers a more complete framework to explain women’s experiences within sport, as an arena of male dominance, without losing the potential effects of class. Green, Hebron and Woodward (1990) utilised a socialist feminist framework to develop the themes from Deem’s work further. The research demonstrated again the inequalities of women’s access to leisure compared to men, and men’s social control of women’s private and public leisure experiences.

Socialist feminism, whilst providing a more complete framework than previous approaches, still had weaknesses. Again the lack of theorisation of resistance or challenge to either patriarchal or capitalist power is acknowledged. According to socialist feminism, women simply accept the restrictive circumstances imposed by patriarchal and capitalist dominance. All women are affected indefinitely and all men are perpetrators of this. This pessimistic approach suggests change can only occur if there is solidarity in attacking the structures of class and gender (Wearing, 1998). However, even when these shortcomings are accounted for, it is still felt that these theories can offer an umbrella framework for the research, as suggested by Wearing (1998). Namely, male domination and class inequalities are appreciated and utilised to understand female experiences, but with the recognition that it is necessary
to explore resistance to this repression and individual difference in experience.

2.2.3 Feminist cultural studies

The growing interest in women’s ability to resist and challenge traditional gender notions encouraged the introduction of a cultural studies perspective into feminist research. Earlier liberal, radical, and Marxist-feminist approaches to studying sport often focus on ‘distributional’ and ‘numerical’ issues (Whitson, 1990), such as unequal access, opportunities and facilities. Feminist cultural studies examines social life and places a greater importance on values and behavioural norms (Whitson, 1990). It is based on the assumption that cultural practices (such as sport) are contested terrains, areas where values, meaning and ideologies are reproduced and challenged (Donnelly, 1988). In contrast to other frameworks, within feminist cultural studies women, are not viewed as either passive recipients of oppressive ideologies or entirely free from social constraints, but as active agents capable of resistance and challenge.

Rather than being grounded in an ideological superstructure or economic infrastructure, critical cultural studies are a macro-social and micro-social concept (Barker, 2000). It looks at the political and economic aspects of social life without losing focus on the meanings individuals give to everyday practices. In sport, feminist cultural theorists draw on the interaction between Althusser’s (1971) notion of ideology and Gramsci’s (1971) concept of hegemony to explain the complexities of the relationship between gendered freedom and constraint in sport. Hegemony is described as

“the control of consciousness by cultural dominance through the institutions of society. Power and privilege are maintained through cultural hegemony, but struggles are often formed which challenge dominant forms” (Wearing, 1998: 61).

Gramsci originally used the concept of hegemony as a tool for critically examining the process by which a social group or class is able to establish its ideas and practices as common sense. Within sport hegemonic beliefs are
responsible for teaching boys that sport is a significant part of manliness and the subsequent exclusion and distancing of women from this domain (Connell, 1995). Hegemony theory attempts to move away from the false dualisms of human freedom and constraint, individual and society, and structure and agency that have burdened sociological theory. It does so by acknowledging that while human beings face structural constraints upon their lives, they are by no means duped by dominant ideologies. The relationship between individual and society proposed is both determined and determining or a product of both social relations and structures of power and conscious thought and action (Hargreaves, 1990).

The framework has been used to demonstrate sport does not simply mirror the gender relations identified in wider society, but actively creates and maintains dominant societal forces. Cultural theorists recognise however that space can be created for resistance and challenge and that no hegemony is complete or without question. Resistance is defined as the process by which groups or individuals who lack power refuse to submit fully to groups or individuals who hold power. Resistance and transformation must occur at a structural and ideological level, but transformation has to be achieved at a level of ‘material practice’ (Birrell and Therberge, 1994a: 363).

Feminist cultural theorists acknowledge that resistance by women and girls is not pure, it is not a simple matter of resisting dominant discourses, Instead resistance is mediated between conflicting issues of accommodation to the dominant order and opposition to it. Females who do challenge the debilitating structures of femininity still have to live in a society governed by gender norms and expectations (Leblanc, 1999). Feminist cultural studies recognise the potential impact such transformations could have on challenging broader cultural power relations once dominant and naturalised notions of gender relations have been broken down, and also the difficulty in doing so. There is always the potential that the dominant forces will resist attempts at transformation and recapture superiority through the cultural hegemony women are trying to break away from (Birrell and Theberge, 1994a).
Feminist cultural theory has been felt to offer a great deal to feminists analysing sports and has been used to examine the notion of female resistance to ideological beliefs and how hegemonic power continues to maintain sport as a masculine domain. Costa and Guthrie (1994), Hargreaves (1994), Mennesson (2000) and Scraton, Fasting, Pfister and Bunuel, (1999) have all used elements of this theory to demonstrate how individual women resist complying with gender stereotypes and contradict expectations based on male power within the sports arena. Mennesson uses interviews with French female boxers to understand how they define their identities as women whilst engaging in such an overtly masculine sport. The data collected demonstrates whilst the boxers felt they were creating new feminine identities, they still faced strong opposition from the logic of assumed binary gender opposites. Mennesson suggests whilst the boxers do challenge the dominant masculine hegemony by engaging in the sport, their presence does little to alter the hegemonic practices which dominate boxing. Scraton et al.'s cross national research used forty interviews conducted with top-level female footballers in England, Germany, Norway and Spain to investigate similarities and differences between their access to the game. The interviews were structured around six key themes: sporting biography, social networks, daily life, gendered identities, the body, sport and life plans. They revealed that whilst images of femininity are ‘diversifying’ as women gain access to traditionally male defined activities, they again did not always lead to a full transgression of hegemonic notions of femininity.

Feminist cultural studies have been used to compensate for the shortcomings of Marxist and socialist feminism and recognise the significant role that sport plays in conveying and legitimising dominant forms of masculinity and inferior femininity. Equally, sport is no longer seen as an "all or nothing phenomenon, as determinist interpretations imply," but rather a site of numerous contradictions (Hargreaves, 1990: 299). Hegemony is incomplete and women in sport are not fully acceptant of gender roles nor do they completely reject them. As with the other frameworks cultural studies has received criticism. This usually relates to its imprecision and lack of acknowledgement of individual circumstances. Rojek (1993) suggests whilst it does allow for the
emancipatory potential of leisure (and sport), its neglect of the body adds to its imprecision. He suggests cultural studies posits a universal ontology, which stresses the need for change to be achieved through the common experience rather than examining individual encounters within this process. It is suggested that although cultural theorists stress the ability for resistance and opposition there are hardly any convincing examples of successful oppositional activity. Challenges are instead seen as left to chance. Rojek (1993) develops this point to discuss how cultural studies also tends to position people as repressed and marginalised, yet still knowledgeable and capable of overturning dominant forces. This is felt by Rojek to present something of an unresolved paradox within the approach. He finds it difficult to accept that those within marginalised positions within society still have the capacity to overturn this position. Cultural studies is felt, therefore, to lack attention to the individual. The following theory examined, feminist post structuralism, goes some way to address this difficulty. Feminist post structuralism centres on the individual and the potential for multiple selves to resist dominant discourses. Particular attention to given to the body and how it can be used to comply with or achieve resistance against dominant societal forces. The following section explores this complex theory in more detail.

### 2.2.4 Feminist post-structuralism

Post-structuralism is the final theory examined in this section. This has provided the most relevant and applicable framework for the research. Feminist post structuralism represents a further development of feminist theory that offers a framework intended to accommodate a complex view of social life. In contrast with other macro frameworks, it does not offer a single explanation for social behaviour, recognising in particular both women’s ability to resist and challenge gender ideology and practice, and the diversity in women’s individual experiences. In this respect feminist post structuralism shares characteristics with feminist cultural studies which similarly recognises both the importance of individual woman and repression or resistance to dominant ideologies. However, under feminist cultural studies differences in these experiences and ways of resistance are not necessarily examined.
Feminist post-structuralism offers a means to overcome this by acknowledging the potential for diverse and multiple subjectivities.

Both feminism and post-structuralism are recognised as challenging traditional epistemologies by refusing to disregard politics, and instead focusing on the connections between knowledge and power to explain social dynamics. Whilst feminist researchers in the 1970s were confronting male knowledge, main stream epistemologies were being questioned by European post-structuralist theorists. The latter raised the issue of the supposed neutrality of more accepted approaches and argued that the fundamental categories of truth and knowledge were influenced by politics (Griffiths, 1995). Post-structuralism therefore offers a radical framework for understanding the relations between people and the social world and for conceptualising social change. It draws on the work of Foucault (1972, 1975, 1982) and Derrida (1982). Their theorising emphasises the need to question systems of thought and identity and the fixed notions of identity and social relations (Wright, 2004). Post-structuralism is particularly relevant for research exploring gender identity because it “raises questions about how selves are constituted, how power-knowledge relations change across times, places and in different social, political and cultural contexts” (Wright, 2004: 20).

Post structural theorising develops the concept of discourses to understand the way that social life is developed and why certain systems are taken up by individuals. Discourses function as a set of rules that specify what is, and what is not, appropriate in relation to all aspects of life. Discourses are understood as a set of meanings that are produced through written, spoken and/or visual representations and that circulate and constitute knowledge around the cultural and social practices of communities and institutions (Webb, McCaughtry and McDonald). Foucault describes discourses as “practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak. Discourses are not about objects, they constitute them and in the practices of doing so conceal their own intervention” (1972: 49). It is through discourses that subjects and subjectivities are formed. They provide a means to
understand what resources are available to individuals and how they exist within the social world.

Disciplinary practices enforced through discourses are seen as creating binary divisions in society, e.g. healthy/unhealthy, sane/mad, legal/delinquent, male/female, that become a means of normalisation and social control. One binary is enforced through discourses as superior to its counterpart (Sawicki, 1991). Post-structuralism, particularly the work of Derrida, involves the uncovering and deconstruction of these binaries to understand how one side has been constructed as superior to the other. Traditionally, gender has been viewed as a dichotomy between masculinity and femininity with the former generating the greater status. Feminists’ use of post structural theory has enabled these concepts to be viewed as social products and demonstrates the limitations of the masculinity/femininity dualism. Instead, feminist poststructuralists seek to indicate the complex interrelationship between traditional binaries. Undermining the dominating power of the superior term involves rejecting the organising system in which binary oppositions are constituted (Bordo, 1993).

Butler’s (1990) feminist reworking of Foucault’s theorising has been influential in supporting the view that gender is socially constructed. Gender and identity are understood by Butler as social productions developed through individual interaction with various discourses. Dominant gender discourses position all people as either male or female, and provides narratives about the ways these people should behave and what they should want (Francis, 1998). However, it is possible to be positioned differently in various discourses and these can have different meanings for individuals. People may be passively positioned in certain discourses but at the same time may be actively positioned in others. For example, a white female may be passively positioned within gender discourse but actively positioned within those governing race.

Foucault and Butler’s use of post structural theory employs a relational model of identity that is appropriate for this research. Rather than privileging any particular relationship as central to identity formation, it highlights the many
relationships through which individuals are produced. It also suggests that while dominant discourses influence and maintain gender relations, an individual's position themselves in certain ways through the adoption of various practices. This understanding offers the possibility of individuals constructing multiple identities through both rejection and compliance with different discourses, rather than being restricted to a single self. Resistance, rather than being an encompassing term, is replaced with the concept of multiple femininities within individual women, which challenge as well as conform to certain 'norms' of traditional femininity (Scraton et al, 1999). Women can use these multiple concepts of femininity to negotiate the contradictions and difficulties of their subordinate status (Hall, 1996: 39). In this way the notion of resistance becomes far more complex, with agency occurring in certain areas but not others for females, and different experiences evident between women. A dynamic relationship is therefore recognised as existing between social structures and individuals. However, practices of the self are still suggested or imposed on the individual by the wider social context (McNay, 1992)., and some discourses are viewed as more insistent than others. McNay suggests that discourses surrounding masculinity and femininity are particularly powerful and that “it is harder to stylise freely one’s identity in the realm of sexuality given the taboo and injunctions that operate around masculinity and femininity” (1992: 71). It is, however, left to the individual how they choose to interpret and adopt these within their own identity. Foucault has been used by feminists to deconstruct female subjectivity and to analyse the extent to which women’s experiences of themselves as subjects may be constructed with discourses, practice and power relationships (Grimshaw, 1993: 51). For women, freedom is viewed as coming from resisting what have been classified as dominant gender discourses. Challenging these discourses is viewed by post-structuralist theorising as individuals discovering new ways of understanding, refusing to accept the dominant cultures of practice and redefining them from within restrained cultures (Sawicki, 1991).

Foucault’s theorising of power has been used by a number of feminist poststructuralists (Butler, 1990; 1993, Bartky; 1998, Bordo; 1989, 1993) for
explaining and understanding the power relationships that exist within gender dynamics. Discourse and power become interwoven within Foucault’s theorising. Individuals can gain power by adhering to dominant discourses but equally power can be removed from dominant groups when individuals resist and contest dominant discourses and in doing so reshape them. Unlike many theorists, Foucault emphasises a micro level of power relations which has enabled an examination of the diverse ways in which individuals take up, resist and challenge discourses associated with masculinity and femininity. Foucault’s conception of power views it as not being located in any single source. Power is everywhere and not in the possession of any particular group, it is always shifting, unstable and importantly for feminist theorising, always generates resistance (Bartky, 1990).

Feminists have used Foucault’s concept of ‘power from below’ where societal mechanisms have shaped and proliferated, rather than simply repressed, and help construct our conceptions of normality and deviancy. Foucault discusses that focusing on power as a possession or within the confines of the state, class or law, has led to locating power as a central source which obscures a complex network of further power relations. Discourses can be viewed as a form of power that attach to strategies of domination as well as resistance. Foucault describes this as being the result of ‘technologies of power’. (1977: 225). If society is viewed as being created through discursive practices, these create and sustain the social world but equally any individual can change these through refusing certain discourses and generating new ones (Davies, 2003).

In the context of the current research Foucault’s theories are especially valuable for their potential application to understanding how children develop gender expectations and ideals and subsequently construct their own gender identities. Davies (2003) has argued that gender discourses are responsible for making it obvious and known that a child has to be male or female: the child quickly learns to make themselves identifiable as one or the other. However, a child does not necessarily adopt these gender discourses and can adopt them differently in different circumstances: for example, children would
not necessarily draw on the same gender discourses when with their friends as they would with parents. Instead children are seen to be learning about the multiple positions and different discourses available to construct and inform their positioning. Children develop an understanding about the power and lack of power embedded within certain discursive practices. They position themselves within some of these. In others they are automatically positioned (Davies, 2003). Masculinity and femininity are not an automatic part of an individual, they are a structure of society and children are drawn to accepting as a logical way to construct themselves. “As children learn the discursive practices of our society, they learn to position themselves correctly as male or female, since that is what is required of them in order to have a recognisable identity within the existing social order” (Davies, 2003: 14). Children can resist these discourses but because they are such an embedded part of society doing so can result in being viewed as a social failure.

Almost inevitably, there are several problems with the application of the complex theories surrounding discourse to the analysis of gender experiences. Concern is expressed that by examining ‘multiple selves’ and deconstructing accepted discourses diversity becomes so great any commonality is impossible to define. This may result in so many diverse femininities being created it is impossible to establish what femininity and masculinity ‘should be’ or to analyse any general experiences shared between girls. Cole defines this as the ‘crisis generated by theoretical interventions,’ (1994: 5) where there is a destabilisation of the object of knowledge. Whilst difference is a central element of this study, it is important not to lose sight of widespread structural control and joint female resistance to this. There is also a danger when examining complex differences to fail to understand why and how this has occurred. Instead all examples of this are collectively shelved without accounting for the social relations that have created difference and subsequently converted this difference into liberation or oppression (Bacchi, 1990).

There are also epistemological difficulties with combining feminism and post-structuralism. Feminism is considered a modernist theory. It has a founding
subject and is based on a ‘truth’ narrative that women are oppressed, the associated moral assumption being that this is wrong and needs to be rectified. However, post-structuralism dismisses political and emancipatory claims as further repressive discourses that should also be deconstructed alongside others which are oppressive (Francis, 1998). Post-structuralism views truth discourses or ‘grand narratives’ such as feminism as exercising power through totalising truth and their claim to moral correctness. Post-structuralism aims to demonstrate how these truths are built on subjective cultural discourses by deconstructing them. Francis summarises the problems of combining these two contrasting theoretical approaches. “Feminist research is motivated by emancipatory aims. Because of its rejection of structured narratives and truth discourses, post-structuralism is unable to engage in theorising or working for social change” (1998: 12). Without a ‘grand narrative’ which feminism provides, it becomes impossible to make generalisations about power relations.

However, despite these difficulties increasing numbers of feminist researchers are combining these contrasting theories. Davies (2003) and Davies and Banks (1992) argues that the use of a poststructuralist perspective ensures it is no longer necessary to worry about contradictions and inconsistencies in different theories as post-structuralism demonstrates the impossibility of coherence and unity. Francis (1988), however, believes completely fragmenting the female voice removes any power women could gain from enabling their narratives to have a public voice. Equally she argues that post-structuralism works against its own concepts, as it is also based in a position about the world and offers guidance on how to understand it. Francis's solution is to agree that, theoretically, people are positioned and position themselves through discourses but Francis places an emphasis on individuals still ‘feeling’ they have agency, moral obligations and preferences for different types of discourses. This enables the use of post structural theory but recognises people ‘feel’ that they are active, choice-making human beings which is compatible with feminist theory. As she explains "I still feel that the feminist argument is valid, despite my recognition that it is a modernist grand narrative, based on (probably over-) essentialist generalisations concerning
males and females" (1998: 16). It can be useful to combine post-structuralist and humanistic approaches for a more holistic, if epistemologically imperfect, perspective. Equally Balbus (1987) argues that it is important to distinguish between authoritarian and liberal truth discourses with feminism being considered the latter. Combining a libertarian discourse with post-structuralism becomes acceptable. Francis suggests whilst this involves a value judgement being made, such value judgements are part of being human, therefore she draws upon part of post-structuralism which she ‘feels are useful for feminism’ (1998: 16).

Feminist post structuralism, although relatively recently introduced to feminist sports research, has been used to examine how sport maintains binary opposites. Discourses can be ‘de-layered’ within sport to understand how participants in certain situations have transgressed gender expectations and deconstructed these binaries (Caudwell, 1999; Wright, 1999; 2000). Gilroy (1997) in interviews with women athletes demonstrated that while the female sporting body could be disciplined and limited in the choice of the activities that women pursued, it could also be reshaped in an attempt to lose weight and fit in with the feminine ideal but equally could be used physically to increase feeling of empowerment and security in the body.

A poststructuralist approach has been used by feminist researchers to advance understanding of lesbians in sport. Sykes (1998) and Clarke (1998) demonstrated how the boundaries between heterosexuality and lesbianism are maintained in and through sport, as previously illustrated in radical feminist approaches. They developed this a stage further to illustrate the potential of the sports women interviewed to resist and transgress the boundaries dictated to them and move beyond homophobic stereotypes. Caudwell (1999) undertook research with female football players also using the tools identified in post structural theory to deconstruct the dichotomies of sex/gender and masculinity/femininity. Using in-depth interviews and participant observation, the study examined female soccer players' experiences of their body in relation to these binaries and dominant discourses. The players were found to adopt a variety of different femininities.
to enable them to enjoy football as a liberating experience within such a gender regulated context. Wright (2004) utilised the approach to focus on the significance of language and discourse for poststructuralist analyses of sport. Using an analysis of language between students and teachers, Wright indicated how their verbal interactions construct and were constructed in gendered discourses about bodies in physical education. Language was seen to be crucial in the maintenance of these boundaries but also had the potential to deconstruct the binary relationships.

Post-structuralism has been instrumental in shifting the focus from structural constraints on women and sport to the possibilities physical activity provides for empowerment and resistance through sport. Researchers using this approach emphasise the social construction of gender and sexuality and show how these binaries can be challenged and transgressed (Wearing, 1998). It is evident that the use of feminist post structuralism within sports research is increasing. It is felt it provides a useful framework for conceptualising gender and identity but can also be used to understand the position of sport within this. The following section examines how the theories discussed will be utilised in the current research before examining specific identity theorisations and the processes that influence gender identity construction.

2.2.5 Summary

The development of feminist theory reflects the major social, economic and political shifts that have influenced women’s position in society over the last three decades. Greater numbers of women are working, there are more dual earning couples, fewer marriages, a higher divorce rate and more women raising children on their own. The role of women has changed, as has their sports participation and theory has subsequently had to evolve to offer an adequate understanding of the ways these changes have influenced gender relations. Scraton and Flintoff (2002) suggest it is impossible to provide a single overriding theory which addresses sufficiently all the issues associated with gender repression, challenge and empowerment, and can also be
adapted to the sport context. An understanding of the development of feminist theory assists with appreciating the weaknesses of each theories and also how they each individually contribute to understanding the complexities of gender as well as sport.

For the purposes of this research, it is recognised that all of the theories examined have flaws and are open for criticism. As Billig (1987) and Billig, Condor, Edwards, Gane, Middleton, Radley (1988) argues, all ideology and arguments are dilemmatic. For every argument articulated, there is a counter argument. However, it is possible to agree with one side of the argument despite acknowledging that there are other possible lenses through which to view it. Such an understanding is applied to the current research. The feminist underpinning of the theoretical perspective used ensures that in this study of girls’ experience of football, the analysis of how gender affects the girls’ values and reasoning is central to the process. It is important in understanding the dynamics behind gender identity construction, that a feminist perspective is used to make the experiences of the girls central to the research and to acknowledge that dominant gender discourses are repressive and restrictive for girls. The theoretical framework will predominantly utilise a feminist post structural approach but recognises that feminist cultural studies offers a number of valuable concepts for theorising girls participation in sport. It is felt that simply using one ‘truth’ narrative is too simplistic and does not capture the complexity of either the girls lived experiences or the broad research objectives. It is felt feminist post structuralism will offer the central framework conceptualising girls identity construction but parts of feminist cultural studies will be used to assist with the examination of sport and gender. Rojek suggests that it is “a pity that debates in leisure studies tend to conform to a gladiatorial paradigm in which different theoretical approaches must present themselves as engaged in a life or death struggle to dominate the entire field” (1993: 287). This research has attempted to avoid such a criticism by overlapping theoretical frameworks where necessary to draw on the most relevant frameworks for the particular objectives addressed.
The chapter now examines in more detail how feminist post-structuralism has been used to conceptualise gender identity. Foucault’s work acknowledges the power of discourses within society and the first section examines how dominant masculine and feminine discourses have been constructed and how these have altered over time. An examination is provided of feminine expectations in contemporary society, followed by a section specifically examining girls and the importance of girlhood to identity construction. This section looks at how ‘girl’ is understood in contemporary society and how girlhood provides the space for developing a feminine identity. Identity, drawing on the literature available, is presented as a fluid multi-faceted concept that is shaped at a global and local level. The chapter examines the importance of gender identity to individuals and explores the role of the body for constructing a successful and appropriate feminine gender identity. After presenting a general overview of the theoretical and empirical research exploring gender identity construction, the chapter examines how the concept of femininity in contemporary society has been created and transmitted to girls and women through global influences such as television and the mass media. The focus of the chapter then alters to examine the local discourses and structures that particularly affect girls’ gender identity construction including school, peers and the family. The review examines how these groups can transmit and reinforce gender discourses perpetuated at a global level before concluding with a brief overview of the numerous influences affecting girls identity construction within contemporary society.

2.3 Dominant gender discourses

Poststructuralist theory, particularly the work of Foucault, centres upon the concept of discourses. The current research focuses on the construction and impact of gender discourses. Young (1980) highlights the importance of understanding the feminine existence because without this it is not possible to see how females escape, or transcend, the typical definitions of woman. It is, therefore, useful to examine how these are constituted, how they have been developed and how they influence and affect men and women in society. This
section illustrates traditional perceptions of femininity and masculinity and how they have been developed in society.

Masculine and feminine discourses are constructs of a particular culture or society and are subject to change over periods of time (Humberstone, 2002: 59). “Masculinity and femininity are not inherent properties of individuals, they are inherent or structural properties of our society: that is they both condition and arise from social action” (Davies, 2003: 13). Gender is accepted as being different to ‘sex’, with the latter referring to a biological condition of male and female, although Foucault’s later work and Butler’s (1990) text have illustrated sex as a social construction as well as gender. Gender is a social, cultural and psychological process, through which masculinity and femininity are constructed and reproduced (Scranton, 1992). Although this distinction has been made, there still exists a common assumption that differences between sexes are wholly biological rather than the product of cultural ideologies.

Conventional notions of what constitutes masculinity and femininity were developed in the 18th century with the humanistic project declaring the ‘rights of man’ (Humberstone, 2002: 59). Women as a category were excluded and subsequently came to be seen as other and opposite to man. Dualisms or gender binaries were developed to reinforce gender separatism. Men were associated with the public life, science, rationality, objectivity and culture, whilst women were equated with the private, emotionality, subjectivity, irrationality and nature. “Women are thereby both culturally and socially denied by the subjectivity, autonomy and creativity that in patriarchal society are accorded to men” (Young, 1980: 43).

Such concepts have become accepted as ‘normal’ and incorporated into masculine and feminine ideologies. These work by making women appear helpless, incompetent and inactive and different from men who are personified as independent, able, competent and physically active (Choi, 2000). Masculinity and femininity are diametrically opposed through discourses but masculinity is always set above femininity (LeBlanc, 1999). Social constructions of gender include women being attributed constraining
characteristics such as ‘powerless, good, anger free, nurturers of others rather than themselves’ (Piran, 2001). These ideological discourses as well as the structural constraints they create, can limit female opportunity for behaving outside of the norm of emphasised femininity (Cockburn and Clarke, 2002).

2.3.1 Gender discourses in contemporary society

In Britain in the previous 20 years, females have been outperforming males in terms of education achievement (Renold, 2001). Over the last decade the proportion of women in paid employment has increased. However, statistics provided by the Central Statistics Office (1995) show that women earn less than men yet do the majority of the housework. Francis suggests that ‘women’s educational success has yet to lead to any increase in the number of women gaining top managerial, governmental and professional post and gender discrimination still continues in the workhouse’ (1998:1). Whelehan suggests that whilst women have made inroads into some previously male dominated spheres, the settings themselves have not changed their ‘bias towards the masculine perspective and needs’ (2000: 16).

Women are now constructed by society as confident and resilient and having the ‘world at their feet’. These women are “identified by their commitment to exceptional careers and career planning, their belief in their capacity to invent themselves and succeed and their display of a consumer lifestyle” (Harris, 2004: 13). New modes of femininity are now closely bound up with success and striving for success particularly in education and eventually work. The signs of success for women are no longer a family, husband and home: glamorous careers, luxurious consumer lifestyles, financial independence and physical beauty are as important as being in relationships and eventually having a family. Young women are perceived as the real beneficiaries of the new consumer economy and those most capable of seizing its opportunities. Rather than being portrayed as helpless, weak and dependent, females are now encouraged to search, to ‘have it all’, and to perform multiple roles. They
should still remain visually attractive, even if the discourses constructing what defines visual beauty in contemporary society have altered.

Gender discourses now construct ‘real’ women as independent, self sufficient, career driven but also beautiful and capable of presenting a glamorous feminine image. However, in reality women and girls still see the best and the worst of these conditions. Overall restrictive gender discourses still exist, young women are still to be found in more gender stereotypical industries and in less skilled jobs, earn less than their male counterparts. It is only a small minority of young women who are capable of living up to the image of the new occupational success story (Harris, 2004).

Although there have been social changes, society remains gender differentiated and women remain disadvantaged (Francis, 1998). The expected norms for women, in family relations, in the work place and in leisure pursuits, creates what Connell in the early 1980s described as “one of the most general and powerful structures in our society” (Connell, Ashenden, Kessler and Dowsett, 1982: 72). These lead women to believe in the normality of their subordinated status (Wearing, 1998: 84). Drawing on the literature documented in this section femininity in this research is viewed as the product of discourses, practices and social relations that construct the notion of ‘women’ to fit in with ideologies in patriarchal societies. Such discourses typically continue to view women as inferior to men (Whitson, 2002: 229).

2.3.2 Girlhood and gender identity

The examination of masculine and feminine discourses and the position of women in society provide a useful context for the current research. However, this project specifically examines the identity construction of young girls. It is therefore useful to discuss why girlhood is a particularly significant phase for identity construction and explore the way girls are constructed within contemporary society. Reflecting adult women, girls’ position in society has also changed and altered with economic and cultural development. This has
impacted on how girls are viewed within society and what boundaries and restrictions are placed on them when they attempt to develop their identities.

Girlhood is believed to operate as a space for "worries about unknown futures, about ability to succeed and dominate in changing circumstances, about maintenance or hierarchies in changing social and cultural landscapes" (Lesko, 2001:50). Girlhood is the time when girls struggle to achieve and negotiate who they are and who they can be through a delicate balance of experimentation, negotiation and compliance within their social worlds.

Harris (2004) suggests that growing up correctly for girls is a complicated mix of experimentation and freedom but within a strongly managed process that ensures particular forms of gender relations are continued. She feels this makes girlhood a "particularly risky business that must be carefully navigated to ensure that girls make a successful transition to normative adult womanhood" (2004: 23). Bloustien (2003) reinforces the view that girlhood is a period of freedom for girls to 'try out' various identities but also feels that there are strong gender limits on what girls can do, what they can say, where they can go and where they can act. Girlhood is therefore a crucial time for learning about gender restrictions and recognising the limitations that guide how their identity should be constructed. It is in one sense a 'grooming ground' for adult women, whilst still allowing some freedom from the demands of adult femininity and the opportunity to be 'just a girl' (Proweller, 1998). Bloustien suggests that whilst for adult women gender regulations become an integral and dominating part of their identity girls are able, for a period of time, to 'play' at being female to try and see what is a 'best fit'. However, as with any game if the girls want to be serious players in womanhood, they need to abide by the rules constructed in various social fields. Girlhood and adolescence thus becomes a period of learning about and beginning to negotiate these identity rules. It is an opportunity to see how they can be stretched or recreated whilst maintain a delicate conforming balance to secure the young girls position within society. The journey through this process occurs in girlhood as girls progress to maturity and an attempt to establish an elusive sense of self and know exactly what to believe and who they want to
be (Bloustien 2003). It is these complex contradictions and the need to establish oneself that make girlhood such a crucial time for identity construction and one that has often been neglected with research. Although there are large amounts of literature discussing youth group culture there is little that focuses on individual experiences within these cultures (Bloustien 2003).

Who and what ‘girls’ are meant to be is continually being redefined. In contemporary society, girls have moved from being constructed as innocent and helpless to images of ‘girl power’ and girls as risk takers. They are emerging as their own phenomenon with their own values and political objectives. “Girl power is perhaps a catch phrase for young women’s new style... a self style, sexy brash and individualised expression of power” (Harris, 2004: 40). Girl power is viewed as redefining femininity and making it an attractive mix of youth, aggression, vitality, sexuality and self determination. “The story on offer here is one of power through control over one’s own identity invention and reinvention” (Harris, 2004: 41). Young women and girls engaging with ‘girl power’ are characterised as being self assured, ambitious, flexible, influenced by independent concepts and the feeling that they really can ‘have it all’. This is clearly in contrast with previous images of females as passive, gentle and home bound.

Girls become gendered through their encounters with gender discourses which persuade them how to present themselves and the role they should fulfil within society. The purpose of the previous sections has been to demonstrate how discourses have altered over time and the very different pressures that girls and young women now have to face to produce a correct gender identity compared to their mothers and grandmothers. However although expectations have altered, the pressures on girls in contemporary society are still underpinned by the same restrictive ideologies which position women as inferior to men. In some ways this actually makes current gender discourses even harder to contest. They appear to empower girls and offer them alternative identities which generate a sense of freedom. This freedom though is limited. Newer feminine discourses, particularly those associated
with the visual, simultaneously keep girls and women within the restrictive boundaries of contemporary femininity which has even greater emphasis on the correct body shape. Girls learn about the ideal modern woman through their interactions with the discourses that construct them. Celebrity culture presented through the mass media plays a key role in transmitting images of idealised women to females of all ages and offers continuous advice, guidance and encouragement about how this construction of the self can be developed. Interactions with appropriate discourses also occurs on a more local level in and through a variety of socio cultural institutions such as family, language and education systems all of which help to promote and mould gender identity (Kacen, 2000).

The literature review has been organised to reflect this system of producing ‘girls’ and discuss how gender identities are constructed and the influences on this process. The chapter provides an examination of identity theory and particularly focuses on how the body contributes to the construction of a gender identity. This section does not explicitly focus on girls but offers an overview of the available theories and those considered most useful for informing the current research. The later half of the chapter examines the global and local influences affecting girls’ gender identity construction. This section focuses explicitly on influences pertinent to girls rather than women and provides an examination of how parents, schools and peers are key structures informing and affecting how girls construct their gender identity.

2.4 Theorising Identity

When using a feminist poststructuralist understanding of gender identity, as this research does, it is important to recognise what is understood by gender discourses and the types of regulations these create that women and girls are required to work within. Although gender discourses are continually altering and adjusting, notions of idealised femininity continues to create boundaries affecting females’ actions in every aspect of their lives. Femininity is still constructed as subordinated to masculinity. Women are still required to
negotiate regulations relating to their appearance and behaviour and to accept certain beliefs about their position within society. Ignoring these boundaries leads to a questioning of a female's validity as a woman.

The research examines how pre-adolescent girls construct their gender identity, using a post-structuralist explanation of identity construction that views identity as multiple, continually changing and constituted through discourse. This approach requires appreciation of the potential role of dominant discourses within this process, and of how girls may comply with or reject them. The following section develops this approach further by examining gender discourses and providing a discussion of post-structural theories of identity construction.

It is helpful to clarify at this point the use of the term identity within the thesis. Identity is most commonly used to describe an individual’s sense of self, an innate, cohesive and unified version of who that person is. It is usually viewed as stable and fixed, a person’s ‘inner essence’. This understanding of identity is commonly attributed to humanist schools of thought which have received criticism by users of post-structuralism for failing to adequately theorise the diversity and difference that exists within society. Within humanist understanding identity is privileged over difference (Adams St. Pierre, 2000). Post-structuralists have tended to avoid the fixed static notion of identity perpetuated by humanist thought and instead have used the term subjectivity to describe the individual. A subject utilising post-structuralist understanding does not have an inner self that is built upon through experience, but is instead constituted through experience creating multiple subjectivities. These refer to individual interpretations of various experiences. Using post-structuralist thought an individual’s sense of self is constituted through interactions with discourse and is therefore fluid, unconnected and variable. Several people may experience the same event but have completely different experiences which in turn shapes the ways in which their subjectivity is constituted.
A liberal humanist understanding of identity is therefore not considered compatible with a post-structural framework. However in this thesis identity is used interchangeably with subjectivity. Identity is understood as being a 'post-structural' multiple fluctuating concept which is constituted through an individual's interaction with various discourses. Identity was a term that the girls frequently used and were familiar with it was therefore felt to be appropriate to use here despite its links with a more humanist framework. Despite the use of identity the thesis still utilises post-structuralist thought and the understanding that there is no pre-discursive self. Within the definition of identity used however, it is recognised that individual's believe they are able to create some sort of coherence and feeling of an inner self (Butler, 1993). An individual needs to believe they have some control over who they are and their own existence. Jones suggests that individuals do believe they are able to do this and that we “experience ourselves as humanist subjects precisely because we are produced as such via the assumptions of our everyday language” (1997:263). Within the thesis the sense of self that individual's feel they develop is understood to be created through their interaction with the discourses available. Whilst an individual may believe they are constructing an 'inner self' this is understood as a narrative that is constituted through discourse. This belief is reinforced in Jones' work. She suggests real people are constituted as a product of the “collective discourses in which they/I engage” (1997: 268). The use of identity allows the researcher to accept that individuals feel they create a coherent version of who they are whilst still recognising that this whole is constructed through discourse.

The way in which identity is defined within the research does not differ a great deal from the understanding of subjectivity. It is also recognised that the use of a post-structural understanding of identity requires resistance to be redefined again away from a liberal humanist approach which positions individuals as having agency and control over their identity construction. The concept of resistance forms a central element of the research objectives. The notion of resistance used here sits closer to a post-structural understanding than a humanist approach and views individuals as being able to take up or resist different positions that are available in discourses but understands they
still have to work within the limitations of available discourses. Adams St. Pierre suggests that a

“different kind of agency must be theorised since the discursive subject clearly is not free to do what it will. Agency does not disappear. Agency seems to lie in the subject’s ability to decode and recode its identity within discursive formations and cultural practices”

(2000:504)

This understanding will be utilised within the current research. As Adams St. Pierre suggests, this enables both identity and resistance within identity construction to be available concepts whilst understanding both terms are set within the context of a post-structuralist framework which views both as being discursive and constructed only in and through the limited discourses that exist within the society that the individual is part of.

Identity in contemporary society derives from numerous sources: nationality, ethnicity, social class, community, gender and sexuality, all of which can cause confliction in the construction of identity and can lead to fragmented ideologies. Identities consist of our sense of selves, our conscious and unconscious thoughts of who we are (Woodward, 1997). Subjectivity relates to our most personal thoughts; however, it is experienced in a social context where language and culture provide the meaning of individual experience and where individuals are then able to adopt an identity. “Identities give us a location in the world and present the links between us and the society in which we live” (Woodward, 1997: 1). An individual’s identity is essential for providing a location in the world and provides the link between subjectivity and society. Woodward explains identities as being “produced, consumed and regulated within culture……. Culture shapes identity through giving meaning to experience making it possible to opt for more than one mode of subjectivity” (1997: 15).

Utilising this understanding, individuals constructing their identity are restricted by the range of discourses available and also by social relations. The institutional and cultural discourses that are brought into play assist with constructing particular identities and social practices. The discourses
individuals take up are influenced by what is considered normal and what has the power to determine this using which authority. However this research will view individuals as having the agency to shape their own identities rather than being solely influenced by social, cultural, political and economic structural factors out of their control.

2.4.1 Constructing a gender identity

Butler (1990, 1993) has reworked a number of Foucault’s theories from a feminist perspective to produce an understanding of gender and identity that is particularly useful for theorising gender identity within the current research. Butler’s work has ensured that gender and identity are seen as socially constructed. She has problematised gender as a category of essence, viewing our supposed ‘inherent inner self’ as something that is developed through interface with various discourses governing social life. By endlessly citing the “conventions and ideologies of the social world around us” we enact a reality but this remains a socially constructed reality (Butler, 1990: 156). Butler views gender as ‘performative’ and a product of individuals’ interactions with a ‘gender matrix’. Gender does not automatically occur once an individual is born but is a sequence of “repeated acts that harden into the appearance of something that has been there all along” (Salih, 2002: 66). In other words, gender is what people do at particular times rather than who that person is. Identity is therefore viewed as free floating and unconnected to a central essence: It does not according to Butler (1990), express an individual’s inner core as Woodward (1997) suggests, but rather the effects of their performance in particular settings. Butler’s theorisations are influenced by a post modern belief that reality is determined by language, making it impossible to view either sex or gender without imposing linguistic or cultural and ideological norms. Gender identity is viewed as an effect of these practices and it is through enacting gender discourses that individuals construct their sense of subjectivity. Butler contends that our sense of independence and subjectivity is a ‘retroactive construction’ that come about only through the enactment of social conventions. She views gender and identity as being inseparable as “persons only become intelligible through
becoming gendered" (1990: 42), a concept which is adopted in the current research.

Viewing gender identity construction in this way enables a break down of restrictive binaries such as male/female, masculine/feminine (Derrida, 1982). It also allows the possibility of individual agency when constructing a gender identity and the opportunity to resist as well as engage in certain discourses as suggested by Foucault (1972) and reworked from a feminist positioning. Utilising this perspective the deconstruction of identity is not a deconstruction of the political but instead establishes the political as the terms through which identity is articulated (Butler, 1990: 148). This has provided a theory of identity construction as a dynamic and multi faceted process (Lowe, K. 1998).

Davies asserts that part of being a competent member of society as it is currently organised, derives from our capacity to attribute to others and to aid others in attributing to us the correct gender (2003: xi). For males and females gender discourses are a prominent part of constructing an identity. For girls, global and local discourses surrounding feminine ideology are still extremely powerful. Leblanc comments in her analysis of how girls construct their identity within a masculine punk culture, “The gender role critiques sparked by the women’s movement have failed to trickle down into adolescent lives and have not yet produced a noticeable impact on adolescents’ gender role expectations” (1999: 12). As result damaging gender ideologies have remained constant across the past half century. Gender identity as suggested by Butler (1990), must be repeatedly achieved by individuals and announced and displayed to the wider world to affirm an individuals place within it.

Wegner’s ‘community of practice’ model (1998) offers a useful framework building on many of the assumptions of post-structuralism and the work of Butler (1990). Paechter (2003) has examined the concept of communities of practice in relation to the construction of masculinity and femininity. She stresses the importance of understanding how gender identities can be constructed and the interactions between the personal and the social evident in a post structural epistemology. In doing so the theory integrates both
structure and agency. Paechter maintains that knowing one belongs to a particular community of practice is an important aspect of understanding one's identity. Wegner’s (1998) model analyses identity as being constructed from five dimensions:

1. Gender identity as the negotiated experience of self. Similar to post-structural theory, gender identity is understood through the practices or discourses with which we engage and these clearly include the practices involved in our enactment of particular masculinities and femininities as well as other aspects of our identity.

2. Gender identity is also viewed as part of a community membership. When constructing a masculine and feminine identity, it can be defined not just internally but by the group that the individual is a part of. Paechter (2003) maintains it is not sufficient to claim a particular identity, a constructed gender identity needs to be recognised by group members, which in turn reflects on an individual’s understanding of their self. This need is the reason that dominant discourses remain so powerful. It is essential to feel part of an external community to feel confident in an individual gender identity.

3. Wegner, similar to poststructuralist theory, sees identity as a learning trajectory. It is work in progress and constantly renegotiated. Wegner views identities as locational, altering as we move between places or institutions: as such we have to take on and learn to inhabit different gender identities. The meaning of a gender identity in a particular social grouping is constantly being reassessed and reconfigured.

4. The community of practice also highlights the multi-membership status of gender identity. It is constructed to take into account many different aspects. Masculinity and femininity are just aspects of our wider sense of self that interacts with other facets such as social class and ethnicity to define our overall identity.

5. Gender identity is seen as an intersection between the local and the individual but it is also a negotiation between the local and global. Gender identities are not formed in isolation, they are influenced by local conditions, but these also relate to more global considerations.
They don't form in a vacuum. They are influenced by the mass media, popular culture and other local and wider masculinities and femininities and the interaction of individuals and local communities with these.

Similar to Wegner, Paechter's (2003) interpretation of the community of practice demonstrates gender identity construction as a complex interlinking of individual agency and local and global structures. It demonstrates individuals may choose the discourses they wish to draw on to create their identities but huge importance is placed on fitting in and being part of the community. It stresses the changing nature of gender identity and the potential for individuals to alter their gender identity depending on certain situations.

Both theories in this section highlight the complexities of conceptualising gender identity. Individuals do not develop a consistent, coherent sense of self according to post-structural positioning. Both Paechter (2003) and Butler (1990) illustrate that feminine identity is established and shaped by an individual's interplay with numerous discourses. Individuals' lived experiences are fragmented and alter across contexts as well as being reshaped by time. This understanding is used within the research making it important to draw on theories that appreciate the central element gender plays in defining an individual's identity, and to emphasise the fluid and shifting nature of gender identity construction.

To further develop this understanding of gender identity, the chapter now examines specific discourses that assist women with constructing themselves as feminine. Of particular importance is the significant literature examining the sociology of the body (e.g. Bartky, 1990; Bordo, 1993; Butler, 1993; Featherstone, 1991), which is examined in the following section. This literature emphasises the importance of the physical body for providing a visual display of gender identity. Bodies have been demonstrated to play an integral part in gender identity construction and many of the discourses of femininity are played out using the body. Women experience their bodies within a social and ideological backdrop that is strongly regulated by gender.
discourses (Frost 2001). The next part of the chapter therefore moves on to explore in greater detail the way in which the body is used by females to assist with creating a gendered identity. It explores the restrictions and regulations tied into creating the ideal female body and the importance of adhering to these to develop an acceptable and recognised feminine identity.

2.4.2 The body and gender identity construction

Perceptions of the female body form one of the central discourses influencing the construction of gender identity in western society. As Featherstone suggests “In the present era, one’s identity is defined primarily in terms of the image that one creates” (1991: 91). The social construction of the body, focusing on issues of slenderness, muscularity and physicality, has been central to the construction of femininities and masculinities (Hall, 1996; Bordo, 1990; Connell, 1983; Young, 1980). Whilst femininity in modern society may have lost a number of the restrictions previously imposed, these have been replaced with new less visible networks of social control. Regulations of the body form a core aspect of these. Gore (1998) has adapted the work of Foucault to understand how techniques of power can influence females to strive to achieve the correct body. The techniques included surveillance, - examining and absorbing gender discourses surrounding the correct bodies perpetuated in society, normalisation – accepting these discourses as reality, exclusion – rejecting individuals who do not conform to these discourses, and regulation – shaping the body to ensure it remains within the confines of dominant discourses. It is through these techniques that dominant notions of the body are viewed as being transmitted to and maintained by females in western society.

Achieving gender is viewed as a public achievement and the body provides the mechanism for displaying to others that an individual is achieving the correct gender identity. “How we look is an extremely prominent cue for gender definition and social reaction/interaction” (Kacen, 2000: 346). The discourses surrounding physical appearance highlight that positioning
individuals as either male or female is more than a conceptual process, it is also a physical process.

Both Foucault (1975, 1982) and Bourdieu (1977, 1990) offer useful theoretical approaches which have been utilised by feminist writers (Bartky, 1990; Bordo, 1990; and Featherstone, 1991) in understanding how the body is embedded as an essential element of gender identity construction. Foucault's (1975) concept of the 'docile body' evident in his earlier work is helpful for understanding how the body is regulated. The body is seen as a historical and culturally specific entity (McNay, 1991), created through a variety of discourses, including sport, and the site where the resistance and deconstruction of assumed discourses takes place. Body size and shape are an extremely important and restrictive facet of body images discourses. The physical body has the potential to be an instrument of power but it must be regulated accordingly to achieve this power (Bordo, 1993; Butler, 1993). Female bodies have historically been viewed as significantly more vulnerable than male bodies. Women are more concerned with their bodies than men due to the pressure of cultural discourses, although arguably men are beginning to encounter similar pressures. As Gore (1998) suggests, surveillance, or watching others whilst being watched, is a powerful regulating technique encouraging women to ensure they develop and maintain the appropriate body shape. Women are less satisfied with themselves and are permitted "less latitude" (Bordo, 1993: 143) to have an incorrect body by themselves, men and culture. Bordo (1993) examines how the obsession with body shape and particularly the demand for a slender body is a post 1960s, post feminist phenomenon with a move away from a curvaceous, fuller body shape, to minimising the hips, breasts and waist to be classified as attractive. This regulation has ensured that there is no natural body. The body is controlled by cultural discourses. "The body, what we eat, how we dress, the daily rituals which we attend to the body are a medium of culture" (Bordo, 1993: 165). Bordo (1989) suggests that the accepted body 'shape' leads women to pursue an ever changing, elusive ideal of femininity that requires women to constantly attend to their bodies in pursuit of the perfect body. In doing this they become what Foucault terms as a 'docile body', a body whose
force and energies are restricted by external regulation, subjection, transformation and improvement.

There has been a gradual shift towards a negative view of body fat and a positive evaluation of thinness, which has been joined by the idea of hardness and muscularity for both men and women. The bad body is fat, slack and uncared for, the good body is thin, sleek and toned (Benson, 1991). This has led to a proliferation of eating disorders amongst women in western societies as they desperately seek to achieve the repressive norms of appropriate body shape. Benson suggests this will continue: “The pressures appear to be worsening. The thin, svelte, youthful woman is the only one available to women in the mass media. But it is certainly one of the most significant ways in which femininity is imaged and one of the most seductive. It encourages the idea of the female body as a commodity, something which used, like other commodities, to construct fantasies of possession, power and desire” (1991: 141). The obese are seen as not adhering to these discourses and this is viewed as unacceptable.

Shilling draws on the work of Bourdieu. The human body is seen as important “not only because it provides us with the basic ability to live but because it shapes our identities and structures our interventions in and classification of the world” (1993: 81). The body, particularly for women, is a project that requires working at. This project provides individuals with a means of expression and a way of feeling good. Central to Bourdieu’s approach is the concept of physical capital, where bodies are developed in ways that are recognised as generating value within the social world, and the conversion of physical capital into social capital and economic capital. Female preoccupation with the body and developing the correct appearance can be viewed as increasing their acceptance within their wider community or social networks, as well as increasing female attractiveness.

The body is viewed as crucial to female identity with appearance being taken as a reflection of the self. The penalties of bodily neglect are the lowering of an individual’s acceptability. The body has become a highly commodified
project. Featherstone, mirroring Bourdieu’s theorising, suggests the closer the female body is to the idealised image of youth, health, fitness and beauty the higher its exchange value (1991). Whilst females do have a choice as to whether they take up certain bodily discourses they are extremely difficult to ignore and are particularly restrictive. “The discourses of choice, diversity and self improvement that justify female work on their body serves only to camouflage the suffocation of actual bodily diversity through the tyranny of the norm of perfection” (Thomson, McGrellis, Holland, Henderson and Sharpe, 2001: 143).

Clothing and cosmetics are further symbols of femininity and are important for ‘dressing’ the body. As commodities they are viewed as cultural signs (McRobbie, 2000). Cosmetics are designed to compensate for natural deficiencies and to emphasise personal attributes. Fashion and make up have been key players in the bodily techniques of femininity (Piran, 2001). Cosmetics and clothing are used to create particular and identifiable images of women. In addition to this in current society, products particularly those associated with how an individual looks are tangible markers that individuals can use to create, transform and reconstruct themselves and maintain a sense of identity (Kacen, 2000: 349). Women can gain a sense of who they are through dressing their bodies in appropriate branding.

Discourses surrounding the body are extremely powerful but the aims they specify are largely unobtainable for most women. Forbes, Doroszewicz, Card, Adams- Curtis (2004) discussed that the slender body type is an unhealthy, unrealistic ideal. It is “not surprising that the adoption of the thin body ideal has been paralleled by women’s decreasing satisfaction with their bodies” (2004: 331). Whilst women can control the way in which they regulate their bodies, the physical appearance they have to work on is continually changing with the effects of age. Equally the ideal femininity that females pursue is continually changing. The processes of working on the body, through diet, make up and dress, need to be acknowledged as one of the most durable strategies of social control and can be viewed as examples of Foucault’s (1977) ‘technologies of power’. However it is necessary to recognise that
women can gain a great deal of satisfaction and pleasure from undertaking these rituals. Despite this, Featherstone (1991) argues that women’s engagement with appearance is always constrained by the fact that their identities are defined in terms of how they are viewed by others, particularly men. Men’s concept of their visual self is less reliant on the opinions and expectations of others. In the context of masculine and feminine relations, physical appearance assumes a greater importance than ever before for women.

For girls as well as women in western society there are great pressures to look right. Grogan and Wainwright (1996) noted a lack of research examining body satisfaction in young girls although there has been a great deal of research focusing on this in adolescence (Paxton, Norris, Wertheim, Durkin, Anderson, 2005). Grogan and Wainwright’s study however, found a great deal of similarity between the attitudes of an 8 year old girl and a 13 year old with both being aware and influenced by the slim western body ideal. Frost’s research with young women indicated that “girls clearly understand that to become a woman means developing the ability to construct a visual and strictly gendered identity” (2001: 95). Oliver and Lalik’s (2001) study discussed how adolescent girls in their study had a fear of being too different, which revolved around how they looked to others. Girls become preoccupied with worry about how their bodies look to themselves and others but the researcher felt they will nearly always be disappointed in themselves because they compare their bodies to idealised and unrealistic versions. The importance of developing a body that is appropriate to others appears to develop in adolescence and increase in age. Gore (1998) highlights the power of surveillance discourses which judge and view female bodies, either appraising them as worthy or inadequate. Equally in Paxton et al’s (2005) research girls felt compelled to develop an appropriate body shape to be viewed as attractive and acceptable by boys.

The correct fashion is also an important part of dressing the correct body. It is important for the girls to be viewed as fashionable which could be achieved by adhering to current fashion discourses. “Those girls who obtain the economic
means to display themselves with the proper adornments may indeed attain the desired status of ‘fashion in’ with its accompanying assignation as right and normal” (Oliver and Lalik, 2001: 449). The westernised girls in this research had learnt early that look was important. For them the right feminine look included having healthy hair, the right clothes and shoes, and the right body shape. An ugly girl was considered to have a difficult time finding friends or peers with whom to associate. This is due to the discourses around the ideal body “being so normalised and taken for granted that they have become part of Western cultural hegemony” (Garrett, 2004: 224).

Evans, Rich and Holroyd, in their research examining females with eating disorders, found that the girls they worked with expressed clear anxieties relating to what people thought of them and meeting expectations connected to a desire to belong to one of several different peer cultures. Perfection ‘code’ principles of slenderness became the credential for recognition and belonging (2004: 132). Evans et al. suggest that for some girls the body “was a way of demonstrating self control, autonomy, individuality and achieving recognition by peers as the end product of disciplined dietary restraint” (2004: 137). Girls and women continually receive messages about thinness from multiple sources and girls live in a culture of dieting. Peers, parents, schools and the media continually promote an “anti-fat” message that ensures this culture is continued and results in girls feeling that they have to work on their body before they can attract others (Jones and Myhill, 2004).

Poststructuralist theorising emphasises the ability of individuals to choose or reject dominant discourses. However, Rice and Russell's study (2002) suggested that whilst girls resented the imposition of culturally generated expectations on their body, they were still extremely conscious of the importance of looking feminine to their social acceptability. Although females appear to have options available to them, there is a strong compulsion to construct their bodies in such a way that pursues the accepted notion of femininity as an aesthetic phenomenon. Bordo (1993) is very pessimistic about the chances of changing this despite poststructuralist theorising suggesting this is possible. She views women as being embedded in a culture
that oppresses them and with which they cannot help but collude. Equally Duke and Kreshel argue “As long as femininity is believed to be the sole domain of women and continues to be linked with patriarchally defined aesthetic standards of what it means to be a woman, women will continue to be effectively constrained by femininity” (1998 cited in Rice and Russell, 2002: 630).

The body is clearly a central part of an individual’s identity. However it is evident that notions of femininity are altering over time. The body continues to play a significant part in these alterations, allowing women to present alternative if equally restrictive feminine identities. “Traditional modern views of gender and gender identity are no longer credible. The old male–female, mind-body, producer-consumer distinctions are gone. Masculinity and femininity are a bricollage of scattered meanings and shifting significance” (Kacen, 2000: 345). The perceptions described illustrating femininity being associated with vulnerability, sexuality and passivity, are all reflected in the macro frameworks that indicate how this ideology has served to repress women. However, as post structural theory illustrates, discourses are multiple and changing. Smith (1988) argues that the norms of femininity are not static, but constructed and can change as females enact them. The hegemonic discourse of femininity as discussed above is not the only discourse available for women to take up. It has now been complemented with other newer discourses, some which enable women to challenge and contest the restriction of femininity and others that replace original restrictions with newer sometimes equally repressive versions of femininity. This is evident in the way that the acceptable female body has changed, with larger and heavier women no longer being accepted as the ideal feminine image in contemporary society. Instead females are expected to be tall and slender (Gill, 1994).

In the 1990s the ‘Spice Girls’ epitomised new empowering images of femininity that at one level presented an autonomous, independent, rebellious attitude to authority. However with their music and videos they resort to an expected patriarchal construction of gender, with their slender sexualised bodies scantily clad, making them an object of masculine gaze (Dibben,
2002). These are the images that are portrayed to young girls as acceptable feminine behaviour. Whelehan (2000) suggests that the "girlie image of today at her best, notionally offers a subversion of the pin up image: she is active rather than passive and ruthlessly self seeking in her own pleasures. Outspoken and sometimes aggressive, the new girl has no trust with feminine wiles, yet she looks deceptively like a pin up" (2000: 37). Although they may not necessarily adopt them at this age, Whelehan’s research provides the context to understand the ideological pressure girls will be experiencing to construct their identity around these visual ideals. It also illustrates how debilitating these norms can be for girls and the importance of understanding the potential strategies girls may use to resist these dominant models.

One of the study’s key concerns is to examine how girls construct their gender identities. The literature examined in the previous section is key to developing theorisations of identity construction and the place of the body within this. Sociological analysis of the ‘body’ emphasises the female body as providing a surface where many of the key discourses of femininity are negotiated, enacted and displayed. The body is viewed as central to visually affirming an individual’s gender. The work of the academics examined in the review highlights the restriction and boundaries females must negotiate when presenting their bodies and in their use of them. Whilst it is suggested that individuals can decide if they want to adhere to restrictive practices, not doing so provides a very immediate, visual display of defiance and/or deviance and one by which an individual can easily be judged. Body discourses therefore are able to exercise a particular type of control over females and are extremely difficult to reject. This understanding provides an important context for the current research. Adolescence is a key time for girls to establish bodily identity which has been demonstrated to be a central component of their gender identity. Discourses surrounding the ideal body are also in contrast to the sporting body, something which is explored in greater detail in chapter three. An awareness of the centrality of the body for constructing gender identity is therefore invaluable for the current study.
The review will now be developed to consider literature informing the specific influences on girls' gender identity construction. Whilst the previous section examines some of the processes through which the body is regulated, the following section will examine at a more holistic level how gender identity is mediated through influences constructed in wider society. Drawing on the knowledge provided by Paetcher (2003) the review will focus on both global and local influences on girls' gender identity construction as these are both recognised as important. The chapter will explore in some depth the global and local mechanisms feminist researchers have identified as generating gender discourses within society.

2.5 Television, the mass media and gender identity construction

At a global level the mass media is a powerful mechanism for transmitting the ideas that create gender identity discourses. Through television, films, newspapers and magazines girls and women learn how the should be aspiring to look, what behaviour is appropriate and what aims and ambitions they should be aspiring to within life. As discussed, girls are not passive recipients of these discourses and do have a choice as to which they take up, but the media continues to be a powerful means of displaying these discourses and regulating females' lives.

Television inhabits a great deal of the space young girls occupy. Girl space has largely been defined in the private spheres particularly in their own room (McRobbie, 1980), although in recent years shopping malls are becoming acceptable and safe spaces for girls to get together outside of their own homes. Mainstream media culture relies heavily on the visual and is responsible for creating many of the visual discourses that are so repressive for girls and women. The best known and commercially viable female celebrities are nearly all young, slim and conventionally attractive. These role models, and those others that exist for young girls in contemporary society, drawn from girl bands, film stars and TV celebrities have done little to dismantle the association of female success with a very rigid definition of
female empowerment (Harris, 2004). Images of these celebrities also assist with creating the 'having it all' concept that is connected with contemporary young women. Female singers, film stars and even some sport stars are viewed as beautiful, glamorous but also successful, often heading business sidelines and being viewed as financially astute and in control of their own destiny (Whelehan, 2000). They do appear to 'have it all' and to have achieved the pinnacle of modern femininity. As these achievements are not obtainable for the majority of women, this may lead to them constructing themselves as failures because they are unable to attain the unreachable standards of 'perfect' femininity.

Modern advertising has also played a critical role in both reflecting and shaping the gendered view of women. The visual media exert a form of 'cultural leadership' in defining femininity because of its capability to shape and promote and communicate consensual images (Kacen, 2000). Advertisements, particularly those selling products aimed at girls and women, present a constricted view of femininity. A high proportion focus on the importance of remaining young and beautiful.

Both television and advertising play a crucial role in developing the restrictive discourses surrounding the female body. "A culture's obsession with thin ideals is played out in the media via models and actresses who may have eating disorders themselves, who may have personal trainers to help them maintain a thin body, and whose bodies, as portrayed through modern air brushing and camera angle techniques may not even be their own" (Botta, 1999: 23). A continued presentation of thin ideal images persists in the media. Adolescent girls are thought to be particularly vulnerable to these images which are available at a time in their lives when they are seeking outside information to form a self identity (Botta, 1999). As a result the media has a direct impact of adolescents' views of the ideal body and their own body image. Perfect images become realistic goals that with hard work can be achieved. This makes the white, western slim body a universal aspiration and a dominant image in the mass media.
Magazines are also part of the agent creating the visual images of idealised femininity. In the UK, teen magazines such as Minx, Sugar and Mizz and now the girl’s version of adult female magazines such as Cosmopolitan, Vogue and Company, all devote most of their space to visual appearance (Harris, 2004). They offer continuous advice as to how a girl should look and how she can create the right look. There is also a strong emphasis on boys and girls and ‘dating’ relationships, e.g. how to get a boy and how to keep him. “All girls’ magazines seem to do is prepare children for the world of glossy women’s magazines which will open up further vistas of anxiety about one’s own body, one’s boyfriend, one’s lifestyle and one’s attitude” (Whelehan, 2000: 53).

For younger children gender discourses can be transmitted through stories. “Through hearing traditional narratives children learn to recognise themselves and others as located within their own gendered narratives” (Davies, 2003: 46). The discourse of marriage seems to be continually presented within children’s stories as well as expectation regarding how both men and women are portrayed. As with more general female discourses, stories are developing to move children’s stories away from always containing a weak woman, protected and saved by a strong man. We are now witnessing more stories with assertive and dominating female characters but these characters still contain most of the fundamental elements of traditional femininity but have more control over their own destiny than previously (Davies, 2003). Reflecting this, the discourse of marriage and its inevitability is still one of the strongest discourses within children’s stories and children in Aydt and Corsaro’s (2003) study felt this was an inevitable result of adult life. They drew on the information presented to them in stories and the wider media to justify these opinions.

Popular culture and the global media clearly vastly influence the generating of gender ideals that affect females of all ages. Television, books, magazines and ‘celebrity culture’ more widely, are all responsible for educating and informing women and girls of the appropriate way to look and behave and the importance of adhering to these norms to generate status as a female. Whilst
individuals are able to decide whether they take up these ideals and to what extent, the mass media offers one of the most powerful mediums within our culture instructing girls and women to be feminine. It is very difficult to resist such values when they are presented continually in such a wide variety of accessible mediums.

Drawing on the theorisations of Paechter (2003) gender identity is an intersection between the local and individual as well as the local and the global. To fully understand how girls are influenced in their gender identity construction it is necessary to examine local structures and settings within the girls' lives. These need to be examined to appreciate how they present and reshape global discourses into regulations and norms that are meaningful to individuals at a local level. Local networks are particularly important when examining children who may be less exposed to global discourses and less able to relate to them than adults. The local environment is therefore where most will gain the majority of their information and confirmation regarding appropriate gender discourses (James, Jenks and Prout, 1998). The remainder of the literature review is guided by this principle and will examine the role the of parents, the school and peers play in affecting how girls construct their gender identity.

2.6 Gender identity and parental influence

The family home provides an powerful arena, particularly in early years, for developing gender beliefs, expectations and shaping gender identities. “Because human beings are helpless at birth…. Children are dependent on families for a very long time. Therefore, parents and the immediate family are one source of transmission of existing gendered expectations” (Risman and Myers, 1997: 233). Parents have access to children from birth, they are usually the first individuals that the child trusts and listens to, as well as being providers of vital information regarding gender expectations before children come into contact with wider local and global locations.
Much of the earlier research in this area has used the concept of ‘socialisation’ theory (Greendorfer, 1983) which views children as helpless individuals unquestioningly accepting the gender rules dictated by parents. This process is viewed as one way, with children being rewarded for learning and enacting the behaviour of the right sex. In recent years sociologists have argued that this is not the case and children participate in the learning of gender regulations as social actors (Corsaro, 1985, Alanen, 1988). Bern (1994) argues that learning gender is a subtle process transmitted to children by parents both consciously and unconsciously so that the dominant views of gender relations become the easiest and the most obvious way to proceed. However, whilst children are undertaking this ‘socialisation’ they can react, negotiate and even reject their parents’ message. The latter theory links more closely to poststructuralist theorisations that understand children as active agents negotiating their gender identities, even within the home environment.

Although the literature discussing parental gender socialisation is recognised as not fully describing the interactions that occur between parents and girls, it still provides useful information regarding the types of gendered messages parents transmit to their child. Gender socialisation theory highlights that parents encourage different type of behaviour in boys and girls particularly in relation to play activities (Lytton and Romney, 1991). Parents, particularly fathers, engage in more physical play with sons that their daughters and mothers engage with girls in more pretence play (Langlois and Down, 1980). Parents, according to socialisation theory are also capable of influencing appropriate gender behaviour in their children. In particular research suggests parents encourage self assertive, independent behaviour in boys and relationship enhancing behaviour and co-operation in girls (Block, 1983). Lindsey and Mize’s (2001) work continues to support the opinion that girls may be socialised to prefer pretence play and co-operative forms of interaction, whereas boys may be socialised to prefer physical forms of play and assertive influence strategies.

