An Ethnography Exploring How Hegemony and Power Mediate Agency and Structure Among a Group of 6th Year Irish Girls in a Middle-Class Post-Primary School

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own work and that all citations and references are correct and complete

Signed:

Date:

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Contents

Chapter 4 Methodology 84

Chapter 5 School Context and Community 123

Chapter 12 Conclusion   306

References   322

Appendices   355

List of Tables

List of Figures

Abbreviations

DEIS- Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools
DES- Department of Education and Science/Skills
CAO-Central Applications Office
CSO-Central Statistics Office
CSPE- Civic Social and Political Education
JCSP- Junior Cycle Schools Programme
LCA-Leaving Certificate Applied
LCVP-Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme
MC-Middle Class
MCG-Middle Class Girls
MIREC-Mary Immaculate Research Ethics Committee
MP-Mount Privet
OECD- Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PA-Public Announcements
PISA- Programme for International Student Assessment
PE-Physical Education
RE-Religious Education
SPHE- Social Personal and Health Education
TY-Transition Year
WC-Working Class
WCG-Working Class Girls

Abstract

This is an ethnographic study of a culture-sharing group of 6th year girls. Facing the high stakes Leaving Certificate examinations while on the cusp of adulthood, this study contributes to the agency-structure debate from a feminist perspective. It is widely acknowledged that schools are sites of social and cultural reproduction with hegemony evident in visible and invisible ways. This ethnography describes how a group of girls navigate this territory in school. It explores the effects of the personal, group and institutional habitus which mediate the girls' everyday interactions. The girls' peer interactions and contextual experiences serve as an explanatory framework which references how power is shared, wielded and resisted among the myriad of relationships within the school. The school life of the girls is consequently explored at an individual and group level.

Reflexivity and ethics are at the core of this ethnography conducted over one year in the field from September 2012 to September 2013. The research design is framed as a feminist reflexive ethnography and bound as a case study. Methods and analysis follow ethnographic techniques. The data gathered includes prolonged observation, ethnographic group and focus group interviews as well as in-depth one to one interviews. Data analysis is through grounded theory methods. This thesis defends the position of the teacher-researcher whilst acknowledging that the potential of the teacher-researcher is punctuated by dilemmas requiring careful consideration. This responsibility is enabled by an ethics of care and trust which is combined with a professional espoused and enacted code of ethics. The role of the key informant, critical friends and confirming voice of the girls are triangulated to challenge researcher bias or assumption and to assist with interpretation and understanding of the data.

This study finds that social class continues to impact educational experience in significant ways, from personal to social to academic experience. The working class girls resisted the dominant discourses and were alienated from their peers and from elements of their own education. The middle class majority are the symbolic oppressors and are also the oppressed, as they collude in a conformity which impacts their own adolescent experience. Conscious agentive conformity is identified as 'doxic'. These girls' stories unveil how their agency is both enabled and sometimes constrained by the institution, peer-group and their own personal habitus. Therefore, contributions to the agency-structure debate through an examination of hegemony and social class illuminate further the positionality of the 'girl' in school and the school as a relatively powerless agent. The unveiling of these personal and collective lived experiences is enabled through the methodological approach which facilitates a shift from teacher to researcher. This study makes a contribution to the insider-outsider debate. It highlights the transition from teacher to researcher and asserts that this is a challenging but worthwhile shift, for the transformational and epistemological opportunities it can provide.

Chapter 1 Introduction

This thesis tells the stories of the lived experiences of sixth year schoolgirls on the cusp of adulthood. These girls recall their lived experiences as friends and as members of a middle-class single-sex girls' school for six years. The thesis explores how school life and broader peer culture impacted on the girls' self identities, peer acceptance and school experience. The girls are a 'culture-sharing group' which is a feature of ethnographic study (Robson 2002). The use of this term for the purposes of this study relates to the sharing of school culture which is classed and also some shared elements of youth culture. The main themes, which evolved through grounded theory, explore school context and ethos, power and inequality, peer interaction and youth culture. The approach is ethnographic with use of prolonged observation, group interview and in-depth one to one interviews. The theoretical frame is informed by agency-structure, hegemony and equality theory from a feminist perspective. Stories of fear and examination pressure but also hope and joy merge to give a holistic portrait of each of these girls' lives, as told by them.

1.1 Research Aims

This ethnography unveils the gendered and classed experiences of a group of girls and their friends. The core research question aims to determine the girls' understanding of their contextual position and identity as agents, students, friends and members of a cultural group. These understandings are contextualised inside the school and outside in broader peer culture. This research was conducted by a teacher in the school with knowledge of the culture over many years. As insiders to school culture, teacher-researchers have a perspective that can be enriched and also challenged whilst sharing a space with students. Notwithstanding the importance of rigour, ethics and quality processes, it is not always beneficial to enlist the stranger to gather impartial data. This researcher contends that it was the shared culture and trust which enabled the girls over time to disclose personal and educational experiences. These experiences enhance an existing body of knowledge as well as the perspectives of the insider.

It is important to acknowledge that an outsider may not have been able to gain entry as effectively as this teacher-researcher did as schools can be cautious of 'outsiders'. A brief discussion of ethics begins the defence of the teacher-researcher perspective from a philosophical stance. This defence is subsequently developed and woven throughout all chapters from varied perspectives. This study makes a methodological contribution to the insider-outsider debate, whilst also reinforcing this researcher's insider status. The theoretical contribution of this study is facilitated through the findings which answer key research questions. These questions form the basis of the discussion chapters and the answers gleaned merge to provide the conclusions to this study.

The core research question is:

- How is agency and structure evident as a duality in the actions, practices and interactions of the girls in school and outside in broader culture?

Embedded questions include:

- How is the personal and institutional habitus realised in the actions and interactions of the girls as members of the school and youth culture?

- How is hegemony related to cultural and social reproduction and a potential vehicle for conformity, resistance and/or alienation?

- How does power operate among the girls and where is inequality subsequently manifested?

- What are girls' understandings of their peer and self identities and how are these understandings related to social class and gender, within school structures and youth culture?

1.2 Ethics and the Teacher-Researcher

Professional ethics are described as the norms that members of a profession adhere to, in the dilemmas and decisions that arise in practice. It is argued that all ethics is based on the way human beings relate to each other (Banks 2004). Banks (2004) asserts that within moral philosophy, an ethical emphasis on care and trust should not be dominated by an overly rigid set of ethical principles, which may threaten the ability of the practitioner to make informed ethical choices. This researcher contends there is a place for norms that bound the teacher or researcher position, especially when working with vulnerable young people. However, there must also be a focus on context and the particularity of the relationship between the teacher and student. This relationship serves to prevent a singular, impartial, detached form of ethical justice to prevail within this study (Banks 2004).

This researcher agrees that the evolving nature of 'new- professionalism' (Banks, 2004, p. 45) provides a space for more egalitarian, less elitist relational opportunities for teachers and students to emerge through research. The two theoretical approaches to ethics can be broadly divided into impartial principles based on rights and justice and partial emotional relationships with people (ibid). This researcher accommodates both ethical approaches in this study. The requirement to present the research proposal through a research ethics committee conferred adherence to an impartial set of protocols to ensure the safety and beneficence of the girls. In addition, being a teacher in the school required the researcher to abide by any requests from school management relating to the study, as well as a professional responsibility to ensure appropriate actions as per school policy requirements. Finally, there is a duty of care to the school that facilitated the research, to ensure the findings are presented with integrity and un-biased honesty. There is always a continuous decision making process during a prolonged research process. This researcher based these partial decisions and actions on an ordinary ethics of care which is commonly accepted as a prevailing public morality (Banks 2004).

The interpretation of a code of ethics was always in connection with personal moral beliefs on issues of welfare. The code was enacted within a particular context and an existing relationship of care, which undeniably and unapologetically involved a level of partiality. This partiality was not power based as it encompassed an implicit need for mutual trust throughout the process. There is also a need for trust within the wider research fraternity so that teacher-researchers can effectively merge the espoused professional and/or research code of ethics with their enacted professional or research actions (Banks 2004). Irrespective of any ethical codes or accepted ethical principles within schools or the academic world there is no absolute ethical certainty in terms of actions made by human agents. Rather than operate on the basis of an 'ethics of distrust' (O Neill 2002) this researcher argues that if we choose to see professional or academic ethics as an extension of ordinary morality (Koehn 1994) then trust is intensified. When trust is present between researcher and participant, concerns with care, empathy and the participants' 'situated selves' are heightened (Benhabib 1992). The care approach in this study was manifested as an acceptance of a level of disclosure the girls were comfortable with. In addition, there was no attempt to venture into more private social spaces such as the smokers area, the girls' parties, disco's or the girls homes. This could be seen as a limitation of the study as an outsider may have ventured more easily into these spaces, gathering valuable data to enhance the findings. However, this researcher argues that the study could have been damaged by doing this. The girls could have told the stories they thought the researcher wanted to hear, or alternatively, could have told lies because they were protecting this private space.

Ethical theory supports this insider position, professing that an 'ethics of proximity' (Vetlesen 1994) where the context is acknowledged, allows the teacher-researcher role to flourish. Therefore, a researcher's embeddedness becomes a positive in the sphere of the ethical as the moral agent's insiderness plays a role in ethical decision making from an 'ethics of care' perspective (Gilligan 1982). This researcher uses her moral voice throughout the study to argue in favour of a more personal and situated approach to ethics. She asserts that this study reclaims a place for the 'partial' researcher.

As a teacher-researcher ethical procedures can be both constraining and enabling in much the same way structures are (Giddens 1984). The ethical codes in this study were adopted with due acknowledgement of the moral agency implicit in the significant decision making with any research.

It is important to also acknowledge the limitations of this study from the outset of this thesis. The teacher-researcher role was not an easy one. The ethical decision making throughout the process was difficult. The choice of school and choice of sample within the school all posed limitations in terms of their being a particular educational and social class context. This study would have undoubtedly differed had the school being working class or coed or if first years were the focus. Balancing the voices of the girls, with due regard and respect for the school's position proved challenging. Dealing with unanticipated responses was difficult and the researcher did not fully appreciate initially, the effect that some of the responses would have on her. The issue of authenticity was a worry throughout the research process, despite all the quality processes the researcher included in the design frame. Researcher agency and decision making was subjective with regard to what was included in the write up, so the supervisor was valuable in questioning and affirming many of the researcher's decisions. A more comprehensive discussion of the limitations relating to elements of this study is included in the methodology chapter. In addition, chapter 7 details the tensions and critical moments that arose throughout the research process.

1.3 Thesis Structure

The theoretical contribution discussed and synthesised throughout this thesis is related to the duality of agency-structure from a feminist perspective. The school and peer group can operate both as agents and as structures and in this way can enable, constrain or be enabled or constrained simultaneously. This occurs within a mesh of cultural practices and is mediated by hegemonic power operating at the micro and macro level. The middle-class (MC) hegemonic context presents equality issues related to social class and gender. The remaining thesis chapters are outlined as follows:

Chapter two examines the sociological theory which has resonance with the cultural setting and context. It examines how neo-Marxist hegemony and the agency-structure theories of Giddens and Bourdieu inform what is happening in the girls' lives. The equality theory of Lynch helps to interpret the experiences of working-class girls (WCG) in a MC school. This chapter examines theory from a feminist perspective with a rationale for selected theoretical perspectives.

Chapter three presents a review of the literature on the key topics of social class, gender, youth culture and friendship providing access to developments in the literature from the relative past to most current studies. The literature provides the researcher with a platform upon which findings are situated, contradictions emerge and similarities become apparent. This review is broad and serves to present the literature as a general orientation for the reader to the key domains underpinning this study. The findings chapters incorporate many more specific and recent examples from the literature which facilitate the discussion and bridge the breadth of this literature review with a greater depth of focus.

Chapter four provides a description and rationale for the methodological approach and for the methods used. The researcher outlines the schedule of data collection and analysis as well as discussing her insider status and how this is managed. The rigorous ethical and quality processes are outlined ensuring reliability and validity. The design frame is described and justified with regard to how it scaffolds this study.

Chapter five describes the school context and the structure of the school community in Mount Privet (MP- Pseudonym). It also includes a descriptive journey through a typical day for the girls to enable the reader to situate themselves conceptually in the school setting. This contextualisation is important in providing a sense of the 'field', to enhance the understanding of the girls' stories within the context in which they are told.

Chapter six profiles and introduces the main fourteen participants with particular attention given to the key informant. It gives an overview of their peer group, hobbies, and aspirations for their future as well as their level of agency. This chapter places the girls in a broad friendship group based on the observation period and with reference to social class differences.

Chapter seven is a reflexive piece written to catalogue the researcher's thoughts, biases, prejudices, frustrations and joys during the research process. It recognises that in the interactions with the girls there was a continual reflexive interrogation of the researcher's personal thoughts and views. This chapter describes incidences where movement within the poles of the teacher-researcher continuum was exciting, rewarding and challenging.

Chapter eight commences the chapters dedicated to the discussion and interpretation of findings. This chapter explores school context and how the school structures influenced the girls' identities, and interactions. It describes the quintessential MP girl. It also explores the phenomenon of 'othering'. It briefly outlines the unique rural-city mix within the school and how varying cultural diversities are mediated with the peer groups.

Chapter nine discusses the key theme of peer interactions and friendship. It examines the categories of friends, friendship roles, and influence of social class on friendship. The topics and sites of interactions among friends are examined with reference to the role of social media and within peer interactions.

Chapter ten examines power and inequality within and outside the peer groups and school structures. This chapter investigates how conformity, resistance and alienation relate to culture. It explores the girls' awareness of patriarchy and the role parents have as influencers of the girls' decisions.

Chapter eleven focuses on the girls' embodied physical selves, their attitudes towards the interrelated themes of appearance, body image and boys. The girls' perspectives on femininity, masculinity and sexuality are discussed. Popularity and the significance of getting picked for school roles are explored. A discussion on the pressure of examinations and other positive and negative memories the girls shared concludes this theme.

Chapter twelve draws together the key findings from all substantive chapters, forming the thesis conclusions. It outlines these theoretical contributions in light of the theory and literature discussed throughout the thesis, with relevance to wider educational debates. This chapter identifies how this study could be extended longitudinally to examine certain themes further and outlines the limitations of the study.

1.4 Conclusion

This ethnographical study of a group of girls in their final year of formal education gives them a voice to relive their experiences. In real time, throughout a whole school year the girls shared their stories, hopes and regrets, during their years in their school. They accepted the researcher's invitation to abandon power and authority, to speak openly as young women. This thesis enabled reciprocal learning between teacher-researcher and participant. It provided time to reflect on self, friendship, past, present and future. This study facilitates an understanding of the lived realities of a group of young women as they embark on new journeys together.

Chapter 2 Theoretical Framework

This study explores girls' agency as enacted within structures such as the peer group and the school. An integrated sociological paradigmatic approach enables analysis across and within the micro and macro domains of the girls' social realities. There is not one theory to explain all the patterns observed, recorded and analysed in MP. This study contributes to social theory by using a unique combination of theoretical perspectives to yield new insights on school culture. Consequently, this provides a number of lenses to look through, with an opportunity to interpret from different angles.

The findings contribute to the agency-structure debate through the combined use of Bourdieu's and Giddens' theory. Hegemony and equality theory also inform the study and the theory is applied from a feminist perspective. This researcher believes the opportunity to develop an entirely new theory is challenging, particularly with the diversity of theory written at present. Therefore, incorporating existing theory in new ways to learn about the social world offers insights which add to the existing theory, or indeed challenge it. Giddens (1984, p. xxii) supports this when he states:

> "If ideas are important and illuminating, what matters more than their origin is to be able to sharpen them so as to demonstrate their usefulness even if within a framework which might be quite different from that which helped to engender them."

Each theoretical perspective within the framework is discussed in terms of its position within social theory and also its relationship to dimensions of this study. Theory is also reviewed with an interlinking and critiquing of the perspectives discussed. This provides the reader with a woven theoretical foundation upon which the research is based. A visual map highlighting how elements of the theory are interrelated is provided below. Figure 2.1 illustrates that structures can enable and constrain. The way in which structures enable or constrain agents has a relationship with social class and hegemony. The school is both an agent and a structure. Individual girls are agents while groups of girls form structures which can dominate others who conform or resist this power.

Figure 2.1: The Theoretical Frame:

STATE

SUPERSTRUCTURES

FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE

CONSTRAIN
FREEDOM TO ACT
TRANSFORM
OR REFLECT

ENABLE
VIA FUNDING
POLICY

GIRLS' SCHOOL

AGENT

STRUCTURE

SCHOOL ENABLES
OTHERS THROUGH

POLICY
HISTORICITY - ACADEMIC
ETHOS
HEGEMONY
GENDER CONSTRUCTIONS

SCHOOL CONSTRAINS
SOME THROUGH

POLICY
HISTORICITY - ACADEMIC
ETHOS
HEGEMONY
GENDER CONSTRUCTIONS

AGENT   STRUCTURE

MIDDLE CLASS

WORKING CLASS

CULTURAL GROUPS   INDIVIDUAL GIRLS   CULTURAL GROUPS

AGENCY MEDIATED BY SOCIAL CLASS

CONSTRAINS RESISTANCE
ENABLES CONFORMITY

ENABLES RESISTANCE
CONSTRAINS CONFORMITY

EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS FOR GIRLS

2.1 Theoretical Perspectives Overview

One of the theoretical perspectives of particular interest for this study is neo-Marxism. Some school-based education can be seen to produce a docile future labour force. This serves the intention of protecting and enforcing capitalist class relations (Bowles and Gintis 1976). Significant examples of cultural and social reproduction are evident among the MCG in this study. Dominant MC cultural discourses can be interpreted theoretically using the concepts of hegemonic relationships (Gramsci et al. 1971). Hegemony is present when the dominant culture has control over what happens and how institutions operate (Ball 2006, Cole 2006). Gramsci (1973) sees hegemony as a form of cultural leadership exercised by the dominant ruling classes. This concept of cultural power and how it is mediated and resisted by the girls is an important theme in this study.

The context of MP is important because it permeates school culture and ethos. MP is an all-girls Catholic, voluntary secondary school. The girls are mainly MC with a small WC cohort. This study is interested in the attribution of meaning to the girls' symbolic worlds. The girls' relationships with each other, the teachers, school management and the girls' families are all explored in relation to theory on power, oppression and inequality from a feminist perspective. The work of Lynch is of significant importance from three perspectives. Firstly, she addresses many of the theoretical influences of relevance to this study in her own work. Secondly, she has a deep understanding of equality and gender issues in education. Thirdly, she has conducted much of her work in the context of the Irish school system.

The many contributions to social reproduction and cultural reproduction theory, including Bourdieu's (1986; 1998) cultural capital theory, were key to finding meaning in the data which emerged from this study. Giddens and Bourdieu provide a lens to interpret the findings from an agency-structure perspective. Giddens' (1984) theory of structuration is examined alongside a number of Bourdieu's (1998) concepts, with particular reference to 'habitus'. Consequently, agency-structure theory forms a key theoretical perspective for this study.

2.1.1 Functionalism: The Base Theory of Education Systems

Parsons (1970) provided a theoretical framework termed the 'voluntaristic theory of action'. He saw society as a series of linked parts functioning together, a system of structures functioning in an interrelated way. This perspective became known as structural functionalism. It originated from Spencer's (1972) biological metaphor of anatomy and physiology being akin to the structure and function of society. Functionalism offers a partial explanation for incidences of social reproduction in institutions such as schools, but neglects to address the diversity of values and practices evident among social groups.

The concept of equality of educational opportunity is embedded in functionalist theory from a meritocratic perspective. Therefore, functionalists believe in the concept of social mobility and contend that an element of inequality both socially and economically is inevitable (Drudy and Lynch 1993). This researcher suggests that functionalism does not sufficiently account for the social barriers, irrespective of ability or effort, which make success in education an unequal phenomenon. The narrow focus of functionalism and its neglect of conflict and difference mean it is not part of this study's theoretical frame. It is mentioned nonetheless in acknowledgement of its relevance to educational theory.

2.2 The Origins of neo-Marxism from Orthodox Marxism

Much of modern social theory has emerged from theorists of the past. So too have the debates on agency-structure and the micro-macro approaches to sociology. Marx (1967) saw society from an economic perspective, arguing in favour of those who provide the labour for production accruing the greatest economic benefit. He predicted the fall of capitalism and believed in a communist approach to the production of goods and services. Elements of Marxist theory are useful in this study for a number of reasons. Marxism is seen as a general theory of how society operates.

It is rooted in the unfairness of capitalism and encompasses three main propositions known as historical materialism, economic determinism and a theory of class analysis. Society sits on an economic base with everything else on top of it, a sort of superstructure (Marx 1967). The site of this study is a school within society which is highly susceptible to capitalist and market forces. School authorities pay particular attention to MP's position on national league tables. These are not national league tables as in other countries like Britain (Ball 2013) but are compiled by the media and compare schools according to the number of their students who are accepted into certain third level Irish institutions. The school have been successful in maintaining high academic results, which are above the national average in all subject areas. This is indicative of the pressures MP faces to maintain its status in a system that has become increasingly competitive with decreasing funding from the state. Mount Privet has found itself in an educational market striving to maintain high standards to attract students whose middle-class parents can help supplement the state funding.

Beyond historical materialism and economic determinism Marx (1967) theorised about social class and its relationship to capitalism as being a constant struggle between the oppressor and the oppressed that would lead to revolution. The Marxist theory of class analysis identifies a conflict between the owners of the means of production and the workers who provide the labour. Commoditisation of labour in a capitalist society results in an exploitation of the worker providing the labour. Marx argues that capitalism leads to a polarised and unequal distribution of wealth (O'Byrne 2011). A significant criticism of Marx is his neglect of the gender dimension within the economy and society. He failed to sufficiently recognise that the ability of men to be paid for their labour was dependent on women providing free labour in the home (ibid). This study examines some of the effects of the contemporary capitalisation of education from a feminist perspective. Elements of traditional Marxist theory are still valuable in terms of the social class divisions in MP and the marketisation of education in capitalist Ireland.

Neo-Marxist theory emerged with the work of Gramsci and Forgacs (1988) in response to criticisms of functionalism. Gramsci et al.'s (1971) theory of hegemony has links with Marxist theory but claims the ways in which capitalism is enabled lies in the consent obtained from those it exploits. Gramsci (1973) claims that capitalist reproduction is informed by cultural and political forces. He links the cultural with the economic and therefore rejects the Marxist economic determinism proposition (Calhoun 2002). Hegemony can be seen as a form of ideological power. Collective will can become a force which is capable of shaping social reality. The concept of 'historical bloc' is central to hegemony theory (Gramsci and Forgacs 1988). It is the union of forces such as political, social and military to maintain power. These forces can operate as structures independent of human will. However, when an enhanced awareness of one's own interests emerges, this can result in conflict to attain the upper hand. Gramsci and Forgacs (1988, p. 195) state:

> "Hegemony of a fundamental social group over a series of subordinate groups is destined to produce favourable conditions for maximum expansion."

Gramsci and Forgacs (1988) identified the use of ideology to maintain power through culture which was central to the attainment of power. The ideological and political superstructures served to maintain relations so that hegemonic dominance relied upon consent rather than coercion. A crisis of authority occurred where consent was challenged. The consent and of the girls towards aspects of their own oppression was evident in this study. The theory of hegemony is also significant to this study as it provides a lens to understand significant levels of conformity observed in the field. Gramsci and Forgacs (1988) divide conformism into two forms, namely, Jesuitical and rational where Jesuitical serves the interests of small groups and rational conformism aims to use minimum force to ensure a useful result. Hegemony helps to explain how the cultural and social reproduction of certain practices, values, rituals and actions is visible in many areas of school life.

Gramsci et al. (1971, p. 40) describe the role of schools in social reproduction:

> "This social character is determined by the fact that each social group has its own type of school, intended to perpetuate a specific traditional function, ruling or subordinate."

Hegemony and issues of inequality are important in relation to their impact on the experiences of the girls. The expressed cultural experiences of the minority group of WCG and majority of MCG elicit some differences worth exploring. Habermas' (1991) work is broadly based on revealing the nature of society more accurately from a cultural perspective. His work on knowledge at the objective level and human interests at the subjective level encompass micro-macro integration as does this study. Habermas (1984) worked on a concept known as communicative action where he described how the actions of agents are primarily coordinated through attempts in reaching understanding. This concept is supported and challenged by varying acts of agency shared by the girls in this study.

The critical theorists like McLaren, Marcuse and Habermas have links with Gramsci's and Bourdieu's theory as they seek to challenge cultural domination, as well as inequalities within social life. Habermas (1984) claims that one component of social life cannot be studied in isolation from the remainder. This study of MP produced as holistic a portrait of the girls' life at school as was possible within the confines of ethics. Also significant are Habermas's (1991) dialectic concerns on the relationship between the subjective and the objective. Habermas criticises orthodox Marxism due to its neglect of the nuances of social interaction and where the critical theorists can appear to take a pessimistic stance they still offer useful insights into the cultural hierarchies which have emerged within the peer groups in MP.

2.2.1 Hegemony and Social Class

This study seeks to understand the nature of agency and to establish why girls choose different actions in varying circumstances to avoid or induce conflict. Giddens (1971) explains that culture is connected to social class and the sources of social conflict from a Weberian perspective are broadly divided into three categories; class, status and party. Class conflict arises from differences in one's position in the market or economy. Status refers to an individual's share of social honour as a community leader or a position of power. Party refers to one's position in the state. When a classed capitalist ideology infiltrates education, equality issues can arise. There can be an inequality of access, opportunity and condition based on a person's socio-economic position in society generating a form of cultural conflict for dominance (Baker et al. 2009). These equality issues can have complex evolutions and unintentional consequences. They may well be difficult to identify and to fully appreciate in a school like MP where the demands, pressures and the scale of school life is a challenging and high octane endeavour. This is why the teacher-researcher with an opportunity to observe, can listen to those at the core of the school experience with an informed understanding of school context.

Schools are also important institutions of social change, in that their role is to educate the whole person for life and citizenship as outlined by the Irish Education Act (1998). However, schools are impacted directly and indirectly by the economy through government funding as well as a school's ability to raise funds through contributions, which tend to come from MC parents (Crozier et al. 2008). This study elicits evidence of a cultural dichotomy between and among girls in MP. In addition, gender can also intersect with social class with MCG culture acquiring a level of dominance. Feminist theory attests to an intersectionality of inequality for women based on race and social class (hooks 2000). Marxist-feminists blame subordination of women on exploitation in a capitalist society and the class system inherent in it (Tong 1989). There are difficulties for the WCG in MP due to their different culture and small numbers.

The understanding of patriarchy is situated in radical feminism seeking recognition that the dominant inequality was against women (Firestone 2003). Patriarchy is described as the subconscious subordination of women by men in order to sustain unequal power (Goldberg 1977). Social class divisions can also reproduce patriarchy by dividing women into separate social class groups as is the case in MP (Millett 2000). Socialisation from an early age contributes to women accepting the dominance of men and adopting roles, practices and careers expected of women. Smith's (2012) theory is valuable in understanding the lived experiences of women and patriarchal power, as is the ethnographic approach used in much of her work. A more detailed exploration of the role of feminist theory as part of this study's theoretical frame is discussed below.

2.3 Modern Feminist Theory Explored

The domains of modern feminist theory fall broadly into four main areas. These are: gender difference, gender inequality, gender oppression and structural oppression. Gender difference theorists explore the contention that women's situation in society is different from men. The theories of gender inequality examine and describe structures in society that are unequal for women (Tong 1989). Theories of gender oppression are more radical (Firestone 2003) and psychoanalytical in nature. They examine the use of violence against women and the effects of patriarchy are also seen as a form of structural oppression. These categories devolve into many sub-categories but feminist theory has a number of distinct features. It deals with a sociology of knowledge, a model of society, patterns of social interaction, subjectivity of social experience and integration of all these features into social life (Ritzer and Goodman 2003).

Feminist sociological theory contributes to the agency-structure debate by seeing it as a conflict between liberation and domination. Human agents are acting within the power of the social structures. Feminist sociological theory also sees social life as a series of responses by individuals and groups to resist or challenge agents of domination (ibid). This is particularly evident in the findings of this study where some girls use visible and indirect ways of resisting domination by their peers and in some cases the structures of the school.

The school on the other hand has insufficient power to resist the superstructures which fund its very existence. Yet it must be acknowledged that schools do have some discretion regarding key aspects of organisation and process such as curriculum and subject provision and in this way are not entirely powerless agents. Feminist sociologists highlight three aspects of social life: relations of ruling, local actualities of lived experience and texts. All these features can contribute to the domination of women (Smith 2012). Therefore, for many feminist theorists structure and human agency are fused. In the case of MP, its role as an agent and also as a structure positions it as 'influencer of' yet it is 'influenced by' the girls it enrols.

The theoretical frame of this study includes theoretical perspectives which address gender issues specifically. Given that MP is an all girls' school with almost all female staff except a male principal, the idea of the female students developing a gender identity or particular gender constructions through the school geography emerges. Gender roles and the expression of gender stereotyping can be examined within sex role theory. When gender construction is perceived to be a social norm which mirrors a socio economic imperative it is considered mainly through Marxist-feminist theory (Tong 1989). Where gender roles are produced as a gender discourse, these can be viewed from a post-structuralist perspective (Francis 2006). Both perspectives inform gender issues in MP. An examination of feminist theory confirms it is best read as a combination of many perspectives. This would concur with Tong's (1989, p. 227) assertion that:

> "Feminist theory is at its best when it reflects the lived experience of women, when it bridges the gap between mind and body, reason and emotion, thinking and feeling."

Where it may appear we have moved beyond the traditional liberal feminist approach, with equality legislation in place, Marxist-feminists would claim this can never be fully achievable as long as the rich and powerful retain the wealth in a classed society (Tong 1989).

Radical feminism acknowledges the difficulty with reform and calls for the overturn of institutions that oppress women including the traditional family (Delphy and Leonard 1992). The psychoanalytic feminist theorists argue that a woman is culturally marginalised as a result of delayed integration into society, due to late separation from her mother (Tong 1989). Existentialists believe women are oppressed due to otherness; they are not 'man' therefore they are 'other' (ibid). This study identifies evidence of girls 'othering' girls unlike them.

The socialist feminists bring many of the feminist strands together, inter-relating the many forms of women's oppression. Although this approach serves to unify feminist theory, it is challenged by postmodern feminism which suggests it is indicative of male thinking to see one absolute integrated feminist story of reality. It is said that postmodernism supports and reinforces the need among feminist theorists to deconstruct and decentre (Tong 1989). Postmodern feminism elicits the idea that feminist thought is diverse and varied because women are. However, refuting the idea of a singular symbolic order on the basis of there not being one single truth, could leave feminism devoid of a firm understandable feminist standpoint (Tong 1989). The emphasis on a centrality of difference in postmodern feminism is accused of directing women towards a sort of radical individuality. This could have the effect of alienating women by leaving them alone to sort out their own individual problems (ibid). The individual and group agency utilised by the girls in MP indicates the complexity of interactions between different girls in varying circumstances.

Structural oppression is a key field of feminist theory for this study because evidence of dominant and subordinate peer groups emerged over time. Structural oppression theories claim that some groups can benefit by controlling and oppressing other groups (Tong 1989). This domination is achieved through the social structures that exist and have arisen out of history. Structural oppression does not disable agency but this agency is connected to structural arrangements. The two key theoretical types within structural oppression are socialist feminism and intersectional theory (ibid). Socialist feminism is a critique of patriarchy and capitalism as oppressors of women's experience.

Socialist feminists aim to unify these two oppressions into one complete capitalist patriarchy or domination, a unified explanation of all types of social oppression (Ritzer and Goodman 2003). There are varying degrees of intensity and modes through which women experience oppression. These include: class, age, race and sexuality. There is a matrix within which oppression and domination can occur (Collins 2000). These intersections alter a woman's experience in the social world which is an injustice against women. Intersectionality theory questions terms such as 'woman', 'sisterhood' and 'gender'. It examines the understanding of 'whiteness' as a feminist construction steeped in privilege, with the aim of evolving a more inclusive feminism (hooks 2000). Structural oppression theory is particularly useful in informing the interpretation and understanding of feminist issues within this study.

2.4 Symbolic Interactionism

This perspective focuses on individuals identifying meanings in their own actions. It is a theoretical perspective useful to ethnographic studies. Symbolic interactionism is briefly explored in this section due to its pertinence in interpreting some of the interactions cited in the findings. However, it does not form part of the theoretical frame. Symbolic interactionism was founded by Mead (1977) but named and developed by Blumer (1986).
It claims that socialisation is a continuous ongoing process where we are adapting ourselves all the time. During social interactions we seek meaning in a situation; complete actions based on that meaning and contemplate how we are perceived by others (Blumer 1986). Labelling theory and symbolic interactionism offer a means of explaining our identities, knowledge and interrelationships. Labelling has a relationship with power. Those in positions of power may label us and we may adopt or impose labels on ourselves (Mead and Morris 1974). Labelling theory informs some of the interactions in MP. There were examples of changes to behaviour, personality traits and actions among some girls in this study. In many ways, symbolic interactionism indicates that the 'self' that is presented may depend on the audience (Goffman 2005). During interactions, social actors act out a line which Goffman (2005, p. 5) describes as:

> "A pattern of verbal and non verbal acts by which he expresses his view of the situation and through this his evaluation of the participants, especially himself."

The analysis of group and individual observational data identifies how the girls manage the impression they portray to the researcher and other peers. Goffman (1971, p. 20) describes this phenomenon in the following quote:

> "Each participant is expected to suppress his immediate heartfelt feelings, conveying a view of the situation which he feels the others will be able to find at least acceptable."

This stage management was identified within some of the interview responses from the girls and is discussed in the findings. It is important to acknowledge that this could be seen as a limitation of the authenticity of responses obtained. However, there were opportunities to interpret this stage management in order to learn more about the girls' agency, rational choice and need to present a certain 'self'. Therefore, agency-structure theory is also connected to how the girls presented themselves throughout the study.

2.5 Pierre Bourdieu and Cultural Capital Theory

The theory of Bourdieu provides a lens with which to understand what is happening in MP. Bourdieu's (1986) cultural capital theory presents capital as labour which is accumulated. When this capital is accessed by individuals, it can become a form of social energy with the capacity to be advantageous to the individual. Capital can be transmitted and reproduced in domestic and institutional settings. There are many types and subtypes of capital, all of which have an inherent power for the possessor. Although capital is interchangeable or transferable, this is dependent on the field it is operating in. The three fundamental forms of capital as detailed by Bourdieu (1986) are: economic capital such as money or property; cultural capital such as education and qualifications and social capital involving the creation of networks or connections. All these forms of capital are interchangeable.

There are three forms of cultural capital; embodied, objectified and institutionalised. Bourdieu's (1986) cultural capital theory originated as a hypothesis to explain the unequal educational attainment of students from differing social classes. Bourdieu believes that educational success is connected to the domestic transfer of cultural capital from parents to children. This continuous hereditary transmission of cultural capital has the effect of social reproduction in systems like education.

Embodied cultural capital is linked to the person's body and must be accumulated, assimilated and/or cultivated by the individual. It involves a personal investment by the individual and cannot be delegated. It becomes integral to the person's 'self', a 'habitus' and is not as immediately transferrable as money could be. Equally, its transmission is not as visible as the acquisition of money and for this reason embodied cultural capital can be referred to as a form of symbolic capital.

Objectified cultural capital is inherent in material things. It is important to note that cultural goods can be possessed as economic capital or as a form of symbolic cultural capital. In the case of a painting there is a cultural and perhaps also an economic value inherent in it. Some MC girls in MP possess expensive accessories like iPhones which display high levels of such capital. As a certain type of cultural capital infiltrates a particular setting, such as a school, it can evolve osmotically into a form of cultural dominance. Institutionalised cultural capital exists in the form of education and academic qualifications. Qualifications can have the dual function of being an academic award and also a signifier of cultural competence. In this way institutionalised cultural capital is capable of imposing certain recognition and status on the holder. This recognition has a role in the transmission of social capital (Bourdieu 1986). In this way schools can unwittingly merge embodied, objectified and institutionalised cultural capital through a combination of tradition, discipline structures and high academic expectation. This amalgamation can develop into power and hegemonic discourses, which can become camouflaged and hard to recognise or address in the daily organised chaos of a school.

2.5.1 Social Capital

Social capital is the possession of a network of human connections offering support individually and also as a collective capital. It is apparent that the greater the social networks, the greater the volume of social capital a person possesses. Social capital is responsible for the production of homogenous groups, like members of select club, where these members accrue benefits. As members accrue social capital this leads to a multiplier effect where access to useful relationships ensures a symbolic profit and social reproduction is an outcome. This is because the accrual of social capital is greater from relationships with individuals or groups well endowed with social, cultural or economic capital (Bourdieu 1986).

Capital can be converted from one form to another, with economic capital at the root of all capital (Bourdieu 1986). Labour time or investment is required to transform capital from one form to the next and this transmission follows the path of least resistance, the least costly in terms of time and benefit. These conversions also enable social reproduction of capital in families and social networks. It is noted in theory (Bourdieu 1986) that much of the transmission of cultural capital is clandestine in order to enable the creation of a dominant culture, hegemony or patriarchy. Therefore, the inter-relationship between the forms of capital and the existence of dominant cultural capital is examined as a hypothesis in MP. The potential power associated with the possession of varying types of capital is also explored in this study.

2.5.2 Bourdieu and Social Reproduction

Bourdieu (1990) claims that academic careers are deemed to follow social origins. He sees a direct link between social class of the person and the prestige associated to their faculty. Certain faculties have greater disciplinary prestige than others. In addition, there are facilities in place to preserve this situation. Renewal of staff involved a selection and moulding process where existing faculty members could exercise power over new entrants.

Therefore, there was a controlling of the transition of new staff enabling existing members to maintain control into the future. This is a form of academic capital, defined by Bourdieu (1990, p. 84) as being:

> "Obtained and maintained by holding a position enabling domination of other positions and their holders, such as all the institutions entrusted with controlling access to the corps."