Parents do treat boys and girls differently. They dress them differently, give them different toys, decorate their bedrooms differently and allocate chores
according to gender differences (Fisher-Thompson, 1990). All of these processes send subtle message to children about what is acceptable for their gender. Children also gain information regarding adult gender relations by observing the parenting and domestic roles that their parents engage with. This includes not only specific tasks like who cooks and cleans within the home but also divisions of responsibility, who organises the house and children and who is responsible for financially supporting the family (Thompson and Walker, 1989). However the extent of this often depends on the individual family structure. Families where women stay at home and fathers work send clear messages regarding women’s role in society to their children, similarly when both parents work. Girls in families with dual earners often have to undertake more housework to assist their parents than sons in the same families, again giving children an indication of what are female roles and responsibilities within the home (Renk, Roberts, Roddenberry, Luick, Hillhouse, Meehan, Oliveros and Phares, 2003). Time allocation data from the USA demonstrates that men spend more time with sons and women spend more time with daughters (Bryant and Zick 1996, Yeung, Sandberg, David-Kean and Hofferth, 2001). This assists with children learning the gender behaviour specific to their sex. In this way parents also are not simply agents of gender socialisation but actors involved in a more complex process of accomplishing gender with and for their children (Kane, 2006).

Parents require children to be able to adopt the correct gender identity in order to secure their own identity as parents. Mother and fathers that have children who do not conform to gender stereotypes risk having their competence and ability as parents questioned within wider society. Recent research suggests however this is much more relevant for parents of boys rather than girls. As the concepts of masculinity and particularly femininity have expanded, many parents have made the effort to stray from and therefore expand normative conceptions of gender, particularly those from middle class families (Kane, 2006). This effort is still balanced alongside conscious attention to producing children with gender identities that reflect some aspects of hegemonic ideals. Parents have been shown to often celebrate non-conformity on the part of their young daughters (Kane, 2006;
Valentine, 1997). Whilst femininity may be viewed as being more restrictive, girls in these studies were actively encouraged to participate in atypical gender behaviour with parents considering that this was a positive thing for them to do. Parents of daughters wanted them to behave like girls but celebrated the additions of non-conventional gender behaviour alongside this feeling it made them 'interesting' and less fragile. Tolerance for boys behaving atypically was limited with parents perceiving that boys would not 'grow out' of this and could possibly become homosexual (Kane, 2006). The research suggested that atypical gender behaviour was accepted by parents whilst their daughters were pre-adolescents. Girls were anticipated to 'grow out of' incorrect gender behaviour (Kenneth-Sandnabba and Ahlberg, 1999) but it would be cause for concern if they did not start adhering to gender ideals when they moved into their teenage years (Pipher, 1994; Thorne, 1993).

Girls are actors in the process of parental gender socialisation but they do tend to adopt their parent's views, be these heavily gender differentiated or egalitarian. Beyond this they depend on their own lived experiences for understanding gender in their childhood worlds (Risman and Myers, 1997). Researchers have viewed parents as the primary socialising agents, but girls and boys are influenced by numerous social pressures outside of the family to conform to existing gender norms as has been illustrated in the various sections within this chapter. It is evident though that parental actions and behaviour particularly in a child's early years are an essential source of information regarding gender ideals and assist with creating and maintaining gender discourses within girls lives.

2.7 School and gender identity construction

Girls and young women spend a considerable amount of their lives in the school environment. This setting is responsible for promoting and constructing many of the discourses relating to gender that children most closely relate to because they are immediate and accessible. "Schools have always been sites for the production of normative femininity and 'appropriate'
young women" (Harris, 2004: 103). McRobbie (2000) suggests schools do not just encourage young people to reproduce skills, knowledge and abilities. They also encourage young people to develop the values and ideals which are related to and part of the dominant ideology.

Education has not always been considered an important facet of femininity. Until the 1980s boys were continually outperforming girls. However, in more recent years girls have been performing increasingly well in terms of attainment levels and now exceed the achievement of boys (Barker, 1997; MacInnes, 1998). The high achieving girl and the underachieving boy are both now viewed as typical of their gender and described as conforming to gender norms (Jones and Myhill, 2004). Girls' educational success has become a much more acceptable and important part of who they are. In Denner and Dunbar's research (2004) girls' perceptions of power included a strong sense of personal agency related to their school work and personal success. Educational discourses are now used by girls to assist with developing their feminine identity. The transformations in women's status throughout western culture have been most evident in the sectors of education and employment. Young women are now able to gain access to educational programmes and are encouraged by educators and others to pursue meaningful work that reflects their interests and skills. "Schools are now one of the primary sites where young women experience regulation and surveillance, no longer simply to produce good wives, but to set them on a pathway to particular kinds of training" (Harris, 2004: 104).

For middle class girls, in particular, educational attainment is an important part of being a successful female. Whereas once a comfortable middle class position was attained or sustained through marriage, in contemporary society this is much less assured (Harris, 2004). Middle class girls can no longer rely on marriage to secure their economic stability and social status. Instead, such women have to generate their own income and to do this they need to achieve academically and professionally. Part of the belief that middle class girls have an unlimited life choices is instilled in the school environment, with educational success being considered the key to these extended choices. As
discussed in the previous section, girls are continually presented with the role model of young professional, beautiful career women with glamorous consumer lifestyles (Harris, 2004). Proweller found that doing well is a key part of doing gender in an all girls school, where “achievement has the opposite effect of strengthening rather than diminishing and compromising one’s self of self as female” (1998: 32) However, education for these girls has become something of what Harris describes as a ‘strait jacket’ determining their future lives. It is of such vital importance it induces anxieties for both girls and their parents who carry the weight of responsibility for securing middle class futures for their daughters (2004:49). In contrast, McRobbie (2000) ascertains that working class girls are taught at school to look forward to a ‘feminine’ career in the home. Despite this, even for working class girls, education is still recognised as assisting with being able to obtain independence into womanhood although it does not carry such a high priority.

Despite their increasing success within education, girls, in contrast to boys, are faced with a conflict between their future career and a commitment to marriage and family (Watson, Quatman, and Edler, 2002). These discourses of femininity are still important alongside educational discourses. For these girls, planning a career comes first then marriage and family later. However, girls that are reaching higher educational achievements do want professional careers with educational success providing girls with the confidence and motivation to aspire towards these higher career aspirations (Harris, 2004). Contemporary adolescent girls now receive cultural messages that it is not only permissible for women to have a prestigious career but to some extent it is expected (Proweller, 1998).

This section has demonstrated the increasing value of education as an essential part of femininity and the route to achieving the modern feminine dream of independence, consumer power, a good career, alongside traditional images of beauty and appearance. The school is demonstrated to be an institution that promotes various gender discourses but education success also become tied up within these discourses. The school provides the setting therefore for many messages to be presented to the girls regarding
gender construction. Girls within schools are not only affected by the teaching structures and staff. Friends and peers have also been identified as potential sources of information regarding the correct gender discourses and how flexibly these can be adopted or rejected. According to both Paechter (2003) and Butler (1990), peers and friends are influential in encouraging individuals to take up certain discourses as their approval is often an important aspect of self worth for individuals. The following part of the chapter explores the influence of these social groups in greater detail.

2.7.1 Cool girls, square girls and identity in the school environment

Friends and peers constitute an extremely important domain in girls' culture. The peer group is the primary form of individual and collective identification during adolescence and provides a legitimating space for girls to experiment with different attitudes and behaviours and explore the limits and boundaries of femininity (Proweller, 1998). Girls in Hurtes' (2002) study discussed school in terms of their interaction with peers rather than referring to grades or learning experiences. The study identified that within schools girls tend to fit into different identity categories ‘cool’, ‘real’ and ‘square’ girls. Cool girls were the popular ones who girls wished they could be friends with; ‘real’ girls consisted of the girls’ genuine friendship groups with which they had interaction; and ‘square’ girls were the girls that were absorbed only in school work and socially uninteresting.

The school provides the environment for many competing female peer groups. It is quickly realised that those girls who adhere to and display the norms of femininity are more likely to acquire popular status. “The cool girls are the first to discover make up and boys... they do just about everything to simulate accepted normal adult femininity” (Simmons, 2002: 156). To be in the popular group it is also necessary to have many female friends who are also committed to pursuing a normality towards femininity. These friendship groups form an important basis of identity creation and reinforcement of the correct gender identity. Within girl culture and reflected in Hurtes' (2002)
research, friendship is rarely just that, it is a tool to achieving popularity whilst simultaneously affirming wider feminine discourses.

Despite the importance of education and academic success it is important that it is not a girl's only defining aspect. Such girls become what Renold determines as 'square girls'. "Although it was an acceptable and legitimate feminine subject position....it was not an easy position to occupy. Rejecting popular peer culture and achieving in high academic terms marked these girls as 'different' and often resulted in teasing and exclusion. It was also a position feared and negatively experienced by the majority of girls in their class" (2001: 579). However, girls will still continue to invest in their academic identities even though 'being square' is considered undesirable and lacking in femininity. They achieve this by being concerned with academic performance but continuing to perform "girlish" practices involving interest in boys and clothes (Renold, 2001). Despite girls' increasing attainment within education Renold maintains it is still not considered a feminine position. "Many girls reported feelings of inadequacy and the need to play down their achievements .....Being academically super-competent or 'clever' seemed to be solely a 'masculine' preserve" (2001: 586). Bucholtz (1999) suggested a 'square girl' or 'nerd girl' identity can offer an alternative to the pressure of hegemonic femininity, although not a desirable position. Bucholtz, in a similar vein to Renold (2001) considers that femininity as an ideological construct is incompatible and sometimes hostile to female intellectual ability. The nerd girls use their intelligence to actively place themselves outside of these feminine expectations.

The school is a vital environment for establishing peer interaction and gender experimentation. The literature documented in the previous section indicates the diverse range of femininities and identities that girls can construct within their immediate environments and the importance of friends and peers for reinforcing and validating these. Adhering closely to identities presented in the wider global media, particularly with physical appearance, is of obvious benefit to the girls in terms of improving their status within the school and amongst their peers. Exploring the relationship between education and
gender within the literature has illustrated that whilst girls value education a great deal, it is important within the context of their peers not to become too immersed within it and become solely defined by educational achievement. Doing so risks ostracising girls and defining them as non-feminine. Constructing a gender identity within their own environment is clearly a delicate balancing act for many girls. They are able to experiment somewhat with their gender identities but girls who are able to replicate and engage with discourses surrounding the body and their appearance clearly gain advantages and popularity within the school environment (Renold, 2001). Not all girls are concerned with this though, and the available research demonstrates some girls actively want to challenge and contest gender ideals and can do so within the school environment.

2.8 Girls, local influences and gender identity

As the research has demonstrated, gender ideologies are transmitted through discourses very early on in childhood and continue to be through a multitude of different sources. The way girls interact with discourses is negotiated over time and differs in the specific social context and with interactions with other people as they move through their life courses. “Young women’s locations within the social structures simultaneously affects their interactions and their notions of being feminine” (Hudson, 1984: 660).

Discourses are presented to children through visual signs of gender involving stereotypically gendered clothes and behaviour that form a crucial part of a child’s construction of their own gender identity (Francis, 1998). However, girls are not simply absorbing gender discourses, but do have a choice as to which ones they choose to use. Denner and Dunbar suggest that girls enact a complex picture of femininity by actively resisting, questioning and embracing femininities, not simply passively accepting restrictive femininities. Their study developed the understanding that girls are “active constructors and re-constructors of their own changing femininities, rather than passive recipients of family, school and community role socialisation” (2004: 303). Their data,
examining how Mexican/American girls develop power within their everyday lives, showed that for the girls involved in their research, being a girl was associated with taking up multiple and contradictory meanings. As a result of this the girls perceived that they had power in some aspects of their lives. The girls felt it was important not to completely take up feminine discourses of women being weak and inferior. Instead they expressed a desire to be strong and advocate speaking for something they believed in.

However, it is evident that dominant discourses are extremely powerful and for many girls adopting the ‘correct’ gender discourses is considered safe and if correctly achieved they are recognised as high status ways of being, that continues to ensure that discourses remain powerful. Davies’ work suggests that children who are able to achieve the regulation specified within gender discourses are popular and other children aspire to be like them. “They leave intact power relations between men and women and in doing so are able to reap rewards of being viewed as being normal within gendered society” (2003: 131). Although this is restrictive for females, creating an ideal feminine identity has compensations for girls. They are in ‘safe’ places and have clearly defined roles to play within this.

2.9 Summary

The chapter set out to provide a theoretical framework for the research and to specifically examine available literature relating to the first two research objectives: how girls construct their identity and the influences on this process. Various feminist positions have been examined with feminist post-structuralism and feminist cultural studies offering the most applicable and useful lens to view the issues raised in the current research. Theories of gender identity construction have been examined particularly drawing on the work of Butler (1990) and Paechter (2003) to explore how gender identity is considered socially constructed rather than a natural, imposed way of being. It is evident that identity is developed through multiple sources with gender being a central and extremely powerful facet. ‘Doing gender’ correctly is vital
for an individual's sense of self, something that girls at a young age are very aware of. For them conforming to gender norms and fitting in is a difficult process to resist particularly if they do not wish to ostracise themselves within their local and global community. Although discourses are extremely powerful and difficult to resist, the feminist post-structural perspective does highlight the agency of the individual in deciding to what extent they want to take up the regulations within each discourse.

The available literature examines how the constructs of masculinity and femininity are created through gender discourses. These provide regulations for how women and girls should behave and particularly how they should look. The chapter has illustrated that the concept of femininity is an elusive ever changing construct that women and girls continually pursue. It is something that needs to be achieved by females of all ages to achieve status within society. The literature review has highlighted the complexities involved in constructing individual identities and the powerful role gender plays within this.

Like all constructions within society, gender does not exist in a vacuum and discourses regulating identity construction are continually altering as society changes and develops. The increasing numbers of women in the workplace, the influence this has on women delaying starting families and the number of women now seeking academic achievement as a means to their future have all assisted in altering the image of women in society and what it is acceptable for females to do. It is evident in recent years discourses of femininity have altered somewhat to encourage a new independent rebellious style of femininity. It is still encased within other, extremely restrictive, discourses ensuring some repressive regulations for ideal femininity remain. These have interwoven with the new discourses that encourage women to be self sufficient, rebellious and pro-active. The literature has demonstrated that discourses regulating the female body and appearance are still very much evident and females face real difficulties when attempting to contest or challenge these. They can be rejected fairly easily but any female who does this risks ostracising herself from her community and her identity as a female.
The chapter has explored how these discourses continue to be so powerful and consuming, and has discussed the role of the media and popular culture in creating a stereotype for which there are very few obvious alternatives. This has created a culture of anxiety for females of striving to achieve visual discourses so they can be valued as a woman. The mass media in the form of television, books, magazines and advertising all play a key role in presenting gender discourses to women and girls and informing them how and why they should be striving to achieve these. At a more local level it has been evident how schools, parents and peers affect the type of discourses adhered to and girls understanding of what are the most appropriate and right global discourses to adhere to in their local community.

The review provided in this chapter has examined a number of the themes generated by the research aims and objectives. An overview of the literature exploring identity, gender and girlhood has been provided. The following chapter now shifts focus to explore the second half of the aims and objectives examining girls' participation in football. Chapter three examines how gender dynamics affect sports at all levels from participation to organisation and specifically for the purposes of the current research, how sport can reproduce and contest the restrictive gender discourses that have been raised in this chapter.
Chapter 3
Girls and Sport

3.1 Introduction

Sport is a central element of British culture. Success in international sports competitions becomes a signifier for national supremacy with tournaments such as the football World Cup or the Ashes creating an extreme patriotism and nationalist fervour. Sporting heroes become national heroes, idolised by adults and children alike. In the 1980s Graydon claimed that, “It is impossible to live in present day British society without being aware of sport as a phenomenon which arouses great interest and is granted tremendous media coverage” (1983: 5). In the decades since sport has strengthened this hold.

Critical theorists examining sport and society claim that sport serves to reinforce and act as a means of control over the current gender order (Curry, Arriagada and Cornwell, 2002; Cole 2000). The qualities that sport portrays are the qualities of masculinity. Throughout history sporting performances have created heroes or ‘true men’ (Biskup and Pfister, 1999). Men are expected to achieve dominance within sport and in doing so reinforce the gender norms of hegemonic masculinity. Those men who are unable or unwilling to participate in sport are marginalised (Connell 1995). As role models athletes symbolise and reinforce prevalent social norms, reinforcing gender identities and gender hierarchies (Biskup and Pfister, 1999).

The prominence of sport as a cultural phenomenon makes it an exceptionally powerful transmitter of these ideologies and norms. It has been suggested that sport, perhaps more than any other social institution perpetuates male superiority and female inferiority (Duncan and Hasbrook, 1988). Sport not only acts as a site for reinforcing the gender discourses, it provides a very visual arena for constructing extreme versions of masculinity and femininity (Connell, 1998; Dunning, 1999). As Dworkin and Messner suggest “sport as a cultural and a commercial production, constructs and markets gender; besides making money, making gender may be sport’s chief function” (2002:
While sexual discrimination laws and issues of equality have become increasingly prevalent in contemporary society, sport provides one of the few remaining arenas where extreme gendering practices and gender discrimination are not only acceptable, but an essential part of its institutional fabric and actively encouraged (Bryson, 1987). Boys and men will naturally play sport, whilst girls and women may do so but risk their gender identities being questioned (Birrell and Therberge, 1994). Sport is also one of the few environments in the public domain where it is acceptable to use force and intimidation. For men at least, sport provides an environment where they can celebrate physical toughness and establish extreme masculine identities without question (Burton-Nelson, 1994; Whitson, 2002; Humberstone, 2002).

3.1.1 Women girls and sport

Sport powerfully enters into individuals' daily lives almost regardless of their personal interest levels or participation and in doing so promotes restrictive gender discourses. The influence of these gendered ideologies which position sport as not-feminine is evident in sport participation data. Data collected during the 2002 General Household Survey (Fox and Richards, 2004) showed that 51% of men reported participating in at least one activity in the previous month compared to 36% of women. The gap becomes more pronounced at the level of organised sport with 40% of men reporting that they had played competitive sport in the last month compared to 14% of women. Sport is constructed as something that women do not do and as a result the great majority do not.

Whilst women evidently disengage from sport, younger females do participate from an early age. Gender specific data from the national survey of Young People and Sport (2002) provides a context for understanding girls' participation experiences in the UK. The survey data demonstrates that at the most basic level girls' participation in sport is virtually identical to that of boys: in 1996, 1999 and 2002, 99% of both boys and girls participated in sport at school at least once a week. The Young People and Sport survey also reports very little difference between boys and girls' participation in sport outside the
curriculum, although there is a steady decline in girls' participation as they move into adolescence. Girls therefore have a high level of exposure to sport, and an equivalent level to boys – yet their participation rapidly falls away as they move towards adulthood.

| Table 1: Young people’s participation in sport outside of lessons at least 10 times in the previous year |
|--------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| Years 2-4 | Years 5-6 | Years 7-9 | Years 10-11 |
| Boys | Girls | Boys | Girls | Boys | Girls | Boys | Girls |
| 1994 | 90% | 87% | 92% | 87% | 87% | 78% | 91% | 91% |
| 1999 | 91% | 87% | 94% | 89% | 83% | 83% | 90% | 82% |
| 2002 | 88% | 90% | 92% | 86% | 82% | 81% | 91% | 80% |

Young People and Sport Survey 2002

Some caution may be needed however in relation to the Young People and Sport dataset. Other data suggests the drop-off among girls as they become teenagers is much more pronounced than illustrated here. Research undertaken by the Office for Standards in Education and the Youth Sport Trust (2000) suggested that 40% of young women have dropped out of physical activity by the age of 18, whilst the Physical Activity in Scottish School Children project (Inchley and Currie, 2004) reported that the proportion of girls taking part in sport more than twice per week in and out of lessons drops from 61% in 8-11 year old age group to 46% in the 12 -15 year old group. As this data includes PE, it is likely that a high proportion of the 45% who do continue in sport are actually participating in compulsory PE.

With these caveats, the national survey of Young People and Sport is nonetheless useful for providing gender comparisons for younger children's participation in sport away from the school context (Table 2). Boys participate more outside of school lessons than girls do, and also have higher levels of participation in competitive sport, especially in club-based sport (Table 3).
Table 2: Young people's participation in sport outside of lessons

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>Girls</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extra curricular clubs</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports clubs</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Young People and Sport Survey 2002

Table 3: Young people's participation in competitive sport

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>Girls</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Competitions within school</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competitions against other schools</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Club competitions against other clubs</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Young People and Sport Survey 2002

The data indicates that the gender divide becomes increasingly pronounced with age and especially away from the school context. While girls may be participating in sport on a similar level to boys through the school environment, they are much less likely to do so of their own volition in other situations. This highlights the significance of school for shaping girls' opinions and experiences of sport.

The Young People and Sport data also illustrates that girls' sports choices continue to largely reflect gender stereotypes, with girls most likely to participate in 'feminine appropriate' sports. Whilst 57% of boys participated in football at school, only 18% of girls did despite the rapid expansion in female participation. Equally 26% of girls participated in dance compared to 6% of boys and 22% of boys played cricket compared to 5% of girls. Gender ideologies clearly continue to affect girls' and boys' participation experiences.

3.1.2 Understanding women's and girls' participation

Quantitative data shows that girls have considerable exposure to sport and participation opportunities in their early years but that the number of girls participating decreases considerably from primary school age to adolescence and then even more so into adulthood. The chapter seeks to understand why
this drop-off occurs and how sport shifts from something that girls are actively involved in, to something that is in opposition with female identity. Girls are participating in sport, but with negative outcomes for many. This chapter explores the sports experiences of female participants and considers how these may contribute to their disengagement with sport.

The chapter utilises the global and local framework provided by Paechter (2003) as an over-arching concept for examining the reasons for female disengagement with sport. The first section examines how sport and the way in which it has been constructed at a global level, provides a powerful arena for generating and developing gender discourses. This analysis examines the structure of sport focusing on women’s exclusion from roles in the management and organisation of sport at voluntary and professional level. From this the chapter moves on to scrutinise the role the global media plays in magnifying the image of sport as a masculine domain. The function the media plays in encouraging female athletes to present heterosexual identities and the position of the body in this process is also considered. The review examines the difficulties of constructing a normalised feminine identity whilst developing an ideal sporting body. The second half of the chapter builds upon the understanding of how sport is constructed as a masculine domain, restricting female participation, by examining how sporting gender ideologies are perpetuated through local structures and institutions.

3.2 Sport as a masculine domain: The influence of global and local discourses

Understanding how sport is constructed as masculine at a global level assists with appreciating how and why females have particular experiences when involved in sport. It also illustrates how dominant gender ideologies constructed in wider society have become accepted, normalised and reinforced to form an essential part of the meaning of sport. The following section examines how women are subordinated in sport through global discourses. Challenging these is extremely difficult. Although some women and girls do so, the participation data shows that the majority do not. The
The easiest way to resolve the conflict between sporting and feminine ideologies for females is to withdraw from the arena which is so overtly fraught with traditional gender expectations.

### 3.2.1 Women and global sports structures

The construction of gender ideologies within sport is a key reason for females' lower participation. Women and girls are however also excluded in other roles, resulting in a sports structure and organisation that is also male dominated, and directly contributes to the construction of sport as an exclusively male domain. Men dominate sport across the public, private and voluntary sector. The gender divide is extremely pronounced, as evidenced by data on the number of female coaches in prominent roles in sport (Table 4)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sport England Active</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports Coaches</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>British Olympic Team</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000 Coaches</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commonwealth Games</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teams 2002 coaches</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Women's Sports Foundation Fact Sheet 2006

The data indicates that women are underrepresented in both participation and organisation of sport, making it extremely difficult for gender hegemony to be challenged in any significant way. This ensures the belief that sport is for males continues to be maintained. Women are viewed as not having the capability or expertise to contribute to the delivery of sport, and female sports participants continue to feel that sport is not something they should be engaging with because a lack of role models suggests otherwise (Birrell and Theberge, 1994b). The lack of female presence has not only been a disincentive to other women to become involved in sports production, but has led to isolation and relative powerlessness of those already involved. The lack
of women involved in the provision of sport is regarded by feminist analysts as contributing to the ‘maleness’ of sport as a whole which alienates many females (Kay, 2003).

This issue becomes more obvious when examining the organisation of formal sport within Britain. The organisational structures of sport are a central facet in maintaining many of the restrictive discourses sport generates. Sports organisations have been found to encourage language, practice and policies that create gender relations favouring masculinities over femininities. Due to their historical construction, these discourses become influential and problematic to challenge (Shaw and Slack, 2002). The following section examines how administrative aspects of sport prevent women from accessing strategic power. Through this exclusion, organisations limit the opportunities available for women to contest the institutional structures that are responsible for generating sport as a strongly gendered domain.

Men have held control in national governing bodies of sport for many years. The voluntary nature of many NGB boards and even more so of the numerous sport clubs that exist, means it is very difficult for any change to be imposed unless brought about by the members themselves (White, 1995). Equally the only way women can become empowered is for men to relinquish their hold, which for many in prestigious positions is an unattractive prospect.

Kay (1992) undertook research with a number of governing bodies and sports providers to establish their views surrounding the position of women and girls in sports. There were several interesting comments in Kay’s research from governing bodies that indicate how restrictive gender discourses continued to be accepted as reality. The lack of women in certain organisations was attributed by one male administrator as being the fault of the women themselves,

"In other words SELF MOTIVATION........There appears to be no physical, physiological or technical reasons why women should not beat the men.....but very few do. There must be a psychological reason........This is something that only women can address for themselves"
The structure of sport, whether deliberately or inadvertently, largely continues to exclude women. Although some women have more recently gained a foothold in previously male dominated sports organisations, this has often been achieved by creating positions to promote women's sections and appointing a female into these positions. Whilst the post holder may be acknowledged within the organisation, the position itself is seen as being on the margins of the work that the governing body undertakes. This has been evident at national level with the Football Association which has been controlled by men since its creation. Several women have been appointed at a managerial level within the organisation but they have been given responsibility for the women's game and education, both new areas within the FA structure. No women have reached the levels of senior management or been given any degree of power over the professional male game. This offers a very clear message that whilst the FA is comfortable that women can organise their own game and nurture the development of the grass roots game, nurture being a quality associated with women and femininity, (Shaw and Slack, 2002), they are not viewed as being suited to the 'more important' work that has always been done by men.

It is the male domination in administrative and coaching positions which most fully contributes to women's invisibility in sport. The institutional and organisational characteristics of sport are central to the women and sport 'problem' (Kay, 2003). Many countries have however tried to address women's under-representation in sport by adopting formal policies to enhance their position. The USA initiated this trend by addressing female under-representation in sport through the use of Title IX of the 1972 Education Amendments Act. In Europe, the work of transnational institutions such as the European Sports Conference and the Council of Europe has supported and encouraged gender equity efforts within individual nation states.

Over the previous three decades there has been significant development in the policy approaches adopted. Early policies tended to concentrate on the participation aspect of involvement, and came under criticism from feminist
critics (Hargreaves, 1994; White 1995) who argued that these were a superficial response to a deeply embedded problem. In Britain, ‘top-down’ policies that tried to ‘get women into sport’ were criticised by authors such as Green, Hebron and Woodward (1990) as failing to recognise, let alone address, the fundamental issues affecting women. Above all, critics stressed that policies that focused on practical participation barriers did not challenge hegemonic beliefs that sport was an intrinsically masculine activity. They argued that it was instead essential to address the causes of women’s alienation in sport by reducing its ‘maleness’.

Giving women power within sport structures and organisations is viewed as a central way to achieve this (McKay, 1997). Such beliefs have underpinned British policy for increasing participation amongst women in sport. These policies have advocated women’s equal involvement in all aspects and at all levels of sports participation, provision and management (Kay, 2003). However, the success of these policies has been dependent on voluntary action by the organisations, resulting in change that may not be beneficial for the male administration currently in charge. To date, policies to promote gender equity have struggled in the face of organisational and societal cultures in which gender differentiation was entrenched (Talbot, 2002). The majority of respondents in Kay’s (1992) research supported the premise that women’s involvement in sport was constrained by a wide range of factors and recognised that policy changes needed to occur to address this. There was however, a large discrepancy identified between support for this and actual action. Only 27% were taking action to promote gender equity policies. This was particularly low given the nature of the research, which tended to invite a greater response from organisations who were committed to encouraging more women to manage their sport. The low level of action suggested that NGB’s remained male dominated and controlled and Shaw and Slack’s (2002) research suggest this continues to be the case. Whilst this prevails, dominant ideologies can continue to marginalise and discourage women’s involvements in sport.
3.2.2 Gender stereotypes enforced: Women sport and the media

Whilst the organisation and management of sport have a central role in maintaining restrictive ideologies, other cultural mechanisms, such as the media, also have a key role to play in perpetuating and maintaining the dominant hegemony. Sport holds such an important position within contemporary society that the sports media has become an institution in its own right. It is a further area of sports organisation where women are greatly underrepresented: in 2005, of the 553 members of the Sports Writers Association, only 59 were women (Lillistone, 2005). The role the media has in transmitting the images, rules and regulations that create gender discourses has already been referred to. This section now develops this understanding to demonstrate how the media uses sport as a mechanism to sustain these discourses. Media coverage uses sport to propagate gender discourses developed in wider society but this process also serves to strengthen hegemonic discourses within sport itself.

The media is one of the most powerful agents in constructing and maintaining gender discourses and re-affirming gender stereotypes. Cultural messages are mediated through newspapers, television and magazines and sports coverage is a prominent feature in all of these. The way in which sport is portrayed is influential in limiting its appeal to women. Media coverage has been a major contributor to perceptions of sport's limited relevance to women. Sports coverage reflects cultural messages, cultivates and reinforces gender stereotypes to a huge audience (Humberstone, 2002). Harris and Clayton's (2002) research examining how femininity, masculinity and physicality are represented in two English tabloid newspapers concluded they played a key role in fabricating a gendered hierarchy in sport and upholding dominant forms of masculinity and femininity.

Women's sports coverage is limited, particularly of team sports. Many authors have suggested female athletes are underrepresented in sports media as a mechanism to preserve sport as a male domain (Duncan and Messner, 1998; Kane and Lenskyj, 1998; Messner, Duncan and Jensen, 1993; Pirinen, 1997).
In research undertaken by the Women's Sports Foundation (2003) five national tabloids were examined for a one-month period. During this time 701 pages of sport were analysed. There were 1564 photographs of men participants and 36 of women. In the text women received 2.3% of coverage. As much of what individuals learn is developed from information provided in the media, the limited coverage of women's sport plays an important role in informing knowledge, opinions and attitudes about women and sport. The limited coverage sports women they receive makes it virtually inevitable that sport will be constructed as something women do not and should not engage in.

The media does not completely ignore women in sport. However, coverage that is supplied is highly regulated to ensure that female athletes are often portrayed in a sexualised manner that demeans their accomplishments on the sports field (Bryson, 1987; Birrell and Theberge, 1994). This sends a clear message that women in sport are only acceptable when adhering to the restrictive norms of femininity and even then, only if they are not engaging in 'real' sport as defined by masculine standards. The power that media coverage has to raise or lower a female athlete’s public profile is demonstrated by the popularity of Russian tennis player Anna Kournikova. Although she has never won a major title, her high media profile has made Kournikova one of the best-known female tennis players in the world. This demonstrates that sporting prowess is not the most important facet of female sport coverage. Harris and Clayton (2002) concluded that “given the amount of attention she (Kournikova) receives within the English press..women's sport is very much a survival of the prettiest” (2002: 411). Kournikova is one of a number of female athletes who actively colludes with the production of a sexualised portrayal of herself, recognising it as a guaranteed way to secure continued earnings.

Media coverage of sport therefore assists with creating discourses that reflect and strengthen wider ideologies that stipulate how women should look and act. Women's sporting bodies are shown to be objects for sexual appraisal (as man like/unattractive or woman like/ attractive) in a significant reproduction in
culture of persistent social and material inequalities (Wearing, 1998: 77). This approach trivialises women’s sport and portrays it as less valuable than that of men (Duncan, Messner, Williams and Jensen, 1991). Female athletes only merit attention for their sexuality rather than sporting achievements (Kane and Greendorfer, 1994; Tuggle and Owen, 1999), and this trivialisation and obvious affirmation of gender stereotypes is a major process through which masculine hegemony in sport is maintained and females become disinclined to become involved in sport (Duncan and Messner, 1998). It is through this process that sport maintains the dominant gender discourses evident within wider society and women continue to be marginalised within it (Bryson, 1987).

3.2.3 Sport and female sexuality

One of the key ways the media regulates females’ sports participation is to ‘defeminise’ successful female athletes. Women who cross gender boundaries by playing ‘men’s’ sports are constructed as ‘unnatural’. Wright and Clarke (1999), in their examination of media coverage of female rugby players, suggested media discourses construct “compulsory heterosexuality”. This helps reinforce social and sexual control by naturalising and normalising acceptable sexual relations. Wright and Clarke found media coverage was swift to defend players’ sexuality by portraying the players as ‘feminine really’, i.e. not a ‘proper’ threat to masculinity or to the notion of rugby as a ‘man’s game’. Players’ families, husbands and children were continually referred to, reassuring the audience that outside rugby, the women lead ‘normal’ feminine, heterosexual lifestyles despite playing a sport associated with male dominance (1999: 228). If this ‘normality’ cannot be affirmed the implication is that the player is unnatural, not a ‘real’ woman, either in terms of sexuality or physically (Whannel, 1992: 127).

The media through their depiction of female athletes can therefore uphold the dominant hegemony of sport as a masculine domain. by ‘discrediting’ some women in sport as lesbian, the media can also assure society that female high achievers in sport are not in fact ‘real’ women and are therefore do not offer ‘genuine’ threats to the masculine sports world. Their achievements do not
count because they have not been undertaken by ‘feminine’ women and therefore are ‘invalid’ (Birrell and Theberge, 1994b). The media can choose to either construct such sportswomen as ‘deviant’ in this way, or alternatively exclude them completely on the grounds they are neither real women nor real athletes. Framing female athletes in this way plays an important role in turning girls away from sport during adolescence (Lenskyj, 1995). At a time when girls are attempting to establish their own feminine identity, the possibility that participating in sport might endanger this process makes participation an unappealing prospect.

The heterosexual female provides the hegemonic sexuality discourse that all women should aspire to (Lenskyj, 1995). The sporting arena provides an obvious environment where it is easy to label women as deviating from this dominant discourse, regardless of their sexuality. Discourses surrounding the heterosexual female have therefore been prevalent in maintaining social control of women’s participation in sport (Stevenson, 2002). Sexuality discourses constructed within sport have been responsible for dividing sport into appropriate forms to reflect the diverse binaries associated with masculinity and femininity. Sexuality is less likely to be questioned when both men and women participate in activities constructed as appropriate for them. Women who participate in sports requiring balance, flexibility and grace, such as gymnastics, ice-skating or tennis (despite the strength, speed and stamina these sports require), do not necessarily challenge traditional gender notions. These sports affirm popular images of femininity and demonstrate their essential differences from popular images of sporting masculinity. They are most obviously sexualised: the performers conform to the norms of femininity, in their appearance, dress and behaviour (Lenskyj, 1995). When acceptable women’s sports are limited to those depicted as aesthetically pleasing, the image of femininity is perpetuated and sports women continue to be linked to beauty and female subordination (Cahn, 1994). Female athletes who display appropriate heterosexual demeanours accrue power and privilege whilst female athletes who do not are perceived as deviant (Blinde and Taub, 1992) and encounter discrimination (Crawley, 1998; Krane, 1997). Female athletes who do construct themselves as heterosexually feminine are able to reap the
benefits of positive media attention, fan adoration and sponsorship (Kolne, 1995; Krane, 2001; Pirinen, 1997). Krane, Choi, Baird, Aimar and Kauer suggest that such athletes “garner respect for their ability to be successful ... whilst being true to their gender” (2004: 316).

Radical feminist approaches have focused on the power men can hold over women by suggesting female sports women automatically equate to lesbians (Lenskyj, 1998). Conventional femininity does not allow for women to embrace an image of physical power or muscle. Femininity in sport is seen as a code word for heterosexuality:

“This intense blend of homophobic and sexist standards of feminine attractiveness remind women in sport that to be acceptable, we must monitor our behaviour and appearance at all times”

(Griffin, 1989: 4).

A woman who defies gender roles is automatically assumed to be a lesbian. As long as this retains its derogatory connotations, it remains an effective way to control women and limit challenges to gender stereotypes.

Women who participate in male sports, such as football, cricket or rugby, appear to be directly challenging male hegemony. They are also most at risk of having their sexuality questioned. Caudwell’s (1999) study of female footballers suggests that sexuality is a strong concern for the players. Because the players have crossed gender frontiers, “discourses of sexuality and/ or desire become profoundly significant” and as such female footballers are subject to prejudice and harassment.

As compulsory heterosexuality continues to be the dominant ideology controlling women’s sports, female ‘masculine’ sports teams have been recognised as a shared space for some lesbian athletes (Caudwell, 1999). The fact that lesbians do participate in sport in quite large numbers can evoke confrontation amongst women themselves and again lessens their ability to confront masculine patriarchal power with any united force. This environment can produce hyper-feminine reaction in athletes who feel it is necessary to display their femininity and obvious heterosexuality at all times which limits
the experience of participating in sport (Scranton et al, 1999). Lesbians are often accused by heterosexual athletes of tainting the image of women’s sport and “corrupting young girls” and converting them or using sports clubs solely as an opportunity for meeting other homosexual women (Lenskyj, 1991). The fear of the lesbian label therefore restricts both heterosexual and homosexual female athletes. Griffin suggests this will continue to dominate female sport:

“As long as our energy is devoted to trying to fit into models of athleticism, gender and sexuality that support a sexist and heterosexist culture, women in sport can be controlled by anyone who chose to use our fears against us”.

(2002: 140).

Heterosexual feminine discourses impact on all aspects of women’s lives. Their influence is particularly problematic in the sports arena. Female athletes, particularly those participating in ‘masculine’ sports, face a continuous battle to legitimise themselves and their identity (Lenskyj, 1995). Dominant discourses ensure women’s participation is controlled and kept within the realm of acceptable femininity. The fear of being labelled lesbian is also a powerful constraint preventing girls and women from becoming involved in sport (Kolnes, 1995).

3.2.4 Sport and the female body

Correct presentation of the body is a fundamental aspect of conforming to heterosexual discourses. The body plays a central role in constructing a female identity. As discussed, production of the female body occurs within the context of powerful discourses perpetuated globally in western society through the mass media and contemporary celebrity culture (Harris, 2004). Through body shape and appearance women can legitimise or condemn their sports participation. If a female can participate in sport, but still adhere to feminine visual body discourses, it is likely her participation will be acceptable (Kolnes, 1995). However, female athletes are faced with something of a paradox (Krane et al, 2004). To be successful in athletics females must develop characteristics conventionally associated with masculinity that contradict hegemonic femininity (Krane, 2001). By developing a sporting body which sits closer to masculine ideals, females risk having their female identity
questioned by the sexuality discourses discussed. In order to avoid criticism and insinuations of lesbianism, heterosexual women need to remain within the regulations perpetuated by discourses constructed in wider society (Hargreaves, 1994). Female athletes therefore continually have to negotiate competing feminine and sports discourses.

The significance of the sporting body goes beyond issues of appearance. Young (1980) suggest the physical use of the body in sport is contrary to the education girls and women have received regarding how they should use it. From the earliest age female infants and young children receive less physical play opportunities than boys, making women and girls more hesitant in using their bodies when taking part in physical activity (Young, 1980). The strength of appearance and body discourses has ensured that women are encouraged to view their bodies as objects with limited movement (Gilroy, 1997; Hall, 1996). Participating in sport is for women again contrary to these discourses. Men in contrast have learnt to express themselves in forceful, active ways and sport sits easily within this.

There are multiple global and local pressures on women and girls to ensure that they adhere to discourses regulating ‘correct’ female body shape and appearance. Whilst there has been a broadening of definitions of femininity to accept a well-toned female body, there are still strong limits placed on ‘how much’ muscle is acceptable (Johnston, 1996). Ideally sports women have toned bodies but avoid excessive masculine-perceived muscular bodies (Young, 1997). If females develop their bodies in adherence with visual and body discourses female identity is not brought into question (Hargreaves, 1994). Presentation of the female body within sports has in recent years extended to regulating what athletes wear, and this has ensured they are sexualised women first and athletes second. In beach volleyball, now an Olympic sport, women are instructed not to wear briefs with the sides longer than six inches. There is no practical justification for this other than to feminise the sport and ensure the players are viewed as sexual objects rather than athletes (Lines, 2000). The majority of female athletes in Krane et al’s, (2004) research discussed having to wear revealing uniforms which they felt
sexualised and exposed their bodies, making them objects for the male gaze. Roth and Basow discussing female ice skaters suggest the result of this is that men and women are not reminded that women’s bodies are capable of incredible strength and athletic feats but instead that their bodies are sex objects capable of displaying “incredible femininity” (2004: 252).

The research literature illustrates that correct cultivation of the body can lead to certain types of sports participation being viewed as an acceptable part of feminine identity. However, those women who transgress gender norms by developing sporting bodies (nearly all elite female athletes) risk having their sexuality questioned if they do not adhere to norms, and their participation in sports helps to affirm that they could be homosexual (Caudwell, 1999). In wider society, disregarding feminine norms concerning the body could lead to a loss of popularity and ostracising within a female’s community (Benson, 1991). Starting from a young age, females are socialised into gendered embodiments and certain feminine ideals, and these influence and affect their decisions to become involved in sport (Strandbu and Hegna, 2006). Within the sporting environment women and girls stand to lose their identities as females if they do not adhere to body discourses. This makes the regulations surrounding this matter some of the strongest global discourses governing women in sport.

3.2.5 Summary

The literature examined has illustrated how sport is a cultural institution that perpetuates and maintains dominant gender values and ideals. Sport is a masculinised domain. Men control the product and the means of production (Barker, 2000), through their dominance of the organisation of sport and the sports media, the mechanism through which beliefs and value surrounding sport are transmitted to wider society. Discourses surrounding sport have been demonstrated to draw heavily on global rules and regulations governing masculinity and femininity, particularly in relation to heterosexual and visual body norms for females. Men and women have been shown to learn the rules and boundaries of acceptability governing their gender through many global
mechanisms. Sport is an obvious site for both reinforcing these norms, but also providing another arena for normalising and justifying the 'truth' of these gender beliefs learnt elsewhere. The literature has demonstrated that global gender ideologies dominate sport as a cultural site but these are upheld through the overtly masculine organisation of the structure of sport. It is this that allows sport to continue to perpetuate restrictive experiences for women whilst encouraging and celebrating men's achievements. The mechanisms that define sport at a global level, the sports media, the organisation and structure of sport and dominant gender ideologies all contribute to shaping and defining women's participation experiences. For many women it simply turns them away from becoming involved, for others participation takes place but female athletes face a continual battle to reconcile their participation with the demands of femininity to ensure their acceptability within the female sport's arena. Females who do participate in sport but do not collude with dominant feminine hegemony face the possibility of being ostracised by both men and women as 'non female', butch and lesbians. The derogatory connotations associated with these labels is something most women attempt to avoid at all costs even if it requires them to act in such a way that they continue to enforce the dominant and extremely restrictive hegemony.

It is evident that both global and local discourses, structures and institutions influence individual's beliefs, attitudes and behaviours. The following section examines how women's and particularly girls' beliefs and experiences of sport are affected when global discourses are experienced through local structures and systems.

3.3 Sports participation and local discourses

The first half of the chapter has focused on examining the place of gendered norms and regulation within women's sport participation.

Most research into females, gender and sport focuses on adult women's experiences of sport. While this provides useful contextual information for
understanding girls’ experiences, it omits important aspects of their sports engagement. In the UK girls are usually introduced to sport most comprehensively through school. PE is widely recognised as providing girls with their first experience of formal, institutionalised sports opportunities, and virtually all girls experience it. Despite these opportunities, by adolescence there is a most notable decline in physical activity (Shakib, 2003). Numerous studies have reported a reduction in participation for girls (Goran, Gower, Nagy and Johnson, 1998) but not so for boys (Trost and Pate, 1999). Long before girls enter adulthood, many appear to have rejected sport.

The remainder of the chapter therefore focuses more specifically on girls’ involvement in sport and the gendered nature of the environment where they are able to access sport. Literature in this subject has primarily been developed from a pedagogical perspective focusing on girls’ gendered experiences within physical education. The significance of this arena is obvious when considering this is where most girls encounter and participate in sport. However, there is a gap in research exploring girls and boys’ experiences outside of school within a gender context.

Females in sport are disadvantaged by ideological and patriarchal expectations that limit their experiences and enjoyment of sport. Whilst these are constructed and developed at a global level, their interpretation by individuals in local structures and systems is key to girls’ and women’s experience of sport. The following section looks at how global discourses are manifest in sports provision and experiences available to girls and women at local level. Much of the research examined in the following sections illustrates how global beliefs regarding sport are instilled and reinforced to girls during their childhood and adolescence through their physical education experiences.

3.3.1 Gender and the school

Parents and the school perform key roles in shaping ‘correct’ gender identity formation and offering a source of information for young girls regarding the
correct gender discourses to adopt and maintain. Similarly, girls’ experiences and interactions with sport and physical activity are heavily influenced by discourses transmitted to them from parents and school (Coakley, 1997). The discourses parents and the school construct centre around the importance and appropriateness of physical activity for girls. As discussed in the previous chapter, parents are less likely play physical games with girls than with boys. From an early age, girls are carried around more than boys, are less likely to be left alone and more likely to be treated protectively, preventing them from exploring their environment to the same extent as boys (Lewis, 1972). Parents are also responsible for offering children their first opportunities to play informal sports. Fathers have been shown to play more games, such as catching balls, kicking and throwing and running, with their sons than with their daughters (Fisher-Thompson, 1990; Greendorfer, 1993; Guiliano, Popp and Knight, 2000; Kane, 2006). Boys, therefore, learn a more extensive range of motor skills from an early age than girls. More importantly, these actions construct the prevalent gender discourses and encourage boys to accept that sport is something in which they are ‘naturally’ expected to participate. For girls, the reverse occurs and they can have little or no early sports experiences (Coakley and White, 1992). They become aware from an early age that femininity is associated with restrictions, in suitable activities, in dress and in appropriate physical activity.

The role various institutions play in introducing girls to appropriate gender behaviour and expectations has been discussed. School, peers and the family have all been demonstrated to have a central influence on shaping early gender identity and this extends to how girls relate to sport. Girls arrive at school very aware of gender opinions particularly in regard to sport, where the teaching ideologies and practices often serve to reinforce the very strong notions that girls already hold about suitable activities for them. The school is widely recognised as the first formal and regulated structure that all children encounter on a daily basis. It also provides what are often the first experiences of sport for girls and as the national survey of Young People and Sport suggests, for many these are the main or only experiences they will access.
It has been widely recognised however that schools offer sports experiences within an environment that is heavily shaped by ideological expectations of masculinity and femininity (Scraton, 1992). These discourses have developed historically within physical education, with the result that the ideologies evident today are deeply rooted within the culture and ethos of schools. The belief that women were physically different and inferior to men was embedded strongly in 19th century society when the PE profession began to emerge. The gender differentiation of sport discussed earlier in the chapter was established within education to ensure girls were able to partake in exercise but not compromise their feminine persona. These beliefs have continued to permeate the construction of sport in contemporary society. Sports were either adapted to reflect female ideologies or new ones developed avoiding sports such as football or cricket which were considered to carry the ‘stigma of overt masculinity’. (McCrone, 1984). Female team sports such as hockey, netball and lacrosse were therefore devised to allow energetic activity but in a controlled and restricted environment. These allowed minimal contact and were considered to remove any threat to femininity. This process assisted with constructing the discourses that have dictated what activity it is acceptable for females to participate. The influence of these discourses can still be seen in the chosen lesson content of many contemporary secondary schools’ physical education curriculum. Although significant gains were made by girls playing team sports, in challenging the use of women’s and girls’ bodies, this remained severely regulated by gender restrictions and provides the ideological roots for the stereotypes still evident within physical education today.

The available research examines the interaction between physical education and gender and how this reflects adult women’s sport experiences. Physical education has been acknowledged as a powerful socialisation structure. It is capable of reshaping restrictive gender ideologies providing it is delivered sensitively without social and cultural expectations dictating lesson content and practice (Penney, 2002). The subject is unique in that it allows pupils to develop physical self-confidence and feelings of contentment with their body
and can teach them how to use it in different ways. Feminist academics have found PE is far more successful at achieving this with boys. For girls it continues to reflect and maintain patriarchal relationships and the wider gender assumptions in society (Scraton, 1986, 1990, 1992; Williams, 1989, 1993; Wright, 2000). The rise in awareness and interest of gender inequalities in physical education mirrored the advent of second wave feminism. Simultaneously, wider sports research recognised the school as an institution helping to maintain such inequalities within the adult sporting domain.

The school has been shown, like other social institutions, to exist within a strongly gendered context. It is heavily influenced by cultural expectations including gender ideologies. Varpalotai (1987) in an examination of the hidden curriculum in physical education concluded that, "girls are excluded from sport, both overtly (through sexist structures and practices) and covertly (through sexist socialisation and education) which are both formally and informally taught and learned" (1987: 411). The literature examined demonstrates the gendered nature of school sport and also how participation in this setting allows girls to learn appropriate gendered sport discourses which continue to have a wider influence outside the classroom. The gender ideologies perpetuated within physical education provide girls with certain values and beliefs about sport from a very young age. To understand why this is so deeply embedded within school physical education, it is essential to appreciate the historical context of the development of girls' physical education. This assists with comprehending how the teaching methods and practices examined in the following section, that disadvantage girls, have been accepted as normal and remained unchallenged and unchanged until brought to the forefront of feminist academic research in the last three decades.

### 3.3.2 Teachers and gender ideology

The physical education teacher plays a pivotal role in maintaining or challenging gendered discourses. As such, they have been the focus of a large amount of feminist research. Scraton (1986) provided the basis for early
literature in this area. She conducted interviews with local education authority officers and Heads of PE in secondary schools to demonstrate how stereotypical beliefs often dictated lesson content and teacher attitudes. The research, as well as advancing the application of socialist feminism to empirical work, highlighted the main areas of concern and indicated where policy needed to adapt to encourage a more relevant and non-sexist physical education curriculum and teaching strategy for girls. Subsequent work deconstructing the discourses of physical education provides additional support for the issues Scraton raised. It demonstrates how many teachers subconsciously reinforce gender differentiation by their practice and particularly the language they use in lessons (Wright, 1999, 2000). Evans, Lopez, Duncan and Evans (1987) examined in more detail why teachers continued to teach using sexist gendered ideologies. This work identified the concept of professional socialisation within the physical education profession. The experiences to which these teachers are exposed, led to the creation of subcultures within physical education departments ensuring male and female teachers have very different conceptions of how and what to teach. More recent work has used life-history interviews with student physical education teachers to demonstrate how masculine teaching identity become naturalised within initial teacher training for both male and female students (Brown, 1999; Rich, 2001).

Teachers, therefore, enter the working environment with preconceived concepts of the content of physical education lessons and how they should be delivered. A number of researchers have now looked in more detail at the complexities of the ideological and cultural pressure that influence teachers, and the effect this has on instilling gender appropriate behaviour in children. Flintoff suggests female teachers face gender conflicts when they begin training.

"Negotiating an identity for the female student, meant ensuring first and foremost that they were recognised as heterosexual, feminine and attractive. Many of the students, particularly in the early years of the undergraduate degree, took great care to emphasise their femininity and sexuality".

(1995: 52)
Rich (2001) suggests that female PE teachers are faced with the dilemma of balancing ‘feminine’ attributes, which are seen as inappropriate in the teaching profession, and masculine ones which are unacceptable to women. The advice from teachers and mentors for the female students in this study was to adopt a masculine style of teaching in order to be respected and gain control. This advocates a confrontational, authoritarian approach, which Rich suggests, is associated with hegemonic masculinity and therefore defined as successful. Women teachers are encouraged to reproduce the dominant gender order. Even if they enter teaching believing it can be challenged, initial teacher training provides a comprehensive site for reinforcing that a male teaching identity and therefore dominant masculine and patriarchal concepts are most appropriate.

Brown (1999) examined the experiences of male physical education teachers within this environment. Although the male teacher stands to gain from the masculine approaches that dominate physical education teaching, they do not necessarily view them as appropriate or wish to adopt this teaching style. Mirroring the female students, the male student teachers in this research experienced a conflict between behaving as they felt they should, (in a masculine appropriate way), or actually attempting to challenge and question stereotypical gendered teaching behaviour. Again the issues of control were found to be paramount. They felt pressured by the expectations of teachers and pupils to adopt a masculine style of teaching so that they controlled the class. Even if they did not approve of such methods, it was found to be a guaranteed technique to ensure discipline and respect within the classroom. As a student under scrutiny themselves, this was of great importance. The male student teachers recognised that by adopting masculine teaching identities they were simply confirming the children’s already heavily gendered beliefs. They still felt unable to change the way they taught for fear of being questioned by teachers, children and parents as to their legitimacy and worth as a male physical education teacher.

Brown and Rich’s studies are both useful for understanding why the teaching attitudes and practices have remained accepted and unchallenged. These
attitudes have survived numerous initiatives to remove the gendered aspects of physical education from the curriculum so that dominant gender assumptions continue to permeate all aspects of the physical education structure. As the research discussed illustrates, they are difficult to challenge because they form an integral element of the teacher's initial training.

Much of the literature examining teachers focuses on secondary school physical education specialists. This is because it is felt adolescent girls are more sensitive to issues of gender and femininity than younger girls. In addition, at secondary level lessons are taught by specialist physical education teachers, enabling analysis of subject specific pedagogical practices. There is also an assumption that primary physical education is not affected by gender issues because it is delivered in mixed groups and therefore equality of opportunity is automatically experienced (Williams, 1993).

In the late 1980s Thompson (1989) reported that primary school teachers tended to be hostile to suggestions that gender is a primary school issue and see it as connected to the secondary school environment. However, Williams (1993) found that teaching practice at both primary and secondary level contribute greatly to the instillation of appropriate gender beliefs in children. In general, primary school teachers tend to be female, although the physical education co-ordinator is often male. Primary teachers receive a minimal amount of physical education training within their overall programme, which leaves many lacking confidence when required to teach PE. This has been perpetuated by the new demands placed on primary school teachers under national curriculum guidelines. As Carney and Chedzoy (1998) suggest, this has meant the pressure on primary school teachers to teach 'effective' PE lessons has been increased, but the time available on initial teacher training courses to study physical education has been reduced. Teachers' lack of experience and knowledge encourages many to resort to the same teaching methods and contents that were used when they were pupils. This leads to traditional methods which reinforce gender expectations, continuing to guide the education system. Thompson (1989) suggests teachers who are less
confident will adopt strategies that ensure they are not challenged by pupils in PE lessons and prevent disruptive behaviour, as demonstrated also in both Rich’s and Brown’s studies with the student teachers. This usually involves accommodating the needs of boys rather than girls, as the latter’s behaviour is seen as less of a threat: football was discussed as providing a ready-made control structure which assists with reinforcing boys’ gender expectations (Thompson, 1989).

Scraton (1986) illustrated how secondary school teachers encouraged stereotypical assumptions of masculinity, femininity and restrictive female behaviour. Her research illustrates how ideologies surrounding femininity and sexuality dictated what teachers believed were appropriate activities for girls. Teachers were strongly opposed to girls playing ‘men’s sports’ such as rugby or football. Their justifications for this used the conflict these sports present with desirable feminine behaviour and the normalised discourses surrounding the assumed delicate nature of the female body.

“I don’t see any place for rugby taught in schools because of the contact. I think girls could probably try anything within reason. Girls shouldn’t be doing weights and I don’t think I’d put girls into rugby tackling for physical reasons. They could hurt themselves around the chest as they are tackling someone”


The potential injuries boys may sustain were not considered. Football was also regarded as an unsuitable sport for girls. Whilst it was acknowledged girls can and do play football and have the skills and strength necessary to do so, some teachers still found it an undesirable feminine activity.

“Football! – I have a personal thing about this. I’ve been to a women’s football match and there’s nothing sorer to my feminine eyes than a big bust and a big behind and the attracted crowd and spectators......I won’t let the girls play because it is very, very unfeminine – I associate that with a man. I feel strongly that girls will never play soccer”

(Scraton, 1992: 49).

The opinions of teachers in Scraton’s research demonstrates the depth of structural obstacles preventing girls from accessing a physical education curriculum that is not dictated by stereotypes. As a result of this for the majority of girls their many and possibly only experiences of sport will occur in
a context permeated by dominant gender discourses. Teachers are influenced by their own socialisation experiences and also a ‘professional’ socialisation process which most commonly encourages teachers to believe that to be competent they need to reproduce traditional, highly gendered experiences of sport.

### 3.3.3 Gendered teaching strategies within physical education

Patriarchal discourses are powerful within physical education. Both men and women reproduce restrictive gender assumptions allowing traditional ideologies to continue to permeate the system relatively unchallenged. The advent of research on teaching policy and practice provides information on the methods as well as the attitudes that contribute to the continued beliefs that girls are less capable and should be more protected than boys.

Research in this area expanded after the introduction of the 1978 Sex Discrimination Act. Although excluding physical education, this led to other areas of schooling being scrutinised. Physical education was the last remaining component of single sex teaching in many co-educational comprehensive schools and debates emerged concerning whether gender divisions should remain in the subject. Traditionally girls had always taken part in single sex classes a legacy of issues surrounding female modesty during the historical development of girls' physical education. Mixed education classes were initiated in the late 1970s, officially to address the issues of gender inequality highlighted by the Sex Discrimination Act but also because economic necessity dictated it.

Research in this area has examined the appropriateness of both settings and spans across the last three decades. The literature indicates the depth and complexity of the issues surrounding lesson organisation. Initially mixed and single sex classes were examined and their relative benefits and shortcomings highlighted (Leaman and Carrington, 1985; Scraton, 1986; Turvey and Laws, 1988). Although research demonstrated the issues, alternative solutions were not readily offered and the area continued to
receive attention. The formation of the National Curriculum provided the opportunity to extend the curriculum to challenge gender stereotypes. Again, this initiated a resurgence of interest, examining whether lesson organisation and content had changed sufficiently to provide such a challenge. The research area, whilst continuing to acknowledge the issues surrounding mixed and single sex classes, began to focus on the position of teachers within the pedagogy process, and particularly, how they could change the way they deliver lessons and engage pupils to create a gender equitable environment (O’ Donovan and Kay, 2006; Williams and Bedward, 1999; Wright, 1997, 1999). As Penney (2002) suggests, the issue has become not whether mixed sex or single sex classes provide a better environment. Instead, there is clearly no guarantee that in either, all pupils will be given the same quality of experience. Whatever the setting, ways needed to be found to ensure this. Research has focused on the effects mixed and single settings have on girl pupils and on how this in turn influences their experiences.

Mixed physical education classes are unavoidable at primary schools, due to a lack of teaching resources to organise single sex lessons. However, most research examining mixed settings uses secondary school lessons as examples. This is largely the result of an increasing awareness in the 1990s that girls were dropping out of sport in greater numbers than boys as they moved into teenage years. The quantitative data provided by the Sport England survey showed that by the time that girls reach year 10-11 their participation is substantially lower than boys. It has been suggested that the problems girls experience within mixed settings are accentuated once they reach adolescence due to an increasing awareness of body image and physical changes. These issues can cause girls great embarrassment. General opinions on mixed groupings suggest they have not been a success in physical education.

“Teachers who have decided to develop mixed activities rarely explain this innovation in terms of equal opportunity, but generally as an aspect of organisational efficiency”

(Leaman and Carrington, 1985: 206).

Boys have been found to dominate all areas of the mixed lessons. They demanded and obtained more teacher attention than girls. They controlled the
format of team situations by not passing to girls and holding possession for longer, and were also used by teachers more for demonstrations (Leaman and Carrington, 1985; Turvey and Law, 1988). Girls’ self-confidence is said to be undermined and they can be subject to abuse and derogatory comments from boys about their lower skill levels (Leaman and Carrington, 1985; Williams and Bedward, 2002). Wright (1997) found girls, confronted with these problems, inevitably became disengaged from physical education lessons. They reacted by actively trying to marginalize themselves from the activity and the practices that were central purpose to the lesson. In contrast, the boys listened to the teacher and acted on instructions by taking a full part in the activities. Wright commented that boys and the male teacher were comfortably positioned in the practices that regulated the lesson ‘albeit frustrated with the intrusion of girls in their domain’ (1997: 60). Bramham (2003) also noted that boys have a literal and metaphorical presence in PE. “the gender order in PE is such that girls are generally marginalised and absent because boys are at its centre” (2003: 60). The mixed classes subsequently have invited comment that they serve only to exacerbate and highlight skill differences between boys and girls. In doing so they actively continue to reinforce the divide between femininity and hegemonic masculinity and undermine the gender equality such settings are looking to promote.

There is a strong argument presented for grouping girls in single sex classes, as mixed grouping arrangements can have an obvious detrimental effect on girls’ enjoyment and progression in physical education (Penney, 2002). Scraton (1986) suggests that single sex classes are a better option for increasing girls’ interest in class. The majority of secondary schools returned to this option by the 1990s. In this environment it was claimed that girls can be encouraged to become more confident, assertive and improve their skills with a strong emphasis on girl centred education (Scraton, 1990).

Despite the strong criticisms of mixed classes for PE and the evidence that single sex classes are more appropriate, criticisms have also been levelled at this type of educational organisation. Williams and Bedward (2002) demonstrated that not all girls dislike mixed settings, and that those with high
ability actually enjoyed the challenge of playing with boys in a mixed setting. An additional consideration is that single sex provision is often underpinned by assumptions that girls on their own will create a welcoming, comfortable environment and will co-operate with one another. There is little consideration of the way in which some girls can actually undermine others' experiences of physical education. Colwell (1999) argues that this could easily occur, given the strength of peer pressure at this age. Williams (1993) study found that even in all-girl settings, team games would be unpopular with less able players who complained of cruel comments from other students. Many girls were critical towards players who lacked motivation. Receiving such criticisms, whether from other girls or from boys, inevitably had a negative effect on the experiences of many female pupils.

At an ideological level, single sex classes have been criticised for reinforcing the very masculine/feminine binaries that they are trying to eradicate. Placing girls in single sex classes can make it easier to practice ‘female’ activities and justify a lack of diversity on offer to girls. As Wright (1999) suggests, while girls may well be learning skills and gaining confidence in single sex classes the issue is whether this will be maintained when the boys' perceptions of girls’ abilities and both boys’ and girls’ attitudes do not change. Single sex lessons are a partial solution in that they fail to tackle the major issues of power relations between boys and girls. They do not change the attitudes of boys who have often created the situation from which the female students have been removed.

The available information highlights the problematic nature of physical education lessons dominated by gendered values and opinions. It is evident how much of the content and teaching styles of PE have been constructed around extremely restrictive gender discourses. The mixed/single sex class debates have successfully highlighted the:

"shortcomings of simple conceptualisations of ‘access’ and ‘opportunity’ and that access to the curriculum is not synonymous with access to learning”

(Williams, 1993: 128).
Both single sex and mixed sex provision have been demonstrated to have a negative effect on girls’ physical education experiences because the assumptions behind both practices are centred in negative gender ideologies. Although some of the data is over twenty years old, the continued attention the issue has received demonstrates it is not being resolved. Sports provision for girls continues to be constructed and heavily influenced by gender ideologies that are extremely dated when compared to provision in other areas of education. The problem lies with altering these values and opinions rather than simply changing the setting in which girls participate. Until this occurs girls will continue to have to participate in gendered physical activity and to see this as normal. The following section uses this information to put in context the influence the sexist attitudes and provision, prevalent in the school environment, can have on the experiences of girls in all ages of the curriculum.

3.3.4 Girls’ physical education experiences

Girls’ experiences of physical education are extremely varied. Research in this area, although available, is not as detailed as literature detailing issues of provision and policy within physical education. It is easier to obtain information from teachers and professionals rather than pupils, particularly those of a young age. Subsequently, information on girls’ opinions of physical education in the primary school is limited. Exceptions are Williams’ (1993) research examining the general attitudes of boys and girls of primary age and Renolds (1997), Skelton (2000) and Swain (2000) who all detail the influence of football on shaping masculine culture in the school environment, both inside and outside the formal lesson environment. Their work is examined later in this chapter to specifically understand the profound effect football can have on influencing male and female gender identities.

The thoughts and opinions of secondary school girls have received more attention due to the issues recognised earlier in the chapter. Adolescent girls drop out of sport at a higher rate than boys and many express a dislike of physical education. Scraton (1992) Williams and Bedward (1999) and Choi
(2000) have documented the issues adolescent girls have with physical education in an attempt to recognise why it is so unappealing to them. The school environment has been demonstrated as having the power to influence girls’ enjoyment of sport. This section looks at girls’ experiences alongside the wider cultural issues that reinforce and build on the gender discourses constructed within the school.

When girls enter school they are offered sports opportunities in mixed lessons and are immediately disadvantaged because of the family socialisation process discussed earlier. The organisational problems of mixed lessons have already been documented but mixed classes also offer an instant environment for boys to demonstrate and confirm to girls their superior skill levels.

“Armed with this social and cultural habitus, this deeply sedimented package of attitudes, skills ..., competences, ... pupils enter into the pedagogical process” (Evans et al, 1987: 64-5).

Girls, because they have not accumulated comparable sports experience, come to believe they are ‘naturally’ inferior at sports and games. It does not occur to girls to question the dominant hegemony within PE. Reflecting the literature discussed earlier in the chapter, many girls accept that sport is not something that females do. For boys, in contrast, sport is presented as an important part of their masculine culture and it is accepted that they will participate and enjoy it because it has such an obvious link with adult masculine behaviour. Girls’ negative experiences are normalised because sport is not seen to play a vital part in their adult feminine identity. Williams (1993) demonstrated that primary school pupils have strong gender opinions that can affect interaction in physical education. Both boys and girls articulated stereotypical opinions, suggesting that football was not a female sport and girls were generally better at dance and gymnastics. It has also been demonstrated that within mixed settings, boys tend to dominate interaction. This affects the content and delivery of physical education lessons with girls instantly placed in a less powerful, restrictive situation where they are playing ‘catch up’ with the boys (Talbot, 1993). This situation reflects many of the contexts they experience in wider society. Boys, due to their
(usually) superior ability can control team games, such as football, by not passing to girls and deliberately excluding them. Girls in Shakib's (2003) study of high school basketball players discussed the limited number of opportunities afforded to them to participate. Available sports tended to be male dominated and in order to participate they had to overcome exclusion by boys, something which was virtually impossible for them to achieve.

There is a great deal of empirical data that suggests sport continues to provide negative experiences when girls reach secondary school age. This disengagement has been partly attributed to adolescent females' increasing appreciation of the requirements of adult femininity and the potential conflict sport provides to achieving this. A girl in Shakib's (2003) research discussed how girls that are 'into sport' are not meant to wear make up or be attractive. The fear of becoming too masculine and therefore not heterosexually desirable was a concern for the girls as basketball players. Girls' friendship patterns change during adolescence when a small group of close friends are a necessary and important part of feminine identity. This group has been identified as crucial to the reinforcement and maintenance of feminine culture (McRobbie, 1991; Griffin, 1985). The small circle can also dictate whether or not girls continue (or take up) sports, depending on whether they receive support from their friends to do so. As well as perpetuating expected images and behaviour of femininity, the best friends and the small groupings are in direct competition with the ethos of team spirit and co-operation with large numbers required when participating in team sports. As Hargreaves suggests "young women often reject these situations as being incompatible with their expectations of adult femininity" (1994: 147). McRobbie (1991) demonstrated that much of female adolescent culture is home centred, again in direct conflict with participation in physically active outdoor sports. Instead, working class girls in McRobbie's studies were found to spend a great deal of time in their bedroom as the focal point of developing teenage femininity, trying on clothes, experimenting with make up and reading fashion, romance and music magazines. "The focus of this culture is the presentation of a 'trendy' and 'sexy' image in order to be accepted by girlfriends and attractive to boys" (1991: 13). The importance of boyfriends to girls can also undermine sports
participation. Relationships with boys often take priority and sport and exercise is often chosen to fit round this (Choi, 2000). As has been evident, heterosexuality discourses guide the construction of appropriate femininity. Having a boyfriend assists with securing a girl’s position as a heterosexual female, playing sport does not. The culture of the bedroom, cultivating a sexualised body, socialising with small groups of friends and going out with boys, is all vital in the creation of adolescent feminine identities. Sport has little or no role to play in this (McRobbie, 1991).

3.3.5 Girls and the sporting body

For girls, adolescence is a key time for developing and using their bodies in the correct way to establish a feminine identity. Adolescence is the life period where girls develop their identity which will take them into womanhood and gender ‘mistakes’ are not easily forgotten (Bloustien, 2003). Whilst adult women are restricted by limiting body discourses the pressure is equally intense for girls, particularly when parents, peers and teachers are all monitoring them closely to ensure they ‘turn out right’ (Proweller, 1998). Having to participate in physical education within this context is not seen as assisting girls with this process. The conflict between cultivating an adolescent heterosexual body and the requirements for the sporting body is discussed in studies examining why adolescent girls do not enjoy physical education. Many of the reasons given by girls relate to cultural issues surrounding their age. Williams and Bedward’s (1999) study examined 87 secondary school girls’ experiences of PE. The respondents reported they did not enjoy PE because they did not like getting sweaty, dirty or developing muscle and the accompanying requirements to take showers, remove jewellery and wear unflattering clothes. All of these reasons relate to how participating in sport conflicts with cultivating the body they desire. Similar to women athletes, girls also had problems with the dress requirements of participating in physical education. Choi suggests there is no logical reason why girls should have to wear minimal tight and revealing clothing to participate in PE except that, mirroring the tight clothing of women athletes, it fits in with dominant feminine perceptions. One year 9 girl stated she began to
realise she was ‘different’ from the other students during PE lessons and this was attributed to her being overweight “because I knew then I was different in many ways and I could see the difference in us and that used to make me more upset” (2000: 56).

The issues surrounding body and self-image were found to be more important in explaining why girls did not enjoy physical education. This again is a consequence of adolescent feminine culture with Hargreaves (1994) suggesting its construction is firmly linked to consumer culture that ensures girls are bombarded with idealised images of the female shape that are impossible to ignore. The body is illustrated to be a central component of girls’ identity development and girls have been found to spend a great deal of time worrying about their body and appearance (Oliver and Lalik, 2001). This has been accepted as normal practice, which in turn has led to the normalising of several destructive ways of regulating the body and how it looks.

The girls interviewed in Oliver and Lalik’s (2001) study were offered a number of methods, primarily focus groups and journals, to articulate their opinions and understanding of their bodies. The study revealed how culturally accepted norms and values dominate girls’ perception of their bodies. Oliver and Lalik identified the power of dominant feminine perceptions in the girls lives and commented that,

"the politics of naming and resisting oppression are dangerous for adolescent girls as they struggle to integrate into more adult like roles, simultaneously wanting to ‘fit in’ and remain connected with others, while also wishing to distinguish themselves from others” (2001: 316).

Dissatisfaction with their bodies was a common theme in their research. Girls were preoccupied with the need to monitor, restrict and control their bodies to achieve the thin desirable ideal. Part of this regulation was to restrict activities such as eating, to ensure their bodies conformed to the standards of beauty as understood by them. Reflecting this research, Milosevic (1996) found whilst boys generally viewed themselves in a positive light, there was a tendency for girls to be unhappy about important aspects of their bodies and felt this was
accentuated when they had to wear revealing PE kit and shower with other girls.

Gorely et al, (2003) demonstrated issues surrounding the female ‘sporting body’ can have a detrimental effect on girls’ desire to participate in sport. Their research used photographs of different male and female bodies and asked secondary school pupils to comment on them. One photograph of a female diver encouraged the following response from a female pupil,

“I don’t think women suit being muscley, it is just not in their nature. They are supposed to be weak and vulnerable and wear flowery dresses”.

(Gorely et al, 2003: 434).

The comments from this year 8 girl demonstrate how feminine ideologies are still strongly embedded in contemporary culture. The study revealed both female and male pupils had issues surrounding the appropriateness of a muscular female body and felt it created a gender ambiguity. All pupils recognised that muscular sporting women could transgress traditional gender boundaries, and did not necessarily feel it was an appropriate image for a woman to portray. A picture of a female body builder elicited high levels of intolerance amongst boys, but particularly among girls, for women with ‘masculine’ bodies.

“This is foul. She is so masculine. If she was just walking around people would talk about her and point. You would think she was a man from behind. (Would any girls like to look like that) Girls that want to look like boys, or lesbians. One lesbian partner always wants to look like another man and be really butch”

(Gorely et al, 2003: 435).

There are strongly held views on appropriate gender behaviour but also the association with the sporting women and the sexuality discourses discussed earlier. For many adolescents, sport is associated with negative behaviour in girls and women. The only legitimate reason the teenagers could give for accepting muscular female bodies were if the woman was an elite performer. It appeared this was accepted as a reason for ignoring gender convention. However, being muscular but not an elite performer was seen by the young people to infringe on conventional opinions of femininity and therefore was not acceptable or desirable.
This research demonstrates how the issues raised in McRobbie's (1991) research still continue to influence girls' opinions of sports. It would appear it is not necessarily sporting activity itself that is disliked but the behaviour associated with physical activity generally. Becoming muscular, getting dirty and being aggressive were all viewed as contrary to the teenage feminine identity so crucial to cultivate in adolescence, if a girl wishes to have a smooth transition into adult womanhood. The discomfort experienced because of these issues was exacerbated by the fact that many of the girls in Williams and Bedward (1999) reported they did not see the purpose of physical education in their lives because unlike boys it has no position in developing and affirming their adult identity. The humiliation of the showers and kit, and the lack of attraction of a female body developed through sport, was enough to ensure many girls tried to avoid physical education. This was thought to be more acceptable than missing an 'academic' subject, such as maths, because physical education would not serve them any future purpose.

3.3.6 Summary

The examination of how global discourses are disseminated at local level again highlights the argument that sport is not an essential feature of adult femininity in contrast to its importance in constructing masculinity. The actual experience offered to girls within PE lessons has been shown to do little to counter this belief. The methods of the teacher, his/her beliefs, the cultivation of inappropriate body image and the overriding issue that sport is not an essential component of female identity, means that many girls come into lesson reticent and leave the lesson with their negative attitudes confirmed (Wright, 1999). The qualitative data examined in this section places the quantitative information provided by the national survey of Young People in Sport in a different light. Whilst the quantitative measures may show relatively high levels of participation, the studies here suggest the actual experience may not be a positive one despite the high numbers of girls involved with sport. It is this quality of experience, within the sports environment, that is of concern and relevance to this study.
3.4 Resistance to dominant discourses

In this study a feminist cultural studies approach is being used to provide the theoretical underpinning to research girls' experiences of football. It is helpful to draw on this approach in this section to contextualise some of the empirical data detailed. A bleak picture has been depicted of the restriction imposed on women by feminine ideology and the place of sport in perpetuating this ideology. Men control the dominant hegemony in the sporting arena and culture, the media and peers may reinforce these ideals and many women simply tolerate and conform. However, Cole and Birrell's (1986) notion of leaky hegemony is useful for understanding women's sport experiences. Cole and Birrell maintain that all hegemonic discourses are open to question: they are not absolute. Despite the barriers preventing and discouraging women and girls, they do participate. Although females still participate less than men, the participation statistics indicate the gender gap continues to narrow. Women's participation in sport reflects their entry into wider, male dominated spheres in society. Sport still remains one of the few areas where men openly continue to have control. However, it is difficult to ignore the challenge presented by the numerous women participating and in the last two decades often doing so in large numbers in sports constructed as masculine.

Women's shifting position more generally within society and the fluidity and diversity of contemporary femininities has been illustrated. It is evident that feminine identities are numerous and constructed through a subtle process of compliance and resistance to gender discourses, a process which shifts and alters across contexts. Sport provides an obvious arena for women to resist and challenge gender stereotypes that restrict both their sports participation and their lives. The section now moves on to examine this process and understand how women and girls can use sport as a means to challenge and contest restrictive gender discourses. It considers the different meaning of resistance for individuals, the impact of this on sport and femininity more
broadly, and also the implications for individual feminine identity construction and women and girls’ experiences within sport.

3.4.1 Challenging gender stereotypes through sport

Colwell argues that simply participating in sport challenges ‘patriarchal definitions’ of submissiveness, passivity and dependence (1999: 224). Contemporary female sporting achievement has dramatically surpassed what would be considered their ‘limits’. They use their bodies, reflecting post structural understanding, as skilled and forceful subjects and challenge fundamental sources of male physical power (Whitson, 2002: 231). Some women are clearly not passive in their sporting endeavours or in any aspects of their lives. Women can and do choose to reject and contest the dominant discourses that construct sport as male and unfeminine. In defying these assumptions and participating in sport a potent arena is created in which gender stereotypes can be defied (Thorpe, 2005). In particular, discourses surrounding how the female body should be used can easily be rejected when participating in sport.

Empowerment has been defined by Gilroy (1997) as the process by which women gain more power over their lives. Sport has been demonstrated to help some women achieve this type of empowerment and to use their bodies to challenge gender stereotypes and patriarchal control of women’s bodies (Theberge and Birrell, 1994). As Talbot (1986) suggests, participating in sport can be a liberating experience for female athletes. Female body builders provide an extreme example of women challenging discourses surrounding the female body shape. This can be seen as a form of resistance but this is complicated by their compliance and acceptance of certain other visual feminine discourses such as styling their hair, and wearing skimpy bikinis (Schulze, 1990). Heywood (1998) recounts her experiences as a recreational body builder and suggests that building muscles and enhancing her strength had a profound effect on enhancing her psychological well-being. She felt professional body builders were unlikely to feel the same empowering
experiences because the shape and the size of their bodies were dictated by commercialised expectations enforced by male judges.

Resistance and empowerment of gender norms through sport is a very individual process. The same experiences can clearly be perceived in very different ways by different women. Women in Haravon-Collin’s (2002) study reported feeling a great deal of empowerment from attending aerobics, whereas other females may simply see this particular activity as adhering to gender norms, helping to create a body that meets gender ‘regulations’. Following poststructuralist thinking, it is evident that women do not create seamless, non-contradictory narratives about their participation in sport. The location of power and resistance is not always stable and static (Haravon-Collins, 2002).

Female participation in male dominated sports signifies a potential change in the power relationship between various men and women (Colwell, 1999: 224). The suitability of poststructuralist thinking is evident in demonstrations of individual difference: not all women achieve power through sport but equally not all women experience gender repression within this domain. Although traditional male sports continue to be male dominated, the increasing number of female participants (as illustrated by football) constitutes a change in power. The construction of gender identities for these athletes is a more complex process than for females participating in acceptable female sports. As Cox and Thompson suggest,

“Women who use their bodies to play sports largely constructed and dominated by men, often experience contradictions, ambiguities and conflicts. Many of these experiences will be associated with having transgressed normative gender boundaries, while at the same time being involved in the conservative practices surrounding traditional male sport....Furthermore these tensions are not static but ever changing” (2000: 18).

Research into the experiences of female football players has generally reported a sense of joy and empowerment from mastering a sport that personifies masculinity (Scranton et al, 1999; Cox and Thompson, 2000). In these studies the issue of how sport allowed them to execute new skills using
their bodies was of primary importance in establishing these positive feelings. All were confident using their bodies to run, jump, get muddy, execute complicated skills and generally partake in activities that would not be considered feminine. However, the players also attached values to the game that are associated with being female. Pleasure came from friendships made, sharing experiences and supporting one another (Scraton et al, 1999: 106). This suggests these women attached their own meanings to the sport and that these tended to reflect traditional feminine values. Men, by comparison, are said to use football as a “safe form of interaction” which does not allow for the development of intimate, co-operative peer relationships, instead facilitating closeness but also distance from other players (Phillips and Phillips, 1993: 223).

This liberation was set against other gender restrictions. The female players, although using their bodies in new ways still remained extremely sensitive to body image discourses and felt it was important to comply with these. Scraton et al (1999) described the interviewees as having slender, fit, toned bodies that matched contemporary notions of the ‘ideal’ female body, but also reported that they still expressed anxiety over the need to lose weight and their ‘problem’ body parts. Thus, although playing challenged how women use their bodies, contradictions were clearly evident. The women felt this must be achieved using a feminine appropriate body shape. There was concern that if they lost this body image they would be deemed ‘butch’ which would create unwanted conflict with the gender identity they wanted to construct. It would seem that for the female footballer, transgressing gender boundaries is acceptable for the duration of the game, so long as afterwards, they can prove they are feminine and can offer ‘multiple femininities’. Outside of playing time, most of the women deliberately constructed an identity that reflected conventional femininity. They wore perfume, make up, kept their hair long and wore dresses and skirts.

Similar complexities in negotiating participation and a feminine identity has been evident in other research. Krane, Choi, Baird, Aimar and Kauer (2004) discuss how female athletes ‘live a paradox’ negotiating femininity and
muscularity. The athletes in this study put aside femininity and resisted the demands involved with this identity construction when they were being athletes as opposed to women. Krane et al discuss the athletes displacing "femininity with their 'game face' or competitive zeal and left 'doing girl' for social situations" (2004: 327). However some athletes in the research also felt compelled to 'do girl' whilst participating in sport. Femininity could not simply be displaced during sports participation. Similarly, Mennesson's (2000) study of female boxers indicated the pleasure they obtained from competing and being accepted in one of the most aggressive male arenas. However, both in and out of the ring they still had to be feminine. 'Something sexy' (2000: 28) had to be worn in the ring and mini skirts and long hair were the norm outside. The women felt that the only way that they could be accepted as female boxers was by parading such overt femininity and by displaying inferior performances to men. Thus, although these women actively challenged stereotypes in a conspicuous way, to do so they had to offer no threat to male fighters. The binaries were thus maintained, male boxing contrasting with its weaker version female boxing (Mennesson, 2000). Although masculine domination continued to be reproduced the boxers did distance themselves from other elements of femininity. They believed women should be independent and spurned the expectations of homemaker and child rearer but did not actively challenge other restrictive elements of femininity. In similar fashion, Scraton et al (1999) also concluded there was little evidence to demonstrate that women's football provides a serious threat to the gender order.

Women do contest, but do not completely change gender expectations through sport. Instead participation represents a complex series of compliance and contestation rather than complete transformation. Some elements are successfully challenged, with the body being a central component in enabling women to achieve this. Women can gain pleasure from sports participation, but their activities continued to be modified by feminine ideology. Women's entry into male sport is now tolerated but only if it is accompanied by attitudes and behaviour that serve to normalise this deviant action and do not challenge male superiority within the sport.
However, the mere entry is enough to broaden femininity and allow women to empower their bodies in what has previously been viewed as an exclusively male practice.

3.4.2 Girls, sport and resistance and challenge

Girls are also able to use sport to resist and contest gender norms. Much of the research examining sports experiences focus on explaining why girls do not enjoy sport and therefore do not participate to the same extent as boys. Female students who are thriving in this system are ignored in such contexts, because they are usually a minority and do not provide information on improving the physical education curriculum. However, to provide a more complete understanding of girls’ experiences it is valuable to understand the experiences of these girls and appreciate why they are different from the majority. More empirical data is now available acknowledging and demonstrating that sport does not provide all girls with a negative experience Gorely, Kirk and Holroyd (2003), Williams and Bedward (2002), Skelton (2000) and Renold (1997) have all indicated that certain girls enjoy the opportunity to play sport and often actively challenge and question gender stereotypes through this. Once again, literature in this area illustrates that male hegemony within the sports arena is incomplete and the socialisation process is not rigid. Neither are absolute or immune to challenge and no one experience, even if collective amongst a group of females, can be seen as the only ‘truth’ (Hargreaves, 1990).

It has been demonstrated that contemporary images of girls are diverse. Popular images of western girls move between two extremes (Harris, 2004). One end sees the modern girl as being powerful, liberated, independent and able to access everything; the other suggests that little has changed and being female is to occupy a subordinate social position (Bloustien, 2003). The post-structural approach guiding the research suggests that ‘reality’ is a complicated mixture of the two. For a long time, it has been important for feminist researchers to stress the similarities between girls rather than their differences. Post-structural positioning allows for the understanding that
multiple femininities exist (in the sense that girls can and do adopt more than one gendered identity) and that girls have varied experiences within sport. Although much research has depicted the majority of girls as disaffected from sport, there are also many who find it an enjoyable and rewarding experience (Wright, 1999, Williams and Bedward, 1999). They actively challenge the stereotypes presented to them by being interested in and participating in sport on a regular basis.

The literature examining girls' abilities to resist and develop their own gender identities is drawn largely from the reflections of women athletes on their childhood sporting experiences (Caudwell, 1999, Scraton et al, 1999). These women are shown to have deviated as girls from the traditional socialisation pathways documented earlier in this chapter. Some of the girls interviewed in Williams and Bedward's (1999) work displayed attitudes and behaviour that indicated that they enjoyed sports participation and did not feel it conflicted with feminine identity. Many girls wanted to play football and found it unfair that this opportunity was not available to them in lesson time. They did not accept this as being correct and 'natural' but instead attacked the curriculum and teachers' attitudes as being sexist and unfair. They accused teachers of having little understanding of the types of activities in which they wanted to participate.

Sports such as football or rugby, which are depicted as unsuitable for girls, are at times more appealing precisely because they 'should not' play them. As indicated in Gorely et al (2003) the physical challenge of these sports attracts girls to them.

"I like rugby because it's like a man's sport and I like trying to be like that because I play football in the park, so I just blend in sometimes. I just want to let my hair down and just act like myself, just really rough..... I think 'I'm not going to be like that', I'm not going to be 'well it's a boys sport'. I think if it's a man's sport then so what? I'm going to play it anyway".

(Gorely et al, 2003: 437).

It is evident that some girls do enjoy the challenge of participating in 'prohibited' sports. It clearly gives them a feeling of physical empowerment and satisfaction. Stranbu and Hegna (2004) argue this in itself is a
transgression of gender ideals if the criterion for a challenge of gender ideals is an extension of what is considered normal activities for girls. Equally for these girls the problems of the female sporting body are less pronounced, they extend the script of what constitutes an appropriate female body for them. In Gorely et al’s research whilst the overly muscular body of the female discus thrower and body builder were still deemed unacceptable, girls who had an interest in sport saw the photo of a female diver as a normal and desirable shape,

“I think I like her better. If I was going to be muscley I think I would like to look like her. I think out of all the girls I have seen I would like to be like her or the ballerina, but I’m not the ballerina type, I like football and stuff”. 

(Gorely et al, 2003: 437).

Although there are still limits to what these girls perceive are acceptable images for themselves, they have extended this beyond stereotypical expectations. It is in resisting these gender norms that girls both subvert and challenge femininity and in doing so engage in a reconstruction of its norms (Leblanc, 1999).

Girls do challenge and contest gender expectations, even if this is only achieved in a subtle way and does not result in any direct or instant changes. Young girls are often described as ‘tomboys’, a label for females who reject feminine ideals from an early age and are generally viewed as deviant and ‘other’ than the ‘normal’ female girl. Mennesson (2000) showed that all the women interviewed in her female boxing study referred to themselves as tomboys when describing their childhood experiences. The female boxers were identified as having had an unconventional adolescence that challenged expected feminine identities. They dressed like boys, played football, climbed trees and preferred the company of boys. From the age of 8-15 the girls were described as “enacting a counter-identity” that avoided traditional behaviour, and included rejecting relationships with girls who they considered boring and fragile (2000: 25). Young girl softball players in Malcom’s (2003) research were keen to emphasise that they constructed themselves as ‘other’ to feminine ideals. For them sport did offer an opportunity to play out an
alternative identity to that which they constructed in wider society. Sport in these cases became a vehicle that girls use to offer continued resistance to compliance with gender expectations.

There was a recognition by girls that through sports participation they could contest dominant notions of femininity. Girls in Shakib’s study (2003) felt due to this there was a perceived conflict between their basketball participation and constructing an adolescent feminine identity. However, the girls continued participation in spite of this using similar survival strategies to adult women, emphasising their femininity and ensuring they present an appropriate physical appearance off the court. Similarly older teenage girl softball players in Malcom's (2003) research tended to display exaggerated versions of femininity. Malcom suggests however this was due to a complicated mixture of desire by the girls to demonstrate they were growing up and becoming women as to prove they were not being masculinised by sport. In contrast, female Norwegian basketball players in Strandbu and Hegna's (2004) study did not experience sports participation as causing gender identity problems. The authors suggested that once females are involved in sport there is little conflict with gender ideals but the voices of outsiders may not be in agreement. Playing sport was recognised by the basketball players as an alternative activity but participation did not rewrite gender scripts or produce a “dramatic gender battle” (2004: 122). Instead participation encouraged a careful negotiation and expansion of traditional gender discourses rather than an obvious challenge and rejection.

The research available illustrates that girls can and do use sport to contest dominant gender norms but as with adults, female resistance can be defined in a multitude of ways. Some girls did feel they could transgress gender norms and would use sport to develop or reaffirm a tomboy identity. Other girls reflected adult women, and whilst they believed they contested gender norms in the sporting arena transgressions did not continue beyond this and they were quick to reaffirm a traditional feminine identity outside of sport or sometimes even when engaging in sport. In contrast the girls in Strandbu and Hegna's (2004) research did not feel that they were particularly contesting
dominant versions of femininity but rather extending what was ‘allowed’ within that understanding. Leblanc (1999) in her research examining girls and femininity within punk culture, felt this alternative subculture offered the girls she interviewed a chance to avoid the process of internalising and enacting expected standards of femininity. It allowed them to experience a different type of childhood. Sport, as an alternative subculture, could be viewed as offering a similar process. Mirroring the girls entering the punk community, sport offers females the chance to resist and fight gender expectation in what has previously been considered one of the most masculine and unreceptive setting. However, girls have very individual ways of entering this arena and interpreting what it means to them. The obviously complex issues of resistance and challenge are now explored in more detail in the following section which looks specifically at football and whether girls who play are challenging the dominant gender order.

3.4.3 Girls, football and gender identity

Sports participation presents a number of gender conflicts for girls and is generally only deemed acceptable in typically feminine activities. A number of formal institutions and informal socialising processes have contributed to girls accepting these gender discourses from an early age. It has been discussed briefly that girls do have the ability to contest and challenge this process and add their own interpretation to what they view as being an appropriate feminine identity. This section looks at the significance of girls playing a sport that has particularly strong associations with masculinity. The ability of the sport to retain its male domination, from a global level through the mass media down to everyday practices within schools, is highlighted, but the substantial and growing number of girls now participating appears to contradict this. Very little is known, however, about girls who participate in male dominated arenas. This section examines this and looks particularly at the significance of girls playing football as a mechanism for challenging established gender identities.
In England, football is one of the strongest and most visible symbols of 'maleness'. Whannel (1992) commented that football in Britain has been virtually exclusively masculine. It has created a culture of 'extreme' masculinity in which toughness and aggressive behaviour are prioritised. Sabo and Panepinto offer a similar interpretation of American football, a sport which has an equivalent status in the United States to soccer in Britain: "the masculinity validating dimensions of football have always been one of the game's prominent cultural features" (1990: 174). In Britain the sport is a source of national pride and a very visible celebration of male culture. The men's game dominates the mass media and is presented as an essential component of hegemonic masculinity. It provides all the essential elements of what it is to be male, competitiveness, success, aggression, violence (both on and off the field in recent years) and importantly separation from and superiority over women. It provides a

"locus of interaction between structural, cultural and psychological process that engenders (male) players and prepares them for life within a gendered society"

(Sabo and Panepinto, 1990: 120).

This 'football culture,' so essential for developing masculine gender identity is one from which women and girls have been excluded in all but very passive roles such as spectator, kit washer or player's girlfriend. As a result, attempts by girls and women to become actively involved in the game have been strongly opposed.

A number of the implications of studies of children, football and gender in the school setting are examined. Bramham, (2003); Renold, (1997); Skelton (2000); and Swain, (2000); have all theorised how playing football in the primary school setting, both informally and formally, contributes to the development of boys' masculine identity. Football in these studies is shown to be an essential part of boys' development, in that it plays a significant role in defining what it is to be a real man or a boy. These studies also illustrate how football has no real part to play in moulding girls' gender identities. Girls, instead, define their femininity by not playing football or engaging in this masculine arena. Girls who do play football have to negotiate a complex set of norms, and move between the competing discourses of football and
femininity. Cockburn and Clarke (2002) in their study examining teenage girls' experiences of physical education concluded that by playing masculine sports teenage girls created for themselves a sizeable 'femininity deficit'. "Through demonstrating such individuality and non-conformity they will in most instances inevitably face powerful cultural limitations and take social risks with regard to their perceived femininity" (2002: 661). Whether they personally accept the feminine norms or reject them, girls still have to contend with the construction of femininity.

Skelton (2000) demonstrates how the gendered attitudes of teachers, discussed earlier in the chapter, can become even more pronounced when they are teaching what is seen as a male sport. The (male) teacher in her study was found to clearly discourage girl pupils from taking any part in football lessons. The class teacher used formal football lessons as an opportunity for the boy's school team to practice and asked girls whether they wanted to take part. Those who did were placed at a considerable disadvantage. The majority of boys participating played together every break time and were not used to passing to people outside their exclusive group or communicating with them which subsequently meant they excluded the girls. The teacher and male players' assumption of lack of skill was also noted in this study as a means for discouraging girls becoming involved. When one girl asked the teacher why the boys were always goalkeepers, he replied, "You want someone to keep the other team's goals out don't you, so let's go for the best!" (Skelton, 2000: 13).

In Skelton's study, the lack of worth of female players was emphasised by them being given add on positions when there were too many children to form two teams. Boys took the core positions, goalkeeper, centre forward, and wingers, whilst girls were given add on defence positions that made it difficult for them to be fully integrated or feel important. Bryson (1987) suggests that this type of approach is important in maintaining cultural hegemony, as examined in chapter two. The negative evaluations of the girls' capabilities by the teachers and by the boys are implicit in creating the masculine hegemony. The power of football, as a 'masculine sport' is vital in this process. The girls'
experience in this environment was understandably not enjoyable and demonstrates the effect of cultural expectations, in a mixed setting, combined with ineffective teaching methods. These methods highlighted in the first section contribute directly to girls' poor experiences of physical education, whilst the power of cultural hegemony ensures such strategies are normalised and maintained within the school.

The girls in Renold's study did question the reasoning behind boys dominating physical activity space, here, in the playground. Football, in the school examined, constitutes a powerful process dominated by boys who actively excluded girls. One girl commented:

“In the summer on the field I like playing football but the boys never let you…..like in games if you play they never pass the football to you”

(Renold, 1997: 9).

and another stated:

“Well sometimes if you go up to them and say 'can I play football?' they say 'No, you're a girl, you're not good enough', or something like that”

(1997: 10).

Girls were aware that maybe the experiences they have within lessons and informal activity were not fair but they did not question their claim to anything better, nor do they have the power to do so because the boys are so competent at defending the dominant hegemony. Although in theory girls are able to join in with playground activities, Swain (2000) found any attempts to do so were largely ineffectual, as boys would not pass to girls and verbally attacked their attempts to play. Boys not only dominated informal activities, but also playground space and maintained expected gender relations. This was achieved by what both Renold and Swain commented as the school playground being divided into a football pitch and then space for ‘other’ activities. This invariably led to girls been marginalized and restricted to the edges of the football space.

This binary division reflects and reinforces dominant gender discourses with boys constructed as the powerful sports participants whilst the ‘weaker’ girls were confined to a spectator role. The boys who played were described as
translating the school’s official policy of keeping football separate and legitimising it as a boys-only zone because of the playground divide (Renold, 1997: 10). Girls’ exclusion was also extended to formal extra curricular football practices. In Swain’s (2000) research, six girls had attended football practice. The girls’ experiences in this setting again reflected those in the formal curriculum context. Two girls had said they felt isolated because they were not taught any skills and made to play small sided games with other girls and one girl had stopped going because of the amount of abuse she received from the boys, who publicly derided her football abilities. This solidarity from the boys is also vital to the exclusion process, as it provides an environment and support for collective negative opinions towards girls. This becomes so convincing that girls end up accepting that football is only for boys and that they are not capable of playing. The reinforcement of dominant masculinities and femininities to the disadvantage of girl pupils is highly visible. Many of the boys internalised and naturalised the view (regulated by the media, teachers and dinner ladies) that girls should be excluded from sports, not just in physical education, but also in the public spaces of the playground and sports field during play.

These studies provide an interesting and relevant background to the current research. Swain’s (2000) case study analysis in an English primary school suggests that gender ideology continues to be a major factor in restricting girls’ participation in the schools. This ensures that girls have unfavourable sports experiences both in lessons and informal situations, particularly in a male dominated sport such as football. His research was conducted over an eight-week period in which he observed the playground and classroom activities of one particular class. The difficulty of researching children’s understanding was highlighted but generally overcome by ensuring interviews were semi structured and took part in an environment as close as possible to the normal social encounters he had with the children during the period of observation. Renold’s (1997) endorses this approach using an ethnographic study to enable her research to ‘open up’ and get close to the social sites and their occupants. Pupils in both Swain and Renold’s study were usually interviewed in friendship groups of two and three. The analysis of these and
the field notes collected during observation offers compelling evidence of girls’ inability to challenging the powerful stereotypes develop through the boys football culture. Instead, it provides an opportunity to use practices to reinforce constraints on girls. Femininity continues to be constructed as subordinated, stigmatised and marginalized, something the girls recognise but are unable actively to do anything to change.

The research offers compelling evidence of the power of football to retain its masculine status and the ability of boys and men to restrict girls’ access to it. Notwithstanding this, women and girls in the UK are now playing football in large numbers and it continues to grow as a female participation sport. That this is happening in what is considered the most masculine of sports has potential implications for the dominant gender order. Many girls are now playing football and in doing so are actively contradicting the image that it is an exclusively male preserve which has existed for decades. Equally, this illustrates that participation in football does not necessarily entail a negative experience for females but instead can provide a great deal of pleasure and enjoyment. The female footballers interviewed in Scraton et al (1999) all describe their enthusiasm and willingness to play from an early age and created reasons for their involvement in the sport whilst actively reconstructing female appropriate behaviour. Although they recognised that football is not ‘supposed’ to be played by girls, they negotiated the stigma surrounding it by viewing themselves as ‘other’ to the girls they had contact with in childhood. The women in Cox and Thompson’s study held similar views,

“I remember distinctly at primary school (5-10 years) that all my friends that were girls liked playing elastics and knucklebones. But there was a couple of us, me and my best friend who loved going playing soccer and bullrush and all that sort of stuff..... I just like really physical things”

(2000: 10).

The women still considered themselves to be feminine but not in the same way as the majority of their friends. Football was described as an important part of their identity both in adulthood and whilst growing up. Although this was different from most of their friends it did not lead to them perceiving themselves as any less feminine.
The women interviewed in both studies felt they were able to challenge perceived stereotypes because male friends or family members introduced them to the sport. Fathers were often recognised as teaching the basic skills that enabled the girls to pursue the sport into a formal environment and compete on a similar level to boys of the same age. This a-typical socialisation process was viewed as key to enabling the women to overcome gender stereotypes and instead enact a gender identity that allowed them greater freedom to pursue the activities they wished.

Research in this area is limited and has not fully explored the effects of playing football on how girls' view gender and their own identity. Football has been recognised as an arena that males can use to celebrate and explore their masculinity. There has been limited examination of how the same context can be used by females to reconstruct femininity. As Horne, Matthews, Detrie, Burke and Cook, (2001) suggest, it is a mistake to think that girls are simply passive recipients of socialisation messages as implied by some of the empirical data reviewed in this chapter. The rapid growth of female football suggests a large number of girls want and are happy to play football. This demonstrates that girls are capable of challenging feminine ideals and attaching their own meaning to femininity and what it is to be a girl. It is significant that they are achieving this in football, which has previously been one of the hardest bastions to break into (Messner and Sabo, 1990). By doing this, girls and women are not only challenging traditional assumptions of masculinity and femininity but can also be viewed as redefining the gender order. As Smith suggests, femininity is “continually undergoing elaboration, contradiction, reworking at the local level” (1988: 55) and female footballers can be viewed as being a significant part of this remodelling of repressive gender norms. They have shown it is possible to overcome the barriers that exist and firmly establish themselves in this masculine environment and in such a way as to provide pleasure and enjoyment.

Patriarchal dominance is not inevitable and if broken down in this sphere, can also be challenged in other areas of society. Girls' participation also has
implication for definitions of masculinity. If football is viewed as an appropriate mechanism for teaching boys what it is to be male, the fact that girls are now playing in larger number, suggests that the sport is no longer wholly symbolic of hegemonic masculinity. If large numbers of girls continue to participate, rather than being the pinnacle of masculinity, football may move to being a more gender-neutral area which both girls and boys can access and enjoy. They can attach their own meaning to what it is to be male or female rather than being guided by stereotypical assumptions of appropriate behaviour.

It is debatable however that this could be achieved. The studies reviewed in this section illustrate the enthusiasm of boys and men to retain ascendancy over girls on the football pitch and exclude them from involvement. Scraton et al (1999) concluded that although the female footballers studied did provide a challenge to gender relations through playing the game, they did not completely overturn gender stereotypes. Instead, girls playing football and perceiving themselves to be like boys simply reinforced and reproduced rather than challenged the binary power relations of masculinity and femininity. "I was like a tomboy. I spent a lot of time together with the boys. It was fun and a little rough" (Scraton et al, 1999: 107). Enacting this alternative gender identity was found to be acceptable by female footballers only for the duration of childhood, thereby questioning how influential is this alternative gender identity is at challenging established gender relations in general. Cox and Thompson (2000) found the female footballers they interviewed felt tolerance for their behaviour diminished with age and they were forced to reconsider the sports they played.

However, despite this, the women in both Cox and Thompson (2000) and Scraton et al (1999) still continued to play into adulthood but did this by adopting a feminine identity. This was altered depending on the situation. At times they did display stereotypical feminine behaviour but continued to offer a subtle challenge to it by playing football. These findings illustrate the complexities and contradictions of contemporary gender relations. It is clear femininity is diversifying and changing, as girls move in greater numbers into male dominated sports. It is not clear how much this actively challenges
normalised standards of femininity. By adopting many types of femininities the women reported that during their teenage years and into adulthood they were able to play a sport they enjoyed but not alienate themselves from the feminine practices of many of their friends during their teenage years. Scraton et al (1999) argue however that this may not be a major challenge to the gender order. Instead, it is simply interpreted as girls and women crossing gender boundaries to access a sport that is associated with masculine traits.

Previous research demonstrates the complexities of theorising and understanding gender and gender identity in relation to girls who play football. Although there is a lack of empirical data to support it, the available information suggests girls who play football are challenging the dominant gender order. The power of masculine hegemony over the sport prevents this being a complete overturn, but girls who play football are arguably redefining what it is to be feminine even when boys and men retain the power in the sport. Girls' and women's feminine identities appear to adapt and alter in different circumstance but football can be a key site for demonstrating they are not simply recipients of stereotypes. Some elements of traditional femininity are used to create a gender identity but girls, by playing football, demonstrate they can choose not to adopt all elements of expected behaviour. The extent to which girls chose to do this will differ between individuals, reflecting the multiple femininities concept introduced by post modernist thinking. Cox and Thompson highlight this point, in relation to adult women, showing that by understanding female football players have multiple bodies we can appreciate how they both challenge and collude with hegemonic discourses. It is also possible to recognise the tensions females face by playing a male sport and how they continually deal with them by constructing themselves according to the context (2000: 17). Whilst there has previously been the implication that girls are either 'tom boys' or traditional 'feminine girl', this suggestion demonstrates girls' gender perceptions and persona are far more complex than those two extremes and that girls often enact both. Instead, previous research had concentrated on the ways in which girls are encouraged to adopt stereotypical gender identities both in sport and through sport, not how they resist and contradict these images and the
implication of doing so. There is an opportunity to understand whether sport for young girls is used as a mechanism to redefine what it is to be female and whether stereotypical notions are changing. This study aims to do this, in the context of the growing involvement of girls and women in football.

3.5 Chapter summary

The research reviewed forms the background to the current study. The literature provides the theoretical grounding for investigating gender identity construction and explores the discourses that inform what constitutes accepted gender identity at a wider level. The available literature examining sports at a global level demonstrates how sport contributes to the construction of dominant masculine and feminine discourses and how the structure of sport and the media reinforces these discourses. The second half of the chapter has used this framework to examine at a local level girls' experiences in sport in relation to the participation context, highlighting the general lack of research into girls' experiences in sport outside of school physical education lessons. There is limited information available regarding girls' experience in extra curricular activity which participation data suggests girls can participate in on a fairly equal level to boys. Whilst schools and school sports can be heavily gendered institutions reaffirming stereotypes in the ways illustrated, there is little focus on schools and other sporting environments which may be structured in such a way as to help girls overcome restrictive stereotypes or for the changing environment occurring within some masculine sports.

The complexities of different girls' gender understandings and how male sports participation influences and challenges dominant assumptions is an under-researched area. As Gilroy (1997) suggests, what needs to be explored is a range of girls' experiences to see if there are any key factors that have contributed to (or inhibited) empowerment. In this study, the theorisation around multiple femininities will be crucial in guiding the research to provide empirical data in this area. The conflicting results concerning women's involvement in male sports and subsequent gender constructions suggests
girls' perceptions of femininity may be more diverse, complex and multifaceted than either challenging stereotypes and being labelled ‘tomboy’, or conforming to convention and being an ‘ideal’ feminine girl. Like women, girls are likely to have numerous influences that shape their feminine identities in ways that simultaneously restrict and liberate them and this is an integral part of managing their sports experiences within a feminine identity. It is the attempt to understand how this occurs that provides the foundations of the research project.

The literature discussed in the chapter has illustrated that sport and leisure research conducted directly with young people is limited (MacPhail, Kinchin and Kirk, 2003). The current study recognises this and also the value of including young people actively within research. The study will look to examine with girls their experiences of identity construction and football and ensure their views are prominent in the data collected and analysed. The following chapter examines the methodological approach in detail, demonstrating how an approach combining feminist theory and childhood sociology can ensure the girls’ voices are at the forefront of the research process.
Chapter 4
Methodology and Methods

4.1 Introduction

This chapter sets out the methodological approach used in the study. That chosen has been guided by the aims of the research project and incorporates a position considered most appropriate for examining them.

The aims of the research project are:

- To examine the experiences of girls participating in football.
- To assess how football experiences contribute to the construction of girls’ gender identities.

The associated objectives are:

1) To examine how pre-adolescent girls construct their gender identity.
2) To identify the influences on girls’ gender identity construction.
3) To examine girls’ experiences of participating in football.
4) To examine whether participating in football impacts on girls’ gender identity construction and in what way.
5) Through the research process, develop a methodology that allows girls to engage and express their experiences in ways most suitable for them.

Key research questions associated with these objectives are:

What are girls’ understandings of masculinity and femininity? Do these reflect stereotypical assumptions?
How do girls view themselves in relation to their definitions of femininity?
How do girls feel they are affected by feminine norms?
What do girls perceive influences the gender identity they construct?
What are girls’ understandings of sport generally and football in relation to gender stereotypes?
Do they view playing football as influencing their construction of femininity?
Is there a conflict between feminine ideals whilst involved in a ‘male’ sport?
How do they negotiate this conflict?
The research questions underpin the choice of methodological approach. Crotty (1998) suggest four different elements need to be addressed within this decision:

Epistemology or the theory of knowledge. The theoretical perspective, the philosophical stance informing the methodology and as such provides the process and grounding of its logic and content. Methodology – a strategy, process or design lying behind the choice and use of methods, and finally the methods – the techniques or procedures used to gather and analyse the data collected in relation to the research question, (Crotty, 1998: 5). It is important these elements link together coherently.

In the current research, these choices will reflect the key characteristics of the study: the gendered nature of the research topic and the focus on children as research subjects. These characteristics have implications for the epistemological stance adopted, the theoretical perspectives and the methods used. The philosophical and practical considerations of examining gender identity in young girls will be incorporated in the methodological framework. Both feminism and childhood sociology will influence this process. The research questions direct the methodology towards a qualitative style of data gathering. This will allow the researcher to uncover in depth information on the subject area and establish a rapport with the participants. The constructs examined are complicated, personal and individual and the research methodology needs to be flexible and sensitive to uncover girls' experiences and opinions. Focus groups, interviews and a range of participatory techniques will be used over a period of time to generate the data. The research will be conducted in a single school site, to which the researcher has gained access, by organising and running an after-school girls football club. Although primarily set up for practical coaching purposes, these sessions will provide the basis for contact with the group of girls involved in the research and provide the opportunity to conduct some of it by using the methods outlined. The next section examines how the research affects the philosophical stance of the research and addresses the methodological issues that arise in relation to feminist and childhood research.
4.2 Epistemological positions

The epistemological position used affects all areas of the research process. A number of competing epistemological paradigms have been identified, each of which offers a distinct version of what constitutes knowledge and reality. The main positions/paradigms are considered to be Positivism, Interpretivism, Constructionism and Critical theory.

Positivism developed in the 19th century and has influenced the other major paradigms. This approach sees knowledge as being the immediate reality, which is measurable using logical scientific techniques. Positivists view knowledge as being created through rigorous and objective testing with the researcher remaining neutral and unbiased. In contrast, Interpretivists look for culturally derived and historically placed interpretations of the social world. In direct opposition to positivists, they argue it is impossible to remain unbiased in the research process. Constructionism shares with interpretivism the belief that experience should be understood through the individuals living it. They differ in seeing knowledge and truth as constructed through human interaction. Like interpretivists, constructionists view the researcher as being a crucial element of the knowledge constructed and recognise the part they play in this process. The final paradigm, critical theory, sees knowledge as developing from an understanding of power relations in society. Researchers using this approach have an implicit objective of trying to use their research to improve the social conditions of the researched and are overtly political and involved in their work (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994).

To summarise:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Aim of research</th>
<th>Knowledge produced</th>
<th>Role of values</th>
<th>Role of the researcher</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positivism</td>
<td>Aim of the research is exploration</td>
<td>Knowledge consists of verified hypothesis that can be accepted as laws or facts</td>
<td>Research is value free. Values are seen as an unnecessary variable that cannot be part of objective research</td>
<td>The researcher plays the role of the disinterested scientists.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpretivism</td>
<td>To understand the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it.</td>
<td>Knowledge is an interpretation of social interaction involving history, language and action.</td>
<td>Values are important. Viewed as impossible to omit from the research process.</td>
<td>Researcher actively involved in research through watching, looking, recording and examining phenomena.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constructionism</td>
<td>Understanding and reconstruction of the constructions that people initially hold</td>
<td>Knowledge consists of those constructions about which there is a consensus.</td>
<td>Values are seen as important in the research process and influence the outcomes.</td>
<td>The researcher participates actively in the research and engages in facilitating the multi-voice reconstruction of information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical theory</td>
<td>Aim of research is critique and transformation.</td>
<td>Knowledge consists of a series of historical insights that will transform as time passes.</td>
<td>Values are essential in the research process.</td>
<td>The researcher takes the position of transformer who is attempting to expand the consciousness of the researched.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5 Epistemology Adapted from Denzin & Lincoln (1994)

In the current research, constructionist and critical approaches have been adopted to guide the methodology. The following section examines the epistemological positions in more detail and explains the rationale for their use in this study. The positions used are then related to the specific methodological areas of feminism and childhood studies. The effect of the chosen stance on the theoretical perspectives and subsequent methods adopted is examined.
4.2.1 Constructionism

A constructionist approach sees all knowledge and reality as being constructed in and out of interaction with human beings and their world, not residing in objects independent of consciousness (Crotty, 1998). Using a constructionist approach, meaning is not ‘discovered’ by individuals, but formed as they engage with and interpret the world. Users of this approach accept that there is more than one view of reality, and as such it is possible to make sense of the same reality in different ways. They argue against positions that see one ‘truth’ as being more valid than another. Instead there is no ‘true’ or ‘valid’ knowledge, only different levels of useful interpretations.

This study, with its focus on the process through which gender identities are established, reflects many of the aspects of the constructionist approach. Constructionism views individuals as being born into a world where numerous meanings of social phenomena exist. These we are taught and learn to accept and work with. These meaning shape our thinking and behaviour throughout our lives (Crotty, 1998). The approach examines the pre-established symbols and meaning turning attention outwards onto the shared social meanings and knowledge. Culture is viewed as the source rather than the result of human thought and behaviour and it is this and the numerous subcultures that give us meaning. Constructionism addresses many features of the current study. However, it does not explicitly address the issues of power and inequality. The study requires an understanding of these aspects. Hence, a critical perspective has also been used to provide such, having these elements embedded within it.

4.2.2 Critical Theory

Critical theory offers an account of power struggles within society, an issue that the constructionist position does not address. Critical researchers wish to illustrate and understand privilege, repression and domination of one group over others and also to assist with creating the change that leads to greater social justice. As such, they have an obvious social and political agenda that
they bring to the research process, aimed at empowering the participants in their studies (Silverman, 2001). In this respect, critical research is ‘unashamedly political’ (Crotty, 1998). Rather than attempting to adopt the neutrality found in traditional research, critical researchers are not content with simply increasing knowledge; instead see their research as a struggle for a better world. They

“enter into an investigation with their assumptions on the table, so no one is confused concerning the epistemological or political baggage they bring to the research site”

(Denzin and Lincoln, 1994).

One of the consequences of this is that the concept of validity is associated with positivist enquiry and is therefore inappropriate. Instead, ‘trustworthiness’ is used to describe useful data. If the researcher can offer credible portrayals of constructed reality, their work is considered ‘trustworthy’ (Kincheloe and McLaren, 1994). In this study, references to ‘valid’ data relate to the concept of ‘trustworthiness’ discussed. There are varying stands of critical theory, but this research will specifically draw on feminist critical theory as a guiding principle of the epistemology.

4.2.3 Feminist influences on the research methodology

The current research focuses on gender identity and young girls. A methodology which incorporates feminist concerns is therefore vital in ensuring methods are chosen which are considered most appropriate to uncover a gendered knowledge. This also provides some continuity with the overarching feminist theory detailed in chapter one which has guided the general research process.

Feminist research differs from mainstream research for a number of reasons. The most obvious is feminism’s concern, reflecting the critical foundations discussed earlier, with highlighting the injustices suffered by women in patriarchal societies through research. Researchers are also committed to changing this by producing knowledge that highlights these inequalities as unacceptable. Feminist researchers have been responsible for questioning the ethical and political implications of research, that has been produced
using male centred knowledge, and contains the authority of a male voice of reason. This is considered biased towards the view of men and produces knowledge which is most beneficial to them (Holland and Ramazanoglu, 1994).

Feminist epistemology acknowledges that women are not a homogenous group and as such no one feminist approach can be used to encompass 'all' women. Different theories and methodologies are utilised to answer different questions regarding women and their experiences. Whichever theoretical perspective is utilised knowledge, produced through feminist thinking, is not only an argument but also a reflection of interest (Farganis, 1989). It looks to provide an insight into the previously unheard stories of women, which by highlighting injustices, serves to benefit all women. Feminists constantly keep in mind the relationship between theory and practice and use gendered knowledge to illustrate the oppression and domination of women.

Feminist epistemology is based on the premise that the experience and emotions of women must be articulated to produce valid knowledge. Experience and emotions are socially constructed and are historical products influenced by the society that constructed them. Therefore, both can contribute to the development of knowledge. Jaggar (1989) suggests feminist knowledge needs to be self-reflective and focus on the outer world and also on individuals, for whom, emotions and experience play a large part. Feminists view women and girls' experience as valid knowledge. It can be used powerfully to voice the subordination of women to men in every area of social life. They regard the knowledge they produce as superior. Their location in the world as women makes it possible to perceive and understand different aspects of both the world and human activities in ways that challenge and move beyond the knowledge produced by current male biased theories. As Narayan explains,

"Feminist epistemology views the oppressed group as having 'epistemic advantage' from having knowledge of the practices of both their own contexts and those of the oppressors".

(1989: 260)

There is not the luxury of discarding this as irrelevant to the research process.
Feminism sets itself out as overtly political and biased but it is vital that researchers can judge between knowledge claims. This can be achieved by stressing their claims are valid because they are grounded in women’s experience and interpreted through the guidance of feminist theory. The voices of the researched have a critical part to play in the production of knowledge but they may struggle to be heard on their own terms. Feminists look to address this but Scott (1992) argues that experience as a form of knowledge is only useful if the researcher acknowledges the series of interpretations involved in bringing it to its final version.

“What counts, as experience, is neither self evident nor straightforward, it is always contested and always therefore political”

(Scott 1992: 37).

There is, as Maynard and Purvis (1994) suggests, no such thing as ‘raw experience’. Female accounts of their lives are culturally embedded and have cultural and social contexts. Their descriptions are constructions of events that have occurred, but at the same time they are an interpretation of these events. The researcher then enters this process and in turn makes an interpretation of the experiences offered in order to move beyond simple descriptions of experience alone. Thereby making connections that may not be immediately visible.

It can be seen that the key characteristics of feminism reflect several aspects of this study. The current research requires an epistemological stance that accepts experience as a valid source of knowledge and also recognises the diversity in experience of females. Feminist epistemology provides an umbrella framework for a methodology guided by numerous different feminist theories. For the purposes of the current research a feminist post-modern theory will be linked to the epistemology. This is viewed as most relevant and appropriate to guide the researcher conceptually in examining the research questions. Feminist postmodernism, whilst grounding the research in girls’ experiences, allows multiple experiences to be recognised. It also offers the theoretical grounding to separate these interpretations, explaining how they are developed. Post-modern theorisation rejects the idea that direct
connections between experience, knowledge and reality can be established and thus relieves the researcher of the difficulties of making any. Postmodernists are concerned with multiple truths and knowledge, deconstructing how these are produced. They direct critical attention to the powerful consequences of ways of telling the truth about ourselves and have been influential in explaining how diverse, variable and unstable identities can be. The ‘rules’ of post-structuralism thought do not generally allow for the theorisations of power. However, feminist post-structuralism adapts the framework to contain this crucial aspect of feminist research. The researcher is able to deconstruct the subjects which produce the knowledge and its political effects, whilst recognising the multiple identities and experiences. The social world is fragmented and individualistic and the research needs a theory that reflects this. The current research draws on feminist post-structuralist thinking but uses aspects of the general feminist approach. This will examine girls’ experiences and recognise power structures within them. It will understand how these have been constructed and developed within their specific cultural contexts and settings and may therefore be diverse and contrasting.

The feminist approach to research has implications for the methodology, although there is some controversy as to whether ‘feminist methods’ exist. It is reasonable to suggest that feminists use the same methodological principles as mainstream researchers but incorporate into their research strategies certain values and ways of gathering information that are distinctively feminist. Such a researcher brings a particular identity to the research project and incorporates this into the data collection phases. By taking away the separation between the researcher and the researched, feminists believe a more valid, legitimate knowledge is produced because the researched are able to overcome the complexities of power and give their own account.

As indicated in the epistemological discussion and theoretical perspective, issues of power are a primary consideration in feminist research and this must continue in the methodological approach chosen and the methods used. The feminist researcher looks to choose an approach that engages the researched...
fully in the data collection process. Whatever methods are used, a feminist approach seeks to develop a reciprocal relationship with equal power balance and a sensitivity to the intrusion that conducting research can have on the females’ lives. This approach contrasts with the traditional, objective attempts to produce neutrality. Feminists reject the value of this objective knowledge and require ‘talk back’ in the research process (Oakley, 1981).

Feminist researchers often, although not exclusively, view in depth qualitative research methods as being the most flexible and sensitive research tools to achieve this rapport. Focus groups, and particularly interviews (both of which will be used in the current study) are viewed as allowing the researched the opportunity to answer back, reflect and clarify with the researcher the interpretations they offer so their voice is heard at all times. The use of these methods makes it vital to keep ethical considerations at the forefront. The researcher will always have the control and power in the research situation and is able to reconstruct the content of interviews on his or her own terms. A feminist approach is committed to not abusing this potential but instead explaining explicitly, before conducting research the aims of the project, how the data will be used and the rights of the researched to withdraw themselves and ‘their’ data from the research at any time.

It can be seen that a feminist approach influences the choices made at each stage of Crotty’s methodological framework. It is also evident that this use of feminism addresses key features of the study. The focus on young girls, however, raises issues that need explicit consideration. The next section examines them and considers their significance for the methodology, before illustrating how the two will be combined to produce the framework for the current research project.

4.2.4 Childhood studies and the current methodology

The ‘sociology of childhood’ has been a relatively recent development in social research. As such it has yet to have a full impact on methodological issues associated with researching children (Alanen, 1994). Childhood and
children have previously been studied using a positivist, empiricist framework. The dominant theoretical perspectives used have derived from psychological notions, which examine the individual development of the child and view childhood as a ‘pre – social’ preparatory phase for adulthood (Jenks, 1982). The impact of such research has been to ensure that children are viewed as ‘natural’, non competent and consequently kept outside of ‘useful’ sociological research which considers them in their own right (Oakley, 1994). Socialisation was viewed as “the key which turns the asocial child into the social adult” (James and Prout, 1997: 13). Children are rarely seen as political figures or their opinions given credibility. We do not often hear children speaking to us in research. Their knowledge continually is seen as ‘naturally’ inferior to adults in so far as they are in a state of ‘becoming’ complete rather than being accepted as having their own identity and social context (Hendrick, 2000: 38).

Using a social constructionist position, more recent research has emphasised the value and importance of the child’s voice and of listening to their understanding and knowledge. Similar to feminisms’ concern with allowing women’s experiences to be heard, researchers studying childhood have used a constructionist epistemology to allow children’s opinions to be known and to justify the knowledge that children create as valid. The focus on the adult world is not completely lost because it is recognised that adult culture and institutions are important in creating children’s worlds. However, the constructionist perspective sees the child placed firmly at the centre of the research process and acknowledges that it plays an active part in constructing their own world. This takes away the assumption of developmental processes that independently shapes the child’s behaviour. The ‘child’ is not a natural phenomenon but socially constructed. There is no ‘real child’ but many different discursive practices that produce multiple childhoods, similar to the feminist principle of multiple femininities, each of which is real in their own context (James and Prout, 1997). A constructionist approach should examine “both the constructions of childhood as an institution and the activity of children within and upon the constraints and possibilities that the institutional level creates” (James and Prout, 1997: 21).
It requires an understanding of the interaction between individuals, how meaning is created through interactions between individuals and communities and enables researchers to recognise the child as an active agent in creating their own meanings and interpretations. Using a constructionist framework ensures knowledge will be generated through children articulating and offering meaning of their social world.

A social constructionist epistemology can utilise a similar theoretical perspective to that used in the feminist methodological approach. Post modernism again is seen as relevant in that it fits with the epistemology and works within the context of the current research. A post-structuralist approach can assist with understanding how specific sets of philosophies, ideas, attitudes and beliefs have been combined to define the 'natural' child or in the case of feminist post-structuralism, the 'natural' woman. Once this has been uncovered the actual meanings and experiences the child creates can be explored. As James and Prout suggest

"to describe childhood or indeed any phenomenon as socially constructed is to suspend a belief in or willing reception of its taken for granted meanings"

(1997: 26).

Drawing on post modernism (like dissembling gender assumptions) it is necessary to go back to the phenomena and demonstrate how it has been constructed across different social and historical contexts. The interactions of children can then be examined to provide an account of meaning as it relates to the child or group in a particular context, rather than adult assumptions made of the meaning children attach to certain phenomena.

Again, reflecting the feminist approach, the theoretical perspective in childhood research also requires power relationships in the research process to be taken into account. It is more important when the research involves children for agency and power to be understood and to recognise the constraints under which data may be produced. The adult/child relationship, rather than the male/female one, needs to be considered. The different range of potentially powerful adults, teachers and parents, needs to be understood, also power between the children themselves. The post-modern theoretical
framework discussed in chapter two draws on Foucault’s conceptualisation of power. This sees it as being multiple and plural and from a variety of sources. Rather than simply seeing power as a hierarchical process it is useful to see it as diverse, unstable and variable. Power is not something possessed only by one group and used against another, instead it is a network of practices, institutions and technologies that sustain positions of dominance and subordination within a particular context. The understanding that power is constitutive is of equal use in this research. The powerful do not wish to make the subordinate submit or destroy them (Foucault, 1979). Adults are supposed to care for children yet this does not stop them from exerting power restrictions over them and may legitimise this process.

As with, a feminist approach, power between the researcher and the researched needs to be considered. The researcher is older, from a different background, and holds different views and understandings. She is also in the same position as many other adults within the child’s life, of holding power in the research situation. The children are used to complying with the expectations of adults. “Children are often suspicious of adult’s questions which in their experience, often contain a hidden agenda” (Thomas and O’Kane, 2000: 831). To engage children fully in a research relationship is very difficult and may be impossible in some cases because of the adult/child divide.

When considering an appropriate methodology, researchers working with children utilising a constructionist framework face similar issues to feminist researchers. The approach taken must allows the child’s voice to be heard and minimise the potential power situations than can develop in the research context. A further similarity is the concern in childhood research surrounding ethical issues. This is arguably more important than in feminist research with the increased awareness and concern surrounding child protection issues in modern society. It is vital that the methodological approach chosen is in the best interests of the child as well as being most suitable for the researcher. As Roberts (2000) suggests, while it is likely that research on children, which includes children and young people, will strengthen the research, it cannot be
taken for granted that participation in the research is necessarily always in their interests.

"Childhood is not simply a preparation for adult life and we cannot assume that the issues we as researchers, or practitioners or policy makers find gripping will hold quite the same interest for children and young people”


Issues surrounding consent in the research process are also more complex than with adults. The researcher studying children should again reflect feminist principles and spend time explaining the research carefully, in detail and in a way that children can understand. It also must be accepted that participants may choose to withdraw at any times even though this could be extremely detrimental to the research process. It must be recognised that however careful the researcher is about informed consent, the adult/child relationship or, within schools, teacher/ pupil may mean it is very difficult for children not to participate (Roberts, 2000). This is particularly evident when research is conducted in schools, where the researcher usually obtains the consent of gatekeepers, teachers and parents, rather than the children themselves (James, Jenks and Prout, 1998). Alderson (1994) views an element of coercion to be present in all research because researchers are seen as authority figures, but this is further complicated with children because they have been socialised to fear declining adult requests (Keith – Speigel, 1976; Powell and Vacha-Haase, 1994).

‘New style’ childhood research seeks to avoid this by adopting a methodological approach which allows trust and rapport to build up with children up over a period of time. Similar to the feminist approach, researchers working with children want the child to feel comfortable and relaxed in the research situation. Ethnographic methodologies have become central in childhood research (James, Jenks and Prout, 1998). As with feminist research, the use of qualitative methodology is felt to allow the researcher to “listen to children speaking in their own voices about issues and events that are important to them” (Bearison, 1991: 26).
Feminist researchers have taken mainstream methods and added their own interpretation to them to ensure they are sensitive to collecting data reflecting gender issues. Similarly, childhood researchers looking to bring the child’s voice to the forefront of the data have taken traditional qualitative methods and adapted them. This has meant taking focus groups and interviews but placing greater emphasis on other ways of communicating outside of verbal narratives and utilising the skills that children possess. Using drawings and stories to obtain children’s thoughts and understanding has become increasingly popular and has opened up considerable methodological possibilities in this work (James, Jenks and Prout, 1998). It is suggested, rather than using methods that focus on the individual giving the information in a one to one situation, children should be engaged in a mutual project relevant to the research. Through drawing, storytelling and diary keeping children have more control over the research situation and the power relationships discussed earlier are diffused. Working with task centred approaches links philosophically to the constructionist epistemology and is practically interesting for the child and exploits their particular talents. It can, if done sensitively, allow children to express their ideas and opinions in a better and more enjoyable way than rigidly applying traditional qualitative methods.

4.2.5 Methodological Framework

Two different methodological frameworks have been discussed, both of which are relevant to the research project. Elements of both frameworks will be drawn on. Women and children are linked socially but there has been little work linking them academically. Gender theory, as seen in the feminist methodology overview, is concerned with theorising the situation of women rather than girls. It has not, as yet, disrupted the mainstream inheritance of marginalizing children.

"In discussing gender issues related to children it has unfortunately remained just as functionalist and adult centred in its analyses as mainstream/male stream social science"


Several similarities are highlighted in the examination of the methodological approaches. This suggests a possibility of combining them at both a
philosophical and practical level for the purpose of this study. The current research focuses primarily on gender issues, but to involve children centrally in the process, the methodology has to show that such research poses different issues to that with adults. The constructionist epistemology allows the girls' voices to be heard and provides the tools to unveil their experiences and reconstruct them. In this way, it can be understood how they have been developed and normalised. The use of feminist thinking offers a critical analysis in this process. Post-modern theory in both methodological areas enables acceptance of the possibility of multiple interpretations and experiences and recognises the numerous power influences that affect them. The position adopted will uncover not just notions of childhood and how they have been constructed, but how gender interacts with these constructs and affects girls' experiences and understanding of their social world.