Any attempt to challenge this conservatism met with intense resistance by the vested power interests. MP could feasibly be ascribed an institutional prestige due to its reputation for excellence in academia particularly. In addition, there is a tradition of employing past pupils and facilitating their teaching practice. This is in keeping with an ethos of care for those the school has educated, but also enables social reproduction among the staff.

Bourdieu mediates between the subjective and the objective, individual and society, micro and macro. He refuses to acknowledge that collective consciousness is mechanical, claiming that human practice is structured partly by the temporal aspect of the social experience. This 'practical knowledge' gives the individual the opportunity to assert a certain level of agency, albeit within the constraints of the conditions possible (Bourdieu and Nice 1977). There is conformity evident in the actions of many of the girls in this study indicating a level of agency constraint or conscious compliance. Bourdieu and Nice (1977) describe the 'generative scheme' which involves an interaction between the individual and society to produce practices. Social reproduction remains legitimate despite the individual's agency as a result of what Bourdieu and Nice (1977, p. 78) term 'Habitus' defined as:

> "systems' of durable transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is principles of the generation and structuring of practices and representations which are objectively regulated and regular without in any way being the product of obedience to rules..."

Habitus is a key Bourdieu concept for this study. A personal 'habitus' is embodied by the individual born into it. However, the temporality of the person filters this habitus and asserts a cognitive element or a disposition to it. The individual has a subjective agency but within the confines of the embodied cultural element of the habitus (ibid). Social reproduction is possible because the individual strategises within the dominant social structures in place, maintaining these structures by exerting limited agency within them. This agency is insufficient to transform or change the structures. Resistance to the social structures enables a rejection of the dominant culture and institutional habitus. Habitus serves to produce a homogeneity which resistance attempts to disrupt. Bourdieu and Nice (1977, p. 80) assert that:

> "One of the fundamental effects of the orchestration of habitus is the production of a commonsense world endowed with the objectivity, secured by consensus on the meaning of practices and the world, in other words the harmonisation of agents experiences and the continuous reinforcement that each of them receives from the expression, individual or collective, improvised or programmed, of similar or identical experiences."

The excerpts from the data within the peer groups' discussions illustrate a reluctance to deviate beyond a narrow range of actions or resistances, supporting the idea that a personal and institutional habitus can operate together to induce conformity. There is strong evidence of homogenous shared experiences among certain peer groups in MP but this is mediated somewhat by social class. A concept Bourdieu and Nice (1977) call 'Doxa' also exists in cultures. Where rituals, routines, practices and tasks become synchronised within groups, these can serve to reproduce power relations. This happens as practices become taken for granted. Bourdieu and Nice (1977) refer to this as a 'naturalisation of arbitrariness'. In order for dominant capital to have its value maintained, social agents must conform in order to evoke this value, making them complicit in social reproduction and habitus. Doxa's consensual emphasis reduces disputes and resistance among groups and individuals. In Kabalian society where these theories evolved, there were punishments for disobedience. Similarly, many schools including MP impose fines and sanctions for disobedience.

There are also inherent clandestine rewards for compliance to the dominant culture in the form of leadership opportunities or selection for roles of responsibility. Doxa was evident in the lack of awareness shown by many of the girls of some of the rules and restrictions implicit in the daily life of the school.

The state examinations also act a form of compliance and reward where those girls seen to comply with lengthy study periods are rewarded by doing well academically. However, there was also resistance evident at times, in varying forms, by some students. Bourdieu (1992, p. 108) refers to resistance stating:

> "Social agents are not particles that are mechanically pushed and pulled about by external forces. They are, rather, bearers of capital and depending on their trajectory and the position they occupy in the field by virtue to their endowment in capital, they have a propensity to orient themselves actively either towards the preservation of the distribution of capital or toward the subversion of this distribution."

Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) refer to the concept of 'field' in much of their work. Thinking in terms of 'field' is a mode of relational thinking. A 'field' is a network of objective relational positions, imposing determinations upon the agents within. These determinations can be power or capital, evident as domination and subordination. Like players in a game, social actors are invested in the game sometimes competing and opposing each other and sometimes colluding. The existence and value of capital is dependent on a field. Players can totally conform to the rules of the game or enter the game with a view to transforming the rules. They can engage in adding value to capital or discrediting capital to valorise the type of capital they possess. These cultural struggles within the field are evident among the friendship groups in MP. In this respect Bourdieu's (1992, p. 102) statement is valuable:

> "Those who dominate in a given field are in a position to make it function to their advantage but they must always contend with the resistance, the claims, and the contention, political or otherwise of the dominated."

2.5.3 Masculine Domination and Symbolic Violence

Bourdieu (2001) sees masculine domination as a form of symbolic violence, relatively invisible and often unwittingly consented to by the dominated. This is similar to consensual elements of hegemonic theory (Gramsci et al. 1971). Social institutions such as schools, state, churches and family can all historically enable men's power and gender dominance by men. Bourdieu purports that while the home may be the place where masculine domination of women is most visible, it is institutions such as schools which perpetuate and exert the symbolic and material power relations of male domination (ibid). He asserts that rather than approach demands for parity universally by constitutional law, it is better to examine the structures of institutions like schools where social reproduction affects the whole social order, bringing about division.

Bourdieu and Thompson (1991) also attest to a relationship between language and power. Bourdieu sees language not alone as a mode of communication, but also an expression of habitus with a facility to be moulded to the field in question. Language provides evidence of the social structure. Accent, tone and use of vocabulary illustrate a social hierarchy. Similar to the evolution of a dominant culture is the acceptance of a dominant and legitimised language. Varying classes engage in 'linguistic unification' (Bourdieu 1991, p.6), particularly the ruling classes. Elements of Bourdieu's (1991, p. 17) theory of practice applies to language where habitus impacts agents' linguistic practices explained as:

> "Linguistic utterances or expressions are forms of practice and as such can be understood as the product of the relation between a linguistic habitus and a linguistic market. The linguistic habitus is a subset of dispositions which comprise the habitus: it is that subset of dispositions acquired in the course of learning to speak in particular contexts."

There are some criticisms of Bourdieu due to the lack of universal validity to his theory. He claims the nature of habitus changes with varying or altered historical circumstances (Bourdieu and Nice 1977). There is a lack of analysis of how gender is related to his theoretical concepts.

There is also a vagueness or need for clarity in some of Bourdieu's work. His complexity of linguistic style coupled with a determinist relationship with agency is a limitation (Calhoun 2002). Smyth and Banks (2012) agree that Bourdieu does not focus on philosophically discursive agency which is incorporated into this study using Giddens' (1984) structuration theory.

Despite some criticisms particularly in relation to the concepts of familial and institutional habitus being theoretically unsound (Atkinson 2011) others see this collective habitus as flexible and dynamic (Burke et al. 2013). This researcher argues that the work and concepts of Bourdieu provide a holistic approach from the micro to the macro within the sociology of education. In addition to habitus, this study is also informed by the way Bourdieu frames social class reproductions around the possession and transmission of cultural capital. However, in terms of agency-structure theory, Bourdieu's and Giddens' theory together provide a more comprehensive means of interpreting and analysing the findings within this study.

2.6 Giddens' Structuration Theory

Giddens (1984) allows for greater discursive, practical and unconscious monitoring of human conduct. The unconscious monitoring of agency is connected to an individual's need for an ontological sense of trust. There is also a routinization associated with structures according to Giddens (1984). When day to day routines are disrupted, significant anxiety can result for the human agent. Therefore, Giddens' (2013a) theory of structuration links structures with individual agency. He argues that human conduct is a reflexive and active process. In this way, agency is an ontological phenomenon. Human agents have the capacity to understand what they do which Giddens calls practical consciousness. Structuration theory helps us understand how human agency and social structure, comprised of rules and resources, operate together across time and space (Giddens 1984). Where functionalism and Marxism preside over the object or society and symbolic interactionism focuses on the subject or agent, structuration theory presents a duality of agency and structure. Social activities serve to socially reproduce as they become bound in a routinization. Structures are created out of the recursive nature of the routinization of activities.

Actions we perform contribute to the creation of the social world but the structures that evolve can also serve to constrain or enable our agency. Therefore, Giddens accepts that individuals are not totally free to select their own actions. Giddens believes we make our society but at the same time are constrained by it. Although actions can change structure, so too can structure mediate action (Giddens 1984).

Giddens (2013a) proposes that sociologists study social practices rather than individual actions. These actions and subsequent actions are partially reflexive, but sometimes our practices are guided less by consciousness, with the reflexive element becoming habitual. No actions can operate entirely outside collective interpretative schemes. Collective structures according to Giddens are like the rules or resources of a social system. Language would be one example as it is a rule which has a relationship with speech and without language speech is meaningless (Giddens 2013a). This example illustrates that structures such as language are not only constraining, they can also be enabling. The rules of language prevent the formation of new words outside the formal constructs of the language but also allow new words with new meanings to be constructed.

Giddens (1984) positions the body as key to social life. All persons are positioned in a multiple way based on a social identity in a given context. This is because society is a bounded regional system of social associations (Giddens 1984). Society has a historicity as this social world is exposed to change all the time. In MP the girls position themselves in different ways, physically and socially, depending on the context. There are multiple identities which vary according to a particular social association. Giddens (1984, p. xxx) explains the value of using structuration theory to examine agency and structure stating:

> "The points of connection of structuration theory with empirical research are to do with working out the logical implications of studying a subject matter of which the researcher is already a part and with elucidating the substantive connotations of the connections of action and structure."

The routinized intersections of social practices are transformational; they can change when agents act on them. In this way human activity is recreated by agents when they act. It is the conditions that agents reproduce which make social activities possible and this is achieved through reflexive knowledge. Giddens (1984) sees action as stratified by reflexivity, rationalisation and motivation, but these are an embedded set of processes. Where agents can show good levels of discursive knowledge with regard to the former two processes motivation is a more unconscious feature of human conduct. Agency is a form of power as the agent is capable of action and this action has an element of rational choice. The fact that the action can have intentional and unintentional consequences does not remove the premise that agency is an act of power.

There are similarities between Giddens and the work of Habermas as well as Bourdieu. While the agency-structure debate has connections with the work of all three theorists, Giddens has a freer, more dual and reciprocal view of the relationship than Bourdieu. Giddens (2013a) sees the power to transform as being inherent in agency. There is no agency without the capacity to make a difference. Giddens' (1984) conceptual framework addresses how context is involved in the production of action. The school context in MP is important in producing social reproduction through recursive routinized action. The girls' agency and motivation is seen as a continuous flow of daily action or *durée* (ibid). The interpretive schemes or knowledge of the structures help the girls in MP to understand through their school experiences, the signification/rules; legitimations/norms and these schemes operate across time and space.

Giddens' (2013) structuration theory has been criticised for being too conceptually contained. He is also accused of being unclear about his meaning and lacking a sound foundation or base for his work (Ritzer and Goodman 2003). Craib (2011) insists that Giddens' concepts are not sufficiently bound by a logical system. He accuses Giddens of using concepts to fill gaps rather than using them as causal connections.

Where Craib (2011) acknowledges that Giddens does provide a range of concepts that are applicable in many situations, he is frustrated by the lack of guidance on where these applications could be best used. In this way, he accuses Giddens of offering a theory which describes rather than seeks to explain. However, this non-deterministic approach suits this research study as it enables opportunities to seek explanations from a combination of a range of theory and the data the study provides. Where this researcher acknowledges that Giddens does not provide an ultimate explanation, he does provide a very useful conceptual framework which assists this researcher with seeking explanation.

In partial response to the criticisms of Giddens' structuration theory, Archer (1996) theorises about agency and structure. She sees the two as analytically separate but accepts in real life agency and structure are interrelated. In addition, she sees the relationship between *culture*, agency and structure as embedded in real life. However, for Archer (1996), structure equates to material phenomena and culture is a collection of nonmaterial ideas. For this reason structure and culture remain autonomous. Giddens sees structures more flexibly, with language a cultural phenomenon but also a societal structure and this is the approach taken to structures in this study. It is likely the agency-structure debate is set to endure further attention for the foreseeable future given its centrality to the micro and macro approaches to social theory as outlined in this chapter. Agency and structure are the theoretical axes upon which this thesis and its findings manoeuvre, whilst mediated by hegemonic discourses.

2.7 Theories of Equality and the Irish Context

It is clear that education has a major role in any society from the point of view of culture transmission and as a vehicle for socialisation. In Ireland there is an educational ideology that claims a position of power for the 'intelligentsia' as theorised by Gramsci (1973). Irish educationalists operate in a domain of consensualism which reinforces their power. The predominant MC status of teachers poses problems for the interactions and understanding of WC students (Drudy and Lynch 1993).

There were references among the WCG in the study regarding teachers not listening to their opinions and in that way disrespecting them. It must be acknowledged that teachers themselves may be restricted in many ways by the school structures. The pressure of the Leaving Certificate in schools and overloaded senior cycle curricula can put pressure on teachers to deliver substantial content leaving little opportunity for dialogue (Lynch and Lodge 2002). In addition, dialogue may be mediated by the Catholic ethos in voluntary secondary schools encouraging an adherence to a particular set of values. The church's power is still significant in many schools. It can operate as a strong mediator of cultural and social reproduction, through values systems and liturgical ritual (Lynch 1989).

It is clear that despite enhanced expenditure towards the creation of greater equality of access, participation and attainment for the lower socio economic classes, there is still a persistence of inequality. Drudy and Lynch (1993, p. 163) attest to economic circumstances being pivotal in tackling this problem stating: 'If income and wealth differentials were eliminated, the problems of WC 'failure' in education would be greatly reduced'. Iannelli and Smyth (2008) also found that level of education was connected to social background in many European countries, while gender influenced the field of study. Based on many of the findings in this study, finance is not the only answer to the issue of achievement and participation in school. There is no denying the impact of the availability of finance on educational access and opportunity. However, there were so many factors discussed by the girls across the social classes which they cited as influences on their engagement in learning and attendance at school. These included friendships, opportunities for leadership, parental and teacher expectation, extracurricular provision and a sense of belonging. It must be noted that many of these domains are mediated by social class. These points also allude to a need for schools and society to recognise the value of the affective skills which are barely addressed within the senior cycle curriculum, yet are central to life (Lynch 1989, Lynch et al. 2009). Therefore, structural and cultural dimensions of school life are mediated in part by economics, but addressing financial difficulty for students will not ensure success or failure.

Participation rates for girls (Smyth et al. 2008) have improved over the years, as is also the case for boys. Girls are performing better academically than boys, but it is MC girls that have gained significantly. Despite the gains there is a concentration of girls in the arts and humanities in higher education and a dearth of girls in traditionally 'male' career areas (Smyth and Darmody 2005). This is in part due to the gendered nature of curricula in schools but also connected to cultural barriers. Even in schools where subject provision is broad and accessible to all students, girls are not choosing the technical subjects. This questions the patriarchal nature of knowledge itself. Subject choice has repercussions for choice at higher level as mentioned, but ultimately for career realisation for boys and girls (Smyth and Darmody 2005). There is an absence of women in senior management positions within the civil and public service, the majority of clerical workers are women and fewer women become employers. Therefore, there are still issues for girls' socialisation into caring roles and careers, not experienced by boys. This can reduce their competitiveness in the labour market in male-dominated career areas (Drudy and Lynch 1993, Smyth and Darmody 2005). This point is illustrated by many of the girls in MP choosing a small number of female-dominated occupations such as nursing, teaching and early childhood care. The subject choice available in MP may restrict their opportunity to access technological or applied mathematics options as careers, unless they study these subjects outside the school. This could be seen as cultural reproduction of gender inequality for some girls in MP.

The hidden curriculum or relational life of the school is often a perpetuator of inequality. Levels of discipline are hugely influenced by the gender and class composition of the school (Lynch 1989). Schools distribute and produce culture and in doing so can reproduce class relations and inequalities. This happens as students resist and contradict elements of the school system. Their resistance results in partial penetration of the system but little change, resulting in the social reproduction of the class structures as they exist.

Schools can be seen as cultural sites of struggle but Giroux (1983) rejects hegemony's denial of the ability of the agent to act through critical consciousness to transcend the dominant power through resistance. In MP resistance is of a low level nature and does not tend to induce change.

There is also research which indicates that many elements of the formal curriculum influence how reproduction occurs. The way in which agency and process connect is important in the understanding of reproduction (Apple 1995). Teachers are actors in the relative autonomy of the school, making decisions which serve to reproduce and produce culture. In this way, the curriculum can become a vehicle for social stratification and class-based inequality (Apple 1995, Apple 1986) Teachers can inadvertently focus their attention on those students who share their values, attitudes and who give them a sense of getting the knowledge through (Lynch 1989). Even if students resist this alienation from curriculum and teachers, this serves to reinforce and consolidate the dominant culture through a student's inability to effect change in many cases (Apple 2001). It is also identified that many students do not resist, despite knowing the unfairness of the dominant ideology (Giroux 1981). Perhaps there is a tacit understanding in MP that the consequences of resistance could ultimately be the failure to reach one's academic potential.

The power of parentocracy is implicit in maintaining privilege where many MC parents send their children to MC schools (Ball 2013). These MC schools also attract substantial aforementioned voluntary contributions or other forms of financial support from those MC families who can pay (Goldring and Phillips 2008) although it could be argued this is necessary due to the widely acknowledged scenario of lower capitation grants being paid to voluntary secondary schools. This inadvertently constructs a hierarchical position for the MC parents and their children as prospective consumers in the education market. Thus, making changes towards greater equality and diversity within the school system becomes challenging when financial liquidity is part of the equation.

The state, parents and to a lesser extent the schools are enabling in-equality by not proactively addressing social class segregation evident in post-primary schools (Brown 1990).

School admission policy in MP affords automatic entry to siblings of past pupils. This is an example of an admissions policy decision which makes transport for siblings to school more logistical but which also contributes to MC hegemony. In Bourdieu's (1986) theory it could be seen as the transmission of symbolic capital. This is particularly poignant at a time in Riverstown (location where MP is located-pseudonym) where there are school closures affecting many schools catering exclusively for disadvantaged students, while MP is oversubscribed. In relation to a hidden curriculum (Lynch 1989) the concept of parentocracy informs us that parents prioritise the pursuit of advantage for their children. Parents will use their acquired knowledge to maximise benefit for their own children (Lynch 1989). This study's findings support the notion of parentocracy and it is explained in part through Bourdieu's (1986) concept of social capital. MC parents employ social capital to identify specific protocols which can advantage enrolment of their child. This was discussed by many of the girls in MP. They remembered their parents initiating a meeting with the principal prior to enrolment to discuss the school's appropriateness for their child. The school never initiated such appointments; it was a practice which evolved through the social capital networks of the MC parents. This meeting became a ritual of prospective MC parents, a practice that was accommodated by the school.

Finally, the individually competitive nature of Irish schools (a universalistic and particularistic component of most Irish schools), the long day and emphasis at second level on homework could be seen as having an economic imperative. It is similar to Lynch et al. (2012) 'new managerialism' which promotes a culture of long working hours and strong competitiveness. It could be seen as being complicit in the training of productive, compliant and hardworking individuals for the labour market (Lynch 1989). Knowledge can be positioned in schools as a commodity to be acquired for personal gain as opposed to education serving the common good.

This situates elements of the inequality debate firmly in education, as the type of knowledge valued in Irish schools is not accessible or culturally valued by all groups in society. In this way education can become an agent of oppression or emancipation mediated by culture and social class (Baker et al. 2009). The centralised nature of Ireland's education system enables greater political manipulation by government. Policy development can sometimes reflect and enable social reproduction of capitalist ideals (Lynch 1989) facilitated by the evolution of segregated MC schools like MP. This problem is reduced somewhat for Irish education due to the partnership model of policy formation where a consultative process operates among educational stakeholders.

Equality can be divided into types according to Baker et al. (2009). These are termed basic equality, liberal egalitarianism and equality of condition. These span four key contexts of equality, namely the cultural, economic, political and affective. Within each of the conceptions are five dimensions of analysis. These are; respect, resources, care, power and learning (ibid). It is important to note that education in the broader sense happens beyond the education system as well as within it. Education outside of school can be a liberating experience irrespective of class (Freire 2000b) but educational failure is related to social class and the value placed on particular cultural capital. Baker et al. (2009, p. 147) warn against fostering 'ghettos of advantage and disadvantage' within different schools with segregated social class cohorts.

In terms of an equality of respect and recognition the subject of sexual orientation is largely ignored in Irish schools (Baker et al. 2009). The nuanced versions of equality discussed by Baker et al. (2009) are powerful as they stand outside, yet are integral to, the broader social class and gender inequality debates. Inequality is experienced in a myriad of ways. Whilst mediated by gender and social class issues of inequality operate across these two domains in terms of mutual respect, recognition, and solidarity between people. This study indicates pockets of homophobia in the girls' responses. There is little scope within the formal curriculum for learning around love, care, solidarity and acceptance of difference which could address some of this prejudice (Lynch et al. 2009).

This is an inequality against those who work or live in affective domains and an educational neglect for those in schools. The gendered expectation and construction of caring as innate to females (Lynch et al. 2009) may be a partial explanation for the low priority of the affective domain within an education system which is aligned to a patriarchal state and where men have not traditionally engaged in the role of carer in the home or elsewhere. Baker et al. (2009) identify that personal intelligences are also not prioritised in the Irish education system. Yet the girls in MP referred often to their need for emotional support from their friends inside and outside of school.

Baker et al. (2009) emphasise that education is a central part of the egalitarian debate. They call for an emancipatory research methodology where equality action plans are developed and a social movement model of egalitarian change has an opportunity to evolve. This approach focuses on convincing dominant groups that they have much to gain from change. Although academics are part of the cultural elite, it is claimed that if links with those experiencing injustice are created then academics can become real agents for change. Theory, method and praxis must become integrated. This re-affirms this researcher's decision to work as a teacher-researcher. The dual roles serve to create a deeper understanding of the role of curriculum, policy, parents, school and indeed teachers in social and cultural reproduction and the inequalities that can arise from this scenario.

Another concept broadly known as transformative agency education has been addressed by a number of theorists (Apple 2001, Freire 2000b, Giroux 1981). This idea is based on individuals reaching a deep level of understanding of the world. It aims for an education steeped in democracy and empowerment, where difference is accepted and celebrated. Transformative agency education is underpinned by critical theory where it is understood that relationships involve domination. Gender discords are also evident in the management of schools. MP has only had male lay principals, yet the teachers are mainly female, as are all the students. In contrast, the role of deputy principal with responsibility for pastoral care has been held predominantly by women.

This male principal, female deputy, arrangement is also visible in many of the neighbouring post-primary schools in Riverstown. Neo- liberal government politics in Ireland and the male dominance and control of educational management is an area of significant inequality. It has relevance to MP where a group of girls are embarking on their careers. There are cultural codes embedded in the appointment of senior managers in schools. This aforementioned culture of 'new managerialism' (Lynch et al. 2012) has similarities with the competitive nature of schooling discussed above. Even when women applicants for senior positions fulfil the selection brief in terms of competence and leadership qualities, it is clear that chances for women to succeed in acquiring management positions are opportunistic. Lynch et al. (2012, p. 83) state:

> "The ideal type of neoliberal citizen is the cosmopolitan worker built around a calculating detached self...Neo-liberal thinking in education subordinates and trivialises those aspects of education that have no (measurable) market value."

The care prerogative for women manifests a position of constraint for women's ambition and is internalised into the identity of some women. The sense that women must juggle family and career in a way not applicable to men serves to restrict agency by gender. It structures particular barriers for women that are not erected for men. In many ways Noddings (2005) reaffirms the ethical and moral foundations of teaching. She sees ethical caring as a state of being and differentiates between caring for and caring about. Caring about can become a societal force because it creates ethical awareness. Noddings (2002) sees the home as the primary educator, but schools should include education for home life on curricula. The model she espouses to address care education in schools includes: modelling, dialogue, practice and confirmation. Noddings (2002, p. 1) states:

> "School as well as home should be central in any adequate discussion of moral life and social policy...but starting at home does not suggest that we must remain there."

Where there are similarities in the centralising of care between Lynch and Noddings there is a feminist tension as Noddings alludes to 'natural caring' being particularly central to the maternal experience. This could be seen as to reinforce a woman's role in 'naturally' being the primary care-giver for her children. Perhaps the messages for many girls around their potential roles in management are socialised in very subliminal ways from their own school days. The 'self selection' (Lynch et al. 2012, p. 153) out of certain management roles is possibly institutionalised from experiences at school.

However, teacher-researchers can create opportunities to openly discuss, challenge and encourage debate on issues of inequality. The constraints of the curriculum in addressing personal, social and affective issues as discussed above could be mediated through meaningful research opportunities based on an ethics of trust, care and proximity (Banks 2004). This discussion confirms that issues of equality in schools clearly operate at the micro and macro level. Inequality is embedded in social class differences, gender difference, power dynamics, cultural difference, school structures, education policy and globally. These same issues cited in theory also impact this ethnographic case study of MP.

2.8 Cultural Politics: Policy, Power and Inequality

It is widely accepted that there is an emphasis on education for economic competitiveness, a knowledge economy (Ball 2013, O'Sullivan 2005). This development has positioned knowledge as a commodity. Consequently, the value of cultural knowledge is diminished and issues of inequality can arise from this predicament. Cultural reproduction of the 'right ' type of culture can position white MC individuals at an advantage (Reay et al. 2005). The stronger the links between education and the economy's needs the greater the impact on educational policy. Policy tends to be shaped by those who have the power to assert their meanings on what education should be. O'Sullivan (2005) uses a construct called the 'policy paradigm' to examine educational policy in Ireland. O'Sullivan (2005, p. xvi) defines this construct:

"Policy paradigms are cultural frameworks that govern the policy process. They embody linguistic, epistemic, normative, affiliative, and procedural dimensions. They regulate what is to be defined as a meaningful problem..."

The policy paradigm construct enables an interpretation of aspects of policy making. The two key concepts broadly embedded in cultural politics are that of power and culture and all cultural sites are also sites of power struggles. Gramsci (1988) also refers to how the dominant class protects the power invested in them through hegemonic practices. There is cultural and relational power evident between the groups of girls in MP which impacts on the girls' school experience. The WCG minority status in terms of numbers in the school inadvertently positions this group in a vulnerable position, in addition to their cultural differences which are visibly different to the cultural practices of the MCG. For this reason, cultural politics in relation to hegemony informs the findings in this study.

Ball (1994) speaks of the need for a social reform to anti-marketise education and to counter all systems of domination in education. There are other contemporary commentators on the marketisation of education who signal the loss of intrinsic education in place of skills and the centralisation of economics (Brancaleone and O'Brien 2011). This includes a continued marketisation in the sphere of public education, through the creation of independent upper secondary school privatisation in many cases (Arreman and Holm 2011). It is important in the discussion of a marketisation of education, to distinguish between Ireland and other international education systems. It is not advisable to make direct comparisons across different education systems, although it is important to explore beyond a national context. In light of this, elements of international research may have varied relevance to the Irish context. Education in Ireland is not marketised in the same way as it is in Britain where national league tables rank schools based on their performance (Ball 2013).

While the marketisation is more overt abroad, one could argue that the power of the hidden market in Ireland is equally powerful. The power of tradition, historicity, Catholic ethos and parentocracy can ensure that academic, cultural and social reproduction is ensured. In could be argued that Irish schools do strive to maintain a market share, albeit in different ways than in Britain. Where schools in Ireland appear more empowered in terms of their freedom to structure curriculum, mixed ability or streamed classes and internal policy this can be strongly influenced by trustees' wishes and the need to protect a particular market share, by providing a particular educational product. This can lead to a relative powerlessness for schools who may wish to introduce change.

A particular Leaving Certificate market is evident in the environs of MP with a number of 'grind' schools charging high fees for Leaving Certificate repeat years or full time senior cycle provision and some teachers offering private grinds in their homes. Higher level institutions are not immune from the power of the education market operating with fewer resources and many more students (Palmer and Schueths 2013). The market operates as a power to manipulate the actions and practices of educational institutions. It serves to cause anxiety on the part of parents and their children which then drives the need to access any educational advantage available.

The idea of a power discourse is a central theme in Foucault's (1980) writing. Similar to Ball (2013), power in educational contexts is connected to the economy. However, power cannot be possessed, it can only be exercised. The key effects of power are seen in actions. Power has the capacity to repress individuals and this repression can be repeated. Foucault (1980, p. 92) identifies two schemes for the analysis of power. These are the contract oppression scheme which is juridical power and the domination repression scheme which is a struggle and submission scheme. Many forms of power repress the actions and agency of the girls within and outside their friendship groups in MP. Punishment is a form of exercised power which is embodied in many institutions (Foucault 1980).

MP has (as mentioned) a myriad of sanctions for deviation from the rules as have most schools. In this way MP could be seen as the vehicle of power and the sanctions the point of application of such power. This traditional, disciplined, educational opportunity would be sought after by many of the MC parents as a symbol of good order and a positive learning environment for success in academia. Foucault (1980) also argues that disciplinary power aims to provide cohesion to the institutions of society, an assertion applicable to MP. Foucault (1980) claims that power and knowledge are interdependent. He argues that power operates between the written, spoken and symbolic discourses and structures of society. Therefore, schools as sites of knowledge transmission and part of society's structures are likely to exercise power and have power exercised upon them also. This study assesses how individual agency is related to power and also how the girls resist the repressive nature of institutional power. It also contests that the school can be powerless as an agent of change in the current Irish context of recession.

Lynch (1999) claims that Marxist and critical theories together unveil quite comprehensively how hegemony and cultural reproduction is manifested in schools. Resistance theory offers an alternative to the social reproduction perspective and examines how individuals or groups can counteract cultural domination (Willis 1977). Resistance is evident in MP mainly among the lower socio-economic groups and to a lesser degree among the MCG. One of the main critiques of reproduction theory is that it is too structurally deterministic and ignores group or individual agency (Fagan 1995). Resistance theory replaces the deterministic elements of reproduction theory with more voluntarist elements, as outlined by Willis (1977) and Mc Robbie (1980). Fagan (1995, p.94) argues that:

> "Much of the political critique levelled at reproduction theory can also be applied to resistance theory as it does not afford us a transformative or ethical version of what could or should be."

Nonetheless, Giroux (1981, p.72) insists that:

> "Schools have immense power to manipulate the consciousness and actions of students, and function to pass on selected aspects of the dominant culture."

Smyth and Banks (2012b) outline how institutional habitus, individual habitus and a young person's agency combine to influence career choice and ultimately access to third level. The dominant culture within the school and mobilisation of capital had a significant relationship to higher level opportunities (Bathmaker et al. 2013). This has direct relevance to MP, as the school's philosophy of education encourages the pursuit of academic excellence among the girls and the majority attend university after school. This could be seen as attractive to many parents and high-achieving students, many of whom derive from the MC. The dominant MC culture permeates MP's activities, rituals and events throughout the formal and informal curriculum. This serves over time to continually produce and reproduce a certain dominant form of culture which is a powerful force. Power is seen as an aspect of all cultural production, as (Fagan 1995, p.97) contends:

> "Culture produces power, knowledge, identities and ways of life; it therefore has the power to reshape social life."

Schools' and colleges' cultural orientation can be overtly classed. Lynch (1999, p.16) in her study on the Irish school system argues that:

> "It perpetuates particular cultural traditions at the expense of others, and in doing so reinforces images of what is or is not culturally valuable in a given society. If one's cultural traditions and practices are not a valued part of the education one receives, if they are denigrated or omitted, then schooling itself becomes a place where one's identity is denied or one's voice is silenced."

Lynch (1999) goes on to assert that at times, the only way to succeed in such a system is to change oneself to adopt the dominant dimensions and cultural traditions of the institution. Giroux (1981, 2004) analyses how schools produce dominant ideologies which can induce resistance or conformity. This is linked to agency-structure because resistance is individual agency in response to perceived oppressive structures.

43

This resistance and conformity debate has resonances with the more philosophical work of Maxine Greene (2000) who discusses whether we see the world big or small. Seeing things 'small' involves looking at schooling from the vantage point of power and through the lens of a system. Seeing 'big' involves more of a consciousness of the greater educational reality which for her is about the interactions of the students in classrooms and social spaces. Resistance and conformity are steeped in agency and structural power. Agency is always mediated through one's interactions and existence with others, but structures also influence transformative agency. Greene (2000, p. 23) points out:

> "When habit swathes everything, one day follows another identical day and predictability swallows any hint of an opening possibility."

It is through the questioning of the routine that it is possible to unravel the unfamiliar and interpret from multiple perspectives. It is in this way we get closer to understanding the realities of others. When individuals come together, identities are created and, very much linked to the perspective of Lynch (2009), Greene (2000, p. 97) states:

> "We work for responsiveness to principles of equality and principles of freedom which can still be named within contexts of caring and concern."

In order for our imaginations to become transformative we must be grounded in our own 'landscape' or context (Greene 1978). If an individual knows their landscape well they can transcend passivity and develop a critical conscious. This self understanding can be transformed into a social commitment to change. The following quote by Greene (1978, p. 94) is significant in light of the equality debate and marketisation of education:

> "If resources are provided once again, if indifference and privatism are overcome can we render education something more than a process of credentialing a process of imposing social controls"

44

The teacher is a part of this social control as the teacher is a part of the institution that creates and imposes these controls. It must be remembered however, that although the teacher's intentions are a function of the context of their work, teachers can also be, as Greene (1973, p. 11) puts it:

> "Human beings who generate a variety of symbolic structures, so that he, as he expects his students to do, can look from different angles on his life world."

The teacher has agency and can chose to act differently on what they come to know and can adjust perspectives on institutions and human beings (Greene 1973). This reiterates for this researcher the importance of reflection and reflexively but also serves to merge the theoretical elements of this study with the methodology. It also introduces the concept of teacher agency which cannot be explored in great depth here, given the focus on the girls in this thesis, but is worth mentioning. This teacher-researcher ensures an ethics of care by acting reflexivity throughout the study and using agency to prioritise research actions which are beneficent. This is supported in the above argument which positions the teacher as a moral human being before any contextual 'teacher' role is adopted. Furthermore, this would suggest that teacher agency, in much the same way as student agency, enables actions to be consciously made within the constraints of other more powerful structures.

2.9 Synthesis of the Agency-Structure Debate

There still remains a debate over the idea of structure and agency in Europe which has paralleled the micro-macro integration debate in America. The linkage of micro and macro analysis has been problematic with attempts to create a sociology that is multi-dimensional and founded on rational choice (Coleman 1994). The 'agency structure' and 'culture agency' debate as outlined by Archer (1996) prompts the question. Is it societal factors outside the individual that influence actions or internal factors which construct the social world continually?

The findings in this study suggest that an awareness of societal structures enables us as individuals to exert agency and as Giddens (2013a) asserts, agency and structure operate as a duality.

Bourdieu equates the agency-structure realm to his concepts of habitus and field. Bourdieu's (1977) theory of practice and explanation of habitus discuss limited agency constrained by institutional and self-habituses. Bourdieu's field could be akin to Giddens' structures. Both are bound by ritual, norms and expected practices. Where Giddens places importance on awareness of structures, Bourdieu sees capital as predisposing certain success in the field. Coleman (1992) links macro-sociological phenomena with individual behaviour. He asserts that individual actions are taken with reference to structures and that change to macro structures can occur as a result. Berger and Luckmann (1967) see the relationship between agency and structure as dialectical. They see the interactions as a continuous loop of society-forming individuals, who then go on to create society. The critical realist perspective asserts that human agency is made possible by social structures and that the actions of individuals can be consciously changed. In this way there is a transformational model of social action evolving from the debate. However, the power of social structures on an individual is a real power, according to the critical realists. Yet Giddens (1984) also sees agency and not just structures as power.

This would be an incomplete section if the area of rational choice theory was not discussed at least briefly. Central to the agency-structure debate is the extent to which agency is a rational choice. Gambetta (1987) claims that educational decisions are a combination of three key processes. These are: what an agent can do, wants to do and, more indirectly, the decision is shaped by conditions that pertain to the individual or place. The form in which these three processes combine determines the agency of the individual. In terms of what an individual can do, there are constraints ranging from institutional to cultural to economic. These can be mediated by social class but all individuals operate under some constraints.

Once constraints are taken into account there is an element of intentionality, what an agent wants to do, within the confines of the constraints. This is motivated, according to Gambetta (1987), by expected rewards and expected probability of success. This probability is based on past performance and perceptions of personal ability and labour market prospects. In addition, choices are based on how agents plan their futures and levels of ambition. Gambetta (1987) believes that the agents, despite constraints which are a key variable, are capable of purposeful behaviour and are intentional agents. This occurs as agents evaluate action rather than being mechanically pushed into action. Therefore, preferences and life plans are distorted by specific social class biases. These weights act sub-intentionally to elements of rational choice. Gambetta (1987) asserts that agents jump and are not pushed but acknowledges that not all children can jump to the same extent. This point is supported by Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997) notion of a 'bounded rationality' where decision making takes place in the interactions between the person and the field, termed 'horizons for action'. An agent's rationality is bounded by what they can see on the horizon, the information they can obtain. Horizons for action are influenced by the context or field and the person's disposition, akin to habitus. Relational forces also bound the agent's rationality. In this way the concept of a pragmatic yet bounded rationality emerges which explains to some degree Gambetta's (1987) idea that not all agents can jump to the same extent. This rational choice theory will inform the discussion of the findings of the study in relation to agency and structure.

2.10 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed Marxist and neo- Marxist theory. The focus of many theorists towards process and individual experience rather than systems is evident in the theory explored (Lynch 1999). The existence of hegemony is apparent throughout the data gathered in MP. The neo-Marxist Hegelian foundations which provided Gramsci the means to develop a theory of hegemony provides part of this study's theoretical frame.

This chapter highlights how a capitalist ideology infiltrates education and in doing so produces inequalities which the school may not have the resources to address. Gender and social class intersect to compound these inequalities for some girls to a greater extent than others. The theory of Lynch on social justice and equality provides a practical framework which identifies the repeated inequality that result from hegemony in a girls' school. Structural oppression and intersectionality theory are particularly important feminist perspectives for this study. The idea that those exploited individuals consent through conformity or resist through counterculture actions is important. The role of MP as a school constrained by other superstructures is highlighted. There is a power in the ability of the girls to use agency through critical consciousness and resistance.