4.3 Methodological Approach

The following section will outline the methodology that will be used in the research and indicates how it fits into the epistemological and theoretical positions illustrated. As the research involves working with young people a proposal for the study had to be submitted to the university ethics committee for approval. This application outlined the experience of the researcher, the anticipated processes and methods that would be undertaken and stipulated how issues such as informed consent would be addressed with the young people and parents. Ethical approval was granted for the study two months prior to the research taking place. As part of this ethical procedure it was agreed that all participants must be kept anonymous. The names of the girls used throughout this thesis are therefore pseudonyms chosen by the girls themselves.

The methods used will provide sensitive techniques, which illustrate the feminist considerations discussed and encourage girls to speak openly through a child centred format. The research will be conducted using an ethnographic approach. This qualitative approach enables a large amount of
data to be collected from a group of girls. A greater understanding is developed of their opinions and experiences of gender relations and the influence of football on them. It allows the research to occur over an extended period of time and again reflects both feminist and child centred concerns by giving the researcher time to build relationships with the girls before attempting to generate data. Due to time constraints and the concern to collect in depth information, the research will involve one school.

4.3.1 Ethnography

Ethnography is a methodology that encompasses the context of the research and usually requires the researcher to work in the setting for a long period. Ethnography provides interpretation by strategies of contextualisation (Skeggs and Nava, 1994). Thomas and O’ Kane (2000) suggest that ethnography is becoming increasingly popular in the developing approaches to childhood research, because it allow the child’s concerns to be placed centrally within the process. The child is able to communicate in the way with which they feel most comfortable. Because the research takes place over a length of time in the same setting, there is the opportunity to develop intimate and informal relationships with the children involved. Observing children in their natural setting and becoming part of their daily routine can all contribute to making them feel confident and comfortable with the researcher.

Ethnography is also popular with feminist researchers because it allows them to enter the lives of females and enables them to express their own point of view. It allows the interpretation of girls' behaviours as shaped by the social contexts in which the research takes place, instead of viewing it as context free.

“Within ethnography every field setting can be thought of as immersed in a larger social context which itself is embedded in a larger social system”

(Reinharz, 1992: 55).

Ethnography allows the researcher to concentrate on different groups and individuals within the research at different times and to gain entry to girls' lives in different ways. This enables him/her to understand how gender structures
are lived, reproduced and challenged within girls' daily existence. According to Skeggs and Nava the

"role of the ethnography is to show the cultural viewpoint of the oppressed, their hidden knowledge's and resistances as well as the basis on which their decisions are taken"


The researcher is looking to discover an element of the girls’ lives through the discursively and socially constructed concepts that are available for examination (Reinharz, 1992).

The position of the researcher in the ethnography is important to the type of data collected. In this study the researcher, ideally, would not want to be viewed as a surrogate teacher, parent or representative of other bodies who might draw judgement on the girls' activities. Instead Fine and Sandstrom (1988) suggest the differences between adult and child need to be accepted but the researcher should attempt to use the 'interested adult friend' role which stresses that communication with him/her can be trusted. This should enable conversations to be as two-way as possible. Hood, Kelley and Mayall (1996) highlight the potential difficulty in this research context of conducting activities in an atmosphere of mutual consent. It is always going to be difficult when the researched is not used to and does not expect to be given any power or control within normal adult/child relationships. As Thomas and O' Kane (2000) indicate

"The active participation of children and young people as partners in the research process has overlooked a number of structural limitations to achieving such participation...we would argue that the structural reasons why children are largely excluded from many aspects of the research process, relate to issues of power and social hierarchies where children’s agency is compromised by that of adults"

(2000: 49)

In this study the relationship between the researcher and the researched is somewhat complicated. The position the researcher would like to take of 'interested adult friend' is not easy to adopt in practice. As much as the researcher attempts to distance herself from teachers and other authority figures within the school, the specific context in which the research is taking place may make it difficult to convey this concept to the children. The girls are
used to unquestioningly seeing adults within the school environment as occupying positions of authority and it is unlikely the researcher will be viewed any differently. The way the researcher has gained access to the school, through the head teacher and physical education teachers, results in an obvious association between her and key authority figures in the school. The researcher would like, initially, to observe and become involved with PE lessons and activities prior to undertaking the research, to familiarise both the pupil and teachers with her. To do so risks becoming associated by the pupils with formal lessons and their teachers. The researcher is gaining access to the girls by working with them coaching after-school football. This alone immediately reinforces a position of authority, with certain justification, because the researcher will be working on developing new skills and ‘teaching’ the girls. This will require some co-operation, similar to the relationship between pupil and teacher to develop. The dual focus of coach and researcher, affects her relationship with the girls in a number of ways. The ‘interested adult friend’ stance, however desirable, may be impossible to develop. It is expected, by undertaking coaching after-school, there is the opportunity to lose the rigid formality associated with curriculum lessons. It is hoped, as the sessions develop, the girls will become comfortable with the researcher as their coach and this will transfer to the research work.

Several researchers have employed this technique in a similar area. Pratt (Archer, Pratt and Phillips, 2001) worked with a male youth football team as a coach and used the relationships developed in this setting to conduct research examining the construction and development of adolescent masculine identities. He viewed his role of coach/researcher as an opportunity to share in activities of the researched in a direct and complete way as opposed to a more passive presence. Through this direct social interaction he found there was opportunity to discover shared and varied cultural meaning within the group, something the aims of the constructionist epistemology outlined. Archer, Pratt and Phillips suggests this approach gave them the “opportunity to explore and discover, through being completely part of their scene, what they thought, what they did, what their experiences were, how they acted, their attitudes and ideas” (2001: 25).
Similarly, in Cox and Thompson's (2000) study of female footballers and sexuality, Cox collected a large amount of data from the team she played with and managed. She found the informal time spent as a team member was helpful in clarifying and expanding on issues raised in the data.

"After I had played, I felt the team accepted me more as another team member rather than an outsider who was researching them. This acceptance helped me a great deal when it came to the subsequent interviews, where the players were very open and honest with their thoughts, particularly on sensitive and personal issues"

(Cox 1998: 22 quoted in Cox and Thompson).

It is anticipated, that working with the girls as their football coach as well as conducting research enables access and should enhance the researchers relationship with the researched. However, the unavoidable problems of being perceived as an authority figure have to be recognised and acknowledged.

4.3.2 Sampling procedure

Selecting the group for research involves defining the potential population that could be studied. How many of them can be involved, when, where and under what circumstances the research can be undertaken. A sample is then taken from the original population for the purposes of the research (LeCompte and Preissle, 1993). Probability sampling is viewed as the most rigorous approach for statistical research but this is often not suitable for qualitative research (Ritchie, Lewis and Elam, 2003). Instead this study will use a non-probability sampling system where units are deliberately selected to reflect particular features of a group within the sample population. This system is not intended to be statistically representative. Instead it will contain a sample that is felt to have particular features or characteristics to enable detailed exploration and understanding of the central themes of the research project. The aim of this qualitative research is to gain an understanding of the nature of gendered experiences, to explain them and to develop further ideas. The sample selected needs to ensure the inclusion of relevant processes that can illuminate and inform this understanding (Ritchie, Lewis and Elam, 2003).
For the current research (linking to the research objectives) the population selected from will be girls aged 9-11, school years 5 and 6, who have an interest in playing football. The target age group was selected largely because previous research has produced limited data for gender and pre adolescent females. Girls younger than 9 will not be included in the target population because primary schools generally do not introduce sports specific activities such as football until year 5.

Accessing such a sample group has certain practical implications. The issues of gaining contact with a sample of girls, meeting these requirements, have been considered. The school provided the most obvious location. It was anticipated there would be a number of problems with the approach. Firstly, it may be difficult to find a school interested in the research. Secondly, even if a school is interested there may be problems with finding curriculum time to work with the girls continuously over an extended period. It was felt that a school might be more interested in becoming involved if there was an overt benefit to them. The researcher therefore decided to offer practical help and support with curricular and extra curricular sports activity in return for access to girls interested in taking part. In practice, the school that expressed an interest in becoming involved is a private primary school that employs two specialist physical education teachers. After discussion with the head teacher and PE teachers, it was decided that the researcher would organise after-school hours, girls football coaching sessions, as the school currently did not offer curriculum or extra curricular opportunities for girls in this sport. These sessions will be used to introduce the sport to girls who are interested and also provide the necessary contact to conduct the research with willing participants.

Using this approach has a number of practical implications. It affects the relationship between the researcher and the subject, as discussed; also the choice of school will bias the sample towards participants from a more affluent background. It was felt that this will not detract from the research and it was of greater importance to organise the practicalities of accessing a group of girls than ensuring the sample was from a diverse site. The researcher will work
with the girls for an hour a week over a ten-week period. The majority of this
time will be taken with practical coaching sessions but some research work
will also be undertaken during these sessions and they will provide the
context for observation and informal research methods to be used. It is
anticipated that in addition to working with the girls during these sessions,
some time may be available to follow up research work. Either during school
time, or at home if parents are willing. The coaching will take place with an
assistant. This will allow the researcher flexibility to be involved practically
with the football and also to work with some girls separately during short
sessions of 'formal' data collection, using the methods outlined in the following
section. It is expected 15-20 girls will be involved in the sessions all from year
6. It is anticipated that all will be involved in research data collection initially.
As the session’s progress and the researcher become more familiar with the
group, focus will be on individuals, to develop in depth and structured data
collection through interviews and small groups.

The following section will outline in more detail, the methods that will be used
and indicate how they fit into the epistemological and theoretical positions
illustrated. They will be diverse to provide a sensitive range of techniques
reflecting the feminist considerations illustrated. They will also encourage girls
to speak openly through a child centred approach and fit in with the
practicalities of working with the group in the context discussed.

4.4 Methods

The methodology used clearly links to the philosophical stance adopted but is
also a practical way to collect data for this particular area. It enables the
researcher to build relationships of trust with the researched. This is
paramount with children and also allows the researcher time to return to the
subjects after collecting data to gain further clarification and to check
meanings. It is also particularly useful as children often ascribe different
meanings to events than adult interpreters. The methods used will allow
children to offer their own interpretation. They will be based on the qualitative
approaches of focus groups and interviews. These will provide the primary structure for obtaining information but will be combined with participatory techniques to make them more relevant to gaining information from children. The techniques, explained in greater detail below, will focus around using visual aides to prompt conversation and involvement from the children. These will be in the form of photographs, magazines and drawings. Their use will vary: all three will be recognised as potential ways of introducing topics or allowing children to offer interpretation.

Participant observation, particularly in the early stages of the ethnographic work, is expected to provide useful context for the data collected and field notes will also provide a useful data source.

"Participant observation in their natural setting is vital including watching, listening, reflecting and also engaging in conversation with children as appropriate to naturally occurring events will contribute greatly to the researchers understanding" (Mayall, 2000: 122).

The overall research process will be a combination of researcher offered methods, which the children can subsequently adapt to suit their needs. Also there will be opportunities for the girls to develop their own ways of generating data and explaining it. The importance of ethnography and the use of a single school are highlighted. Developing the methods will be a complicated and ongoing process, (linked with the practical coaching activities) and subsequently can only be achieved after a relationship between the researcher and the girls have been formed. The following section explains in greater depth the methods to be used. Each section examines the theory behind the methods, why they are appropriate for the current research, and how the data collected from them will be analysed. The final section will draw them together and describes how they will be used in practice.

4.4.1 Focus Groups

Focus groups, with visual prompts, will be used to generate general conversation and views surrounding gender and femininity. They will also be used to continue discussions throughout the ethnography and clarify and
respond to data as it is accumulated. This fits in with the acknowledged purpose of focus groups, which are typically used to bring a group of individuals together to discuss a particular topic area (Morgan, 1988). Gaining data from this method is reliant on the interaction between the group primarily, but also on the skills of the researcher to guide the group through the topics, invite discussion to keep the group from straying onto irrelevant topics. They are not only useful for generating data, but also for developing topics and schedules for subsequent interviews and discussion. (Morgan, 1988; Krueger, 1988). They are theoretically relevant to the current research because they link with feminist thinking by providing a safe environment where females can interact and voice their experiences and concerns. Also, they can provide a less intimidating arena for children to work with the researcher. Children can gain confidence from group discussions and to a certain extent, discuss the topics with which they feel most comfortable. Focus groups have many advantages for this research in terms of providing group support, the opportunity to discuss issues and the chance to develop researcher/researched relationship in a relatively informal way.

The difficulty for the researcher is to maintain an appropriate balance in terms of directing and controlling the group whilst creating the atmosphere in which participants feel free to discuss issues. This challenge is heightened when working with children, who are used to listening to the teacher at school. They are likely to view the researcher as an authority figure and will continually look to her for guidance on discussion of subjects and acceptability of answers given. Defining the 'interested adult friend' relationship is vital to minimise this power imbalance and should ideally be achieved before any formal methods are implemented and data collection begins. Returning to the earlier problems highlighted with this approach, there are further issues in attempting to organise the formal research methods in a relaxed manner. The children are not used to operating in this sort of environment within the school context. Rather than relaxing them and helping them to feel confident in the research arena, it may well be confusing and unsettling because of the contrast with the usual way they are addressed by adult authority figures. Working with the girls first as their coach, it is hoped they will become used to the researcher.
By interacting informally during the practical coaching sessions this ambience should be transferred into the research context.

When the focus group is underway, it is important that the researcher listens to the girls' opinions but also, where possible, probes and clarifies points. This is to check that children are responding to questions and connections that the researcher is interpreting. Morgan, Gibbs, Maxwell and Britten (2002) found the greatest difficulty they encountered when conducting focus groups with children was accessing children's meanings compared to adults as a result of the differences in language and in the social worlds of the children. They overcame this by using careful clarifying and probing but also suggested that whilst focus groups were useful for gaining insights into children's social worlds, they should be linked with observation and the activities of children in their natural setting to fully understand the meanings placed on concepts discussed. It is expected that the initial time spent in the school will again help to minimise this as the researcher will develop an awareness of the capabilities of the girls involved in the research process and structure the specific methods accordingly. It is also important to observe the group dynamics to provide the researcher with insights into social relationships and social norms. Friends may feel more comfortable in a group together but also some children may feel anxious about revealing certain information in front of their friends.

As with all methods of data collection, focus groups may only provide a partial account and as such will be supplemented by other data gathering techniques. Interviews will be used to follow up on issues discussed in the groups and to gain individual insights and experiences. It is felt conducting individual interviews may not always be a viable option so it is anticipated that interviewing will generally take place with pairs of girls, which each girl selecting a friend of their choice to work with. As Mayall suggests

"At ease with each other and thereby perhaps, more confident with a adult participant, children can follow one another's leads, pick up points and confirm with each other".

(2000: 124)
Although some formal interviews will take place in set locations, it is anticipated that a great deal of the interviewing will take place as the girls work on various other activities described later. This will involve the researcher moving amongst girls as they carry out tasks. Again, it is hoped this will be relatively informal and will minimise the potential for anxiety. The following documents the principles of interviewing and again how they work with the epistemology and theoretical perspective chosen.

4.4.2 Interviews

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2001) suggest that interviews in social research enable participants to discuss their interpretations of the world in which they live and express how they regard situations from their own point of view. According to a constructionist perspective, the interviewee and interviewer are always actively engaged in constructing meaning (Silverman, 2001). The respondent's narrative is not viewed as portraying a fixed reality but a construct of reality in conjunction with the interviewer. This research project will use what has been defined as an exploratory interview format (Oppenheim, 1992). This is intended as a way of seeking to understand and develop phenomena, in this case gender relations and identities, rather than simply collecting facts and figures. It allows the respondent to talk freely and emotionally and adds a richness, depth, authenticity and honesty to the description of their experiences (Oppenheim, 1992: 65). The style of interviewing in this research will be a semi-structured approach exploring and focusing on particular themes, not using strictly formatted questions but also not having any direction at all. With the age of the interviewee in mind it is probably unacceptable to assume that they have the ability to articulate and lead their own interview entirely. Instead open-ended questioning will guide the girls but allow them to answer as they wish. It is flexible, encourages an in depth response, and allows the researcher to probe and clarify points. Morrison stresses the importance of including clarification and probing within the framework for a semi structured interview, to encourage the participant to extend and elaborate on issues and minimise misunderstandings in meaning.
The ideal interview should be spontaneous, provide a rich amount of information and contain relevant answers.

It is anticipated the interview context will be more private and personal for the girls and offer them the opportunity to raise issues with which they may not have felt comfortable in a focus group. Whilst the latter provides the basis for establishing a rapport and an emerging structure for the interview themes, this can then be built on to discover individual experiences and emotions in relation to these themes (Greig and Taylor, 1999). The interview allows girls to articulate their own experiences and also to reflect on their meaning. It provides an indication of how the girl understands herself within her world. Where and how she places values and what particular meanings she attaches to her actions and locations in the world. According to feminist thinking (Reinharz, 1992), the categories and concepts individuals use for reflecting and evaluating themselves, come from a cultural context. For women and girls this cultural context has historically repressed them. An exploration of the language and meaning the girls use to articulate their own experiences, will lead to an awareness of the social forces and ideas affecting them.

Feminist and children orientated interviewing requires interviewer restraint and listening as well as the ability to be verbal and responsive to what the interviewee is discussing. It is anticipated that multiple interviews will be conducted across the course of the ethnography as the relationship develops between the interviewer and participants. This will open up the opportunity for further information and again to share and clarify information previously obtained. The opportunity to add questions and get corrective feedback can allow the researcher to see how thoughts are situated in particular circumstances (Reinharz, 1992). Interviews let the researched speak and therefore allows understanding of the girls particular social systems and how they fit into them. They provide the opportunity to uncover previously neglected worlds of experiences in both feminist and childhood research and as such are a central component of the methods used.

4.4.3 Analysis of data collected from focus groups and interviews
The formal focus groups and interviews will be tape recorded and transcribed. The researcher will also look to make some notes whilst conducting the interviews of key points and write up afterwards her impression of the girls involved, how the interview went and how the girls appeared to respond. These will be examined alongside the transcriptions to provide a map of how the interview developed with descriptions of non-verbal details and well as the spoken data.

Analysis of the qualitative verbal data will be systematic and structured to ensure the results produced are not just a re-description of the researcher’s impressions whilst in the field. To achieve this, it is necessary to analyse the data produced in line with the theories and assumptions that have guided the methodology. A social constructionist perspective will look to examine the data to demonstrate how the interview and focus group responses are produced in the interaction between interviewer and respondent without losing sight of the meaning, or the circumstances that condition the meaning making process (Silverman, 2001). The overall objective, tied in with the epistemological position selected is to not only examine what is said but to show how what is being said relates the experience and lives being studied.

To achieve this the data will be analysed using a mixture of content analysis and discourse analysis both of which reflect several key features of the constructionist position taken. Discourse analysis in particular takes a critical stance towards taken for granted knowledge, and scepticism towards the view that our observation of the world leads us to understand the nature of it. This is important within the current research context, where setting aside assumed gender and childhood beliefs is essential to explore in depth girls ‘real’ gender identities. Users of this type of analysis acknowledge that the ways in which we understand the world are historically and culturally specific and relative and as such knowledge is socially constructed. Discourse analysis, in line with the feminist theoretical perspective used, views social life as being characterised by conflicts of various kinds and as such much of the analysis is
involved in establishing one version of the world in the face of competing versions (Gill, 2000).

The first phase of analysis is to produce detailed transcriptions of interviews and focus groups that can be placed in context, verified and supplemented by detailed observational field notes. When examining the transcription, it is necessary to suspend beliefs and taken for granted assumptions in order to focus upon the construction, organisation and functions of discourse (Gill 2000). Although what is being said is examined, the researcher is looking for common content themes and their functions. The aims and objectives of the research are crucial here is providing the themes which will be used to discern patterns and connections that go beyond specific detail. The importance of the researcher undertaking the transcription is emphasised as this offers the opportunity to gain an initial grasp of the material and opens up the flow of ideas for interpreting it. Jovchelovitch and Bauer (2000) recommend reducing qualitative data into paragraphs, and then summary sentences from which key words are developed. The initial reduction is centred on the themes developed from the aims and objectives and the key words provide the basis from which all the data can be coded. It is suggested this is undertaken with individual interviews and focus groups. An overall coherent category system is then developed with which the researcher can return to the narratives and examine them again within this frame. It is necessary to see the data as being analysed in two related phases. First, there is the search for patterns in the data in both variations of accounts and consistency, as with content analysis, but discourse analysis also looks to be sensitive to what is not being said. Discourse analysis, reflecting the epistemological position and the methods used, does not attempt to identify universal processes through the data or generalisations. It is recognised that discourses are always produced from a particular interpretation as the result of an occasion and the subsequent interaction between the researcher and the researched. As such it is acknowledged that the view presented is not the only way of interpreting the data presented.
A great deal of the process described has been transferred to computer packages in recent years. Whilst the researcher may use Nud*ist (Non numerical Unstructured Data: Indexing, Searching and Theorising qualitative data analysis computer program, 1993) and recognises the benefits of such packages in terms of being systematic and efficient in processing large amounts of data, there is a concern that it can result on overemphasising coding and so neglect other forms of textual analysis.

"Computer packages will not do the intuitive and creative work that is an essential part of qualitative analysis. At most they will support the process and provide a representation of the output of the analysis"

(Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000).

For this reason it is intended that the majority of the analysis will be done personally or only incorporate some elements of computer analysis initially to minimise the data.

4.4.4 Visual techniques and participant involvement

It has been indicated throughout the chapter that researching children poses a number of difficulties for the researcher, particularly the potential power imbalance. Therefore, within the core methods outlined a number of participatory techniques will be integrated to help overcome problems of power and involve the girls fully in the research process. Participatory techniques enable the children to communicate in different ways, offer interpretations on the work they produce using different methods and also select methods with which they are most happy. Children, according to James (1993) and Alderson (1994), are often happier communicating in mediums other than verbal because they are more practised in these forms. It makes sense to integrate mechanisms such as drawings, pictures and photographs into the focus groups and interviews. Asking children to explain why they attribute certain meanings to their paintings and stories allows them to engage more productively with the researchers questions but still using the talents which they possess (James, 1993). Nieuwenhuys (1994) found that children’s preferred activities were games, story telling and drawing. These may be more effective in bringing out the complexities of their experiences than
conventional focus groups and interviews. It should be made clear that these techniques will be used in conjunction with verbal methods and to enhance the quality of data obtained. They can assist with the problems of researcher interpretation because the children's voice is required to explain the visual aid produced or selected.

In choosing to use research techniques that are more responsive to the participant than the research agenda, the opportunity to gather information in a consistently systematic and structured matter is forfeited. It is felt in this research context, providing the space for children and young people to be listened to is more important than creating uniformity in the research process. The data gained from this process outweighs any negative elements in that it may not be standard across every respondent.

The techniques used in this research will include photographs taken by the children, photographs from magazines and children's drawings. All will be used with the respondent's interpretation to provide data in their own right and to stimulate discussion within the focus groups and the interviews. It is anticipated this will vary the research process enough to make it fun and interesting for the girls involved. Oliver (2001) introduced a practice, which will be adopted in this research, of using teen magazines to tap girls' interests and help them to articulate their experiences of their bodies and to learn to critique dominant discourses of their bodies. The girls were asked to cut out pictures that interest them and then categorise them to explore how the images they found were interesting. Oliver found such a techniques was useful in creating space for group discussion, reflection and critical analyses. Engaging girls critically in studying images of the body was found to make space for students to voice their opinions and concerns about their bodies and body images but also allow them to begin to challenge dominant discourses. It is anticipated this technique will be adopted, using magazines. Girls will be asked to cut out pictures of different types of women and girls, those that they perceive as feminine, and those that do not conform to stereotypes and then explain why they have chosen certain images. It is anticipated this will create the stimulus for an in depth discussion of girls' general perceptions of femininity and
masculinity and an understanding of how they see themselves within these cultural concepts.

Alongside this technique Oliver (2001) issued the participant with disposable cameras to allow them to take pictures of situations when they felt good or bad about their bodies or people or objects that sent messages to them about how they should look. In this research girls will be encouraged to take photographs of situations where they feel they are behaving in what is perceived as a stereotypical feminine manner and examples where they believe they are challenging these images and again encourage discussion around the results produced. These images will hopefully be used to bring the specific practices surrounding football and how the girls believe this may challenge or comply with accepted feminine behaviour. It is expected this will again be used in both a group setting to facilitate discussions on one another’s pictures and in the interview context to allow the individual to explain their photographs. Giving girls the cameras and the scope to interpret the instructions given to take photographs that they think are most reflective of the subject area offers them the chance to take control of the research process. They can display images that have meaning to them and describe why. Schratz and Steiner-Löffler (1998) used this technique in an evaluation examining pupil’s opinions of school and found it facilitated both data collection and also engaged pupils actively in group work and discussions. They concluded that children taking photographs could be an effective and powerful research method, which offers greater flexibility than solely using verbal methods. It contributes to bringing the pupils into discussion with each other about their personal relation to the situation and location depicted in the pictures. It also acts as a further mechanism to ensure each individual voice is heard. As with other research methods used in this project, photographs are not intended to offer data that is uncontaminated by reactivity and unbiased by cultural expectation. It is these cultural expectations, and how they affect girls that we wish to examine and photography provides what Prosser and Schwartz (1998) describe as a “uniquely iconic capacity... to usefully represent the particularities of a specific moment in time and space” (1998: 119).
The final alternative technique will be to encourage the girls to develop drawings along the same themes as the photographs and explain them in both group and individual situations. MacPhail, Kinchin and Kirk, (2003) have used this technique extensively to evaluate primary school pupil's experiences within a new physical education initiative. The children took part in a block of physical education activity and were then asked to ‘Draw a picture of Sport Education’. The researchers returned to the school to discuss with pupils the reasons and meanings behind the drawings produced. The girls in this research will be asked to draw what they consider girls should look like, what they should wear and the types of sports they play ‘normally’ and situations in which they feel their participation may be limited because of their gender. This technique is broad based. It can be used to facilitate general discussion surrounding football, through drawing of football matches and why they have illustrated them in particular ways. Girls can also be encourage to produce drawings of themselves playing football which could lead to further discussion as to how football interacts with gender stereotypes. The images can be continually returned to, in order to facilitate further discussions once new topic areas arise. White (1998) suggest this may be a particularly useful technique within this research because children’s experiences of the world are often reflected in their art making.

Thomas and O’Kane (2000) maintain that drawing pictures and writing stories is often more appealing to children because they are concrete and tactile ways to express themselves rather than being abstract and verbal. The use of drawings again alleviates some of the problems of conducting focus groups. They allow children to explain them to us through a visual concrete means, rather than simply verbalising them. Drawing methods are child centred (MacPhail, Kinchen, and Kirk 2003) and in educational terms offer children a cross curricular activity which encourages drawing, reading and verbalising their experiences. As Macphail, Kinchen and Kirk suggest,

“The encouragement of a greater use of child-centred procedures in evaluating school experiences can only enhance the delivery of a curriculum that is informed by students and not only teachers”

This has been particularly useful when seeking a case study school to work with. Teachers are more receptive to research that can be linked to the requirements of the national curriculum and has obvious educational benefits to the pupils involved.

Offering children a choice of alternative techniques has been suggested as being one of the most effective ways of empowering children in the process, whilst gaining their views in hopefully an enjoyable manner. Children who are less confident find it easier to engage in concrete techniques where it is clear what they are required to undertake (Thomas and O’Kane, 2000). For children the body is clearly an important resource of non-verbal communication and using it is important in expressing their views (James et al, 1998). As well as providing practical methods, the use of visual techniques links well with the constructionist standpoint of discovering children's knowledge through sensitive research methods. Corrado Ricci (1887) put forward the idea that “the drawings children produce are not an attempt to show the actual appearance of objects but are expressions of children’s knowledge about them” (cited in James et al 1998: 87). A constructionist approach looks to understand children’s interpretations of the world and access their knowledge. The range of methods illustrated will be used across the ethnography and it is anticipated that some will be used continually but to obtain data for different themes. The benefit of using an ethnographic approach is that there are opportunities to develop and improve methods as the researcher becomes more engaged in the process and the researched feel more at ease with their presence. This flexibility and opportunity to change and alter methods is particularly important when using relatively innovative approaches, but is anticipated that the methods will only be adjusted within the overall framework provided. Exactly how they are used may alter once the researcher enters the setting and can gauge more accurately how they would most appropriately be applied.

4.4.5 Analysis of visual methods
The visual aspect of the research provides a further challenge to the analysis process. It is anticipated a great deal of interpretation will be offered from the children themselves and will be analysed as part of the conversations within the focus groups or interview data. However, the pictures themselves are useful data that can be used in conjunction with descriptions to emphasise and highlight certain issues or verify interpretations given. Visual research methods texts suggest using semiotics analysis as a recognised way to examine images but it is felt in this research project such a process is not suitable. Images analysed using this technique are usually developed independently of the researcher and form the basis of the research area. They are not images that are produced as a result of the research process and which form a central tenet of the methodology itself. For this reason, the content and the context of the photo or picture will be analysed using the same coding scheme provided for the narrative text, but will look for themes within the images produced. Bauer (2001) highlights the importance of examining the image alongside the context in which it is produced to understand its internal and external narrative.

4.4.6 Methods in Practice

The following section will briefly illustrate how it is anticipated the methods outlined will work together in the research setting. It is difficult to predict exactly how this will occur at this stage of the research as it is anticipated the themes discussed and methods used will develop as the research progresses. Equally predicting how much time will be available during coaching sessions for ‘formal’ data collection using groups and interviews is problematic. It is expected that with the presence of an assistant some interviews will take place and group work but it may be quite fragmented as the girls will be engaged in football then may spend 15 minutes on tasks before joining back in with the session. Also discussion of some of the key themes can take place informally whilst the girls are engaging in playing, for example when they are warming up or cooling down. What is provided here is an overarching framework of the key sessions, which will take place with the girls, the themes to be discussed within them, and the methods used.
After the initial time spent in the school, the first session will be used to discuss the research, and offer girls an opportunity to voice concerns or and ask questions. The session will focus on discussing sports generally and football, in particular. To gain girls’ opinion of sport, whom they think participates in certain sports and then moves more specifically into their opinions of football. Once the girls have voiced some views a range of visual football images will be provided by the researcher of professional and amateur football and with males and females playing and ask girls to discuss the various pictures. It is anticipated this will provide context information as to how they perceive football and it place within their cultural worlds. The second session will continue this theme on an interview basis. Girls will be encouraged to produce drawings of themselves playing football and in other non-sports related settings either in the school or home of their choice. Whilst they are undertaking this task the researcher will look to examine, in more detail, individual girls opinions of football, experiences of the sport and why they became involved in playing.

From these sport and football focused sessions a general understanding of gender stereotypes will be developed. Due to the complexity of this session it is hoped it will take place outside of the coaching session and offer a sit down opportunity with a number of girls, after there has been a chance for some trust to develop between the girls and the researcher. In a group situation the girls will be asked to list all the different types of categories for girls and boys such as ‘sporty girl’, ‘girlie girl’. This is to enable the researcher to be able to communicate with them about masculinity and femininity in their own terms and in a way that is understandable to them. The girls will then be given magazines and asked to cut out pictures of women that fit into the different categories and make a visual display of them. A follow up focus group will be conducted to encourage the girls to explain why they have picked certain images for each of the identified categories and how they perceive each category. For instance, whether the images for certain categories are desirable or to be avoided, and why. Again, it is anticipated this will be discussed on an individual basis in interview situations, continuing to use the
visual prompts and to build on specific comments made in the group discussions. The girls will also be asked to draw their own versions of girls in the categories they have identified. This may be a task that the girls are asked to complete on their own outside the session, although there may be potential for parents to influence the images produced.

These drawings, along with the initial pictures the girls produced of them playing football and in another setting, will be used for more interviews bringing together the perceptions of masculinity and femininity identified previously. The girls will be encouraged to articulate where they feel football fits with the gender categories they have identified and how they see themselves in these concepts. A more general discussion will follow, bringing the group back together, looking at women and girls and sporting bodies using researcher provided visual prompts of different female sporting images. Some will show females playing what has been defined as feminine ‘appropriate’ sports and others where they are engaged in typical masculine activities. The group will be encouraged to articulate their opinions of the different images and whether they see them as appealing and desirable together with their reasoning behind this. This will lead to a discussion on when they think females are not behaving in a stereotypical way and how they identify this through the images provided and their own drawings.

Once the concept of resistance and challenge has been raised girls will be asked to think of ways they think females can achieve this. This will be assisted by the use of disposable cameras. The girls will be asked to take pictures, during a typical week, of settings where they think they are behaving in a feminine appropriate manner and where they think they are challenging these perceptions. Again, this is something that can be achieved outside of the coaching sessions or during them, if the girls want to record playing football as one of the categories. Individual discussions will follow to explain the context and reasoning behind the different photos and girls’ experiences within the settings they identify and why shifts in gender identity occur within the different images.
This general framework is provided as a brief guidance to illustrate how the methods will be applied. It is anticipated more sessions will develop from each of the discussions highlighted, particularly when specific areas of interest are vocalised and the researcher wishes to focus on them. The girls will also be encouraged to develop their own methods to research the areas and possibly even devise a way to research the views of other pupils, teachers, friends and family on them playing football and how they are viewed as girls within their own social setting. It is recognised within the context of the coaching, that the research programme is ambitious but it is expected once the researcher develops a relationship with the girls, parents and school through the football sessions, there may be opportunity for follow up work outside the set contact time. The framework should illustrate how varied and interactive the research process will be. It is child centred and flexible to different abilities but importantly for the researcher able to generate in depth data relevant to the research objectives.

4.4.7 General data recording and analysis

The chapter has looked at individual research methods and how data will be collected. The following section documents briefly how it is anticipated data will be recorded throughout the ethnography. As the research is using diverse methods and taking place alongside practical football activity, recording research data will not always be neatly confined to transcriptions of tape recorded interviews and focus groups. There will also be opportunity to gather informal research data from interaction with the girls during the practical sessions, casual conversation and observations of the girls whilst they are engaging in the research tasks outlined. This 'informal' data will be recorded using a research log that will consist of field notes, observations and details of discussions. To add some structure to this process, a session plan will be compiled for each meeting with the girls that will outline the expectations and purpose of each session and then a documentation of what happened.

The field notes will be written up after each session to provide a running description of events, members present, things heard and overheard and
conversations among the girls and with the girls. It is important to recognise the mood of the girls, emotional tone and any difficulties that are encountered in the sessions. In addition to the description of the sessions the researcher will keep a personal log recording her own perceptions of the session, how she feels the research techniques are working, any opinions of the girls and issues with the group and detailing any concerns or adjustments that need to be made. The researcher diary is an opportunity to record the researchers own impressions and feelings and personal opinions (Lofland and Lofland, 1995). A combination of these records will be used to validate transcriptions, compare information collected and provide a data source in its own right. By updating the research journal on a weekly basis, there is opportunity to reflect on how the research is working and make adjustments where necessary. It can also provide prompts for further questioning (either, formally or informally) or raise issues that need clarification.

In terms of analysis of this multi method approach the interpretation produced needs to be considered useful. Gaskell and Bauer (2000) suggest instead of assessing this in terms of validity it is useful to look at findings in terms of confidence and relevance. To achieve this it is necessary to be explicit throughout the finding of the theories, design, methods and procedures used which produced the interpretation. The use of mixed methods in the research can help increase confidence in the results. Examining different data sources reflexively forces the researcher to address inconsistencies and contradictions as an ongoing part of the research process. Examining the research area using different methods will inevitably highlight these and illustrate how social phenomena can be seen differently from different angles. Highlighting this within the analysis process demonstrates a rigorous examination of the data has been undertaken (Gaskell and Bauer, 2000). Within the interpretation there needs to be a clarity and transparency as to how the result have been reached which illustrates all data has been considered in producing the final analysis. The researcher should not carefully select data to support pre-conceived ideas or produce an account that confirms evidence without any indication of possible contradictions. Finally the validity of the analysis will be continually checked by returning to the girls in the process of the ethnography.
and confirming they agree with the interpretations offered. It is recognised the limitations in this process. Individuals will only be able to validate their own interpretations. The researcher may have a broader knowledge that enables them to place the data within a wider context and make interpretations that relate to events the participant may not be aware of. Even so, it is felt such a process is still useful to undertake.

4.5 Summary

This chapter has outlined the methodological approach that will be used in the research and the methods that will be used for data gathering and analysis. The approach has been decided by considering a number of practical and philosophical issues. Childhood studies and feminism both influence the chosen framework. At a philosophical level social constructionism recognises that there are multiple realities and we can only uncover a version of this reality. It highlights the need to unpack and explore meaning in social life that is constructed from interaction in cultural contexts with individuals at particular times. Feminism contains elements of this thinking, but draws conflict into these cultural settings. This enables an examination of how gender power relations interact in social life to create the experiences the research will look to examine. The need for in depth data highlighting girls’ experiences and uncovering meaning within them has led to the choice of a single site ethnographic methodology. The methods used within this setting have been decided primarily and most importantly because they are considered suitable for working with children and helping them to engage in the research process. However the diversity of methods allows for multiple levels of investigation and analysis and will assist children with verbalising and explaining their own interpretations.
Chapter 5
Results (1): Girls, Gender Identity and Global/Local Influences

5.1 Introduction

The following chapter provides a descriptive discussion of the journey through the research methodology illustrating how it was developed in practice. As this was a very personal process this is reported in a first person narrative. The chapter then moves on to provide a further descriptive account of the data which has been generated from the multi method approach. This chapter will focus on how girls construct their identity and the influences of both global and local discourses on this process. Examining the factors influencing the girls enables a deconstruction of how they have developed particular beliefs and understandings and how these have impacted on their identity construction. The chapter demonstrates the role culture, school and family structure play in influencing and defining the girls’ construction of both their gender identity and their expectations for their future lives.

5.2 The Research Format

5.2.1 Gaining entry to the school and recruiting research participants

Developing the research format has been a disjointed but rewarding process. Although I had some specific ideas of what methods I intended to develop during the ethnography, they, when applied, had to be very flexible. A great deal of experimentation was required to find tools which were enjoyable for the girls involved as well as gathering the appropriate data. After initial discussions with the head teacher and the PE teacher it was confirmed that I would run an after-school girls football club, for an hour a week on a Friday evening. The club ran for a term and a half, 15 sessions in total. The organisation and recruitment of these sessions was conducted by the school’s two dedicated specialist female PE teachers. They made announcements on my behalf and arranged for me to speak to all the girls in year six, to inform...
them of the club and research work and invite them to attend. The school was a privately funded preparatory school and as such had high levels of resources available for all subjects, particularly physical education. Due to the choice of school all the girls who attended were from affluent, educated and often dual earning families. One black girl and three Asian girls attended, the rest being white. Despite being co-educational, all physical education lessons were single sex and followed a rigid and traditional curriculum which extended into extra curricular opportunities. Girls could participate in netball, hockey (the PE teacher’s specialism) rounders, tennis, athletics and dance, whilst the boys’ curriculum focused on football, rugby, cricket, tennis and athletics. Some girls played football in the boys’ extra curricular sessions and two girls who participated in my sessions had previously done this. Most of the girls, however, had no prior formal experience of playing football.

Thirteen girls in total expressed an interest in attending the football club. One girl, Heather, joined after the first half term. Ethical approval for the research was sought and obtained from the Universities Ethics Committee prior to undertaking the research. The researchers and assistant coaches involved all had criminal record bureau clearance to work with young children. Anonymity was guaranteed to all research participants as part of fulfilling ethics committee procedures. I was committed to protecting the identity of all the girls involved by making sure they remained anonymous in any written documentation produced from the study. After the initial invitation had been made to the girls to join the football club I asked them to meet me for a sit down session where we discussed the research. I used this as an opportunity to ensure that all participants understood what they were taking part in. I had an open discussion with the girls about the work I was conducting, what the aims were and why their opinions were important. They then explained in their own words what they felt the research was about and all gave well-informed answers suggesting they understood. Generally they were an extremely intelligent and able group of girls and had no problems grasping even the more complex aspects of the research. Parents were supplied with an information sheet detailing the research methods and what would be required of their daughters if they chose to take part.
Due to the problematic nature of adult/child relationship in research I took a number of steps to try to make certain that the girls were not pressured to participate. I spoke to the girls one afternoon about the football and they signed a sheet independently indicating they would like to take part. After this the concept of the research was explained in full. Once both children and parents and teachers understood its purpose, the girls were invited to take part in the research but it was continually emphasised that it was not compulsory. They were informed that they could still attend football and not take part in the study. It was also stressed that participation in the research was not a commitment - withdrawal could occur at any time. I feel the girls did genuinely believe this as a number of girls stopped attending the research for several weeks at a time during the six month process but then would come back and join certain sessions even though they had not been requested to do so.

The girls came from different school class groups but were all familiar with one another. To begin with they attended in friendship groups of two or three but different friendships developed within the course of the research. The PE teacher, prior to the first session, commented that the majority of the girls taking part in football were not what she considered to be the ‘sporty girls’ (Session log 1; 23.01.04). Holly was one of the school’s recognised ‘sporty girls’ and excelled in all the school teams. Helen played hockey for the school team, Ursula and Jenny played netball and Beth played rounders and tennis. The rest were not considered to be ‘sporty’ or have any prior interest in any sports participation. The PE teacher felt it was encouraging they were trying an extra curricular sport. She felt their confidence to try football may have developed due to most of the girls starting from the same level and that it was therefore less intimidating for the girls lacking physical skill.

Over the course of the research I became very familiar with the different girls. There were a range of personalities. All of them were confident and articulate, but some of the girls were much quieter than others. Helen, Melanie and Sarah were the louder girls in the group. They talked constantly and also took
responsibility for directing the other girls, often to the annoyance of the rest of the group. Alison was much quieter but was well respected in the group and seemed to be one of the leaders. Holly came without any of her normal friends, but her status as a sporty girl and also as part of the 'popular' group ensured she was respected and easily integrated. Ursula was new to the school and one of the few black pupils there. She had very little self confidence and was at first very awkward and quiet in the group setting. This was communicated through an extremely sulky and aggressive façade that was eventually broken down as the sessions and as the research progressed. Sally, similar to Holly did not attend with any friends but, unlike Holly, she did not have a firm 'outside' group she belonged to. She tended to drift amongst different groups of girls and did eventually become good friends with Ursula. She, Ursula and Holly, were the only girls who had a genuine wider interest in football. They always attended wearing football shirts and watched professional football a lot, either live or on the television. The rest of the group had little contact or knowledge of football outside of the coaching sessions. The original friendship groups were Sarah and Alison (both Asian girls); Helen, Elle and Susan; Kathy, Karen, and Beth; Holly and Jenny were friends in the session because they played netball together but were from separate friendship groups outside of football. Over the research period Alison and Karen became very good friends and they, with Kathy and Sarah, became a close-knit group who were probably the most friendly and interactive with me. Helen and Ellie remained close but Ellie also developed a strong friendship with Jenny. Holly and Melanie worked together a lot in the football sessions but Melanie was unpopular generally in the group and she and Holly had a number of fall-outs. The rest of the group would inevitably support Holly and this would result in Melanie storming off and refusing to play. This was extremely taxing to deal with at times. Beth also lost favour in her original group of Kathy and Karen, but Heather was her best friend and she introduced her to the group soon after this disagreement occurred. Helen had a similar influence to Melanie on the girls and was continually causing upset amongst all the groups. Susan and Helen's friendship was completely terminated after the first term and Susan stopped attending due to this. These problems arose during school time and continued in the football to the extent
that the other girls requested for Helen and Susan to be on opposing teams Because it was so difficult when they worked together. The dynamics of the group were therefore fluid and continually changing and at times extremely difficult to manage just within the coaching context before transferring to the research setting.

5.2.2 Developing the research methods

To begin with I had anticipated that the research would be integrated into the practical football sessions. I directed the first coaching hour with another female assistant. I felt she would be able to take over the practical work once I organised the girls and I would be able to work with some of them and draw them out of the session to undertake research work. In practice this was not possible. The girls saw me as the group leader and continually referred to me for direction even when the assistant was leading the session. Even when I was engaged in 'research' they would come over and ask me questions about the coaching making it impossible to achieve any quality research time. I had made a note of this in my session log in the first session. “It is difficult to slip in and out of the coach/researcher role... It is very difficult to encourage them to respond and gain the girls' opinions whilst having a conflict with needing to retain control and direction for the coaching” (23.01.04). During the second coaching session I managed to undertake some research by organising a circuit which the girls completed in small groups with one of the tasks being a sit-down research task. This was fairly successful because they were undertaking a simple exercise writing down the different sorts of girls they felt there were. By the third session combining the two aspects was not working. I was not having enough time to dedicate to the research work. I felt under pressure, rushed and also guilty for keeping the girls out of their practical session. We would talk at the side of the activities so there was the continued distraction of what was happening. I was unable to spend much longer than ten minutes with each girl which was not conducive to in-depth discussion. Due to this, it was impossible to build up much of a research relationship with them. In hindsight these sessions were invaluable for allowing me to get to know the girls and enabling them to feel more familiar with me without the
added pressure of the research. At the time I was constantly worried that I was not completing enough data collection and the research would suffer. After discussions with the girls and the PE teacher about this, they indicated that it would be possible to conduct more formal research sessions during lunchtimes. Once this was agreed I arranged to see the girls in small groups most lunchtimes during the week and then continued with the practical session on a Friday. To begin with I saw all the girls for research sessions once a week and many of them would attend more than one. In the latter part of the research Holly, Melanie and Susan hardly attended at all and Jenny and Lisa were restricted due to summer sport commitments during lunch hour. Alison, Karen, Kathy, Helen and Ursula were the most regular attendees and would take part in the research two or three times a week, sometimes attending the same session with different groups.

The research methods developed over time. This relationship was vital for developing and devising the methods as the research progressed. I interacted with the girls using multiple roles, their coach, a researcher and eventually as their adult friend who they confided in and invited to share other aspects of school life. I attended numerous school functions, open days, fairs and festivals, as well as watching some of them participating in other sports fixtures. This ensured I became firmly embedded in their daily lives and they came to think of my presence as a fairly normal part of the school day. This was all conducted on ‘their territory’, a setting where they felt comfortable and in control. A further significant event which shaped the research techniques occurred whilst trying to conduct follow-up interviews in the football session after the girls had completed the writing down ‘girl task’ the week before. I felt working with the girls on their own would ensure I gained the maximum benefit from the time I had available with them. Whilst this worked with Alison who was very self assured, I conducted an interview with Kathy which was very uncomfortable for both of us. I had not really had the chance at this stage to develop much of a rapport with any of the girls and particularly not with Kathy who was quite reserved and quiet. The previous week in the group situation she had come up with a number of interesting comments in casual conversation and I wanted to follow up on these and explore them in a one to
one situation. Whilst she had been confident and assertive in the group setting, she closed off in the one-to-one situation despite her friends playing close by. I decided after this that I would conduct all the research in small groups as all the girls seemed more relaxed and confident in this setting. Having the extra time during the lunch hour assisted with this.

5.2.3 Research practicalities

Generally I would meet the girls for 45 minutes during their lunchtime. The continuous nature of the research allowed me the opportunity to expand and develop the methods as the relationship improved and try new ways of collecting data. During the earlier sessions, we would undertake focus groups in the school hall, or a classroom and as the weather became warmer we would sit outside on the benches in the school courtyard. These were the girls' choices and they were happy and relaxed in these settings. It also allowed me to make different types of observations outside the football setting and see how they and other pupils interacted in the 'normal' school setting. Often other girls would come over and talk to them during the research session and occasionally join in. Although at times these interruptions were quite frustrating, I was happy that they felt confident and interested enough to want to involve their friends and it also assisted with understanding the different influences the girls encountered. It helped me understand the structure of their school life and how they interacted with both their peers and teachers in this environment.

The first lunchtime session involved all of the girls. To ensure they all contributed I requested that the girls to work in pairs and ask one another questions from a sheet I provided them with. They wrote down their partner's response and there were also a number of mini disc recorders placed round the room to catch any conversations they had with one another. This method worked particularly well. It engaged all the girls and gave them a sense of control over the research process. A number of them commented on how it made them feel 'grown up' and like researchers. It was crucial that the first session was enjoyable to encourage future attendance and this method
appeared successful. The question topics encouraged the girls to talk about
themselves, their likes and dislikes, favourite films, about school life, about
home life and future aspirations. The latter was very popular and they enjoyed
discussing what they wanted to do when they were older. After this I arranged
to see the girls in smaller groups and discussed their answers in greater
detail. This formed the general pattern for the research. I would use a
particular technique to engage the girls and then build on this to encourage
more in-depth conversations.

The focus groups were relatively unstructured and informal. I would tell the
girls the topic I wanted to discuss at the start of the session and have some
lead in questions, but the girls would often talk extensively on different
subjects. As part of limiting the adult/child power relationship I did not want to
keep preventing them from doing this and appearing that I was not interested
in what they had to say. This again helped me gain the confidence and trust of
the girls and helped them realise I was interested in them and not just
satisfying the research requirements. In return though, I feel I received richer
research data because the girls would often talk about areas I had not thought
of that were relevant to the research. I obtained a great deal of contextual
data from these discussions, as well as information about the school and
power relationships in the school that may have remained unexplored had I
not let the girls’ open discussions continue.

The next sessions used photographs to encourage discussion about gender
stereotypes and the ‘correct’ image for girls. Within the groups I handed out
different magazines and asked the girls to tear out pictures that they liked and
disliked. Again they enjoyed having something tangible to do. The task
prompted a lot of discussion within the session before we moved into greater
detail about why they had chosen certain images. After this, I provided a
number of images of different sporting body shapes from very muscular
female body builders through to more traditionally feminine sports
personalities such as Anna Kournikova. This prompted a lively debate and
fully engaged all the group in conversation. All the girls wanted to express an
opinion on what they thought of the different bodies and what they felt was an
acceptable image. The girls found it much easier having something visual to discuss rather than talking about abstract concepts. In subsequent focus groups this also assisted with helping the girls to move on to talk about their own body shape. After a number of weeks of different discussion I gave the girls disposable cameras to take away for a week and to take pictures of when they felt they moved through different types of identities. The girls, after being given the initial instructions, were in complete control of this process. In my research log I had written I was nervous about this. I was unsure what the results would be and whether the girls would undertake the task seriously. I also disliked the lack of control I felt I had over the data collection. The photographs however provided extremely useful visual evidence of the girls' worlds both at home and at school. They contained further indications of the structure of their friendship groups outside the sessions and identified important family members. The girls enjoyed the fact that this technique was different and also generated a certain amount of interest from other pupils and teachers in the school. They liked being able to tell them what they were doing and why, and that they were taking part in 'football' research. (Research log 5; 23.02.04).

Once the photographs had been developed we talked about them in groups of two or three. I asked the girls to pick a selection of photographs they considered illustrated their different identities and then explain to me why and how they felt they were enacting a particular identity in that photograph. Throughout the research they were always forthcoming in talking about themselves and their lives and seemed to enjoy having the opportunity to be listened to by an adult outside of the home. The photographs allowed them to bring these conversations to life and to provide visual illustrations of their home and their family. It encouraged detailed conversations around the girls' multiple identities, a subject that without the photographs could have been meaningless and tedious for the girls.

After the photograph sessions I used a number of more traditional verbal focus group sessions to explore identity and football in more detail. When I moved on to discussing football we started with encouraging the girls to talk
about their own playing experiences. Then using newspapers, pictures of professional footballers and their own wider experiences, we explored more global perceptions of football. I also asked them to fill in a picture diary over a week period, indicating if they had played, watched or talked about football and these helped provide the starting point for some of the discussion. This assisted with understanding the relevance of football to the girls and they were again enthusiastic about explaining their diaries and how football had influenced their week.

The football coaching allowed continuous interaction with the girls during the research process. In the research I was generally quite passive and the girls responded well to this, but in the coaching they expected me to be more directive and in control, similar to how their teachers would behave. In the research sessions they were very respectful to me and one another and allowed everyone to convey their different viewpoints. This may have been assisted by being in friendship groups of their choosing. In the practical football group this was not evident and there were numerous tensions between the girls. Melanie and Helen were the main instigators of arguments and disputes and would often turn on me and argue against me. The other girls found their aggressive and at times offensive behaviour difficult to deal with and it caused a lot of upset. This happened fairly early on in the coaching sessions and I was worried it would impact on the research. However, at the research sessions any of these problems appeared to be forgotten and both Melanie and Helen were enthusiastic and talkative, but allowed the other girls to have the chance to be heard. Melanie went through a phase of coming to numerous research sessions and would meet me at the school gate when I arrived at lunchtime to help me set up the session. It was difficult to comprehend how disruptive she could be in the football sessions, although possibly she disliked the fact that I could not give her as much intense attention as I could in the research context. The football sessions continued throughout the research to be hard work to undertake because there was usually some sort of argument every session which would disrupt the football and cause unrest amongst the girls. There were also numerous threats from Helen and Melanie that they would not attend again which were never fulfilled,
and generally by the time I was back in the school on Monday all incidents would be forgotten. The only exception to this was the fall out between Helen and Susan which began during school time, stretched through the football and the research, and resulted in Susan’s withdrawal from all aspects of the football. The incidents were very frustrating for me as a researcher, but were part of the ‘real’ lives that the girls engaged in and by becoming part of this life it was something I had to endure. The friendships and relationships in the school were dynamic and as part of the research I had to work through this.

The final research technique I used with the girls involved them constructing story ends for a story about an older girl footballer. They had suggested ideas for the story and I produced one due to the lack of time they had to write whole stories during their lunch hour. They were left to write an ending for the story. Some of them did this in their lunchtime, others took it home and Melanie and Holly wrote theirs together during the football coaching. We then had a sit down session and talked through the endings, why they had written them in certain ways and what they thought of the female football player in the story. The final coaching session consisted of an ‘official’ game which parents were invited to come and watch with a presentation at the end.

During the research process data was recorded using a number of methods. I wrote a session log of my observations during the practical sessions and a research log reflecting my thoughts on the formal research process. All focus groups were recorded using a mini disc player. After finishing the magazine sessions we sat together and made a poster of positive and negative images and cut up the transcriptions of what they thought and added them to the poster. All the focus groups were transcribed and with the visual data thematically analysed.

The remainder of the chapter discusses the results once categorised in the themes of girl identity, culture, school and family. The chapter is descriptive to allow the girls’ voices to be heard. A more detailed analysis will follow in the discussion chapter. The results illustrate how much gender interweaves in the girls’ everyday lives and the complexities they negotiate in defining
themselves as girls. The subsequent results chapter looks at the interaction between sport and feminine identity and then specifically at football: what the global game means to the girls, their experiences of playing football, football as a masculine sport and the connections between playing football and their gender identity construction.

5.3 Girls and gender identity

This section examines the theme of ‘girl’. It demonstrates what the girls understood by female identity, particularly focusing on the construction of ‘girlhood’. The girls discussed what they perceived it meant to be a girl and the different types of girls that they recognised. These definitions were then used by the girls to articulate how they constructed their own identity. The girls felt their identity was constructed using three main elements: behaviour, visual appearance and body shape. The girls considered they were able to construct multiple femininities, but also tended to locate themselves as closer to one particular identity almost as their ‘base’ identity whilst experimenting with other ways of being. The girls discussed using multiple femininities particularly in relation to the behaviour aspect of their identity. Their behaviour was not restricted to stereotypical expectations and they appeared able to shift identities relatively easily using their behaviour. The other facets of their identity appeared to be less flexible. Their body shape, and to a lesser extent their visual appearance, needed to remain within the confines of feminine expectations. There was less room for the girls to experiment with different types of visual identities.

The girls felt theoretically there were two potential pathways that could be taken to be a ‘girl’. The feminine girl, or using their own language, the ‘girlie girl,’ was associated with traditional discourses that dictated how girls should look and behave. In contrast the ‘anti-girl’, the ‘tomboy’, disassociated herself from traditional feminine discourses and deliberately adopted and pursued an identity which took her away from this and closer to masculine discourses. These labels were developed during an exercise where the girls worked
together and were asked to draw spider diagrams naming all of the different types of girl they could think of. The two definitions appeared continually.

5.3.1 Being girl: The ‘girlie girl’ and the ‘tomboy’

The magazines and pictures assisted the girls with articulating how they understood the term ‘girl’. The girls understood femininity as being synonymous with ‘girlie girl’. This was their own term used to describe girls who they felt behaved and looked as girls ‘should’. Such girls were preoccupied with their appearance. They had to look neat and have long hair, wear fashionable clothes and have or be looking for a boyfriend. These girls formed groups or ‘gangs’ that dominated a large proportion of the playground space by walking around together and talking about boys who they ‘fancied’.

RJ: “What do you think a girlie girl is then?”

Kathy: “Someone who loves shopping and clothes and make up and always has to have their hair right and could not get dirty and always has to have clothes in the latest fashion.”

The research girls viewed the girlie girl as striving to meet the targets of perfect femininity. Shopping was something the girls believed ‘proper girls’ should want to do along with wearing make up and having their hair styled and long. Attention to these aspects would allow a female to be classed as a girlie girl. Their understanding was that for a girl to be perceived as a ‘real’ female they had to be concerned with their appearance and strive to look good. Similarly, they linked being fashionable as an integral part of assisting the girlie girl with creating her identity. The focus on girlie girl and image dominated the conversations. The girls offered very little discussion on the behaviour of a girlie girl. Much of their behaviour was seen to be tied up with developing and preserving this appropriate image and this in itself would take a great deal of time and effort. There was some commentary on the activities that they felt the girlie girl would not engage in, such as doing well at school (Alison) or getting muddy and being rough. These were recognised as being important in assisting the girlie girl with maintaining her visual display of feminine perfection. To complement this image construction the girlie girl was required to be interested in boys and be striving to obtain a boyfriend.
Receiving interest from boys or having a boyfriend were seen to be vital aspects of the 'girlie girl' persona. Boys, the girls felt, gave the 'girlie girl' status.

The girls accepted it was normal for the 'girlie girl' to be like this. It was something a girl can 'choose' to be like if she wanted to. According to the research group, most girls wanted to follow this pathway. Without the correct visual image and adherence to the rules of femininity, concerning clothing, hair and make up, they felt a girl could not assume the label of girlie. This was even if her behaviour fitted into what the girls understood as the way the 'girlie girl' behaves.

The 'tomboy' was positioned in opposition to the girlie girl. Image was still considered an important part of defining the tomboy, but the girls felt the tomboy was associated with masculine behaviour and appearance. A tomboy was someone "who plays boyish stuff, someone who enjoys football a lot and someone who doesn't wear skirts and dresses and doesn't really bother with their hair. It is someone who is quite rough and aggressive" (Alison). The girls saw the tomboy as attempting to contrast with the girlie girl and as such they would be unconcerned with 'feminine' image. Looking like a 'girl' carried no importance in their identity. Instead visually looking like a boy, adopting boys' dress and appearing unconcerned with feminine attributes was viewed as the way the girls could align themselves to the tomboy identity.

The girls' descriptions were very rigid. Although they recognised a single female identity did not exist, they still felt girls could be labelled into two distinct categories. The identity of sporty girl was given as an additional possibility by some, but after further discussion they felt a sporty girl who played traditional female sports, such as netball, hockey and tennis, could still be a girlie girl if it did not compromise her visual image. They felt that girlie girls often played feminine appropriate sports and these activities were not perceived as incongruous with the gender identity they were constructing. A tomboy could also be a sporty girl but it was likely that she would enjoy sports that were rougher and more aggressive and more 'masculine'. Hockey still
came under this category as well as football and rugby. The girls felt a tomboy would play hockey differently to a girly girl. She would be more aggressive, more competitive, want to win all the time and be nasty to her team mates and the opposition. Such behaviour would illustrate that although playing the same sport, she was completely different from the girly girl. The tomboy would also enjoy sport for different reasons from the girly girl. Whilst the girls felt the girly girl would play sport only to enhance her image, the tomboy used sport as a way to reinforce her disdain for the restrictions placed on girly girls. She enjoyed sport because it gave her a chance to get muddy, be loud and direct and shout at her team mates. This was in contrast to the norms imposed on the girly girl which the research girls viewed as rejecting such behaviour.

These two opposing binaries were used by the girls to illustrate the ways they perceived it was possible to be a girl. Girls could be either feminine or masculine, girly girl or tomboy. Femininity was associated with ‘hyper’ girl behaviour and strict adherence to appropriate traditional ways of being a girl. The strong desire to demonstrate they were a girly girl led to a pronounced concern with appearance. It was important to demonstrate the correct visual appearance of long hair, fashionable female clothes such as skirts and dresses, and make-up to enhance facial features. The tomboy was concerned with rejecting all the ideals that the girly girl held and developing an appearance that was anti-feminine and behaviour that was in opposition to expected ‘feminine’ conduct.

5.3.2 ‘Doing girl:’ Constructing a gender identity

Once discussions had taken place to clarify what the girls considered were potential female identities the conversations were developed to discuss how they felt they sat within the definitions they had provided. The disposable cameras that the girls used to illustrate their different identities were particularly useful to prompt this process.

‘Doing girl’, or constructing their own gender identity was considerably more complex than their perceptions of ‘being girl’ would imply. There was a
contrast between their understanding of identity and the 'real' identity they constructed and engaged in. None of the girls could position themselves solely within the categories they had created. Alison and Heather considered themselves to be girlie girls to a 'certain extent'. Helen, Sally and Beth viewed themselves as tomboys most of the time. The remaining girls felt they were neither, but drew on discourses from both at different times. The group had depicted 'being girl' as a simplistic concept and one that represented a straightforward choice between two pathways. Their lived realities were completely different and involved a complex negotiation between identities to suit the context they were in.

The girls identified 'girlie girls' in their school but none of those involved in the research positioned themselves as what they now suggested was an 'extreme' girlie girl. The 'real' versions of the girlie girls, reflecting their abstract descriptions, had boyfriends, were continually concerned with their appearance and excelled at the school's established female sports of netball, hockey, rounders and athletics. Alison and Heather felt their identities were 'mostly' girlie girl as they enjoyed following fashion and taking care of their appearance. However, they were not interested in boys and felt this demonstrated that they were not complete girlie girls.

Heather: "Yeah we are girlie girls, but we don't have boyfriends, that is not us and we don't go around acting and thinking that we are so cool. So we are girlie girls but we are not as girlie as them. They think they are really cool because they hang around with boys all the time. That just isn't the sort of girls we are".

Heather felt her lack of interest in boys demonstrated her defiance against being a complete 'girlie girl'. She viewed such an interest as being negative and not something she wanted to embed as part of her identity.

5.3.3 Mixing gender identities: Multiple femininities and gender construction

The girls felt in their realities the two identities could be combined, they did not necessarily have to sit in arbitrary opposition to one another. When discussing
individual identities, usually the girls tended to align themselves closely to one end of their defined spectrum. They did not have the language available to articulate a label for the position they adopted or their own mixed identity.

Heather: “My friend is 15 and she goes out in heels and skirts and acts as if she is a girl but she is still really sporty”

RJ: “So it is more like girls aren’t expected to do that sort of thing?”

Heather: “Yes”

RJ: “But do you think you can do both?”

Heather: “Yes but you will always be a bit more of one, I think I am more of a girlie girl”

Beth: “I’m not”

Heather: “Beth is more of a tomboy, she doesn’t really like girls stuff”

Beth: “No not at all I hate being girlie”

Heather felt the identities could work together, but she chose to sit closer to the girlie girl end. She was not completely restricted by this and could adopt tomboy discourses when she wanted. Helen reflected Beth and felt she constructed her identity closer to the tomboy end of the spectrum. She also did not completely reject all values and behaviour associated with being a girlie girl.

Helen: “I would prefer to think of myself as somebody who isn’t a girlie girl but doesn’t wear make up or stupid dresses for no reason especially with frills and I am kind of like a tomboy mostly, but sometimes I do get dressed up so I am not a total tomboy, but no one would ever say I was a girlie girl”

Helen’s friends agreed with her description of her gender identity. They suggested she demonstrated her strong tomboy affiliation by playing with boys at the school but that she was not a complete tomboy.

Sarah: “You know like Helen, she is always playing with the boys and none of the boys mind at all. But when she wears her hair down she looks really nice and girlie.”

Ellie: “Sometimes she wants to be a girl, but sometimes she wants to be a boy, she wants to be both”

Ellie’s description was very appropriate because it demonstrated the girls’ desire to construct more than one identity in their own gendered lives. Despite feeling more comfortable situating themselves towards one type of girl they
continually draw on discourses from each. Rigidly retaining a single identity was not practical and did not allow them to enjoy different aspects of their lives.

Kathy found it very difficult to describe how she enacted ‘being a girl’ and illustrated she had her own way of ‘doing girl’.

Kathy: “I’m more of a tomboy than a make-up person but I am not a tomboy”
RJ: “So Kathy you are maybe not a tomboy but maybe not a make-up girl either?”
Kathy: “I’m not a make-up girl, I’m more of a tomboy than a make-up girl”
Beth: “You are sort of in between”
Kathy: “Yes, it is sort of a bit of both”.