The domestic transfer of valuable capital from parents to children perpetuates the generative schemes which serve to produce dominant cultural values and practices. Bourdieu's work is used to interpret interactions in MP among the girls' friendship groups and with staff from a cultural capital perspective, with due regard to habitus and field. From an agency-structure perspective Giddens' (1984) concept of practical consciousness frees individuals to develop a reflexivity of routinization and recursive actions. Yet the theory of structuration also identifies collective interpretative schemes within which actions operate. Giddens' conceptual framework provides a scaffold which frames how context is integral to the production of action. Giddens' theory of structuration is therefore used with Bourdieu's habitus to fully realise how agency and structure operate in MP.

This study's theoretical frame triangulates agency-structure theory, hegemony and equality theory from a feminist perspective as the principal framework upon which this study is situated. This unique integration of perspectives makes a methodological contribution in its use of new theoretical combinations to interpret individuals, groups and social structures within a girls' school. The context and scope of this study requires a multi-perspective integrated theoretical approach.

It is important to be able to mediate between the subjective and the objective in order to accommodate the complexity of the site of study, which recursively situates interactions from the micro to the macro, individual agent to peer group to school.

Chapter 3 Literature Review

Themes and strands for this literature review were initially selected based on the site of study being a single-sex, MC girls' school with a particular historic school context and ethos. This study elicits insights about how agency and culture is enacted through the patterns that inform the girls' interactions. Therefore, this review focuses on literature relating to social class, gender, and youth culture. This chapter forms a broad analysis of key areas to orientate the reader into the literature field of this study. A substantial number of new literature sources of direct relevance to the findings of the study are incorporated directly into the discussion of findings in Chapters 8-11.

There is a tension among ethnographers as to whether it is correct to theorise in advance of data collection and analysis, or whether it is truer to the ethnographic approach to enter the field willing to observe the emergence of patterns, over a prolonged period of time. Similarly, many ethnographers would wait to write a review of the literature once the categories and themes have emerged in the field. That way the ethnographer does not contaminate the study by having themes selected prior to data collection (Creswell 2009). In this study, literature and theory was reviewed prior to and during the study. This researcher argues it is important to read, present and discuss literature to situate the study in a theoretical and literature field prior to data collection. However, allowance was made for new categories to emerge based on findings in the subsequent research phases.

3.1 Social Class: An Analysis

Social class stratifies people into hierarchical social categories. Marx identifies social class in terms of a person's relationship to the means of production in capitalist societies, broadly divided into proletariat, bourgeoisie and aristocratic groups. Social class was based on the concepts of property, authority, expertise or money which also all relate to a person's position in relation to means of production (Giddens 1971). Property refers to whether a person is an employer, self employed or employee. Authority refers to status within property in the form of management, supervisor or non-managerial roles.

Expertise divides employment into professional, skilled or non skilled. A combination of these divisions produces a contemporary class structure broadly divided into upper class, MC and WC. However MC can feasibly be divided further as is the case with Weberian class division (Weis 2008). Weberian based divisions of wealth/class, status and party (as mentioned briefly in Chapter 2) take greater account of education, skills and power within the social class structures which can facilitate social mobility (Giddens 1975). Social class is linked to wealth which is seen an index of occupation and income; status the level of esteem an individual is capable of attracting and party relates to the influence an individual could have over others. It relates to control, power and political effectiveness (Entwistle 1978). On the basis of this theory the girls' parents' occupations was used to assign a broad class distinction to each girl.

Social class has long since been associated with educational access, attainment and outcome (Devine 2004; Entwistle 1978; Willis 1977). It is clear from much of the literature that educational access, attainment and outcome at school could all arguably be impacted by both a student's social class and gender.
Brewer (1993 p. 17) argues that: 'Gender as a category of analysis cannot be understood, decontextualised from race and class.' The influence of both gender and social class in relation to educational experience can vary depending on the context or type of school in question. It is claimed that socio-economic status more so than gender, has been the predominant focus in Irish educational research over the years (Lynch and Lodge 2004).

Strong links have been identified particularly between social class and attainment in Ireland and elsewhere (Drudy and Lynch 1993, Smyth and Banks 2012b). Bourdieu (1993) claims that social and cultural capital can be converted to economic capital and MC families have enhanced means to acquire and access the types of capital that can advantage their children educationally. This advantage leaves WC families with unequal power as is evident in MP. A parent's WC culture can mean access to a meaningful education for their children is a much greater struggle (MacRuairc 2009; Reay 2002).

In addition, MC students find their culture affirmed through the status accorded to certain curriculum subjects over others and often WC cultures are underrepresented on syllabi which can affect these students' interest levels and abilities (Smyth and Hannan 2007). lannelli (2013) argues that subject choice among the MC shows a higher propensity towards science and mathematics. This favours more highly valued labour market occupations, further advantaging the MC. Streaming in academic settings can also serve to alienate the WC further, while affirming MC students, and those placed in lower stream classes show greater student disaffection (Smyth et al. 2004b, Smyth et al. 2011). This can occur through the development of subcultures, intellectually based on interest in or achievement in academia (Middleton 1987). These points are pertinent to the educational context in MP as there is a narrow traditional curriculum and also streaming of classes.

Edwards and Westgate (1987) examined the role of classroom discourse and found that a significant language gap exists for many between the home and the school, making access to opportunities for educational attainment more challenging. This is well documented in theory on language codes and their ability to transmit values and patterns of culture (MacRuairc 2009). Linguistic rule systems are part of culture and those with different class codes can be alienated from the dominant culture (Bernstein 1990). Therefore, the family and home provides a domain upon which social classes are composed. The occupation of the primary breadwinner would traditionally have determined all the family members' social class. An implication for women historically with these divisions was that their role primarily in the home was an unrecognised part of the social class hierarchy (Kay 1987). With the expansion of women into the formal wage labour market there have been subsequent challenges for Marxist theory of class as it does not recognise the role of women and work. Barrett (1987) argues that it is more likely that gender class divisions were only incorporated into the capitalist labour divisions as women joined the labour force (Smyth 1997). At this juncture, women as a stratified social class emerge.

Millett (2000) asserts that in modern capitalism women can be viewed as a reserve labour force in times of war or economic expansion. Women are seen to serve society as formal labour only when required. The use of women to fill low paid clerical roles and the expectation that women also do domestic work with no market value provides no threat to patriarchal capitalist ideals (Lynch et al. 2012). This is familial exploitation of women and supports the argument that women occupy a different niche than men in terms of social class which is entirely related to gender (Delphy and Leonard 1992). Therefore, social class and gender intersect to position women in an unequal lower status position in education and the workplace. This is a particularly significant inequality issue for women which is further compounded for working class women (Baker et al. 2009). This literature relates to this study site which is an all girls' school with a minority group of WCG who are positioned as having a lower status in visible and invisible ways. This was mediated by curriculum and school structures as well as attitudes of some of the MCG based on cultural difference (Bourdieu 1998).

3.1.1 Social Mobility and Parentocracy

Theories of social mobility attest to the fact that there are opportunities for WC parents to navigate into MC educational territory. Entrance to particularly prestigious secondary schools can cause 'application frenzy' among the parents in securing a place for their child (Weis and Cipollone 2013). Brown (2013) identifies a recent social congestion as many families across the social classes seek similar educational benefits for their children. It is educational level as well as field of education which influence occupational outcome and this is mediated by social class and gender, indicating complexity in the realm of social mobility (Iannelli and Smyth 2008). In addition, curriculum, pedagogy and other aspects of student school experience beyond social class or gender differences need to be considered in the debate on social mobility, educational attainment and equality issues (Goldthorpe 2007, Smyth and Hannan 2007). This debate is complex and it is important to distinguish between WC social mobility to MC and status maintenance of the MC.

The former relates to the acquisition of various forms of capital (Bourdieu 1986) which facilitate a social transition and the latter pertains to attempts by the MC to socially and culturally reproduce their highly valued capital to maintain and protect their position of social class dominance. This produces access and opportunity inequalities for those who remain alienated from these cultural elite (Lynch and Moran 2006).

Halsey (2013) agrees that social policy is required to address education for livelihood, but also for living. He claims this would assist with the equality of opportunity and access for the lower socio-economic classes. The research findings in relation to the impact of social class are very much determined by the measurement processes used to examine the phenomenon (Breen and Whelan 1996). The way in which researchers investigate a complex area such as social mobility determines the findings and answers they report. This explains the varied and un-deterministic nature of the literature in this domain of social class (Pole and Lampard 2002). Despite this, it is generally accepted that there is still relative stability in class mobility. It is clear that lower socio-economic groups find positive social mobility challenging (Whelan and Layte 2007).

Positive social mobility is not a solution to educational inequality or social justice issues. It is argued that if social class is embodied, individuals should be able to achieve a positive sense of their social class (Reay 2013). Only by reducing the distance between the social classes and developing a collective sense of being human, which relates to education of the person, can the power of the dominant classes be removed (Reay 2013). Lareau (1997) highlights the differential in parent involvement or social distance between WC and MC parents and schools. Where all parents share similar aspirations for their child to achieve educationally, MC parents utilise their dominant cultural capital to become more involved in their child's school. This can be perceived by teachers as positive vested interest in their child's education, resulting in educational advantage for these children through the reinforcement of their dominant cultural capital (Lareau 2000). This is an example of status maintenance (Ball 2013).

WC parents are also just as supportive of their child's education although they can be less visible which can be falsely perceived by teachers as indifference. This is supported by many research findings (Lareau 1997, Lynch 1999, Reay 2001a). This suggests that MC teachers can have MC perceptions of what it means to be engaged as well as a lack of understanding of the constraints of WC jobs which may involve clocking in and out and increased shift work. These factors hinder parental engagement in education during the day. This can lead to further alienation of WC cultural capital, due to these parents being unable to be as involved with the school, for a myriad of reasons (Lareau 1997). This is a barrier to WC social mobility.

Symeou (2007) observed cultural capital in an ethnographic study, in its embodied, objectified and institutionalised forms. Families lacking one or other of these forms of cultural capital tended to be among the WC. This impacted on WC parents' abilities to support their children's education, due to differences in the access to and quality of teacher-family collaboration. This study also emphasised the importance of schools avoiding homogenisation of the parent group, but instead forging greater links with parents with varied cultural capital.
Crozier (2000) suggests that schools should gather data on parents' social classes so as not to assume that they are MC. Schools defended their stance by saying they treat all parents the same where the lack of recognition of difference, is in fact discriminatory (ibid). Some WC parents find the school setting intimidating and have a lack of confidence in dealing with school staff. WC parents have reduced agency often due to transport or childcare restraints, work or low self esteem which highlights the need for schools to understand and act on these constraints from an equality perspective (Lareau 2000). It is also important to note the pressure felt by Leaving Certificate students to achieve academically is very high, yet preparation for transition to higher level and the world of work can be neglected (Smyth et al. 2011). WC parents may not have the resources MC parents have to support this transition. These points illustrate the aforementioned challenge and debate around WC social mobility.

The issue of MC social advantage is discussed by Devine (2004) who attests that MC parents mobilise and transmit their economic and cultural resources to ensure their childrens' educational and occupational success. They use social networking to 'status maintain' (Ball 2013) and thus ensure reproduction of their cultural capital in schools. Ball (2003) claims that parental choice is one of the key contributing factors to the increase in school segregation. This leads to greater inequality as MC parents want their children streamed or kept separate from low achievers. This can lead to a hegemonic school environment (Gramsci 1973). In this way it is not alone what these parents do, but an orientation that develops from their actions which has a powerful influence on policy and school practice. Crozier et al. (2008) also found that many MC parents did not want their children socialising with 'certain' children. This issue arises throughout this study with reluctance among the girls in MP to mix with girls from other schools and was also evident within MP. Educational establishments can therefore become sites of reproducing class inequality, rather than places of social mobility and opportunity. This leads to a segregation among schools, which leads to less social class diversity in schools (Apple 2001). Again, the ideology of knowledge being for consumption and production instead of for social transformation contributes to MC families having no interest in yielding their advantage (Weis 2008).

Weis (2008) examines the idea of parents doing the best for their child from a philosophical perspective according to their principles around diversity and inclusion. The dichotomy for many MC parents is whether to send their children to a MC school or to a school where they experience diversity. An interesting finding is that MC parents who send their children to the diverse mixed comprehensive get a huge value added educationally. This is because their children move beyond an average position in a wholly MC school to top of the class in the more diverse comprehensive, yielding significant attention and status to the child. In terms of the social mixing though, there can be a social mix of students, but little social class mixing (Weis 2008). It would appear that MC parents' practices around choice of school invariably end up maintaining privilege as opposed to addressing it (Crozier et al. 2008).

Therefore, the ability of the MC to status maintain is evident in this groups social processes, whereas social mobility of the WC is a more complex endeavour as outlined above.

3.1.2 Cultural Resistance to the Dominant Social Class

Willis's (1977) ethnographic study on WC boys identifies, in contrast to MC hegemony, continuous regeneration of WC forms of culture. Cultural reproduction is very evident in his study, yet this work is located in resistance theory. Willis sees the boys' counterculture actions as the infrastructure which binds the social group. Of relevance to this study in MP, is the discussion of how the boys' culture is related very complexly to the regulative state institution of the school. Willis (1977, p. 2) highlights the contract between social classes where:

> "The middle class child is thrown back on indigenous culture and instead of finding oppositional themes, he finds the same ones."

Willis (1977) study on WC boys' culture makes many references to the idea that work is not to be enjoyed for itself but as a means of getting a wage; and also for the extrinsic rewards it brings on receipt of the wage. Willis (1977, p. 128) makes a distinction between MC and WC aspiration and conformity to the school as an institution when he highlights:

> "The middle class enjoys its privilege not by virtue of inheritance or birth, but by virtue of an apparently proven greater competence and merit. The resistance to compete, implicit in the counter school culture, is therefore in this sense a radical act, refuses to collude in its own educational suppression."

Therefore, the WC boys collude in failing educationally, so that they are not compared to their MC counterparts. There are elements of this resistance and collusion also evident among the counterculture girls in MP. Giroux (1983) sees schools as cultural and political sites. They are arenas of struggle among differentiated cultural and economic groups. Critical theorists see the potential for radical transformation of class domination (McLaren 2002). This can be achieved through the dialectic of agency and structure. Resistance is linked to human agency and how it interacts with social structures.

Resistance theory aids understanding of relative autonomy as it can mediate links between structural determinism (Giroux 1983). However, there needs to be a greater account of gender and race, particularly as women experience the dual forms of domination through their social class and gender and race (Giroux 1983). Willis's (1977) boys remained in school which contrasts with Fagan's (1995) study where there is considerable drop out when WC cultures in school are not accommodated. Even the WC who do go on to higher education often find the institution alienating (Forsyth and Furlong 2003).

A case study by Reay (2002) illustrates clearly the difficulty experienced by a bright academic WC boy in an inner city school, whose aspiration to achieve is hindered by his need to maintain a position among his masculine peers. Social position which privileges the masculine can mean a struggle for a boy who wants to embrace the opportunities of academic achievement, as this is perceived as not for 'boys like me' and also feminine. Lynch and Lodge (2002, p. 106) concur with these findings but point out in their study that MCG, although mainly conformist, will 'challenge and subvert some of the traditional feminine ideologies promoted.' The findings from MP found that many of the WCG resisted conforming to academia and gender constructions, yet a few achieved academically despite low academic expectations by teachers. This latter type of resistance by WCG was also found by Smyth and Banks (2012) who argued that WCG were capable of using their agency to make rational choices about their academic futures, albeit bounded by habitus.

This section connects directly to the theoretical frame for this study. It highlights how hegemony can produce in-equalities for WC students (Gramsci 1973, Lynch 1999). This section positions resistance (Giroux 1983) as a form of agency which is bounded by social class and institutional habitus (Bourdieu 1998, Giddens 1984). Finally, it makes a connection between agency and rational choice theory (Gambetta 1987).

3.1.3 Social Class and Educational Policy

An examination of the historical evolution of modern schools in the late 20th century points to the need for capitalist societies to ensure the continued production of raw materials and a labour force to provide a variety of skills ranging from manual to management. This provision is partly met through ideological processes provided by the state in the form of educational establishments (Barrett 1987). O'Sullivan (2005) and Drudy and Lynch (1993) provide an excellent historical overview of Irish education detailing the role of changing society on education provision; however it is not possible to explore this fully here, except to examine key points on government educational policy.

Parents look for the complete package in a school comprising of good examination results, an atmosphere or ethos and a good standard of discipline and conduct (Drudy and Lynch 1993, Lynch and Moran 2006). These components are seen to inform good conduct and character in the students. However, it is clear from previously cited literature that this choice is highly classed (Ball 2006). Hatcher (2006) suggests that government policy encourages such diversity of choice across the social classes, as it is seen as a means of raising standards in PISA. MP circumstances mirror the points above, being oversubscribed due to its historical academic reputation and positive examination success over many years. Parents view this school as providing the complete package for many MC parents. This puts pressure on MP to continuously live up to this by ensuring academic success, extensive extracurricular provision and by advertising this via the school prospectus and open evenings.

Hatcher (2006) explains that even if MC students gain access to a school with an impoverished curriculum, they have the means to develop a supplementary home curriculum with private tuition, arts-based clubs and societies privately funded to enhance their children's' learning. Some girls in MP manage the narrow gendered curriculum by studying other subjects outside of school privately. These points are supported by Lynch and Moran's (2006) study on Irish schools, which points to evidence of a growing moral endorsement of parents advantaging their children.

It is not only condoned but there is pressure on parents to do the best for their children in whatever ways they can. It is evident that national performance measures such as PISA and government policy may also be implicit in facilitating the competitive and unequal nature of school choice to persist (Hatcher 2006). The politics of school choice has an ideological connection to Marxist divisions of labour in the workforce, where we now we have different schools accessible to different social classes (Giddens 1971). This is potentially more important now in recessionary times as even MC parents cannot guarantee their child's career success, leading to greater anxiety and an intensified drive to do whatever it takes to ensure success.

Educational outcomes beyond academia for Irish children are connected to social class and a positive childhood experience. Emotional and physical health as well as academic attainment are mediated by social class as outlined by an ESRI (2012) report on children's experiences growing up in Ireland. Dunne and Gazeley (2008) examined the experiences and achievement of second-level students and found a tacit understanding and reluctance by teachers to acknowledge students' social class positions. WC students' underachievement was normalised and even when successful educationally, this generated limited social mobility due to cultural barriers and other background constraints. Low teacher expectation and negative expectations of behaviour for WC students were identified in this study. The study concluded that teachers' judgements of ability and character were significantly influenced by social class, although teachers denied that this was the case (ibid). Van Galen (2010) acknowledges the disregard of the deep class differences that can exist between teachers and students in higher level teacher educator institutions. She encourages an academic discourse in teacher education to address the silence of social class and to enable effective teaching across social class differences.

A struggle to achieve at second level has a direct effect on access to higher education (McCoy et al. 2009). Children in this study felt that teacher support and interest was more focused on the honours classes. There are hidden disadvantages experienced by a number of socio-economic groups, even amongst the lower non-manual groups in accessing higher education. The quality of school career guidance when combined with cultural capital was also seen to influence access to and success at third level (McCoy et al. 2009). Forsyth and Furlong (2003) also assert that pupils from the most disadvantaged backgrounds are least likely to access higher education. They present a further inequality of participation for disadvantaged pupils, because academic achievement at school level is often the sole determinant to entering third level. This study also reported that attendance at a non-DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) school offered greater chances of transition into senior cycle than attendance at a DEIS school (2005). This consequently influenced a student's chances of moving into third-level education. Therefore, the socio-economic barriers for WC families may be evident from the beginning of secondary school and connected to their choice of school, which is a classed choice.

Reay (2006) looks to initial teacher education as a means of raising awareness among new teachers of the impact of social class on education. This is difficult as they are MC, may have a very utilitarian view of teaching and may not see the relevance of foundation disciplines. There is a worry that recent British educational reforms aimed at giving schools more powers over their admissions will segregate schools further (Apple 2013). This will then maintain the disadvantage for the WC and endorse privileges for the MC. The MC will then continue to maintain the authority, run the educational system, maintain and promote their cultural capital and in doing so further pathologise the culture of the WC (Apple 2013). These issues of power dynamics (Giroux 2004), hegemony (Gramsci and Forgacs 1988) and cultural politics (O'Sullivan 2005, Purvis 1987) among the MC in schools have been addressed in detail in the theory chapter but have relevance to this literature.

3.1.4 Social Class and Women's Education

Historically, clear divisions existed between MC and WC women. MC women experienced expectations of ladylike femininity combined with the role of mother and wife, whereas WC women were required to be a 'good woman' with fewer expectations as a social inferior, to be ladylike (Purvis 1987). Initially, in seeking educational opportunities, the challenge for a woman was based on gender more than social class since few WC women initially sought educational access. In contrast, WC women served the role in capitalist societies of providing healthy children for the labour force, or were slaves to MC women and men (Marx et al. 1992). The MC women were often home schooled or attended small private schools with some accessing higher education (Purvis 1987). The 1870 Education Act in Britain in theory heralded opportunities for WC women to access education. However, access was hampered by the prevailing domestic ideology that women were inferior to men and furthermore that WC women were subordinate to MC women (Purvis 1987).

Up to and after 1900 the social status of a woman had a direct relationship to what was taught, with a clear gendered division from what males across the classes were learning. Woolf (1929) expressed the wish to have educational opportunities that were bestowed on her brother made available to her also. Cullen-Owens (2005) highlighted the educational inequality existent for women and the challenge for attainment of womens' rights in the educational, legal and political spheres from 1870 to 1970. Therefore, the dominant ideology of society is explicitly represented in educational structures. Inequality on the basis of gender or social class can then be manifested or culturally reproduced in schools, instead of being places of opportunity or change (Apple 2001). While there is a male ordered hierarchy within society, gender differentiation for women operates both across and within the social classes (Deem 1983).

Delphy and Leonard (1992) examined the subordination of women in many areas of contemporary western society. They saw the family as a site of inequality for women where a male head has a maintenance role over a number of dependents.

As more women enter paid work whilst combining career and family there is another issue as employment structures are based on patriarchical structures. Even when women become managers they don't change the structures but instead take on more masculinised ways of working (ibid). Millett (2000) positions gender as a power dynamic based on dominance and sub-ordinance between men and women. This is in part due to the socialisation of both sexes to patriarchy in respect of temperament and status. The lack of reward for domestic work provided women with no legal standing for the work they did (Barrett 1987). Discrimination against women economically or psychologically positioned them as a group with minority status and a marginal existence.

There has historically been varying levels of gender discrimination evident with regard to the education of women and subsequent entry to the work place (Lynch and Lodge 2004). In Ireland, the Equal Status Act 2000 and Employment Equality Act 2004 have gone some way towards highlighting gender discrimination against women. Despite some claims that we are now in the post-feminist era with women operating on far more equal terms with men, it is still the case that women have not achieved equality on a number of grounds including pay, promotion and leadership (Kelly 2006). While there is evidence of increasing numbers of women accessing higher education (Lynch et al. 2012) educational institutions including initial teacher education colleges with largely female occupancy, can still serve to reinforce conservative values. Walkerdine et al (2001) examined the transformation of social fabric and breakdown of old established communities that have come with globalisation and neoliberalism at the level of the individual. Their study concluded that it is still social class that divides girls and young women in terms of their educational attainment with primarily MC women succeeding at school.

Lynch (1999) argues against the liberal distributive model of social justice where gender equity is measured as a proportional comparison with men and calls for research which examines the varying experiences of women from different backgrounds in education. She also highlights that improvements in girls' education and experience do not exist across all social classes.

The upper MC are the main beneficiaries of enhanced educational outcomes and lower MC experiences more akin to the WC. Lynch (1999, p. 147) asserts:

> "Little attention is focused on the fact that it is a particular social group of Irish women who have been successful... notably young, middle class, white, non disabled, settled women."

It appears that for the MC, educational success is perceived as the key symbol of healthy normality (Walkerdine et al. 2001). The attainment of academic excellence for MCG is a cultural expectation (Lynch 1999). Some girls are resisting this cultural expectation by demonstrating ladette type behaviours (Jackson 2006b) and this is a tacitly observable feature within MP culture. Beck (1992) asserts that MC girls' educational pathways are extremely homogeneous which he feels contradicts theories of individualisation, while Walkerdine et al. (2001, p. 167) elicit that the similarities among MCG educationally are so evident that:

> "A sense was strongly evoked of them not only following well trodden paths but also of being on a conveyor belt."

When examining the area of gender and social class routes through school and onward to the world of work, it appears these routes are underpinned by epistemologies that privilege certain forms of knowledge over others and institutions that normalise rather than contest their classed and gendered uptake (Leathwood and Francis 2006). This is mirrored in Smyth and Darmody's (2009) Irish study which argues that the continual gendered and classed nature of some subjects prevalent in Irish schools has significant implications for the skills obtained by girls and boys across the different social classes. However, it is important to note that girls are entering more traditionally male dominated subject areas where access is available (Smyth and Darmody 2009).

The way schools and career guidance teachers emphasise certain career areas is also connected to school ethos. Greater opportunities in education alongside career choice and training opportunities are all influenced by access to and take up of a myriad of subjects.

The technological subjects such as woodwork and metalwork were not available in MP. Even if they were they may not have been seen as important for points as MCG can be utilitarian in their subject choices and girls are also influenced by gender discourses which position certain subjects as 'male' (Smyth and Darmody 2009)

Gender hierarchies are reinforced when male principals are employed in all girls' schools, or when women applicants for promotion particularly in teaching, have less chance of success in open competition scenarios (Lynch and Lodge 2004). Lynch (1999) points out that gender inequality is linked to the capitalist patriarchal society which fears destabilisation and therefore resists changes to gender inequality. Enhanced equality may be achieved with a move away from the androcentric stereotype where male norms and values are privileged over female ones and where things considered 'feminine' are also considered inferior (Baker et al. 2012, Lynch et al. 2012). In addition, it would be important that the affective domain is respected and recognised (Lynch et al. 2009). The last twenty years have seen schools, teaching and education, becoming more output, performance and quality control driven. Ball (2006, p. 13) purports that teaching and learning has been reduced to a production line and that previous public sector leadership has been replaced by:

> "Leadership which is animated by the changing policy concerns of government and the vicissitudes of the educational marketplace, rather than to any commitment to substantive and situated values and principles."

A new managerialism with targets and performance indicators has consequently reduced the complex human dynamics integral to effective teaching, learning and education (Ball 2006, Lynch et al. 2012). This is being driven by PISA and the closer connections with business and global companies in recent years. Education appears to be moving from the holistic with less recognition of the personal, social, spiritual and physical development of the child as outlined in the Education Act (1998). The shifting of education to a commoditised entity, influenced by the market forces of supply and demand, is evident in some Irish schools (Lynch and Moran 2006).

An overview of cultural politics and further elaboration on the neo- liberal philosophy of education is provided in the theory chapter and referenced where appropriate in the discussion of findings chapters. This debate on the purpose of education is important as the pressure on the girls in MP to achieve high grades in order to maintain the school's reputation is stark. The girls must also live up to their parents' expectations in acknowledgement of the considerable investment they made on their daughters' behalf.

3.1.5 Gender, Aspiration and Friendship

O'Connor (2007) believes in Ireland and western society there are still significant elements of socialisation which are gender specific. Gender is something that people do and we bring our gender into being through behaviours that are deemed masculine or feminine. For Irish males the denial of vulnerability and absence of confiding is seen as culturally masculine. This may explain why girls refer to friendships far more and why friendships are often exclusively same sex. O'Connor (2008) also found that Irish youth's sense of self was not reinforced by individual best friends. Many MP girls referred much more to a wider group of friends, raising the issue of girls in this study adopting some male friendship patterns. Culture was identified as significant to the construction of self but culture does not operate in a vacuum (ibid). Instead it is mediated by gender, hegemony and social change. At times of crises girls resorted to connectedness through friendships far more than boys (O'Connor 2007). An earlier study by O'Connor (2004) identified a continuum of relatedness between boys and girls, with twelve year old girls highest on relatedness and fifteen year old boys quite low. Many MP girls cited friendship as the principal reason for coming to school every day. This concurs with the assertion that friendships among women enable social networks which support intimate confiding and often practical help (O'Connor 1992).

Pahl (2000) described women's friends as important in the process of working out emerging identities. Women's friendships are bounded by talk and communication with qualities such as insight and intuition very important. Pahl (2000) also contends that static separate WC and MC patterns of friendship have been replaced by a context-driven view of friendship, based on time and place. This raises the question as to where and to what extent hegemony influences the formation of friendships within youth culture (McRobbie 1991) yet it appears to be a significant factor in MP.

Duncan (2004) examines the transitional peer relationships of girls, moving from intimacy in primary school to fluidity in secondary school and assesses how these changes impact on school culture and friendship. A similar school transition based Irish study by O' Brien (2003) compares the class distinctions between girls moving from primary to secondary education and assesses how differing social class backgrounds influence girls' ability to negotiate the transition. Findings indicated that WCG found the transition more challenging, especially if they struggled to accept the dominant MC norms associated with girls' convent secondary schools. Smyth et al. (2004b) identify particular difficulties during the transition period for 'at risk' students who are from the Travelling community and fear acceptance or students who suffer from low self confidence. This transitional difficulty was also experienced in MP by the WCG who expressed feeling different to their peers. Brooks (2005) also found that friends informed a young person's sense of self and their position relative to peers. This theme is well explored in MP where the girls discuss the influence of friendships and school context on identity. It also connects with the theoretical perspective of Lynch et al. (2009) which highlights the importance of the affective domain in school.

It might be assumed due to evidence of social divisions across certain types of school (Lynch and Lodge 2002) that friendships would also demonstrate such divisions. However, Brooks (2005) found that young people were able to maintain friendships that they perceived to be socially unequal. This was not the case in MP where friendships were based largely on social class and interests within the friendship groups.

Other studies examining peer friendships attest to the importance of considering both types of friendships, inside and outside of school, as a means of understanding adolescents' social experiences in a more comprehensive way (Witkow and Fuligni 2010). The understanding of friendships, whether between boys and girls and across the classes, is complex. It needs to be examined from many different perspectives. Peer interactions offer opportunities to examine elements of gender, as friendship patterns differ among boys and girls (Bukowski and Concordia 2007) with girls tending to engage in far more intimate types of friendships than boys (O'Connor 2007). This study in MP examines girls' interactions and relationships within and outside of MP as well as friendships with boys in broader peer culture.

This social class division in friendships connects with cultural capital theory (Bourdieu 1986). Cultural capital and school context (particularly in relation to prestigious MC schools) are seen to play a major role in aspiration and choice of higher level establishment (Smyth and Banks 2012b). Subject choices for second level education are relatively individualised and rely little on peer approval but more on family support and advice, according to Smyth and Darmody (2005). This brings familial habitus into the educational decision making process. When students and friends shared social class similarities Brooks (2005) found that the choices of field for higher education indicated a common social process. An ethnographic study on final year students found that student assumptions and aspirations were also significantly influenced by teachers. The teachers were found to actively reinforce aspirational gender stereotypes (Gillborn 1990).

Marjoribanks (2002) found that a number of varied factors combine to influence adolescents' educational aspirations, so the domain of aspiration is very complex. This is supported by Ojeda and Flores (2008) who examined the influence of gender, parents' education level, and perceived educational barriers on educational aspirations. They found that perceived educational barriers had a more significant impact on educational aspirations than either gender or parents' education level. It tends to be white MCG with an abundance of social capital who aspire to higher education (Riegle-Crumb 2010).

Access to career guidance resources, career programming and the shaping of career interests had an impact on aspirations and occupation choices (Rowan-Kenyon et al. 2011). Smyth and Banks (2012b) affirm that aspiration for the lower socio economic classes could be supported by enhanced career advice. Interventions aimed at increasing access to advice and information for students on higher education opportunities (particularly for those in lower socio- economic groups) can be successful (Scull and Cuthill 2010). Shapka et al. (2006) found that early achievement in subject areas such as Mathematics, can also influence career aspiration significantly

Fagan (1995) identifies the lack of work experience as a limiter to early school leavers' aspirations. Leaving school early has long term implications for the realisation of aspirations among young people. Work experience and Transition Year (TY) is seen as an opportunity to try out non-gendered occupations, although there is significant stereotypical behaviour evident in schools around these choices (Smyth and Darmody 2005). Again, MP does not offer an opportunity for girls to study technological subjects during TY as they are not offered at Leaving Certificate and one focus of the TY programme is to let the girls try potential subjects for senior cycle in the school. Smyth et al. (2004a) found exposure to the world of work was a feature of TY that students believed was important and enhanced enjoyment of the programme and this was reflected in the attitudes of MP girls to TY. The opportunity for varied subject choice in school enables wider career aspirations (Francis 2006). Poor junior cycle subject choice has implications for senior cycle and ultimately accessing higher level courses and the labour force (Smyth and Calvert 2012). There are still gendered patterns of subject choice evident between males and females at second level (Smyth and Darmody 2005). These points are all reflected in the MP context with limited subject choice at junior cycle, TY and senior cycle and evidence of traditional gendered career aspirations.

There has been significant research done on the area of gender stereotyping, gender differentiation and sexism in schools (Browne 2004, Gillborn 1990). The effects of gender stereotyping in schools had been narrowed to three key areas which include: the communication of the teachers' expectations for boys and girls; classroom practices, including communities of practice in the classroom and among peers, and whole school rituals (Walker and Barton 1983). There is also evidence that children themselves have a significant role to play in gender stereotyping (Davies 2003, Martin 2010). More recently, this is supported by research indicating that same gender peer interactions at home and in school can reinforce gender role expectations and sexist attitudes (Keener et al. 2013). In some ethnographic studies, these taken for granted assumptions of male and female gender roles permeated school practices, rituals and even opportunities offered to children (Francis 1998).

The consideration of school context in relation to gender stereotyping suggests that elitist girls' schools categorise a well rounded girl as demure, feminine and conformist (McRobbie 2007). Skelton and Francis (2003) found that teacher attitudes towards the different social categories of girls and boys were significant. Typically, girls were seen as cooperative and conscientious while boys were perceived as boisterous and demanding but more rewarding to teach. This study concluded that teachers categorised girls as plodders who conform and boys as naturally talented but lazy. Girls who were very high achievers were often unfairly perceived by teachers as overconfident.

Hodgetts (2008) also identifies differences in how academic success and failure are perceived across gender. Boys' achievement tended to be naturalised whereas girls was pathologised. Underperformance for boys was seen as proof of potential and simply a lack of ability in girls. This study reinforced the idea of an intellectual gender hierarchy. In deeming boys' achievement as success with no effort, this marginalises many children from real success at school as genuine effort can be equated with not trying hard enough. At the same time girls remained pseudo academics and inauthentic learners.

This rejection of feminine and cultural enforcement of appropriate male behaviour serves to hamper the achievement and potential of both boys and girls (ibid). The MCG in MP adopted a cooperative conformist presentation of 'self' while the WCG adopted more varied constructions of 'self' and resisted in more visible ways. This relates to Goffman's (1971) symbolic interactionist theory on the presentation of self. Wardman et al. (2010, p. 259) argue that it is important to:

> "Raise questions about the taken for granted discourses of feminine achievement that equate femininity with passivity and subservience in the patriarchal order."

Delamont (1980) and Arnot (1980) examined teachers' assumptions of male and female personality traits, with girls being described repeatedly as obedient and tidy while boys are lively and adventurous. Wolpe's (1980) study of secondary school girls uncovered many incidences, where girls were both implicitly and explicitly encouraged into feminine behaviour by their teachers and where social relations in such schools were greatly sexualised. More recently, pressure to adopt expected gender roles and sexualisation see girls being portrayed in elite secondary school prospectuses as subservient and beautiful (Wardman et al. 2010). This would be reflected in the MP prospectuses over the years where girls are posed playing instruments or reading silently in the library. Reay (2001b, p. 164) points out that some girls are mounting challenges to resist gender constructions which discriminate stating:

> "Girl power is accruing power in both the male and female peer groups and providing spaces for girls to escape gender subordination by the boys."

This escape from gender subordination is evident among adolescent groups. Research on lads and ladette behaviour clearly indicate a determined attempt to resist gender stereotyping (Jackson 2006a). One study describes 'slutwalks' where adolescents take to the streets to protest against the victimisation of girls by choice of fashion and dress (Ringrose and Renold 2012). Smyth (2010) argues that attainment and progression differences are largely due to social class. Lee et al. (1994) suggest that gender plays a role in higher level progression rates.

In co-educational schools particularly, the exposure of girls to gender stereotyping on a daily basis has led to more females in single-sex settings pursuing higher education and selecting more male-dominated subjects, as they are protected from stereotypical expectations (ibid). However, it appears that despite 'girl power' boys are still positioned as more powerful than girls (Martin 2006). Even though MP is single sex the girls commented on their boyfriends who checked on them constantly by text when they were out with the girls. The area of co-education is a contested one with varied findings depending on context (Hannan et al. 1996, Kessels and Hannover 2008). This area is beyond the scope of this single sex study but merits mention nonetheless.

While it must be acknowledged that some girls are outperforming some groups of boys academically and in some cases being blamed for boys' underachievement (Francis 2006), there is resistance to this assertion. Epstein (1998) believes it is unhelpful to have a binary opposition between the schooling of girls and boys. She claims that boys' educational failings have been located extrinsically, with social class and race mediating boys' underachievement. This is because MC boys are performing just as well as MCG and WCG are not doing well educationally so social class is mediating the success of girls and boys (Blackhurst and Auger 2008). The current moral panic pertaining to boys' underachievement provides an opportunity to challenge and discuss gender inequality in general. School context and expectations of masculinities inform boys' performance in school (Mac an Ghaill 1996). In addition, the capacity for continual improvement academically enjoyed by some groups of girls in recent years, under the post-feminist guise of equality could be seen as a political tool. McRobbie (2007, p. 718) states this success is an:

> "Economic rationality which envisages young women as endlessly working on a perfectible self, for whom there can be no space in the busy course of the working day for a renewed feminist politics."

The key informant in MP, Ruth, referred to the endless hours spent studying being ideal preparation for motherhood. During motherhood she acknowledged that women manage most of the care duties of the child and subsequently have little time for anything else. This links to Willis' (1977) ethnography on WC culture where the boys positioned girls in the traditional role of wife and mother. Willis (1977) profiles the idea that WC boys engage in sexist behaviour at school as part of the social group's masculine identity. According to Willis (1977, p. 43):

> "The lads have a traditional conflict in their view of women, they are both sexual objects and domestic comforters... while women must be sexually attractive they cannot be sexually experienced."

Willis (1977, p. 149) also creates a link between the boys' counter school culture and sexism when he observes that a member of the counter school culture can only believe in the effeminacy of the white collar worker as long as girlfriends and mothers are regarded as restricted and inferior. Reay (2001b) claims WCG see 'nice girls' as lacking the toughness and the right sort of attitude to compete or stand up to boys. They chose to be 'spice girls' playing pranks and flirting with boys, in a bid for social power but these roles were seen by teachers to be counterproductive for learning and inappropriate behaviours. Despite this agency the girls still felt it was better to be a boy. It is noteworthy that girls impose dominant forms of femininity also and this has considerable relevance in the gendered context of this study. In addition, this study indicates that girls in MP dominate other girls to achieve power and succeed at school socially and academically in the absence of boys.

The use of sex appeal by men and women to get recognition is a form of capital termed erotic capital. This form of capital is used when sexuality is commoditised to acquire social power (Hakim 2011). Hakim's concept of erotic capital has been criticised for being overstretched, inconsistent and asociological as it glosses over issues of race, social class and age (Green 2013). Some self-made career women display greater satisfaction in less rewarding positions when compared with men indicating the acceptance of gender inequality in the workplace as well as in school, as highlighted above.

This suggests lower expectations among women in relation to career satisfaction due to their management of the role of carer in the home as well as a career outside the home (Hakim 1991). The need to recognise the affective domain and the connection with equality theory is reiterated again here, for women who manage the care roles in the family as well as managing careers (Lynch et al. 2009).

3.2 Constructing Identities and Girl Culture

Gender is fragmented into multiple femininities and masculinities throughout everyday life. Reay (2001a) asserts that even in contemporary society many girls still feel it is preferable to be male rather than female. She identifies different forms of femininity always intersected by class, age and race. A study by Thienhuong (2008, p. 4) on transition from primary to secondary school found that:

> "School context fosters a sense of maturity upon which thirteen-year-old female students can build their various identities, individually and collectively as a peer group."

Swain (2003) suggests that children's bodies in schools can be seen as either collective or individual. In both cases the school attempts to train and exert control over these bodies through the structures of the school system as a form of control against agency. This resonates with the MP context where examples of the girls' agency enable conformity to control and also resistance to control (Giddens 1984). Drawing on Bourdieu's (1986) notion of capital, physical or embodied capital has potential for the development of agency and can be linked with power and status, collectively or individually. Jordan (1995) explains how girls can be used and abused in the construction of male identities as can non-fighting 'good boys'. Gender identity is seen as the conception a child brings with them into the school. The pervading culture in the school can then influence the changing identity of the child. However, this is an active and not passive process where gender is not opposed, but constructed through interactions with peers and teachers.

There are multiple identities which are continually constructed and reconstructed in a fluid way (Jordan 1995). This study is interested in the development of girls' gender and self identities as part of a cultural group and the role of the school context and peer culture in constructing these identities. This is examined through the theory on hegemony and inequality (Gramsci 1973, Lynch 1999), agency-structure theory (Bourdieu 1998, Giddens 1984) and rational choice theory (Gambetta 1987).

Swain (2003) asserts that boys define their masculine identity through cultural actions, often through sports involving strength, speed and stamina. He found that popularity and status among the male peer group was very much dependent on athletic prowess, so success in sport signified successful masculinity. This was recognised as higher status for sporty boys in the culture of the school. However, the level of this honouring was found to be influenced also by class, sexuality and race (ibid). Similarly, Bhana (2008) concurs with these assertions but finds that although sport integrates masculinities, it can also maintain prejudices in terms of homophobia, misogyny, race and class. This study examined a form of masculine hegemony (Bhana 2008) as a high order masculinity embedded in aggression and male authority. Here, the sporting culture served to create and reproduce gender division, inferiorising weaker boys and girls in the process.

These findings are also evident in Irish studies which examined the different social and cultural arenas which give rise to a range of masculinities (Mac an Ghaill and Haywood 2007, Mac an Ghaill 1996). O'Connor (2007) also concurred that sport was extremely important as a signifier of the formation of masculinity, particularly competitive team sports like football. Similar gender reproduction issues were found in Lynch and Lodge's (2004) study. The sporty girls in MP were seen by the others as 'masculine' but this masculinity was accepted because it was associated with sport. Girls outside the sporting setting described as masculine were not accommodated in the peer groups, indicating the inflexible gender identity constructions operating in MP and also indicating the presence of homophobia among the peer groups.

Booher-Jennings' (2008) study on gender identities professes that in order to create symbolic distance between their all-girl friendship groups and boys, girls have adopted an achievement ideology. He found that high stakes testing has created categories of passers and failers which directly affected identities. Girls tended to want to be part of the academic achievers group, in an effort to distance themselves from failing boys. High stakes testing causes high levels of pressure and stress, alters the teaching approach and can have a negative effect on student experience (Smyth and Banks 2011, Smyth and Banks 2012a) Renold (2001) points out that this achievement ideology could impact on perceived femininity. She found that girls who enjoy academic success can be seen as less feminine and in rejection of dominant cultural modes of femininity. This was because being academically successfully often meant a rejection of popular peer culture which included drinking alcohol, boyfriends and socialising outside school. This resulted in negative attention and rejection from the peer group. Ironically, working hard and achieving academically was seen by boys as an ultimately feminine position to adopt. Some girls who identified as 'tomboys' did so with the notion that cleverness and intelligence was a male preserve and therefore sought after as an identity (Renold 2001).

Educational self image appears to differ between girls and boys, with girls having a lower academic self image than boys, despite superior academic achievement across single sex and co-educational settings (Smyth 2010). Gendered experiences in the classroom, extracurricular provision and expectation all contribute to a gender identity. Schools with a strong academic ethos tend to have girls with much higher stress levels and this pressure has a role to play in the development of a dominant girls' culture within the school (Lynch 1999). A study in Belgium found a positive correlation between the educational achievement and well-being of the girls. There was enhanced wellbeing noted among those who were succeeding, according to the academic expectations of the school (Vyverman and Vettenburg 2009). This suggested that conformity to the school culture and context matters. In contrast, Lynch and Lodge (2004) found MC girls under stress and with lower self-esteem than boys, because of the pressure of expected performance in examinations.

In MP, the Leaving Certificate examinations caused significant stress and there was also evidence of girls' difficulties maintaining a dual identity which adhered to the academic expectations of the school and also facilitated elements of popular peer culture. This was mediated by social class as discussed in the findings chapters.

Girls in Ireland have also been found to be less physically active than boys (McCoy et al. 2012). Therefore, physical activity is not used as a tool to relieve stress by many girls where it may be for boys. As a result girls are less likely to experience team sport and team skills than boys which could lead to greater individual competitiveness. Lack of involvement in peer activities regarded as important by the cultural group, may also lead to marginalisation for some girls. Blatchford's (1998) study on the social lives of pupils at school posits that break-times are often when friends can meet and form networks. He asserts that activities and social relations at break-time are important as it is then that pupils are freed from the attention of adults and the structured classroom.

Sexuality forms part of girls' culture in schools. Sexual orientation can be interpreted to mean being heterosexual, homosexual or bisexual. Evidence shows that homosexual or bisexual youths can experience rejection at home and school, leading to isolation and in some cases depression (Minton et al. 2008). Some research asserts that homosexuality is often considered deviant or is pathologised in schools, while O'Carroll and Szalacha (2000) point out that sexual orientation has been ignored in the Irish relationships and sexuality programme in schools. This is linked with a traditional and conservative strain of Christian morality, according to Rolston et al. (2005), and is an area also neglected in MP due to curricular constraints and a focus on academia. Reygan (2009) found that Irish young people experienced problems associated with their sexual orientation and homophobia at school. A significant proportion left school early as a result of feeling unsafe at school due to their homosexuality. This indicates the heteronormative nature of schools. MP girls also proffer significant statements indicating that heterosexuality is the dominant culturally accepted form of sexuality.

There is significant investment by girls and women in the story of female attractiveness and heterosexual romanticism and these investments are important to a girl's culture as well as gender constructions (Francis 2006). Heterosexuality was romanticised by the girls, with many girls feeling pressure to have a boyfriend and most admitting having reservations about acceptance of homosexuality in MP. Peer culture is generally more informal than school culture and comprised of student subgroups, with their own rules and structures. It is suggested that racism and homophobia occurs during breaktime when children are on their own (Smyth et al. 2009) and significant data on homophobia was elicited during interviews in MP. In older school groups, friendship and social practices act as a significant support towards terminal exams (Lynch 1999). Some studies point to the idea that the more popular pupils tend to have more pro-social and less aggressive behaviours than less popular pupils (Blatchford 1998).

Finally, it has been also reported by Blatchford (1998, p.166) that the realisation for a girl in secondary school was that 'sense of a lost or buried world of childhood' The literature in this section suggests that girls' culture is a far reaching and complex phenomenon, so an understanding of identity construction creates more informed and considered relationships between teachers and students. Thorne (1993) found that girls who matured early enjoyed less prestige among their peer group. They were less satisfied with their bodies and sometimes suffered self-esteem issues as a result. The opposite was the case for boys enjoying better athletic prowess as a result of early maturation and forming friendships with older boys enhancing their self image. Early adolescence for girls was where appearance and relationships with boys begin to take precedence. Girls' identities from that point on can be shaped by how popular they are with boys romantically and girls as friends (Thorne 1993). A girl's social position derives predominantly from relationships particularly with boys; where this is not the case with boys attaining status through sports mainly. Some of the girls in MP expressed disappointment with their weight gain at adolescence, which became noticeable for many girls in TY. Some girls dealt with this by dieting and others developed signs of eating disorders as expressed by the girls in MP.

3.3 Gender and Leadership

The focus on academic subjects endemic in many Irish schools, especially single sex girls' schools (Lynch and Lodge 2004), can militate against the development of leadership skills among girls. Since women are under-represented in management roles in education (Lynch 1999, Lynch and Lodge 2004) a focus on leadership roles in schools may in turn assist the imbalance of genders in the management of schools into the future. Oplatka and Tamir (2009) found that a number of female deputies in schools see a significant difference between their role and the role of principal. Many had no aspiration to move beyond deputy head. They were keen to uphold what they saw as relational leadership and felt this would not be an acceptable leadership approach for the position of principal. Reay and Ball (2000) identified that female head teachers were operating in a male hegemonic environment, where success in management meant a woman must be prepared or able to modify her own identity in order to attain credibility as a leader. This would suggest that 'good' management could be conceptualised as a masculine endeavour. This alienates many girls and women from seeking out such roles.

Various definitions or typologies exist of leadership with reference to Fullan (2010) on motion leadership, Harris (2010) on sustainable leadership. Conaty (2002), Lyons et al. (2006) and Sergiovanni (1998) all offer perspectives on styles of leadership in educational settings such as schools. The literature on leadership examined in Spillane et al's. (2001) work focuses primarily on organisational leadership as a distributed practice which involves formal and informal leaders. There were formal and informal leadership structures in MP. Within the informal structures the girls used agency to influence who would lead and how. The formal leadership structures were initiated by the school and selected by the peer group. Spillane et al. (2001) believe that learning how school leadership works involves knowing what, why and how leaders lead. This is not achievable simply by observing but requires a conceptual framework which has led to the development of a distributed perspective on leadership (ibid).

Lansford et al. (2009) find that peer leaders and non leaders differ considerably in their level of influence over social activities, with peer leaders dictating many of the social practices. This leadership pattern was evident in MP. Edwards (1994) agrees that informal, not elective leadership is the most stable leadership style among school-aged girls. A gender-based study by Embry et al. (2008) addresses the significant gender stereotyping that can exist for male and female leaders. Female and male leaders using a gender inconsistent style were less favourably accepted in a number of settings. Powell et al. (2004) disagree with the above contention and notes that while males were not penalised for using gender inconsistent styles and could even be rewarded, females were not similarly rewarded. Studies have shown that female leaders often employ masculine qualities and can be oppressive to other women by looking down on traits associated with women (Oplatka and Tamir 2009, Reay and Ball 2000). This raises interesting questions with regard to how females approach leadership and how cultural and social influences can impact the development of a leadership style.

There is considerable research claiming that sport has a role in the development of leadership skills, particularly for girls, who it seems can benefit in terms of self esteem, self- discipline and social competence through participation in school sports (Hart et al. 2003). Dobosz and Beatty (1999) assert that participation in athletics and early leadership opportunities have an impact on girls' leadership skills. Involvement in physical education and sport is seen to have benefits in a range of areas including enhanced, physical, lifestyle, affective, social and cognitive domains (Bailey 2006). This research on sport is pertinent as many of the girls in the study cite sport as hugely important to their enjoyment at school and see sport as a stress-relieving activity. It is clear that there are benefits for some girls who are physically active or engage in sport (McCoy et al. 2012).

Research also identifies benefits of after school girls' leadership programmes in transforming the school environment positively for adolescent girls (Mono and Keenan 2000). Sperandio (2000) conducted a study on adolescent girls and found they are primarily motivated towards examination results. She highlighted the importance of the hidden curriculum in developing female leaders through training and institutional positions such as prefects. This has similarities with the context in MP and the similar academic orientation of the sample group. However, the leadership structures in MP caused disagreements, induced power plays and identified some issues of frustration due to a perceived lack of agency. This was due to the perceived lack of willingness among school management and teachers to listen to their requests for change.

3.4 Conclusion

This literature review addresses the major themes of social class, gender, the construction of identities, girls' culture and friendship. Each section has included a reference to the literature's relationship to this research study. This comprehensive review is not a set of standalone themes and strands. Each theme connects to the next; with particular interconnectness evident between social class and gender, friendship and identity. The main trends emerging from this literature review include an assertion that hegemonic MC culture is prevalent in many schools. This serves to culturally alienate WC students. The acquisition of cultural and social capital is a significant mediator of success in school.

The power of parentocracy cannot be underestimated and WC parents are positioned as less powerful for a variety of reasons. Social mobility can navigate working-class families into the middle classes, but can implicitly diminish and undermine WC culture in doing so. The academic success of some girls and underachievement of some boys is related to social class. It is mainly white MCG who are succeeding at school. Women have a dual relationship to the social class structures. Social class can be somewhat determined by education but women still have the primary care role in the family. This partially explains why fewer women reach the higher occupational levels that men do.

Friendships among girls have a role in developing leadership, providing emotional support and influencing the construction of identities. School breaks offer opportunities to enable peer interactions to develop and connections among friends to be created. School structures, teachers and curriculum all play a role in constructing and sustaining gender stereotypes and sexist expectations. There are inequalities for girls embedded in many of these themes as stereotypes serve to challenge choice and agency. There is also a culture of stress and pressure evident in school life, particularly for girls. This is connected to examinations but also to societal expectations of heteronormativity, body image and educational self image. The Leaving Certificate examinations have an impact on educational self-image and confidence where perceived underperformance can lead to intense stress (Lynch and Lodge 2002). The self-rating of one's self varies for boys and girls with Thorne (1993) indicating that early maturing boys enjoy status among peers while early maturing girls did not. The single-sex and co-education debate is mentioned but a thorough examination is beyond the scope of this review, given the breadth of this area and the ethnographic rather than comparative nature and focus of this study.

In relation to the theoretical framework, this review has examined social class, social mobility, parentocracy, cultural resistance and sexuality which are all deeply connected to hegemony (Gramsci 1973) and elicit how dominant cultural expectations influence actions and practices. Gender has been explored from the perspectives of a woman's access to education, gender stereotyping, aspiration, leadership and examination pressure, all of which create tensions with both feminist and equality theory (Lynch 1999). Power is embedded in the literature on friendships in the way these are mediated by social class and the disciplined nature of the school as an institution (Foucault 1980). Agency-structure and rational choice theory informs the creation of identity and informs decisions related to girl culture, all of which influence school experience (Bourdieu 1998, Gambetta 1987, Giddens 1984). This is because the relative freedom of agency is bounded in the way certain choices interact with the variable constraints of social class, gender and school structures as seen in the literature and also among the girls in MP.

Each of these arguments and conclusions from the literature will be further developed and discussed alongside the theory in light of the findings from this study of a group of girls. As previously mentioned, significant additional literature is incorporated into the findings chapters to provide further specificity and depth of review. In this way, the ideas generated by existing research will inform the findings across the themes of social class, gender, identity, friendship and youth culture from a both a broad and more in-depth perspective.

Chapter 4 Methodology

The need to acknowledge and challenge bias is integral to this study due to the insider positionality of the researcher. This was done by triangulating three elements of the research to specifically address this issue. Firstly, the researcher took Goffman's (1971) concept of the go-between by engaging two critical friends (who were teachers in the school) to discuss the research with and who would challenge bias and assumptions. These friends mediated the space between the front and the back stage presentations of the girls and also the space between the researcher and the girls, giving advice, direction and critique where necessary. Secondly, the way in which Whyte (2012) employed Doc as his gate keeper, but more importantly his key informant, is mirrored in the role adopted by Ruth, the key informant in this study. She was chosen to confirm, challenge, explain and present perspectives and also the researcher's biases. Thirdly, Poles' (1999) 'confirming voice' is incorporated in the way this researcher uses the girls' voices as the dominant voice in this research, whilst also employing her own reflexive voice as a teacher-researcher. This triangulation forms the foundation to the argument for research design which upholds the teacher-researcher approach.

This study began with a holistic look at the school as a whole. This enabled the researcher to provide a portrait of the structure of the school day, the arrival and daily exodus of the girls and the social spaces they occupied. It facilitated a description of the buildings and grounds, the formal and informal curriculum and the timetabling of a typical school day. This is in keeping with an ethnographic approach which provides a description of the site and setting to situate the reader in the space (Chang 1992). This is detailed in Chapter 5. The study focused on the 6th year girls as a discrete group once this initial contextual profile was complete and this chapter begins that phase. Therefore, the methodological lens for the purpose of this chapter was on the whole 6th year group initially and it then narrowed to a key group of fourteen girls nearing the end of the study.

These design decisions posed limitations to the study. The choice of case study school undoubtedly influenced the type of data and findings which emerged from this study. Schools differ in many ways from historically to culturally to gender composition (Smyth 1999). There are implications for research which relate to the context the researcher chooses to study. Had this study been conducted in a working class school there may have been similar alienation issues in terms of social integration for a MC minority. However, as Willis (1977) contends, MC students tend to have the MC school structures as a cultural scaffold. The formal and informal curriculum may have been different in another type of school. The hidden curriculum enables particular contextual differences (Lynch 1989). Alternatively, a fee paying school could have elicited similarities and differences contextually and culturally. Despite many commonalities, schools are constructed historically over time, each with their own characteristic spirit. Where there are possibilities within this study for contextual generalisation to similar schools, it would be incorrect to assume a homogenous set of findings would have emerged elsewhere.

Even the choice of the 6th year group for the sample presented limitations. 6th year girls' enculturation may have enabled the development of biases over the years. The focus on this particular group may also have omitted significant perspectives from other year-groups. Girls self selection into observations and group interviews was chosen to avoid researcher bias in selecting girls. It also avoided issues of potential jealousy as highlighted by MIREC (see Appendix C) but did mean girls taking part may have had their own agendas which could have skewed the results. Many of these limitations are discussed further throughout this chapter. Research studies are time and resource bound and difficult decisions have to be made. Notwithstanding this, it is important to acknowledge the potential limitations which arise through the decision making process at the outset of this methodology chapter.

4.1. Introduction to the Design Frame

The study sets girls' stories within the framework of MP's socio-cultural, political and historical context (Creswell 2009). The research design is qualitative and incorporates multiple methods of data collection. The methodological approach is a reflexive ethnographic case study. This facilitated a flexible research process which could evolve contextually in response to the lived realities that were encountered in the field by the girls (LeCompte et al. 1992). The researcher's philosophical stance is that research is value laden with the truth embedded in subjective accounts by participants. This study is enhanced by the researcher's partial insider perspective which facilitated the building of trust throughout the research process. The researcher's incomplete access to peer culture is balanced by prior knowledge of the socio-cultural systems. This enabled a detailed unveiling of the daily interactions amongst the girls. Denzin (1997, p. 247) asserts:

> "Ethnographies will not attempt to capture the totality of a group's way of life. The focus will be interpreted slices, glimpses and specimens of interaction that display how cultural practices, connected to structural formations and narrative texts, are experienced at a particular time and place by interacting individuals."

The researcher's intention was to explore and extensively study an intact cultural group in their school setting over a prolonged period of time. This study involved significant attention to reflexivity due to the researcher's partial insider status. The methodology incorporates the perspectives of the participants (emic) and those of the researcher (etic). These have merged to enable interpretation of the shared patterns. This mirrors features of a reflexive ethnographic case study (Robson 2002).

4.2 Ethnography

Ethnography is a qualitative enquiry method suitable for the study of an entire cultural group over time. Ethnography has its roots in cultural anthropology with ethnographers such as Boas (1969) and Mead (2001) who researched primitive cultures rituals', practices and beliefs.

Malinowski and Young (1979) also made significant contributions to ethnographic fieldwork techniques and the comparison of cultures. Lévi-Strauss and Layton (1983) conducted ethnographic work from a structural anthropology perspective. However, it was sociologists from the Chicago school who in the 1930s adapted anthropological studies to examinations of American culture. Most notable was the ethnographic study by Whyte (2012) on gang culture in an Italian slum in Boston. It demonstrated the organisational structures which existed among a poor community in 'cornerville' using participant observation. Whyte (2012) argued this community was not disorganised as he mapped the social world of the boys. Ethnographic studies at this time positioned the researcher as 'other' and examined face to face interactions in a variety of locales, often using a symbolic interactionist approach to the research (Atkinson et al. 2007). Whyte's (2012) study was a departure from this where he built close relationships with the gang in an urban setting, living with one of the gang member's families and becoming immersed in the culture. He used his key informant in a similar way to this researcher by checking if his interpretation was correct and seeking clarification. There was subsequent prolific expansion of ethnographic studies from the Chicago school led by Park and Burgess (2012).

Educational ethnographies cited in this study include Willis (1977), Fagan (1995) and Lynch and Lodge (2002) who researched the school context ethnographically. In addition, Chang's (1992) study of adolescent life and ethos in a co-educational US high school addresses many of the tensions and challenges of balancing the establishment of rapport with the participants, whilst avoiding deception by the researcher. Her descriptions of difficulties experienced in attempting to achieve complete insiderness resonate with this study. Fine's (1987) study, although dealing with young boys, is situated in a MC context of students, parents and coaches. It offers an in-depth examination of sporting culture with related issues of control and leadership among the boys. It examines the importance of developing trust within relationships as well as effectively categorising the acceptance of the researcher. This was measured by the researcher through the increased volume of swearing by the boys in the presence of the researcher over time. This was given as an indication of acceptance.

Fine's (1987) study also describes issues of inequality in status between researcher and participants and how a reciprocal arrangement was managed to counterbalance this inequity. An ethnographic case study of particular relevance is Ball's (1981) 'Beachside Comprehensive'. This study provides insights into elements of research design illustrating the ethnographical approach to collecting and interpreting field notes. Social class and gender are addressed through the actions, practices and interactions of the participants. This study identified how social class can act as a discriminating factor for success within the comprehensive school system. In terms of methodology, it offers a good illustrative insight into the management of general observations, with a steady focussing down to the specific interactions, which parallels this researcher's observational approach. Willis's aforementioned (1977) ethnography on WC boys and Griffiths' (1995) ethnography on adolescent girls offer a thorough exploration of the effects of culture on school experience. These studies provided useful insights which aided methodological decisions for this researcher.

There are many sub groups of ethnography. The two main divisions within ethnography are realist and critical ethnography. The former relates to the anthropological histories of cultures, where researchers reported the facts. Critical ethnographies speak out and highlight inequality among groups in society (Creswell 2007). This study falls between the two types as it attempts to recount the real stories of the girls; however there are critical moments throughout the study where domination and inequality are highlighted and discussed. Most ethnographical studies require an immersion in the culture of the study group for a prolonged period of time. The evolution of mini- ethnographies aim to maintain the approach but to conduct the research in a shorter timeframe (Robson 2002). This study was conducted over a year in the field, to maintain some integrity with the prolonged ethnographic approach. Current ethnographical research employs a range of methods but usually includes observation. From the position of describing participants' social realities, the ethnographer moves towards developing theory (Flick 2009). The theory emerges from research questions which elicit an exploration of what is happening in the field of study.

The nature of a reflexive ethnographic approach lends itself to beginning with specific and embedded research questions, with an awareness and flexibility that these questions can change and develop as the study progresses. Being a teacher-researcher influences the data in a number of ways because insider perspectives and biases are present. The knowledge has also been constructed and interpreted with the researcher as a member of the culture sharing group. Partial insider perspectives facilitate an ability to describe what is heard and seen within the framework of the social groups' view of reality (Creswell 2007). Figure 4.1 outlines the approach taken by this researcher in a visual way.

Figure 4.1: Ethnography:
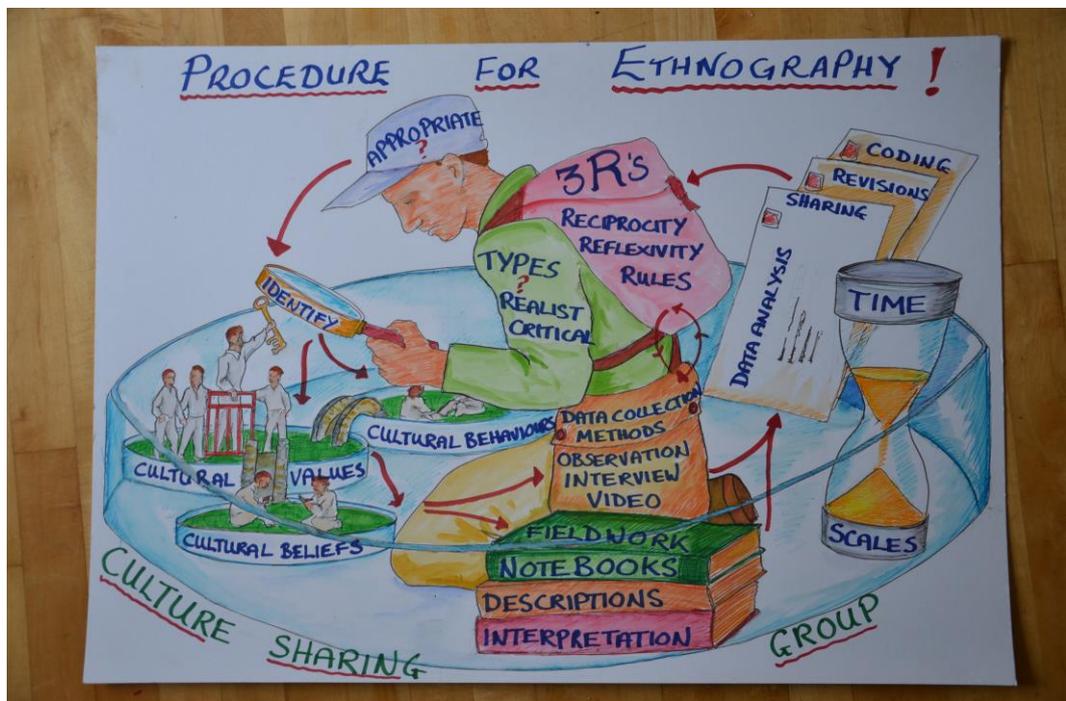
This figure presents ethnography as an examination of a culture-sharing group. The cultural values, beliefs and behaviours are investigated following entree to the site by a gatekeeper. The key informant assists with the bridging and interpretation of findings. Data is collected over a prolonged timescale using a variety of methods. The source of this poster was a tutorial methods session; it was subsequently used in the International Research Methods Summer School (IRMSS) Mary Immaculate College, 2011.

4.3 Rationale for Reflexive Ethnography

The process of deciding on a reflexive ethnography involved a brief exploration of autoethnography as a possible approach and a potential means of dealing with the partial insider status. The following section outlines the personal reflexive discussion which ensued while reading the literature. This section is included to share with the reader issues that arose in the selection of a methodological approach. Reed-Danahay (1997) sees autoethnography positioned among three genres of research. The first is 'native anthropology' where former subjects of ethnographic study research their own group. The second is termed 'ethnic autobiography' where members of ethnic groups write personal narratives. The third is 'autobiographical ethnography' where the researcher includes personal experience into the ethnography. An autoethnographer can be seen to occupy dual or multiple identities which can shift according to the social situation they find themselves in (ibid). Alternatively, reflexive ethnography appreciates that ethnographers can never be totally unconnected from the study. There will always be queries as to what extent the ethnographer's presence influenced the research process, confirming the need for reflexivity. However, this is distinctly different from becoming a participant in the study as is the case in autoethnography (Davies 2008). This researcher cannot be completely objective but reflexivity can help address any subjectivity and acknowledge and account for it. Reflexivity as defined by Davies (2008, p. 4) is:

> "A turning back on oneself, a process of self reference...it refers to the ways in which the products of research are affected by the personnel and process of doing research."

Reed-Danahay (1997) suggests that autoethnography is more authentic than traditional ethnography due to there being more truth to the insider's perspective. However, there are other ways to represent the 'self' and reflexive ethnography also provides a place for the perspective of the teacher as researcher. Agar (1996) emphasises the importance of researchers asking themselves why they want to do ethnography and choosing an approach on the basis of their aims.

The adherence to reflexivity throughout the study enabled an awareness of power relations and ethics within all interactions as a teacher- researcher in the school. Reflexivity enabled an examination of the researcher's thoughts and attitudes (Davies 2008) during all interactions with the participants.

When examining a social context where there is a dominant value system, others play roles in our stories and we in theirs (Muncey 2010). The meaningful relationships this researcher shares with others in MP's cultural setting can inform stories and how they are told. Relationships and interactions are inevitably influenced by the researcher's position within the culture. This is why the researcher aims to be ubiquitously reflexive throughout the research process from methodology to data collection, to analysis and write up. Hertz (1997) argues that reflexivity enables researchers to become more conscious of the ideology, culture and politics of those we study and our own position. The feminist dimension adds another layer. The researcher is a woman and an insider and she may have impacted the study as a man and/or an outsider may have focused differently. Pole (1999) discusses the dilemma of the insider-outsider in terms of taking an optimistic rather than a pessimistic view. He was a white researcher attempting to understand black teachers' experiences and this researcher is a female teacher trying to understand girls' school experiences. We have all experienced school and thus have opinions of it; therefore there is an insider element to a lot of research. For both insiders and outsiders the dilemmas of ethics, feasibility, and quality of data are present. There are therefore ubiquitous beneficial and challenging elements to both the practices of insider-outsider research as well as fluidity around what actually constitutes an insider or outsider. This is discussed more specifically below.

Reinharz (1997) asserts that reflexive feminist ethnography combines the way in which a researcher's attributes become meaningful, as the researcher gains knowledge in the field. The appreciation of a 'researcher based self' is integral to the design frame of this study. There are some critics of many forms of ethnography, particularly autoethnography as an approach because it can appear somewhat self-indulgent to others.

Sparkes (2000) believes the charge of self-indulgence stems from an individual's deep mistrust of their own self worth. Autoethnography did not engender an adequate level of comfort with this researcher as the study was not envisaged to be about the researcher's experiences, despite a need to be sensitive to reflexivity. The researcher did not want to tell her story but instead wanted to understand and hear the voices of the girls in MP. For this reason reflexive ethnography was the chosen approach. There is no research method or approach which will find the elusive absolute truth, as truth is socially constructed (Berger and Luckmann 2011) and re-constructed through agency and interaction. This reflexive ethnography serves to connect the cultural with the personal in order to answer the research questions.

4.4 The Insider-Outsider Debate from a Feminist Perspective

There is a element of co-creation of knowledge during the research process between educators and learners (Reid et al. 2008). This researcher argues that this is a phenomenon of all qualitative research. In addition, there is a view that any academic who does research in a school has a level of insider knowledge and can never be fully impartial (Ellis 2009). It is the extent to which the researcher influences the study and how this influence can be managed which is important. Perreault et al. (2009) suggest that effective research training enables insiders to complete ethical research in certain environments. Innes (2009) conducted a study which specifically addressed the insider-outsider debate. The debate centres on the scholarly validity of insider research due to the potential for biased findings, over-rapport, and power dynamics which serve to question validity. However, these criticisms have been countered with arguments of insiders having better contextual insights, an ability to question preconceptions and more trusting relationships (Innes 2009). Over-rapport was prevented in this study due to the existence of naturally occurring barriers to over-familiarity. Being a teacher in the school meant there was not a difficulty with 'going native' (Creswell 2009) as the girls understood the teacher-student boundaries in the school. There is an arguable need for both insider and outsider research to further understand the complexity within the two approaches.

Irrespective of the environment, a researcher is still to a large degree an outsider by nature of their role within the field. In addition, insiders to a culture tend to be repositioned as outsiders once their researcher role is established (Gilbert 1994). There is a need in any research to create a research relationship which will differ from any previous connections. Merton (1972) criticises 'insider doctrine' which insists that researchers should only study members of their own groups. He believes this fragments the research approach and asserts that an outsider can enable new questions to be posed. The outsider is better posed to ask naive questions (Pole 1999). Hodkinson (2005) asserts that outsiders have to work harder to gain trust but defends the outsider's ability to gain a good understanding of the field. He dismisses the premise of a single insider truth, arguing instead that there are multiple insider and outsider views, collectively contributing to understanding.

There is a feminist perspective embedded in the design frame and methodology as mentioned previously. It is the experiences of girls that are interpreted and told. The school is an all girls' school; the majority of teachers are women including the researcher. There is a male principal. This research is grounded in the girls' adolescent lives where personal stories answer the research questions. The telling of these stories distributed power to the girls. Despite there being issues of power this study is not a critical ethnography which Thomas (1993, p. 4) defines as 'modifying consciousness or invoking a call to action, attempts to use knowledge for social change.' Gluck and Patai (1991) suggest that women are better able to research women and women's issues, irrespective of their insider or outsider position. This researcher contends that there was a greater comfort level evident during the research while discussing some of the issues, than there may have been had the researcher been a male or an outsider. Researcher empathy was made possible through gender similarities and the insider perspective. This researcher believes that much of the data from the girls was divulged on the premise of trust which had developed over six years between the girls and the researcher. This opinion has been confirmed by the girls during informal meetings after completion of the fieldwork.

Naples (1997) discusses the insider-outsider debate from a materialist feminist perspective. She argues that there is always a shifting of power relations in any cultural community and this is a natural element of cultural interaction. Relationships are negotiated and renegotiated enabling a fluidity of the insider-outsider standpoint. Even though this researcher was an insider to the school culture and in a position of relative power, this power shifted back to the girls in their lunch room and their other social spaces. All researchers have pre-conceptions and biases from their own experiences which makes totally impartial research unlikely. There are benefits and challenges to both the insider and outsider approach. It is the rigour embedded in the design frame, combined with the ethics and reflexivity of the researcher which differentiates good research. Researcher knowledge of the school context facilitated a little understanding of the social categories within which the girls positioned themselves and background information, but not enough for the researcher to tell their stories.

The social class practices within the school were familiar and understood to some degree. The same class practices that impacted the student's lives also impacted the researcher, albeit in different ways. The research questions asked explicitly about the girls' friendships, experiences and their patterns of interaction in school. This researcher contends that relative impartiality in these discussions was possible due to the personal nature of much of this data. This data was then supported by the girls' quotations, triangulated with group interviews and observations and validated by the key informant and critical friends.

A reflexive chapter is included in this study to give particular space to those 'etic' elements of the study but it is the 'emic' perspective which takes precedence. Voice is also an important dimension in this study. The use of substantial accounts and narrative excerpts by the girls presents their voices as prominent within the text. It is acknowledged by Hertz (1997) that the author still has control of what voices to represent, where and in what context. In a way the girls' voices are filtered through the researcher's account.

However, this researcher chose many lengthy excerpts of text with a view to illustrating how the girls had ample time and space to interpret their own responses to some degree, during our conversational interviews. This deliberately deflects attention away from the ethnographer in places and facilitates a connection between the reader and the girls. The researcher's insider status facilitated access to the school but also enabled trust by the school. The school trusted the researcher to protect both the girls and the school. This posed its own dilemmas in ensuring the findings were presented in a fair, balanced and yet representative way.

4.5 Case Study

Robson (2002, p.178) defines a case as 'the study of an individual person: a group, a setting, an organisation, taking context into account.'
Merriam (1998, p. 21) similarly defines a qualitative case study as 'an intensive holistic description and analysis of a single instance phenomenon or social unit.' It was not the intention of the researcher to manipulate behaviour to implement change, but to interact as far as possible as a passive data collector (Yin 2009). Bassey (1999, p. 60-69) suggests that a case study answers the 'how' and 'why' research questions and is an ideal frame for the study of educational systems or institutions. It is often conducted with some depth in natural settings and allows a good degree of flexibility, with no specific data collection methods or analysis. Case study research unveils patterns and practices through the interpretations that emerge from the data (Bassey 1999). Stake (1995) argues that a case study's best use is for adding to the understanding of human experience. These points are pertinent to this contextual study and this researcher's rationale for choosing an ethnographic case study to answer the research questions.