Again it is evident how there is no label to articulate this identity and as a result Kathy struggles to describe it. Kathy felt that she was a bit of a tomboy because she liked playing boys’ sports. She also wanted to do well at school, which was not associated with either category. Kathy used the disposable camera to take photographs of when she felt she behaved like a tomboy and when she was being a girlie girl. These photographs illustrated both the types of behaviour and actions she felt reflected each category. They also demonstrated how she fluctuated between many different identities during her daily activities.

Kathy: “This one is girlie because I’m doing my hair and I’m doing it in front of the mirror rather than just doing it quickly and not caring. I am doing it in the mirror to make sure it is okay. I am making sure I look ok. It is something I do everyday and I think it is girlie”.
RJ: “So it is because you are looking after yourself and making sure you look good?”
Kathy: “Yes and this one is me before the spring fair and I am wearing a skirt, for the first time ever, I never wear a skirt so that is a bit girlie girl as well”
Katie: “I’ve never seen her in a skirt in the 5 years I’ve known her”
Kathy: “This one is me in tomboyish clothes”
RJ: “The jeans and baggy t – shirt?”
Kathy: “Yes that is my normal clothes, that is what I like wearing so that is tomboy”
RJ: “So why are those clothes tomboy?”
Kathy: “Because they don’t show off your body like girlie girl little skirts do, I am all covered up and I like that”
Kathy: “And there I am pretending to whack my sister which happens quite a lot, although I am only pretending there”.
RJ: “So that is quite tomboyish?”
Kathy: “Yeah fighting and being aggressive is what boys do”
RJ: “Do you think girlie girls could be very aggressive?”
Kathy: “No, not at all, they shouldn’t be like that”.

Kathy’s conversations demonstrated how she perceived she moved between different gender identities. Her means of changing identity was linked to image and moving between the image discourses perpetuated by both of the identities. She saw certain clothes as being more girlie girl or tomboy. Certain behaviour also helped her with this. However, she easily interacts differently with both of these and it was not set in one rigid identity. The camera gave her the opportunity to recognise this. The other girls held similar opinions to Kathy. It was very hard for them to place themselves within a single identity and only adopt the associated actions. Instead the discussions revealed that there was a constant interaction and negotiation between different identities with certain aspects being considered as fitting into neither of the polarisations previously offered.

Alison’s photographs similarly illustrated the contradictions between the many identities she enacted. Despite describing herself as mainly a girlie girl, it was evident that she also drew on many different discourses including a number of tomboy ways of doing girl.
Alison: “This is one of my favourites, but it is also my tomboyish one because girlie girls wouldn’t go on long walks outside, especially going through muddy fields”
RJ: “Why is that then?”
Alison: “Well they wouldn’t want to get dirty and wear those old clothes that I was in, I didn’t care about how I looked because I was just having fun outside
but they would be worried that they didn’t look good and they looked all messy”.

Alison: “This is one of my favourites with all my friends. I think it is girlie girl, because girlie girls are always into hanging around together with all their friends. And I like this one because it is just before dance, so that is girlie girl because only girlie girls do dance”.

RJ: “So only girlie girls do dance then?”

Alison: “Yes because tomboys won’t want to do dance because it is so girlie, boys would never do dance so tomboys wouldn’t want to either, like Helen, she would never do dance it is just not something she would like doing because it is not rough and you have to be all girlie”.

Alison: “This is another girlie girl one, I am all dressed up in a skirt and ready to go out, I’ve done my hair and I’ve got my make-up on. My hair is not that neat but it is more my skirt and what I am wearing”.

Although Alison demonstrated how activities can be girlie girl or tomboy, her own identity construction was a combination and contradiction of these two different identities. She claimed she was mainly a girlie girl, but it was apparent that her identity construction drew on more than just this. She did ‘girl’ by using a number of girlie girl discourses and particularly liked paying attention to her appearance as part of this. She liked to feel she made an ‘effort’ with her appearance and wore appropriate fashionable clothes and make-up, but she liked the freedom the tomboy identity could give her away from this. The tomboy gave her the chance to relax this identity on occasions and not worry about her appearance and looking good, but just enjoy the activity she was engaging in. The girlie girl, whilst a large part of the identity she constructed, did not complete her. It did not explain how she ‘did’ girl but instead defined part of the way she achieved this. As well as this prominent part of her identity, Alison combined many other aspects that helped her construct who she was as a girl. It was not as simple as selecting one identity or simply shifting between the two extremes. Alison instead drew on tomboy discourses and others that could not be labelled, without embracing that identity as something she wanted to portray continually.
5.3.4 Education and gender identity

Academic achievement was strongly embedded in many of the girls’ identities but they felt it did not belong to either the girlie girl or tomboy persona. Kathy discussed how her motivation to do well educationally was not ‘girlie girl’ as they were “only interested in how they look, not doing well at school” but equally ‘tomboys’ “only want to do well at sport and win all the time”. All of the girls felt that academic success was very important except Sally who viewed herself as ‘tomboy’. This added to the complication of describing themselves and how they ‘did’ girl because it was an important part for many of them, but could not be categorised into a fixed identity. In their understanding, the girlie girl was not interested in educational achievement because they focused their attention on boys and their image and having the right fashion to attract boys. The girls discussed the association between the traditional role of the woman as a homemaker and the need to attract a husband as providing the reason why girlie girls were not interested in academic success. For the girls in the research, working hard and doing well academically was an integral part of their identities and something they strived to achieve. Ursula was very negative about her academic ability because she was in a lower set for maths. She felt this was disappointing for her family and herself because the need to be ‘clever’ was such an integral part of who she was. She was very determined to be perceived as academically successful and pass the entrance exam for the high school.

Beth and Helen both viewed themselves as tomboys and were less concerned with school work. Although they were committed to doing their best at school and wanted to get good marks, it was more because they felt they had to than because they were intrinsically motivated to do well to complement the identity they constructed. For Beth, Sally and Helen, doing well at sport took precedence over academic work, although Beth and Helen also wanted to be successful academically. Sally played netball and football a great deal. Helen was a goalkeeper for the hockey team and discussed this as important to her and a source of pride. Beth discussed her high skill levels at tennis and rounders when the other girls were talking about academic
success. This was far more important to Beth and an embedded part of who she was than being successful at school. When the girls were asked to describe one another, Kathy continually made reference to Beth’s sporting achievements but hardly mentioned any information about the sets she was in for different subjects at school. Beth focused on the latter when talking about Kathy.

Sally had no interest in academic achievement. It was of such little value to her that she seemed unconcerned when she failed her entrance exam to the high school and had to remain at the primary school for another year. For a number of the other girls this would have been devastating because doing well at school was so important to who they wanted to be and be seen as. However, Sally did not comment about being unhappy about this, perhaps reflecting her more tomboy identity and the lack of importance she attributed to academic success. She was pleased that she would be able to continue playing in the school sports teams.

The girls who placed themselves closer to doing ‘tomboy’ were reinforcing the stereotype that they were primarily concerned with sporting achievement, but only Sally fully embedded this into her identity. Helen and Beth moved towards being less concerned with academic work but did not fully discard educational discourses that maintained it was important to do well at school. The girls who felt they mostly did ‘girlie girl’ considered their need to do well academically demonstrated that they were not complete girlie girls. This was important to them. Alison felt most of her identity was constructed around being a girlie girl, but she had a strong desire to be successful at school which made her different and ‘better’ than just being a girlie girl. She was talked about by her friends as being extremely intelligent and this was clearly an important part of who she regarded herself as and how she was perceived by her peers. Sarah, when describing her to the group, mentioned how clever she was first and then went on to talk about how she liked wearing dresses, getting dressed up and having nice hair. The two were viewed as separate identities: Intelligent Alison, but then girlie girl Alison who adopted many of the expected behaviour of ‘being’ a girlie girl. By drawing on these different
discourses Alison was able to gain the benefits of both. She was viewed as attractive, an important facet for a girlie girl, but by ingrafting educational discourses into her identity she was able to dismiss any negative assumption about being stupid which was also closely associated with the girlie girl persona. She actually gained a great deal of respect amongst her close peers from this part of her identity and this elevated her to being ‘better’ than a girlie girl.

5.3.5 Non identity?

During these conversations and when discussing their pictures there were a number of times when the girls could not place themselves in any recognised identity. They often described these moments as being them or their ‘true’ identity, where they were being themselves rather than being influenced by polarised expectations.

Sarah: “I don’t really know what this one is, it is just me”
RJ: “So it is not either?”
Sarah: “No”
RJ: “Why not?”
Sarah: “I don’t know really I am just at home and not really being girlie at all but then I am not doing anything that is like a tomboy, so I am just being me at home and relaxing. It is just not either of them so I can’t really say what it is”

The girls had periods when their behaviour or image did not sit within any of their defined categories and it was difficult to articulate what their identity was during these moments. This positioning seemed neither masculine or feminine and as a result the girls had no language to discuss this element of their gender identity. This was understood within their perceptions of doing girl as times when they were not in a category. This time was, however, important to their identity construction and gave the girls a chance to just be ‘themselves’ as Sarah suggests.
5.3.6 Acceptable identities: Girlie girl v the tomboy

Identity construction was a complicated process for the girls and at times the language was not available to define the stages they moved through. The majority of the girls were drawn towards one type of identity as their predominant persona but still used other discourses available to them. It was evident in further conversations that certain identities were more acceptable than others. The girls acknowledged that in society the girlie girl was the more culturally acceptable ‘model’ for girls to adopt. Equally within their own environment this attitude was evident. Some of the girls were subtly negative about the girls who ‘did’ girl closer to the tomboy side of their feminine spectrum. They were also condescending about the ‘full’ girllie girls, who they felt constructed their lives around appearance, boys and let their need to be girllie dominate their behaviour. The research girls felt these girls had very little ‘substance’ or interest to them. None of the research girls placed themselves in this category. Heather and Alison sat closest but they wanted to demonstrate they were not completely aligned to this identity, due to the perception that girllie girls were not intelligent. The girls who would not commit to either girllie girl or tomboy adopted a relatively ‘safe’ position. They were not associated with the stigmas of being stupid, only interested in boys, or being too competitive, loud and aggressive, as occurred with the girls who were at the extremes of the two identities.

There were girls in the research group who constructed enough of a tomboy identity to warrant them being the recipients of such negative associations. Helen, Beth and Sally, at times, were considered less acceptable by the other girls. In particular, Helen and Beth’s behaviour and manner were considered inappropriate and caused many arguments during the practical football sessions. They were accused of being too aggressive, too loud and too domineering by the other girls. All of these characteristics were linked to the tomboy personality. The girls who sat nearer to the girllie girl identity did not encounter such criticism.
Alison: “Helen thinks she is the best, she is so loud and bossy and she always wants to be in charge. I just think she is quite mean. She is always shouting at you and she is just so competitive”.
Kathy: “Beth puts you up and puts you down and she’s nasty about people behind their backs and she’s really bossy. She is always trying to tell people what to do”.
Karen: “It is just Helen and Beth, they just try to control everything and they are always shouting and wanting their own way”.

It was only the ‘tomboy’ girls who encountered these types of judgements from the others. Although it was acceptable for Kathy to occasionally assert herself and behave in an aggressive, loud way, it was not considered suitable as a consistent part of a girl’s identity. Adopting this led to the exclusion and negative comments demonstrated. The influence of traditional discourses was again evident. The girls who moved to the extremes away from the girls’ normalised notion of being female were less acceptable. Although they did not accept the hyper feminised ‘model’ of hetero-sexual girlie girl, the tomboy was discredited more for being abusive, aggressive and inappropriate. The girls who adopted this behaviour, Helen, Beth and Sonia were not excluded, but the other girls were sometimes critical of them. Enacting the tomboy as part of ‘doing’ girl created the risk of being viewed as less acceptable and marginalized from the girls who constructed their identity in more safer neutral territory.

Reflecting this, several of the other girls who had positioned themselves closer to the tomboy identity when they were younger now felt it was inappropriate.

Ursula: “When I started off, especially in year 1 I was a real tomboy and like then I sort of grew out it in year 2 and became more girlie”.
RJ: “Why did you become more girlie?”. 
Ursula: “Because I was growing up and I wanted to do all the things that my friends were doing and I didn’t want them to think I was really boyish”.

The pressure of gender expectations limited some of the girls’ opportunities to behave like tomboys. The girls felt that not complying with feminine expectation would ensure that they would become increasingly marginalized.
This process had subtly started to develop. It was evident in the girls’ conversations, but this was not yet enough to convince Beth, Helen and Sally to move away from their preferred identity. However they did discuss that they would be under continued pressure to move further towards a girlie girl identity as they became older.

The girls’ understanding of identity recognised the potential for developing multiple femininities within their way of doing girl. The tomboy and the girlie girl were considered overarching ways of ‘being a girl’ but to ‘do’ girl, or experience all aspects of life available to them, the research girls did not feel they could rigidly adhere to the rules which were associated with each single identity. Identity was discussed as a multi faceted concept comprising of different core elements and the girls felt there were different ways to be within each these core elements. The diversity within these elements as a whole constituted their ability to have multiple identities. The girls viewed their identity as consisting of behaviour, body shape and visual appearance. These three components had defined rules which were different depending on the core identity the girls were engaging with at a particular time. Certain behaviour was therefore acceptable for a tomboy, but not a girlie girl. Girlie girls were expected to develop a certain visual appearance but the same rules governing their appearance were not applicable for tomboys. The girls all saw they had these components within their own identities. The girls’ behaviour was relatively flexible as the previous section has demonstrated. They recognised there were rules governing the behaviour of each core identity but they tended to ignore these and draw on ‘accepted’ behaviour across multiple identities according to the situation they were in. There were some noticeable exceptions when they were forced to behave in certain ways for example during family occasions. In contrast their body shape and visual appearance were strongly regulated by assumptions of what was acceptable rather than how the girls wanted to be. The girls understood there were again multiple body shapes and visual appearances that linked to different identities. However, the visual appearance and body shape associated with the girlie girl identity was considered by the girls as the most acceptable. There was not the flexibility that was evident with behaviour, to experiment across identities.
with these two components. Instead the girls were fairly traditional in how they wanted to look and what they felt was appropriate. They were concerned about having the 'correct' physical shape in a way that was not apparent when they were talking about appropriate behaviour.

5.4 Feminine identity and the importance of visual appearance: Identity and body shape

The girls felt their own body shape should conform to the feminine norms established in society. Acceptable body shape equated to being an acceptable girl. Even at a relatively young age, having the correct 'look' was an important but restrictive facet of the girls' gender identities. The 'right' look transgressed all ways to 'do girl' with this group of girls. They wanted to have slender, toned bodies and felt being fat or overweight was very unpleasant and unattractive. The girls conformed to the 'girlie girl' regulations because they believed it was important to retain some elements of appropriate feminine persona in their identities. This was even if they preferred to be viewed predominantly as tomboys in the way they behaved. It appeared to be a trade off, particularly for Helen, Sally and Beth. By retaining the important visual elements of femininity, they were given greater leeway in the way they behaved because they looked like a 'girl.'

Discussions on this topic were littered with contradictions. Previously they had been particularly disdainful of the girlie girls' extreme concern with image but now seemed to be acknowledging that it was important to them. Also, they initially appeared to have liberal opinions on what was an appropriate body image:
Heather: “I think it doesn’t matter how girls look, so long as they are happy”
Ursula: “It doesn’t matter whether they are big, huge, tiny so long as they are having fun”.
Kathy: “It shouldn’t matter what you look like, it is your personality that matters”.
However, these were not values they upheld when discussing their own appearance. More detailed discussion revealed they felt certain body images
were very unappealing. This resulted in anxiety about the way they looked. Reflecting the desires of adult females the girls all wanted to be thin. Being overweight was considered unattractive and unacceptable. The girls’ concerns about their own weight were varied. Whilst it was an issue for all of them, generally those who worried most were the ones who were a slightly bigger than the ‘average’ size for their year. Alison was very slim and petite.

RJ: “Are you concerned with how you look?”

Alison: “Yes of course but not all the time, it doesn’t matter if I don’t look good sometimes. I do watch how I look though but it is not as important as doing well at school and stuff like that.”

Whereas Ellie was slightly bigger than the other girls,

Ellie: “I am fat, my legs are really fat”.

Ursula: “No you are not, Ellie you can’t be fat”.

Ellie: “Look at my legs though”.

RJ: “So how ideally would you like to look?”

Ellie: “Thinner than I am”.

RJ: “So you are concerned about your body size then?”

Ellie: “Yes I am. I feel I am way overweight and I don’t like it”.

Ellie felt that she was much bigger than the other girls and therefore did not fit with the wider cultural norm or the visual identity she wanted to construct. This caused Ellie a great deal of anxiety.

The girls felt developing an appropriate body image was their choice. They justified contradicting their initial liberal ideas by suggesting pursuing an ideal body image was something they wanted to do. Ellie felt wanting to be thin was her choice rather than something she was pressurised to do. The group felt girls should want to visually look feminine but it was up to them whether they pursued and maintained the correct look. They argued it was acceptable for women and girls to look however they wished but their choice was to be thin. The girls suggested it was almost coincidental that this reflected wider cultural expectations.

RJ: “What about their body shape? What should their body shape be like?”

Kathy: “It shouldn’t matter”
Sarah: "The perfect body it could be a bit fat and a bit slim, but if you are too slim it doesn’t look too bad”.
Kathy: “It doesn’t look very attractive”
RJ: “So you need a bit of shape to you?”
Sarah: “yes”
RJ: “And what if you are quite fat?”
Sarah: “If you are quite fat, then you should try and take a bit off”
Kathy: “You shouldn’t want to be stick thin and it shouldn’t matter what other people think and if you don’t care if you are fat then it shouldn’t matter”
Kathy struggled when verbalising these views. Rather than suggesting body shape should not matter at all, it was not an issue if the person did not care about their image. If they did then being fat was problematic. Kathy admitted that personally she was concerned.
RJ: “Would you mind if you were fat then Kathy?”
Kathy: “Probably; that is just me though”.
RJ: “So you don’t mind if other people are fat but you would not like to be fat yourself?”
Kathy: “Yeah”
RJ: “Why not?”
Kathy: “Because I wouldn’t feel very nice”
Sue: “You would feel worn out”
Kathy: “You would feel like you are being stared at sort of thing”.
Sarah: “If you are fat you can’t help it but some people stare at you and look at you but if you don’t mind then it is nothing to worry about”
RJ: “Ok then so would anyone here mind being fat?”
Yes (all of them)
RJ: “Is that just because it doesn’t look good?”
Sarah: “It looks a bit wrong, because if you are doing something and your top goes up and you are quite fat then you think ohh”.
Kathy: “It shouldn’t matter what you look like, it is personality that matters”.
Kathy continued to maintain that appearance should not be an issue and instead personal choice was used as justification for her own concern with appearance and adherence to dominant body image discourses. Reflecting this, most of the girls suggested that it was acceptable for women to be fat so
They chose to pursue thinness rather than be affected by such stigmas. There was no questioning of whether these attitudes were correct. They did not attempt to challenge the discourses that made being overweight seem unpleasant and unappealing. They suggested they would not be overtly nasty towards girls with the wrong body image, but made it clear that they aligned themselves to a more traditional body shape and complied with the restrictions surrounding this.

What the girls perceived as ‘fat’ was at times a cause for concern. Ellie was a healthy weight for her height but she was heavier than the other girls. This created anxiety for her about her body image. Holly recognised she was underweight but her perception was that she was still fat and unattractive. Holly: “I am underweight for my height but I still think I am fat”.

Holly discussed other girls she considered to be fat and reaffirmed that she did not believe it was a positive image to develop. However, she had an unhealthy belief of what constituted being fat. Sarah talks about ‘fat’ flesh on display as being unattractive compared to the smooth toned skin of the slender girl. It was worrying to see how strong these pre-adolescent girls’ views were about what constituted being overweight and how undesirable this was. There was a great deal of pressure on the girls to achieve the required body shape even though for many of them achieving this would not be possible. The following section discusses data collected with the girls when we attempted to look at how this pressure had developed. The girls’ beliefs surrounding this component of their identity were very narrow, encouraging the research focus to alter to examine how these were developed and particularly understand how images presented to them in wider society may have influenced the values they held regarding acceptable body images. This was explored by asking the girl to look through popular female magazines and tear out images of women they liked and discuss the reasons why.
5.4.1 Culture and the appropriate female look

This topic was examined when we looked through the magazines and the girls were encouraged to tear out different pictures they like and disliked. Generally the girls pulled out their favourite female ‘celebrities’ as examples of the perfect look. They rarely moved away from the norm of very slender celebrities with long hair and good skin as being the visually ideal female. Equally, there were very few photographs of women with alternative body shapes suggesting the girls were bombarded with this as being the only acceptable image.

Melanie: “I like that one, it is Cameron Diaz, she is just really pretty”
RJ: “Why do you think she is pretty?”
Melanie: “Well her face is really pretty and it is smooth and she doesn’t like to wear too much make up and she has nice blue eyes and I like her hair”
Susan: “And I don’t like her”
RJ: “Why not?”
Susan: “Well she is just like horrid, she is just all fat and it doesn’t look right and her hair is horrid”
RJ: “So which of these pictures is the ideal, what you think a girl should want to look like”
Holly: “Cameron Diaz”
Helen: “I like Kiera Knightley, she’s my favourite”
RJ: “And what is so appealing about those two?”
Holly: “They are just really pretty, they have perfect figures, like they are not too fat and they are not too thin. Like Kate Moss, she is just way too thin but both of those are just right and their hair is really nice and styled and they just have really pretty faces”.
Helen: “Yeah like I don’t like this girl because she is just boasting with her lips and her hair is just all over and there is a long bit and a short bit and it is just horrible”.

It was evident why the girls had developed such strong beliefs on acceptable body image, with few alternatives being available to them. They recognised this was what was considered ‘beautiful’ within western culture and as a result tended to reject any pictures which deviated from these perceptions of
acceptable. It was also clearer why their own body images were a source of anxiety if they were aspiring to attain the images of perfection presented by celebrities. An overweight girl in the pictures was not perceived as attractive and none of the girls felt they would be happy looking like her. It was also possible to be too thin, but the girls talked about this in reference to women who looked anorexic and extremely skeletal. However, the ideal was still very thin women and this was the image that was continually presented to the girls as the most acceptable and attractive way to look by the media. When we were talking about this the girls did begin to acknowledge that there were pressures on them to look a certain way and their appearance was not completely down to personal choice as they had first suggested. As Ursula suggested: “We are surrounded by different stuff, you always look at weight and height of someone first and then make a judgement by that”.

Because these images were so embedded within the girls’ lived experiences it became an important part of how they viewed themselves and other girls. The celebrities also provided a role model and pinnacle body image to aspire to and measure themselves against. Interestingly despite being a culturally manufactured way of looking, the girls felt that the perfect body image was also a natural one and it should not be obvious that celebrities are using external means to achieve the required look. It was necessary to be ‘naturally’ beautiful not to be a manufactured beauty. This seemed to be very important to the girls.

Helen: “She’s ugly. I don’t like her because she has way to much make up on and she whitened her entire face and she has got a really ugly face”
Karen: “Yeah she looks like a barbie doll and she is generally ugly”.
Kathy: “But she is just very pretty, like she is isn’t even trying, she is just so pretty but she doesn’t need make up on or anything”.
This concept of natural beauty seemed to be very important to the girls. They were striving to achieve an ideal but it was necessary to be this way naturally not to make themselves like this and become “something that you are not” (Alison).
It was easy to see how these images have become so entangled within the girls own identity and image construction. All the pictures the girls found attractive displayed very slender women with clear skin and long glossy hair. Anyone moving away from this norm was pounced on as being unattractive and unacceptable even if they were not over weight but just bigger than the slender 'perfect' bodies. The girls rejected extreme thinness and recognised this was associated with illness and eating disorders, but they still bought into the dangerous perception of normality being the slender body of the average female celebrity. They could not explain why they liked this: it just looked right.

5.4.2 Identity, and the ‘correct look’

The girls were not just concerned about their body shape being ‘right’. They held similar belief about their hair. This was again an essential part of the overall visual image females needed to create. As with body image, appropriate hair styles transgressed different gender identities. The girls felt female hair had to be kept long. Even Helen, Beth and Sally, who considered themselves ‘genuine’ tomboys, felt it was essential to have long hair. Keeping their hair in the appropriate style and length was one way to illustrate they were not ‘total’ tomboys. This issue was discussed a great deal during the story sessions when the central character cut her hair to stop it from getting in her way when she was playing football. All the girls felt she was making herself visually unfeminine which was not acceptable.

RJ: “The other girls, the big girls would you want to look like them with short hair?”

Alison: “No definitely not.”
Kathy: “No”
Karen: “No”
RJ: “Why not?”
Alison: “I just don’t think it is very nice. I don’t think it is very girly and I just wouldn’t want to be like that. It is okay to be like that if you wanted to be, but I wouldn’t and I wouldn’t try to be.”
Kathy: “Yes I wouldn’t not be friends with someone like that, but I don’t want to look like that myself. But she shouldn’t have cut her hair, she could have just tied it back or something. She was stupid to cut her hair.”
Karen: “Yeah I wouldn’t cut my hair really short, it just doesn’t look right on a girl.”

The girls rationalised their beliefs as a choice rather than the influence of image discourses that pressured them to incorporate this into their identity. They suggested others who did not conform would not be judged. However, they still perceived short hair to be unattractive and unappealing on a girl. There was no questioning of why this was not appropriate or why long hair was more suitable and an important part of ‘being a girl’ whatever ‘sub’ identity they chose to adopt. The girls willingly accepted this because they felt it was positive to have long hair and girls should want to look like this and it was ‘stupid’ not to. Again there was no alternative visual discourses that were acceptable and available to them. The girls who vocally expressed strong opinions on this area were closer to the girlie girl identity. They could be expected to hold such views as it was an integral part of girlie girl discourses. However, Helen as a tomboy, was also adamant that long hair was a necessary part of her identity. It helped relieve the pressure to being girlie in other aspects of her identity and behave like a tomboy. Although the girls sometimes were negative about her behaviour she generally had the freedom to behave as she wished.

Helen: “I would never cut my hair all off, I would never shave my hair completely.”
RJ: “You know the girls in there that are boyish and have short hair and stuff would you not like to look them?”
Helen: “I would mind if somebody said to me you are not a real tomboy if you have long hair. I would cut it shorter if someone said you need it shorter like a coach but only a little but though I like it long it wouldn’t look right short”.

Helen felt long hair was compatible with a tomboy identity even though there was some conflict between the two discourses. In their descriptions the girls saw tomboys as having short hair reflecting their ‘boy’ status. However, Helen would not even consider incorporating this element of the tomboy discourse into her own identity because it was an overt sign that she was completely
rejecting feminine ideals. Retaining her long hair allowed access to feminine ideals when she wished and generally made her acceptable, whilst still maintaining her tomboy behaviour.

Physical aspects of the girls' bodies seemed to be more important for reflecting appropriate feminine ideals than their appearance as a whole. They discussed body shape and their hair as important to give them some aspect of a feminine 'girlie girl' identity. Not conforming to this was unacceptable for the girls. The girls discussed clothing using the magazine images and photographs and demonstrated how certain sorts of clothing were associated with their two defined female binaries. They thought there were obvious signifiers of femininity such as skirts and dresses and these were seen as the chosen clothing of girlie girls, whereas jeans and t-shirts and baggy trousers were viewed as more tomboyish. However, wearing the 'correct' clothing did not appear to be as important to the girls as having the right body shape and appropriate long hair. Clothes helped some of the girls construct their identity, but they were not vital for affirming it. Alison as a girlie girl was very interested in clothes and following 'girlie' fashions and this assisted her with being considered a girlie girl by both herself and her friends.

Alison: "I love shopping, I like getting clothes, it makes me feel good. I bought a really nice dress."

RJ: "What is it like?"

Alison: "It is black and it has a strip there and a cross and a halter neck. There are really nice dresses. I really like my dress and I look nice in it. It just makes me feel girlie."

Alison did like using clothes to assist with developing her girlie girl identity. Heather also suggested she preferred to wear short skirts and heels because it was girlie. However, both of them identified times when they were comfortable wearing the jeans and baggy comfortable clothing associated with tomboys. The girls who sat in the middle of the identity binaries hardly mentioned clothes as being an important facet of their identity. Kathy and Ursula felt they wanted to be comfortable in their clothes. Unlike when Kathy discussed body image, her opinion that clothes were not important seemed to be genuine. Kathy and Ursula preferred to wear looser fitting, comfortable
clothes, because they were practical and enjoyable for them, not because they felt pressured to comply or reject certain gender stereotypes. They did not feel adopting this style of dress made them complete tomboys, although they did recognise such style could be linked to a tomboy identity and again suggested they felt this helped construct them as 'sometimes' tomboy. Kathy suggested she did not often wear 'girlie' clothes because she did not feel very nice in them and did not want to be perceived as 'overly' girlie. Her choice of clothing though was not made because she wanted to be seen as a tomboy but because it was a practical and comfortable choice for her. The same could not be applied to her hair or her body image where she found it important to rigidly confirm to feminine expectations despite attempting to justify her adherence as a choice.

5.4.3 The influence of visual feminine ideals

After the magazine session the girls did begin to acknowledge that there were expectations placed on them to look 'right,' and that this was not simply a matter of choice. They talked about how these pressures inevitably impacted on their body confidence. Even as pre-teenagers, before the years when girls are reported to become more self conscious about their body shape, it was already causing this group some anxiety.

Ellie: "It is just with girls you associate glamour with girls and stuff".
Sarah: "Yeah so if you are a girl you want to be glamorous and look right"
RJ: "So what is right?"
Sarah: "Not to fat and not too thin"
Helen: "That picture of Anna Kournikova, she is really pretty, that is how I want to be weight size"
Ursula: "I think I eat too much and I am too fat"
Holly: "It shouldn't matter how you look but first impressions and stuff are important and people will always judge you on how you look".

The girls felt the right look was important to how they would be viewed and was central to making them acceptable and appealing. However, when their images of perfection were defined by models and celebrities it was a struggle to achieve the 'right' look. Even at a relatively young age these girls were
strongly influenced by these stereotypes and already striving to achieve the ideal due to being constantly surrounded by these images. However, although they actively wanted to comply with these they were beginning to recognise such pressures were not necessarily correct. They understood that attempting to comply may lead to health problems and discussed at length how obsession with body shape could lead to illnesses such as anorexia and other eating disorders. Whilst they felt compelled to be thin, they did think it was possible to be too thin and reassuringly this was also perceived as unattractive.

Susan: “You need to make sure you don’t get too thin and damage your body and stuff and get like anorexia couldn’t you”

Ursula: “Yes there was a girl at my last school who had anorexia. She wouldn’t eat”

Helen: “Yes I wouldn’t want to be really thin, I don’t want to be like a stick. I just want to be normal”.

It was encouraging to see that the girls felt it was possible to pursue a perfect body shape to an extreme that was unhealthy and visually inappropriate. However, this section has illustrated that the girls are still complying with these visual pressures even though they recognise it can reach dangerous extremes. They are not prepared to compromise their health, but will not challenge the discourses which dictate how their body should look. They instead seem content to maintain the gender equilibrium and accept this is how they have to be because they are female and they do not want to risk being ostracised as non girl.

5.4.4 Heterosexual relationships and the correct look

I asked the girls to discuss why their look and having the correct body image was so important. Their responses were tied into the need to fit in and generally be viewed as socially acceptable. Being visually ‘different’ was perceived by the girls as being one of the quickest ways to become unaccepted by their peers. Those girls who already were slightly different by being heavier were already experiencing anxiety because of their concern with not fitting in and feeling different to the other girls. The girls also felt it
was an essential part of developing a normal female life which ultimately ended in them getting married. Further discourses surrounding the necessity of marriage for women to fulfil their role in society put additional pressure on the girls to look attractive. The girls felt the pressure to look right was greater for girls than boys because becoming a wife was a role females ‘had’ to fulfil and appearance was so tied up in its achievement. They perceived that men and boys accepted or rejected females by appearance. It was therefore important for women to develop and maintain the perfect body shape and visual look. The group felt it was very important for women to get married (something examined in further detail later in family section of the chapter) but this would only be achieved by adhering to the restrictive body and visual discourses discussed.

It was a difficult topic to discuss with the girls because marriage was not an immediate concern for them, but they felt having a boyfriend or husband was an essential facet of their adult identity. The need to be in a heterosexual relationship developed a further set of ideals and pressures created through discourses which position women’s role in society. These interlink with the discourses surrounding appropriate visual appearance and added to the girls’ beliefs that appearance was an extremely valuable part of their identity. The girls felt their look would have a central part in defining whether they would be able to fulfil their female role when they moved into adulthood. The section in chapter 5 examining future identity and football reinforces how important it is to the girls to fulfil these expectations and again highlights why they are so intent in developing and maintaining an acceptable physical appearance.

The girls’ identities are clearly complex and changing as well as being individual. Their understanding of girls was very neat and defined but their lived experiences of ‘doing girl’ did not reflect this simplicity. Using the different research methods the girls illustrated how they reject the extremes of identity but adopt discourses from both to develop identities which cannot be categorised using the language available. In the midst of the contradictory and conflicting identity construction within the behaviour element of the girls’ identities, they were stabilised by their continued need to reflect feminine
stereotypes in their visual appearance, specifically their physical looks. However much the girls experimented with other aspects of their identity this remained constant and indicated the continued power of traditional discourses even if they were not rigidly adhered to in every aspect of their identity.

The previous section of chapter 5 has illustrated how gender discourses are developed at a global level particularly in relation to generating an idealised female ‘look’. The following parts of the chapter illustrates how the school and family can create environments which influence the girls’ perceptions of gender identity and are places where they engage in lived reality using the identity they construct. As the girls were discussing the complexities of their identities I encouraged conversations about the different environments they lived in and how these influenced their gender beliefs and identity construction. They gave context on their school and family lives and talked about the gendered dynamics that existed in both of these environments. The school section in particular looks at how other girls in their immediate environment construct their identity and the influence this has on power relations within the school. The section begins by looking at how space is gendered within schools and then specifically examines the different identities the girls considered were constructed within the school environment. The section illustrates that a fairly rigid and appropriate feminine identity can lead to a great deal of power for the girls who wish to construct their identity in this way.

5.5 Gender dynamics and the school: The gendered layout of the school

The girls recognised there were numerous gender divides within the structure and layout of the school.

Ursula: “The boys stick together more than the girls, have you seen the cafeteria? Normally the boys will have one whole line to themselves and the girls used to sit separately.”

Sarah: “Yes all the boys are together. But usually Helen and them sit after but usually there is a big long line of year 6 boys and we sit separately”.

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The gendered segregation of space occurred inside and outside. The boys were active when playing outside but the girls felt they were confined to much smaller areas.

Eli: “The boys invade our space all the time”.

Ursula: “I think we should be able to choose what sport we want to do, boys have so much more space as well to play, so much more space and so much sport”.

Sally: “They use that field and that field there”.

Sarah: “We just have a tiny block”.

Ursula: “We just have the netball courts”.

RJ: “And what do all the pupils do at lunchtime?”

Ursula: “Well the boys all play football and the girls sit around in the bit with benches or walk around in big groups”.

Sarah: “Yes we can catch up on the gossip it is really important to find out what is going on and who fancies who”.

The school was very gendered despite being co-educational. Talking or gossiping was very much a female pursuit which the girls engaged in whilst the boys were taking part in football as a masculine activity. Although the girls did enjoy their ‘private’ space to develop friendships and be socially integrated with other girls, they were in effect conforming to gender stereotypes and re-enforcing these within the school environments. The gossiping groups at lunch and break were seen as an exclusively girl culture. Whilst the research girls all played football, the informal playground games were viewed as a solely male space. Both boys and girls stayed within their respective areas.

The gender divides were also reinforced within the more structured aspects of school life. As indicated, in physical education lessons pupils were segregated into male and female classes and pupils undertook a very traditional curriculum for their gender. The girls felt this presented a clear message about what behaviour and in particular which sports were acceptable. The girls seemed to accept this. Although they participated in football at the coaching they seemed to find it hard when pupils, particularly boys ‘broke’ the gender rules at school. Although some of their conversations implied that boys and girls should be able to play any sport, if in reality this happened they
found the experience very unsettling. They discussed the boys playing netball at a school open day.

Heather: “But I suppose even I have to say, even we have to say that you know when you were playing on the open morning, there were some boys playing against us and I thought it looked a bit weird.”

Ursula: “I am not criticising them but it just didn’t look right”

The unofficial gender rules of the school were very powerful at dictating how the boys and girls behaved. There was a distinct separation which was evident whenever I entered the school. Boys and girls nearly always played separately. When I asked the girls about friendship groups they talked about either all girl or all boy groups. There were no mixed friendship groups. This segregation helped enforce the gender regulations and ensured boys and girls stayed within their own spaces and activities with very little crossover minimising any identity confusion. The girls in their initial conversations felt that after teachers and adults in authority positions, boys also held a great deal of power within the school environment reflecting wider cultural stereotypes, gender and power dynamics within society.

They felt that boys controlled the playground space and had more access to sports opportunities. However, the girls controlled the academic environment. Whilst this area was important to the girls’ personal identities, they did not consider it an important source of power to hold or one which gave them much prestige within the school amongst their peers. The research girls thought being considered ‘academic’ was of little value to the boys and they rarely attempted to challenge the girls’ dominance of this aspect of school life. The social power relations among the pupils appeared to be dominated by the boys, but once I asked the girls to talk about their friendship groups they discussed another complex layer of power dynamics within these groups. Certain types of girls seemed to have much more power and status amongst their peers than others.

5.5.1 Power, gender dynamics and friendship groups
The girls described a hierarchy of friendship groups within the school. At the top of this hierarchical power map were two key female pupils, Anita and Robin. These girls seemed to have much more authority and status within the school than the other girls.

RJ: “So who amongst the girls has the most power within the school?”
Heather: “Anita and Robin”
RJ: “How do they have power then?”
Heather: “Because they are the most popular people in the school, where they go everyone else goes”.
Ursula: “Yes they are really pretty and whatever they do, Robin started a new flat shoe trend and now at least 15 other girls have got that..... and Anita, everyone was coming in, in normal clothes and she started wearing all these skimpy clothes and then everyone else wanted to try it”
Heather: “Yeah and all the boys like Anita and Robin”
Ursula: “Yeah they just have so much power because everyone thinks they are perfect like Anita and Robin, they think they are the best and they have the perfect image so it make it alright for them to tease people”
Sarah: “They are really sophisticated”
Jenny: “They are really popular girls, the really fashionable popular girls who are going with boys.”
RJ: “So how do you get into the popular group?”
Ursula: “You need to be pretty, on the sports teams, quite thin, good at every sport, ready to have a boyfriend and that if they play with your hair you will like it”
RJ: “So you have to be pretty, sporty and clever....”
Sarah: “No, no, no, not clever”
RJ: “So what makes them pretty?”
Sarah: “Their hair”
Ursula: “The boys that fancy them”
Jenny: “Annie’s hair is what makes her pretty, she is pretty because she is blonde and fit and thin”.
Sarah: “Robin is thin, but not too thin, she is not overweight, she is just perfect”
Jenny: “She has got the perfect body”
Sarah: “She is not fat and she is not thin she is the right size”
Jenny: “She has a wonderful body”
Sarah: “She is the right size and any boy would want her”.

The reasons the research girls gave for the two girls’ popularity and subsequent authority were heavily tied into having this correct visual image that we have seen the girls ‘buying into’ at a global level and which is so important to them. Anita and Robin provided a further indication why image was so important to the girls. These girls were the right body shape and correct visual appearance, both of which have been shown to be valuable commodities for a girl. Because they were seen as being desirable many of the other female pupils wanted to emulate them and as such they could define the appearance of other girls in the school.

Much of the popular girls’ identities centred upon complying with girlie girl stereotypes, but sport was also a very important part of who they were and allowed them to maintain and affirm their status in the school. They had to excel at the school’s established female sports and be part of the school teams. This gave the popular girls a great deal of credibility amongst their peers. The girls’ sports abilities also helped them to obtain formal positions of authority within the school. Both girls were captains of sports teams and ‘house captains’. This confirmed their superior status and authority and was also supported by the adult teachers. The girls involved in the research discussed how they felt the teachers played a significant role in maintaining Anita and Robin’s status particularly in physical education lessons. The girls felt Anita and Robin were the ‘favourites’ of the PE teachers and were always picked for demonstrating or given important tasks to do. The girls felt this was an indication that the teachers valued Anita and Robin as being ‘better’ than the other girls and held them up as example of what the others should be aspiring to.

The popular girls also attained power and status by being viewed as attractive to boys and by being prepared to mimic adult gender relations by ‘going out with boys’. Being willing to do this and importantly being considered pretty enough to attract attention was another central part of the popular girls’
identities and what helped them sustain their positions of power within the school. Whilst the football girls did not appear to like Anita or Robin's status there seemed to be an element of jealously, particularly with regard to Robin's body shape and appearance.

The girls felt that Anita and Robin could also be very nasty to the pupils who were not acceptably feminine. Even though the football girls did not like them they felt it was difficult to challenge their power because doing this would make themselves targets for Robin and Anita's ridicule and could lead to other female pupils in the school turning against them.

RJ: “So why don’t you challenge the power that they have?”
Heather: “Because they are bullies, they would bully you”.
Ursula: “Because we don’t have any power”
Heather: “They would say something that you can’t answer to”.
Ursula: “They have so much power that everyone would automatically go on their side. If we try and challenge them, the whole school would be against me”
Sarah: “Yeah some of the girls are like ‘I hate Anita’ but then they don’t stick by it”

There seemed to be a network of playground politics in the school but it was clear Anita and Robin remained unquestioned in their position as leaders of this system. The girls' discussions suggested this was largely due to their compliance with feminine stereotypes and their position within school sports. The girls talked briefly about the male friendship groups in the school. They felt there were male parallels to Anita and Robin – John and Daniel – and these four were all ‘going out’ which again helped both pairs cement their status. There were similar categories for the boys to be considered ‘leaders’. Playing sport was of greater importance as a status symbol and they were generally thought to be nasty to all the girls apart from Anita and Robin.

Sarah: “John is nice to Robin and Daniel is nice to Anita but that is because they are going out with each other”.
Ellie: “Yes the boys are just mean to all the other girls”.

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Appearance was of less concern to the boys but the girls admitted that after being good at sport, it was important for the boys to be deemed good looking and to wear appropriate (fashionable) clothes.

Ursula: "For the boys to be popular they have to be in one of the school teams, be decent looking, like messing about and playing games at break times and have good clothes".

Beth: "All the popular boys and girls go for the sporty people but like the team sports, so like the captain of the football team and the hockey captains, the rugby captain and the netball captain they go for these."

Ursula: "But not the football girls, apart from Holly, she is the only one who is from the popular group who plays football."

This extract suggested the importance of being sporty to be popular but only within the acceptable teams. Girls football was not a 'status' team, resulting in the girls gaining very little credibility or authority from participating. Taking part in the research rather than the actual football seemed to generate more interest and status for the girls.

The two sets of popular girls and boys were seen as the key authority figures amongst pupils, but the girls also referred to the 'popular group' who were the girls in the friendship circle of Anita and Robin. Access to this group appeared to be defined by the same criteria which had elevated Anita and Robin, but it was the latter who decided who would receive entry to the group. They would try to force any girls who wanted to become part of the group to comply with their expectations.

Ursula: "They make them get boyfriends and things like that, that you don't want to do to make you get into the group".

Sarah: "If you don't have a boyfriend they just say oh we don't want you in our gang".

Generally the football girls felt priority was given to the popular girls' team mates in the school teams. Access was also available to girls who focused on their appearance and were viewed as pretty. Holly was the only one of the football girls in this category so access to the popular group for the majority was denied. The girls felt there was a core group of popular girls and then several who were desperately trying to gain entry but were on the fringes.
rather than being accepted. The research girls were very disdainful of these girls who were not as popular or powerful as they were aspiring to be.

Ursula: “They like using people and because some girls want to be in the popular group they let them do it to them”.

Ellie: “Yeah like Sophia”.

Ursula: “Yes Sophia copied everything that Anita did she even copied her shoes and she just like worships Anita and they don’t like her”.

Sarah: “None of the popular group like Sophia but because she is being a tag along they just sort of use her. It is her birthday and she has tickets for the SugaBabes so they are all pretending to be her friend because they want to go”.

Ursula: “Yeah but I heard Anita saying once they get to the concert they are just going to leave and if you ask them on their own who likes Sophia they would say no one. But once the SugaBabes thing is over they are going to start picking on her”.

The girls’ discussions served to demonstrate how shallow and manipulative the popular girls were viewed to be, but also demonstrates the extent of their control of the social aspects of the school environment. They were nasty and disrespectful to the other girls but because they were admired for how they looked and many of the girls aspired to be like them, they could continue being like this. Of the research girls, only Helen and Beth had endured Anita and Robin being spiteful directly to them. Both of the girls felt this was due to having more tomboy identities, which the popular girls were unhappy with. The other girls had not been direct targets and so tended to accept that this was how power relations materialised within their school environment and that this had to be accepted.

The research girls were also asked to discuss where they felt they sat within the hierarchy of pupil status in the school. They believed their groups of friends sat in between the popular girls and what Ursula termed the ‘nerds’ at the bottom of the power ladder. The girls felt within their own friendship groups some of them played sports and they were interested in their appearance, but not to the extent of the popular girls. The research girls also
felt they were intelligent but not completely absorbed by school work in comparison to the girls at the bottom of the hierarchy. These pupils defined themselves around their academic abilities and their interest in school work. These girls however were seen as not having power. Their lack of power was also attributed to the way these girls looked. They were considered ugly as they did not wear nice clothes and some of them were overweight. These girls were often mocked and taunted for not fitting in with appropriate dress even though the girls admitted if Anita and Robin wore the same it would be viewed as desirable.

Ellie: “So they tease them about how they look”.

Ursula: “Yeah I think so, you know that thing that Bridget wore on jeans for genes day she didn’t do her hair very well but I think if Annie had done her hair like that it would have been accepted”.

Jenny: “The popular people don’t like people like Bridget because they are unpopular and they think they are all geeks and nerds and stuff”.

RJ: “So why are they less powerful?”

Heather: “Well one reason is ’cos, I don’t mean this in a horrible way but they are not pretty.”

Ursula: “They are all ugly and Jane and Caroline are quite fat, I don’t want to be mean but they are and maybe it is because they focus too much on their work all the time”.

These conversations were particularly useful in illustrating how much girls could gain from adhering to gender stereotypes and how advantageous it was to be considered to have ‘pretty’ facial features. Anita and Robin were not considered generous or genuine, but the research girls were quite envious of both their visual appearance and the power they had. The football girls accepted they would not be able to gain such status because they were not completely compliant with the required feminine categories.

The sections within this chapter demonstrate the pressure on the girls to cultivate an appropriate feminine identity. It was both desirable globally and created an obvious source of power for young girls as Anita and Robin demonstrated. The complex gender dynamics that exist within the school
were also evident. It was not as simple as boys being more powerful than girls, but instead was a continuous power exchange between the four boys and girls at the top of the friendship pyramid. For the girls beneath this there were several layers comprising of different friendship groups each with varying amounts of authority and power usually relating to how much they fitted in with the concept of the perfect female.

5.6 Gender relations within the family structure

The home was the other key environment within the girls’ lives. In a similar way to peers, family could impact on the girls’ gender identity construction. This section discusses how mothers in particular were currently influencing the girls’ gender ideals and how the structure of the family more generally helped shape the girls’ perceptions of acceptable and normal adult relations.

Some of the girls suggested that their mothers pressured them to be more feminine. This was most pronounced with the tomboy girls’ mothers.

Helen: “No not really, I don’t wear make up except this time when my Mum made me, she literally strapped me into the chair and put it on me”.
RJ: “Did she?”
Helen: “Yes she is trying to change me into a girlie girl, she doesn’t like me being like this. We went to Gap last week and she picked up this flowery skirt and said that would look ‘so nice’ and I should have it but I don’t want that sort of stuff. She is trying to change what I wear and make me wear make up and stuff but I don’t want to. I like being the way I am”.
Sally: “My Mum doesn’t mind what I wear but I always used to play with boys all the time and my Mum said I needed to start getting some girl friends. So I did and I don’t play with the boys anymore”.
Helen: “Yes I did enjoy spending time with the boys but it would be a bit weird now”.
RJ: “Does anyone else’s Mum influence what you look like?”
Beth: “My Mum is trying to buy me skirts and stuff but I don’t like them. She has been buying me stuff like make-up but I don’t think I will use it. I have this little box on my window sill but I don’t use it”.

Ursula: “My Mum has started buying all this stuff for my skin because I have got some spots and she bought me all this Nivea stuff to make my skin look better”

Beth: “You know in ‘Bend it like Beckham’ when the Mum is trying to get her a girlie bra and she just wants a sports bra, that is exactly how I was. It is just like you don’t really want stuff like that. It is not exactly that you are being a boy. It is just you don’t like the girlie things but you don’t want to do the boyish things.”

The girls who pursued tomboy identities encountered their mother's pressure much more frequently than the more feminine girls. When we discussed why they thought this happened the girls considered that mothers were less comfortable with having tomboy daughters because they did not ‘fit’ with convention. At the moment Helen and Beth were resisting making any obvious changes to their tomboy identity, but the pressure to conform was evident. Sally stopped playing with her male friends because her mother considered it inappropriate and potentially problematic for Sally’s development as a girl. The girls themselves felt that playing with boys was no longer appropriate ‘at their age’. They felt this would single them out as ‘weird' or that they would be assumed to be interested in the boys they were playing with or ‘fancied them,’ an accusation that the girls seemed to want to avoid. Even though Sally had enjoyed the interaction, she would no longer consider playing with boys because it was ‘not right’. This belief seemed to have been instilled in her by her mother, rather than something she genuinely felt. The girls discussed their understanding of why they felt their mothers acted this way using the mother figure in the story to express their views.

RJ: “Why is Rebecca’s mum upset about her playing football?”

Helen: “It is like with my Mum, I think she wants a daughter who is a girlie girl who she can chat to and talk about things with.”

Beth: “Yes she wants her to be like the other girls so she can be proud of her. She wants her to do the girlie stuff and then she won’t be different”.
Ursula: “Yes she doesn’t want to risk losing her as a girl”.
The girls felt that by not being girlie they could be letting their mothers down. They recognised it was not appropriate to be different and they thought there could be a great deal of pressure from the home to be feminine. They also considered this was not just visual pressure that they were already experiencing, but subtle influences on their behaviour as well, for example Sally no longing playing with the boys. However, the girls who were aware of their mothers influence, Sally, Beth and Helen, were currently apathetic towards their mothers’ views although they felt it was not something they would be able to continue to ignore.
RJ: “So do you think you will have to be like your Mum says?”
Beth: “Yes I think so, eventually I think they will force me to be girlie”
RJ: “They?”
Beth: “Yes my Mum and my friends like Heather, they are all trying to make me more girlie”

Their mother’s opinions could clearly be important to some of the girls in influencing how they felt they ought to construct their gender identities, even if they were currently attempting to ignore this pressure. Only the tomboys appeared to be steered by their mothers to alter their identities, suggesting that girls who were more neutral or girlie with their core identities were not viewed as problematic.

However, all of the girls appeared to be influenced by their family structure to a certain extent, particularly in how they anticipated living their future lives. The girls all came from dual parent, relatively affluent, educated families. Two of the girls were from divorced families but the parents they lived with had remarried and they regularly saw the other parent as well as having two adult guardians in the home. The girls accepted their family structures were normal and acceptable adult relations. As a result, all of them expected to get married and have children in the future and felt this was an essential part of adult femininity. This tied into their concern about maintaining the correct visual appearance. Without the correct look they would be unable to attract a man and fulfil this expectation. They all also expected to go to university and felt this would be an essential part of their adult feminine identities. They felt this
would be a continuation of their current desire to achieve educationally and an important part of moving into womanhood.

RJ: “So why do you want to go to university?”

Alison: “Because my parents did and it is a good experience and it make you get better at stuff”.

RJ: “How about you Karen?”

Karen: “Same because my Mum and Dad went to university and it will be fun. And it makes you more independent because you are away from home”.

Kathy: “Because you can get more qualifications which opens up more opportunities for you and you can do any job that you like”.

Being able to work and have a career was important to the girls. This may be due to being exposed to this way of life within their family structures with Alison, Kathy and Karen’s parents working full time or managing businesses from home. Nearly all of their mothers had ‘careers’ which they were committed to. Although several mothers had reduced to part time work to look after their children, the girls still felt a career would be a important feature in their future identity.

However, despite this progressive attitude they still felt they would be expected to undertake more traditional gender roles outside the work place. Again this can be linked to the families they were growing up in, which reflected the traditional family models presented as normal in wider society. The girls felt it would be their responsibility to look after their own children even if they did not believe this was fair.

Ursula: “Girls work so much harder. Men say they go out to work and stuff but women do too now”.

Sarah: “But when they get home the women do all the work as well”.

Ellie: “Yeah men like my Dad work and so does my Mum, and my Dad says he works harder than my Mum and it is not true because she does all the house stuff as well as working.”

It was understandable that where the girls have been used to these concepts in their every day life it can become a further aspect of their environment which shapes their gender beliefs and their future behaviour. It had become normalised making it much harder to resist traditional expectation when
parents are actively conforming to them and presenting this as how gender dynamics in the home coexist. Ellie’s final comment demonstrates the girls’ acceptance of them.

RJ: “Do you think you can change this or have an impact on making it different at all?”

Ellie: “I am not sure, I think it is just the way our society is”

The girls’ beliefs were deep rooted but generated largely through cultural expectations. It was evident how these norms surround the girls and persuade them they are the correct way to be. They exist not only in wider society, but also in the girls’ personal surroundings and serve to reinforce the beliefs that are generated by the culture that their own worlds exist in.

5.7 Summary

The chapter has illustrated how the methodology worked in practice and discussed the data that has been produced using the different approaches. It has illustrated how complex it has been for the girls to construct their gender identities and the tension between ‘doing girl’ how they wanted to and how they felt they ought to. The girls do not have a single identity or simple multiple identities. They have discussed how their identities are made up of central components all of which link together but are influenced in different ways. The chapter has looked at global and local influences and how both of these have made an appropriate visual appearance a central part of the girls’ identities. The girls have discussed how they could behave in multiple ways but still felt that facet of their identity could be restricted at times. None of the girls involved in the research chose to construct ‘extreme’ identities. Although there were a few tomboys and several girlie girls, none perceived their identity was completely within these categories. Instead the gender positioning they adopted was largely a safe one, leaving them free to experiment and try different behaviour without placing themselves at any extreme. Although this kept them away from being taunted as abnormal, particularly if they were ‘too tomboy,’ it also meant they were unable to obtain power over their peers within the school environment as the extreme girlie girls were able to do.
However, they were also able to be liked by their own friendship groups even if they did not hold a great deal of status within the school. The following chapter moves on to look at the girls’ opinions of sport and then specifically football. It will examine how the girls felt female identity generally and their own identity can fit in with activities that have been masculinised within popular culture.
Chapter 6
Results (2): Girls and Football

6.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the girls' understanding of sport and why it is not considered a part of female gender identity construction in wider culture. The chapter starts by examining the girls' discussions when they looked at sports coverage in the national media and noted the absence of women within this. The girls discussed why they felt this occurred but also how they still considered that sport was an acceptable activity for them to take part in. Linking to the previous chapter and the importance of appearance to appropriate femininity, we then moved on to discuss the appropriateness of the female sporting body. The girls found some sporting bodies difficult to justify and they felt some women were moving too far outside the boundaries of acceptable feminine appearance by pursuing their sport of choice. The second part of the chapter focuses on how the girls personally reconcile sports participation within their own gender identity before focusing specifically on football. The girls' perceptions of the global sport of football are examined before they discuss their personal experiences with the sport and particularly the negativity of males within their immediate environment to their participation. How football sits within their gender identity is considered before the chapter concludes with the girls' discussion regarding how they feel football participation can continue to sit within their adult female identity.

6.2 Sport and female identity

The girls were encouraged to discuss British sport using newspapers to prompt conversation. They were asked to study the back pages of a number of different national newspapers and comment on what they found. All of the girls recognised the sports news was dominated by male sport and that sport
was an important signifier of masculinity. However, this appeared to have little impact on their perceptions of sport within their own immediate environment. All of them felt that sport was open to both boys and girls, although certain sports were viewed as gender specific. We have also seen in the previous chapter how female sports could be an important part of constructing an extreme feminine identity, suggesting the girls did not perceive sport as an exclusively male domain. The girls' open views regarding sport seemed to reflect the regulations discussed within the behaviour aspect of their identity. As the previous chapter has demonstrated the girls currently felt able to behave as they wished rather than being regulated by gender specific rules. Sport was perceived as a behaviour and therefore became a further unrestricted domain for the girls. Linking to the girls' earlier discussions, sport did become problematic when participating hampered their ability to develop the ideal visual image. Temporary changes in visual image were acceptable and quite enjoyed by the girls. Some of them liked being able to look scruffy, get muddy and get their hair messy whilst playing sport. Permanent changes, which may alter their bodies away from the feminine norms they were trying to create, were not welcome and it was when this occurred that females playing sport seemed to become unacceptable. This was particularly pronounced if women were engaging in sports that were recognised as aggressive or masculine. The girls felt this was only acceptable so long as they were able to look feminine when they were not playing.

6.3 Gender identity and the sporting body

To explore this further I asked the girls to look at different pictures of athletes who participated in different sports. We looked at photographs of various women to see the girls’ reactions to body shapes other than those presented by models and celebrities and also to help understand how sport might be perceived by the girls to impact on this component of their gender identity. Generally the bodies of the athletes were seen as less acceptable by the girls. They looked at images of a heptathlete, a gymnast, a tennis player and a female bodybuilder. The tennis player (Anna Kournikova) was viewed as
having the most desirable body shape assisted by a slender toned figure and very long blonde hair which the girls felt made her feminine and therefore attractive. In contrast to this image, was the female body builder who despite also having long blonde hair was viewed as disgusting by the girls.

Holly: "Urghh oh my god, that is horrible".
Sarah: "That is disgusting, she is too body built"
Ursula: "I don’t like it, that is sick. I think that if girls want to be boys then that is fair enough but that is just too much".
The girls associated her extreme muscles with being unnatural and unfeminine.
Helen: "I don’t like that because I think it looks a lot like a man especially her arms, her arms just aren’t right. It is not natural for a woman to have that strength"
Holly: "It is not a woman, a girl wouldn’t pose like that or flex her muscles or have arms like that"
Susan: "She’s a tranny"
Ursula: "Well I think that women have rights to play games that men do but not have the bodies that men do. Having arms like that, I bet there are loads of men who don’t have arms like that.”
Susan: “My opinion is that she is stupid and she is a tranny”
RJ: “Why stupid?”
Susan: “Because she is a tranny, women just don’t do that”.
The girls were appalled by the woman’s body. They viewed it as so unfeminine that they could not believe she was female. They felt she had to be a transsexual and this was the only possible explanation for why she should have such large muscles. These muscles had no place on a woman’s body, so naturally she had to be male. They drew on discourses of what is considered right and the concept of being ‘natural’ to explain why they felt it was wrong and inappropriate for the woman to look the way she did. The bodybuilder was overtly challenging visual femininity and was therefore classed as ‘stupid’ and ‘not right’. The girls found it a disturbing image: it was impossible for them to understand why a woman would choose to look the way she did. They struggled with some of the ambiguities within the woman’s appearance though, particularly her styled long hair.
Sarah: “I don’t think she is a tomboy because she wouldn’t have long hair and blonde, she would have it cut short like a tomboy and then she would completely look like a man but with that hair she has a man’s body but she is still trying to look like a woman”.
Lisa: “Yes so she does want to be like a girl”
Sarah: “She might be like a girl with the body of a man and she likes to play sport but she would have a low voice and like to play sport and be a man but when she goes out she likes to be a girl”.
The girls felt the bodybuilder must have a feminine side, which explained the hair but they were still baffled by her body and felt this would limit any chances of creating a feminine appearance.
Lisa: “I don’t like it she is ugly. I just don’t like her arms.”
Holly: “She looks like a man but when she dresses up she might change her face to make her look more like a girl”.
Sarah: “If she puts make up on and straightens her hair and wears nice dresses and stuff which hide her muscles she might look a bit better”
Holly: “Yes if she had something that covered her arms up and kept them down then maybe she would look better”
The woman was viewed as being too far removed from a feminine norm, but the use of some feminine techniques, such as make-up and appropriate clothes and attempting to hide her muscles, may make her seem slightly less extreme.
The girls considered that the woman could make some changes to make her less controversial but this would be limited. This greatly concerned the girls because of the need to be visually acceptable to attract a man that was demonstrated to be so important to the girls in the previous chapter. They felt this woman should be very anxious about her body shape because she would currently be unable to attract a man. They felt men would be scared by the woman’s extreme muscles.
Holly: “If she wanted a boyfriend in the future she might not get one”
Ellie: “She probably won’t get a boyfriend because she is competitive to the same level as men and they won’t like that”
RJ: “So you think that would put them off?”
Ellie: “Yes they would not like it because they would think that she was better than them”

Ursula: “If she went out with a normal size man he wouldn’t like it because she would be able to fight for him”

The girls had discussed previously how they felt men had control and power and this enabled them to dictate how women should look. They felt men would be unsettled by a woman who was physically stronger than them and capable of protecting herself, and by the suggestion that she could compete on an equal level. They recognised that men had the power to reject women because they looked a certain way. The girls were appalled by the thought that the bodybuilder was actively ostracising herself from male approval and thus limiting her chances of following the expected pathway into marriage and children. They understood that men did not want women to challenge their masculinity or dominance in any way and particularly not in such an overt visual fashion. Equally there was a suggestion that men would not like women being equal to them in the sports arena. It was unlikely they would be able to in traditional male sports unless they were as physically strong as men but achieving this was wrong and unnatural. The girls did not feel it was desirable to challenge visual expectations at all and particularly not to the extreme that the bodybuilder was managing.

The other images of athletes did not provoke such emotional responses from the girls, but it was clear that certain athletic bodies were seen as more acceptable than others. Those bodies that were considered more desirable were generally closer to the feminine stereotype of slender, toned rather than muscular, and with other appropriate visual features such as hair and a pretty face to offset this. It was important to them that a sports body could in no way be confused with being masculine. Denise Lewis even though slender, was considered too muscular and therefore manly.

Alison: “She just looks too manly, her face and everything, she just looks too manly, you can’t tell whether she is a woman or a man. It is like with her hair scraped back, she needs it down and then you could probably tell that she is a girl”.
The girls had similar, but less extreme issues with Lewis’ sports body as they did with the bodybuilder. They essentially felt she was too muscular and again her gender identity could be questioned because of this. In contrast, the image of a gymnast evoked no negative comments. They were given this picture immediately after the bodybuilder, but instead of making a direct comparison between the different bodies and visual appearance, the girls simply commented on what they thought the gymnast was doing. Their silence about the girl’s body seemed to be due to an automatic assumption that the gymnast’s visual appearance was acceptable so required no commentary from them.

RJ: “So this picture of the gymnast, what do you think about this one?”
Lisa: “She is contemplating, she is not like preparing”
Holly: “She is not showing off, she is doing her job, it is like she is trying to do it right, but she is not showing off”
Sarah: “I think it might be like her exam or something”
The girls only commented on her visual appearance when prompted and the conversations suggested that obviously the gymnast was more acceptable and appealing than the bodybuilder.
Sarah: “We are not saying that we are being bad to that other picture, but this girl is pretty and she is trying to show that urghh even though I am small I want to do this as my job”
Ellie: “I think she is much prettier than the other one, she doesn’t have any muscles”.
Lisa: “Well she does”
Ellie: “No she is not showing them”
Holly: “Yes she does because you have to have muscles in your legs to be able to do that.”
Ellie: “Yes but she doesn’t have big muscles”
Susan: “I don’t think she is going over the top like the other woman”
Helen: “I don’t think she is saying ‘oh gosh look at me I have really big muscles’. She is not showing off”
The girls seemed to feel that because the bodybuilder chose to look as she did, she was demanding attention and this was considered negative. It was clear however, that the gymnast’s body shape was viewed as more desirable
and attractive than other sporting bodies. Although they understood gymnasts required muscles to perform, they felt her muscles were ‘hidden’ and this was acceptable and the gymnast could be strong but visually still very overtly feminine.

It was evident from these discussion that sporting bodies could be incompatible with what the girls thought was desirable and attractive and most importantly acceptable. When sports necessitated the development of a muscular and therefore manly body, the girls felt they shouldn’t be engaged in. Slender and toned bodies were sought after, but the girls felt it would be easy to slip from this into being too muscular and unattractive. These conversations also suggested that whilst the girls were able to categorise male and female sports currently, they were happy and thought it was acceptable to play either, so long as it did not have a detrimental affect on their body shape. The girls thought athletics was a particularly positive female participation sport, but also felt that Denise Lewis had ‘gone over the top’ by developing the muscles she needed to be an elite athlete. Girls were seen therefore as always being limited in sports that required strength, not because they could not develop this, but because doing so would make them visually unattractive and unacceptable. Although we looked at extreme body shape images, the issues of muscles and being too muscular was the common theme generated from the girls’ conversations.