Criticisms of the case study include that it is unscientific and of dubious value by itself (Robson 2002). Yin (2009) asserts that lack of rigour can be overcome by care in the design and delivery of the study and fair reporting of data. The argument that case studies provide little opportunity for generalisation is refuted on the basis that case studies are generalisable only to theoretical propositions and not to populations.

Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) suggest there is a tendency to regard alternative research methodologies and case study as competing research paradigms with standards and strategies that are oppositional. However, the process of enquiry in all research has similarities and many methodologies have merit in answering a range of research questions. Marshall and Rossman (2006) claim that case studies provide the reader with a vividness and detail not typically present in more analytical reporting formats. This also suits the descriptive character of ethnography.

4.6 Ethics

The researcher was mindful that she was an insider in a position of authority. This presented a dilemma from early on in the research. There was a lot of soul searching prior to commencement of the study, during the research process and also at write up stage. Issues that could not have been anticipated arose in the stories the girls told as well as some deeply upsetting incidences where the girls discussed negative elements of their school experience. Being an insider was difficult because being ethical to the girls and also the school required balance at all times. This positioned the researcher as an ethical agent throughout the research where ethical rational choice was employed alongside quality processes to ensure ethical and moral reflexive choices were made. It was important to the researcher that consent was obtained willingly with the girls being very clear that there was no obligation to take part in the study. In addition, it was made clear both verbally and in writing that a decision to cease participation could be taken at any time during the course of the research with no repercussions. The existing trust allowed students to feel confident about ceasing their involvement at any time. As a vulnerable group, parental consent was sought for all participants, even though all but one girl was eighteen years old.

The dual roles of researcher and teacher operated along a continuum with either at opposite poles of the line. In order to facilitate the optimum trust between the researcher and the participants, there was a need to give up the identity of teacher and develop an identity as a researcher. The researcher balanced herself somewhere between the complete researcher and complete teacher.

There was a shifting of the dual roles which varied according to the task. This required some awareness on the researcher's behalf when moving daily between the two roles as outlined in the following diary reflection:

In my classes I was teacher and during the rest of the research process I tried to leave the teacher behind the classroom door. I walked to and from the staffroom with other teachers by waiting for them to pass my classroom. That meant I did not have to discipline or correct the girls on the corridors for any potential misdemeanours as another teacher would get there first. I kept a lower teacher profile and tried to become less visible as an authority. I did ignore some minor rule breaking when on my own and continued a practice I always had, which was to say a friendly hello to girls and to ask how they were on arrival or leaving the school. This transition was not as difficult as it may sound because my natural inclination as a teacher was to be respectful, relaxed and friendly with the girls without being over familiar. I was never perceived as one of the strict teachers anyway. I was always terrified of the strict teachers at school and worked very hard on building a positive rapport with my classes as a result.

This was important as how the researcher related to the girls and how trusting they were ultimately influenced the validity of the study. This ethnography was less about erasing boundaries and more about acknowledging, monitoring and understanding those boundaries.

The approach to ethics as outlined in Chapter 1 combined an 'ethics of care' (Banks 2005) from a moral philosophy perspective with strict adherence to a professional ethical code as a teacher and also a researcher. Therefore ethics was approached from three perspectives in order to protect the girls and ensure rigour in conjunction with care. Prior to seeking ethical approval from the college a letter was submitted to the school Board of Management requesting permission to conduct the research in October 2011 (see Appendix A). The school granted written approval on 15th of November 2011 (see Appendix B). Ethical approval was then requested through MIREC (Mary Immaculate Research Ethics Committee) prior to any data collection.

Ethical approval was granted on 8th November 2012 with three ethical recommendations. Firstly, it was pointed out that due care would be required to explain the researcher's rationale in the selection of the group interviewees to the girls, to address potential feelings of exclusion. Secondly, it was advised that data collection and findings be dealt with according to statutory requirements and protocols of the school. Thirdly, it was recommended that written permission from the school be obtained (see Appendix C). Having insider knowledge of school protocols benefitted the girls and protected the researcher. For example, the school did not allow a teacher and one student to occupy a space alone with the door closed, so the one to one interviews were held in a quiet corner of the school library. Child protection procedures were well understood by the researcher and the 6th year girls in that they were aware from school talks and reminded prior to giving consent that disclosures which suggested a risk to them would not remain confidential and would have to be reported. It would have been more difficult for an outsider to gather this contextual information as there could have been potential ethical risks for the school and the girls.

The 6th year girls were approached class by class on a Tuesday morning following MIREC ethical approval. The rationale, purpose and focus of the research were outlined. The girls were studying culture in their English classes at the time and some groups mentioned that they were aware of the concept of culture. There was time in each class for questions or queries and the girls were reminded they could ask the researcher questions at any time prior to during or after the research process. Following a description of the proposed research and a verbal explanation of informed consent, anonymity and right to withdraw, the girls were given information sheets, personal consent forms and parental consent forms where all this information was reiterated. A box was placed in the school library where the girls were asked to return their forms within two weeks if they were interested in taking part in the study (Appendix D & E).

In terms of a general code of professional ethics and to assist with writing the consent forms the researcher adopted the rules as laid down by the British Educational Research Association (Robson 2002, p. 65). Key features included; seeking written consent, being clear and honest about the research aims and ensuring participants' anonymity, storage of data and right to withdraw.

Other ethical considerations observed during the research process included data, fieldnotes and interview transcripts being ethically managed in a secure password protected home office computer and locked filing cabinet. No written information was available for another individual to identify the source of the data (Robson 2002). Pseudonyms were used for the school and only the final fourteen participants (participant selection processes are described below). Group interviewees were identified by interview number rather than individually so as to avoid too many pseudonyms and the confusion that might cause. The section on methods discusses the approach to observation and interview in more detail. The reflexive chapter provides a further discussion of the ethical particularities of the research, particularly from a relational and care perspective.

Table 4.1 outlines the sequence of events in relation to ethical approval:

1. Approached school and applied in writing for consent (Appendix A)
2. Obtained written consent from the school (Appendix B)
3. Applied for ethical clearance through MIREC
4. Obtained ethical clearance from MIREC (Appendix C)
5. Approached the girls in class and handed out ethical forms (Appendix D&E)
6. Obtained consent and proceeded to 6th year observation and later interview selection (See table 4.2)

4.7 Sample Group and Key Informant

The sample initially included all ninety of the 6th year girls in the school. This group were moving from second level to third level in the year data was collected. They had spent six years in the school at the point of research and thus understood the culture of the school. This was why they were selected. Of the ninety girls in the year seventy two returned consent forms. It was necessary to remind the eighteen girls who had not returned consent forms that although I would be observing the year group frequently, they would not be the focus of the observations. This was done at the end of a whole year assembly prior to the observation phase. I mentioned that if anyone felt unhappy or uncomfortable with this they could speak to me, personally or via a representative friend or alternatively they could drop me a note. I told the group I would work around this should it arise. I reminded the group I was not listening to specific conversations but obtaining an overview of the interactions of the year group. On commencement of the observation phase I reiterated this message verbally at the beginning of the first observation session. None of the girls indicated any problem or raised any issue throughout the observation phase.

Midway through the observation phase the researcher requested participants to partake in group interviews. Twenty-five girls agreed to be part of this next phase. These girls were divided into five groups according to their friendship group. The key informant (discussed below) confirmed these friendship group allocations. Friendship groups were identified during the observation phase and the researcher also had prior knowledge of these groups from her insider knowledge of the girls over six years. Following the group interviews, the offer to continue with one to one in-depth interviews was extended to all the girls who had taken part in group interviews. Sixteen girls initially wanted to continue with in-depth interviews but two cited struggles with time and exam stress and consequently ceased participation. The remaining group of fourteen girls who agreed to participate were the final sample for the focused phase where one to one interviews were conducted (Flick 2009).

Allowing the girls to voluntarily participate enhanced the ethics as there was no point where the researcher pressured any girl to participate. As mentioned in the introduction, it also adhered to the MIREC requirement to avoid harm or jealousy by selecting some girls over others. It avoided potential researcher bias in the selection of critical cases which may have skewed the results. The potential negative aspect of this was that this voluntary group were maybe more unhappy with the school and biased towards or against the school. Alternatively, those girls who did not take part may have been more aware of the Leaving Certificate expectations and could have been excellent participants. However, it did transpire that there was varying representation across all the peer social groups which enhanced a holistic portrait and also issues of reliability. The researcher was aware of the limitations of drawing conclusions from a small number of girls but was constrained in two ways. She did not want to put pressure on 6th years approaching high stakes examinations to participate until the end phase if they felt unable to. In addition, time and financial constraints meant that the there was only one researcher and this presented logistical challenges to methodological decisions. On the other hand the data obtained from the fourteen girls after a year of observation, group interview and one to one interview was rich and authentic. The researcher feels confident that those who participated throughout did represent the year group.

It is commonly accepted that ethnographic study requires a gatekeeper and key informant (Creswell 2009; Flick 2009; Robson 2002). The gatekeeper in this study was the school's Board of Management. The informant was a girl called Ruth (pseudonym). As a teacher-researcher there was a need for a key informant to challenge or act as a counter to any biases or assumptions the researcher may have had. Morse et al. (2001) suggest criteria for the selection of a good informant. This person would have knowledge and experience of the field, be reflective and articulate and willing to participate. Good informants are integral to the ethnographic process as they can provide the researcher with an opportunity to counter-check interpretation for validity. Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) point out that the key informant should offer a range of insights to develop and test emerging patterns.

Spradley (1979) acknowledges the importance of having a productive relationship with the informant. This person should be sufficiently enculturated so that they understand the intricacies of their culture well. Ruth's immersion in the girls' culture was extensive and she was not taught by the researcher, which facilitated the emphasis on the researcher rather than teacher role. Ruth's selection as informant was based on early observations where she was seen to mix with many of the different groups rather than stay with one. She appeared to be open to discussion, was confident and the researcher believed she would be willing to challenge researcher assumptions and assist with interpretation.

Ruth did not play a hugely different role to the other participants except to meet more often informally, to discuss the data. She had moved groups frequently even spending time in the counter culture group in her earliest years in MP. She occupied a leadership role as a deputy head girl and had served on the school student council. She also had numerous interactions with the larger peer group as an organiser of events such as the charity events in school and the debutante ball and so had insights other students did not appear to have by virtue of her various roles. Ruth was academic but also sociable, maintaining time for friends and also study. She had an interest in sport and participated in extracurricular activities.

If the researcher needed to see Ruth separately she was asked if and when she might have time to meet. There were numerous opportunities to meet as there would often be a teacher out on school business or a talk organised in careers that was not relevant to Ruth. This maintained a level of anonymity as Ruth was not leaving the peer group or her classes to meet. Ruth's role was not divulged to the other participants in case there was an issue with jealousy or perceived favouritism. Ruth made that decision herself. Meetings with Ruth were held in the library, a public space where many girls frequented. Whyte's (2012) relationship with 'Doc' (the key informant in Street Corner Society) is a foundation point to this discussion on the key informant. Doc became Whyte's key informant because he was pointed out as someone with knowledge of the culture of the Italian slums and also someone with good conversational skills and insights.

This was similar in the selection of Ruth. Conscious of exploiting Ruth (as Whyte was accused by members of Doc's family and also the academic world) during her Leaving Certificate year I was very careful not to call on her excessively. Doc expressed to Whyte during the course of the research that he wanted to continue to help because a relationship of friendship and trust had developed. In a similar way Ruth wanted to help with this study and expressed that regularly (Whyte 2012). Where Doc was an informal leader of his gang Ruth fulfilled this brief socially too. The way Doc provided Whyte with his interpretation or feedback informally in small meetings over time, was also the approach taken with Ruth. Whyte was accused of presenting a distorted portrait of the culture in 'Cornerville' and of violating professional ethics, particularly for not sharing his findings with all the participants (Whyte 2012). Equally this was a concern in this research as the girls were leaving school to begin college careers before the analysis was complete so much of the member checking took place during and at the end of interviews where the researcher discussed the data and sought validation of her early interpretations through effective listening and questioning.

In this way, Ruth was important for validity as she provided a second validity check after interviews were over. She facilitated discussion of the preliminary findings in our informal meetings by giving me her perspective on themes or patterns that were emerging. This was mainly carried out through conversation rather than taking drafts away to read (although this was offered) due to her time constraints in relation to revision for examinations. The role of the two critical friends (discussed below) also contributed to research validity.

4.8 Data Processes and Procedures

Data was collected in the field over a period of one year as it was felt this time was necessary to achieve as holistic a portrait of the culture-sharing group. Table 4.2 below provides an overview of the fieldwork phases. Data collection and fieldwork methods employed include semi-structured observation; semi-structured one to one interviews, semi-structured group interviews and focus group interviews. The focus group interviews were conducted to explore emergent themes from the group interview stage thus providing a more focused approach to themes. The use of a research journal to record a personal diary of thoughts during the process was beneficial to the researcher to record ideas and was critical for reflective thinking. A consecutive data collection interview period followed the initial observation phase. This allowed the emergence of friendship patterns to dictate a revisit to an observation site or interviewee for reliability purposes.

This theoretical sampling was enabled and enhanced by the flexibility of ethnography as an approach. These methods mirror those used by Fine (1987), Chang (1992) and Ball (1981). Banks (2001) argues that seeing is not as natural a process as we think. The interpretation of what individuals see and hear is culturally and historically influenced. Enmeshing the visual in language through discussion or conversation can add meaning. The school yearbook and newsletters along with the school blog also provided additional data for triangulation and reliability. In addition, the school prospectus, school policies on bullying, RSE (relationships and sexuality education) policy, code of behaviour and admissions policy were consulted at various stages during the research to support or assist with the interpretation of findings.

Table 4.2: Overview of Fieldwork Phases

September to November 2012	November 2012 to December 2012	January to March 2013	April to June 2013	June to August 2013	September to October 2013
Initial gathering of data re physical structures and school environs. Full Ethical approval granted	Observation of the 6th year group	5 Group interviews 5 Focus groups Continued observation phase	14 One to one in depth interviews Final observation phase	Data analysis/ contingency to contact participants if required for extra data	Final interviews with 14 participants Attendance at Debs Ball Sep 2013 to check career plans

4.8.1 Observation

Observation took place in the 6th year classrooms and on their corridors in the morning, at breaktime, in lessons, during lunch, late study and at specific school events like sports matches, the graduation and sports day. Table 4.3 documents all the observation sites. The lunchtime period proved the most valuable period to gather data. It provided enough time being a forty-five minute long break and the only time where all the girls were together as a complete group. The observation sites and frequency of visit were agreed with the girls at an assembly when the discussion dealing with the eighteen girls who had not returned consent forms took place. I agreed to visit the lunch room three days a week at most, two mornings a week and two break times a week, reducing this over time. The other observations in lessons and late study were opportunistic and dependent on the researcher being free from class or other commitments herself. Permission was asked for those particular observations as they arose.

Table 4.3: The Observation Sites

Morning- 4 different 6th year classrooms in school on a rotation basis
Breaktime- Rotated to various corridors or spaces where the 6th year gathered
Lunchtime- Study hall which doubled as the 6th year lunchroom in school
Afterschool- Intermittent observation of after-school study in classrooms in school or extracurricular activities on the school grounds
Weekend- Occasional observations of sports matches outside the school
Special Occasions- Masses, charity events, graduation, sports day in venues inside and outside the school

The observation sites were picked to provide variety in terms of time of day, location, setting and context for reliability and for immersion into the social spaces occupied by the girls in school. In addition, the researcher's insider knowledge made it easier to know where the girls would be at different times of the day. Observation of key events was communicated to the girls at the assembly meeting where observation was specifically discussed. The only point raised by the girls with regard to observation was that I attend and chat to the girls at the debs but not observe for the evening. I agreed to this request acknowledging that this was a special time for the girls and their partners to celebrate without the surveillance of a teacher or researcher.

The first observation took place in November 2012 and the final observation was in May 2013. Observation was necessary as it enabled the researcher to look for rituals, practices and actions that underpinned the girls' interactions. It also enabled identification of the social peer groups the girls were part of. Other methods would not have provided this information.

Field notes were written in the role of non-participant observer. This involved taking no direct part in the activities observed but being known as researcher to the participants (Spradley 1979). The role of teacher was relinquished to some degree during the data collection by ignoring loud noise levels and some minor rule breaking, which would not have been possible when in teacher role. This was effective in the initial stage of observation as it enabled the girls to observe the difference between the researcher role and the teacher role. Consequently, over time the researcher became more accepted and less intrusive. When observing during non-class periods, the researcher alternated between leaving the observation setting before the bell so as not to have to ask the girls to go to class and on occasion even ignoring the girls' delayed reaction to the bell. This sustained bout of observation, in the researcher's opinion did serve to desensitise the girls toward my presence and it allowed them to act naturally. However, it is always an issue to what degree did this influence their behaviour.

Pole and Morrison (2003, p. 20) cite that observation enables ethnographers to:

> "Listen, watch, record and subsequently share with informants what they say and do in specific educational settings and time frames."

It is important during observation to attend to the lens focus and the periphery of the lens (Wolcott 2001). The initial main lens in this research looked firstly for friendship groups that the students were part of. The peripheral lenses flicked to vignettes of interactions within the groups to help colour or illustrate the categorisation of friendship and types of interactions. The researcher looked to see how agency and power mediated the way friendships groups interacted. Through this observation period, the types of groups were identified and leaders emerged. This was most evident in the physical divisions between groups of girls in the lunchroom. The different groups gathered around different tables but would visit girls from other groups, standing to chat before returning to their base table. The leaders were often the girls who commanded attention of the others around them and were also less likely to visit other groups. Looking for the unexpected patterns in the girls' peer groups and then establishing and interrogating the social categories enabled the portrait of the year group to emerge.

In essence, the researcher looked for patterns of what was and what was not happening (Wolcott 2001). Note taking of observations was critical and involved writing the day and date and including a brief description of the scene. The researcher made short entries to describe and interpret what was being observed. An important element of the field note phase was the inclusion of the researcher's feelings, reactions and thoughts. Developing good observational techniques took practice and indeed became easier with time. This was because the researcher became more familiar with the site and the activities. The observation phases continued until no new material was emerging. Over time a level of theoretical saturation was reached.

The observation descriptions adhered to Spradley's (1980) nine dimensions of an observational setting. This included the space, actors, activity, object, act, event, time, goal and feeling for each of the observations. Figure 4.2 below illustrates a visual representation of Goffman's dramaturgical approach combined with Spradley's nine observational dimensions. This poster was used to conceptualise how the observations would be conducted and for discussion with peers on the PhD programme who also acted as critical friends.

Figure 4.2: Spradley's Observational Dimensions.

The observation phases began with descriptive observation which orientated the observer and developed lines of vision. The second phase involved more focused observation with relevance to the research questions. The final phase was selective observation (Spradley 1979) where there was a search for further data on patterns found. The final phase focused more on specific phenomenon (Pole and Morrison 2003). The observation phase assisted with the selection of more specific questions and themes for the one to one interviews. The core and embedded questions were explored at interview which assisted with confirming observations for reliability purposes. Eventually through observation from a wide angle to a closer lens, the personal and the cultural distinctions become more blurred and the emic and etic perspectives could blend (Ellis and Bochner 1996). Field notes rather than observation sheets were used during this phase to maintain a more open structure which freed the researcher to really see what was happening and record accordingly.

There is debate in the methodological literature around firstly, what fieldnotes are, secondly, whether they help or hinder data interpretation and thirdly, if the skill of taking field notes can or should be taught. This researcher decided to write and use fieldnotes defined by Emerson et al. (2011) as writings that record what researchers learns about the activities of others and their own questions and reflections. This researcher found fieldnotes helpful in reflecting back on the interactions, the unusual observations which ultimately provided a deeper understanding of the data (Emerson et al. 2011). Over time the researcher developed her own style of fieldnote taking based on writing a descriptive account of what was happening in the site in question. Therefore, there was an element of personal judgement to the selection of an observation lens and therefore also to the fieldnote record taken. Due attention was paid to the suggestion by Emerson et al. (2011, p. 9) that:

> "Writing fieldnote descriptions is not a matter of passively copying down facts about what happened. Rather these descriptive accounts select and emphasise different features and actions while ignoring and marginalising others."

This early textualisation in the form of fieldnotes informed the writing up of the ethnographic account at a later stage. Groups were observed over time as structures, within which the individual members used agency to conform or resist group norms.

4.9 Group Interviews and One to One Interviews

Table 4.4 provides an overview of the interview structure and schedule. Five semi-structured group interviews with five separate groups were conducted focusing on broad issues relating to friendship initially. Later in the data collection period, five follow-up focus group interviews were conducted with each of these groups to begin narrowing the focus to issues of interest. Fourteen one to one in-depth interviews with the final sample of students were conducted near the end of the data collection period with a brief final one to one informal interview held with the same fourteen girls after they had left school.

The main aim of this interview was to find out what the girls were doing with their lives since leaving school and reflections on the research process from their perspective.

The groups represented at group interview stage were categorised where possible with three pure friendship groups and two groups which were mixed. This was because the volunteers did not distribute evenly across all groups. There were four counter-culture group members forming group 1. There were six girls in the loud popular group forming group 2. There were four in the quiet group 3 and the mixed groups both had five girls from a range of groups. These girls were sporty, studious, girly or members of no particular identifiable group. Profiles were taken of the final sample of fourteen so that their social class, interests and aspirations could be identified. Profiles were not taken for interviewees at group interview stage as it was decided that membership of the particular peer group would be sufficient. The final girls who were profiled were those who had participated in every research phase from observation through to one-to-one interviews. It was deemed important by this researcher that the reader gain an insight into the identities of these girls to fully appreciate the discussion chapters, where individual excerpts of narrative from each of the girls are included.

Table 4.4 Overview of the interview structure, schedule and order of interviews:

January 2013	*March 2013*	*May 2013* *One to one interview 1*	*September 2013* *One to one interview 2*
Group interview 1 **Counterculture gp** Group interview 2 **Loud popular group** Group interview 3 **Quiet group** Group interview 4 **Mixed group 1- 5 girls from all groups except counter culture group (sporty, loud, quiet)** Group interview 5 **Mixed group 2- 5 girls from all groups except counter culture group (sporty, loud, quiet)**	Follow up Group 1 **Counterculture group** Follow up Group 2 **Loud popular group** Follow up Group 3 **Quiet group 1** Follow up Group 4 **Mixed group 1- 5 girls from all groups except counter culture group (sporty, loud, quiet)** Follow up Group 5 **Mixed group 2- 5 girls from all groups except the counter culture group (sporty, loud, quiet)**	**Counter culture group-** Mary, Laura, Betty **Sporty group-** Emer, Keira **Quiet group**- Cait, Caz, Sarah **High achievers group**- Ruth, Julie **Loud group-** Carrie, Shirley **Posh group**- Lara **Alternative, member of no group**- Anne Marie	**Counter culture group**- Mary, Laura, Betty **Sporty group**- Emer, Keira **Quiet group**- Cait, Caz, Sarah **High achievers group**- Ruth, Julie **Loud group-** Carrie, Shirley **Posh group**- Lara **Alternative, member of no group**- Anne Marie

Interviews were conducted at a mutually agreeable time in a rarely used quiet room (suggested by the girls) on site and lasted one hour. A list of interview stem questions on a range of topics was prepared and typed up before the interviews (Appendix F). These came from the observation phase where ideas and thoughts emerged and also branched into areas that were highlighted by the theory and literature researched on education and peer culture. These served only to guide and prompt the discussion as required. After the five groups were interviewed, responses were manually coded and the five groups were interviewed again a month later with these group codes explored more specifically. Codes varied from group to group and were merged to form the final most structured one to one schedule (see Appendix G).

Where the main analytic focus during final analysis became the one-to-one interviews, as this was where the most in-depth data emerged, some material from the group interview phases is included in the discussion chapters where appropriate and relevant. Analysis is discussed in more detail below.

The interview focus was always on the cultural elements of the girls' life at school and outside in peer culture. The interview questions for the final one to one schedule were divided into five broad themes based on the research questions and also on data that emerged during the earlier observation and interview phases. These themes were categorised as: peer interaction and friendship; school culture, body and boys; pressure and stress and the girls' experience of power. The girls' stories provided much of the data and there was an emphasis on a relaxed conversational ethnographic style throughout. Spradley (1979) outlines that an ethnographic interview is like a conversation, it is a certain type of speech event. A good ethnographic interview enables the participants to speak as they would to others in their culture. The girls were not prevented from interrupting, using peer language, raising their voices, contradicting or speaking their minds. In this way the interviews differed from more structured and formal conventional interview.

Importantly, this smaller final group of fourteen girls had representation from all groups. The more regular conversational interviews with the informant were also conducted during this time but were not recorded as were conversations with two teachers who acted as critical friends. These teachers agreed to discuss findings with me and similar to the key informant were willing to challenge biases and assumptions. One teacher was a former pupil of the school and the other was a senior teacher in the school a long time. They provided another perspective at times and assisted with interpretation. In this way, the participants, key informant, critical friends and the researcher all played a role in the triangulation of the data and analysis. These teachers facilitated my queries, read drafts of fieldnotes, disagreed with and illuminated interpretations throughout the whole research process. Biases were challenged particularly by the ex-pupil who used her own memories to assist with validating the data and managing my own very different school experience.

All interviews began with a reminder to the girls of the purpose of the research and thanking them for their willingness to take part. Ethics were revisited and the freedom of any girl to withdraw at any time was reiterated. The questions were predominantly open ended and were phrased in simple clear language. All of the interviews were allowed to diverge so that theme emergence could occur in a natural way. The researcher still managed to ask many prepared questions at appropriate points in the interviews. Interviews were recorded with permission and notes were also taken. The experience the researcher had as a teacher of teenagers for many years was valuable here in managing the interview interaction. Only rarely was it necessary to intervene to calm a discussion or redirect the interview. The importance of developing a rapport was very important especially for the one to one interviews. At the end of the interviews the participants were thanked again and the girls were asked if everyone was comfortable with the discussion, content and arrangements of the interview. The researcher made notes and prompts during the subsequent and repeated listening to each interview on areas which needed further probing or clarity at a subsequent interview. By discussing the interview notes with the girls at the end of the interview, they had an opportunity to clarify ask a question and the researcher also had an opportunity to discuss the data and to member check. Finally, by sharing drafts of the final transcripts the girls were given an opportunity to decide what was included and what was left out.

Over time an ethnographic record was compiled, comprising of field notes, interview transcripts and journals, to assist with documenting the cultural scene. The cultural descriptions of the girls' friendships emerged from this record. In total, thirty-eight interviews with the girls were recorded, transcribed, coded and analysed alongside three phases of formal observation and numerous other informal observations over a year in the field. These provided the collective data to enable a portrait of the culture-sharing group to emerge and provide the basis for the findings chapters.

A number of actions were adopted to assist in the process of ensuring quality during interviews. In order to avoid overly rigid categorisation and interpretation as experienced by Ball (1981), the shared interpretations and findings with the girls, particularly Ruth, were useful indicators of quality. Pole and Morrison's (2003) contention that group interviews and focus groups can be like having a conversation with a number of individuals simultaneously resonated with this researcher's experiences. The approach to interview as a data collection method in this study mirrors that of Charmaz (2003) who sees interviews as emergent techniques to enable an interviewer to immediately pursue new leads. This flexibility enabled this researcher to pursue a number of interesting areas which may not have been accessed had structured conventional interviews been used.

4.10 Analysis of Data and Grounded Theory

Spradley (1979, p. 92) describes analysis as:

> "A systematic examination of something in order to determine its parts, the relationships among parts and their relationship to the whole."

Data analysis was conducted in concurrence with data collection and influenced each subsequent data collection phase. Manual coding of the emerging patterns was used during the data collection and analysis phase. Therefore, information pertinent to each theme began building throughout the collection phase and was also analysed at the end of the process. This facilitated the researcher to carry out some analysis on each topic as it was categorised in an attempt to make sense of the data. Analysis of data was informed by grounded theory methods. Charmaz and Mitchell (2001, p. 161) see grounded theory and ethnography as complementary stating:

> "Using grounded theory methods can streamline fieldwork and move ethnographic research toward theoretical interpretation. Attending to ethnographic methods can prevent grounded theory studies from dissolving into quick and dirty qualitative research."

The rationale for choosing grounded theory methods stemmed from its approach to analysis having embedded procedures which challenge bias while at the same time remaining sensitive to actions (Strauss and Corbin 1998). In addition, grounded theory is based on categories emerging from the data (Charmaz 2006). The basic rules of grounded theory are to gather data, answer the key foundation question and develop theory. Using grounded theory in ethnography the key initial question can be 'What is happening here?' (Charmaz and Mitchell 2001, p. 163). This methodology is located within the domain of constructivist grounded theory as the themes emerged from the data and were not selected beforehand in the generation of knowledge (Charmaz 2003). The search for patterns is common to ethnography and grounded theory (ibid). Theory was developed inductively from emerging patterns; in this way being sensitive to the process and outcome of the data collection and analysis. In addition, grounded theory methods facilitated interpretation of the perspectives of the participants (Glaser and Strauss 2009).

The stages of grounded theory analysis adhered to in this study were to firstly become immersed in the data, secondly to interpret data through constant comparison of similarities and differences and thirdly to collect new data as initial data analysis yielded insights; known as theoretical sampling (Glaser and Strauss 2009). The researcher read and reread the data from early data collection throughout the process. This facilitated the immersion strategy and assisted researcher familiarity with the data (Marshall and Rossman 2006). During this repeated review, categories naturally emerged. Once the themes began to emerge the day-to-day observational notes were broken up which comprised of removing and pasting relevant data together. The observation fieldnotes comprised the initial narrative account. The more focused observation and the use of a variety of methods assisted in addressing dimensions across and within the themes. This method described is a form of qualitative analytic induction where observation and analysis are intertwined (Flick 2003). This is well illustrated by Ball (1987) in his case study of an entire comprehensive school.

The stages of analysis in this research, are closely aligned to the accepted stages of grounded theory methods in ethnography (Charmaz and Mitchell 2001). Open initial coding began at the observation phase. The interview focus was then based on this open coding of categories. Each stage of data collection determined the focus of the next. A relatively simple ethnographic model adopted for the initial analysis of data included; beginning by knowing the data well and thinking about it; developing categories to put some order on the data; followed by progressive focusing or 'funnelling' of the data (Spradley 1979). This ethnographic approach was in keeping with a flexible grounded theory approach. Charmaz and Mitchell (2001, p. 160) assert that 'Ethnographers can adopt and adapt grounded theory to increase the analytical incisiveness of their studies'. Line by line coding of group interviews identified further codes which were then examined in the in-depth one to one interviews. Coding of interview data was managed as follows. As the interview transcripts were read, the text was annotated with a code.

The researcher recorded this code, the transcript page number, respondent name in one to one interviews and interview number manually. No software was used at any stage as the researcher wanted to become as familiar as possible with the data. As new codes emerged, the researcher opened a new manual entry. As additional references to an existing code emerged, these were added to build an index of references under each code. Code titles included, 'getting on with many' or 'sorting disagreements'. A total of fifty-seven codes emerged with some having up to fifty indexed references and others as few as eight. Codes were then arranged into sub-themes and themes. At this point some codes were omitted as a form of data reduction as they were not relevant to the key research questions. Codes with associated indexed references were not solely selected on the basis of their size but also less frequent codes that were interesting or unusual were included where appropriate. Some codes were merged at this stage to form one integrated code. From the fifty-seven codes five themes emerged each with five or six sub themes. This detailed coding procedure is a mix of Huberman and Miles' (1994) group analysis methods and Glaser and Strauss' (2009) constant comparison method. The initial themes and sub-themes are tabulated below.

Table 4.5:Theme and sub-theme categorisation.

Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3	Theme 4	Theme 5
Peer interactions	*School Context*	*Power and Relationships*	*Body and Sexuality*	*Youth Culture*
Sub- theme 1	**Sub- theme 2**	**Sub- theme 3**	**Sub- theme 4**	**Sub- theme 5**
Categories of friends	*School and teachers*	*Experience of power*	*Boyfriends*	*Getting picked for things*
Friendship roles	*Othering girls from elsewhere*	*Resistance*	*Sexuality*	*Popularity*
Gender and Class underpinning friendship	*Values and ethos School shaping identity /*	*Conformity*	*Femininity and Masculinity*	*Pressure and stress*
Friends shaping identity	*MP girl*	*Alienation*	*Body Consciousness*	*Likes and dislikes*
Sites and topics of conversation- interaction	*Rural city context*	*Patriarchy*	*Accessories*	*Adolescent language*
	Emos/Goth	*Parents Power*		

Once the themes and subthemes emerged, complete with a comprehensively
coded and indexed analysis chart, write up began. Each code with associated
index references was revisited to choose excerpts and build a narrative description
of each subtheme. The researcher used existing theory and literature to inform and
interpret meaning from the data building theory from the data. Significant
organisation was required for the formatting, cross referencing and indexing of all
the data. The reduction and selection of data was difficult and painstaking due to
its volume (Creswell 2009). The researcher chose to represent themes which had
enough valid data to enable comprehensive rich description and interpretation
(Chang 1992).

4.11 Quality Variables Overview

The validity of ethnographic study is enhanced by immersion in the field over a significant timescale (LeCompte et al. 1992). This was an integral quality variable in this study. Ethical considerations were considered at every stage of the research enhancing validity and reliability and ethics. The five general standards for validity in qualitative educational research were adopted. These include ensuring a good fit between the research questions, data collection methods and analysis techniques. The researcher was mindful of her prior knowledge, biases and prejudices through reflexivity. Recognition of internal and external value constraints and comprehensiveness of the research process was achieved by rigorous adherence to such validity checks (LeCompte et al 1992). The key informant and the two critical friends were crucial reliability and validity checks that were used throughout the research process to challenge biases and assumptions and to comment on interpretations.

Other specific ethnographic validity checks incorporated in this study included writing field notes promptly (Chang 1992, Spradley 1979), seeking participant feedback on findings, and writing thick description of observed events (Robson 2002). The maintenance of a field diary helped greatly with idea generation, reflexivity and general recording of the sequence of elements of the research process. Another process in the methodological literature which was used was that of 'retroduction' (Olsen 2012). It involved the revisiting of data continuously to identify what had been learned and to elicit deeper understanding. This was a reliability tool that was used extensively throughout this study up to the final reading prior to submission. The transcripts were listened to while the researcher was in the car or walking to really interrogate the data.

Reliability concerns were continuously addressed by checking and cross checking transcripts, field notes, coding and other data collected for accuracy (Flick 2009). While Fine (1987) advises the use of other individuals to collect some of the data, this was considered but was deemed impractical for this particular study. There was perhaps an element of selfishness or independence in wanting to complete the study without a co- researcher.

In addition, this would have felt like an added complication to an already challenging study. It could also have been a risk to the trust between the researcher and the girls and the school's willingness to allow the research to go ahead had another researcher been involved. In order to enhance the quality of the write up, the researcher described and interpreted the patterns that emerged in the data, as well as inter-relating these patterns with other patterns. This produced a more composite woven piece of research that adds to the existing body of theory (Agar 1996). Chang (1992) was aware of the need to carefully select the most relevant data throughout, whilst being definitive about excluding all unrequired data. The aims of a reflexive ethnography according to Bochner and Ellis (2002, p. 224) include:

> "Not to use criteria as universal standards against which to make judgements...but to educate ourselves and others to recognise differences and judge various genres accordingly."

Acknowledging researcher bias is a significant part of all ethnographic research. The importance of being continually aware of the researcher's own selective perception, personal biases and theoretical predispositions was recognised (Patton 2002). The aforementioned validity, reliability and triangulation processes have aided the management and tracking of biases. Robson (2002) advises on specific approaches to aid the avoidance of bias during observation sessions, which include fairness in selective attention, selective encoding and interpersonal factors which were dually respected during the data collection and analysis. In the findings chapters the voices of the participants are prominent in the discussion which ensures student voice and moderates researcher bias. As well as the critical friends and key informant the researcher's supervisor continually challenged potential bias in meetings, discussions and in written feedback on early drafts.

4.12 Conclusion

The scope of this research topic and approach offers a novel epistemological opportunity to add to the international body of existing theory. This study also contributes methodologically as it builds upon existing ethnographic school studies and especially from a teacher-researcher perspective. Themes and research questions have changed, evolved and been refined during this study with patterns emerging and merging throughout the observation and interview phases. Our consciousness is not static; it is based on experience and our interpretation of human action. Facts do not imprint on an empty mind but unfold through consciousness when people act (Pawluch et al. 2005). When a person acts on an issue they learn from that action or interaction and sometimes reform thoughts or ideas. New questions may emerge with new answers. These interactions lead to learning both about the world and also self identity (Atkinson et al 2007). This links with the theoretical agency-structure focus of this study where methodological decisions require agency and elements of rational choice (Gambetta 1987, Giddens 1984). This methodology employed in this study has enabled this researcher to reflect on where she is situated within the group and how she understands more fully the inequalities, beliefs and values evident within the cultural groups and the school context. In addition, it has been necessary to challenge, sometimes painfully personal assumptions and prejudices.

With vulnerable groups, the absolute holistic portrait of the culture-sharing group may not be feasible ethically. Alternatively, because of the researcher's and the participants' multiple realities and their positions within the culture, it may be necessary for beneficence that they remain somewhat separate. Being clear about 'insiderness' and what that means, being routinely but honestly reflexive whilst using the right tools are of critical importance for this research. The careful construction of this study's design frame was crucial to the contribution this research makes to educational theory and methodology. The limitations of this study are highlighted throughout the thesis but particularly in this chapter. Limitations arose from the need to make decisions which directed the study along a particular trajectory from the outset and throughout the research process.

The position of the researcher as a teacher in the school poses dilemmas in this study many of which have been discussed in this chapter. The insider is never fully an insider and nor is the outsider ever fully an outsider as we share experiences throughout life that give us insights, create assumptions and position us as reflexive agents with a particular positionality. We can only aim to maximise the benefits that our research position provides us with and minimise the negatives through rigour and good process (Pole 1999). The transition from teacher to researcher proved an interesting experience for the researcher and was successful in creating trust and minimising power dynamics in the subsequent interactions. This is an area of potential future exploration from a methodological perspective.

This researcher argues that future ethnographic studies can accommodate the teacher-researcher perspective as long as the design frame is constructed with the correct validity and reliability tools and with reflexivity as an integral part. The avoidance of probing or interrupting the girls' responses during interview enabled an opportunity for a comprehensive personal experience to be outlined. This adds a richness and depth to the data. The lack of some disclosure or discussions of particular experiences of broader peer culture, are perhaps unfortunate absences within this ethnography. Yet the level of disclosure experienced was significant given the teacher-researcher dimension and there were valuable cultural insights in the way the different girls mediated disclosure of information during interviews. There is huge potential in extending a study such as this longitudinally to move beyond the second-level school structures to third level or indeed to begin back at first year and examine the cultural transition to 6th year. The opportunity to return to the girls in the context of third-level education or work would perhaps enable freer less guarded responses on certain topics. However, this ethnography paints a comprehensive portrait of school culture among a group of 6th year girls in a particular space and at a specific time in their lives.

Chapter 5 School Context and Community

Mount Privet secondary school for girls is situated close to Riverstown and has a school population of approximately six hundred. Riverstown is bordered by numerous town lands, villages and urban housing. Some of the large urban estates have significant social problems, coupled with high unemployment and in some cases high crime rates (CSO 2013). The housing estates surrounding the city are quite segregated with privately owned housing existing in close proximity to council housing. Despite state efforts to change this there is still little social integration between different areas. There are designated MC and WC areas. House prices clearly reflect this division. The population of the city has changed dramatically in previous decades with the expansion of cultural and racial diversity. Along with white Irish, there are now populations of Chinese, Asian, African and Eastern Europeans living in Riverstown (CSO 2013).

Despite this cultural diversity the school community in MP is not representative of the city population. Only a minority of girls are from the diverse cultural make up of the city and indeed very few reside in the city centre. The majority are white Irish and commute from rural locations and also travel in from the wealthier suburban and peri-urban housing estates. Parents are willing to travel long distances to enable their girls to attend MP. Consequently, despite its close proximity to many of Riverstown's impoverished areas the school population is predominantly MC. The school is close to two other girls' schools that have a very different intake catering primarily for girls from disadvantaged backgrounds. The school community operates as a mini-community physically situated in the city but not a functioning part of it. Student life revolves around the school day and the extracurricular activities the school offers are mainly contained in the school. The school is supported by a committed parents' council who organise numerous gatherings and fundraising events for the school. These parents exert agency to support the school and create a link to the school their daughters attend. They also exert agency through their choice of school.

5.1 School Ecology

MP is protected by gates which are kept locked due to limited parking inside the school grounds accessible only to staff. The school is surrounded by impressive grounds with mature trees, grassy areas and playing pitches. The school was built in the 1800s with a number of more modern additions and extensions to the main building since that time. There is a chapel with a concert hall adjacent to it and a separate large gym behind where the smokers gather. Inside the school is a maze of corridors and stairs on varying levels. The school boasts some beautiful old rooms with large paintings and elaborate coving and mouldings on the ceilings preserving the character of the building. The 6th years are allowed to use the study hall for lunch both as a privilege and to also reduce the numbers in the main lunchroom.

Facilities in the school include science laboratories, a language laboratory, computer rooms, a music room, home economics kitchens and numerous offices, resource rooms and meeting rooms. The entrance hall is dominated by a large statue of Our Lady with a room to the left for meetings or a waiting space for parents. The principal's office is situated around the corner from the reception staff office, not far from the school entrance. This affords the principal a view of the main school stairs and all persons entering and leaving the premises. This is a structure which serves to regulate the girls' agency and the girls modify their behaviour passing the principal's office, checking the tidiness of their uniform and quietening their chatter (Giddens 1984). The school has numerous cabinets displaying trophies and awards the girls have won along with many religious icons depicting the Catholic heritage and trusteeship of the school. This visibly reinforces the atmosphere of high achievement and the rounded education a MP girl receives. This is all structured within a Catholic girls' educational ethos.

5.2 Staff and Curriculum

The school has a mainly female staff of forty, with two permanent male teachers. However there is a male principal who has succeeded the first lay principal; also a male. The deputy principal is female. The current Board of Management is comprised of six men and three women with the school principal secretary to the Board. The chairperson of the Board is also male. For the purposes of this study the 'school management' refers to the principal, deputy principal, assistant principals and special duties post holders as these individuals comprise the senior management team. There is a full-time school secretary and a part-time receptionist as well as one full-time bursar, a librarian and caretaker. There is one school guidance counsellor and a part-time chaplain responsible for faith development with the girls. The girls range in age from 12/13 to 18/19. The school operates a six year second-level cycle with TY compulsory for all students. There is no Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) or Junior Certificate Schools Programme (JCSP) available while there is an option to do the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme as an additional senior cycle programme if a place is available. This reinforces the academic ethos and could act as a deterrent to some girls who may not be academic applying.

The curriculum is gendered and traditional. No practical subjects like Technical Graphics, Woodwork, Metalwork, Applied Maths, Engineering, or Economics are available. French is the only European language offered in the school. Physical Education is not an examination option and neither is Religious Education but both are on the curriculum. SPHE and CSPE are also provided on the junior cycle programme. These structural constraints may influence some girls are to choose traditional careers. However, the parents and girls make informed rational choices to attend at enrolment despite the relatively narrow and traditional subject choice (Gambetta 1987). The curriculum, subject options offered and school ethos are outlined on open days and in the school prospectus so that parents are aware prior to admission the options available.

Extracurricular activities occur at lunchtime, after school and sometimes at weekends. They include debating, orchestra, choir, chess, hockey, GAA, basketball and a host of other sports. The Gaisce awards are offered as well as leadership courses, outdoor pursuits and trips away. There is an annual trip to a European city and a Ski tour. Numerous cultural day trips to historical or art venues also take place alongside fieldtrips and enterprise visits. These activities are open to all girls who can afford them but if tours are oversubscribed then the student's disciplinary record (Foucault 1980) may be taken into account in deciding who gets a place. This encourages conformity to the code of behaviour and rewards good behaviour in the process akin to hegemony theory (Gramsci 1973)

There is an aforementioned issue relating to over subscription to the school with many girls unable to get a place causing great angst among the parents and girls who fail be admitted. Sisters of previous students have right of entry as have the daughters of staff. If a girl puts MP as their number one choice and are unsuccessful, they often end up being offered a school they would not want to go to. This is because the other popular schools fill their spaces from those who choose their school first. This means if you do not get your first choice your latter preferred choices are full and only schools who have not enough applicants have spaces. These schools are often designated disadvantaged and would not be sought after by MC families. MP enrols mainly above average to extremely academic girls from mainly MC backgrounds. This scenario indicates a rational choice dilemma for parents where they must weigh up the benefits and costs of applying to MP as their first choice school (Gambetta 1987). The process of enrolment involves completing an application form available on the school's open day, which requires personal data and requests parents to rank their school choices according to their preference. Parents can then seek an informal interview with the principal to discuss the school's suitability for their daughter and where the principal can meet prospective parents. Prospective students do not attend this meeting. Following this process the school's admission policy is implemented and successful applicants are informed.

5.3 Discipline and Order

MP has a disciplined academic reputation. The disciplinary code requires girls to be well behaved, well groomed and respectful at all times. This reinforces the traditional girls' school ethos (Lynch and Lodge 2002). The uniform is a particular feature of the code of discipline which is expected to be worn correctly with pride. Ties must be up with the top button closed. There is frequent lunchtime detention and discussions with year heads or the principal for rule breaking but generally disciplinary issues of a serious nature are rare. In terms good behaviour compliance is expected. The uniform is the biggest area for anti school agency or resistance to be exerted (Giroux 1981). Parents sign an agreement to adhere to the school code of behaviour prior to their daughter beginning school. Minor breaches of discipline are recorded in the school journal to be signed by a parent. The disciplinary structures indicate a tension between agency and structure where there is limited real agency and democracy during the school day for the girls. The school's discipline structures encourage structural compliance and there are rewards for those who do conform (Gramsci 1973).

The school has a student council run by volunteer teachers and student elected representatives from every year. There are three head girls, three deputy head girls and one games captain also voted in by peers. There are also a number of elected prefects in each 6th year class. All school leaders get an engraved badge which they wear on their jumpers, to highlight their leadership roles. These are the school leaders who are responsible for hearing the student voice, negotiating change or organising events. These structures do not tend to function well according to the girls in the study. The leaders are there in theory but have limited practical impact, frustrating many of the girls who take the responsibility and role seriously. The girls expressed that barriers are regularly presented by the school authorities when they want to make changes and their efforts usually become futile. This is discussed further in the findings. This section outlines that the school operates a linear patriarchal, hierarchical, management and student structure.

5.4 A Typical Day in Mount Privet

The description of a typical day for a MP school girl is constructed using extracts of my observation journal which were written during this early observational phase. Girls arrive to school in many ways. Some girls arrive to school by car, individually or in groups. Some girls get the bus from suburbs and rural communities outside the city and walk the remainder of the journey to school. Girls rarely cycle, although this was more common in the past. A girl's position in the school is identifiable by the size of their schoolbags rather than their height. First years, by far the most laden down, are dwarfed by the weight of the bags, not proportional to their body size. Transition Years have bags which appear to have little more than their lunch, due to not having a formal booklist but a modified curriculum based on active learning. Girls in 6th year also travel light due to their attendance at after school study which allows them to leave the bulk of their books in school lockers. After school study and late study run from 3.45-6.30 pm and 6.45-9.00 pm respectively. Some girls stay for both sessions and other just for one. This facility is charged as an extra optional cost per term. The majority of MCG would attend one or both of these sessions. The WCG tend to be less likely to attend, particularly for the later session preferring to leave school earlier. There was a cultural element to the girls' use of study facilities. This could have been due to constraints of economic capital or resistance among the WCG to the dominant MC practices (Bourdieu 1998).

On arrival some girls smile and greet each other as they pass to go to their lockers or base classrooms. Others pass quietly with their heads down. Girls seem to link up on arrival to school, moving in groups of 2 or 3. The younger girls move with greater purpose, with older girls more sociable and chatty as they go. This could be due to older girls being closer friends and more comfortable with the school and spaces. Girls routinely glance at their phones as they move, often eating as they travel to class. Girls generally congregate in one of three places on arrival. They meet in the base classrooms, locker areas or the toilets.

Girls use the toilets as a private space in which to have a conversation with a select few. It appears there are certain girls allowed to access and occupy this space. If certain groups are in the toilets, then others stay outside so as not to interrupt or disturb. This illustrates that the girls mimic the hierarchical school structures. Those who occupy classrooms tend to sit on the desks rather than at them, perhaps to distinguish between social times and lesson time where this would not be allowed. These are examples of the girls exerting agency in the use of the spaces they occupied (Giddens 1984). The chat is quite general and conversational in large groups. The locker areas allow for brief interactions during the transfer of books. The space is filled with the characteristic noise of closing metal locker doors.

When the bell goes most girls move purposefully to class. Many girls only decide to begin organising themselves with books and visits to the toilets after the bell has gone. The purpose with which girls respond to the bell is linked to what year the girls are in, with 1st years the most responsive and 4th year the least. Girls in 6th year appear to respond differently depending on what subject they have at first class. If it is PE or RE they may not go to the class. If they do, they tend not to rush. The girls use agency in how they mediate the curriculum. It shows a rational choice whereby some subjects are deemed not necessary and it also illustrates opportunities to resist school structures and the enforced curriculum.

Interaction practices during class time are dependent on many factors including: the time of day; the subject and the teacher. Subjects that are not examinable by the state elicit the greatest levels of class discussion generally. The existence of an exam appeared to hinder the freedom to challenge, discuss or debate at times, with an emphasis on getting the course done and learning for the exam. Breaktime and lunchtime routines followed a similar approach to mornings except that interaction and noise level increased as the day went on. Additionally, lunchtime offered the opportunity to go outside or wander down the gardens to socialise. The 6th year lunchroom was of particular interest as this was the group of particular focus for this study.

The following excerpt describes a typical lunchtime and the researcher's experience of being in the girls' space. It is a synopsis of a few of the early observations.

5.5 Sixth Year Spaces

This observation used Spradley's (1980) observational settings to record the interactions and events as highlighted in Chapter 4.

5.5.1 Activity-Girls Negotiating a Space.

Girls have already entered the lunchroom as I arrive. There are approximately eighty girls present. They look up and then continue what they are doing. My first observations are of girls' negotiating a space around one of the tables. There does not appear to be any held spaces for friends who have not yet arrived. Neither does there seem to be a request procedure to sit down. However, there is clearly an evolved pattern here where girls know where they are going and who they intend to sit with. This indicates that groups with friendship bonds have developed within the large group. Where there appears to be no room for someone, there is a routine of picking up a chair and moving it to where the girl wants to be. Girls seem to prefer to choose a space and be squashed with those they want to be sitting with, rather than sit perhaps outside their friendship group, where there is more space. There is no apparent plan to the arrangement of the space. There are activities such as arranging tables, dragging chairs, some queuing for the microwave. Some girls enter quietly while others make a definite entrance. A shout of 'save me a seat, will you' or 'I'll be over in a sec' are all I can hear with the noise.

Girls sitting alone look up expectantly to see if a friend has arrived. Most girls are in large groups with sub-groups evident within them. There is a routinised set of actions visible in the space. Friendship is evident immediately and groups of girlfriends are visible. There is peer conformity and peer power evident here (Foucault 1980). The girls have a structured method where their actions are historically based on previous experience.

They sit where they feel they will be accepted and with girls like them (Bourdieu 1984). The room smells soupy and popcorny with a hint of the familiar damp, musty, study hall smell. There is a lot of animation, physical contact, hugging and whispering. Girls kiss each other and pat each other affectionately quite regularly, although the counterculture group appear to be visibly less tactile. The issue of masculinities, femininities and sexuality arise as areas to explore at interview on the basis of these observations.

5.5.2 Object-Researcher Presence

Two girls smile as they walk over and ask me about the research. I have a brief chat with them and reiterate that if anyone is uncomfortable with me being there (despite consent) to let me know. They respond that they will but indicate that no one is really bothered as long as they are free to enjoy their break. I thank them for popping over and one girl tells me:

> "Miss, it's really cool you're doing research on us and we don't mind you being here as long as we can do our own thing at lunchtime."

I feel welcomed and it is a nice gesture. I wonder if it is also an ownership of power within the space, even unintentionally. I find this territorial piece interesting. This ugly study hall is their lunch space and a privilege only for 6th years. I am being allowed in, with conditions. Early on in the observation phase there is shushing and glancing if someone is heard shouting. This diminishes over time. The girls become desensitised to my presence and I become a routinised part of the space. The use of discursive agency to approach me with a clear set of parameters is interesting (Giddens 1984). It enables a negotiation around use of the lunchroom space and perhaps also sends a message regarding the research process and the level of interference that would be tolerated.

5.5.3 Scene-Noisy Busy Space

A lot of books and school based material is surprisingly brought into what is a social space. Pressure of examinations and stress emerge as possible themes for interview. Mobile phone use is prevalent both individually and in pairs and represents a form of resistance as these phones are banned at school (Giroux 1983). It also provides a connection with the outside world, perhaps a boyfriend or a parent. This identifies social media as a potential area of interest. Over the course of the lunchtimes, the noise levels become unbearable. I continue jotting notes and with difficulty ignore the deafening conversation. I avoid making eye contact so as not to disturb the girls' lunch. There appears to be little notice taken of me but on occasion looking up, I catch the odd student keeping an eye on me. The noise level is such that some of the girls huddle around in order to hear each other or perhaps to keep a conversation private. Girls converse across and within table groups, mostly shouting to be heard. The noise level, in a way makes me feel more comfortable because it would appear the girls are not modifying their behaviour for me. But alternatively the noise could be a test of my chosen relinquished authority and a check to see if I react. The girls seem either oblivious to the noise or able to seamlessly adapt to it. I feel I am fading into the background the louder the noise gets.

5.5.4 Event and Actors-Shape of Groups

Girls are discussing generally in groups of 4-6. Some girls stay in the same spot once seated. Others move around popping in and out of conversations to connect with different individuals and groups. One student greets another with a friendly kiss as she takes her seat. As some girls sit, they glance over and smile at me. I smile back. There is a degree of awkwardness for some girls and also a bit for me. I feel I am out of my comfort zone. The interactions are all friendly in appearance, although I cannot hear specific conversations. As conversations develop some girls pair off to talk. A few girls move into a kitchenette to talk, negotiated by eye contact and a nod to initiate that something private needs to be discussed.

A quieter group of girls text or check their phones for much of the lunch break, speaking little. Other girls bring out notes and amazingly despite the noise begin to study. Different groups become evident. One group is clearly the sporty group comprising of rowers and other games players. They are extremely gregarious and particularly loud. Their noise appears to be an assertion of confidence or dominance. I hear comments discussing the calorie content of food from a large dominant group:

> "Are you really going to eat that, it has 200 calories in it, I found these (pointing to a packet), and they're half the calories and are just as nice."

The reference to food prompts a note to explore this at interview in relation to body image. This group regularly spontaneously break into song only quietening when they notice others girls' annoyance at the interruption. This group are identifiable in part due to their wearing of navy sports hoodies on top of the regulation uniform. Some members of this group share headphones to listen to music, screeching periodically. There is lots of laughter generally in the room. I note the groups I see emerging and make a note to verify these groups with the informant during interviews. In addition, youth culture and elements of popular culture emerge as themes of interest given the use of social media, music, hoodies and references to appearance and body. A distinctive close knit group who are evident from early on are the counterculture group. Many of these girls would have been in trouble regularly. They sit together in the setting and many of them wear a woollen headband as if a mark of the group membership. Many of these girls are also in the smokers group. These girls do not merge as closely into the main group. Unlike the sporty group whose chat is around food and exercise, this counterculture group talk a lot about their appearance. One comment overheard is:

> "I looked like a right gowl in the fucking school photo, I hadn't washed my hair for two days and it was manky."

The language generally from this group would appear to have much more audible swearing than other groups or perhaps it is that they are less bothered by me hearing it.

I note a thought on the management of 'self' or presentation of 'self' as another theme to consider for the remainder of the research. There is a social class difference in relation to how the girls interact with each other and present themselves to me. The MCG regularly come over and chat or say 'hello'. The WCG only engage me if I stop to chat to them or pass by and say 'hello' to initiate conversation with them. They are a little less comfortable or less keen to talk to a teacher- researcher in a social space. Another potential area for exploration at interview emerges. There is a studious group who sit together with their books by their side and after eating or even while eating they are jotting notes and reading through texts. No one seems to bother them and they are left alone by the other girls to study. The leaders group with badges and roles seem to spread themselves around the groups. The 'girly' girls always make an entrance and tend to travel together as an entourage. Other girls look up when they come in and they have an air of confidence about them. There are many quiet girls who speak in hushed tones in pairs within the room, but are isolated physically from the main groups. There is a lot of hierarchy and status in this excerpt (Gramsci 1973). The social categories of the girls are becoming more clearly delineated (Reay 2001b) and the exercising of power is evident in relation to the noisiness and actions of some girls (Foucault 2000).

5.5.5. End of Act

The smokers are always the first to leave. Smoking is not allowed in school or outside school in uniform. These girls eat quickly and leave within twenty minutes even though the lunch time lasts forty five minutes. Sometimes they reappear at the end of lunch to sit down again and chat appearing to be satiated by nicotine. The smell of cigarette smoke enters the room with the girls as they return. As girls finish their lunches they begin to tidy their space. A few girls stand up as if to initiate the exodus. Often these are the prefects or head girls, or studious or quiet girls. The loud group and the counterculture group rarely leave first.

There are glances my way early into observation, establishing if I am checking who is tidying up. This is unsurprising as there has been a lot of annoyance among management due to the 6th years leaving the hall in a mess for afternoon study classes. The girls have been warned they will lose this space unless they maintain it. I keep my head down taking notes trying to be less overt about looking around at this point. I want the girls to know I am not there for reconnaissance of that nature. The school is exerting their agency to ensure that a space that is given to the girls is maintained as the school would like it. The dominant MC culture is reinforced in the way the girls use and leave a space and the school uses power to ensure this is realised (Gramsci 1971).

5.5.6 Bell as Symbol

The bell goes but there is no sense of urgency among the girls whatsoever. Again I see this as positive. They know at this stage I am not there to discipline them. A couple of girls stand up as if to initiate the exodus. Tables and chairs being dragged and piled add to the unbearable noise. Some girls carry chairs belonging to others to pile up. I gather there is a clean-up crew or rota of some sort. There is a clear categorisation among the groups with the counterculture never playing a role in the cleanup. The issues of conformity, cultural resistance and also power to comply are evident in the daily ritual of cleaning up the space. The second bell goes and the majority of girls are gone at this stage. However, a small number still remain from the counterculture group. The girls should be in class at this stage. Now there is a sort of stalemate between the girls and myself. The girls, late for class at this stage, would be known for their non compliance to school rules generally. They would have been in trouble on and off over the years, although in my teacher role I have never had any issue with them. I am reminded of Willis' (1977) boys. I wonder what to do. I decide to move as this is their space. I use agency as a researcher to make decisions like this throughout the observations with little time to think. The minute I make a move to leave they begin to shuffle, gather their stuff together and as I pass, get ready to leave. They have won and they know it. While I have no issue, it is a very interesting power play.

This ritual is repeated every time I observe the girls. The counter culture group always wait for me to leave before them indicating perhaps they are not intimidated by me. They use this as a way of exerting their power and agency over a perceived authority figure. As I pass I simply say "bye girls, thanks for having me" not referring at all to the lunch time bell. They smile and say "fair play to you Miss for sticking out that noise". They were aware of the noise level. Additionally, one girl asks me, 'Why would you want to spend your lunch break down here watching us, don't you know us girls are bitches.' I do not correct the language and tell them I find it interesting. They ask if I could tell who was fighting with whom. I said I could not and they offered to 'fill me in' if I wanted to know. I thanked them and said I might take them up on that. They said "bye" in a genuine tone. In subsequent observations, I simply received a "bye miss" or the odd "how's it going" rhetorical question as I left.

5.5.7 Feelings and Reflexivity

I enjoyed and benefited from this observation period. It was fascinating getting a totally different insight to the lives of the girls outside the classroom. I could feel that some of the girls were aware of my presence especially at the beginning. Others were a bit challenged by it. Some were apparently not bothered either way. Some appeared oblivious as they were on their mobile phones all the time. I went from feeling excited to be finally collecting data to feeling awkward invading the girls' space. I felt very comfortable with the noise as an indicator of the girls conversing, singing and doing their thing at lunchtime. I felt welcomed and accepted by some and a bit of an outsider by others. There were understandable power plays evident between me and some girls, as this was their space and I was acutely aware of that. I needed the girls to trust me for the interview phase and this meant I had to work to ensure I was not seen as an 'authority'. I was clear that the power of agency should be in the hands of the girls as they were sharing their experiences with me. They seemed to appreciate and recognise that my role as researcher was vastly different to my teacher role, through my actions and interactions with them. This was an act of reflexive agency on my part and part of an ethics of respect and care for the girls.

5.5.8 Goal of Observation

The goal was to examine the social spaces of the 6th year girls over a period of time in order to identify groups and select themes to examine at interview stage. This goal was achieved through observation with a variety of themes emerging for further exploration. Girls on their mobile phones sat with other girls, but did not appear to interact at all together. The groups emerged at this stage such the counterculture group, loud group, sporty group and studious group and the interactions and categorisation of these groups was important. Other emergent themes of importance have been mentioned above. Much of the theory and literature in relation to power, hegemony and cultural capital was visibly manifested in the daily interactions of the girls.

5.6 In the Corridors and End of Day

Corridors between classes were noisy bustling places with lots of queuing in narrow spaces and negotiation on the stairs as to who gets the handrail. Between classes, visits to the toilets provided the best opportunities to meet friends and have a brief chat. Girls chatted continuously along the corridors with increasing intensity as the day wears on. Use of school space, power, hierarchy and resistance were visible to varying degrees simply by observing in the corridors. The day is structurally similar for all the girls; the main difference for senior girls is the option of late study. The end of the formal school day is signalled by the sounding of the bell, but before this is heard there is always movement on the corridors. Girls can be seen running, some shouting, texting, or walking briskly towards the exits. Those without a sense of urgency are the girls continuing on to afterschool study. These girls take their time packing up books and seem less enthused by the end of the day bell; with another long shift to do until they see their families. The school becomes quiet remarkably quickly at this time of day.

5.7 Conclusion

This chapter sets the scene for the reader but also provides a structural description of an observational phase. It is deliberately descriptive as the role of the observation was primarily to provide a portrait of the girls' lives at school and to identify themes for the interview phase. The observational findings set in the school context informed the division of the girls into social categories and peer groups. In addition, it assisted through concurrent analysis to identify thematic areas such as power, conformity, resistance, body, and examination pressure for later data collection phases. This phase provided examples of limited democracy and limited agency for the girls. It also identified examples of resistance to the structural constraints in school. The MC status of the school was reinforced in some of the expectations of behaviour, dress and practices communicated visibly and invisibly to the girls. It was during this time the counter culture group became identified as a uniquely different peer group.

Significantly, this chapter details the transition of the researcher from teacher to researcher both from the girls' perspectives but also through a reflexive self dialogue. This chapter provides a visual description of the school, setting and general patterns of movement and interaction. It is structured to present the study site from a macro perspective to a micro one focusing predominantly on the 6th year group. This holistic portrait is provided as a backdrop to help the reader identify the context of the key 14 participants who remained participants from early observation through to one to one interviews. It was unclear at this stage of the research whether the girls were aware of their privileged status and the selection process which left them successful in getting into MP. In addition, observation did not allow the researcher to identify the pressure the girls perhaps felt in having to live up to the expectations of the school, their parents and their culture. These areas were all noted as emergent areas for examination during the interview phase.

Chapter 6 Profile of Participants

This chapter briefly profiles the final fourteen girls who participated throughout each stage of the research including the key informant who was introduced and whose role was outlined in Chapter 4. The profiles are brief and were administered prior to commencement of the one to one interviews. This chapter introduces each girl to enable the reader to become familiar with her profile. These profiles are provided prior to the application of the girls' stories throughout the findings chapters. All of the data gathered from the profiles are the girls' opinions of themselves as written in the profile or shared during interviews. The social class of each girl was determined using the Marxist divisions of property, authority and expertise (Giddens 1971) and by applying this framework to both parents occupation. This posed limitations when one parent was in paid employment and the other was not, or when different parental social classes emerged. In these instances, the presence of one MC parent was used to determine a girl's social class for the purposes of the study. Rubin et al. (2014) highlight the difficulty with assigning social class which they believe is a subjective embodied interpretation by an individual. It is socio-economic status which is mutable with social class being more static. This researcher acknowledges the limitations and difficulties in assigning a social class to an individual but applied the above method consistently to each girl, based on the profile information they provided. The parental occupations are not included in the profile to protect the anonymity of the girls and their parents' occupational details.

6.1 Ruth

Ruth was an eighteen year old student who lived in a MC suburban estate outside the city centre. She went to a primary semi-rural school not too far from her home. Her hobbies were sport and socialising with friends when she had time outside from study. Ruth conformed to the school structures most of the time but used agency to question the decisions of school management at times. Ruth was considered a good student by virtue of her academic success at junior cycle.

Ruth remembered her parents being relatively easy going about her education until her mother got the job in an educational setting. It was then Ruth claimed her mother began checking homework more often, encouraging Ruth to do her best and emphasising the importance of her schoolwork. She had the cultural, social and economic capital to do well in MP (Bourdieu 1986). Ruth is a MC student whose family have moved from WC beginnings. Her older sister went to the more diverse local secondary school but Ruth was the first in her family to attend MP instead. This was a decision Ruth initially struggled with as she wanted to attend a co-ed school but she settled into MP quickly.

Ruth began school life in MP with a group of girls who began to cause trouble. She made a deliberate effort to carve a new path out for herself by distancing herself from this group. Ruth was considered to be a high achieving student. Ruth was a deputy head girl and was popular with teachers. She was one of the most interested and willing participants from early on in the study, often asking deeply critical questions and also enquiring how things were going with the research. For many of the reasons mentioned and detailed in Chapter 4, Ruth was the key informant in the study. Ruth did not have a specific group because she moved groups so much given her broad interests. This was a benefit to the researcher because she had insider knowledge of many of the groups. Ruth did not have a boyfriend and did not socialise much in 6th year due to the pressure of the exams.

6.2 Mary

Mary was an eighteen year old student who had a love of fashion and art. Her aspiration was to complete a further education course after school with a view to getting a place in higher education the following year. She lived in a suburban estate a few miles outside the city. Mary was from a WC background and admitted to having very strict parents who punished her for the least thing. Her life, in her opinion, had been blighted by lots of missed opportunities due to punishments for misdemeanours. Many of these occurred in school. Mary was 'notorious' among staff and students for breaking the rules and having a negative attitude towards school. She admitted to never fitting in and feeling different to other girls from the start of secondary school.

Mary had not experienced positive relationships with many of her teachers and admitted being difficult to teach, particularly when she did not want to be there. Mary had a boyfriend who she met during 6th year which was unusual because many of the other girls had already had a first boyfriend. She admitted actively seeking out a boy as she was conscious of this which indicated pressure to conform to peer expectations. Mary regularly used agency to resist the school structures and culture (Giddens 1984). She truanted, smoked, refused to give up homework and would argue with staff if she disagreed with what she was being asked to do. She did not conform to the school rules and resisted all power exercised through the school attempts to get her to comply. Mary's personal habitus was culturally alienated from the school's institutional habitus and the MCG culture (Bourdieu 1998).

6.3 Carrie

Carrie was an eighteen year old MC girl who lived in an estate on the edge of the city. Her father had left home a few years previously. She had a boyfriend whom she struggled to find time for in 6th year. Her hobbies included rowing and running and she achieved academically at school. Carrie was a popular girl with an ability to influence her peers. Her views were quite traditional and her attitudes could be viewed as conservative in that she was not in favour of homosexuality and was also of the belief that girls should be feminine. She was more outspoken in earlier years sometimes getting in trouble but became more conformist as the years progressed admitting to wanting to get on well. She conformed to the school ethos, expectations and institutional habitus throughout 6th year (Bourdieu 1998). Carrie was determined and ambitious, keen to experience life and, according to her friends, exciting to be around. In our conversations she indicated she was very stressed about exams and became very dejected when she did not meet her own high standards. Carrie hoped to do nursing or business studies in college. This aspiration is in keeping with her attitudes to gender and her conformity to the types of careers girls do. Carrie used agency to support the school ethos in her actions and opinions which she voiced regularly.

6.4 Emer

Emer was eighteen, from a MC family and big into sport, particularly GAA. She lived in a rural village not too far outside the city. She was academic but appeared to balance her sport very well with study. Emer mixed with other girls who were involved in sport but also high achievers academically. By nature she was quiet, choosing to listen rather than talk. She hoped to become a teacher in the coming years. Emer was quieter and more private than many of the other participants. She used agency to keep her opinions to herself a lot of the time and in many ways this was how she managed her relationships within school, especially with teachers. At the same time this agency was conformist as Emer was very compliant and never complained about anything. She tended to get on with things and make the most of her time in school. She was loyal to the school and expressed satisfaction with her experience in MP.

6.5 Laura

Laura was nineteen, the eldest in the group and lived in a rural village having moved from the city many years before. The family are WC and Laura admitted her parents wanted her to make the most of her education to ensure a professional career opportunity. Laura's hobbies were sport and she also worked part-time. Laura was unsure what she wanted to do as a definite career but had an interest in physics. Laura had been in trouble with school authorities a lot over the years admitting to disliking school and having little in common with other girls in MP. Laura appeared to have a very mature way of seeing things and also had strong opinions. Laura was part of the counter culture group and was only recently diagnosed with dyslexia. She was angry about this late diagnosis, arguing she was 'not right' for years (her words). Laura admitted to being clever but had not achieved academically in the school due to her continuous resistance of school culture and her tendency to get in trouble.

6.6 Lara

Lara was an eighteen year old student from a more upper class background than the other girls. She lived in an affluent village outside the city. Her hobbies were horse riding and skiing and she competed at international level in both sports. Lara wanted to study law in university and was an academically high achieving student. According to herself she was a lady like, prim and proper girl who found some of the girls in the school a little rough. Lara used her femininity to reinforce the MP gender expectations. She admitted she was willing to take the moral high ground and correct someone, if she felt what they were doing was wrong. Lara provided an alternative perspective coming from a marginally different background to the others and also admitted feeling marginalised at times because she was different. She had never had a boyfriend and wished she had one indicating the pressure to conform to cultural expectations. Lara was conformist at school and was very happy with the way in which the school authorities insisted on good behaviour and keep good order. This enabled her to achieve academically. Lara used agency to support the school and was never in trouble. She had ample cultural, social and economic capital and yet felt different as she inferred she was too posh for the school citing a nearby school as being the really posh school.

6.7 Julie

Julie was a MC eighteen year old girl who was quiet and studious but happy to chat when engaged by the researcher. Julie was keen on sport and also wanted to do well academically. She was a high achiever but felt she had never received the recognition she deserved, due to being quiet. Julie lived in a rural village close to the suburbs. Julie was not definite on a career for the future, her only prerequisite being she wanted to work directly with people and had some interest in business. She was friends with a quiet group of girls which indicated her compliance to aspects of gender constructions of femininity. Julie used her agency to keep a low profile in school and to get along with everyone and her school work.

6.8 Keira

Part of the sporty group, Keira appeared to balance sport and study well. She was from a rural location outside the city and loved camogie. Keira, who was eighteen, hoped to be a primary school teacher. Keira appeared very easy going and relaxed. She admitted that she loved school and all her friends. She avoided arguments and voicing her opinion to things she disagreed with, preferring to talk about sport and get on with her work. In this way she used agency to portray the expected stereotype of girls as passive and conformed to school structures in order to achieve academically. Keira admitted not getting too worked up about anything, showing a high degree of conformity. Keira had high levels of cultural, social and economic capital and seemed unaware of her privilege.

6.9 Cait

Cait, an eighteen year old, was a MC girl from a rural community and her passion was music. Cait was extremely quiet and friendly with other quiet girls. Cait was committed to school work more than anything else, indicating the pressure she felt to achieve and her conformity, which assisted with getting on well at school. Cait hoped to be a teacher. She was very academic and admitted she 'would die' if she had to speak in public or voice her opinion, preferring to take a passive role in school. Her agency was constrained by the pressure of examinations and need to succeed academically. The power of the institutional habitus was evident in Cait's actions and attitudes. Cait admitted to rarely going out and did not have a boyfriend and had little interest in fashion or make up. Cait's parents wanted her to do well and there was pressure on her to do better than her cousins who were also sitting the Leaving Certificate the same year.

6.10 Betty

Betty was eighteen and the only member of the study from a multicultural background. She was of Asian descent. Betty did not choose to provide a profile so her background was unknown but she was friends with the counterculture group, all of whom were WC. Betty struggled to settle in the school. She was in trouble a lot with school authorities and admitted she was looking forward to leaving school, but did not know what she wanted to do after school. Academia did not interest her so she said she did little school-work. Betty promised the world when it came to interview times and dates but was difficult to meet at times. This indicated use of agency in a highly structured institution to decide when she would attend. However, when she did turn up, she was very willing to chat and extremely pleasant and interested. She was friends with Laura and Mary but shared little information on her life outside school. Here, there is intersectionality for Betty in that she had to mediate being a member of the counterculture group and also being a different race. Betty used agency to resist the dominant MP culture. She seemed neither stressed nor happy and appeared to be waiting to finish school which she found hard. Her father attended parent-teacher meetings and had high expectations for Betty. Betty resisted this pressure as well as the school expectation to achieve.

6.11 Shirley

Shirley was eighteen years old and lived in a rural location. She had modified her behaviour to conform and get on in school but in her opinion, had refused to give her life to study. She was from a family who moved into the MC as her dad was the first of his family to attend college. Shirley felt she would suit a more liberal school setting. She loved musical theatre. She hoped to study arts in university. She did not have a boyfriend and admitted to not wanting one, resisting the expectation that she should. Shirley provided an example of how an individual could alter themselves to fit in more easily with the dominant culture (Lynch and Lodge 2002). She spoke openly of ridding herself of her bad traits in order to fit in and be liked.

She admitted not feeling like a MP girl and struggled to conform all the time feeling guilty when she let her friends, family or the school down by not doing well academically. There was considerable pressure on Shirley from home and she tried hard to conform and study but felt constrained as her first love was musical theatre.

6.12 Sarah

Sarah was a MC eighteen year old who was keen on sport. She had been in a lot of trouble in school during her younger years. She conformed in 6th year to the school culture and then studied very hard. Sarah decided to change her actions in order to succeed academically. Her parents influenced this agency as they had high expectations which they expressed to her regularly. She was still friends with a few girls from the counter culture group but also mixed with other more studious girls. Here, she used agency to mediate her friendship needs with expectations of her peers, her parents and the school. Sarah admitted being 'saved by sport' from a dysfunctional phase in her earlier teenage years. She said sport helped her find a focus and some discipline. Sarah lived in a rural community where she hoped to become a French teacher. She used sun beds to look 'healthy' and in this way conformed to an expectation of femininity which was a part of MP culture.

6.13 Caz

Caz was MC, eighteen and sports mad. She lived in a rural community and was friends with a group of quiet girls who liked music. Caz made the most out of every opportunity in the school. She struggled a little with academia but admitted she always tried very hard. She had aspirations to be a teacher. Common perception was that Caz was down to earth and unassuming and one of the most obliging girls in the school. Caz was nervous of the debs because she admitted not being into glamour or boys. She resisted traditional gendered expectations of femininity admitting to having no interest in fashion, make up or boys.

She was aware of her popularity with the school authorities as she made many of the speeches on the sports field and enjoyed considerable attention from the teachers and school management. She exerted agency in upholding the school ethos, rules and structures at all times yet resisted the gender expectations. This was accepted because of her sporting prowess and otherwise compliant actions. Caz did not have a boyfriend and did not drink alcohol.