6.3.1 Negotiations between sport and feminine identity

The girls demonstrated that participating in sport was not always problematic for females. For the research girls, it was the potential of some sports to permanently alter their body shape and how they looked that caused them concern. They did feel that certain sports, usually ones associated with masculinity, may require females to develop unattractive bodies in order to play and be competitive. Currently participating in sports was not viewed as problematic by the girls because it had little impact on altering their body shape apart from in a positive way by losing weight through being more active. This is relevant to the remainder of the chapter which examines the girls’ interaction with football at a global and a personal level. The research
girls were never too worried about playing football, even though they recognised it was probably one of the most ‘male’ sports they could undertake. The lack of restriction on their behaviour, and their belief that playing at school would not alter or be detrimental to their physical appearance, made it currently acceptable to participate in the football club. Rugby on the other hand, may visually affect their appearance by leaving them bruised or damage their ears and facial feature so they were more averse to participating in this. However, as this section develops it shows that there was a strong belief amongst the girls that their behaviour would become more restricted as they move towards adult femininity. Participating in football may become more unacceptable even if it continues to have little impact on their visual appearance.

The remainder of the chapter looks at the girls’ perceptions of football. The first part examines how girls interact with football on a daily basis, then moves to look at the girls’ understanding of football as a global game, particularly looking at the girls’ views on the way the media has constructed football as masculine and our national sport. The results then focus on the girls’ personal experiences of football, why they were attracted to play and what they felt they had gained from their participation. Also examined within this section is the influence male peers have had on the girls experiences of playing and the role of the family for encouraging participation. The final part examines how the girls have defined football within their own gender identities and any influence participating has had on this process, before examining how the girls would see football fitting into their future adult female identities.

6.4 Football’s position within the girls’ lives

Prior to the research process the girls had very little opportunity to participate in formal football coaching. Sally and Helen both played sporadically for the boys’ school team and several of the girls were football spectators and followed professional football teams. There were no girls who were extremely interested in football to the extent that some of their male counterparts
appeared to be. Whenever I went to the school at lunchtime the playground was full of boys playing football and dominating the hard court and the field space. A few girls could be seen participating with them but they were usually the younger girls and weren’t fully integrated, but instead would just run up and down with the boys. I never saw the research girls playing football in these settings, they preferred to use the space at the side of the playground to sit and talk or walk round in the area that was designated for year 6 pupils only.

My research notes and session logs suggested that the girls never integrated football as an important part of their lives. It remained very much on the peripheral of their daily routines. I noted that they never really talked about football unless I prompted them to as part of the research session. The exception to this was when there was a major tournament or match being televised which involved the England men’s side. The European Championships were played during the latter stages of the research and this created some spontaneous discussion on football. However I felt generally that the football sessions became another activity they engaged in rather than any focal point of their lives. At the first coaching session I wanted to gauge how much they were aware of football and its position as a national sport. I played a game using images of different professional footballers. All of them recognised high profile national players such as David Beckham, David Seaman and Michael Owen but they were less certain of players who received less media coverage such as Liverpool’s Stephen Gerrard. They did not recognise any of the international women players, although Ursula knew that Mia Hamm was a high ranking American player. They seemed to have an awareness of football at its highest level but beyond this had very little interest or knowledge of the sport. To encourage them to begin talking about football and its position within their lives I asked them to complete a football diary over a week period. This recorded any contact they had with football and included playing football, watching, both live and on the television, and talking about football. Only Sally had watched live football. All of them watched some football on the television, but this may have been due to them completing the diaries during FA cup final week when their parents and brothers were
watching this game. All of them had played some football, both at the coaching sessions and informally, either with friends from the football group at visits to one another's houses, or with brother and sisters in their garden. Ellie provided an example of the unstructured way she approached playing football: “I don’t really play anytime but except in the summer me and my brother play in the garden sometimes”. The diaries illustrated that football touched their activities quite often during their week, but except for Sally their associations with the game were very sporadic rather than something they planned and wanted incorporated within their lives.

6.4.1 The girls’ views of public football

The diaries helped prompt some initial discussion and enabled understanding of how football sat within the girls’ lifestyles. Once we established the extent of their contact with football, I steered the girls to talk about their perceptions of football as our national sport and what they felt the national game meant to them. Again we started discussing this topic using a series of national newspapers and looking through the sports pages and encouraging the girls to comment on what they saw. Ursula was swift to recognise these pages were dominated by male sport, predominantly football and the other girls agreed.

RJ: “So what do you notice about these newspapers?”
Ursula: “They are all on cricket”
Ellie: “Football”

Ursula: “There is never anything about women, that is exactly what I said, women have all the pain”.
Sarah: “More football. Everything in this one is like football and for boys”
Ursula: “Well what I have done is counted out how many pictures of men there are and there are like 20 main pictures. 15 are men and 5 are women. Men get three times as much coverage as women.”

The girls involved in this session understood that sport was dominated by males and that football in particular, took precedence in sports coverage. Ursula articulated this extremely succinctly by illustrating how much more
attention men’s sports received in the newspaper compared to women’s. This conversation provided a starting point to discuss why men’s football dominated media attention and the effect this has had on the girls’ perceptions of the female game. The girls did enjoy male football and were particularly animated talking about it during the European championships. When England lost to Portugal in one of their games a large proportion of the following research session was dedicated to discussing the game and what the girls felt were unfair decisions in it.

Ursula: “It was like he gave all the free kicks to Portugal”
Sarah: “The ref was a homer”
Ursula: “It should have been the ref with the staring eyes, he’s really good”
Heather: “Isn’t he the best referee in the world?”
Sarah: “It looked from where the referee was standing that Terry had pushed the goalkeeper when Cambell scored”
Heather: “But the linesman let them have it”.

This conversation suggests that when football was continually in the public eye the girls engaged with it and were able to speak knowledgeably, even to the extent that they were aware which referees were considered the best. They talked about how they discussed the football in class, with their friends and particularly with male pupils and also at home with their families. Several of the girls discussed how they were continually watching football because it was exciting and accessible through television coverage and they seemed to enjoy this. Generally the girls did not seem overly interested in football but the media coverage during an international tournament held it at the forefront of the national press and encouraged the girls to watch and become involved as supporters. However, once England lost and stopped participating in the tournament the girls’ interest was limited and they returned to barely mentioning football in any of the research sessions. The boys at the school became engrossed with the on-coming domestic season and focused on this.

6.4.2 The media and girls’ perceptions of football

We examined football at a national level focusing on the men’s game. The girls were then asked to talk about why they felt female football was not
covered in the media to such an extent as the men’s game. The girls were aware that there were women’s teams and that women played to a high standard. When writing the story ends they commented that Rebecca, the central character, could go and play football for Arsenal and Manchester United and they realised that there were several international sides for different age groups in England. Despite this they felt that women’s football was massively underrepresented in terms of profile in the national press. They believed it was this that led to the perception that women’s football was not a popular participation sport.

RJ: “Can you understand why Rebecca thought there wasn’t an England women’s team?”

Alison: “Yes I think I have only once seen women’s football on the TV. It just doesn’t get shown.”

Helen: “Yeah load and loads of girls do and there are like girls teams and playing Chelsea and Man United and stuff but they are never on the TV.”

RJ: “Why does her Mum think she won’t be able to play when she gets older?”

Karen: “Because they never ever show girls playing on the TV so I don’t know if she even knows there are proper girls teams. For like Manchester United there is a girls team that plays for Manchester United”

They understood that the media was crucial to the profile of the sport and saw that the lack of profile of the women’s game was in huge contrast to the popularity of the game as a participation sport. They discussed how there were numerous girls sides and opportunities to progress within the sport and play at a high level. This encouraged them to discuss why female sport lacked coverage, particularly football, when there are such high participation rates. They used their perceptions of the national game being a exclusively male sport and the determination of men within the structures of the game to retain control of it to explain why women’s football was excluded.

RJ: “So why is football never on the TV?”

Alison: “Men don’t want to show women’s football because they don’t want people to know that girls are good at football. They want to keep it just as a man’s sport.”

Helen: “Yes it is the pigs at the BBC because they are mostly men anyhow”

RJ: “What do they think about women’s football then?”
Helen: “I think that if there are women there they don’t even know about women’s football. I don’t think they feel there is a need to show women’s football even if it is really good. Even if the sides were amazing they would still think that the men were better.

RJ: “Do you think people would watch women’s football?”

Helen: “If it gets more popular then yes”

Alison: “Women’s football gets such little attention because people don’t think it is that interesting and lots of people think it is a boys game.”

Lisa: “I saw the women’s FA cup on the TV the other day, it is the first time I have ever seen women playing football on the TV”

RJ: “Was it good?”

Lisa: “Yes I enjoyed it”

RJ: “So why does women’s football get such little attention when the women’s FA cup was really good.”

Lisa: “Because there are more men supporters.”

Susan: “Women aren’t that interested, they are like for goodness sake I have to get the ironing done.”

Jenny: “Because like boys and men play more football than women it kind of means they show more men’s football because they are going to get more spectators, you are going to get more people attend a men’s football match, rather than a women’s.”

RJ: “Is that because it is played by women?”

Jenny: “Yeah because it is the same game but I think men think that they should be like the best.”

Lisa: “Yeah”

RJ: “So what do men spectators think of women playing?”

Jenny: “They class men as the best and think that women aren’t as good even if they are they wouldn’t admit it because they want men to be the best”.

A number of themes were raised in this lengthy dialogue. The girls demonstrated a sophisticated understanding of football as a national sport embedded within English culture. They were also aware of the way men dominated and controlled the game. They realised that the women’s game was often discredited by men as a ‘lesser version’. They found it easy to
explain why this occurred, viewing men as desperate to retain control of ‘their’ sport. During this conversation I attempted to keep my prompts as neutral as possible to encourage the girls to offer their own reasoning, but they still drew on gender stereotyping to explain why this was the case. They appreciated how restrictive female gender assumptions can be. They disagreed with the idea that women’s football is less attractive than the male version and argued that however competent women are, men would still be able to prevent their game receiving attention by keeping women outside mainstream media profiles.

Helen was very disdainful of this power, referring to those who controlled televising sport as ‘pigs’ and suggesting females within media are not given the power to decide what is televised. The girls recognised that technically there were no differences between men’s and women’s football, but culturally the women’s game was dismissed as inferior and kept hidden from public view. They understood that culturally women weren’t supposed to play football, which helped rationalise why they should not receive any media attention. There was an awareness that their choices were restricted but the girls agreed that this was wrong. Susan discussed stereotypes of what women should be doing (the housework and the ironing), to explain how men justified why women’s football should not receive any attention. She felt that men perceived women ought to be focusing on the tasks they ‘should’ be doing, as defined by cultural expectation, rather than engaging in football. The girls also recognised the impact of the lack of media attention for ensuring that women and the public generally were uninterested in the sport because it had no profile or importance in the public eye. When we were talking the girls felt that if women’s football could be readily available for public viewing it could gain a spectatorship level similar to men’s. There was however, some division on whether female football could ever gain the popularity and status of the male game. Susan firmly stated her belief that “I think by 2031 the girls FA cup will be on the telly and all the women will watch it and all the men will be doing the ironing.” She felt the public view of football could be changed and altered. Kathy was less positive. She thought the only way the public image of football would alter would be to televise more women’s football but she felt
this was unlikely to happen as it would involve changing the attitudes of men who benefited from controlling the sport.

Kathy: “Well they won’t show it more will they?”

RJ: “Why’s that?”

Kathy: “Because they know if they did people wouldn’t like it and then it wouldn’t be a man’s game anymore. By not showing much women’s football that won’t happen. People will just think it is only for men and that women don’t even play even though lots of them do”

The girls’ conversations illustrated that whilst participation is developing in the sport, there is a limit to how much this can alter the global perception of football and what it signifies. They still feel football is a male sport and that the media continues to display it as such keeping women on the margins of the game. Encouragingly and possibly because the girls have grown up during the expansion of female participation, they were very aware that women’s football is silenced. It is not that women don’t play: they were aware that they do, but they were kept outside of mainstream media attention. However, they felt women were relatively powerless to alter this whilst men had control of both football and the popular media. The girls’ recognising the female game exists is a positive step towards transformation, but at this stage they could not necessarily see football’s national image changing significantly to benefit women. They felt men had too much invested within the sport to risk this happening and football would therefore remain a man’s game. However, they did recognise that large numbers of women were still participating and they drew on their own positive experiences of football to explain this. These conversations led on to the next section examining the girls’ experiences of football within their lives.

6.5 Girls personal experiences of football : The appeal of football

The topic was introduced by encouraging the girls to talk about when they played football and what they felt made it appealing to play. They were asked why they felt so many girls and women wanted to play football despite it having such a limited profile. I then discussed with them what they specifically
liked about playing. The girls all had different aspects that they found enjoyable and these often linked to their constructed gender identity. The common theme for all the girls though, was that they found football ‘fun’.

Beth: “It is fun and like in tennis it has taken me a long time to work up to my standard but football is much more natural and I can go out and play football”.

The girls saw football as different from curriculum activities they took part in and this contributed to their enjoyment. As well as being a different sport, the girls also enjoyed the football coaching because it was not dominated by the ‘sporty girls’ or Alison and Robin, who were pupils with high skill levels in all sports. The majority of the football girls felt they were not part of this group. Jenny and Holly were exceptions and played in the school’s netball and athletics teams. The non-sporty girls talked in detail about this being the appeal of football to them when they interviewed each other.

Alison: “Right to you Kathy, why do you want to play football?”

Kathy: “Because it is fun”

Karen: “They say in rounders if you haven’t learnt anything then what is the point of coming but it is fun that is the point”

Alison: “It is so competitive, I like football because the way we do it is not competitive”

Karen: “I enjoy myself when I am playing football and it is nice and we like doing it”

Sarah: “I like playing football because it is fun and it is something we don’t normally do and that people think I am not supposed to do it so I like to be different”.

Karen: “Well I think it is fun and I enjoy it and because it is a sport that I can do and because apart from rounders I don’t do any other sports but I actually do a sport now”.

Lisa: “I like it because it is more fun than the games we play at school because that is all netball and stuff”

Ellie: “Yeah because you do the same thing every year and you hardly do anything new”

Beth: “I don’t know anything goes, I like to do it when you have had a bad day and you can just go and play football. Netball we play all the time so it just gets a bit boring really”.

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Ursula: “Beth is amazing at rounders, I am not that good at rounders but I am good at netball. Football is just like a sport that no-one else can be better at”
Karen: “And that Alison and Robin don’t go makes it much better”
Alison: “That is part of it that they are not showing off. They are Miss Neville’s favourites. They are good at rounders and at netball and hockey and all the sports besides football they are there”.
RJ: “So these girls dominate?”
Beth: “Yes and it is the same with all the house stuff, this is the best thing about football is they are not there and we can just have fun”
Kathy: “Yes that is really good”
Karen: “Yeah”

The girls’ discussions illustrated the enjoyment they gained from participating in a different sport that did not require them to be very skilful. As Ursula commented “no-one is better at it” and this was part of its attraction. They enjoyed football as a new sport but also as an activity which they were all starting at the same skill level. This did not happen during their other sports participation experiences. Football was their chance to ‘have a go’ and play sport in a non-pressurised environment where they would not be ridiculed for their lack of skill or prevented from participating. This was due to none of the other girls being proficient players. It was also an opportunity to have some adult attention in a sports situation, whereas normally they perceived their teachers were focusing on the girls with higher skill levels.

Some of the girls enjoyed playing football because of the public perception that is was something that they shouldn’t do and they wanted to disprove this. They enjoyed the challenge of attempting to discredit this assumption. In particular, for Ursula it was the enjoyment of being a girl and demonstrating that she could play a male sport, rather than just enjoying playing football. This enjoyment was heightened because football was not classed as ‘girlie’ yet she was proving that girls could play it.

Ursula: “I would prefer it if I did everything like a boy but instead of just being one of the boys I would be like a girl and proud and like to stand out”
RJ: “How about you Jenny what do you like about football?”
Jenny: "Well quite a lot of people consider it is a boy thing, but because a lot of people think it is a girl thing that is why you want to play it just to prove that anyone can play it"

Melanie: "Yeah that is me too, I want to play football because most girls think that football is just for boys. Football is not for girls it is a boys sport, but I think it isn't, I really enjoy it when I am playing"

The chance to engage in 'non' girlie behaviour through football was obviously very appealing, but as Ursula suggests it was not that they all wanted to engage in boyish behaviour. The appeal was centred around engaging in male activities in their own way and in doing so recognising they were female but succeeding in a masculine activity. Jenny, Melanie and Ursula all enjoyed contradicting the norm and demonstrating football was not an exclusively male sport. Melanie highlighted her belief that many girls, as well as boys, feel that girls can't play football. She wanted to disprove these assumptions and this provided her with a central reason for playing.

Sally and Heather seemed to have a genuine interest in football as a sport and this influenced their reasons for playing,
Heather: "I like playing football because I like watching it. We have a season ticket and me and my brother share it so we take it in turns. I like watching football so I thought it would be fun to play it".
Sally: "Yes I love football, I want to play because when I’m older I really want to go to America and play there and be a footballer"

These girls’ desire to play was centred around their enjoyment of watching the game and for Sally, seeing herself as creating a career from football. Neither of these two were overly concerned with disproving stereotypical assumptions. Their reasons for playing were centred around self fulfilment through a sport that they really enjoyed.

Lisa, Susan and Jenny had much simpler reasons for wanting to play. They just saw football as an activity to participate in that was uncomplicated compared to some of the other sports they did. There was also a consistent theme developed by many of the girls that football was attractive because it
allowed them to use their bodies in ways they had previously been unable to do.

Ellie: “Yeah because you do the same thing every year and you hardly do anything new. But in football you can learn something new”

Ursula: “Football is more of a challenge anyway, Netball is just like throwing stuff. It is good but like football you use your feet, no-one ever used their feet before only their hands and I really like it. I like being able to use my feet.”

Susan: “It is just nice when you are really stressed out that you can just boot the ball and get your aggression out. You just can’t do that in netball or hockey, you have to do it properly”.

The girls gained some physical freedom when playing football, which they found enjoyable and attractive. Susan provided an illustration of this. When we were having this conversation she got up to demonstrate to the group how she would kick the ball to visually show us how it was a stress relief by running around and jumping afterwards (research log; 21.05.04). Football gave her some physical freedom and made her feel like she could release tension in a way that wasn’t available in the more controlled traditional ‘feminine’ sports. During these sports her movements were restricted by rules and expectations of how they should be played. Ursula enjoyed the connection between using her feet and controlling the ball directly through her own body rather than indirectly through a bat or a stick. Several of the girls agreed with this as a further reason why football was so appealing.

Ursula: “Yes, like I said it is using your feet, I can decide how I kick the ball whereas in hockey you sometimes don’t hit it properly or you might miss it but this is much easier to kick the football where you want it.”

Kathy: “I think that too, it is like with rounders it is so hard to hit the ball with that stupid bat but when we play football rounders with you I kick the ball every time and score loads of rounders. It is really good.”

We talked about the numerous and varying reasons why football was appealing to them despite its public profile as a masculine sport. Some of these reasons did focus around challenging this profile but the girls also had more intrinsic reasons for wanting to play and felt that playing football could provide them with a great deal of physical satisfaction. None of the girls
wanted to play because they wanted to be like boys, even the girls who considered themselves tomboys. It appealed because it was a boys’ sport, but they wanted to be girls who played. The following sections move on from the appeal of football to discuss how the girls’ felt people in their lives reacted to them playing football, particularly focusing on their family and peers at schools. The next section uses the global attitudes towards femininity that the girls have identified existed at a public level and examines what direct impact they have on the girls at the personal level and in turn how this affects their experiences of playing football.

6.5.2 Boys and football

We began discussing this issue by reflecting again on the public view of football and why there was restricted coverage of women’s football. The girls were then asked why they felt playing as well as controlling football was important to boys in general. They were very aware of the issues surrounding football and masculinity and were able to articulate them easily and discuss how they were personally affected.

RJ: “Why do you think football is so important to boys?”
Lisa: “Because they get taught it”
Jenny: “Because they can be rough”
Susan: “It is just that they want to prove themselves, it is a showy off thing for boys”
Lisa: “That is why they like it”
Jenny: “It lets them prove that they are tough and that they can do things”
Alison: “Boys think it is their sport don’t they, they think girls shouldn’t be playing. They don’t like girls being able to do it because they might be better than them and they like football because it helps their masculinity”.
Karen: “I think if boys play football, then they think they are cool”
Alison: “And it gives them a sense of masculinity”

The girls understood that football was a signifier of masculinity and the boys used it to be ‘tough’ or to prove their worth as males. It was a sport that allowed boys to assert their maleness. The girls recognised this and the
consequences for boys of not conforming which was far worse for them than for girls who did not reflect gender norms.

Ursula: “If you are like a boy and you don’t play football then they all pick on you and bully you. If you are a girl then basically sometimes it is the other way round although girls can do it a lot more than boys”.

We talked a lot about the importance of football to boys for affirming their gender identity. We discussed how boys’ football was considered rough and aggressive, traits which were linked with masculinity. I then asked the girls how boys perceiving football as a male sport and an essential part of their masculinity, had affected them and their experience of football. Our discussions demonstrated how much antagonism and negativity they faced from boys as they attempted to discredit the girls as footballers. We began by all sitting together and drawing a large map of the playground. The girls then marked how the space in the playground was used at lunch and break times. Their drawings illustrated that boys dominated the outside space around the fields and the hard concrete areas. The girls drew their spaces as being restricted to smaller areas enclosed by school buildings. The boys’ favoured activity in their spaces was football which I also observed whenever I came into the “school during lunchtime. The girls felt the boys’ dominance of the space was unfair.

Ursula: “Yeah on the playground it is always boys only”

Not only did the boys control this space, they excluded girls from engaging in it and playing with them.

Ursula: “If they let you play it would be ok but if you ask them if you can play they are like ‘no’.”

6.5.3 Male opinions of girls’ participation

It was evident from the girls’ conversations that the school’s physical environment was dominated by boys playing football. Inevitably the boys had opinions on the girls entering their environment and playing football and generally the girls felt these were very unsupportive. They ridiculed and undermined the girls’ sessions and excluded Helen and Sally when they
attempted to play with them. They continually suggested the girls’ skills were inferior and used this as a means to make fun of them.

Ursula: “Boys would think that they are so much better and they would become so big headed it would be really annoying. It is really annoying when they laugh. Just now Susan was telling me that she was getting her boots ready for the session and Sam started laughing so I said ‘what’s wrong with Susan sorting out her football boots?’ and he was like ‘urghh football isn’t for girls’ and things like that and boys laugh at the idea of girls playing football, but it is just for everyone”.

The boys continually mocked the girls for playing football. None of the girls spoke about any male pupils being supportive of them playing. The boys used the assumption that girls shouldn’t be playing football and that it was a male sport to justify their contempt towards the girls playing.

Beth: “They just don’t think girls should play”

Heather: “You are ok if the girls are playing but if we win they wouldn’t like it”.

Holly: “I think it is really annoying, say you did a football match boys against girls. Then they say I think I will go on their team because they are better but girls can be equally as good at football as girls can. Heather, remember last Friday when I was asking about your boots and then Dominic starts laughing and says we would beat you 50-0?”

The core theme evident in these conversations was that the boys considered girls playing football was a joke and unworthy of serious attention. In doing this they devalued the girls’ sessions amongst the boys in the school. The girls believed they could be as good as the boys, but they also recognised it would be difficult to demonstrate this due to the superior skill levels the boys had been able to develop from playing over a long period of time.

Sarah: “The boys are only better because they start playing from year 3 onwards and they just get better and better. We haven’t been playing very long, but if we had been playing as long as them then we would be as good as them.”

Beth: “If we had been playing football from year 3, we would be as good as them. But if we joined in now we would be rubbish compared to them because we haven’t had as much practice”.

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Ursula: “If we joined in we would be rubbish but if we do the exact same lessons as the boys we would be as good as they are. But they think football is made for boys. In my old school, what we would do would be PE and would be with the whole class and it would be girls and boys and no offence to anyone who has been here the whole time but I think it is plain stupid that they split up girls and boys”.

Sarah: “A few years ago I wouldn’t dream of playing football. At my old school when we have PE we would all go to the same field and we would use half of it and was like the girls playing football so I just thought it was something that I wouldn’t be able to do”.

It was encouraging that the girls did not accept stereotypical assumptions and believe that boys were naturally stronger and better at football than them. Instead they understood that there were other structural factors that limited them and also fuelled the boys’ beliefs that they were better. The lack of time playing had limited their skills but Sarah and Ursula also felt the organisation of their PE lessons had not helped them and had limited their access to football opportunities. This had affected Sarah to the extent that she previously had not realised football could be played by girls. It was evident from these conversations how girls and boys could develop the stereotypical beliefs regarding football and normalise these within their everyday culture. The girls understood why the boys assumed that girls could not play football. They did not necessarily see it as fair or normal but also accepted they could not be as good as the boys if they could not access the same opportunities.

6.5.4 Girls’ experiences in male football environments

Sonia and Helen had participated in the boys’ formal football sessions for a period of time and the antagonism towards girls playing was even stronger within the space the boys perceived as ‘theirs’. The boys had not been able to prevent the girls entering this environment, but from Helen and Sally’s narrative it sounded as though they did everything possible to ensure the girls did not enjoy being in this space. This theme was introduced within the stories when the central character had an unpleasant experience playing with boys and they refused to include her.
RJ: “And what about the way the boys treat her when she is playing? What do you think about that?”
Helen: “Well I know how she feels because that happened to me as well, because I used to go to the boys’ practices because that was all I could go to if I wanted to play football, but they made fun of me and they say stuff.
Ruth: “And did you stop going?”
Helen: “Yes I did in the end, because they were not letting me play and I did try to play with them but they wouldn’t pass me the ball. They would just pass it to the other boys.”
Sally: “Yes that happened to me too.”
Helen: “Yes they did that as well didn’t they? They would not pass to you”. RJ: “Why do you think they are like that?”
Helen: “Because they think it is their game. It is not a girls game”
Sonia: “They think they are better. They are always saying if you tackle someone you got tackled by a girl.”
Ursula: “Girls are just like boys really, but even if you are in a big space and not being marked by anyone then they will just not pass to you”.
Both Helen and Sally eventually stopped playing in the boys’ sessions because of the constant abuse and lack of genuine opportunity. Both of them were very able players, but it was easy for the boys to exclude them by not passing to them and keeping them out of the game. Even when they played well and demonstrated similar skill levels to the boys, this was used by the latter to tease the other boys rather than recognising the girls’ performances. They would infer that the boy must be a weak player to be tackled by a girl. There was no acknowledgement that Helen and Sally may be accomplished players and that was why they were successful at taking the ball from the boys. In this situation the boys successfully defended and controlled their space and removed the girls from it. The only way Helen and Sally could really ‘play’ football and be involved in all aspects of the game was to access it through my sessions. Once the two girls were removed from the masculine domain of the boys football sessions, it was even easier for the boys to disregard their abilities because the football they played in our coaching was girls football and therefore not ‘real’ football and subsequently of little threat to their masculinity.
6.6 Girls, football and family support

Some of the girls experienced similar situations within their families. Those with brothers often received very little support or encouragement to play football. Again this seemed to develop from their brothers’ needs to affirm football as a male only sport and show their ability was far superior to their sisters.

Ursula: “I play with my brother but whenever I take the ball off him he always says things like unfair tackle.”

Lisa: “I play football with my brother but he doesn’t think that girls can play football. I went to the Lake District and me and my brother were playing football with some friends and we were playing and they just didn’t pass to me.”

Hannah: “Yeah like I asked my brother if I could come out and play football when all his friends were round and he said ‘no go away it is not for girls’.”

Beth: “Yes that is the problem, I wanted to play football, well actually I was supposed to be doing the BBQ, but I didn’t want to do that so I went and played football and then it was uneven so they said to me it wasn’t fair and that I should play with the rubbishy boy but he didn’t like it so went off. They don’t think girls should play football.”

However, Beth did gain some respect from her brother when she demonstrated her high skill levels.

Beth: “When I first started liking football my brother was like you are rubbish, you are rubbish, I can beat you but the minute I beat him because I got better than him, he’s like wow and then he starts going from criticising me to praising me because he knows I am better than him.”

The rest of the less skilful girls continued to be undermined by their brothers and perceived as incompetent at football. Generally their brothers held strong views that football was not for girls and they used this constantly to justify why their sisters shouldn’t play and why they were less skilful. They used the same devices as the boys at school to keep the girls away from the game.
The rest of the family varied in their support. Mothers and fathers generally seemed very supportive of their daughters playing, but insisted it must come secondary to academic work. Beth was the only girl whose mother did not like her playing and wanted her to focus on playing tennis. During casual conversations Beth's mother made clear her anxiety about Beth getting injured through football and this limiting her tennis. Her mother felt football was a rough and dangerous sport and this made her nervous about Beth playing.

Beth: “My Mum keeps saying that I won’t be able to carry on playing. She doesn't mind my brother playing but she says football isn’t really for girls and I should focus on my tennis and it would be really bad if I could not do that because I hurt myself playing football”.

Beth was one of the more skilful players and enjoyed the sessions a great deal. She was part of the minority who wanted to continue playing football, but whenever I spoke to her mother about Beth joining a club she was very doubtful and wanted Beth to concentrate on her school work and tennis. It was difficult for Beth to undermine her mother's influence. I talked with both Beth and Heather about why they felt Beth's mother did not like her playing. They both offered what they felt were rational reasons why this was and linked it back to football’s connection with masculinity.

Heather: “Dad’s get worried if their son isn’t into football, but then you think football isn’t just a sport for boys. If you have a daughter then you basically want them to be cooped up in the kitchen cooking with Mum”.

Beth: “Yeah my Mum just worries but she doesn’t like me playing football because it is not very girly”.

The girls drew on traditional gender roles to help explain the lack of support Beth received from her mother despite being a very talented footballer. Although neither of the girls were affected by these rigid gender stereotypes, they were both aware that culturally this was how it should be. Whilst parents will actively encourage a son to play football, they may not do the same for a daughter because they are openly contradicting the role daughters should be performing of being domesticated and supporting their mother. This linked to the conversations discussed earlier, in which the more tomboy girls felt pressured by their mothers to move away from aspects of this identity.
The girls experienced different levels of parental support, but obviously would not have attended the sessions if their parents strongly disapproved of them playing. Just allowing them to be there was all the support the girls required in this setting. Some of the parents were very supportive. Sally’s father would often come and watch. Melanie’s family actively encouraged her to play and had sought a club for her to allow her to continue participating.

Within their immediate environment the girls had received different levels of support and encouragement. Parents generally were happy for their daughters to participate, but all the girls could recall unpleasant and unsupportive experiences involving football and males within their school or homes. They demonstrated the levels of antagonism that they had to overcome in order to play football. They had not allowed this to prevent them participating, and as the chapter demonstrates, they gained a great deal of enjoyment from this despite having to deal with the negative attitudes towards them playing. The first part of the football section also clarified that both boys and girls recognised that culturally girls were not expected to play football. The chapter therefore moves on to examine how the girls negotiate this within their own gender identities and ‘doing girl’.

6.7 Football and female gender identity

Football fitted into the girls’ gender identities in different ways. For the girls who viewed themselves as predominantly tomboys playing football sat easily with the identity they wanted to construct.

Beth: “Football fits in with me, but I am not a girlie girl. I am a tomboy”
Helen: “I am less girlie and other girls are more girlie and they don’t like doing rough things or getting dirty which I like doing which is why football fits in well with me”.
Lisa: “I’ve always been not very girly so I have always played all games and football is good because it isn’t girlie so I like playing it”
For the girls who sat closer to the girlie girl persona this process was more complex. They were aware that playing football was in opposition with their gender identity construction, but it formed one of their multiple behaviour identities that were often in opposition to their core identity and helped affirm to them that they were not ‘complete’ girlie girls.

Heather: “I am a girlie girl but I do like football and I play it because it is fun. I don’t play it to be different or because I am a tomboy but I just enjoy it. But I am definitely a girlie girl. Football is just something that I do, it doesn’t stop me from being a girlie girl”.

For Heather there was no conflict. Although she recognised that tomboys may find football appealing and it was perceived as a male sport this did not affect her decision to play. Despite being a girlie girl she enjoyed football and wanted to play so ignored what cultural connotations were associated with it. To her, being a girlie girl should not prevent her playing football, although participating did not assist her with constructing the main aspect of her identity in the way that it did for the tomboys. Instead it sat alongside her core identity and although in contrast to this, Heather did not find it problematic to maintain this multiple identity. She just slipped between identities on the football pitch and away from it. A number of the girls did not experience conflict within their gender identities, but playing football did raise issues for them in relation to how the two aspects worked together.

RJ: “So do you think it is appropriate for girls to be playing football?”
Jenny: “Yes, I think we should be allowed to do anything.”
RJ: “Do you see yourself as different from girls who don’t play?”
Lisa: “Yes”
Jenny: “Yeah (hesitating) In some ways but not in other ways”.
Lisa: “Girls who are girlie girl, they like make up and mini skirts”.
Jenny: “Yes but Lisa I like that stuff”.
Susan: “I like mini skirts”.
Jenny: “I like mini skirts (pause) but I still like playing football”.
Susan: “I’ve got a girlie side and a boy side and football comes into my boy side”.
Jenny: “I like make up and shopping and wearing skirts”.
Lisa: “I don’t”.
Jenny: “I like girlie things but I still like sports and football”.
Unlike Heather, the girls seemed to be aware of the contradictions within their gender identity. For Heather and the tomboy girls, playing football did not cause any tension within their gender identities. Lisa’s dialogue however, raised potential issues for Jenny and Susan’s gender identity construction. She considered she was different to ‘normal’ girls because she was not a girlie girl and football helped confirm this for her. This caused some confusion for Jenny who argued that she also liked football but did not feel this stopped her being a girlie girl. Lisa did not believe that girlie girls would play football but both Jenny and Susan felt they were girlie and still wanted to play. They viewed themselves as having multiple femininities with football assisting with constructing an alternative identity to their core way of being. Whilst Lisa struggled to understand how they could make this work, Jenny and Susan justified their choices as who they were. They saw themselves as having different sides and different activities fitted in with these. Lisa’s identity was more straightforward and football happened to fit well with this. She also choose not to engage with the type of activities which might contradict her core identity, such as dressing up and wearing make up and short skirts

The girls were very aware that playing football did not sit within a conventional girlie girl identity and by playing they were stepping outside and distancing themselves to some extent from this identity.
Ruth: “So why is football not as important to girls then?”
Ursula: “Three words: High heels, boyfriends and make-up. That is what society expects girls to be into. I’m not, I’m into football”.
Heather: “I’m into high heels and make up”.
Beth: “No thanks”.
RJ: “So you are into that but you still like playing football as well?”
Heather: “Yes like I am into that but I still love football and playing on the Xbox.”
The girls did not see the behaviour aspect of their gender identity as a singular concept. Instead it was something that was flexible. Football was part of this experimentation at times. The girls used football in different ways but it did not become an integral part of who they were. For the tomboys, football
helped enforce their main identity but for the girlie girls it provided a contrast, a change from their ‘regular’ identity. For all the girls, playing did not automatically cause any problems because experimentation within their behaviour was an acceptable part of their pre-adolescent identities.

Playing football alone can be viewed as constituting a challenge to restrictive feminine stereotypes, but the girls may not necessarily attach the same meaning to their involvement in the game as it has at a global level. Playing football was redefined by the girls and moved away from being the football played as our male national sport, and instead became an activity that the girls could access, that is fun and free from the established sporty girls. To engage in football the girls had to be marginalised and moved out of the arena of ‘real football’ as defined by males. They were, to a certain extent, also removed from the ‘real’ sports arena due to none of the sporty girls participating either. Whilst this created a very positive space for them to participate in, it did little to challenge the global assumptions surrounding football and instead became simply an activity they took part in. This actually neutralised football so that their version caused little conflict within their identities and ceased to be an active site where contestation of stereotypical gender identities could occur. That is not to say that football was not used at times to construct an alternative identity, but this was viewed as little more than an experimentation with the behaviour aspect of their identity. Football did not have to be the sole mechanism they could achieve this through, it just happened to be the available vehicle during this particular time. Equally the girls felt the behaviour aspect of their identity had never been particularly restricted.

6.8 Football and adult female gender identity

We talked extensively about how football sat within the girls’ current identities. The conversation was then extended to look at how they felt it may work within their adult identities. The story ends were used to encourage the girls to begin conversations on this area. I asked them to put themselves in the
position of the female character who was in early adulthood and had a boyfriend who refused to support her participation. They wrote an ending to this story and then explained why they had chosen their ending. This led to a more general and personal discussion with the girls about their own future aspirations, the pressures of adult gender expectations and how football may fit in with this.

All of the girls had some issues with how acceptable playing football would be as a female adult. They considered adult femininity to be much more rigid than the feminine identities they were currently experimenting with. They felt they would have to adhere to both the behaviour and visual aspects of traditional female stereotypes, rather than having the freedom they currently experienced to move away from gender expectations when they wanted to.

We talked about the situation between Rebecca, the central character, and her boyfriend Jack. Rebecca was participating in elite level football but Jack was unhappy with his girlfriend playing a 'masculine' sport. This was the first time the girls discussed how experimenting with non feminine behaviour may have a further impact on how their gender identity as a whole is viewed. A number of the girls felt it was essential for compromise in this situation and Rebecca should either stop playing completely or at least reduce to a less demanding level of football. It was quite disappointing to see how readily the girls would develop a situation where Rebecca reverted to gender stereotypes because of expectations placed on adult women. The girls were suggesting that they also would not be willing to challenge these stereotypes. The girls felt there was a blurring of the components making up identity within adult femininity and there would be less flexibility than was available within the gender identity they were currently constructing.

They also perceived it was far more important to adhere to norms in adult life than in childhood. Those that chose to keep Rebecca playing football felt that she ought to hide what she was doing from her boyfriend. Only a small number of the girls felt she should forget her boyfriend and continue participating at elite level.
Sally: “Rebecca would sneak off to play football pretending to do a job. She would then sneak back into the house and go off with her boyfriend later in the night and then prepare for football”.

Heather: “She was not going to stop playing football but was going to start being a girl. Rebecca and Jack didn’t split up. Rebecca grew her hair long and started to wear make up. She found that she liked being a girl. She and Jack played football in the park together.

The girls’ story ends suggested that they did not feel the central character could carry on playing football and retain her boyfriend. Instead they felt she would have to hide playing or ensure that she had an obvious and dominant feminine identity to continue participating. We suggested that Rebecca did not have any issue with playing or with her appearance being unconventional, but the girls were insistent she must compromise to make her boyfriend happy.

Sarah: “After a lot of thought Rebecca decided that she was going to forget about training for the England team, play less football and try to take off her muscly body. Jack was very pleased with her decision. Becky was also going to grow her hair longer. Jack said to her ‘thanks Becky darling’. Becky said sadly ‘yeah whatever’.

The girls demonstrated in their own gender identities that behaviour was relatively flexible, although generally appropriate appearance needed to be maintained. It seemed from the story ends that the girls felt once they moved into adult femininity, behaviour became more rigid and the importance of a feminine appearance more pronounced. It was disheartening to listen to Sarah’s story end because she felt that ‘Rebecca’ should do everything possible to be with ‘Jack’ even if this required making herself unhappy. It was difficult to understand how the girls were not rigidly complying with gender behaviour stereotypes in their current life period but were resigned to this having to change this in the future even though this may cause unhappiness. They seemed to believe it was something that was inevitable and had to happen once they became adults. The girls who decided to let Rebecca carry on playing football often created a situation where something bad happened as though to suggest she was being punished for not adhering to traditional feminine pathways.
Alison: “She would play football, this was the chance of a lifetime that she could not miss. So the next morning she tentatively told him the news. He started shouting at her and she was sobbing. The next Saturday was her first match and on Friday she flew out to Brazil. Jack was furious with himself for driving Rebecca away. He begged his parents to let him fly out to Brazil to watch Rebecca play in the big game. As the plane was about to take off it blew up and Jack was dead. Rebecca missed her match and flew back to England as soon as she heard. She took the blame entirely on herself and dropped out of the England team”.

The harshness of Alison’s story end was quite shocking. She did seem to feel that Rebecca had made the wrong choice by deciding to carry on playing and this has been turned against her. When Alison was questioned further on why she had ended the story this way, she was insistent that she personally would have given up football to retain her boyfriend and she felt that Rebecca could not just ‘get away’ with continuing to play without it having some sort of impact. She decided to highlight this in a dramatic way to make the message clear that bad things happen to girls who deviate from the norm.

Alison: “I would have just chosen my boyfriend because well I don’t know if he was that special but he might have been my soul mate and I wouldn’t want to lose out on that because of football”.

The girls recognised that males may be unhappy with their football participation and understood why this may occur. They felt that men could feel uncomfortable and threatened by their girlfriend playing. They just seemed to accept this rather than question whether it was acceptable for males to have these feelings towards female football participation. They were adamant that a traditional female identity was essential for attracting men and the need for a male partner would be increasingly important in adulthood.

RJ: “Why was she so worried about telling Jack?”
Jenny: “Because boys want their girlfriends to be girlie girls”.
Alison: “Yeah they don’t want them to be better than them at things that men should do”.
Kathy: “Yes she has to dress up to show him that she can be a girlie so he won’t mind so much when he finds out about her playing football.”
Jenny: “If she doesn’t do that then she could end up being sad and lonely with no boyfriend at all because they all think she is too boyish and this isn’t very nice”.

These were particularly telling statements from the girls about their anticipated futures and the importance of not disrupting gender norms as they grew older. Again they felt that men would be threatened by girls being adept at what was considered an exclusively male pursuit. Whilst they are currently playing, they felt it would become increasingly problematic to negotiate with age. The only way they can see this being managed was by demonstrating a hyper femininity outside of football to prove they could still be feminine and play football or remove themselves from the sport altogether to pre-empt any problems and secure themselves in adult culture. The consequences of attempting to pursue a non traditional path were perceived to be negative. The girls would be unable to engage in relationships with men and this was a vital part of a woman’s identity as has been evident in the previous chapter. There was a resignation that this was how things are, but the girls suggested they would be unwilling to challenge this as they get older. They actually seem to feel it was necessary not to, for their own security which would centre upon being in a stable heterosexual relationship. Alison summarises this when asked if she would carry on playing.

Alison: “I don’t know, it depends…. But I want to get married as well. I’m not that into football to risk not being able to get married”.

Football did not carry the weight of importance to risk continuing playing and upsetting their ambitions for adulthood. Their need to be married and follow a gender typical path was seen to be far more valuable to the girls. Football firstly was not significant enough to them and added to this was it being viewed as an indicator of maleness resulting in there being little encouragement for them to continue playing. It was interesting that both the tomboys and the girlie girls held these views in relation to their future in football, suggesting their current preferences will have little impact on how they develop their identity in the future. Instead gender stereotypes will have a much more pronounced and continued influence on shaping their adult identity.
6.9 Summary

The chapter has illustrated how the research girls see global sport and particularly football as a male domain. The girls have indicated that this belief has largely been developed by the media keeping women’s sport hidden from the public eye. Even though the girls know that females participate in football extensively it is culturally perceived that this is not the case. The girls acknowledged that men are able to control how much profile the women’s game receives and as such it is difficult for women to gain any recognition or respect in the sport.

The girls did not feel it was problematic for them to currently engage in sport so long as it did not impact negatively on their visual appearance. The session with the photographs allowed the girls to communicate their concern for women participating in any sport that might masculinise their body shape or appearance. However, current participation was acceptable as it was not adversely affecting how they wanted to look. Their participation in football however, appeared to have a limited time frame. Participating in sport was an acceptable part of the girls’ behaviour identity and at their current age behaviour was relatively unrestricted. They felt this would change as they became older and playing football, as a culturally unacceptable behaviour for girls, would not be possible. At the moment football fitted fairly seamlessly with the girls’ different identities. They used it for different purposes depending on the core identity they were constructing. Football does not seem to have been important enough to the girls to have had any real impact on significantly altering their gender identity or defying feminine stereotypes. The girls used football to defy expectations whilst they were playing, but this only had any lasting impact if they pursued a tomboy identity in other aspects of their lives. Those girls who felt their base identity centred around being a girlie girl simply returned to this after they finished playing. Participation did not seem to create any lasting or greatly altering impacts on their identity, possibly because football was not internally valuable to any of them.
What has been clear from this chapter is how deep-set stereotypical assumptions are for both males and females. The girls playing football had little impact in challenging this for either. The boys still hold values that suggest girls should not be playing football and the girls were pursuing the same identity pathways they were before participating in football despite having very enjoyable experience.
Chapter 7
Discussion

7.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an examination of the five research objectives using the research data collected. The literature review provided in Chapters 2 and 3 demonstrates the continued impact of gender regulations on society and how sport can be a site for perpetuating these and also contesting them. The review has indicated that gender identity construction is a complex process. However, little has been written examining this process either in relation to pre-teenage girls, or the impact participation in specific sports may have on gender identity construction for this particular age group. The five objectives that will guide the discussion are:

1) To examine how pre-adolescent girls construct their gender identity.
2) To identify the influences on girls’ gender identity construction.
3) To examine girls’ experiences of participating in football.
4) To examine whether participating in football impacts on girls’ gender identity construction and in what way.
5) Through the research process, develop a methodology that allows girls to engage and express their experiences in ways most suitable for them.

The discussion will be framed within the context of feminist poststructuralist/cultural studies lenses. The chapter initially focuses on objective 5 and the methodological implications of the research. The remainder of the objectives will be discussed in order within the context of the theoretical positioning and previous research in this area. For each section the discussion will consider how the research has contributed to the knowledge and understanding of each research objective.
7.2 Developing a methodology that allows girls to engage and express their experiences in ways most suitable for them

The discussion examining this research objective provides a reflection on three areas of the research process that were found to be crucial for developing an appropriate methodology and allowing the girls to express themselves effectively. The development of the researcher/researched relationship, an examination of the methods used and the difficulties with hearing children’s voices within research are all assessed. A critical assessment is provided in relation to research in this area. The discussion assesses both the benefits and shortcomings of the approach used and the impact of the multi method approach used on the research data collected.

7.2.1 Developing the researcher/researched relationship: ideals and realities

Developing the researcher/researched relationship was a crucial part of the data collection process. Alderson and Morrow (2004) suggest that the biggest challenges for researchers working with children are the disparities in power and status. A strong researcher/researched relationship is key to minimising this. This bond, was pivotal for the research, and one of the most complex issues negotiated. When I first entered the research environment I wanted to align closely with Fine and Sandstrom’s (1988) ‘interested adult friend’ approach but found this model too simplistic in reality. My roles with the girls were complex. I was not only their researcher, but coach, an adult, friend, and confidante.

The way that access to the school was negotiated, through the head teacher and teachers, meant that it was difficult at first to disassociate with key authority figures in the school. As the girls’ coach I was able to develop relationships that would not otherwise have been possible, but at times these also affirmed this authority position. Fleming (1995) highlights the difficulty of conducting research in schools as the potential for conflict is so acute. My conflict centred on moving between the coach/researcher relationship and how best to negotiate this. During the coaching I was viewed by the girls as
an authority figure. This was perceived as lesser than a teacher but I was expected to be in control, directing them and reprimanding 'bad' behaviour as defined by the school rules. I tried to move away from being a teacher by asking them to use my first name, giving them some control over the content of the session and allowing them to wear casual clothes rather than school PE kit. This did not, however, remove the additional responsibility I had, as the only adult figure at the coaching, of looking after the girls' safety and welfare and also teaching them the skills they were there to learn. This issue remained unresolved. I simply became more comfortable with the girls and they with me, making it quite straightforward to slip in and out of the coaching/researcher role when necessary. Losing the 'authority figure' identity was not realistically possible at times, and indeed was sometimes a necessity of the coaching session.

Reflecting on this, the coaching persona was probably one that the girls were more comfortable with initially in that it reflected the approach used by most of their teachers. The school in which the research was undertaken was a co-educational private primary school. The school day was extremely structured and teachers were well respected, resulting in few behavioural incidents. The presence of a non-teacher, friend, coach and researcher, encouraging the girls to convey their views in a conversational, unstructured way as equals might well have been very unsettling for them as it contrasted with the relationships they had with most adults in the school environment. Having some obvious authority in the coaching sessions may well have eased the path to developing the more informal role with the girls. Whilst the 'interested adult friend' or similar roles may be the most appropriate for undertaking research with children it may not be initially appropriate. It must appear strange to participants to have an unfamiliar adult enter their everyday lives, wanting to be their friend and hear all their opinions. Through the coaching I was able to break down adult/child barriers slowly and in a way that the girls accepted rather than finding disorientating.

I felt I developed a strong relationship with nearly all the girls and this was rewarded by their openness to talk and discuss numerous issues. However,
the development of such a good rapport with the girls could have led to difficulties when exiting the research environment. Over the previous six months these girls had shared their views with me, been listened to, made to feel their opinions were important and valuable, discussed intimate details about their lives and then I would no longer be there. I did attempt to manage my withdrawal from the research situation but inevitably the girls would have to cope with my disappearance from their daily lives. In attempting to involve the girls as much as possible in the data collection process, I potentially created many more complications regarding my departure. In this respect it appears that the methods that are designed to most engage children can also be the ones which render them most vulnerable to this potential 'betrayal'.

To address these issues, I attempted to arrange for my departure from the football sessions and the research to be simultaneous. In the final term I outlined to the girls when we would be concluding the football and when the research sessions would finish. I organised a game for their final coaching session and invited parents to attend to try and create an obvious finale. I was also fortunate that this coincided with the girls’ end of year and move to secondary school. I thus became another adult left behind as they moved on to new experiences. I placed a great deal of emphasis on the final coaching presentation to tie up the research and the football. All of the girls were given my contact details and I have subsequently visited the secondary school to which the majority moved several times. Taking research realities into account, there was little more that could have been done to manage withdrawal, although personally I had some feelings of abandoning the girls. However to them my leaving was a relatively small event amongst the numerous changes that were occurring in their lives at the time. I attempted to be ethical in my withdrawal but I was also pragmatic.

7.2.2 Methodological reflections

Participatory techniques enable children to direct the content of the discussion and rely on them explaining their interpretations of their reality to the interviewer. The methods developed and the overall research design were
found to suit both the research purpose and the girls involved. The challenge as defined by Punch (2002) is to strike a balance between not patronising children and recognising their competencies, whilst still making the research process enjoyable. This balance was obtained during the research. The methods engaged the girls actively in the process and allowed them to express their views in ways which suited them. The approach though was still limited. To have fully engaged the girls it was necessary to offer them the opportunity to design and develop their own methods. Although 'researched friendly' methods (Punch, 2002) were used, I still retained power and control over this crucial element. Finch (1986) suggests that researchers feel a necessity to retain a central role in the research design to avoid being a 'mere technician'. I experienced some of this concern but more pressing was a lack of trust in the girls to develop their own methods which would also be effective at collecting data for the thesis. The methods were clearly the central element of the research process and I was not ready to relinquish control in such a personally important context. Other researcher have struggled with this area. Pole, Mizen and Bolton discuss that,

"those who advocate the active participation of children and young people as partners in research process have overlooked a number of structural limitations to achieving such participation"

(1999: 50).

I had a real need to control the data that was produced in this specific research setting. Ethically this may be inappropriate but the risk of not collecting appropriate data outweighed this consideration. The approach used was instead an ethical compromise. Hart (1992) illustrates these difficulties visually as a ladder with steps to achieving children's participation in research. The ladder begins at 1. Manipulation and ends at 8 -the ideal- with child initiated, shared decisions with adults. I feel the research sat at 6. on Hart's scale: Adult initiated, shared decisions with children. To reach this I had moved from step 5. of consulted and informed. It fulfilled some of the necessary criteria by giving the girls a chance to find the way to communicate that suited them best, giving all the girls a voice and giving them an interesting research process to be involved in. They could decide how they wanted to use certain methods and which they preferred. They enjoyed taking part in
this. Even though they did not have the final say in how the research was
collected I was very flexible in my approach and if they were not enjoying a
particular session we would move on to something they preferred engaging
with. This was a realistic approach to adopt which suited both the girls
involved and fulfilled the research requirements.

7.2.3 Hearing the voices of the researched: problems and conflict

In this final section I reflect on using the data gathered and specifically on how
much of a ‘voice’ the girls were allowed once the information was transcribed
and then written up into academic text. The message within legislation and
participatory research is that children’s voices should be listened to by adults,
be given respect and be viewed as a central source of knowledge in the public
domain. However as Davies indicates the difficulty lies in deciding “what
actually constitutes the ‘child's' voice and how should we listen to it?” (Davies,
1998: 327). When I began to analyse the data there were numerous
inconsistencies between girls’ ‘voices’ and within the narratives of individual
girls. On occasions they would offer completely contradictory explanations
and viewpoints. When analysing data gathered from children the researcher
is, in reality, faced with making judgements on their meanings, examining any
contradictions and deciding which, if any, is the ‘true’ voice. As Stainton-
Rogers and Stainton-Rogers (1992) suggest, the difficulty lies in knowing
what is in a child’s ‘head’ compared to what has been said. To resolve this I
attempted to clarify with the girls their meanings as we moved through the
research. When this was not possible I made decisions based on the
contextual data available, my knowledge of the girls developed over the
previous 6 months, and my own experiences and beliefs. Greene and Hill
comment that: “As we set out to research children’s experiences we must add
analysis of this extra layer of interpretation to the interpretation that is at the
heart of experience itself. As adults we bring to our encounters with children a
particular package of attitudes and feeling, constructed through our own
personal childhood history and our contemporary perspectives of childhood”
(2005: 8)
Inevitably when this occurs, it leads to the child's voice becoming entangled with the researcher's as they provide the interpretation. The 'voice' portrayed thus no longer 'purely' belongs to the girls'. As much as I attempted to diffuse adult/child power relations in the data collection process, ultimately I controlled the power of the research process because I decided how to interpret the data and present the girls' voices. In light of this, assumptions that participatory methods automatically release the child's voice from silence seem naïve and simplistic. The researcher will always retain control in this process and have the 'final say' on what is interpreted and this was evident in my research. Both ethically and practically I wanted the girls' voices to be dominant when writing up the research but it is necessary to acknowledge this has not always been possible, particularly within the discussion chapter and inevitably my voice will be woven into their experiences and beliefs. As Greene and Hill acknowledge “the subjectivity of the researcher adds a further layer of complexity to the research process” (2005: 7). It does add complexity in terms of deciphering the girls' voices but it is only with this subjectivity that I could express the girls' voices in written form. The lens of the observer or researcher is said to inevitably distort (Greene and Hill, 2005) but in this research, as in many other studies, the intention is to 'distort' only in order to clarify, albeit acknowledging my contribution to the creation of the girls' voices.

This section has outlined some of the fundamental methodological issues encountered when undertaking the research. The issues dealt with here are not necessarily new, but are concerns often identified in research for which there are still no obvious solutions. The key difficulty I faced was the impossibility of being ethically and methodologically perfect in relation to standards defined by childhood methodology literature. I felt that the more I reflected on this topic, achieving the 'gold standard' in child research practice would result in undertaking no research at all, and instead I would be continually focused on trying to work through the numerous conflicts that could potentially arise.

Possibly the most that can be aspired to in such situations is a compromise and the development of a 'best fit' for the specific research context. There
were areas of my research that would have benefited from further consideration initially and this is something that can be taken forward into future research. ‘Perfect’ research conditions will never be possible. They are not available in ‘real’ life and it is unreasonable to expect to generate them in ‘real’ research.

7.3 Examining girls’ gender identities: How do girls construct their gender identity?

It has been evident from the research data collected that young girls’ gender identity construction is as complex as that of teenage girls and adult women. The girls in the research were influenced by social ideologies and discourses surrounding gender and these affected how they constructed their gender identity. The theories used to understand the girls’ gender identity construction within this research (predominantly the work of feminist poststructuralist Bulter (1990) and Paechter’s (2003) gendered community of practice model) despite theorising adult gender identity construction, have both been useful and applicable. However, despite the similarities it is important to position the girls’ gender identity construction within the context of other discourses that may affect this process particularly those associated with being a child. Whilst there are many similarities in the way these girls constructed their gender identity to research in this area examining adult women, it is still useful to remember that there are very different pressures on young girls and adult women during this process. Adult women are afforded less leeway and are expected to know ‘who they are’. For younger girls there is greater capacity for experimentation which leads to them constructing often contradictory gender identities but having little difficulty reconciling this in the way an adult female might. It is important to recognise the girls reshaping and resisting dominant discourses may not reflect the way adult women achieve this or what they jeopardise to portray unconventional/alternative identities. Rather than presenting an active challenge to dominant discourses the girls’ rejection could be perceived as an experimentation with alternative discourses that they are able to engage with precisely because they are children and as such have been socially constructed around discourses of ‘becoming’ or being
'incomplete' (Bloustien, 2003). It is important therefore to frame the following discussion on girls’ identity construction within this context.

7.3.1 Gender identity and gender discourses

The girls’ conversations indicate that their gender identities are constructed through their interaction with copious discourses. This creates a multi-faceted identity developed through acceptance and rejection of various regulations and norms. The data suggests the girls’ identities were socially constructed. The girls discussed how individuals could select a particular feminine identity (girlie girl, tomboy, sporty girl) and this could be constructed through adherence to particular rules and regulations that created that particular way of being. This process, according to Butler, is the way in which females become ‘culturally intelligible subjects’ (1990: 45). The girls became particular types of ‘girls’ through their interaction with “rule bound discourse that inserts itself in the pervasive and mundane signifying acts”(1990: 145) associated with that particular identity.

The agency girls could exercise over their choice of identity was a consistent theme in the research data. Heather, Alison, Melanie and Holly felt they were more of a girlie girl and wanted to continue to create this identity. To achieve this they would interact more frequently with discourses regulating appropriate appearance and fashion. Sally, Beth and Helen preferred to be viewed as tomboys and so rejected some ‘girlie’ discourses and instead drew on ones that promoted aggressive behaviour or a disinterest in appearance. The girls actively fashioned their own existence, as Butler (1990) also suggests, and this occurred through the adoption of various practices associated with particular discourses.

The research data also served to illustrate the girls’ choice of discourses to engage with was severely limited. Butler’s states this is inevitable if it is believed that gender identities are constructed by language: “The cultural matrix through which gender identity has become intelligible requires certain kinds of identities cannot exist…..precisely because certain kinds of gender
identities fail to conform to those norms of cultural intelligibility, they appear only as developmental failures or logical impossibilities from within that domain" (1990: 17). There is no available language for a gender positioning outside of feminine or masculine and as such the girls cannot draw on this. If, as post-structuralism suggests, discourse and language create identity the girls' gender identities will always be regulated with the binary masculine/feminine framework because these are the only two positions vocalised within contemporary culture. The girlie girl (feminine) and the tomboy position (masculine) and something in the middle of these two (unlabelled but called 'normal' sometimes), were all that were identified as being available ways for girls to construct their own identities. Foucault (1975) has identified this as "active freedom", the individual may have the freedom to decide how they will fashion their identity, as the girls clearly believed they could, but this freedom occurred within the boundaries of larger cultural constraints which ultimately limit the range of femininities that the girls are able to access.

7.3.2 Constructing a gender identity: inner essence v socially constructed core

Throughout this research, the poststructuralist approach has provided the theoretical positioning for what is understood by identity: that it is fragmented, multiple and has the potential to alter depending on the context. Despite this epistemological positioning it has been difficult to move away from the belief that individuals also have an 'inner self' something that defines them as different to everyone else and is a part of who the individuals feel they are. Woodward sees this as an individual's subjectivity, 'our sense of self' comprising of "conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions which constitute our sense of who we are" (1997: 19). Using Woodward's understanding, social contexts, language and culture all impact on our experience of our subjectivity but we define this ourselves in the first instance.

The girls' conversations indicate that they felt individuals can have this 'essence'. When discussing their own identities they would often position
themselves as more of one type of girl. Their multiple femininities were then created by deviating away from this central core. Helen was mainly tomboy, but felt she behaved like a girlie girl sometimes. Alison believed she was mostly a girlie girl, but sometimes would construct herself more like a tomboy for brief periods. Their inner core, who they felt they were the majority of the time, determined the types of discourses they ‘mostly’ interacted with and chose to accept.

The current research, however, uses Butler’s (1990) understanding that the girls’ central core is also socially constructed. As Butler discusses “when the subject is said to be constituted that means simply that the subject is a consequence of certain rule governed discourses that govern the intelligible invocation of identity” (1990: 145). When the girls’ ‘inner selves’ are examined, their descriptions of these still comprise of identities that have already been identified as being constituted by discourse. Heather is ‘mostly girlie girl’ because she wants to, and enjoys, interacting with feminine discourses. What the girls perceived as ‘them’ can be viewed as consisting of discourses that they adopt more rigidly and frequently than other aspects of their gender identity. If, as Butler suggests, gender is a consequence of ‘repeated acts’ then the girls’ core can be interpreted as them repeatedly engaging in certain discourse whilst fluctuating with others, but the more frequent repetition with some discourses provides them with a centre that becomes ‘them’. As Butler explains “the enactment of gender norms has real consequences including the creation of our sense of subjectivity but that does not make our subjectivity any less constructed” (1990: 152). The girlie girls, such as Alison or Heather, mainly adopted stereotypical feminine appearance and some elements of behaviour which they felt made them ‘mostly girlie girls’. However, the tomboys repeatedly adopted non feminine behaviour values which they felt assisted with defining them as mainly tomboys, even if in they adopted typically feminine values in different areas of their identity. The girls, such as Karen and Kathy, who had less obvious central cores, can be understood as interacting with contradictory discourses regularly, preventing them from feeling attached to one type of identity.
The girls' identities were both multiple and fluctuating depending on different contexts. They did not appear to be overly concerned about the type of identity they wished to construct. They continued to stress it was a matter of choice. However, all of them wanted to construct themselves as 'girls'. Contrasting previous research (Davies, 2003), the tomboys did not want to be boys, but rather girls who adopted some of the masculine discourses available more frequently than other girls did.

7.3.3 Complying with dominant femininities: Gender identity and the body

The girls demonstrated that they all engaged with non-typical feminine discourses in some contexts and viewed this as being a positive thing. The feminist framework the research is positioned within enables this action to be viewed as political and interpreted as the girls contesting and challenging dominant discourses. Butler (1990) suggests the girls adopting 'alternative' or anti-feminine discourses stretches the boundaries of acceptable femininity and in doing so alters what it means to be a girl. The research suggested that the notion of 'girl' is not particularly fixed or definable. It was evident the girls simultaneously conformed to gender norms whilst at the same time resisting them. They were very scathing of what they saw as pure 'girlie girls' who they felt did not display such resistance within their identities. By refusing to adhere fully to all traditional femininity norms they were able to distance themselves from this. However, it was continually apparent that certain discourses were harder for them to resist than others if they want to be viewed as 'normal girls'. Visual discourses and those regulating body presentation appeared to be particularly difficult for the girls to reject. Bordo (1989) suggests this is due to femininity becoming defined by an individual's ability to construct the appropriate surface presentation of the self. This has made norms and regulations surrounding appearance one of the most power discourses governing feminine identity. The body provided the girls with a site where they could most obviously construct and display their gender identity. Linking with Paechter's (2003) framework, the adoption of correct visual identity discourses, more than any other gender identity discourses, enables the girls
to be part of their wider community. Not adhering to appropriate body discourses was a simple way to construct an identity as a 'non girl,' something that the girls all wanted to avoid.

7.3.4 Constructing the ideal female body

Foucault’s writings on power have given feminist academics a useful theoretical framework for understanding the body as a site of political struggle (McNay, 1992). Foucault’s work highlights the power of bodily discourses and how the body effectively becomes shaped by them, as has been evident in the current research. His concept of 'disciplinary power' where power is understood as being exercised by surveillance rather than force, has been useful when examining the research data. Gore (1998) has adapted the work of Foucault to identify several techniques of power which are helpful for understanding why the girls adhered so closely to dominant body and visual discourses. The techniques applicable for the current research are surveillance, normalisation, exclusion, and regulation.

All of the girls were capable of making judgements regarding the suitability of their own body and appraising those of others. They talked about being fat as not very attractive and gave examples of both peers and celebrities who they felt had a 'perfect body'. Gore (1998) views this as surveillance of the body which involves supervising closely, observing and making comparisons. It functions as a technique of power because it perpetuates, creates or prescribes behaviour according to dominant discourses within society. Foucault (1979; 1982) sees all bodies as being subject to surveillance or 'gaze' from both overt external sources and internalised control. Some of the girls who felt they were not able to demonstrate an appropriate body shape clearly had well developed internalised surveillance, referring to their legs as fat and wanting them to be thinner. Foucault describes this practice as the 'normalising gaze' which is internalised and prescribes what is and is not acceptable. Adhering to the norms of this gaze was important to the girls, they wanted to look right because they wanted to be viewed as female. As Bartky (1998) indicates “a body felt to be feminine, a body socially constructed
through appropriate practice, is in most cases crucial to a women's sense of herself as a female" (1998: 78).

Haber (1996) interpreting Foucault's work, sees the regulating gaze that most females experience as being the result of men's appraisal of women. The need to be acceptable to a male gaze was reflected by some of the girls who believe that their appearance would ultimately enable them to pursue a normal female life that would culminate in marriage. Looking right for the male gaze was not as important to the girls as research suggests is the case for adult and teenage females (Paxton's, Norris, Wertheim, Durkin and Anderson, 2005). Instead it was evident during the research that the girls experienced different types of 'gaze'. The girls both judged and were judged by their female peers, with the girls often appraising the body shape and look of other girls in the school. Having the correct body shape and appearance was extremely important for the girls to assist with being accepted within their local environments. Oliver and Lalik (2000) highlight that 'ugly' girls were considered to have a difficult time finding friends or peers with whom to associate and the girls in the research seemed to have similar fears about not being accepted. The girls experienced surveillance from a number of sources and as well as internalising this and developing their own internal gaze. They too developed a critical eye for appraising the bodies of those around them. As Frost (2005) suggests, females are both the products and the producers of social meanings. The girls absorbed dominant discourses but also perpetuated them.

Gore's second technique of power, normalisation, also influenced how the girls felt they should present their bodies. Normalisation is defined as "invoking, requiring, settling or conforming to a standard defining the normal" (1998: 237). Through this discourses become accepted as normal and in doing so create power and become dominant. What is defined as normal for the female body sits within an extremely rigid set of discourses. All of the girls were aware of these and had internalised them adeptly. It was unquestioningly accepted that they should be wanting to look thin and this equated to a positive body image. Normalisation of dominant discourses was
not restricted to body shape but also to how the body should look. This was
most obvious when the girls were discussing appropriate hair length and
viewing short hair as 'not right' and not natural for a girl. These discourses
have become normalised to the extent that the girls could offer no response
when asked why they felt they should wear their hair in this way. They would
just suggest that it did not look 'right'. It was something that the girls accepted
as an essential part of being female. Paradoxically, even the girls who were
not adhering to dominant discourses as to how they would use their body and
considered themselves as tomboys, still felt it was important to have long hair
and wanted to display this on their own bodies. It demonstrates the continued
contrasts between how they felt their bodies should be presented and how
they perceived they could use them.

The third technique of power, exclusion illustrates the consequences of not
adhering to normalisation procedures. It was evident from the girls' dialogues
that certain body shapes are rejected as abnormal and unattractive, usually
any female who is at all over weight, has poor skin or short 'unfeminine' hair
style. The rigid norms that surround the female body have been identified as
inducing a great deal of anxiety in women that cannot obtain them, even
though they are often obtainable for only a minority number of females.
Deviations from accepted body appearance will usually produce negative
social reactions, resulting in "large numbers, probably the majority of young
western women judging their bodies by unhealthy, unrealistic and
unobtainable standards" (Forbes, Doroszewicz, Card and Adams-Curtis,
2004: 331). Many of the girls' dialogues conveyed discomfort about the shape
of their own bodies and the feeling that they potentially could be excluded
from appropriate femininity if they could not address this. As pre-pubescent
females the majority had extremely thin undeveloped frames desired by many
adult women (Bloustien, 2003). The girls that did not have this body shape
were clearly already aware of the difference and it was beginning to cause
anxiety. Ellie was not over weight but was larger than the other girls and
desperately wanted a body that was unrealistic for her to obtain. As a child
with a larger build it is unlikely she will ever be able to develop the desirable
'skinny' shape without extreme restrictions placed on her food intake. Orbach
(1993) argues that women are stigmatised for not being slim and although Ellie did not state that anyone had commented negatively about her body size, she had clearly internalised the possibility that she may be stigmatised and wanted to change it and ‘fit in’. The fear of not achieving the standard was also evident in girls who currently sat within the ideal body definition. Holly discussed knowing she was underweight but feeling that she was fat and wanting to be thinner. By being thinner she could reassure herself she reflected the accepted norm. The girls were aware that judgements were made on appearances and they wanted to make sure they were judged favourably. Frost suggests

“opinions formed by those making the judgements does not stop at immediate presentation, but inevitably imputes certain characteristics and personality features on the basis of initial presentation, the discrediting of the person is not limited to the superficial but takes in the whole identity, their whole self becomes not good enough”

(2005: 74).

Ellie and Ursula, both girls who were unhappy about their body shape, were not particularly self confident individuals and struggled to fit in. It is likely that Ursula’s ethnicity, as one of the few black girls in the school contributed to her feelings of being on the outside. A black body again did not conform to the dominant discourse of beauty as white and slender (Bloustien, 2003). The two girls discussed how their bodies contributed to their lack of self confidence in all aspects of their lives, illustrating how anxiety created by dominant discourses can permeate beyond just appearance and undermine an individual’s sense of self.

The girls were aware of the body shape that should be cultivated and wanted to pursue this ideal, but as yet did not seem to be regulating their bodies in any particular way to achieve this. It is possible that the pressure to actively develop the perfect body may well develop with age. Oliver and Lalik (2001) found that adolescent girls in their study were dissatisfied with their bodies and were active in their effort to monitor, restrict and control their appearance. This included regulating practices such as dieting to become thinner. Whilst in the current study it was evident that some girls were very dissatisfied with their body, none of them discussed any serious attempts to alter their body
shape. Ursula discussed how she felt she was fat and should eat less but was not actively doing this. Although girls at an increasingly younger age are becoming unhappy and critical about their bodies, the girls involved in the research, unlike those in Evans, Rich and Holroyd's (2004) research, would not necessarily buy into the regulating practices yet to try and develop such a body. There may be several explanations for this. Although the girls recognise the ideal body and the pressure to produce one, they may not yet feel this pressure at a personal enough level to attempt to want to actively reshape their bodies. Being aware of the discourses and adhering to them are different concepts. Whilst the girls clearly recognised regulations surrounding the body, they had perhaps not fully internalised them yet. The issue of gender and age discourses interacting was evident here with several of the girls talking about still ‘becoming’ a girl and the notion of their body shapes changing favourably with age. Sarah in particular highlighted ‘puppy fat’ and perceived that she would lose this naturally with age. It is possible when girls begin to develop more fully physically and understand what their finished bodies may be like, that they begin to regulate them to ensure the ‘finished product’ fits in with desirable norms.

The girls’ discussions suggested shaping their bodies was ultimately a matter of personal choice. Although they did seem to recognise that desirable images of women were continually presented to them, they felt it was their decision to accept and reflect these. Kathy discussed how she did not want to look fat but that was ‘just her’, suggesting other girls may wish to pursue this body shape even though it does not reflect feminine regulations. Bordo attributes this perception to contemporary advertising, “women are strongly encouraged by advertising to think of their choices as free and playful” (1993: 11). She discusses that women do not view themselves as following “the dictate of fashion magazines or even of broader cultural pressures” (1993: 157) when developing and engaging with body ideals. Instead females believe they do it for themselves which was reflected by the girls' discussions. Females convince themselves, as Kathy and Ellie did, that they are doing this as individuals. They are complying to their internal surveillance but it is their choice to do so. Female and particularly the girls, felt they controlled their
inner surveillance. It was not developed from the pressure of the external gaze and regulations perpetuated in wider society.

7.3.5 Obtaining power through dominant discourses: Displaying the ideal body

The research has illustrated how girls are able to obtain power for themselves through cultivating an idealised body. It is useful to draw on Bourdieu’s (1977) work and the concept of physical capital to understand how this occurs. Appropriately developed bodies can be converted into social, economic and cultural capital. This theory enables an understanding of how women can obtain certain power and status within society by being able to display a body that conforms with gender norms and regulations. Females are criticised and deemed inadequate when they do not create a body that reflects dominant discourses. Equally, those that do achieve this ideal are perceived more favourably. The girls’ conversations discussing the various friendship groups has illustrated this belief. Alison and Robin were considered to hold power within the school. They were status figures, had large friendship groups (social capital), were the favourites of some of the PE teachers (cultural capital) and were able to dictate to and control other pupils in the schools. The girls believed that this was due to their ‘perfect bodies’ and being considered beautiful. This was reinforced by the attention they received from the ‘male gaze’. Both of them had boyfriends which confirmed their beauty. When asked why these girls had achieved such status all the research girls’ responses cited Alison’s and Robin’s bodies. Both girls illustrated that developing appropriate physical capital as defined by dominant feminine discourses can be converted into power in the form of status and authority within their social networks (Bourdieu, 1977). Bloustien’s (2003) research demonstrates similar findings with the popular group being dominated by two main members who were exceptionally and naturally attractive. The power Alison and Robin derived from displaying an appropriate body was far reaching. It illustrated to the other girls why it was beneficial to want to buy into dominant discourses and reinforced the potential dangers of not doing so and being cast outside of this powerful social network. The pitfalls of not being able to display an
appropriate body and appearance were highlighted by the group the research girls considered to be the ‘nerds’ and the ‘geeks’. These girls were seen as having little influence within the school environment. When asked why, Heather and Ursula immediately suggested it was because they were not attractive and quite fat. The research girls discussed how these girls were unable to cultivate the status and acclaim within the school because they did not have the valued physical capital to exchange into social capital. The research girls placed themselves into an intermediate position. Holly was discussed as one of the popular girls but the other girls felt they sat within a neutral position. They were neither part of the popular or the nerdy group. Their looks did not warrant them achieving high status within the school but equally they were not cast aside as ugly and unworthy and ultimately powerless within this setting.

This initial examination of the research objectives illustrates how girls internalise aspects of restrictive gender stereotypes. They firmly believed these needed to be adhered to. It demonstrates how these beliefs can influence girls' views on body image, appearance and behaviour with the first two being of particular importance to maintain. The girls, when questioned directly, would argue with this. They suggested it was possible and acceptable for girls and women to behave in any way they chose. However, with the assistance of Butler's framework it is evident whilst the girls may choose certain discourses, their identity construction is continually influenced by wider cultural beliefs and the need to be accepted within their immediate environment.

7.3.6 Girls, education and gender identity

The discussion has examined at a broad level how girls construct their gender identity and the importance of the body within this process. It has been evident that the girls accept and comply with dominant visual feminine discourses but the behaviour element of their identity was much more fluid. They demonstrated behaving in ways that both rejected and complied with feminine discourses at various times. Academic success was continually
identified in the data as being something the girls used to construct their identity. Educational attainment was important to some extent to all of the girls in the research except Sally. It was not simply academic success that was important to the girls, but the belief that they worked hard and tried their best during school. This appeared to be an important part of who they defined themselves to be.

Educational discourses, when examined in greater detail, also appeared to be heavily gendered and affected the girls' gender identity construction in complex and contradictory ways. The primary discourse appeared to be that idealised femininity, as displayed by the popular girls, is incompatible with academic success or being considered clever. The research girls frequently discussed how the popular girls rejected educational discourses and did not view them as having any role to play in the construction of their feminine identity. The research girls were swift to point out that the popular girls were not very clever and felt this gave them some superiority over the popular girls in the classroom. By engaging with education the research girls were to some extent rejecting idealised femininity. However, by continuing to engage with some of the more traditional visual stereotypes they all felt that they were different from the 'nerds' who also defined themselves through educational success. The nerd positioning is also associated by Renold (2001) with defeminising girls who occupied it. The research girls appeared to avoid this by complying with some feminine discourses and not engaging in public demonstrations of their intelligence in the classroom as 'nerds' in Bucholtz's (1999) research did.

The active avoidance of educational discourses by the popular girls was seen as vital for developing 'perfect' feminine identity. Having the correct clothes, the correct look and being clearly heterosexual were the key elements they used to achieve this gender identity. Bourdieus's (1990) theorising suggests these girls possibly anticipated that educational success was not necessary for them because they would continue to use their physical capital to generate social and economic capital. The research girls appeared to construct an alternative, but still acceptable feminine identity whereby they refused to be
defined by visual appearance alone. Heather was insistent in describing herself as ‘more than a girlie girl’ because she actively sought academic achievement. Educational success helped them have an alternative aspect to their identities and could also be later transferred into social and physical capital in terms of university education and employment. They successfully blended aspects of both diverse communities of practice, the popular girls and the nerds, but keeping themselves within the boundaries of acceptability whilst doing so. Through this they moved beyond the restrictive discourses of femininity but not so much that they alienated themselves completely from them. It was in effect a delicate balancing act of various discourses to construct an identity that was feminine enough to be acceptable but not ‘too’ feminine.

7.4 Identifying influences on girls’ gender identity construction: Global discourses

It was very evident how dominant body discourses have become normalised by the girls. Bordo suggests that with “the advent of movies and TV, the rules for femininity have come to be culturally transmitted more and more through the deployment of standardised visual image” (1989: 17). This was evident when the girls examined how women are portrayed in magazine images. They were rarely able to access any alternative body discourses to the thin toned ideal. Pictures outside of this were not available apart from extreme examples of obesity. All of the girls’ favourite celebrities portrayed an idealised body image. Frost (2001) suggests that females celebrities have developed an increasingly impossible pinnacle for girls to aspire to. As normal women are getting larger they are becoming thinner. Grogan and Wainwright’s (1996) work suggested that girls as young as eight recognised the acceptability of the slim body in western society. The ability of the media to continually permeate all aspects of the girls’ lives ensures that they are continually fed these images as normal and something they should aspire too. Bloustien (2003) acknowledges that dominant western discourses of femininity are widely circulated in electronic and print media and "an extremely limiting set of codes that circumscribe the ideal female body" are continually presented. Ursula’s
comment that the girls were surrounded by images which encourage them to look at the appearance of someone and judge them and themselves by this is very apt. Oliver and Lalik (2001) commented that concern for the body has become normalised for girls and this reflected the current research. They did see it as a part of life that they should be concerned with their bodies and want to reflect the norms and regulations presented to them by wider culture.

7.4.1 Gender identity and local influences

The literature review highlights schools as being places where girls spend a considerable amount of time. Schools are viewed as creating an environment which encourages young people to develop values and ideals which are related to and part of the dominant ideology (McRobbie, 2000). The research has indicated how the school reinforces dominant gender values to the girls continually, particularly those linked with masculine/feminine binaries. The separation of girls and boys during free time in the school and during PE lessons enforces the differences between males and females. The use of the playground during free time reinforced to pupils that boys should be active and occupying the majority of space, whereas girls should be sitting or standing in small groups and taking up the minimum amount of room possible. This reflects wider discourses regarding appropriate behaviour for males and females. It also sends clear messages to the girls regarding the value of their activities compared to that of boys and the requirement for them to be less visual and obvious within the school environment. The difficulty girls have in obtaining and defining their own space within the school is reflected by other research in this area (Valentine, 2004; Renold, 1997, Skelton, 2000).

7.4.2 Contesting gender regulations within the school

The school, whilst reinforcing certain stereotypical gender values, also appeared to provide a setting for girls to contest these. The girls’ determination to construct their identity incorporating educational success appears to be influenced by both parental aspirations stemming from middle class values and from the pedagogical atmosphere developed in the school.
(Harris, 2004; Renold, 2001). The school did place a great deal of value on pupils’ academic success. As a fee paying school, emphasis was placed on pupils having a quality ‘all round education’ but with particular attention on core subjects. The school’s emphasis on the importance of educational success was particularly evident when attempting to negotiate access for the research. This was organised to fall after the girls’ high school entrance examination because neither parents or staff at the school welcomed girls being distracted when preparing for the exam. The value of education was therefore continually reinforced to the girls through a variety of adults sources and for the research girls through their friendship group who all held similar beliefs regarding the importance of doing well at school. Girls such as Alison, who was acknowledged as being clever, were given respect and admiration within her friendship group because of this. Within her own community of practice educational attainment was a valuable commodity to possess.

As well as this ethos being promoted by staff within the school it was clear that parents exerted a strong influence on girls to incorporate educational success as an important part of their identity. Most of the girls expected to go to university. The majority had university educated parents and it appeared that a university education was viewed as normal and desirable for the research girls due to this. Harris (2004) highlights that parents of middle class girls view education as extremely important for their daughters as it is this which will secure their ‘middle class futures’ (2004: 49). The girls made similar assumptions surrounding education and seemed to accept them unquestioningly as being appropriate and right for them to pursue.

7.4.3 Friendship groups and their influence on gender identity

The girls’ friendship groups have been demonstrated to play an important role in reinforcing their identity construction and also in transmitting cultural discourses regarding femininity and the advantages of adhering to these. The type of group a girl was attached to was demonstrated to reinforce what type of girl that individual was. Gender dominated social networks within the school, with boys and girls having very separate friendship groups and also
regulating the space they occupied outside of classroom time into very strict male/female divides.

During the research it was evident that the gender identities of girls who were part of certain groups become categorised by this membership and developed a ‘group’ gender identity. Girls became known as ‘normal’ ‘popular’ or ‘geeks’ with most of the research girls being part of what they considered to be the normal girls. Epstein (1961) views friendship groups as maintaining a set of norms and values. The popular girl was viewed by the research girls as reflecting stereotypical femininity and adhering to and actively pursuing dominant feminine values and norms. Participants of this group were able to develop a collective identity and reinforce their own identities as feminine girls by adhering to feminine norms. Paechter's (2003) gender community of practice highlights that for gender identity to become cemented it needs to be recognised within the group context. The girls’ friendship groups offered a setting to achieve and reinforce the gender identities appropriate within that particular community. As Paechter discusses, membership of the various friendship groups ensure that a girl’s particular gender identity is recognised at a wider level which in turn allows individuals to develop a more secure sense of self. Bloustien (2003) reinforces this suggesting that school groups can have a particular effect on girls’ sense of self because of the obvious visual exclusion that can occur if an individual is not part of a group. Reflecting this, the girls with the least confident sense of selves, Ellie and Ursula, did not belong to any particular friendship group during the initial stages of the research and were not able to have their identities confirmed on this wider platform as acceptable.

The various friendship groups also served to illustrate how dominant discourses can become accepted and desired within the girls’ local environments even if they are particularly restrictive. Girls who adhered to dominant notions of femininity, particularly surrounding their body, and were able to display this obtained a great deal more power for themselves. Anita and Robin’s power allowed them to develop status amongst the girls, ensured they would be listened to, emulated and have a plentiful supply of girls
wanting to be their friends. They were able to judge and marginalise other girls in the school, allow them access to their group and deny it to girls they considered were unworthy. The power networks evident within various social groups reflect Foucault’s (1975) notion of power as everywhere and always local and unstable. Foucault sees power as exercised through a net like organisation which reflects the sources of power running throughout the school. The girls discussed the teachers as having power and control within this classroom but power dynamics within the school environment were much more complex and often took place outside of taught lessons. The power held by popular girls was felt by the research girls to be one of the most oppressive they experienced during their time in school. The popular girls, through their adherence to prevalent feminine discourses, had the ability to make school life difficult for girls. The research girls were able to give numerous examples where Anita and Robin bullied and picked on girls who they felt were inappropriate and not adhering to appropriate feminine regulations. It was evident that power was not simply restricted to adult/child relations or straightforward male/female gender relations, although both of these dynamics also influenced and affected the girls. The female to female peer relationships generated through their structured social groups seemed to take precedent in terms of influencing and affecting how the girls were able to conduct themselves within school life. Using Foucault’s (1975) concept of power as existing in the structure of society and in people’s thought systems, rather than in individuals or institutions, it makes escape from social control very difficult. Gender relations and expectations have been shown to affect all aspects of the girls lives. Feminine requirements and expectations cannot be ignored. They are constantly presented to the girls both globally through the media and within their daily lives. The social hierarchy that existed within the friendship groups made it clear to the girls that those who did not measure up in terms of acceptable femininity would be unable to access the power available through membership of the popular group.

The girls though, as Foucault suggests, can be both the recipients of dominant power relations and the holders of power within their social networks. It was evident how all girls were subject to male restriction and
repressive power which prevented them accessing and occupying all but very small parts of their playground space. However, the popular girls clearly accessed a great deal of alternative power over other girls and sometimes boys through relationships with them. Equally the research girls, whilst continually the recipients of the popular girls' influence, were still able to acquire status and domination over the 'nerd' girls and over the popular girls when in the classroom and engaging with educational discourses rather than purely dominant feminine ones. Their conversations illustrate the diversity of power relations and the diversity of contexts where power can be transmitted. It cannot be attributed to a single group, individual or institution but is continually multiple and shifting in different contexts and circumstances. Complying with dominant gender discourses gave girls a great deal of power. It was desirable for the research girls to attempt to comply with these to secure their position within the school. They did however, develop a compromise to this situation which enabled them to access some power through alternative discourses and by taking up feminine norms to a certain extent rather than rigidly complying with them.

7.5 The girls' experiences of football

The aims and objectives of this research have been two fold. Firstly it aimed to examine how girls construct their gender identity and the discourses that affect this process. The research has looked to understand how girls' identities are created through interaction with numerous discourses and not only those associated with hegemonic notions of idealised femininity. The second phase of the research has been to examine how participation in football, as a sport constructed as predominantly male in the UK, affects this process and how girls reconcile participation in a masculine sport within a female gender identity. The remainder of the chapter provides an analysis of the data in relation to these aims. It examines how the girls perceived sport is presented to them, the position of sport within feminine identities and how participating in football affected their own gender identity construction.
7.5.1 Girls and sport

The sessions using newspaper sports reports indicated that sport and football at a global level are presented to the girls as an exclusively male occupation. Harris and Clayton discuss how “the absence of women athletes from the public eye is an explicit reminder that sport is a male domain” (2002: 399) and this ideology was presented in the media the girls examined. Feminist critiques view men as owning and controlling the cultural production of football and as Helen powerfully indicates, the distribution mechanisms – the mass media - for the product. It is through these structures that the global game as a male entity is shaped (Barker, 2000). The girls were aware that both sport and the coverage of sport is dominated by men to the detriment of women. Images presented through newspapers convey cultural meanings (Humberstone, 2002) and the girls identified these.

However, the girls' perceptions of sport in their local environment were very different, with sport being perceived as something that was accessible for girls and an integral part of some of their identities. Varpalotai (1987) argues that girls are excluded from sport both overtly and covertly. In contrast in the current study it was acceptable and encouraged for girls to pursue sport, albeit traditional feminine sports, in their local environment. The girls saw minimal gender related restrictions preventing their participation but sport was not a gender free arena. Organised sports at the school were heavily gender differentiated. Birrell and Cole (1994) suggest that sport is a field for legitimising certain dominant versions of social reality. The girls' participation in hockey, netball and rounders, whilst the boys played football, rugby and cricket instilled and emphasised a wider belief that the sexes are innately different, something which was then reproduced by pupils during their free time at school. The school created an environment where it was acceptable for girls to play sports that they defined as appropriately feminine resulting in wider gender regulations present within the sport domain being very evident.

The girls did not perceive the sports arena constructed in the media to be the same as their local sports environment. In the latter it was 'normal' to be
playing sport. Whilst Cockburn and Clarke assert that for girls “to be a socially acceptable teenage girl, they are required to neither take part in sport . . . nor to physically exert themselves”, (2002: 653), the research girls expressed different experiences. Girls’ participation in school sport gave them status and credibility. Part of Anita and Robin’s power and respect was generated from their performances in the school sports team. The girls identified that this was a further entry requirement to the popular group. Not being sporty was a further barrier to most of the research girls being unable to access the ‘popular’ group and an additional source of power for the girls who were on the school teams. It was also evident that the research girls, did not engage with school sport because of any concerns regarding its incompatibility with developing a feminine identity. The main barrier they perceived was their lack of ability. Penney defines ability as a “key variable (creating for some and inhibiting for others) affecting pupils’ experiences in physical education” (2002: 114). The school environment had created alternative but equally limiting discourses preventing participation for the girls. All sports perpetuated masculine values of competitiveness, aggression and the need to win despite this being through the mechanism of feminine appropriate activities. It provided an extremely traditional competitive sporting environment where extra curricular sports teams were only available to pupils, both male and female, who were good at sport. It was these discourses, as opposed to difficulties reconciling feminine identity that prevented the girls from participating.

7.5.2 Girls’ experiences of male football

It was evident that the girls did feel it was unusual for females to participate in football, although they qualified this by suggesting this was because the media constructed it this way and very few girls in the school environment played. They did not however, completely accept the dominant hegemony and were aware that girls could and did play football and numerous competitive teams existed for this purpose. Gramsci’s (1971) concept of hegemony when applied to gender relations suggests, similar to Foucault, that power relations are differentiated with different meanings assuming particular dominance in
localised sites (Connell, 1992). School football was one area where patriarchal hegemony was particularly evident. The girls officially were able to take part in football at the school’s extra curricular boys club but in reality very few girls were able to access this. Similar to Skelton’s research, the girls were very aware that football was not something they were supposed to take part in even though the official word was that they could (2000: 12). Dominant hegemonic assumptions were much more evident when understanding the position of football in the school. The local environment reflected global assumptions created through the mass media that football is a sport for boys that girls are incapable of playing. Football was positioned within the school as a key sport and one that only boys were able to access in the curriculum. In addition to this boys defended their exclusive access outside of the curriculum, contributing to creating powerful discourses reinforced in the media, stating to the girls that football was neither desirable or accessible for them. Similar to Swain’s (2000) study of school football, the physical space in the playground was dominated by boys with girls marginalised to the edge in small groups. The boys’ reasoning for this process can be understood as a need to defend the dominant hegemony which currently benefits them (Connell, 1998). Similar to the girls at the school, much of the boys’ status was developed from successful participation in gender appropriate sports. Skelton (2000) suggests football participation automatically enabled boys to access high status groups and the same was applicable in this context. Girls participating in these and on their territory presented an immediate threat to the validity of this status. Alison noted that football participation cements boys’ identities. Swain (2000) reaffirmed this view:

“The associations of football with corporeal masculinities could be seen in the playground games with boys learning how to use their bodies to demonstrate strength and competence through practical combinations of force and skill”


Feminist cultural theory can be used to contextualise the subordination girls experienced when attempting to participate in football. Girls are marginalised by the interaction between ideology and hegemony. The global ideology of football created an extremely restrictive local hegemony within the school that
the girls have been unable to break down when attempting to compete equally with the boys on what has been defined by global and local discourses as ‘their territory’. The ideology of football, constructed through the mass media, secures football as male and a symbol of normal masculinity. Participation in football allowed the boys to perform their masculinity on a regular basis, reflecting Bramham's (2003) research in this area. Girls' participation in the boys' football could lead to a questioning of whether these are exclusively masculine traits leaving their masculine identity as non legitimate and invalid. The easiest way of preventing such a debate from occurring is to prevent the girls from participating in football or marginalise them when they did attempt to play in their space. Similar tactics were displayed by boys in the research of Swain (2000), Skelton (2000), Renold (1997) and Harris (2002). As a result of this the girls who had tried to access football within the school's overtly masculine defined space have had to withdraw from this setting because male pupils refused to integrate them fully. As Harris suggests “the fact that games of football at this age were considered to be solely male activities powerfully conveys the almost mythical status of football with English culture” (2002: 166). This was not something the girls had any success at breaking down. At a wider level this suggests that despite the huge increase in participation in the female game little is changing at local level to alter the attitudes and perceptions that it is not an exclusively male sport and perhaps it is been defended even more rigorously as a result because of the perceived threat from the growth in the female game.

7.5.3 Girls’ football participation in the context to other sports experiences

The girls’ football sessions offered an alternative sports participation experience. The sessions existed reasonably separately to other aspects of school life, taking place on a Friday afternoon after-school when all pupils had left. Although teachers were very welcoming and helpful, none attended the sessions and my position as a non teacher helped take the sessions completely away from the educational context. There was also an element of football being ‘something special’ for the girls. They were aware it was taking
place for the purpose of the research and it was a one off event happening over a set period of time. This all assisted with making it ‘different’ and out of the ordinary for them. The type of girls attracted to take part in football also affected how the sessions have been interpreted and valued. Unwittingly, the sessions consisted of a group of girls who had no interest in either football or sport. A small number participated in the school teams for netball or hockey but most of them had little sports ability and were unable to access any of the school’s organised extra curricular sports activities. It was an unusual group of girls to work with and this affected how they perceived the football they took part in at the sessions.

The work of Skelton (2000), Swain (2000) and Renold (1997) all support the findings of this study illustrating that girls are marginalised within boys’ formal football structures. The girls’ sessions became constructed differently to the boys’ formal opportunities. The gender dynamics that have been demonstrated to limit girls’ involvement and enjoyment in sport when they participate in mixed groups, (Scraton, 1993; Williams and Bedward, 1999; Talbot, 1993; Wright, 1997 and 1999) and the research girls when they participated in football, were not present in their football sessions. The content of the sessions were also different. There was not the same emphasis on skill attainment, competition or formality evident in the boys’ coaching. The girls referred to me by my first name whilst the teacher/pupil relationship was evident in the boys’ group. During the football coaching the girls would play matches amongst themselves, but the competitive element was removed with no formal games being organised against other schools and the girls often refereeing their own matches removing the adult supervision element from a number of their games.

The football sessions were also very different to sports activities generally at the school. The school ethos encouraged traditional competitive games both during curriculum time and outside of it. Scratton et al (1999) highlight that one of the key concerns about women entering male sports is the possibility that this may encourage females to reproduce traditional masculine values, such as competition, aggression and win at all cost (1999: 107). However, these
values were already evident within female school sport particularly the concept of win at all costs. The school’s girls and boys teams were constructed around discourses associated with masculinity: success, performing well, being skilful and beating others and these also reflected western discourses surrounding sport (Bale and Sang 1996). Paradoxically, the girls who most closely bought into these masculinised values on the sports field were the girls who most avidly constructed an idealised heterosexual feminine identity. In doing so they did reflect the findings of Mennesson (2000) and Theberge (2002) that women heavily involved in sport feel the requirement to emphasise their femininity.

The research demonstrates, as Colwell’s (1999) suggests, that single sex settings do not automatically create welcoming encouraging environments for all girls to participate in. It was equally easy for girls of lower ability to be marginalised by other girls. Power was not determined solely by gender relations but also by discourses surrounding competence. These discourses were highly valued within the school environment. Football provided the girls with a completely new activity and one that they did not require any skill to participate in. Many of the enjoyments and benefits they gained from football could have been developed using any activity that was deviant from the school norm. Sporting ability was not valued during the football in the same way that it was during their PE sessions, it did not gain the girls any particular favour with the teacher or respect from their peers because the sessions were so separate to ‘normal’ life at the school. For a number of the girls, particularly Kathy, this was the appeal and advantage of the football sessions. They were not reflective of either boys’ football sessions or the girls’ sport she had been exposed to and been unable to measure up to.

7.5.4 The impact of girls’ participation on football ideologies

The girls were able to reshape football into an alternative activity devoid of many of its usual cultural meanings. It ceased to be a hegemonic practice that reaffirmed masculine values and actively excluded women. The girls, by accessing the alternative sessions, were able to recreate the meaning of
football for their own purposes. Scraton et al suggests that “for women to enter the powerfully male defined and controlled world of football they have had to challenge dominant notions of appropriate female sport” (1999: 101). The girls’ football was neither male defined nor controlled. Instead the sessions allowed the girls to remove football from its gendered context and produce an activity that was associated with neither masculinity or femininity. Football was returned to its basic level with a ball, a field and a group of young girls who were unconcerned that they were not particularly skilful players. Within the micro environment of the football sessions the established structure and ideology of football was completely altered into an activity that they could participate in and that was pleasurable for them. It became ‘pure football’, that was different to both the boys’ construction of football and the global game. The research football lost all of the negative connotations the girls associated with both sport and male football. Some parallels can be drawn to the sport of snow boarding when first developed which was considered to offer an “alternative youth space to cooperate, express individuality and play in an environment that ran counter to the controlled, competitive and rule-bound system of mainstream sport” (Thorpe, 2005: 77). Many of the girls highlighted the pleasure gained from playing a sport without the sporty girls and to be able to demonstrate to themselves that they could be involved in sport when it was redefined in this way. It opened up the possibility to them that sport does not only exist within the narrow terms made available to them at school and this alternative was something they could access and enjoy. They felt football was not ruled bound, they could move freely around the field and importantly for them it was not competitive. They could use their bodies in different ways and move away from the competitive aspects that seemed to be emphasised in their other sporting experiences.

Scraton et al’s research with adult female footballers indicates that women ascribe their own meanings and values to the sport. Participants in their research discussed experiencing a “tremendous amount of pleasure from playing the game and feeling in control and the excitement of being physical” (1999: 106) as well as the pleasure of connectedness and being part of a team. It is therefore not unusual for women to use masculine spaces but
redefine the meaning and values participating in these spaces can offer. However, whilst the women in Scraton et al’s study achieved this within the framework of football as a male sport, the girls in the research had this completely removed. The benefits they were able to attribute to participating in football did not come from it being a male sport, they came from it being an alternative activity that was neither masculine nor sporty.

Wearing (1998) discusses how cultural theorising can allow us to understand how females can use leisure space in the way the girls have done to deconstruct gendered boundaries, and move beyond the restrictions of cultural stereotypes. Whilst the girls did redefine football within their space, the wider game still retained all of its masculine connotations and associations with masculine superiority. Feminist cultural theorising (Birrell and Theberge, 1994) maintains that for the girls’ participation in football to be a resistant, transformative act, it must be ‘public’. The girls’ sessions were removed from the public setting. To transform football ideologies the sessions would have had to enter the consciousness of the dominant groups (Barker, 2000). The girls’ football was not perceived within the school culture as ‘real’ football. As a result of this the girls’ participation had little influence on altering the hegemonic perceptions surrounding football. The research suggests that men still retain control over football at a global and local level. Although by playing football the girls were challenging at a very basic level the belief that girls could not play, their discussions of football participation in the wider local environment suggested hegemonic discourses were prevalent. Reflecting Scraton et al’s conclusions, structures of power within football still remain in the hands of men (1999: 108). Realistically the only way this group of girls could access football on a regular basis was if similar sessions were offered. Reflecting this none of the girls have continued participation now the sessions have ceased.
7.6 How girls integrate participating in football within their gender identities

7.6.1 Sport and gender identity

There is limited information available regarding pre-adolescent girls, their construction of identity and the role of sport within this. What is available is also usually reflective, adults reminiscing on childhood, rather than information obtained from girls at this time in their lives. In the research of Cox and Thompson (2000), Harris (2002) Scratchon et al (1999), most of the women explain their identities solely as being ‘tomboy’ and rejecting all feminine discourses. This was an adequate mechanism for ensuring participation in football was acceptable and it was not until they were older that they had to develop more sophisticated strategies to integrate football into their identities. This research offers a more detailed insight into the complexities of younger girls’ gender identities and the potential role of sport within this. Varpalotai (1987) suggested that girls’ sports subcultures are sites of resistance and opposition to dominant gender values, but the girls’ sport culture within the school was an integral part of femininity construction and did not discourage the girls from adopting hyper feminine ideals. Reflecting the current research, Strandbu and Hegna in their examination of teenage Norwegian basketball players found that “to a large extent, skills and values previously identified as masculine, fit unproblematically into ordinary gender scripts for girls. Embracing of sports activities seems not to be accompanied by threatened gender identities” (2006: 122). Playing sport for girls did not, as Cockburn and Clarke suggest, create a ‘femininity deficit’ (2002: 661). It was instead used by the popular girls to strengthen their feminine identity.

7.6.2 Sport, gender identity and the female body

During the research the girls indicated there was a contrast between how their bodies could be used, which appeared to be fairly unrestricted, and how their bodies must look, which was very regulated. None of them discussed feeling limited in what they could achieve using their body. Cockburn and Clarke
(2002) argue that girls who comply with emphasised femininity appear to be the more passive victims of femininity. The popular girls in the school colluded most closely to hyper feminine discourses, but were equally viewed as the most active and sporty girls in the school. Using their bodies in this way appears to present little conflict for them and was readily encouraged. The potential of sport to provide an arena for women to contest how they should use their body has been documented within the literature review. As Dworkin and Messner suggest,

“when women exercise their agency to develop bodily mobility …. these activities are antithetical to patriarchal definitions of women as passive, docile and weak.. women have created an empowering arena where the meaning of gender is being contested and renegotiated and where active rejections of dominant notions of femininity may be forged”


The girls appeared to have little difficulty in using their bodies how they wanted to, but were also unaware that this was presenting a challenge to feminine regulations. It was viewed as ‘normal’ practice and one that some girls integrated firmly into their feminine identity.

However, although the use of their bodies was unrestricted, the girls suggested it needed to remain visually feminine regardless of the activities they participated in. This reflects wider theorisations by Bordo (1990) which suggest that whilst restrictive discourses governing women have lessened in some spheres, discourses surrounding feminine appearance have become increasingly rigid. As the girls were not at an age where sports participation could significantly alter their body shape much of the discussion about sports participation and the female body was hypothetical using adult women or fictional characters. The girls' reactions to athletes who defied feminine norms by appearing overly muscular indicated their disapproval of sports participation that altered appearance away from feminine regulations. Inappropriate appearance focused largely on the development of muscles. Visually muscular bodies, the girls felt, transgressed boundaries into masculinity and was not perceived as appropriate. Their discussions regarding the fictional character in the story illustrated the girls' belief that
participation in football became unacceptable once participants' visual identities became questionable as feminine and began transgressing towards masculinity. The girls did not like the character becoming muscular and felt she should attempt to rectify this and return to a more slender feminine body. Their dislike of obvious muscles on women reflects the work of Gorely, Holroyd and Kirk (2003) examining young people's articulation of muscul arity, physicality and gender. Girls in this research also experienced difficulty accepting women displaying muscles. A girl commented in Gorely et al's research that "A woman can do anything that she want to but when she gets loads of muscles it doesn't look right" (2003: 8). This directly reflects Ursula's belief that women should be able to play any sport, but it was unacceptable to look like a man whilst doing so. Gorely et al's research argued that using Bourdieu's notion of physical capital, a female muscular shaped body has little exchange value beyond the field of physical activity itself. This was recognised by the girls in the current research who saw an appropriate feminine appearance and body shape as having far greater exchange value both in terms of economic capital and particularly social capital, and still enabled them to participate in alternative activities.

The research suggests that whilst sport and particularly football participation allows the girls to reject dominant norms and assumptions regarding the use of their bodies they still adhered closely to dominant visual discourses. Previous research has defined this as an 'apologetic defence' (Del Rey, 1978) where women compensate for the perceived masculinising effect of participating in sports by exaggerating their femininity (Malcom, 2003). Numerous researchers have highlighted how women, particularly those who participate in sports with overtly masculine connotation legitimise their participation by demonstrating they are a real woman outside the sports arena (Mennesson, 2000; Scraton et al, 1999; Cox and Thompson, 2000; and Malcom, 2003). As Theberge suggests, "whilst it is no longer unacceptable for women to be successful athletes, it remains imperative that they also remain appropriately feminine" (2002: 294). Theberge (2002) views women athletes as exaggerating femininity whilst at the same time embracing athleticism. Although the girls' show evidence of this in the way they construct their bodies.
as feminine, it does not appear as though they consciously do this to offset their sports participation. It seemed to be necessary for acceptability generally in their lives and part of their wider gender identity construction, rather than something they strived to achieve so their sports participation would be viewed as satisfactory. Whilst they do discuss the sporting body as being unacceptable from adult women, that perhaps could not currently relate to this happening to them if they continued participation. Their current interaction with feminine visual discourse could however help legitimise their sports participation but they did not construct their bodies specifically for that purpose in the way adult athletes have been demonstrated to do.

7.6.3 Constructing football within a feminine identity

Caudwell suggests that for women “playing football, an activity clearly constructed as male affects players subjectivity, in particular their gender identity” (1999: 400). Due to the girls’ football not being constructed as ‘male football’ the impact participating could have on redefining restrictive gender ideologies seems to be limited. It is too simplistic to state that playing football did not or did redefine restrictive feminine stereotypes. The post structural underpinning of the study recognises that the girls’ identities were complex and by constructing multiple identities the girls were continually able to challenge feminine expectations in different contexts.

Butler (1993) argues that multiple narratives of the self expressed in post modern theory are an inevitable consequence of the proliferation and diversification of social relationships, contexts and sites of interactions. Utilising this understanding, it can be recognised that the girls were likely to generate alternative identities from playing football as this provided a different context to those available in their lives normally. They were operating within a different discourse which, according to normalised gender beliefs, should not have been available to them. However, this need not necessarily have any wider impact on global gender beliefs and values. Equally, football is not the sole mechanism they could achieve this through: rather, it was the available vehicle during this particular time. To some extent the effects of playing
football were muted precisely because the girls felt the behaviour aspect of their identity had never been particularly restricted and because the football sessions became so gender neutral.

Butler's theorising suggests it is possible to experiment with multiple identities and participating in football sat within this, but it did very little to break down either the rigid discourses surrounding the game, have any lasting impact on the discourses surrounding the way girls and women should behave or encourage the girls to take up alternative discourses in wider aspects of their lives. Playing football had little impact on these discourses. Previous research in this area (Scraton et al, 1999; Cox and Thompson, 2000) suggests that for most women footballers their first access to the sport has been through the male domain. In order to be accepted within this it was necessary to distance themselves from feminine values and position themselves as 'other'. Only then could they gain entry into a football world defined by males values and ideologies. Sally and Helen, the only two girls who had attempted to access male football, similarly positioned themselves as 'mostly tomboys' and as different to the other girls in some contexts. This suggests that when attempting to gain entry to football as defined by males, distancing from some feminine discourses is necessary. However, for the majority of girls, football was not accessed through the masculine domain so there was little need to significantly alter gender identities to enable access.

Their football, therefore, became a space for girls to experiment with alternative identities, but it was not the only setting they had available to do this. Playing football was an example of the girls experimenting, rather than the catalyst to this process. Several other sports researchers have noted the flexibility available to pre-adolescent girls to accommodate multiple and often diverse contradictions in their gender identity (Scraton et al, 1999; Harris, 2002; Cox and Thompson, 2002). It is felt accommodating such extremes is less possible during adulthood when it is necessary to present oneself as a consistent 'holistic' individual (Woodward, 1997). The girls seemed to accept that football participation could be part of the experimentation that was available to them at their current age. There was evidence that they felt this
flexibility would diminish with age as has been illustrated to occur (Mennesson, 2000; Harris, 2002). The girls particularly viewed football participation as incompatible with heterosexual discourses of marriage and families. There was the suggestion that the behaviour aspect of their identity would become increasingly regulated. There is a continued juxtaposition, also identified in Harris' (2004) research, between the educational aspirations the girls currently have, their willingness to try new activities and the belief that this freedom will need to be reconciled as they get older with marriage and a family. There was an acceptability that this would occur, but potentially due to their middle class upbringing, marriage would take place alongside a career. However, there did not seem to be a place for football within this or 'alternative' gender activities. The girls perhaps saw both gender and football as getting more 'serious' with age. To play football when they were older they would need to play 'real' football as opposed to the 'pure' football they currently accessed because that was all they felt was available for women. It could not be 'play.' Football would be firmly embedded in its masculine ideological context and participating would cause conflict with a feminine identity and potentially make it difficult to find a partner. Their responses to the fictional character illustrated this. As such, the girls saw no room for football within an adult feminine identity.

The girls perceived the pressure to adhere to gender discourses would increase with age but their interaction with them currently was still very apparent. Although the girls played out multiple behaviour identities, the strength of dominant feminine discourses was very apparent. The girls adhered fairly rigidly to discourses surrounding their visual appearance. Playing had little impact on changing how they considered they should construct their visual identity: All of the girls felt it was essential to continue to 'look like a girl' even when they were playing football. Krane, Choi, Baird, Aimar and Kauer (2004) describe this process as performing femininity to gain social acceptance elsewhere in their identity. It was this conformity that allowed them generally to adopt a more fluid shifting identity in relation to their behaviour because visually they still remained feminine. This process indicates the continued power of feminine regulations despite the progress
females appear to be making in other aspects of their lives. As the girls demonstrated this still has to be achieved within the context of being ‘female’ as defined by norms and regulations.

Wearing (1998) uses post-structural theory to describe how women use leisure for rewriting the script of what it is to be female beyond definitions provided by powerful males and dominant gender truth discourses. To an extent this has occurred here, the girls have reshaped and redefined their own football space, but this actually neutralised football so that their version caused little conflict within their identities and ceased to be an active site where contestation of stereotypical gender identities could occur. This space was extremely positive for them and it is not to say that football was not used at times to construct an alternative identity, but this was viewed as little more than an experimentation of the behaviour aspect of their identity. Reflecting the research of Standbu and Hegna (2006) the girls’ football experiences did not cause them to deny their feminine identity or question the male/female dichotomy. Transgression instead lay in the extension of what the girls considered normal activities for them to take part in. Playing football enabled them to extend the gender, and to a greater extent the sporting scripts, available to them.

Although the research has demonstrated the difficulty of penetrating the masculine domain of football and the continued power of hegemonic ideologies within this domain, it has also provided a useful example of the potential ways to engage casual female participants in football. It is too simplistic to state that football should be reshaped into a similar context to encourage participation from females. There are clearly huge numbers of women and girls engaging in football within a more masculine environment and doing so successfully. Many females also appear to gain a great deal of pleasure from accessing football through the masculine structures and domains and this forms part of their pleasure and experience (Caudwell, 1999; Cox and Thompson, 2000). For these females it would be inappropriate and undesirable to attempt to reshape all football opportunities into a similar space in which the girls in the research accessed football.
7.7 Summary

The chapter has provided an examination of the data in relation to the research aims and objectives. Using a feminist post-structural framework it has illustrated that the concept of ‘girl’ is complex and multiple. Girls construct their identity through their interactions with numerous gender discourses but these have been shown to always be framed within the boundaries of the masculine and feminine boundary. Whilst global mechanisms are essential for creating gender discourses it is their interpretation through local networks that has been shown to have the most significant influence on girls. It is how global discourses are interpreted by their family, peers and teachers that affect how they construct their own identity.

The girls were aware of gender regulations and rules that have been constructed through celebrity culture and disseminated by the mass media. These discourses particularly affected how the girls constructed their visual appearance and were demonstrated to cause a great deal of anxiety for girls who were unable to present a body that was deemed suitable by global discourses. The local environment provided the girls with a means for interpreting and understanding how global discourses should be affecting their identity construction. The friendship group in particular was shown to be a vital source of affirmation and criticism of girls’ gender identities. The girls placed themselves in a relatively safe position, neither overtly non-feminine nor displaying extreme femininity. Through this they were continually positioned as having power but then being relatively powerless. As Bloustien (2003) suggests, girls’ identities appeared to be a complex mixture of give and take or rejection and compliance. Through this the girls fashioned an identity that whilst sometimes reflected traditional global discourses, also gave them a suitable position within their local social worlds that generally they were comfortable with.

Unwittingly an unusual sample of girls were involved in the research in that most of them were not particularly competent at the school’s recognised
sports and due to this they did not enjoy PE. Whilst global football is constructed as a masculine, aggressive and competitive game, the local interpretation was again vital for shaping girls’ experiences. Instead of viewing football in this way, at a local level the girls reconstructed it so that it was a sports activity they enjoyed taking part in and that they could access, but was different to other opportunities afforded to them. The girls in this study can be viewed as playing ‘their’ football rather than ‘the’ football but the consequence of this was that at a global level it did not present any real challenge to the prevalent views of football as a symbol of masculinity and female participation being inappropriate and subordinate to men’s. These global assumptions are expected to continue whilst there is a lack of any real media profile, society continuing to perpetuate the belief that football is a male sport and one that girls cannot play, the continued education of young people that this is the reality and the marginalisation of girls who do wish to play to alternative spaces as occurred with these sessions.

At a local level though the girls were able to reshape both football and their beliefs about themselves as non sporty. They used this experience as an opportunity to experiment with alternative identities as well as extending their own scripts regarding what they felt they could achieve within sport.
Chapter 8
Conclusions

8.1 Introduction

The research documented in this thesis was conducted within a context of rapid expansion within female football participation. This expansion has occurred within a global society that continues in the western world to be governed by gender regulations and norms and a sport that remains controlled and dominated by men, whilst providing a central aspect of masculine identity. The thesis was developed to understand how the entry of girls into this masculine domain impacted on girls’ gender ideals, values and gender identity construction. Women and girls are surrounded by gender discourses which create feminine ideals they are required to aspire too. Traditionally sport has not had a central role within these discourses, femininity instead has usually been constructed in opposition to sporting discourses. However, at a local level women can and do participate in sport and often face little gender conflict whilst doing so. The participation of women in sports defined as masculine has extended their ability to use sport as a mechanism for overcoming and contesting gender regulations. This study aimed to understand more about girls’ participation in these alternative activities and whether their involvement in football had the potential to disrupt the binaries that constitute the traditional gender order.

The initial aims and key objective of the research were:

- To examine the experiences of girls participating in football.
- To assess how football experiences contribute to the construction of girls’ gender identities.

Objectives:

1) To examine how pre-adolescent girls construct their gender identity.
2) To identify the influences on girls' gender identity construction.
3) To examine girls' experiences of participating in football.
4) To examine whether participating in football impacts on girls' gender identity construction and in what way.
5) Through the research process, develop a methodology that allows girls to engage with the research and express their experiences in ways most suitable for them.

8.1.1 Deconstructing pre-adolescent girls' gender identity construction

The research has illustrated how girls can exhibit multiple gender identities, continually adapting to different contexts and circumstances within their daily lives. Butler's (1990) post-structuralist theory of identity has been used as the framework to underpin the analysis. Examining the girls' identities using this has illustrated how their identities are socially constructed and can alter according to the discourses dominant in certain social situations. In this study the girls felt they were able to choose how they shaped their identity but it was evident that dominant global notions of femininity were key influences on their local interpretations. However, the girls did fluctuate between what they identified as different types of girl, particularly with their behaviour. As Bloustien's (2003) research with teenage girls also identified, the girls felt they were currently able to experiment with different types of behaviour, some of which reflected traditional 'girlie' actions – dressing up, putting on make-up and doing their hair – and others which they equated with 'non-girlie' activities – getting dirty, fighting, playing computer games. Being academically intelligent provided a central aspect of the girls' identities, but they felt this was in opposition to idealised femininity.

Constructing their visual identity was demonstrated to be a much more rigid process and one heavily defined by dominant discourses. Although the visual discourses they felt compelled to conform to were not as numerous and restrictive as adult feminine ones, the girls were still required to comply with a number of basic visual rules constructed at a global level, which ensured they were identifiable as girls. Proweller (1998) discusses girlhood as a grooming ground for adult femininity and there was evidence of this in the current
research. Although not completely accepting of all feminine discourses, the girls were preparing themselves for an appropriate adult visual identity and recognised the importance of doing so for their social acceptance. Having long hair and an appropriate body shape was viewed as a central to this. Their perceptions of appropriate body shape were centred around dominant western beliefs that a slim, toned female body is sexually desirable and a visual illustration of femininity. Reflecting the conclusions drawn in Harris' (2004) research the girls' identities were therefore a complicated mixture of compliance and contestation of various gender discourses. It was evident that while there was not one type of girl or one way of defining themselves, traditional femininities exerted a strong central pull and were referenced back to even when the girls deviated from a norm they very much recognised and largely accepted.

8.1.2 Identifying the influences on girls' gender identity construction

Girls' identity construction has been shown to be heavily influenced by dominant gender discourses. Using Paechter's (2003) model the research has examined both global and local discourses influencing this. It has been evident despite being relatively young the girls are affected by gender messages transmitted through the mass media, although they may not be listening to these messages to the same extent adult females do. The research reflects Kacen's (2000) view that the girls' beliefs around the ideal body and visual discourses are shaped by regulations transmitted to them through television, magazines and general celebrity culture. The girls are able to identify gender regulations surrounding the body and are already experiencing anxiety if they feel their own bodies are not reflective of these ideals. However, at an individual level, the girls are not yet at a position where they are taking action to attempt to ensure their bodies and visual appearance reflect feminine norms. They instead appear aware that these pressures exist and attempt to comply where possible, but still feel it is not yet necessary to actively try to shape their bodies to guarantee the appropriate look.
At a local level the institutional structures girls interact with have a central role in influencing the girls' identity construction. The school the girls attended contained informal gender divides and the formal school PE curriculum was heavily gender differentiated. This assisted the girls with developing beliefs regarding appropriate behaviour and activities for girls and boys to engage in. Similar to Hurtes' (2002) research, the girls' friendship group also provided a crucial influence on shaping their gender identities. These groups were developed by girls with similar interests and identities but this group also played a central role in constructing and reinforcing girls' beliefs, interests and identities. The research has illustrated how constructing an idealised feminine identity can equate to power and influence within the girls' local environment. However, reflecting the 'square girls' in Renold's (2001) work, the research girls were able to seek some power in alternative ways, through their educational competence and by aligning themselves to dominant visual discourses although not to the same extent as the 'popular', extreme 'girlie' girls.

8.1.3 Examining girls’ experiences of participating in football

The research has illustrated that for the girls involved, playing football has provided them with a positive sporting experience. It was also very apparent that the girls' experiences of football in this research were heavily dependent on the context it took place in. Their enjoyment was gained by football being taken out of its normal global context as both a masculine and sport domain. It was this repositioning of football that allowed the girls to enjoy participating. The research has illustrated how many of the girls did not consider themselves to be sporty. One of the key aspects of the football sessions for them was that they were not dominated by the school's established sporty girls. Providing a sport to participate in outside of the girls' regular sports context and one which reflected global definitions of sport, allowed the girls to actively take part but also reshape the beliefs they held about themselves and their sports ability. Sport to the girls had previously been defined by traditional female team games and was an exclusive arena they were largely unable to access. The football they played was not seen initially as a 'real' sport by
them because it was not defined by these standards and it was something they could play and were competent at. They were able to give football its own local interpretation. This was key to their enjoyment of football. Equally, as well as the football sessions being conducted outside of the normal sports environment, football was also removed from the overtly masculine domain it is constructed in within wider society. Their enjoyment of football appeared to stem from the fact it was neither football or sport as traditional constructed. It was instead ‘pure’, taken back to its basic level as an activity. The girls gained pleasure from the activity, using their bodies in alternative ways and feeling they were competent at the fundamental aspects of the activity. Viewing the sessions as ‘pure’ football did not appear to devalue them at all for the girls. They did not consider their football was devalued because it was not defined by normalised masculine standards. Instead they recognised it was different and it was because of this and the context in which football was provided that they were able to enjoy participating. It allowed them to broaden their notions of what both sport and football was and see it as something they were capable of participating in.

The girls’ experiences differed in a number of respects from girls’ experiences documented in previous literature. Renold, (2001); Skelton, (1997); Swain, (2001), all illustrated the negative experiences girls have encountered when participating in football. The settings that girls participated in have been a key contributor to these experiences. The girls in previous research have all attempted to access football on male-defined terms. Access have been through football as a masculinised sport, it has been competitive and based on skill level and competence and as a result the girls participating have been marginalised, abused and continually compared to male performances which they are unable to measure up to because of unequal early access to the sport. Removing football from the male and sport setting also has removed these comparisons. Football for the girls in the research was purely an activity to take part in with no predefined expectations or beliefs about who should be playing and how it should be played.
8.1.4 How girls integrate participating in football within their gender identities

Football was perceived by the girls as an alternative activity they took part in. Whilst they enjoyed this it did not become a central element of their lifestyle or an important part of who they were. The wider impact it could have on their identity construction at a general level was therefore limited. The removal of football from both its masculine and sports context also limited any potential disruptive effects it could have on the girls’ construction of a traditional gender identity. Although for different reasons the results reflect Scraton et al’s (1999) and Menesson’s (2000) views that participation in male dominated sport by women did little to disrupt the dominant gender order. The girls however, did view the activity as something different and did feel that during participation they could develop alternative identities that were different from the personas they adopted with the school setting or home life. Cockburn and Clarke (2002) suggest that for girls to be involved in sport they have to be a ‘masculinised doer’ of PE or a tomboy (2002: 661). This research has illustrated the reality of how sport fits in with girls’ gender identities is far more complex. Football provided an opportunity to experiment with a different identity but this did not necessarily need to be a non-feminine identity. For some of the girls it gave them the opportunity to develop ‘sporty’ identities for a period of time, whilst for others it did allow them to reinforce the tomboy identity they created more generally for themselves. For some girls, again reflecting Scraton et al’s (1999) and Cox and Thompson’s (2000) work with adult women, football presented an opportunity to reject traditional feminine stereotypes for a period of time, use their bodies in alternative ways and try an activity that under normal circumstances they would not be able to do. It was simply another setting for them to try different identities. Similar to Thorpe’s conclusions when examining female snow boarders, the research illustrated that “rather than conceiving of female snowboarding experiences in terms of a dialectical struggle between empowerment and constraint, I have shown that resistance to, and complicity with, traditional notions of femininity coexist within the same cultural space” (2005: 95). The girls enacted many types of identities within their normal lives and in the formal setting.
However, for most of the girls this experimentation was still set within the context of visual feminine discourses. Experimentation was limited and their identity was still required to be constructed within the boundaries of acceptable visual feminine identities. The research also illustrated that whilst the girls felt they currently are able to experiment with their identities and deviate from the norm in the playing out of multiple identities, reflecting the views of parents in Kenneth-Sandnabba and Ahberg's, (1999) research, they expected that this would become increasingly restricted with age. Childhood was viewed as a time when flexibility in identity construction was afforded to girls in particular without question. However the girls involved believed that as they became older gender identity would need to be constructed in a more rigid fashion and more tightly aligned to all dominant discourses. There was a perception therefore that participating in football as they approached adulthood would become more complex and eventually unacceptable. The girls felt that as gender discourses became more rigid so too would those surrounding football, making experimenting in either setting problematic. Football would become real rather than 'pure' and they expected this to cause conflict with constructing an adult feminine identities.

8.1.5 Developing a methodology that allows girls to engage and express their experiences in ways most suitable for them

The research has illustrated the benefits of utilising an ethnographic approach when undertaking research with children as advocated by James, Jenks and Prout (1998). Having an alternative identity other than researcher has been crucial to developing a trusting and open relationship with the girls and also observing them in their relaxed daily settings. As Archer, Pratt and Phillips (2001) also advocate, the coaching enabled an understanding of the individual girls, what they enjoyed, what they disliked and their personalities, all of which were vital for placing the research data in context. The research utilised a qualitative multi-method, interactive, dynamic approach. Through the combined use of images, story writing, disposable cameras, magazines and focus groups the girls were able to communicate in multiple ways and share
information using approaches they felt most comfortable with. It was evident during the research that whilst these techniques made the process more interesting their real purpose was to give the girls a focus, make them feel at ease, confident and in control of the research process. Once this environment had been achieved the girls spoke extremely confidently and articulately about their views and opinions and were happy to share intimate details about their lives. The majority of the data collected was verbal largely prompted and directed through the other alternative methods. The research was conducted in a messy reactive fashion. The girls often directed the conversations, or were prompted to undertake a specific task and would then develop the conversations through this themselves. Due to this a great deal of rich data was collected and themes emerged which had not been considered in the initial research design. Throughout the research the need for flexibility was apparent. The research data collected was diverse and sporadic which made analysis difficult, however there is a depth to the data collected that would not have been possible to obtain had more traditional methods been used.

8.2 Research contributions: Understanding girls and sport

The research has offered an insight into the position of sport within girl culture that is not readily available in research elsewhere. Whilst the work of authors such as Harris (2004), Boustein (2003) and McRobbie (1978) all provide valuable information regarding ‘girlhood’ and the construction of girl culture, these do not include an understanding of the place of sport within this. Equally when examining research on girls’ sports participation (e.g. Cockburn and Clarke, 2002; Williams and Bedward, 1999; Gorely, et al 2003; Malcom, 2003;) the focus is on the girls’ sports experiences and not on how sport can sit within the culture of girlhood except to comment that the potential conflict between the two is a reason for limiting girls’ participation. Research examining adult women’s participation often examines how women construct sport within their lives (Mennesson, 2000; Scraton et al, 1999) but the same attention has not been directed to girls’ participation. Shakib’s (2003) study of high school female basketball players acknowledges the importance of
examining the peer context when investigating adolescent female physical activity. However, the study provides limited information on the general positioning of sport with the girl culture the players interacted with on a daily basis.

This thesis has illustrated how sport sits fairly comfortably within girl culture, girls' peer groups and for the popular girls was actually a status symbol. Participation in the school teams was a very visible sign of success in a school with a strong sports culture. In this setting sport was a normal and accepted part of everyday girlhood and something that limited the research girls' power and status in school because they could not access it. It also illustrates that whilst sport was not a central part of the everyday lives of the research girls it did have a place within their experiences and in contrast to Choi's (2000) beliefs was for some girls an important element of the girl culture that they were absorbed in on a daily basis.

The research undertaken has been one of few to explore young people's sports participation outside of formal PE or formal extra curricular opportunities. Whilst research (Williams and Bedward, 1999; Wright, 1999, Penney, 2002) has explored young people and specifically girls' experience of sport within an education setting, there is little work available examining how these experiences may change within less rigid sports participation structures. Malcom's (2003) examination of recreational girl softball players is one of the few pieces of research to address this area. As a result of this there is limited information on non-sporty girls' experiences of sport outside of recognising they often have an uncomfortable time in school PE. This study has begun to address this gap.

### 8.2.1 Sport and the non-sporty girl

While this research did not specifically seek to engage girls who would not normally participate in sport, the involvement of these girls in the study gives rise to both academic and policy contributions. The girls in the research had minimal interest in either sport or football and did not feel able to join the
school's extra curricular clubs. As a result of this the majority constructed themselves as 'un-sporty' and lacking in ability because they were not particularly skilful at the sports that were held in high regard by the school. These beliefs permeated all areas of sport and the girls therefore felt they would not be particularly competent at any sport. For this reason they were highly unlikely to join sports clubs outside of school and particularly not a club offering opportunities for girls to play football. Penney and Harris (1997) noted similar issues with many pupils in their research wanting to participate in school teams but feeling too intimidated by those who excel to do so. The authors suggest participation levels will not be increased until these feelings of inadequacy are addressed. The football sessions went some way to tackling this issue. Taking football out of both the masculine football setting and the girls' sports setting in the school enabled the girls the opportunity to reshape their beliefs about their sporting ability and enjoy participating in an activity where ability did not determine either participation and enjoyment.

For football and other sports more generally there appears therefore, to be a group of girls who will happily become casual participants if the right environment is provided for them to achieve this. This is not to say all females require this setting to encourage sports participation. As Colwell indicates, "some women, and some men find.....the competitive and macho values of sport to be the very elements that they find valuable or positive" (1999: 225). For some females therefore, the development of skills, competition and numerous other benefits they can obtain from playing sport regularised by masculine structures and values is what draws and attract them to it (Gorely et al, 2003; Williams and Bedward, 1999). Feminist researchers stress the importance of not viewing women as a homogenous group and there is clearly no overall 'fit-all' solution to encourage females to take up participation in sport. The research would suggest however that for these types of girls the movement out of both the competitive male and female sports environments helps them to participate in sport, redefine their beliefs about themselves as non-sporty and enjoy doing so in ways that have not been possible when accessing the more competitive male orientated culture of sports participation. Humberstone's research examining girls' experiences in an outdoor education
programme illustrated similar findings. Taking physical activity outside of its
gendered context encouraged girls to participate on equal terms and “write an
alternative script to those prescribed for them by cultural and familial
representations” (1987: 45). Whilst for many girls participating in football
through both the normal masculine channels and the establishing channels of
the female game is appealing and desirable, it is possible to attract a more
casual level of participant who may then become interested in engaging more
with the game in terms of general interest by using a similar model to the one
used in the research. There also may be the potential to develop casual adult
women’s participation in a similar way.