6.14 Anne-Marie

Anne-Marie, the youngest of the respondents at seventeen, was the most alternative girl with very good insights into life and friendships. Anne-Marie was very solid in her views. She could analyse situations very easily and was very capable of expressing her impression of a group, incident or attitude during interviews. She was able to move groups when she was being dominated by another girl and resisted being told what to do by peer leaders. Anne-Marie resisted the power of her peers and the school authorities at times but used agency to ensure this was not excessive so as not to become alienated. She resisted within the constraints of the institutional habitus (Bourdieu 1998). Anne-Marie, from a WC background, had a strong work ethic, clear values and a determination to do well. Her hobbies were reading and music and her aspirations were to become a nurse. She lived within walking distance from the city centre. While she was not a typical MP girl she has carved out a niche for herself. She challenged authority but did it in a way that kept her reputation intact by being prepared to back down before her reputation was damaged. This demonstrates rational choice and discursive agency in relation to her actions. Anne-Marie suffered seriously with stress and pressure in the run up to the examinations discussing a need for medication to get through this period.

6.15 Groups

The groups were identified during the observation phase and validated by Ruth, the key informant prior to the interview phase.

Table 6.1- Group membership

Group Description	Girls in Group	Description of Agency
Counter culture group (WC)	Mary, Laura, Betty (social class not confirmed)	Negative agency and resistance Anti authority/power
Sporty group (MC)	Emer, Keira	Compliance to structures Resistance of femininity
Quiet group (MC)	Cait, Caz, Sarah	Compliance to structures Resistance of femininity
High achievers group (MC)	Ruth, Julie	Compliance to structures Traditional femininity
Loud group (MC)	Carrie, Shirley	Some resistance initially but now conformist Traditional femininity
Posh (upper MC)	Lara	Compliance to structures Traditional femininity
Alternative no main group (WC)	Anne-Marie	Constrained agency/ resists to a point but then conforms.

It was not possible to get a second member to join Anne Marie or Lara as these two girls were not in one main group. Anne Marie crossed membership of a few groups. Anne Marie also had time for different girls in a few groups. She did not align herself to any one group. This is agency where Anne Marie did not want to be controlled by a group but wanted to be in control of whom she was friends with.

6.16 Final Word to the Girls: Where are they now?

This section provides the reader with an opportunity to look forward to the girls' successes and challenges and to appreciate where they are now. In this way the findings can be read with a real-time connection made possible between initial aspiration, social class and the actual education and career realities for each of the girls. Ruth was unsure what she would do at third level. She was thinking about physiotherapy. She is currently studying to be a teacher.

Ruth did very well in her Leaving Certificate examination but did not get the points she wanted. She felt she was affected by stress and exhaustion by the time the exams came around. On the day of the results she was very disappointed with some results but feels she is very happy with her course now. She admits to being so much happier in college and feels she has a social life and time to have fun again. Anne-Marie was thrilled to get a place on a nursing degree.

Lara is studying law as she had planned to do and is very happy with her choice. Shirley did not achieve the points she wanted but is doing a college course which will enable her to transfer to her favoured course in the future if she wishes to. Keira got the points for teaching and was relieved and excited, although her two friends Caz and Emer did not join her to become teachers as hoped, as they did not achieve the points required. Both were disappointed when I spoke to them as they felt their chosen career path was closed to them. Caz was starting a different degree course and Emer had accepted a place on an arts degree. Emer plans to do a post-graduate course to become a teacher after her degree.

Cait got a place on a teacher education course and was very happy with her success. Sarah got the points to study arts and hopes to have time again to pick up her successful athletics career in university. Julie wanted to do a business degree and was successful in securing a place. Mary accepted a place on a post Leaving Certificate course with a view to going on to a higher level college the following year. Betty did not get her career choices through the central admissions system (CAO) but was hoping to study in a private college once funding was secured. Finally, Laura was not successful in getting a place on her preferred course. She did get offered a third level course but turned it down as it was not what she really wanted. When we last spoke she was enquiring about doing an access course to find a route into her career area of choice.

6.17 Conclusion

A few interesting observations were made upon completion of these profiles including the highly gendered patterns of career aspiration with teaching and nursing prominent and no traditionally male occupational options evident. This is noted in the literature with Smyth and Darmody (2005) claiming that students make decisions within their school context and their choices can be influenced by school structures and practices, as well as their social and peer context. It is also noteworthy that Laura and Betty had no specific decision made on career choice. Mary, in the counter culture group, was one of a small group of girls planning on doing a post Leaving Certificate course as opposed to a degree course. It seems social class is a factor linked with career aspiration and choice. Research by Smyth and Banks (2012b) indicates that MC students have higher expectations of going to college. There is also some evidence to suggest that greater gender stereotyping in subject choice and career aspiration occurs more in co-educational settings than in single sex ones (Smyth 2010). Yet this study indicates that there is significant gender based career choice. This chapter identifies the final group of study participants to be a varied group in terms of social class, identity, attitude to school and interests.

These profiles offer insights which will form part of the interpretative approach to understanding the girls' experiences as 6th year girls in MP. In addition they provide information on the competitive nature of the Leaving Certificate and college admissions processes. Many of the girls despite significant study failed to achieve their required points for their first choice course. This may also indicate ambitious aspiration in some cases. What is encouraging is that many had secured other means of accessing their first choice after a year via a transfer.

This chapter highlights the successes of many of the MP girls. Some of the girls in the liminal social class group like Anne-Marie achieved their goals and got their first choice course. Mary was elated to be going onto further education, being the first in her family to do so. This was also the case for WCG who were not part of the final sample. The majority of the 6th years were very happy with their educational achievements on Leaving Certificate results day and at the debs. In this way the academic success of the school and the reward for all the hard work was realised. This indicates the wider sense of academic success for the girls from a variety of social classes in MP.

In terms of the theoretical framework there are lots of interesting findings. Very few of the girls were aware of their own real agency, choosing to comply with the structures within the school and their peer group. This was a way of doing well in the system and the Leaving Certificate examinations. Some girls actively conformed to gain recognition or popularity from teachers and peers or to attain extra rewards like leadership positions. Others conformed in a much more passive way and were frustrated by their lack of recognition. The girls were also unaware of their own privilege and the power of the institutional and/or their personal habitus. In many ways this facilitated the hegemonic discourses that were evident in MP.

Chapter 7 Reflexive Teacher-Researcher

Many ethnographic researchers provide personal reflections on the development of the ethnography and the way it affected them. This serves to re-visit ethics and validity and provides the opportunity to balance the 'etic' and 'emic' perspectives (Chang 1992, Whyte 2012). This chapter discusses the reflexive journey I have taken from deciding on a topic to final conversations with the girls, a time span of almost four years. I have included this chapter to discuss the reflexive elements of the research. This chapter continues the defence of a teacher-researcher's ability to conduct ethical and valid ethnographic studies in their own school. This chapter recalls my awareness of biases and my need to move from teacher to researcher to enable trust. It recounts my own experience moving into the social spaces of the girls and the challenges this posed for all participants in the study. It details the transition that took place over time where boundaries became fuzzy, voices became confident and the process became natural and benign. This chapter concludes with a rationale for why the research yielded valid rigorous ethnographic insights into agency and structure among the girls. It addresses reciprocity, beneficence and active listening which were all implicit in the research process. The chapter addresses what it means to understand and how this can be made possible, despite the apparent insider challenges.

7.1 Ethnography

I remember discussions early on in our methodology seminars where as the inaugural group on the first MIC doctoral programme, we discussed the merits of finding a methodology to fit the research questions we wanted to answer. We also debated the idea that sometimes it was better to choose a methodology that resonated with us as people and to approach our problem from that methodological angle. I was hugely outnumbered as I argued for the latter, knowing that the methodological literature largely supported the former. However, from early on when assigned a methodological approach to research and present to the rest of the PhD group it was ethnography which stood out for me.

I was drawn to the history of the approach, the emphasis on ritual, practice and lived experience of people. I wanted to learn more about culture and the human subject. The ethnographic need for immersion in the field with lengthy periods of observation in order to learn motivated me far more than quantitative research. It was at this point I realised the extent to which research is a personal as well as a pragmatic endeavour. I began reading more about qualitative methodologies and finding possibilities in many of them, but especially ethnography. This bias towards a methodology did not hinder me or pose problems because at that stage I did not have specific questions. I knew I wanted to learn more about the school experiences of the girls in MP and how the structures in the school influenced, constrained and enabled them. I also wanted to know how the girls managed to construct identities in school and in their lives outside of school; in other words their school 'self' and their authentic 'self'. There were no specific themes to examine initially and so ethnography and grounded theory methods enabled an inductive exploratory approach to understanding elements of the girls' lives. The research questions began as open broad questions and became more focused as learning progressed. For me, finding ethnography helped with this process. I knew I wanted to research in an educational setting, a school and most likely a secondary school, seeing as that was my 'field' so to speak. Therefore, where ethnography was selected early as a methodology, a specific topic of study was not decided. I knew from early literature searches and reading of theory that there was a potential contribution to theory, and possibly methodology, in exploring the culture of a group of MCG as an insider to the school culture; a teacher in the school.

The reading of theory and literature was also a reflexive exercise. Each page I read was reflected upon in relation to experiences of my own education but also in relation to MP. Through this continual reading I developed a greater understanding of what was happening in MP. This reading illuminated some biases, challenged some, reinforced others and produced some new perspectives. I read reflexively to help me learn more about the landscape through the literature but also to interrogate my own thinking. This stage helped to formulate research questions and create a design frame.

7.2 Ethics

I was challenged on a number of occasions about how I would cope personally with a full-time teaching position and an observation schedule that would take considerable volumes of extra time. I realised that after twenty-one years of teaching with seventeen of them in the site of study, I knew too little about the lives of the girls I was teaching and how their school experiences impact their everyday lives. I realised early on that I was bounded by a professional code of ethics to maintain barriers between the girls and I, as a teacher. These barriers were going to shift and I was going to hear stories of a personal nature from the girls while still being in a position of authority, albeit a teacher-researcher. I presented at a few conferences with this ethical/methodological dilemma and met with varying reactions. Some felt that with the correct quality tools incorporated, this could be an ethical and valid study. The fact that I had substantial insider knowledge, a relationship with the participants based on trust, and a real opportunity to be immersed in the field due to being there every day were positives. In addition, as few teachers research ethnographically in their own schools it offered a chance to assess the effectiveness of the approach and introduce a different research niche. However, there were worries about how reliable data could be ensured. There was a valid worry on behalf of the girls whether they would be harmed in any way through the research. There was a time where I did consider changing the study entirely for a safer option, but with all the considerations weighed up and the proposal approved I decided to proceed.

My relationship with the girls in the study began when they were first years where I became known to them as a teacher in the school. For a few girls I had taught their sisters. I had also run a voluntary extra-curricular fitness club over the years in the school and here the atmosphere was one of fun and enjoyment. It was set up for girls who did not enjoy competitive sport but who wanted to join an after school club to meet other girls. I also went on tours and day trips over the years and would have met many of the girls informally many times. I believe these chance encounters contributed to the girls' interest and comfort in being part of the study.

I spoke informally to the girls after the research was completed as I was working in the school during the state exams and also met a few of the girls on Leaving Certificate results day. I also spoke to all of them at their debs briefly. These were the times I could ask how they felt about taking part in the research and why they got involved. During these times the girls were over the stress of the exams and had officially left school. In this sense we could speak freely and openly about the experience without it feeling like a data-gathering exercise. The girls mentioned that my reputation prior to the research was of a teacher who was fair and open. They stated that there was a trust before the research began. I feel this was significant in the success of the data gathering. The girls commented that I reinforced my reputation through things I did during the research process. They remembered how I asked them not to stand up when I came into any of their classrooms to pass a message or speak to another teacher. They knew that I insisted the girls go to the bathroom in my classes without having to ask. They knew I was confidential if a girl came to discuss an issue they were having. The girls indicated they made a far more informed decision in taking part in this research than they could have with an outsider they did not know. There was implicit historic trust which was then reinforced during the research process. This was the key advantage to my insider status and the honest responses the girls gave at all stages of the research.

7.2.1 Issues in this Teacher-Researcher Ethnography

In assessing the effectiveness of teachers researching ethnographically in their own schools it is important to detail the issues which arose in the course of this research, for the benefit of other researchers. The most significant challenge I faced was hearing unanticipated responses from the girls. It was not possible to eliminate the teacher role completely. For example, when references to eating disorders emerged in the interviews, it was necessary to check that individuals involved were being taken care of, as I still had a duty of care to the girls. References to other teachers or management posed a dilemma as to how to, or whether to present this information.

This led to many decisions not to include certain data on individuals or to manage such data with great care. This prevented some very useful material being used. Again, the ordinary ethics of morality assisted with being fair to all members of the school community. This required much thought and judicious balancing in the write up. It was challenging for me not to question the incidences where moral superiority was evident among some of the MCG. As an educator I felt I should find a space to address some of the issues raised, but this was not my role as a researcher. Equally, the lack of appreciation of the girls towards their privilege was not anticipated and again it was tempting to raise and discuss this. Had I made decisions to address these issues, I believe the girls would have re-positioned me as the teacher or authority and this would have negatively affected their authenticity, and perhaps their honesty in further discussions. It was difficult not to empathise with the WCG predicament at times especially when they described feeling inferior or humiliated. I had to keep my own emotions in check and try to remain neutral, passive and as uninvolved as possible. This was very challenging and many evenings I struggled to deal with what I had heard that day. Being a teacher-researcher carries an emotional toll, perhaps greater than an outsider may experience, due to the closeness and connection to the context.

I also learned a lot from the experience from a teacher-practitioner perspective. For instance, I did not realise how important the relationship the girls had with teachers were and how much they appreciated the more liberal interactions they enjoyed with teachers in 6th year. The level of sensitivity the girls had towards examination pressure or comparisons with previous year groups, came as a surprise. Overwhelmingly, I learned that it is possible to engage with 6th years in an egalitarian, mutually respectful way, despite the power differential. However, the researcher must let their teacher-identity recede significantly, and listen rather than be listened to. This was not an easy research route to take but was also very worthwhile.

7.3 Why Begin Looking at Peer Interactions?

The idea to look at peer interactions seemed a natural starting point. Recollections of my own secondary school days revolved around interactions with friends. I could recall with intense clarity the days I skipped off to socialise with friends in the parish field. I remembered the influence of friends and excitement of having my first cigarette, alcoholic drink and relationship with a boy. The ups and downs of friendships still remain fresh; I remember being called to task by a teacher for mixing with the boys and girls in the lower streams. Many of these children were WC and I suppose I was not considered to be WC, although my parents always proudly said we were. It was all so confusing to me and I did not understand the dynamics and sociology of social class. I remembered the different treatment where the higher streams always seemed to get the best teachers with the lower streams getting the teachers everyone knew struggled to teach. I learned to understand the privileges associated with being academic. I knew at 13 that privilege was socially reproduced in my own schooling in the early eighties.

I contemplated how social reproduction operated to serve the MC? I wondered how aware the girls in MP were of these issues and also imagined how different the schooling process would be in a single-sex setting and how the girls experienced this. In a way reflexivity of my own position in a co-ed school many years before had influenced this choice of study. My own research agency was still being influenced by the structures of my own schooling. This made me reflexively aware of the need to acknowledge and manage these potential biases. It was through this process that hegemony, social class and gender, as experienced and managed by the girls, triangulated to become the domains of interest for this study. Over time the ways in which the girls used their agency to interact with their group, school and societal structures emerged as significant in terms of a potential theoretical contribution.

7.4 Data Collection

The beginning of the data collection phase involved my first real contacts with the girls as a researcher rather than a teacher. As explained in Chapter 4 I went to all the sixth year classes one Tuesday morning to explain the research idea to them and to invite them to consider taking part. The following is an excerpt from my research diary summarising the response that morning in October 2012. It is in points for ease of recording.

a) I explained the study to all sixth years, going through the consent forms, taking questions and entering into discussion at length. Girls were generally very positive to be told about and included in the research study. They told me they had just studied culture in English and could relate to a cultural study. A few girls asked why I was not looking at first years coming into the culture and we discussed immersion into a culture-sharing group.

(b) A number asked how I would account for friendships outside of school and friendship with boys. I explained I would not observe this but would discuss it through interview.

(c) One student asked what I would learn from student friendship when students were mainly from similar backgrounds. I explained there was always learning even among a group that appeared homogenous. There were always differences and also interesting things to learn even if they are similarities.

(d) I had an excellent response from the consent phase with seventy two of the ninety girls in the year returning forms within 2 weeks. I believe this positive response was linked to discussing the research with them and also considering their suggestions.

(e) On analysis of the consent forms there was a good varied cross section of students who responded, with a few critical cases from different social classes agreeing to take part.

From the very beginning it was important for me to give the girls' voices prominence and to encourage a dialogue so that we were more like co-participants in the process. The girls were certainly intrigued that a teacher was so interested in the social aspects of their lives. I was also given my first glimpse that the girls were aware of the classed nature of the school with the comment mentioning the similar backgrounds of the year group. From a reflexive perspective, I felt the high response rate to the informed consent indicated a willingness to take part. The girls were given two weeks to complete the consent forms. I believe this gave them time to reflect and really consider their participation. They were not pressured to participate as would have been the case had I asked for consent the day I talked to them. The following weeks were punctuated with corridor comments of 'Miss I have that form for you, I'll drop it in later' or more frequently 'Miss I lost the form, any chance you'd find me another?'. I felt this was genuine interest and therefore discussed the relevance of this previously in the methodology.

7.5 Building Trust

Initially I felt very uncomfortable watching the girls. I felt like an imposter. I felt it was unfair to impinge on the girls' free time when it was so limited. I also felt out of my comfort zone and in the beginning yearned for my own social space. Over time I became less awkward and it became much easier and routine to be observing. I did observe silently, avoided joining in or influencing conversations and I did not intervene to discipline at any stage. This was difficult, not because I wanted to enforce the rules or be the teacher but because I worried that other teachers or management may have felt that I was allowing discipline standards to slip. I knew if I intervened in a disciplinary way, the natural behaviours being observed would be modified. I managed my own worries by avoiding speaking openly in the staffroom about my research and not really bringing it up in conversation.

The 6th year group were a good group to choose, not alone because of their immersion in school culture but because their maturity and age left them on the cusp of adulthood which equalised the relationship to some degree. I believe this would not be possible if they were 1st years. Many of these worries were discussed with the key informant who assured me the girls were getting on with things undeterred by my observations.

7.6 Partners in Research

Once the bulk of the observations reached saturation and the interview stage began, the girls were well used to my presence. There was a researcher-participant bond created and the girls were chatty and relaxed in my company. They frequently laughed at my ineptitude with the recording equipment often stepping in to give a hand. The atmosphere during interviews was convivial and very often during group interviews the girls discussed, debated and disagreed freely. The group and more focus group interviews gave me great insights into how the girls interacted. The girls were usually in their friendship groups and this put them in a safe environment. The interviews were ethnographic in the sense that they were akin to a discussion the girls would have at lunchtime, with me guiding the conversation down routes of interest where appropriate. This was ideal preparation for the one to one interviews. By this stage I had observed and interviewed the girls over many months and with fourteen girls willing to give even more time to the research. A solid rapport built up over the months. There was great trust; I was seen as a researcher interested in them and their opinions.

I enjoyed the interview phase a lot because during the observation phase I was somewhat detached from the conversation and merely an onlooker. I enjoyed hearing the girls' discussions and having the flexibility to question or seek clarification to a response or comment. This phase left me feeling I was really starting to understand the cultural nuances among the groups and also the individual personalities of the girls. I tried to resist taking on any role outside that of researcher which required active listening skills. I tried not to participate in the discussions as I was aware that expressing my views may shift the power dynamic or lead the conversation.

Sometimes when the responses were different to what I expected to hear I had to accept that my biases were biases and instead listen to the respondents. When I was unsure about the data I spoke to Ruth, the key informant and to my two critical friends in the staffroom. Notwithstanding the quality processes in place to ensure reliability and validity I found myself wondering about an unusual response or a comment that appeared contradictory. To understand better I usually asked more questions or rephrased them. Often I needed to reflect on the theory to understand why certain girls' responded as they did. The individual profiles and prior knowledge also helped untangle the social processes in each of the girls' lives.

7.7 Reciprocity

At the end of the year and on completion of the one to one interviews I wrote a card to each of the fourteen key participants, mentioning odd things we had discussed that showed I had really been listening to them. Things like encouraging some to keep up the running, or wishing others a great holiday in Tenerife, or reminding others they were nearly there. The cards were personalised to include a sense that I had gotten to know each girl, personally and socially. I included a small present again individualised to each of the girls resonating with something about them. These included things like bath salts, candles, sweets or mugs for their tea break. I asked the office staff to hand these out as the girls came naturally to the office so as not to make a fuss for them or draw undue attention to them. Some girls asked for help with academic subjects from time to time and it was really great to reciprocate in this way. I was working in the school during the examination period and it was great to feel that I was a friendly face before the girls entered the exam halls. I made sure to be around before and after every exam, just to ask how it all went or to wish them good luck. I was able to reassure some girls when they felt they had done badly in a more personal way based on the different relationship that had developed due to the research. Some of the girls called into my office if they left an exam early just for a chat or to say hello.

Interestingly, the counter culture group were the most frequent visitors to my office. This indicated to me the success of the teacher to researcher transition and reinforced my belief that the teacher-researcher role is effective and authentic research practice. Perhaps the research produced beneficence in unexpected ways. I hope that through this research Mary, Betty and Laura had a positive adult connection leaving the school they struggled in. I often wonder whether the research had a real personal impact on any of the girls. Certainly, I feel no one was harmed. On graduation day, a few of the girls' mothers thanked me for the card I had written for their daughters. They said it meant a huge amount to their daughters when they arrived home the day they received them. A few of the mothers were emotional about the nice things I said about their daughters. These mothers felt the research was good for the girls, an aside to the stress of the exams. I felt overall a lot of positive experiences both for myself and the girls emanated from the research similar to Whyte's (2012) assertions and experiences.

7.8 Teacher as Researcher: Who am I in the Research?

Rubin et al. (2014) stress the subjective and intersectional nature of social class. They distinguish between one's current socio-economic status which is mutable and social class which is more static. Both have powerful influences on an individual's personality or behaviour. Where socio-economic status is more measurable objectively it is argued social class is perceived subjectively by a person, although they are co-occurring constructs. It is important that individuals are able to reflect on their own internalised standards based on contextual experiences and varying reference groups (ibid).

It is on the basis of this proposed subjectivity that I discuss my positionality in this research. I am working class. My father was a fisherman and my mother a housewife. We moved to private housing from corporation housing when I was three and both my parents (although they did not go to secondary school) were extremely supportive of mine and my siblings' education. My primary and secondary education was in diverse schools with working-class and middle-class students. It was in secondary school I felt out of place.

Despite being put in the top stream I was more comfortable with the banter and culture of the students in the lower streams and struggled considerably with the confines of school and home life. In second year, I went 'off the rails' and truanted at every opportunity with my friends. I enjoyed this freedom until I got caught, and after several bouts of running away from home and the unpleasant repercussions that entailed, I weighed everything up and began to conform. By 5th year I was a model student and did well in my Leaving Certificate. Conformity had its benefits and I consciously left resistance behind.

After school I trained as a secondary school teacher in London where I was at home in the diverse mix of schools the city provided, and I got my first teaching position in South Wales. This was also a diverse multicultural school. In 1996 I got married, returned to Ireland and got a teaching position in MP. From the outset I felt like I did not fit in at MP despite my socio-economic status now being MC. I did a postgraduate diploma in Trinity College Dublin, but transferred to do my Master of Education degree in Mary Immaculate College (MIC). It was in MIC that I began to read more widely and I developed an overt interest in social justice issues, although I used to contemplate equality issues prior to this. This interest evolved further over the years as I embarked on and journeyed down the PhD route.

In hindsight, the decision to examine student experience in a MC school was no coincidence. It was partly based on my own school experience and my growing interest in the lived experiences of different students that this study evolved. The position of the WC minority in MP did not cause me to reflect until I started to read and think and ask questions. For years I taught in the school without really stopping to think very much about the social aspect of student experience. Yet, I noticed I got on particularly well with the WCG and found myself as their advocate in the staffroom and beyond. I was still rooted to my WC culture whilst perceived to be MC. I was able to relate to both cultures in a relatively seamless way. This was my positionality at the outset of the research and by this point I had not consciously set out to investigate social class.

In the field, social class issues emerged quickly and still I took no responsibility for this, with a schedule exploring friendship in my hand. It is now I see that my subjective self must have influenced this transition to discussing difference, although the words social class were rarely mentioned. Once I began to hear stories from the WCG that I could relate to I was immersed in these accounts. The MCG served to remind me of how I had felt different in school and on arrival to MP. I found myself sympathising with the WCG alienation because I had felt it too, but I also sympathised with the MCG who studied so hard, as I had. I was on the girls' side, at times cross with the school for not seeing the girls' plight. This was the point where bias was discussed and my supervisors were crucial in insisting on critical thinking in all elements of the data collection, data analysis and especially in the write up phase. The quality processes, key informant and critical friends, but especially my supervisors, kept asking the questions which made me reflect on my role and influence in the research. This critical thinking was an organic process which developed and grew over the data collection and write up year.

Nearing the end of the process there was a critical moment when with the help of the supervisors I had to address my influence as a WC woman, which was far greater than my influence as a teacher on the research. This required extensive re-writing of sections of the thesis, re-visiting transcripts and a lot of reflexivity. At this point decisions were made to remove some of the most sensitive excerpts from the thesis, balance the positive elements of the girls' experience more judiciously with the negative and really consider the relative powerlessness of the school as an agent. This was excruciating but necessary in order to provide the reader with as fair and impartial an account of the MP girls' experience as possible. From an ethical and moral perspective this was the right thing to do, both for the quality of the work and also because I had a duty of care to the school and all the girls. The discussions that occurred at this stage were extremely valuable for me in realising my influence, challenging my own classed biases and assumptions and producing a thesis which is truly representative of the girls in MP and the school itself.

This piece was included to acknowledge my acknowledgement of bias and to represent my positionality at the beginning, during and at the end of the research. This journey for me has been a transformational one, an unexpected and sometimes painful part of the process of becoming a researcher.

7.9 Conclusion

In the end there were many twists and turns during the research process. The girls used their agency to choose to take part, to engage, to share stories and to cease participation. The girls were the centre of the research and through my interactions with them I began to understand more about their lives. This chapter outlines the tensions and issues which arose during this research process which other teacher-researchers may find helpful. This chapter also positions the subjective 'I' into the thesis by discussing my own positionality, biases and transformation during the research process. This helped me to understand my influence on the research process as well as understanding others better. This understanding was dependent on a few words of advice provided by Chang (1992, p. 207) on understanding. She says:

> "*Standing under* others requires four stances, coming out of one's own shell of values and judgements, lowering oneself and elevating others, opening one's mind and turning into others voices and trying to look for what others have, not what others lack."

This is the approach I tried to adopt throughout the year and it helped shift the power away from me. It facilitated situating myself in the girls' culture and removed me from my teacher's role. The teacher-researcher role is one which is authentic and valid. This role was aided by the triangulation of the key informant's feedback, the advice of critical friends and the confirming voice of the girls, positioned centrally in the findings as discussed in Chapter 4. The researcher's biases, prejudices and assumptions as an insider were managed with the assistance of these co- participants and also with the help of my supervisor. This is similar to Whyte's (2012) experience with 'Doc'.

It also helped me believe that ethnographic research in a teacher's own school can be ethical, rigorous and beneficial to both researcher and researched. Merging an ethics of care (Banks 2004) with a professional code of ethics may have limited the data obtained but ensured what was gathered was acquired ethically. This was important to me because I believe the role of trust, power sharing and reflexivity is embedded in ethics and integral to the research process and outcome.

Chapter 8 School Context: Ethos and Field

This chapter explores the influence of the school's history, tradition, and ethos on the girls' experiences. It identifies how experiences personally and socially at school inform the construction of the girls' identities. It examines the concept of 'othering' which was a phenomenon evident among some girls in the study. The academic excellence the school enjoys and how this is mediated by different groups of girls is discussed. This chapter also aims to establish a description of a MP girl. Relationships created with teachers over the years of schooling are understood in relation to a sharing of culture. The rural, suburban and city mix of students is highlighted as a particular cultural nuance of MP.

8.1 The Context of Mount Privet

Many students spoke of the stress of trying to get a place in the school. For many students it was their first choice, or their parents' first choice. This choice was mediated by the parents' wish to transmit their cultural capital and enable their child's acquisition of the school's similar institutionalised cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986). It is a combination of cultural capital, ability and confidence in educational language as well as knowing how to social network, that gives advantage to the MC students in accessing a place in a school (Devine 2004). Reproduction of class inequality through connections and networks (Devine and Li 2013) is inevitable in the way MCG succeed in being admitted to MP where very few WCG are enrolled. Over the years it has become the norm that mainly MCG apply and far fewer WCG apply to MP. The rationale for this was beyond the scope of the study. This point is supported by theory on the hidden curriculum illustrating how inequalities can be perpetrated with only tacit awareness of how this is manifested (Lynch 1989). The concept of parentocracy informs us that parents prioritise the pursuit of advantage for their children (Lareau 2000). Parents will use their knowledge to maximise benefit to their own children seeking advantage in an unequal school system (Baker et al. 2009).

The MCG and their parents have a greater awareness of the practices necessary to gain admission and get on well in the school through their acquisition of social capital (Bourdieu 1986). Some girls recalled vivid memories of waiting anxiously to know if they had a place. Carrie says:

> "I sat and bawled with my mum in case I didn't get in. It's very upsetting especially when you are that young. But then I got in..."

There was a sense of being lucky to get into MP and also an acceptance that conformity to certain behaviour traits once admitted was expected. All parents signed and agreed to the code of behaviour as is the practice in many post-primary schools. A girl in interview 2 points out:

> "Sometimes it would be mentioned that parents want to send their children to this school because of the way you look when you're seen down town, but not every MP girl acts the same way. I think there is sometimes a stress in school that everyone should be the same and behave the same and I know you have to obey rules and stuff like uniform."

These quotes would suggest that there is not only a hidden curriculum but a hidden market within education (Lynch and Moran 2006). Some might see this scenario as the school actively reproducing their sense of privilege. However, it is more complex than it may seem. The centralised nature of Ireland's education system enables greater political manipulation by government. Being a capitalist society, policy changes can reflect and enable social reproduction of capitalist ideals (Lynch 1989). Some schools have introduced self management interventions to improve student behaviour (Chafouleas et al. 2012) whereas in MP this presented as a self regulatory phenomenon needing little intervention by management. The school structures its admission policy to afford an automatic place to MP attendees siblings and children of MP teachers as do many Irish post-primary schools (Smyth et al. 2009). This offers parents and teachers logistical advantages in transporting sisters to school but could also be viewed as an example of reproduction of class inequality, rather than an enabling of social mobility and opportunity for children of WC families (Devine 2004, Lynch 1989).

The question arises, were the school to remove this admissions clause would parents be prepared to transport their daughters to different schools? If the answer to this is 'no' then the school could face the prospect of falling numbers and ultimately closure. In addition, removal of this clause could have a more detrimental effect on the WCG who do attend the school, due to greater transport constraints for those parents. Rather than serve as a tool to enhance the diversity within the school it could limit diversity in terms of social class further. What could appear at face value as school agency to socially or culturally reproduce is in fact a constrained agency or powerlessness to societal and political structures, beyond the school's control. Connotations associated with school choice can develop over time and can be based on school intake. These perceptions could deter some parents from applying because they might feel their children or they won't fit in. Caz says:

> "I have friends in xxxx and they're like 'you're in the posh school' and I'd be like 'go away'. I think when you put it down as your first choice in primary school they just think of your background and everyone thinks you probably the cockiest."

This fear and realisation of struggling to fit into an elite school is confirmed by Kennedy and Power (2010) who found significant integration difficulties for scholarship recipients enrolling in private schools in Ireland. MC parents' representation on the parents' council and an absent representation of WC parents also afford the MC families greater relative power over school decision making and access to information in MP. The WC parents do not seek nomination due to a fear of not fitting in culturally, as well as other barriers to school involvement. These lower levels of interconnectedness found between WC parents and the school can act to disadvantage WC children, relative to their MC peers as the examples above illustrate (Lareau 2000). Lareau (1997) also claims that parent-school relationships provide valuable information on the stratified social class system we live in and how they can perpetrate inequality. She explains that MC parents are far more adept at transforming their social and cultural resources into educational profits for their children.

In MP resource transformation includes MC parents' enhanced ability to use economic resources to pay the voluntary contribution requested by the school management. This highlights how a capitalist ideology infiltrates education and in doing so perpetrates equality issues (Baker et al. 2009). The school's potential agency to become more inclusive by increasing the social class diversity of its intake is constrained by the need to access additional funding, compete academically with other schools and maintain its historical reputation for academic excellence. In an era of school closure and amalgamation there is a fear of losing the power embedded in the status quo. The school's agency is weakened by the circumstances it inherits (Bourdieu 1998, Giddens 2013a).

There are a number of second-level Irish schools operating a private-public management structure, particularly in the community school sector. A move towards privatisation can be attractive to governments as it assists with public sector reforms of productivity and costs (Ball et al. 2010). This was evidenced in Germany's move from comprehensive to differentiated education provision which led to intergenerational inequalities (Below et al. 2013). This issue of marketisation of schools which induces competition for MC students and leads to segregation by social class is very real in Ireland. It is important to recognise that marketisation in Ireland is different to other countries where league tables are widely used to compare schools (Ball 2013). The denominational legacy in Irish education adds a further layer of complexity. The tradition, discipline and academic ethos of voluntary secondary schools is sought after by many parents as the preferred type of education for their child. There are a number of school closures and forced amalgamations due to falling numbers in DEIS schools adjacent to MP, while waiting lists exist for a place in MP. The school closures are affecting schools with predominantly lower socio-economic student cohorts yet the girls in MP seemed unaware of this. The closing schools have become collateral damage in an educational market place but MP has not survived unscathed. It has also become caught in the marketplace and in a way is a hostage to its own fortune.

The suggestions that girls do better academically in single-sex rather than co-educational schools yields inconclusive results, when samples are controlled for pupil intake and background (Hannan et al. 1996). Yet this was anecdotally accepted and believed by the girls in MP to be the case. Social background and prior academic attainment have the greatest influence on examination performance according to Smyth and Hannan (2007). MP girls also believed single-sex education better suited their long-term career aspirations which has been found by Lalor et al. (2007). Girls in single-sex schools were found to have higher realistic career aspirations than both boys and girls in co-ed schools (Watson et al. 2002). It was also expressed by the MP girls that boys would be more disruptive in class, interfering with their learning. This is borne out in recent literature which asserts that the greater the proportion of girls in a co- educational setting the better the behaviour and study patterns (Demanet et al. 2013). This choice could be seen as the girls using purposeful agency or displaying rational action (Gambetta 1987) within the constraints of school structures they actively sought.

The school context and educational experience for the girls was influenced by relationships with teachers. The girls spoke openly of the changing relationship with teachers from junior cycle through to 6th year. They enjoyed freer interactions and more 'egalitarian relationships' with teachers as they got older. Girls also agreed they conformed more over time, suggesting teachers were able to relax their discipline roles once good discipline was achieved. Huan et al. (2012) highlight that positive student perception of their relationships with teachers showed enhanced attitudes towards school. They also found that perceptions of teacher-student relationships among girls centred on care and nurturing whereas the perceptions among boys was that relationships with teachers were based on power. In MP, the counterculture girls cited more negative experiences of what they perceived as teacher power, whereas the MCG experienced very positive relationships of care, with a few feeling care for academia superseded care for the individual. This would suggest that cultural differences between girls have an influence on teacher-student relationships. It also points to a dichotomy in how 'care' can be perceived or bestowed.

Care is cited as important for positive teacher-student relationships in a study by Smyth and Banks (2011). Finally, this highlights the focus of academia over emotion in the eyes of some MCG as outlined by Lynch et al. (2009). It is important to acknowledge the pressure of curriculum demands on teachers and schools in senior cycle and also the expectations of parents and indeed students to achieve high points. Where schools might want to exert agency to ensure the affective domain is prioritised this can be a structural constraint they must manage alongside the myriad of demands placed on them (ibid).

The girls in the study were proud of the school's reputation for academic excellence and a disciplined tradition. They saw the uniform as one of the outward signs the public used to distinguish MP from other schools. Observations indicated that the MCG colluded more actively in the symbolism associated with uniform. They did this by wearing the uniform within the parameters set by the school, e.g. school skirt, jumper, tie, black shoes, minimal jewellery, no make-up. Badges were awarded and worn by class prefects, sports captains and head girls who were nominated by the 6th year group. McDaniel (2013) found that school managers saw the uniform as a promoter of social responsibility and as a disciplinary tool to enhance academic performance. There is also an argument that compulsory uniforms can pose an infringement of the right to self expression with students generally less positive than parents and teachers about the wearing of a uniform (Wilken and Van Aardt 2012). Therefore, the uniform acts as a school structure which constrains some girls and enables agency among others, mediated by social class. Giddens (2013a) acknowledges that historicity is important and powerful. The uniform is part of a tradition and a quality associated with the history of the school. Here the MCG employ a purposive rational action (Habermas and McCarthy 1984) to instil a shared understanding of MC culture via the uniform. This is supported implicitly and explicitly by the school.

The possession of a badge signified a level of status and popularity with peers and management and those elected to leadership tended to be MC by nature of the fact girls were elected by the MC majority.