8.2.2 Research contributions: understanding girls and gender identity
construction

The study has offered a valuable indication of the relevance of both Butler’s
(1990) and Paechter’s (2003) theories of identity for understanding young
girls’ identity construction. It was recognised in both chapter two and chapter
seven that childhood constitutes a separate and distinct life phase for
individuals and one where flexibility is afforded and accepted that would not
be available in adulthood. Both Paechter and Butler have developed their
theories using a post structural underpinning but essentially to discuss the
identity construction of adults. Both have however been useful in exploring the
complexity of girl identity construction and for highlighting the diverse nature
of this and the role sport plays in influencing this process. It has been evident
that although the girls may refer to each other as tomboys and ‘girlie girls’
their reality is a negotiation between competing discourses. Childhood, as
both Harris (2004) and Bloustien (2003) discuss, affords them some flexibility
in the rejection of these discourses that is often not as acceptable in
adulthood, but the balancing process through which girls contest, challenge,
accept dominant discourses reflect the negotiations adult women undertake
when attempting to construct an identity that is both individual but appropriate.
The girls wanted to feel they defined themselves and controlled who they
were and it has been evident that they do so to a certain extent. However, the
use of Bulter’s rationale has illustrated how much of the way they defined
themselves was shaped and developed through discourses governing social appropriateness. This positioning has been particularly useful for developing understanding about the girls’ identity construction and the place of sport within this. Whilst previous research focusing specifically on sport has tended to suggest that girl participants are usually tomboys and through this identity they are able to negotiate access to sport (Swain, 2000; Scraton et al, 1999; Harris, 2002; Mennesson, 2000) this research has illustrated that girls’ identity construction is far more complex. They are not solely a ‘tomboy’. They may use elements of unfeminine or masculine discourses to gain entry in certain social settings but this did not automatically define who they were. Equally, and contrasting with Cockburn and Clarke’s assumptions, participating in sport did not automatically produce confusion, tension and conflict for girls with regard to their ‘sense of self’ (2002: 662). Sport has been found to sit fairly comfortably within some girls’ feminine identities.

The current research also offers some insight into an infrequently researched age group. Both Davies (2003) and Francis (1998) offer an in-depth illustration of the impact of gender on the behaviour and attitudes of younger children and Bloustien, (2003) and Harris, (2004) focus on the construction of identity amongst teenage girls. There is limited information on identity and girl culture amongst girls who are neither young children or adolescents, but are affected by discourses from both life periods. Although adolescence is recognised as a conflicting period for young girls, this life stage where girls are neither one or the other appears to be equally complicated. The girls were still allowed some experimentation that is given to younger children but they are rapidly learning that to ensure power and success within their social groupings it is essential to conform to certain feminine discourses and replicate the feminine behaviour of older teenagers and young women. The commercial sector is recognising the importance of this life stage as the newest generation of consumers and are targeting their goods at these ‘tweenies’ (a marketing buzzword used to describe someone between their childhood and teenage years. (Russell and Taylor, 2002)). The research has offered some understanding of these girls and the influences in their lives,
particularly in relation to their complex friendship networks which are clearly as influential as any teenage groups.

8.2.3 Methodological contributions

Until recently there has been limited use of methods adapted to suit the needs of young people in sport and leisure research. The work of MacPhail (2001), Oliver and Lalik (2001) and Gorely et al, (2003) and the current research have all illustrated the benefits of developing a sensitive research methodology that suits the individuals involved in the research. Many of the benefits of this approach for this study would be equally applicable with adults. The research has increased understanding of ways to collect research with young people. The story-writing sessions were particularly useful for encouraging the girls to discuss a situation that was not within their immediate understanding or experiences, in this case how they felt football would be positioned within their adult feminine identity. The stories provided the ideal way to encourage them to think about this and then discuss in some depth the story ends they wrote. Equally the use of disposable cameras allowed an insight to be gained into their lives outside of the school and research setting. Although somewhat limited this provided an appreciation of the types of activities they engaged in outside of school, their home life and important aspect of their lives away from school. This tool was also invaluable in allowing the girls to have some control of the research process and feel important within it. Reflecting Schratz and Steiner-Loffler’s (1998) and Oliver and Lalik’s (2001) research it gave all the girls an opportunity to be heard and share their views, even the girls who tended to contribute less in group settings.

One of the key aspects learnt from the research was the importance of developing a relationship with the girls that extended beyond the research setting. They had to feel I was interested in them as people. This was achieved to a certain extent through the dual role of coach and researcher, the merits of which are documented in Cox and Thompson’s work (2000), but also through my continuous presence at the school. It was through this continuous interaction with them and by just 'hanging around' with them that
the girls learnt to trust me and talk to me and see me as a non-teacher. I did become an adult with whom they wanted to share their views and this was key to producing the in-depth research data that has been discussed in the thesis. Part of this relationship was cemented early on with the realisation that it was essential to talk to girls in friendship groups. Because of this the girls were comfortable and in the early weeks, as Mayall (2000) also suggests, gained confidence from one another that it was acceptable to talk to me. It also helped with the durability of the research process in that I became almost another friend talking as part of their circle at lunchtimes. Without this it is likely they would have become bored with having to attend formal research sessions on most days. However, because they used this as a chance to have their normal discussions with an adult they considered a friend it was not a problem that had to be faced.

There has been greater encouragement than ever to involve children as active participants in the research process in recent years. This has been growing in the UK since the 1980s with mounting pressure for children’s voices to be heard and their opinions to be sought in matters that affect them (Alderson and Morrow, 2004). With the increase in research that has been adapted to be child friendly there appears to have been an accompanying assumption that adopting innovative techniques automatically equates to rich, methodologically sound and useful data. The current research has illustrated in reality the process of collection is more complex. Certain sessions would not always yield data of any quality and others which seemed extremely informal and unstructured would. The main difficulty initially identified when attempting to analyse the data was the number of inconsistencies apparent in what the girls were saying and the difficulties of deciphering these whilst still giving the girls a voice in the research. The analysis process requires the disentangling of the data produced by children using a multiplicity of different methods and this process is not widely documented in research. Green and Hill’s (2004) work was essential for guiding this process and reassuring me that it was virtually impossible to create a ‘pure’ voice for the girls. Instead a layer of interpretation was essential to make sense of the data but did not
necessarily prevent the girls’ views and opinions being at the forefront in the two results chapters.

8.3 Implications of the study: Policy and practice

The thesis’ key contribution to future policy is the information provided regarding ways to encourage non sporty girls to participate in sport. The lower participation rates of girls generally and the drop-off rates of girls in sport has been documented in chapter three. At the same time, recent media attention has highlighted the growing levels of childhood obesity in westernised countries and government policy has shifted to focus on the potential use of exercise and physical activity to combat this growing epidemic. Finding ways to encouraging non-participants and those disengaged with sport to participate in some form of activity is of greater importance in the current climate than it ever has been previously.

Bale and Sang (1996) illustrate the potential of sport and physical education to take different forms to those regarded as the norm. However this research has shown that to redefine sport it is vital to take it out of its current recognised context. The situation in which the girls took part in football, away from competitive sport, not directed by teachers and in a fun friendly atmosphere were key to their enjoyment. It was completely different from the physical education contexts where girls have been demonstrated to have negative experiences (e.g. Scraton, 1992; Williams and Bedward, 1999; Wright, 1999, 2000). The sessions removed a number of issues that have been demonstrated to be a barrier to girls in physical education. There was no issue with uncomfortable and inappropriate kit (Choi, 2000; Williams and Bedward, 1999), the girls chose what they wanted to wear at the sessions. The high ability girls that Williams and Bedward (1999) identified as problematic for lower skilled girls were also removed from the sessions, either through non participation or due to the activity being new for everyone.
Potentially, the experiences the girls gained in this study from taking part in football could be obtained by other girls with similar attitudes and beliefs about sport if offered the opportunity to participate in a similar context. Equally as the emphasis is on ability as a barrier it may provide a similar setting for boys of low ability who cannot access, or do not want to access, sport as defined by masculine standards. As Penney asks “where are the opportunities to participate informally, for fun with friends of varied ability?” (2002: 119). This was exactly what the football session became and in doing so as Penney (2002) asserts it confronted the dominance of particular behaviours and values associated with more readily available sports participation.

When the girls were participating in football they did appear to become more engaged with football at a wider level (possibly assisted by the Euro 2004 championships). A number commented they watched the women’s FA cup final on the television which they would not have considered doing before and several girls also purchased football shirts that they attended the sessions in. The non-sporty, non-masculine element of the football sessions did not prevent the girls from engaging therefore more widely with global football. To develop these casual participants within the game it is not necessary to significantly alter the ethos and structure of women’s football. Instead football or indeed sport needs to be integrated within existing play structures available for girls which do not have ingrained in them an ability led, competitive sporting ethos. Wright (2000) questions how sport can be planned and taught so that the centrality of team sport is dislodged and it provides opportunities for all boys and girls to explore a variety of more equitable and empowering movement possibilities. For this particular group of girls, and possibly for others similar, the football provided exactly the arena to achieve the environment Wright is seeking.

8.4 Future research

There are inevitably limitations to the research which impact on the conclusions drawn. The girls involved in the research were all from a similar...
background and socio-economic class. Whilst the research provides in-depth information regarding the lives of girls within this group it is unclear how applicable the results are to a wider population. For further research it would be both interesting and useful to explore the research objectives covered in the thesis in relation to the experiences of girls from different social classes and ethnic groupings. Skeggs (1997) has illustrated the influence social class can have on females’ construction of gender values. Certain aspects of the girls’ gender identity construction are also identifiable as being influenced by social class: their engagement with educational discourses, the desire to have a career and be successful alongside other traditional pathways of marriage and children (Harris, 2004). It would therefore be useful to understand how these compare with the beliefs and values of young girls from working and lower middle class backgrounds. As Penney and Evans (2002) suggest for a full understanding it is necessary to engage with the dynamics between gender and issues of class, ethnicity, ability and age. The current research has not addressed the issues of ability, ethnicity and social class. Several girls who took part in the research were black and Asian. However, they appeared to have been strongly westernised both within the school culture and their home lives and there was rarely any discussion regarding how their ethnicity impacted on their views and beliefs. When analysing the research data there were no noticeable differences in the information they provided from that of the white girls involved. Scraton, Caudwell and Holland (2005) have undertaken research with adult female football participants from a diverse ethnic background to explore the intersection of race, class and gender. It would be useful to take this research forward in a similar manner again focusing on girls, from diverse ethnic backgrounds and particularly to intersect social class within this analysis. Basu (2004) has undertaken research examining Bengali teenagers and young women’s experience of traditional Asian sports, in this case Kabadi. However there is limited research examining girls from different ethnic backgrounds, and their involvement in both traditionally white English and male sport. There is a lack of knowledge on how class, race and gender intersect to influence the identity construction of girls this age. Such research would begin to address this issue and in doing so would also assist with understanding the role and value of sport in the lives
of girls from different socio economic and ethnic backgrounds and how these compare to the middle class girls’ experiences detailed in this thesis.

The current research looks at girls in a very specific time period in their lives. It may be beneficial to undertake a longer-term tracking study with girls of this age. The girls involved in the research are now 13 years old. None have continued in their football participation, largely because no similar context was offered to participate in football as was available as part of the research. Details of local clubs were passed to girls and their parents with the offer to escort girls to clubs and train with them for a period of time to integrate them into other opportunities. However, none of the girls were interested in participating in football in its ‘real’ competitive context. They would only continue in the informal, non-sport setting provided. It would be useful to explore in more detail why they have ceased participation and whether as they enter their teenage years they would participate if a similar context were now provided. Further research would examine their current identity construction, how certain influences may have shifted, whether they still feel they are afforded such flexibility within this and how as they are moving towards a more adult feminine identity sport can sit within this. When undertaking the research it was evident that the girls were not particularly disengaged with sport, just unable to access suitable opportunities. Equally, they did not feel that sport in any way conflicted with developing an appropriate female gender identity. However, previous research (e.g. Choi, 2000; Cockburn and Clarke, 2002; Williams and Bedward, 1999) suggests that during adolescence, girls see sport as becoming increasingly incompatible with an adult feminine identity and this is a major influence limiting their participation. A tracking study would be useful to examine when and why these attitudes alter, if in fact they do. It is understood that girls’ participation lessens in adolescence but there is limited knowledge of girls’ experiences during this process and how and why their values may or may not change.

It has been evident during the research that sport is not necessarily incompatible with a feminine identity. For several of the girls, sport was
regarded as highly compatible with an extreme 'girlie' identity, as exemplified by the 'popular' girls. Being recognised as successful at sport assisted with securing status and power in the school for boys and girls. It would be useful to undertake more in-depth work with these types of girls to understand more fully how sport fits into their identity, why they are able to ignore its wider connotations as a masculine domain and instead use it as a vital part of hegemonic femininity within their local environment. A tracking study of these girls would also be useful, again to see if attitudes change or whether they are still able to position sport easily within what otherwise appears to be an extremely conventional female identity. There is an assumption that female sports participants automatically present some challenge to gender stereotypes through their involvement in sport (Colwell, 1999). However for the sporty popular girls in the study this did not appear to be the case. Participation caused little conflict or the requirement to transgress certain feminine boundaries. It was simply seen as compatible with being female and a normal and desirable activity to want to participate in. Further research in this area would provide a better understanding of the role of sport in these girls' gender identities but also understand how and why their attitudes are different to females who perceive sport as undesirable because it is perceived as masculine and participation may therefore bring their identity and sexuality into question.

The thesis has provided an understanding of girls' gender identity construction and the role of sport within this. However, further research may consider examining boys' experiences of this particularly if a similar sample of boys could be encouraged to become involved. Penney and Evans (2002) emphasise the need for gender to be recognised as an issue for men and women, boys and girls and to appreciate the restrictions hegemonic masculinity can place on boys as well as girls. Boys also construct multiple masculinities but this research has focused on the detrimental influence of hegemonic masculinity for girls' participation. Whilst for the girls in the research their non-involvement in sport was unproblematic and not detrimental to their identity construction, it would be useful to understand in greater detail how boys construct an identity excluding sport when sport is
such a strong signifier of traditional masculinity. As Messner suggests, “all boys are to a greater or lesser extent, judged according to their ability, or lack of ability in contact sports” (1992: 163). There is potential to learn more about the experiences of boys who do not match up to standard in terms of their sporting ability and what impact this has on their identity construction.

Boys in Bramham’s (2003) research noted that there was a lack of opportunities for them to take part in non-sport ‘dominant masculine contest’ games although some would welcome this opportunity. It would be useful therefore, to understand if boys who have been excluded from sports opportunities on the basis of their ability, or because of their dislike of sport in this context, would benefit from similar sessions to the girls where they can participate in opportunities that do not require ability and remove the competitive masculine element of sport. Such research would assist with understanding the complexities of gender identity construction for both boys and girls. Although a body of literature is available examining the role of sport in the construction of masculinity (e.g. Connell, 1995; Messner, 1992), as with girls, there is a limited understanding of this process on younger boys. A number of researchers have looked at the role school sport has on constructing boys masculinities (Bramham, 2003; Skelton, 2000; Swain, 2000; Burgess, Edwards and Skinner, 2003). However there is little knowledge of boys who have limited ability or are disinterested in sport and the impact this has on their identity construction and their perceptions of gender discourses and beliefs when they are continually having to operate in a social world that place such value on sport as a signifier of masculinity. To fully appreciate the place of sport in gender identity construction it is necessary to understand its role with both boys and girls.

8.5 Concluding summary

This research was developed with the intention of examining girls’ experiences in football, in the context of the continuing expansion of female participants in the sport. From this it has been possible to examine girls’
gender identity construction more generally to understand the possible impact football participation may have on this process. During the course of the research, these initial aims have provided the central focus but the process of engaging and working closely with a small group of young research participants revealed further dimensions of knowledge that had not been considered when initially developing the research. The methodological approach has became a more prominent component than initially planned, and the research has been able to contribute to a growing literature which sees young people actively involved in sport and leisure research. The approach has also enabled a detailed examination of girls’ lives beyond their experiences of sport. This broadening of the scope of the research revealed further potential for work of this type within sport and leisure studies. Much is to be gained by sports researchers engaging directly with children and young people; diversifying their methodological approaches to do so; and through this extending the agenda of youth sport research. Doing so may enable us to genuinely understand the position of sports within young people’s lives, to encourage those who are apathetic to becoming involved, and in doing so re-create sport as a more inclusive institution.
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Appendix 1: Session Log

Date session took place: 12.03.04
Duration of session: 1 hour ¼
Location of session: In school hall

Equipment needed for the sessions:

- Balls for everyone
- Goalkeeping card
- Bibs
- Cones
- 4 goals
- Cameras

Research section: What will be discussed/tasks to do:

Try and do interview with Lisa and Ursula from last week if possible.

Practical part of the session:

WARM UP:
Everyone with a ball, running round same as last week. Do different exercises, tap from one foot to the other, balance ball, head it, kick it from side to side etc.
Series of dribbling races in and out of cones.
In fours passing round in a square, then add a defender in.
Then try and head it round the square, either catch and feed or if good enough head it on.
Treasure chest game dribbling in and back.
MAIN SESSION:
Back to back drill
Goalkeeping skills – In pairs lying on the floor, have to throw ball up jump up and catch it. Keep changing over.
Go over principles of goalkeeping staying outside area, crouched position ready to go up or down, get in line with the ball, want to smother it not give anyone a rebound attempt.
Then have 4 goals and a square filled with attackers and defenders. Can shoot in any of the goals so long as inside the square. Keep changing over.
Then have a full game to finish.
Melanie, Helen, Ellie, Karen, Katherine and Beth, Lisa, Sarah, Alison

Support coaches present:

| Rob |

Any staff/parents present:

| None |

Focus of the session: Practical/research

| Practical session on goalkeeping and follow up to previous weeks skills. Research explain about the camera to get some more idea about the girlie girl/tomboy issues and complete the interview with Ursula and Lisa. |

Prior to the Session:

| What do I hope to get out of the session? |
| I hope to get some interview data out of the session and some more observational notes similar to last week when I was properly able to observe the group dynamics and the way the girls are reacting. I also hope that the girls will listen a bit more this week and be a bit nicer to one another particularly with going outside and seeing how they react. I also hope to start off the camera data and explain to the girls what they are for. |

| What tasks are planned for the session? |
| In terms of research only one formal interview with Ursual and Lisa but would also like to do the camera thing. More practical stuff but working on basic skills still which the girls are still struggling with. |

| What do I feel about what I am trying to do? |
| Not sure how the picture thing is going to work, hope it will but not sure whether the girls will manage to do it unsupervised and remember to do it and remember to bring the cameras back. |
During the session:

What was my role at the session?

I started off by going over the research information and then led the session when we went outside. I was going to try and do some research sessions with the girls over some of the drills.

What did I actually do?

In practice it took about 20 minutes to explain the research session and then we ended up working outside which I wasn't overly keen on because it was very cold and wet. However, the girls were very keen to work outside so we did. I decided to leave the research aspects because it was just too cold and muddy and also I felt like I had to constantly direct the session. I also have organised to see most of them in the week next week at lunchtimes so there was less pressure to do research stuff.

What did the girls do? Who worked with who?

Karen, Katherine and Beth worked together with Melanie and in the other group Helen, Ellie, Sarah and Alison and Lisa all worked together.

What were the girls reactions to what they were doing?

The girls were really keen to work outside. For the first time this week I noticed the power they have to manipulate me, particularly collectively. Even though I feel like I am being authoritative all the time the girls are actually good at turning situations down and chipping away at my power in subtle ways. I think the crying last week is quite a good example of this. They recognise that they probably can't directly challenge me back but by crying I will usually back down and let them have their own way. This week with going outside they completely wore me down and recognised that by pleading and adding numbers to their pleading they could persuade me to do whatever they want. I think they recognise I just want them to enjoy the session and saying that certain things would make them enjoy it more or by saying that they are not enjoying certain activities is a very powerful way of making me change what I am doing to something that they want to do. After going outside I saw this again with Melanie who was whining quite considerably during the drills saying that she didn't like doing them and she didn't want to do them. The do obviously enjoy playing matches but I was quite worried about Katherine who doesn't seem to get involved as much when we do play games. I think she prefers the skills and the girls aren't skilful enough to be able to do a pass to everyone type of game to include everyone in it. Is quite difficult to know how to deal with this.

They did enjoy getting muddy and playing outside even though it was very cold, absolutely no one complained about being cold or getting dirty, even Alison who is I would say the most girlie of all of them seemed to enjoy tramping round in the mud.

In terms of the research all of the girls seemed excited about doing the lunchtime sessions and a number asked if they could come along more than once.
They were also quite excited about the cameras. I was not sure how well I have explained it to them and Hattie in particular was questioning what she would be doing. Sarah was saying what when you are a girlie girl? And Melanie who I have not actually sat down with and discussed the whole girlie girl, tomboy categories repeatedly stated she didn’t understand. Karen explained it by saying ‘well if you are playing with Barbie dolls then take a picture’ and instructed the girls that they ‘should get someone else to take it of them’ which was quite useful. Helen’s problem lay with the fact that she didn’t ever feel like she behaved like a ‘girlie girl’ and so it would be very difficult for her to take photo’s of this. Although I repeatedly stressed this was fine and she just needed to take pictures of her being a tomboy she obviously wanted to make this point clear to me and stated a number of times that she ‘just didn’t behave like a girlie girl’ ‘it just wasn’t her’

A couple of issues with the girls not listening again which I kept pulling them up on. The biggest problem arose with the game of treasure chest. We introduced a stealing rule but the girls did not seem able to listen to the rules of this and were repeatedly not following the instructions. I was particularly harsh with Helen and Melanie and said that they were cheating again and then the bottom group of Karen, Katherine and Beth started to have a conflict with Sarah and Alison and Lisa over the same issue. Again I saw the ability of the girls to jump on the bandwagon together in an attempt to gain power in the setting. Someone I am not sure who started a cry of cheat at Karen and Beth’s group and all of a sudden all the girls were aggressively chanting and pointing at the group crying cheat. For me it was quite frightening because suddenly they seemed out of control. I felt I should stop the group from behaving in this aggressive manner towards one another and that I should intervene but I couldn’t be heard. I was also very shocked by this sort of behaviour and is perhaps an indication of how much I let my own stereotypical views influence what I am doing without realising it. I think the thing that horrified me most was what would teachers or parents think if they walked past now and saw the 9 and 10 year old girls chanting abusively and aggressively at one another. This is not a very good image to portray but would I have felt it was so negative if I had been coaching boys? This episode led Melanie also to turn on me and say why was I picking on her group and saying that they were cheating when obviously all of them were cheating but it wasn’t fair. She stated very forcefully that she didn’t want to play anymore folded her arms and had what I would call a very girlie tantrum (again reflecting my own stereotypes on what it is to behave like a girl) and stormed off. Beth also questioned why people should be allowed to get away with cheating and I tried to reason that it didn’t really matter and it was just fun and something we should all enjoy doing, which Karen agreed with me, but Beth came back with if you let people cheat they think they can get away with it all the time. Their obvious intelligence and ability to think quickly can be quite frustrating and I could feel myself wanting to say shut up it doesn’t matter listen to the next exercise but I just repeated what I had said before that we were all there to have fun and should play fairly but we needed to take things less seriously as a group. Again thought this is directly discouraging competitive behaviour which is not associated with femininity. Why did I find it so difficult to deal with? Was it because they were directly challenging me or because I felt they shouldn’t be behaving like that? They were covered in mud stood out in the freezing cold playing football. They couldn’t have been less stereotypically feminine and their attitude towards defying, authority, being excessively competitive and directly questioning the validity of my arguments reflected this. It was amusing that the girls most feminine, Karen, Katherine and Alison were the least involved in this scenario and often backed me up and told the other girls to quieten down.
have to back me up so as to support me. In a strange reversal they are suddenly protecting me against the girls that are challenging me and have done so on numerous other occasions when I haven’t really been so aware of what is happening. I think I ended the game at this stage again reflecting the power they had over me and then tried to do a goalkeeping exercise. Melanie and I think Helen and then Sarah who always jumps on the whining bandwagon when ever she gets a chance then waded in with they didn’t want to do anymore exercise but just wanted to play a game. I explained I wanted to do some goalkeeping with them and the reason we did skills was to make them better at the games but they were not having it and again I felt really threatened by their questioning of my authority in what activities they should do. It was a direct challenge to the activities I had planned and saying that they wanted to do something different and they didn’t feel what I was doing with them was appropriate and it made me feel bad as a coach that they weren’t enjoying the activities I was doing. I didn’t back down and we did the exercise which interestingly Melanie came back to me and said she had enjoyed but I was really on edge hoping that it would work and they would enjoy it. I think some of the girls looked like they were suffering a bit Alison in particular didn’t seem very enthusiastic. Helen repeatedly kept breaking the rules and getting annoyed when we told her the goals didn’t stand. Her competitiveness was excessive in that she was desperate to score a goal and kept picking Katherine as the weakest player and charging at her which was distressing Katherine quite a lot. I had to speak to her again and explain why we were imposing the different rules on her of having to score before the line and I think Rob also tried to explain to her the logic behind doing it this way. The final battle with them came over using the goals. They wanted to play on a full size pitch using full size goals using the rationale that they never scored goals in the small ones. I didn’t want them to play on a large pitch or use the goal because I didn’t feel it would be very beneficial or use the large goals but the girls were adamant they wanted to and again starting moaning excessively when I said they couldn’t. Rob actually took them aside at this point because he could see I was starting to get annoyed at their constant questioning of what we were doing and explained why we used the smaller goals. This didn’t appease them that much but it did quieten them down and we got organised into two teams and started the main game.

What went well?

The match went well apart from Katherine not getting involved but Beth played really well and keeping Helen in goal seemed to work well in terms of keeping her away from being nasty and competitive with the other girls. Playing outside minimise the amount nasty comments can be heard as well. They seem to like the first drills particularly the group who worked with Rob and got one to one attention because of this. The girls were very excited about going outside and most of them seemed to like getting muddy although they weren’t to keen to do headers with a muddy ball. Helen however enjoyed getting mud over her face and commented she needed a camera now to show her being a tomboy whilst Beth said she needed a camera because they were all behaving like girly girls including her and trying to avoid the mud. They definitely enjoy the games rather than being obviously coached.
Were there any particular comments, actions by the group or by individuals?

Helen still talks quite a lot about her brothers. We had a brief discussion about who supported who and Helen said that she didn’t really support any professional team and that she preferred playing football rather than watching which perhaps indicates for her it football doesn’t constitute a part of her culture as much as it does for boys. They asked me who I supported and when I said Aston Villa they said their old head master used to support them which indicates how much football maybe was a part of the school in that they knew their head masters team.

What did the support coaches/other staff do?

Rob was really good, considering he was just thrown into it and the girls were funny in their reaction to him. I introduced him and they started a chorus of Rob the builder which most of the girls joined in on apart from Karen, Katherine and Beth who seem to distance themselves from this sort of behaviour. I don’t know whether this is because Karen is T’s daughter or whether it is just that as a group they are not like this. Karen I don’t think would ever get involved but Beth can be quite troublesome but also seems to not get involved in disruptive behaviour of the group and actively stands away from this. Rob did a lot more explaining and obvious work with the group than Heather does and was quick to step in to tell them to be quiet. The most obvious example of this being with the argument about which goals to use where he gave them a clear demonstration of why we were using the smaller goals which helped quieten them back down again and get them on my side again.

Is there anything that needs adjusting /altering for next session?

I think definitely more games are needed. I was a bit ambitious with the skills section this week but I will go back to the basic assumption I made early on about keeping them playing games and look at ways to get the weaker players like Katherine more involved. I was also thinking about involving them more in the planning of the session by asking them to write down three things they like to do most in the session and then planning it out from there so they have more ownership over the session and less opportunity to come back at me and say they don’t like doing certain activities because it should be what the majority of the group want to do.

What might I be aware of if similar research methods are used?

I think the whole time I have been really concerned with getting proper data and feeling that the observation work is not as important and that some weeks I am not getting anything out of this because the girls are not directly talking about ‘gender’. However I realise that I have been failing to pick up on the dynamics of the session and it is not so much observing the session as a football class but more looking at a group of girls playing a non traditional sport and how they react to this, to each other and to me. It is only really this week I have considered issues of power and interaction between one another and who holds power in the group.
Any specific issues to highlight relating to the session?

It has become clear in this session that having high skill levels, or perceived high skill levels constitutes a form of power in the group and Katherine sometimes looks a bit helpless because she is neither skilful or loud and aggressive like Melanie or Helen for instance. Helen actually played really well in goal this week and was very good at defending which is one of the first times I have seen her obvious arrogance justified. Beth is funny because she seems to have respect in the group but is fairly quiet, although sometimes quite cutting. She also is very skilful which is maybe why she commands respect within the group. Sarah very much follows Alison’s lead. She tries to be one of the dominating girls but does not have the control of Alison, Helen or Melanie and tends to follow the rest of the group and agree with them rather than expressing her own opinions. This also came out when she was doing the research work with Alison and she tended to take Alison’s lead and say the same comments that she did then as well.
Appendix 2: Girls' photographs using disposable cameras

Sarah: This is me, we are being girly here because we are doing dance and dance is really girly.

Alison: Yes it is really girly and what I'm wearing that skirt and the top, that is girly because it is pink.

Helen: I am being quite tomboy here, I wouldn't say it was very girly. I am playing football but I'm being quite aggressive and running after the ball, I want to do well, and it is really cold and muddy, it wouldn't be girly to be running round in the mud.
Ellie: I got Susan to take this one of us doing the research, I don't think this is very girlie because we are thinking and talking about stuff and telling you, if we were being girlie we would be worrying about what we look like not concentrating on what we are doing.

Alison: This is me not being very girlie when I'm out walking the dog and I'm getting all muddy and wet. Girllie girls don't like going for long walks in the fresh air. I'm all wrapped up to keep warm and have my hat on so don't care about my hair or what I look like.
Ursula: This is me with my sister, we are definitely being girlie here, we are trying on new clothes and pretty girlie tops which are all strappy and tight. And we've done our hair, I've got braids in my hair so it is all long and that is all girlie because it is really long.

Holly: This is me and Sarah at our football sessions, I think this is us being tomboys. We are muddy and all wrapped up. We don't care what we look like and we are playing football so that isn't girlie.
Ellie: This is us being girly, we are having a sleep over me and all my friends, they have come round which is really girly and then we are all in our pj's and together. Sleepovers are really girly.

Karen: I think this one is us being girly because we are all in the playground gossiping. Girls stand round and gossip and boys play football, so we are being girly here.
Susan: I think this is me being tomboy because we are getting ready to go and do football which I wouldn’t normally do. We are all dressed up to be all sporty and to go outside. I don’t think girlie girls would look like us. We’ve all got our hair tied back so we don’t care what we look like.

Heather: This is my friend Susannah in class, we sit together. I don’t think Susannah is being very girlie because she’s working really hard and the girlie girls don’t work hard, they are not very clever.
Alison: This is definitely me being girly, I'm about to go out and I'm all dressed up in my skirt which is really girly. I've done my hair and put make up on, if it wasn't girly I wouldn't have done that.
Appendix 3: Posters made from magazine images liked/disliked
Appendix 4: Sample story ends

Ursula:

Talk it over with Jack. Rebecca decided to grow her hair back and forget England, she was still going to play football but she thought that she should become more of a girl because she was missing her friends and she loved Jack. Rebecca was happier with the fresh start. She went to the park with him to play football and to chat generally and mess about. A few years later it came to the last exam of university and Jack proposed to Rebecca during the celebration in the dormitory. Rebecca was even happier now and Jack said because he loved her so much that he said she could play for England if she wanted but Rebecca also liked Jack so she said no and carried on playing mild football. And they lived happily ever after.

Karen:

To carry on playing football. She had thought long and hard and decided that there was plenty of boys out there but only one sport she loved. Although Jack was angry and told her over and over it was the wrong decision she stuck with it. A few weeks later she was in a horrific car accident whilst on the way to football. Although she only got out of it with a badly broken ankle it meant the end of her football career. Rebecca was devastated if only she could turn back time and avoid the accident but she couldn't. Had she made the wrong decision? Should she have stayed with Jack? Two years later a very happy father picked up the newspaper. He read one of the headlines 'Youngest ever ladies coach makes another win'.

Adiya:

Play football. This was a chance in a lifetime that she couldn't miss. Jack could come and visit her couldn't he? So the next morning she tentatively told him the news. He started shouting at her and she was sobbing. This wasn't the jack she knew. She was glad she broke up with him. The next weekend was her first match against the U16's Brazilian team and she knew that is would be an exhilarating match. She trained after school every day and on Friday she flew out to Brazil. The next Saturday was the match and she was really excited. She would be staying there for a week and she started to miss Jack and her friends and family. She tried to focus her mind on the upcoming match, but she couldn't help but miss him. The same thing was happening back in England. Jack was furious with himself for driving Rebecca away. He begged his parents to let him fly out to Brazil to watch Rebecca play in the big game. As the plane was about to take off and fly it blew up. Jack was dead. It was all over the news and Jack's parents after the devastation though Rebecca should know about the tragedy. Rebecca missed her match and flew back to England as soon as she heard. She took the blame on herself and dropped out of the England team. As she grew older she got depressed and started taking drugs and getting drunk and one day she committed suicide by falling off a bridge and getting crushed by a big boat all because of Jack.

(Note Added at End) I would chose the boyfriend.

Hannah:

She was not going to start playing football but was going to start being a girl. Rebecca and Jack didn't split up. Rebecca grew her hair long and started to wear
make up. She found that she liked being a girl. She and Jack played football in the park together.

Sally:

Rebecca would sneak off to play football pretending to do a job. She would then sneak back into the house and go off with her boyfriend later into the night and come back and prepare for football. Rebecca’s muscles started to bulge out and Jack started to notice. Jack asked about still footballing. Jack and Rebecca split up.
Appendix 5: Example of interview transcript

13/02/04

Discussion between Ursula, Alison, Sarah, Lisa, Katherine and Beth

RJ: What I wanted to do today was I am interested in what you think about being a girl and what you think about girls do and what girls were like.
Ad: So like I think girls are nice yes?
RJ: Yes so what I want you to do is to get into pairs and write down a description of the other person. So Sarah and Alison, Sarah would describe Alison and the other way round. Anything that you think what you think Alison is like is a person and then we are going to share that with the rest of the group so don't write anything that you don't want to tell the rest of the group. It is not so much what the person looks like but what sort of person they are so is Sarah lively? Is she sporty? Is she fun to be with is she active? What does she like doing? Does she like music:
Lisa: I don't know much about Ursula
RJ: Do you not?
Sarah: Can we start?
RJ: well maybe you just say what you do know, or Lisa; just put down the impression that you have of Ursula what you think she might like doing and Ursula just put down your impression of Lisa, what you think she is like it does not necessarily have to be what she is like. And then we are going to comment back to one another and see what we think.
Sarah: What did you say sporty and....
RJ: I don't know, I don't know Alison very well it is what you think
Sarah: Yes but what did you say:
RJ: Fun what she likes doing. Or maybe you might want to say that someone is a bit quiet. I did this last week with Helen and Emma was saying how loud Helen was and that she shouts all the time.
Katherine: Helen's horrible
Lisa: Helen has to have the ball all the time she expects to much of the ball
She always has to be with the ball, she can be nowhere else.
And she doesn't listen to the teacher.
Katherine: Is this Helen? I've known her since was really little and she has always been like that – mad and you know Susan, she's even madder.
Sarah: Yes she is
Katherine: they used to be best friends and they were like the 'mad hatters' it was so annoying
Lisa: Ursula what do you like doing?
Ursula: I don't know (very quiet)
RJ: Do you think Ursula is quite quiet
Ursula: (Shouting) I'm quite quiet I think, I'm very very quiet
RJ: Or if you think someone was very confident like I would say that Helen was confident
Lisa: What maths set are you in Ursula?
Ursula (very subdued again) second
Lisa: She's extremely clever
Ursula: Alison in top, Katherine in top
RJ: You were adding up quicker than all of them
Ursula: it is because I had less points
RJ: You do not have to write loads if you think you have finished

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Sarah: I've not finished I could write like 5 pages on Alison
Alison: That means I'm interesting
Sarah: Do you have to put what they look like?
RJ: No unless it is something that you really like
Lisa: what like you really like their hair or something?
RJ: Yes
Lisa: Oh Ursula show them your hair it is really cool (Ursula twists her hair up so it stands up)
Alison: Yes do your devil horns.
Lisa: What don't you like?
Ursula: ummm
Lisa: Do you like swimming?
Ursula: I don't like being poorly.
RJ: I don't like that either. It is just any activities that you don't like doing if you don't like I don't know, things you think are girly activities.
Ursula: I like the old dressing up but sometimes it is like
Lisa: I like it
Lisa: Do you like to wear skirts?
Ursula: Yes
Lisa: Do you think dressing up I don't know in short skirts or mini stuff, you know what I mean.
Ursula: Sometimes they are okay but sometimes they can just get on my nerves I wouldn't wish I was a boy like some people.
Lisa: I don't like dressing up and dressing up in like short skirts
Ursula: I don't like hanging out with people who dress up and like.:
Lisa: Put make up on and stuff.
Katherine: My sister wanted to be like a boy she used to say she was going to go to the grammar school when she was older and she was going to be Daddy's boys.
RJ: Really but you are not like that Katherine?
Katherine: No I hate boys, they smell
Lisa: I need to write loads more about Ursula.
Ursula: I've finished look (only) 1,2,3,4,5 lines
RJ: Right Beth do you want to feed back first, tell me what you think about Katherine.
Beth: She is not that lively, but she is quite sporty
Katherine: I'm not!
Beth: She likes to play football, she likes to play the piano and is quite musical. She is not the best runner but she is fun to be with. She is quite shy and quite quiet if she doesn't know you that well, but she can be loud at times, she is quite clever and she likes art. She is person you could easily have as a best friend. She hates netball. She is not one for wearing dresses and short skirts.
RJ: Are you not Katherine?
(Shakes her head)
Beth: She's not a make up girl, but she is more of a tomboy, she is cool and she likes reading.
RJ: Cool and do you agree with that Katherine? Are you a bit of a tomboy
Beth: She is more of that than a make up person
Katherine: I'm more that than a make up person but I am not a tomboy
Lisa: no you are not.
RJ: So Katherine you are maybe not a tomboy but maybe not a make up girl?
Katherine: I'm not a make up girl I'm more of a tomboy than a make up girl.
RJ: So you sort of sit somewhere in between? (Katherine nods) Hang on a minute we will let Katherine do Beth now.
Beth: Do you like boys and stuff, Katherine shakes her head.
Do you like boys:
Ursula: No – she’s got a boyfriend, she’s got a boyfriend. I like playing football with boys but that is about it.
RJ: So it is more doing the sports that they do than wanting to be.
Ursula: No, I like doing boys sports but my work is really important to me as well and I want to do well in school.
Katherine: Beth is sporty and lively but she can be very annoyingly mardy cos she picks on her friends but she can be very nice. She like messing around, having fun and being naughty. She is a tomboy. She does not wear girly clothes and make up and she’s not that kind of person.
RJ: Is that about right Beth? Do you get a bit mardy?
Katherine: She does, you don’t think you get mardy but you do.
RJ: What other sports do you play Beth?
Beth: Tennis, swimming
RJ: All sorts really (nods her head)
RJ: Right we’ll have Ursula feeding back on Lisa now
Ursula: Right I don’t know Lisa that well because I only started at this school this year in September so I haven’t written that much.
RJ: That’s fine
Ursula: She has a passion for drawing and she is really good at it and if there is any art competition we are like oh great cos Lisa will always win.
Ursula: Her drawings are really good, she is sometimes quiet but sometimes loud and sometimes quiet as well. She doesn’t look that sporty but she is. When she’s on the football pitch she is quite good at it but she is not the best runner.
RJ: Is that about right Lisa?
Lisa: Yeah I suppose it is
RJ: Is art your favourite thing to do?
Lisa: I’m more of a swimming person
RJ: You swim?
Ursula: Yes she is always swimming
Lisa: I’m in all like the swimming galas and stuff.
Lisa: I think Ursula is sporty
Ursula: Thank you
Lisa: Her hair is cool, she’s a flute player so probably quite musical. I like playing football with her because she is good.
Ursula: I lost five –0
Lisa: Ursula is good at Maths because she is in Mr Wellingtons set and that is next to top. I’m interested in art and Ursula says that she is too. She said she didn’t like being ill and I don’t either. I don’t like hanging out with you know those girls who have boyfriends and make up and think they are cool and have mini skirts and stuff and I don’t think Ursula does either. She’s just a sporty sort of lively person.
Ursula: Thank you Lisa
Lisa: Beth has written she has a boyfriend called Justin
Ursula: No I don’t he’s 17
Beth: you love him though
RJ: So do you girls consider yourselves to be different from the girls who have boyfriends and wear short skirts and stuff?
Lisa and Ursula and Katherine: Uh huh yes
We are like sporty and we wear different clothes.
Katherine: we sit on those girls tables and we do not enjoy it.
Ursula: Annie and Rosie
Katherine: Rosie is quite nice
Yes she is quite nice when you get to know her
I’m not trying to be offensive to Annie but sometimes she pretends to be more of a girlie girl and I have to say she is more of a girlie girl but sometimes she does sports as well but she doesn’t really like sports but she makes herself good at it.
Sarah: I like Rosie and Charlotte and everyone else but sometimes they can be really really mean.
RJ: When you say about the girlie girls, do you ever have times when you are girlie girls
Sarah: yeah but we are girlie girls but we just don't have like boyfriends and how they act thinking they are so cool we don't think we are cool like that.
Alison: No saying that we are not thin but just because they are thin they are great.
They hang around with boys
Lisa: And she offends people without knowing it and at the swimming pool she said to Becky you know your legs are really fat.
And Annie said my legs have shrunk and now I have got thinner.
And they care about things like having the perfect body and stuff.
Alison: Sarah is kind and funny and she is always ready to help people and she is good at sports and stuff. She is quiet and shy if she doesn't know people.
Sarah: No I'm not!
Alison: She is friendly towards everyone and she like shopping. She enjoys sports and she likes listening to music especially Kelise Milkshake song (they sing this!)
She likes the computer and stuff and she likes gadgets
Sarah: I can type fast!
Alison: Yeah she can type fast. She's quite clever and she is always well dressed.
And you can have a laugh with her and she is quite pretty.
Lisa: I think you can also have a laugh with Ursula as well.
Alison: and she will always try to make people better. Sarah likes to eat sweets and
she doesn't have a boyfriend, study is quite an important thing in Ursula's life.
Sarah: Alison, is sporty and lively and fun. She is quite musical and plays the flute.
She likes football and netball and other sports I think. She is really friendly,
sometimes she is really talkative and she is confident. She is really clever. Ad's hair
is really lovely and thin and wicked meaning cool, not bad! She love to shop and
music and sing songs for example Milkshake by Kelise (girls sing it).
Ad's is very friendly as I said but she also makes you laugh, she has lots of cool
clothes. Ads is popular
Alison: You are lying
Sarah: No I am not Alison misses her friends when they go away, Adiay misses
Helene, Helene is her best friend.
Ursula: She's been away for three hours
Alison: She is going away for six months
Sarah: She is not good at running or athletics, she loves to eat, does not have a
boyfriend. Ad's art and loves to draw she is brilliant at it and I can write lots about
her, she is pretty as well.
Alison: You are lying
Sarah: She is sporty, she shares the same interests as me. She is extremely good at
art because she got an exhibition at the high school.
Alison: Some of it she is lying,
Sarah: Ali's is pretty Ursula is really mean.
Ursula: She was lying when she said she was a bad runner because if she plays
netball and football then she can't be
Alison: I'm terrible at running on the running track.
Sarah: Yes she is terrible.
Alison: Is that a man?
RJ: No it is Denise Lewis
Sarah: She'll be a tomboy (pointing to Denise Lewis) She'll be a tomboy as well (Mia
Hamm) She'll be a girlie girl (Katherine Moss)
Do you think she would like to wear skirts Ad's (pointing at Mia Hamm)
Ad's: She could do because she likes to play football and we like to wear skirts and
we play football too.
Sarah: Do you think that she doesn't to have hair because she doesn't like to have to tie it back (talking about Denise Lewis) so that is why she has short hair.
Lisa: My friends shave their legs
Katherine: really how old are they?
She is like 11.
Lisa: do you know if you shave your legs then the hairs grow back quicker, you should only shave them when you are older.
Ursula: She probably shaves them because she likes wearing mini skirts.
I want to be like her because she is famous.
Aren't they all famous?
Sarah: Do you think they would both be rich.
Lisa: I've wrote loads about Victoria Beckham
Beth: I've written loads about hockey girl
Can we write she likes to wear pants (Denise Lewis)
Lisa: I wrote that she likes to show off her body
Her pants are ugly.
Lisa: I want to be the hockey girl
Beth: I want to be the tennis girl
Lisa: She cares about her looks cos she is wearing a necklace
Lisa: My dad loves walking and I do too, he's been to lots of places, he's going to Morocco this year
Appendix 6: Example of research reflection diary

Reflections on the research 20th May 2004 with Helen, Ellie, Alison, Katherine and Karen.

Bit of a strange session. It was only today that I really began to see the contrast between me as the girls friends and confidant in the research session and the very authoritarian role I have to take up in the coaching and why the latter doesn’t really work at all.

Couple of things when I was walking in. In the younger age group there were a few girls playing football with the boys on the field but among the older boys there were no girls at all. At the session I talked to Helen to start with about her wanting to give up football. Part of me thinks it would be better not to have her there but then the other part of me feels really, really, bad that one of the girls has not enjoyed my sessions and has been picked on by the other girls so that she wants to leave. I felt I should have intervened and been aware of it sooner and sorted it out. I told Helen that I really wanted her to stay but it was her choice and I would understand if she wanted to leave but I would suggest that she gave it one more week. I also bribed her a bit by saying I would need her as a goalkeeper if we ever got this match sorted out which seemed to change her mind a bit but was maybe wrong of me.

In the actual session the girls were talking about Ryan again I was telling them about my new flat and living with Julian and the problems this was causing with Ryan. They were chatting back and offering solutions and it was the most broken down I think we have been together. I wasn’t really in an authority position with them at all just openly talking and they were responding to this. It still didn’t feel quite right because I am always conscious about being totally open within reason and whether I am crossing the boundaries of what is respectable in the school environment. They obviously wouldn’t talk to their teacher in this way and it worried me that the teacher would think it was wrong of me to be talking about myself and my difficulties so openly with them. A little later this went beyond comfortable when they took my mobile phone off me and started reading the messages. I felt this was really not on and asked for it back but they wouldn’t give it to me and I felt really powerless to get it back. I couldn’t grab it off them as a friend would do but also they had lost sight of me as any sort of authority figure and were just ignoring me. It was the first time I really recognised the conflict between trying to be friends but also being seen to be appropriate particularly within the authoritarian environment of the school. Sometimes the girls are really loud and I think this may cause a problem. It is really hard to maintain the position of adult visitor within the school and respecting all the regulations and expectations that go along with this and manage to be friendly with the girls and open with them. I think it is impossible and just ends up with being a mixture of the two which at times can be confusing because I don’t want to be like that. I have to negotiate between the two different approaches constantly and try and change in and out to suit the situation. However, I realise the potential for this to be confusing for the girls because one minute I am being all jokey and chatty and then the next time at football I am expecting them to listen to me and do as I say when yesterday I was seen on a similar level as their friends.

At this session I let the girls do the interviewing themselves which was really hard to do because I want to control it and also I feel it is not always eliciting the best data but it is a good way to empower them and they enjoy it more. It is really hard relinquishing control though because I am worried that I won’t get what I need and this is a real battle. Is sort of a sacrifice in terms of quality of data with giving the girls...
the opportunity to actually control the research but is a compromise that needs to be accepted. They are having fun and having a giggle at it but at the end of the day that data is essential to me but surely if the girls are enjoying themselves and I am collecting some information that is better than them not liking it and doing a really rigid session but getting lots of information? I do find myself getting annoyed sometimes that they don’t take it seriously but then get angry at myself for thinking this because why should they?

We discussed the story idea and they seemed quite receptive to this although they wanted to do it in pairs and everyone was worried that they were ‘rubbish’ at story writing and it wouldn’t be very good apart from Alison who everyone claimed is brilliant at story writing. This has been useful because it stresses the need to say to them that it doesn’t matter what they write but it needs to reflect how they think it should end in realistic terms rather than be concerned with writing the ‘best’ most inventive ending. Need to watch out for this happening though.
Appendix 7: Participant profiles

**Alison**

Alison was one of the three Asian girls who took part in the research. She was extremely intelligent and articulate and was part of a friendship group consisting of Karen, Katherine and Sarah who were the most intensely involved in the research. Alison originally attended the sessions with Sarah the other Asian girl who took part but quickly became very good friends with Karen, a friendship that lasted the duration of the research. Although not part of the established ‘popular’ group Alison was very popular within her own friendship group and was well respected for her ‘cleverness’. She was a gentle girl, who rarely created any problems or started any disagreements during the football coaching. She was always quick and confident to voice her opinions in the research setting but would listen to the views of others before considering what they said and responding. Alison described herself as mostly ‘girlie girl’ and it was evident that she did take an interest in her appearance. She was a very slim petite build, as was her Mother who always collected her in extremely stylish, fashionable western clothes. Alison had very long shiny straight hair which she wore in a variety of styles. She was always ‘accessorising’ the set school uniform with various in-fashion items at the time such as certain shoes or jewellery. Alison enjoyed playing football but really seemed to have little interest in either football or sport outside the coaching sessions. She was one of the girls the PE teacher was very surprised had attended.

**Beth**

I found Beth quite an interesting character. During the first few sessions she seemed a fairly quiet girl who did as she was told and had a lot of natural football ability. It was evident once I got to know her that she was actually extremely confident, very boisterous in both the football coaching and the research setting and had the tendency to be bossy and domineering with the other girls. She could also be very rude to both the girls and myself. She frequently talked over the other girls in the research sessions, would often not listen to the views of others but would just disregard them or openly tell them she thought they were wrong. She had a great deal of confidence in her own views and opinions as being correct and was happy to inform the other girls that this was the case. Due to her somewhat aggressive manner she was unpopular with a number of the girls including her original friendship group of Karen and Katherine. Beth was quite a short stocky build and was thought of by the other girls and by herself as a bit tomboyish. Although she wore her hair fairly long she did not pay attention to her appearance in the same way that was evident with Alison. She was keen on sport and was well known by the other girls as a good rounders and tennis player. She was the only girl in her family with two older brothers, both of whom she played some football with informally which helped her have a higher skill level than most of the other girls. Beth was one of the few
girls who wanted to continue playing football but her Mother was not happy for her to continue playing and seemed to exert quite a lot of pressure on Beth to behave in a female appropriate way.

Ellie

Ellie was a really gentle, kind girl who was involved in a number of the research sessions. Ellie was fairly tall and quite a stocky build, something which seemed to cause her a great deal of anxiety. Ellie generally did not seem to be very confident and seemed to worry a lot about certain issues. Her parents were divorced and she frequently talked about the anxiety this caused her and how she did not want to annoy and upset her Mother because it was difficult for her as well as Ellie. She was popular with the other girls and was particularly good friends with Jenny and Helen to begin with. She became good friends with Katherine, Karen and Alison as the sessions progressed. Ellie had not previously played any sport outside of PE and seemed to really enjoy the football sessions. She rarely missed one and would always let me know if she could not be there. She came to most of the research settings and similar to Melanie would frequently attend duplicate sessions. During the research she was always very thoughtful and would listen to the other girls. She was, to start with, a little hesitant when sharing her own views as though she was expecting others to disagree but as she became familiar with the setting and the other girls this hesitancy disappeared and she was happy to share her views with others.

Heather

Heather was Beth's best friend and was introduced to the football sessions after the first half term when Beth became unpopular with her original friendship group of Karen and Katherine. Although Beth upset and annoyed a number of the girls involved, Heather was regarded as friendly and kind by the other girls and was a popular member of the group. She was always very cheerful, willing to contribute in the research sessions and wanted to be involved and at the heart of everything in the football. Heather, was one of the girls who was genuinely interested in football. Her family held a season ticket at the local premiership club and her and her brother attended matches on alternate weeks. Heather discussed how her father was very interested in football and that her house was a 'football' house with all the family frequently watching football on the television. Heather though still classed herself as a girlie girl. Similar to Alison she dressed very fashionably and frequently wore make up and jewellery. She was very tall for her age and slim giving her the appearance of a girl three or four years older than what Heather was. The friendship between Beth and Heather seemed unlikely because they had very different interests and opinions. However, they remained good friends throughout the sessions.
Helen

Helen was one of the louder more aggressive girls involved in the research. She was very passionate about everything she did including sport and it was sometimes difficult to control this enthusiasm. Helen was not very popular amongst the other girls because of her loud, aggressive and brash personality. The girls disliked her competitive attitude in the sessions and the way she would have tantrums if the games were not going her way. She became easily bored and had to be given constant attention and a variety of tasks to be involved in to stimulate her interest. In the group research sessions she would frequently talk over the other girls, not allow them to speak and generally dominate the conversations which the other girls found difficult to accept. This aside though, she was an extremely cheerful, exuberant character who contributed a great deal to the research sessions. She was always enthusiastic to talk, took the tasks very seriously and her behaviour in the sessions seemed to me to be a result of her desire and enthusiasm to be involved rather than her direct attempts to exclude other girls from being involved. Helen played hockey for the school team and was a goal keeper but it seemed that she was also marginalised by the other girls in the hockey team because of her aggressive confrontational behaviour. As a result of this she was not classed as one of the school’s sporty girls although it was recognised she was good at sport. Instead she classed herself as a tomboy although visually Helen was very feminine looking. She was of average height and build but had extremely long hair that reached her waist which she frequently wore lose when she wasn’t participating in sport. During the course of the research there were a number of disruptive incidents involving Helen. Most prominent of these was her fall out with Susan, her then best friend which initially required constantly placing the girls on different teams to allow both to participate but eventually ended in Susan ceasing participating because Helen was so nasty to her during school time.

Holly

Holly was the only girl who took part in the football who was considered both a 'sporty girl' and one of the popular group. Holly was very small, blonde and petite and was considered by the other girls to be attractive. She did not have any particular friends with the football sessions but was easily accepted because of her popular status. During the research she became quite friendly with Melanie although this friendship was very on and off because of Melanie’s tendency to sulk and cry if she did not have her own way. Holly was a very easy going girl, she seemed to enjoy taking part in the football coaching and was a regular attendee. She also participated in the school netball, rounders, hockey and athletics teams. When asked to join the research sessions she would come along and would willingly contribute. She tended to listen to the other girls and chip in with her own opinions and she was not afraid to disagree with them on certain points. She would never attend any additional
research sessions than those she was asked to as some of the other girls would do. I think this was due to her friends not being involved and not wishing to lose out on too much free time with them. It was also sometimes difficult in the sessions when we were discussing other girls in the school and particularly Anita and Robin. Although the majority of the other girls did not like them, Holly was good friends with both these girls and could sometimes restrict the content of the focus groups when she was present and we were discussing this subject.

Jenny

Jenny took part in the football sessions but only attended a handful of the research sessions due to her other commitments with music, drama and athletics in the summer months. Jenny was very close friends with Ellie at the football sessions although she had another circle of friends outside of this setting. Jenny was a gentle girl who tended to get on with what was asked in both the research and football settings. She seemed a very sensible girl and was always very calm and unfazed when the sessions were disrupted by outbursts from the other girls. Jenny was fairly tall for her age, of stocky build and was mixed race. She had very thick curly dark hair which she always wore in tight plaits. Jenny was considered to be on the verge of the popular group but she admitted that she did not really want to be part of that group because she found the girls that were part of it were insincere and were trying to make her get a boyfriend which she did not want. She was always a very confident person who was listened to and respected by the other girls in the group.

Karen

Karen was one of the most quietest girls in the group but was heavily involved in both the research and the football sessions. She rarely missed a session in either and attended numerous additional research sessions. During the research she would never start a conversation or voice an opinion to start the sessions off. She would sit and listen to the other girls and occasionally chip in with her own views and thoughts. Often though I would have to ask for her views directly to encourage her to take part in the group discussions. Karen was very good friends with Katherine and they attended most of the research sessions together. Karen would often feed off Katherine who once comfortable was very vocal about giving her opinions. Towards the end of the research Karen had become close with Alison and the three of them would frequently attend the research sessions together. Karen had a very petite slight build but seemed to really become involved in the football sessions and was always willing to play aggressively in matches. Katherine, Karen and Alison were probably the girls who most resented the disruptions caused by Helen and Melanie and they voiced their annoyance in the privacy of the research sessions but they would never cause any fuss or indicate their annoyance within the sessions. It did seem that Karen was a little shy when taking part in the research sessions but she seemed fairly confident within herself and never appeared to be
embarrassed or agitated when asked to talk in front of the others, it just appeared that she chose not to speak a great deal but would willingly do so when asked.

**Katherine**

I found Katherine, like Beth an interesting girl because my initial impression of her changed dramatically once I got to know her. I initially thought she was extremely quiet and shy and would be unwilling to share her views in the research setting. However, after a few weeks once she became more confident with me and when surrounded by her friends in the research setting she was actually extremely vocal and articulate. Katherine had very rigid views and opinions and would state them to the other girls as facts and was happily to argue with anyone who questioned her views or contradicted her. She frequently referenced her Mother and her elder sister as being the source of many of her opinions and they seemed to be an important influence in her life. She also had a tendency to make statements to shock and sensationalise and provoke discussion/arguments with the other girls rather than because she actually held these views. Katherine always gave the impression that she wanted to be different. She was very disdainful of figures in popular culture such as Britney Spears or Kylie saying they were like Barbie Dolls and she wanted to be more than that and have a brain as well. Education was very important to Katherine and she focused heavily on doing well at school. Katherine was not interested in any sports and considered herself to be un-sporty and not very good at sport. She was a fairly tall girl and quite stocky but gave the impression of being quite clumsy and cumbersome in her movement. In the early sessions it was evident that she did not pick up skills as quickly as the other girls and took longer to learn basic drills such as passing and dribbling. However, she seemed to think a great deal about the game when she was playing and would frequently tell her team mates how they should position themselves and various tactics in matches. The first few weeks her lower skill level and lack of confidence meant she tended to hang back in matches and I was initially worried about her lack of involvement and that she might become marginalised. However, as her confidence grew in the research setting she also began to involve herself more in football and not be put off by her slightly lower ability.

**Lisa**

Lisa, similar to Jenny was one of the girls I did not see a great deal of during the research. Lisa was a gentle kind girl, she was fairly quiet and had a tendency to disappear into the background in football sessions. She just got on with what was asked with minimal fuss only occasionally requesting to do certain activities whereas most of the other girls would be jumping around in front of me demanding they did certain exercises. Lisa was a very talented artist and the girls knew her as such and would always discuss how Lisa was ‘fantastic at art’. She was also a very good long distance runner and would compete for the county during the
summer time. Other than running she did not consider herself to be particularly sporty and did not play in any other school teams. Lisa was a very friendly girl but seemed to be a bit of a loner in the school. She did not find the big gangs of girls appealing and seemed to prefer at break times to play with a ball either on her own or with pupils in the years below her. Towards the end of the research I noticed that she was fairly friendly with one or two girls who were classed by the other football girls as the ‘nerds’. Lisa seemed to prefer closer friendships with one or two people. She had a younger brother and she frequently discussed having to ‘look after’ him and play with him, something she seemed to enjoy. Lisa was a very slim build and fairly tall with long wavy brown hair, she discussed how she had little interest in ‘girlie’ things and was not interested in following fashion or her appearance.

Melanie

Melanie was one of the more demanding girls involved in the football sessions. There was rarely a coaching session where she did not start arguing with the other girls or me, try and tell us what to do or start crying because she was not doing what she wanted to do. She also had a tendency to be quite nasty to the other girls and would sometimes say cruel things about them. One of the best football sessions with Melanie was when I asked her to referee a game. She seemed to really enjoy the responsibility and realised she had to support and encourage the other girls rather than be critical of them. Katherine in particular had a real dislike of Melanie but she was not overly popular with any of the girls again because like Helen she was so aggressive towards them sometimes. Holly seemed to be Melanie’s friend within the group but even she would become annoyed with her sulky behaviour and the way she always started crying when she was unhappy with an aspect of the session. Melanie would frequently storm off declaring she would not be part of the session and would no longer attend again but invariably would always turn up the following week as though nothing had happened. Despite these difficulties Melanie did express an interest in carrying on with playing football and her Mother spoke to me about her attending particular clubs. Her Mother and her Grandmother were particularly supportive and always came down to watch her participate. In the research sessions Melanie was a different girl, for a period of time she would come to every session I ran even though I was asking similar questions at each of them. She would wait for me at the school gate and help me carry my bags in and then would help me get set up if we were doing an interactive task. In the sessions she was helpful and chatty but would allow the other girls to speak. Katherine, Karen and Alison were all a little wary of her in the research sessions so I tended not to group them together but the other girls seemed very relaxed having her in the session even though they knew how nasty she could be when she chose. Visually Melanie was an extremely pretty girl. She was medium height and build and had long shiny brown hair and huge blue eyes. One parent discussed how they thought she looked like a ‘little angel’ and it was difficult to believe how troublesome she could be.
Sally

Sally loved football and along with Helen had previously played for the boys' school team. She knew a great deal about men's football and wanted to be a professional footballer in America when she got older. Sally was considered to be quite sporty and played netball on the school team although she did not have the 'sporty' status that the popular girls obtained. She was a fairly quiet girl and although she attended a number of the research sessions did not talk very often and had to be encouraged to offer an opinion. She was not as articulate as the other girls in expressing her views and the alternative methods were a useful way of encouraging her to participate. She was the only girl in the group who was uninterested in education and did not pass her entrance exam to attend the high school. In the football sessions she demonstrated very high skill levels but would always be supportive of her team mates and all the girls wanted to have her on their team. Outside of the sessions Sally did not seem to have any particular friendship group but seemed to drift between groups of girls. The football seemed to provide her with some friendship links and during the research she became good friends with Ursula. Sally was Asian, and like Alison had a very westernised fashionable Mother who picked her up from the football sessions. Sally was fairly petite build but seemed to be very strong on the football pitch. She paid little attention to her appearance and was not interested in fashionable clothes or make up.

Sarah

Sarah was the third Asian girl who took part in the sessions. She was a very confident vocal girl who was always very cheerful and enthusiastic. She had lots of opinions and seemed to enjoy taking part in the research to be able to vocalise these and be listened to. Despite this she was not as forceful as either Beth or Katherine when discussing her views and would debate and consider points with the other girls. Sarah originally was very good friends with Alison and this continued but she also became good friends with Ellie and Holly. She remained part of a friendship group which contained a number of girls including Karen, Katherine and Alison who classed themselves as the 'normal' girls within the school, neither popular nor nerds. Sarah did not feel she was very sporty and felt that playing football was a really unusual thing for her to do. She was a very bright and bubbly girl always smiling and always wanting to talk and discuss things in the research setting. She had a tendency sometimes to keep talking with taking a break but the other girls would gently tease her and ask her to let them have a go and she would also then be quiet. During football she could sometimes get a bit aggressive and over questioning but I could usually make her laugh in a way that was not possible with Helen or Melanie when they were getting angry. With Sarah this would immediately diffuse the situation and she would settle back down. Sarah was very happy giving opinions on other girls in the school and seemed to really enjoy being part of a
big group of girls and being able to access a 'gossip' network through this. Visually Sarah was a little bigger than her other classmates and was of medium height. She was quite interested in clothes and her appearance although she admitted not to the same extent as Alison.

Susan

Susan only attended around half of the football sessions before her fall out with Helen stopped her coming anymore. Susan was visually very striking, she was extremely tall and thin with thick red curly hair and freckles. I found her very easy going and pleasant to work with, she was always enthusiastic in the research settings and would become really passionate when discussing certain issues. She happily shared her views and got involved but would also listen to the other girls. Despite my view that she was a very pleasant, kind girl, she was not very popular among the other girls. It was not immediately obvious why this was the case. When I asked the other girls they would just say that she was a 'bit strange' or a 'bit weird' and that was why they did not really like her. I think her friendship with Helen initially provided a barrier to her developing friendships with other girls because Helen was not particularly popular with many girls in the school. However, she never really seemed to become integrated into the research despite her willingness to be involved. She seemed to enjoy playing football and was always one of the first girls changed and ready. She also played little sport outside of football and did not particularly enjoy participating in PE.

Ursula

Ursula was one of the few black pupils at the school and had only been attending there for a few months before the research started. During the first football session it was evident that Ursula was very skilful but seemed to have quite a sulky, aggressive outward appearance that made me feel she was not enjoying taking part. Whenever I spoke to her she always answered with monosyllabic statements and generally seemed like quite a 'cool' girl who thought she was too good for the sessions. As the weeks went on it became evident this was not the case. During the research sessions I began to appreciate how difficult it had been for Ursula changing schools and particularly at the start of the football sessions she was still feeling like she did not really fit in and had limited friends. She was very unconfident and shy and would frequently get upset when she made a mistake in the football sessions and say she was rubbish and should not be playing despite the fact she was actually much better than most of the other girls. As the research sessions progressed she became a frequent attendee with Alison and Karen and Katherine and really seemed to open up in this environment. She moved from saying very little to openly expressing her views, starting debates with the other girls and becoming fully involved and contributing a great deal to the research data. She also developed strong friendships with Sally, Jenny and Ellie which seemed to help build her confidence and also became integrated with the group of girls that Sarah was part of. She
was a very kind girl who clearly thought very deeply about issues and worried a great deal about different aspects of her life. Academic work was very important to her and was again a further area where she was not particularly confident despite passing the entrance examination to the high school. Ursula was a tall girl and had a fairly solid muscular build for her age which again seemed to cause her a lot of anxiety and was something she was worried about.