The elected student leaders did express their willingness to be loyal to the school given the responsibility conferred on them and felt an added responsibility to adhere to the rules and role model good behaviour for the other girls. In MP the WCG were less particular about their appearance in the uniform, sometimes wearing extra jewellery or having their tie very loose. They also complained more about the protocols with regard to wearing the uniform well. This variation in conformity and resistance towards uniform is explained in part by Gramsci (1971) who claims the way in which capitalism is enabled lies in the acquisition of consent from the collective group. The resistance of the WCG did not induce change. Even partial penetration cited by Willis (1977) was not apparent as MCG saw uniform as a cultural entity and it was a sign of the prevailing MC hegemony. This raises the question as to whether the counterculture group were merely acting in opposition rather than real resistance. Giroux (1983) asserts that true resistance is a conscious critique of the social conditions, in many cases effecting change. Where many of the WCG did not discuss their lack of representation within the school's formal leadership structures, Laura states:

> "No one in our group gets picked to do anything, because we are kinda out, if that makes sense, it's annoying at times though."

Betty her friend responds:

> "She lets on like she doesn't care about this and she doesn't care about school but deep down she does care."

These quotes would suggest that MCG who conform are rewarded by peers like them, with positions of power as a form of control. This socially reproduces conformist actions and practices which serve to dominate the resistance actions of the WCG, who do not hold positions of power. This is rational conformity where minimal force is required to get a powerful result and homogenous members of groups unite consciously as a relational force (Gramsci and Forgacs 1988). It is the peer group who vote for and elect peer leaders not the school management or teachers. This example does indicate limited democracy for the WCG which is experienced by some as alienation and presents one area where the school might consider proactively looking for alternative leadership positions for the WCG.

As Giddens (1991) argues, the educational traditions and ethos of the past still inform much of a schools structures, philosophy and aspirations. This was evident in the discussion on uniform in MP.

The perceived importance of discipline in order for academic success to be maintained and enhanced trust of the teachers over time is expressed by Carrie who says:

> "It is strict like, the teachers don't like messers. They don't like people to do what they want, when they want. Other schools are much freer but once the teachers have your trust they know you're not going to do anything, so there is leeway when you become older."

This is connected to labelling theory which is part of the symbolic interactionism tradition (Blumer 1986). During interactions with others each person reflects on their 'self' based on a series of symbols from the cultural group. Some girls saw the benefits of avoiding the label of 'messer'. The discipline structures in the school also activated agency in the girls. Most MCG exhibited rational choice acting in a conformist manner because they could foresee and understand the benefits for academic success (Gambetta 1987). The counterculture group chose to resist the disciplinary structures being pushed culturally in different directions which manifested as an educational and academic inertia (Gambetta 1987) expressed as guilt in interviews. This resulted in release from the structural power but it also constrained their opportunities to develop the sorts of positive affirming relationships the conformist girls enjoyed. Lynch et al. (2009) build a strong case for increased attention to the affective domain in schools. Care is considered crucial to our sense of justice (Noddings 2005).

In Ireland there is an educational ideology that claims a position of power for the 'intelligentsia' (Drudy and Lynch 1993). There is a MC dominance of the intellectual world with the WC unequally represented. Irish educationalists including teachers, operate in a domain of consensualism, which reinforces their power.

The predominant MC status of teachers poses problems for the interactions, understanding and expectations of WC students (Drudy and Lynch 1993). This has resulted in calls for greater representation of student teachers from diverse social backgrounds (Heinz 2013).

An acceptance of teachers' decision making and rule setting was evident among many of the MCG and welcomed by those who wanted a regulated setting in which to learn. The resistance of the WCG may have been understood and handled more empathetically, had there been teachers available who had similar cultural backgrounds. The same argument applies to the need for teachers of varied races in schools. The context within Irish schools would be improved if it were more representative of all sectors of society, in terms of social class and race, for the reasons discussed above (Bryan 2012, Cooper 2003). This is a broader issue simply reflected in the experiences of some of the MP girls.

8.2.1 The Counterculture Group and School Structures

The counterculture group comprised primarily of a small group of WCG who were very forthcoming in discussing their school experience. This raises interesting comparisons between the MC and WCG presentation of self (Goffman 1971). There was a higher level of stage managing evident among the MCG. They were less willing to lower their image of 'good girls' or reveal an alternative image. There was internalised conformity where a mask was adorned in order to preserve perceived MC cultural expectations. Alternatively, the WCG were more open and less inhibited in their responses. Laura, a member of the counterculture group, illustrates this openness:

> "There are fantastic teachers in here, in Junior Certificate I was so lucky I got really great teachers for all my subjects and then 4th year I was very unlucky. Well three of them had maternity leave which wasn't their fault, then I found out I was dyslexic and was deciding whether to do Irish or French and didn't go to either for a while. Another teacher left without telling us. So now we've a load of subs and we've only a few weeks left...I was dossing last week and saw a teacher and we dodged her like a bullet."

Teachers who leave without letting students know indicates a power dynamic or hierarchy (McCoy et al. 2009). Despite the looming examinations Laura is still resisting the prevailing dominance of academia yet at the same time she values her 'good teachers'. There is a tension for her between maintaining a contact with her culture which is often manifested as resistance actions to the school and the realisation that her education is important. This fits with Lynch's (1989) and Mills and Lingard's (1997) claim that cultural difference between a student and their school friends can lead to changing oneself to fit in. Laura's resistance became less visibly addressed in the final weeks as the focus shifted to those girls who were preparing in earnest for the examinations, as perhaps they were seen as making a greater contribution to the school. These more outwardly successful girls would be most likely to enhance the status of the school in the public state examinations system and were very well supported in the final weeks. Similar to Willis's (1977) boys Laura alienated herself from even negative attention in the end, colluding in her own educational demise. This shift in attention is noted in school studies examining school dropout and transition from school to work (Fagan 1995, Griffin 1985). Mary, also from this group admitted that even though she did not enjoy school she appreciated the good reputation it had and would not have wanted to go anywhere else. This is an example of 'doxa' (Bourdieu 1998) where the positive reputation of the school was absolutely acknowledged by Mary even though she did not have the same positive experience as the majority of other girls. It was inferred by Mary that it was not the school but she who was implicit in her failure to fit in. This is a good example of the flaws inherent in a functionalist meritocratic education system (Parsons 1970).

Here Mary reflects on her opportunity and blames herself for her failure. She was guilty about her 'bad behaviour' and felt she had missed an opportunity. Mary is unable to reflect on the nature of an education system which is hugely influenced by market forces, a high stakes examination system and which mediates more favourably towards middle-class culture. There is limited reflective space for schools to examine the cultural nuances of their particular contexts with the myriad of pressures they face at present.

The sentiment expressed by Mary was cited by other young people who resisted school culture in a study by Fagan (1995). Mary acknowledges her particular view of the context in MP saying:

> "I think it is a posh school it's kinda academic as well. When I compare our year to other 6th years in different schools we're all doing higher level and they are all doing the ordinary level and I think it's normal for them to do ordinary level, whereas in this school I think it would kinda be looked down on."

Everyone doing higher level in their subjects at Leaving Certificate is a form of institutionalised cultural capital. It is likely the choice and capacity to do higher level is mediated by parent expectations, peer influence and level of educational support. Crozier et al. (2008) highlight that MC parents seek to ensure their daughters' academic success based on a number of acceptable success parameters. In MP 'doing higher level' is one such success parameter. It also points to the school's high academic expectations for the girls in their care as part of the educational contract entered into by the girls' parents. Lara, who was from an upper middle-class background, questioned the MP posh image, from a negative standpoint stating:

> "A lot of people think we are very posh but I don't think we are at all. There are a lot of people in our school who aren't posh, I don't mean it in a bad way like but they're not. Compared to xxx people have an image of them as well but at least they live up to it."

Lara has grown up in an environment with others like her; she is unable to reflect on her relative privilege. She positions 'Posh' as powerful and sought after but only when authentic. Lara is undoubtedly referring to members of the counterculture group like Mary whom she blames for negating the potential for poshness in MP. This indicates the subtle discriminatory divisions underlying some attitudes among the girls.

8.3 Tradition and Academia

Many of the students who were getting on well at school spoke of the encouragement they consistently received from teachers and management. They spoke of the change from teachers teaching facts in first year to teaching life lessons in sixth year. However, most girls saw the main aim of the school as being success in academia and getting good Leaving Certificate results. Learoyd-Smith (2010) identifies that school context, including a strong academic focus, is connected to social and emotional development. Cait was very clear about the various ways in which the school promoted and rewarded success in academia. She says:

> "More so than other schools this school loves you to do well. I think students that do well are praised a lot more. They're always picked and told 'oh look you got this many points' and even now there would be students who stand out for doing really well. You always hear about the ones who got good results, you never really hear about the ones who never made it. That's understandable though."

Bourdieu (1977) claims that qualifications can have the dual function of being an academic award and also a signifier of cultural competence. In this way institutionalised cultural capital is capable of imposing certain recognition on the holder. This recognition has a role in the continued transmission of social capital (Bourdieu 1986). The school exerts an agency here in choosing to reward and acknowledge the academic success stories whilst also encouraging conformity, but it must do so to maintain its position in the market place. The unique selling point of the school is first and foremost the excellent examination results. Where the school does other excellent work in supporting the girls in school and providing a wealth of opportunities these supports do not receive the same recognition in the public sphere. In an era of parentocracy (Goldring and Phillips 2008) and competitive schooling, failure to reinforce the message of academic success may be seen by wider society (and most importantly by future MC parents) as a lowering of standards which could be detrimental to school enrolment numbers.

The school management are understandably anxious to ensure this positive academic success story is heard on a financial and pragmatic level. There is a very public reinforcing of success which has been found in a lot of MC Catholic girls' schools, where silence could be seen to indicate failure or mediocrity (Lynch and Lodge 2002). It is interesting that Cait has internalised this to some degree with her final comment that due praise for the academic girls was understandable.

8.4 School Shaping Identity and 'Othering'

Evidence from the 'Growing up in Ireland' study points to the importance of families and parent as educators of their children. Appropriate attitudes and behaviours can be fostered and nurtured in the home (McCoy et al. 2012). The school as a structure alongside the home informs the development of the girls' self identities. Thienhuong (2008) claims that school context can foster a sense of maturity upon which girls' identities can be built, both individually and in the peer group. Many girls commented on how different they would have been had they gone to another school. Some girls said they would have met different sorts of friends and peers had they gone elsewhere. Difference was not always seen as a good thing when the girls discussed girls in other schools. Othering of difference is identified as having consequences for underperformance and increased school exclusion for students who are othered on the basis of race, social class and/or gender (Wright 2010). Some girls attributed many positive changes in themselves to the school itself. For instance, Anne-Marie felt the rules, values and teachers taught her a certain morality which became part of her identity. She explained this morality was a shared cultural entity which made upholding it easier because most of the girls adhered to it and modelled it for each other. She says:

> "The school has influenced who I am in good ways. It's given me more of a moral compass. I know now what is right, that you cannot do that and what's okay, like what you can and can't say to people. It's made me want to get on more in school and life and to achieve more and when you see other girls achieve you think you can do that too."

Anne-Marie who is from a WC background has immersed herself in MC school culture and is seen by teachers as a successful student. The opportunity to identify the MCG' academic success as attainable has clearly influenced Anne- Marie. She is adopting the cultural and social nuances, which along with academic success are facilitating social mobility. This identity shaping for Anne-Marie could lead to a leaving behind of her WC origins. There is a strong argument for the preservation of dignity, pride and self worth associated with one's WC culture, rather than adopting the 'positive gloss' of social mobility (Reay 2013). Where there are no Travellers in MP there is resonance with Traveller culture and education. In order to succeed you have to take on MC values and in the process leave behind your own culture. Even then it can be difficult to be fully accepted (Hourigan and Campbell 2010).

The girls felt the school contributed to the development of desirable qualities such as being nice, kind or caring. These are all traditional gender constructions which have been cited by girls in previous research (Reay 2001b). The girls would give genuine praise for MP during interviews but this occasionally merged into a criticism of girls from 'other' schools. A girl in interview 2 says:

> "Friends in my group know when it comes to your best friend here in MP you don't go to another person. Like I've never gone to someone from another school that I'd be good friends with and be like completely bitching about my best friend whereas they'd probably do that to me or go on about their best friend to me, that's like 'Oh my God' you know..."

This is an example of how the MC girls actively upheld the reputation of MP in their external and internal lives. The girls discursively promote values such as loyalty and trust. Yet it could be seen on another level as moral superiority. There is a lack of acknowledgment here that girls in MP could be 'bitchy'. Yet both Laura and Betty cited the bitchiness of the girls as their main reasons for looking forward to finishing school so perhaps the MCG did not want to acknowledge or discuss this with the researcher in case it was perceived as disloyal to the school or in case I would judge them.

There were many positive comments from the MCG with regards to their experiences in settling into MP even when unusually it wasn't a first choice. A girl in interview 1 says:

> "I came into this school kicking and screaming. I did not want to come here at all as I wanted to go to another school and within a month or two you completely forget about it. God I just wouldn't look back at all. I'm so happy that I came here, so happy."

There is little doubt in the literature that negative elements of youth culture such as bullying are common to both the MC and WCG. Sreekanth (2009) asserts that school social segregation creates perceptions about bullying. MC students in that study believed bullying was prevalent in the public schools, attended mainly by WC students. This was because bullying is less recognisable when it is not physically violent. This is similar to the quote above which alludes to the differing values of girls outside MP in relation to gossiping and bitchiness. An interesting aspect of 'othering' by the girls was that even friends the girls had in primary school who went to other schools were accused of being the ones who had changed. Sometimes the school they went to was blamed for their character demise, other times it was the friends they chose to be with. Maxwell and Aggleton (2010) found that young private school girls positioned themselves in relation to others in state schools that they referred to as 'chavs'. They also compared themselves to their MC peers on the basis of parental wealth. Ruth admits: 'You can kinda tell if someone is a rich person.' MP girls also felt differentiated from their peers on the basis of accent, upbringing or being from the country. Caz mentions:

> "I'm from the country and the girls from the city all tell me I have a bogger accent and they can tell I'm from the country, but I think it is a positive thing."

Ruth admits that among MP girls there are different value systems:

> "It's only in some aspects we are the same , but there are people who draw the
> line of respect differently, sometimes they go over it , and you're like 'you can't
> do that', so there are different lines of respect..There are more fake people in
> other schools. You would see the stuff they do and think. I'd never be doing
> that."

This is a reference to the WCG in MP being like girls from elsewhere with different values. There is an inference that there is enhanced status in her eyes for a certain type of girl who is high in moral values like honesty and respect. This is akin to Giddens' (2013) routinization and recursivity concepts where the girls' actions, practices and attitudes become structured to reinforce their MC privilege. It also indicates the presentation of the MC face (Janus) which the girls feel I must see as a MC teacher- researcher. When the MCG encounter difference in MP or outside school, they are unable to reflect on their position but unwittingly seek to maintain their privilege by alienating other girls as highlighted by Weis and Cipollone (2013).

Tormey and Gleeson (2012) conducted an Irish study on the social distances created by Irish girls and boys in TY towards ethnic minorities. They found that girls created the least social distance from minorities. The most negative attitudes were towards Irish Travellers across both males and females. Traveller girls were never directly referred to but there was an underlying sense that the differences mentioned referred to Traveller culture as well as WC culture. This issue of 'othering' indicated a lack of reflexivity among the girls around their own biases and a deep seated prejudice towards those unlike themselves. Irish studies have identified a fear of strangers attitude within many Irish schools culminating in racist tendencies (Bryan 2008). The findings in the literature would suggest racist tendencies are present in MP as they are in many schools but these tendencies were not discussed, identified or acknowledged by the girls. The issues discussed tended to centre more on social class differences.

One group interview descended into an intense debate about 'knackers'. Three respondents take up the issue in the context of discussing different adolescent groups. Girls 1 and 3 are intensely involved in the discussion. Girl 2 is uncomfortable about the direction the conversation is taking:

> **Girl 1**- "There's nothing worse than people that try to be knackers. Like knackers are actually people who have a xxxxx accent. People who are from, I don't know... Who act...? They just try and go against rules and stuff."

> **Girl 2**- "I hate using those labels though as it's so politically incorrect."

> **Girl 3**-"Yeah, knackers have no respect for anyone; well they act as if they've no respect for anyone."

> **Girl 1 again**- *Rowing back* "But there can be nicer people in some of those areas than in some good areas..." *realising that the girl sitting beside her was from a poorer area*

There are a number of inferences to be made here. Firstly, the mention of knackers going against the rules reinforces the importance of conformity and self regulation in order to be accepted in broad MC culture. The importance of language as a linguistic unifier and expression of culture and habitus is implicit in the comment about accent (Bourdieu and Thompson 1991). The MC stage management in terms of self presentation (Goffman 1971) is visible in this excerpt. Girl 2 tries to indicate the distastefulness of the comments and influences a calming of the vehemence with which 'knackers' are discussed. The girls are not referring specifically or only to Travellers here when they mention 'knackers'. Accent, dress, jewellery and other cultural traits that would be different to MC culture could mean that person acquires the slur of being called a 'knacker'. The girls show a lack of sympathy towards less fortunate groups, and in this excerpt portray a dominance that could be daunting for someone who was different to experience. Indeed, Mary admitted feeling very inferior to some of the other MP girls. She points out:

"I feel very inferior to some people in our year. I don't know why, they just have that effect. Some of my other friends feel the same but then again people could possibly feel inferior to me for all I know. That's just the vibe I get ...I feel that they're above me. Yea I feel they're kind of elite, not everyone just some people. I think they kinda look down on me as someone who doesn't have really high moral standards like them. I think they do look down on us."

Mary's WC origin has meant that she has made friends with other WCG like herself. They have formed a counterculture group in 6th year and are regularly rebellious. The girls did not 'other' boys from a different class in this way. They only ever referred to girls who were different. This is an example of gender oppression (Tong 1989) by girls against other girls, intersects with hegemonic cultural dominance (Gramsci 1973). The dominance of the MC group as a structure is constraining Mary's own cultural acceptance, as she feels inferiorised. The dominant group operates as an interpretative scheme to enable Mary to partially understand through experience, socialisation and reflexivity, her own domination (Giddens 2013).

Lee and Kramer (2012) assert that it is cultural difference that limits access to social mobility and perpetrates inequality as seen in Mary's quote above. However, WC students can navigate 'a cleft habitus' or a gap between their habitus and that of their MC peers. There are moments where students analyse how their habitus is changing from that of their parents. This creates a divide between the student and their origins, making social mobility opportunities more feasible (ibid). This, however, has not occurred in Mary's case. It seems a further consequence of inequality that in order to achieve the educational and occupational benefits of moving from WC to MC, an individual may have to detach from their origins. Halsey (2013) calls for social policy to protect the individual from this fate by seeking a way of solving the issue of social inequality. However, this is a societal issue that schools have few resources to address alone. The trust enabled the girls to let their guard down at times, especially when the interviews were very conversational and they displayed attitudes that clearly need further discussion.

The space to do this on the senior cycle curriculum is minimal and this is a difficulty; the pressure of examinations reduces time for the girls to reflect, read beyond curricular texts and really interrogate their thinking in a safe and supported environment. The girls are probably so focused on the exams they would not see the benefit (Smyth and Banks 2011).

There are many career and occupational advantages cited for those who access MC schools, with curricula favouring the more highly valued labour market subjects (Iannelli 2013). However, this study illustrates that admission to a selective school does not automatically confer these advantages. There are many other cultural and social barriers, which are constructed by society which mean that a more positive school experience is advantaged for some over others, even when curriculum is the same. Mary's own sense of inferiority morally and culturally in school was due to her feelings of difference which she failed to verbalise as social class. Ultimately, she did not succeed in academia when compared to her counterparts, which is very disappointing for herself and those who did their best to help her within the confines of constraining structures.

Weis and Cipollone (2013) identify increasing insecurity and difficulty among the MC in seeking to maintain advantage educationally. Economic circumstances can limit absolute mobility causing an opportunity trap. This can lead to too many families seeking out the same opportunities causing social congestion (Brown 2013). Therefore, intergenerational social mobility could be much less to do with meritocracy and more to do with the occupational pressures of a growing MC leading to application frenzy (Brown et al. 2013). Bernstein (1990) points out that the most formative influence on socialisation of young people is social class. The main agencies of socialisation in contemporary settings include: peer group, school, family and workplace. Socialisation operates within social class and there are elaborate codes integral but separate for each social class. Limited access to the codes of other classes serves to culturally reproduce a series of symbolic and classed codes (Bernstein 1973). Mary was culturally alienated from the codes of the MCG by nature of her WC origins.

She has not managed to adopt the cultural nuances that may have enabled her to fit in and succeed in school (Bourdieu 1984). Where the school provided and encouraged her to take part in extra-curricular activities she was not comfortable with doing so and this left the school powerless to see another way of helping her to succeed. It would appear the relationship between MC and WC culture is still broadly characterised by exclusion and unacknowledged entitlement as asserted by Skeggs (2004) and highlighted above.

Human agents have the capacity to understand what they do which is understood as practical consciousness (Giddens 1984). This 'othering' occurred in a context evidenced by a high level of discursive ability among the girls, but with a contrasting lack of reflexivity. This would suggest discursive or practical consciousness can be present without significant agent reflexivity but as an act of collective power or dominance. Again, the pressurised examination system in 6th year eliminates the opportunity to engage in meaningful discussion which could be given more timetable space or be guided by a facilitator who could probe the girls' thinking. This data would suggest however that other schools like MP could also have similar incidences of unempathetic attitudes within the peer group and in this way suggests a contextualised generalisation is possible.

The power of the MCG' individual and institutional habitus when operating in tandem was significant as an influence over agency. Burke et al. (2013) promote the idea of the individual and collective habitus as interrelated. They purport that social actors interact with the field as well as with each other. Therefore, 'othering' is steeped in power relations as outlined through the concept of hegemonic relationships (Gramsci et al. 1971). Hegemony is present when the dominant culture has control over what happens and how institutions operate (Ball 2006, Cole 2006). MP girls and their parents could be seen to collude in exerting control in the field to maintain their own power and to ensuring the reproduction of their own cultural capital. This is because of the pressure they feel to ensure success for their daughters in the uncertain academic and occupational world (Devine 2004).

This study also illustrates the existence of women oppressing other women on the basis of difference (Tong 1989). Some girls admitted they were told by their parents not to hang around with girls from outside, but to mix with friends from school. This points to parents' rational choice where actions they suggest to ensure their daughters' success include telling them to make sacrifices in their friendship choices. This is similar to findings in a study by Crozier et al. (2008). For instance, a girl in group interview 2 states:

> "I think all of us come from a strong background so, well you know, not like a perfect family but you know morally strong parents I know that's kinda being... It's easy to model yourself around people in your year cos you know you'll turn out like well cos you can trust them. If you were in a rougher school and you were changing yourself to be like them then you wouldn't change for the better you'd change for the worse."

Brown (2010) found links between social hostility in secondary schools and drop-out rates for students from lower socio-economic backgrounds. This raises concern for the WC minority in MP and highlights the isolation they may be experiencing un-realised by the school. There was praise proffered for the school's maintenance of order by many of the girls. There was a sense the girls appreciated the calm and safety they feared might not be the case in other schools. Cait reiterates this saying:

> "I can't get over in other places where they don't really care and here they do. In other schools they are totally undisciplined; they'd be having fights like...what's a school, a zoo? That's totally not accepted here at all. If there was a fight you'd be gobsmacked."

This quote indicates the importance of care to the girls and the sense that they felt cared about in the way the school did not tolerate violence or ill-discipline. However, there is a strong sense of care for education without a full appreciation of the privilege they have experienced which others may not have (Lynch et al. 2009).

The need for agency to enact change through resistance is not an issue for Cait who is comfortable with the structures of the school which she perceives keep her safe and cared for. The appreciation of conformity is similar to Duncan and Owens' (2011) findings on the connections between social power and homogeneity.

8.5 Mount Privet Girl

The girls were capable of summarising the quintessential MP girl and were keen to elaborate on the social and educational outcomes of fulfilling that role. Initially in group discussions the girls were inclined to memorise a physical image of how they saw MP girls six years ago. There was a hairdo, 'a side fringes look.' Distinctions like hair, clothes are aesthetic choices which are consciously different to the choices made by other social classes (Bourdieu 1984). Julie highlights the public perception of what a MP girl looks like:

> "I know from some schools they think were perfect. They talk about the MP hair
> cos it can be half curly and half messy. You just tie it up and we don't think
> anything of it and we have our uniform and people think we are so proper. I'd
> say we all look like we're full of it..."

The girls mentioned the cost of the uniform in MP is approximately €300 and the voluntary contribution is currently €500 although the recession has meant that income from these contributions are falling which presents financial challenges for the school. These could be seen as economic barriers which could deter those with financial difficulties from applying to the school. In addition, the expensive uniform is a form of objectified culture and could also serve to deter the working class from seeing the school as an option for their child. The issue of convertibility of economic capital in relation to social class is documented by Lynch and Moran (2006). Pupil performance is also linked to economic capital in that MC parents are better able to provide enrichment activities and support for their children where WC parents may not (Ball 2010).

Although the girls did not overtly discuss these issues, there was a tacit understanding evident in the tone of the excerpt above that indicated awareness of the extrinsic value associated with uniform and hair. This would suggest a strong 'appearance culture' (Adler et al. 1992) is evident in MP. It was acknowledged that the type of MP girl who would be held in high esteem was an all-rounder who was predominantly academic. Cait says:

> "Yeah except for the odd one or two there definitely is a MP girl. They'd be much disciplined, really mannerly, friendly and into their study. You know they want to do well. There would be the odd 1 or 2 who wouldn't be into school but like... They are really friendly and they'd be chatting away... Sometimes it's nice to talk to someone who isn't totally into school, just for a break."

Cait is referring to members of the counterculture group here and presents a different view to how some members of that group felt they were viewed. It is very positive that Cait is open and positive about the WCG. This supports the view that friendships for social learning can be formed more easily when the competitive nature of academics does not threaten this (Brooks 2007). There could also be an inference made that the WCG are also being used 'just for a break' from study, a convenient distraction, as opposed to there being a pure or authentic egalitarian relationship (Giddens 2013b). Shirley summarises the MP girl and provides a very positive image of a MP girl and suggests the possibility of managing academia with other adolescent activities saying:

> "Girls who are just nice people who actually have a balanced life and aren't always just studying. They can have friends and hobbies and still can do well."

As this quote illustrates, gender constructions of a MP girl did not always follow an expected stereotype of a feminine docile, passive student who would conform, study hard and attain great results for the school's positive image. Theory indicates that when a gender construction is perceived to be a social norm which mirrors a socio economic imperative it is considered mainly through Marxist-Feminist theory. Marxist feminists blame subordination of women on exploitation in a capitalist society and the class system inherent in it (Tong 1989).

Capitalism is associated with long working hours and a dedication to the 'new managerialism' where care is replaced with a focus on productivity (Lynch et al. 2012). The MCG' in MP are offered long after school study facilities until 9 in the evening. Where some girls go home, most avail of this late study facility. The girls and their parents are very grateful for a study facility on site which is charged at a very low cost when compared with other study facilities in Riverstown. Many girls in MP also attended grinds to support their progress in a subject. Grinds could portray an enhanced objectified cultural capital. The ability to use economic capital for extra academic support created a sense of confidence in some girls' abilities to be able to overcome issues like perceived poor teaching or difficulties in a subject.

There is also social capital in evidence here as there is a clear network of information regarding who is good for grinds in each subject area. Smyth (2009) discusses the prevalence of paid private tuition among MC students in Ireland indicating the intensely competitive nature of upper secondary school education. Despite the investment in private tuition when key differences between students accessing grinds were accounted for, no enhancement in academic performance was found (Smyth 2008).

Having appropriate values and personal qualities mattered a lot in the discussion of a MP girl. Shirley elicits her difficulty with fitting this profile:

> "I don't think I'm a typical MP girl. If you saw me in the street you wouldn't get that off me. A MP girl is respectful and nice and gives everyone a chance and wouldn't be very judgemental on first basis and being very intellectual is important too. Getting the points seems to be what's remembered."

Again, there is a focus on the importance of values with 'respect' and 'nice', keywords which are used regularly by the girls. The intellectual domain is ever present as a key aspect of the character of a MP girl. There is an indication here that the value of examination points could be linked as a measure of some one's worth as a person. Where this would not be the case in reality as the girls would be remembered for their personalities, it does indicate the way in which the girls struggle to separate their academic achievement with their self identity.

Even if this is not the reality within the school it is something that would be worth exploring with future 6th year groups or addressing earlier through SPHE. Values were imparted to the girls and cited as important in the formation of a MP girl as alluded to above. Caring for others was mentioned repeatedly as a key school value. Gaining confidence was also heralded as directly relatable to the school's influence.

A number of students spoke of the importance of trying not to talk about others behind their back and to be willing to stand up for someone if they were being wronged. Trying to see the good in people rather than criticising was mentioned by a few girls. These values indicate an institutionalised habitus connected to a Catholic ethos which has been identified in another Irish school study (Lynch and Lodge 2002). Although religion was not overtly discussed there were inferences among some girls that certain practices like physically standing up when the teacher arrived were there as demonstrations of traditional respect for elders and also a sort of reverence. Caz mentions her memories of this in 1st year stating:

> "The teacher kind of expected you to be a certain person initially but from 2nd year to 6th year you develop. You think initially you have to have your tie right up, once 2nd year comes you don't really care."

Ruth justifies the control in the following quote:

> "Well with teachers from 1st to 3rd years the teachers would be always 'pull up your tie' and I used to be 'why do we have to do that' and now I realise now that if we were going around without the tie up the uniform it just gets worse like you'll do something else worse."

 The justification of the use of disciplinary power and affirmation of conformity is indicative of the willingness of the girls to use agency to support the schools ethos, even when they questioned it initially. The concept of 'enculturation' is evident in the acceptance and validation of the school authorities rules and regulations (Schutz 2011). Weber's (1978) theory of bureaucracy identifies consequences resulting from excessive control and over conformity.

Bureaucracy is one of three forms of legitimate domination (Merz 2013). 6th years felt it was a rite of passage to have 1st years move out of the way for them, indicating power struggles between the more enculturated and the new arrivals. Hierarchy and status are themes evident here between the students as the cycle of power between new arrivals and more established girls is played out on the corridors. There is an internalisation of power and student hierarchies as part of the school ethos and MP persona. Foucault's (2012) disciplinary power as internalised and constant is evident here. It serves to induce adherence to the rules as a form of self surveillance often used in institutions to ensure good order. Carrie describes the issue of aesthetics and taste as a cultural phenomenon and part of the image of a MP girl (Bourdieu 1984) in relation to choosing a debutante ball date. She adds:

> "It is a debs date you have to get the perfect debs date. You have to ask the perfect person like someone who's gonna treat you well and be nice to you on the night and not kinda go away from you and stuff like that cos you're bringing them to your debs it's because you wanna spend time with them. You wanna show them off to your friends and stuff. Say 'look this is my debs date' and stuff."

This scenario indicates a significant investment by some of the girls in the story of female attractiveness and heterosexual romanticism. These investments are considered important to a girl's culture (Francis and Leathwood 2006). The influence of popular culture on the constructions of feminine identities is documented in the literature (Gilbert and Taylor 1991). The maintenance of a public image if you are a MP girl is important according to the girls. Hakim (2011) argues that physical and social attractiveness is a valuable form of capital termed 'erotic capital'. Attractive people succeed in many social and economic arenas and this is understood by the MP girls who access social media and celebrity culture when they have time. Individual agency operates within the confines of a certain range, determined by the institutional habitus (Bourdieu and Nice 1977). This relates to a MP girl picking the perfect debs date within a pre-set range of parameters described by Caz:

"Even preparing for the debs now it's all about the date and the girls asking who you have. They'd be like 'Oh definitely don't go with a girl anyway' and I didn't know in MP it was a wrong thing to go with a group of girls. But apparently it is. Even if you bring a ginger (boy with red hair) as well that's really bad nowadays. I mean he could be your best friend. It's very superficial but they will ask you 'why are you bringing a ginger?' I don't see it as a bad thing at all but others would. Well he is kinda my best friend and I said to the girls 'Would it be a bad thing to bring a ginger' and the girls said 'Oh Caz you'd never bring a ginger'. I'd like to bring him but I'm scared it would backfire in my face due to the slagging. Maybe it's just in my group rather than any other type of group but it's really bad in my group."

Cultural peer constraints reduce Caz's agency in choosing a date as Bourdieu and Nice's (1977) theory explains. Heteronormativity is prevalent in many Irish schools and is evident here (Baker et al. 2009). Even actions which may appear straightforward are mediated by powerful constraints sometimes within the school, other times in wider culture. This illustrates the connections between agency, structure and culture as also theorised by Habermas (1984). Where the group expected and insisted on conformity, Caz who was ordinarily extremely conformist resisted this. Caz did bring her ginger male friend to the debs. This would suggest that girls do use agency to resist significant cultural constraints, based on a reflexive practical consciousness imbued in their actions (Giddens 2013a). It must be noted that Caz had left the school at this stage and may have weighed up her options differently now that her peer group had less power over her once she had left.

8.6 Rural and City Divide

The school has a considerable mix of students from rural and suburban/city backgrounds. This created an interesting insider-outsider dimension to the study. Although Caz admits she is laughed at a lot for her 'bogger accent' she offers her city friends the opportunity to learn about farm life. This is cited in the literature where private school girls laugh at those who speak with a different accent (Maxwell and Aggleton 2010).

Carrie felt it was much harder to make conversation with the country girls pointing out they did not know how to react to city banter. This would suggest an element of cultural superiority associated with city or suburban living. This indicates differing embodied cultural capital and varying dominant discourses which make the transition and acceptance in second level difficult when coming from differing localities (O' Brien 2003). The country girls were generally much more involved in sport. They claimed to be much more laid back and less intense than the city girls. They put this partly down to avoiding exam pressure by using sport as an outlet and having a relaxed place to be at weekends. They were amused by the city girls' fascination with clothes and boys, paying less attention to the appearance culture (Adler et al. 1992) evident among the other girls. Keira points out for instance:

> "We don't fight I know every group has issues but we really don't fight at all. Other groups, I don't know if they're really friends. We are all really laid back and get on really well. We are not that bothered about things that other girls get bothered about. I'd never even take notice of what I look like coming into school. I just walk into school I don't really care. It could be the sport but I think it might be cos we are all from the country. Our families are all kinda the same. Even before we really got to know each other we already kinda knew and thought the same things. We play camogie and we'd be doing the same things... I'd be lost if I didn't have the sport though. I only stopped playing with my club a few weeks ago in case I got injured but I really miss it."

There is less stress evident among the sporty group. This appears to lead to less conflict within their group and a more laid back attitude to life and school. Appearance is less of a worry as there is a physical status or a physical capital (Clark 2009) associated with sport that perhaps replaces the need for another form of physical recognition. There is also an inference that social class differences are less evident in rural settings where country families are culturally similar. Barnes (2007) found Irish rural dwellers had a strong bias towards country life when compared with city dwellers. Involvement in sport is in keeping with being a 'well rounded student' and accessing an overall good MC education (Clark 2009).

Where there are few social class differences and no gender diversity for girls in MP, this rural/city divergence provides an important element of variance among the peer groups. It must be noted though that in general the country girls were MC.

8.7 Conclusion

The school as a structure operates within a far more powerful superstructure, the state. Funding for the voluntary secondary sector is lower than other post-primary school sectors in Ireland receive. In addition, schools are closing in the vicinity of MP due to falling numbers and the competitive nature of ensuring demand for school enrolments is a constant pressure for schools. The pressure of examination league tables positions and academic success as a sought after commodity by many parents places schools like MP in an educational market without choice. The school is a relatively powerless agent in the sense it is responsible to a large extent for its own survival. It is with due cognisance of this backdrop, the following conclusions are detailed.

Hegemony is connected to the way a school ethos, social grouping, actions and practices are reproduced in MP as has been found in other studies (Lynch and Lodge 2002). Parents use their cultural and social capital to acquire a place for their daughter and once admitted this highly valued MC culture continues to confer advantage for these girls. This advantage is compounded because the MCG conform more readily to the MC culture of the school with their similar forms of capital (Bourdieu 1986). This positions these MCG girls in opposition to those who resist, as more suitable for selection by the peer group to leadership roles. More significantly the use of conformity by the MCG facilitates better relationships with teachers in contrast to the WCG who are different culturally and resist the school structures more often, leading to alienation (Giroux 1981). The uniform, prefect badges, appearance culture, and particular aesthetic demonstrations demark the MCG from the WCG. The girls from different social classes use agency with a practical consciousness (Giddens 1984), to consent to or resist school and peer structures.

There is evidence of rational choice (Gambetta 1987) in the actions of the girls to ensure their academic success. This was visible in the ways they supported the school ethos, disciplinary structures and their presentation of themselves. Therefore, admission, school experience and relationships in MP are all mediated to some degree by the acquisition, reproduction and portrayal of a myriad of forms of MC capital (Bourdieu 1986). Individual and institutionalised cultural capital is socially produced and reproduced inside and outside MP through the actions and practices of the girls, their parents and teachers over time. This is not the case for the WCG who do not possess a form of dominant capital on admission. Consequently, their cultural capital is not valued in the same way and they feel alienated. There is a multiplier effect evident in the dearth of valued capital available to the WCG. This serves to indicate some inequality for these girls on the basis of social class. The recursive reinforcement of the MC dominant cultural capital indicates how difficult it is to exist outside of the dominant culture and this explains why conformity is the prevailing pattern among the peer group.

The power of hegemony is very difficult to overcome once it embeds in an institution and for some girls and also the school it becomes naturalised or doxic. Hegemony is most visible as 'othering' of girls in neighbouring schools, communities and within MP who are different socially or culturally. Girls are identified as 'other' through linguistics, practices, resistance actions, differing values and morality. The promotion of homogenous, conformist actions serves to reinforce prejudice towards others and in doing so reinforces an understanding of cultural dominance Hegemonic discourses in MP have become a self regulatory disciplinary mechanism among the MCG and a powerful alienation structure for 'others'. This homogeneity can result in low tolerance and appreciation of difference. The MCG are not reflexively aware of their own privilege as it is routinely normalised in their homes, school and communities. Therefore, the relationship between the MCG and WCG is characterised by a sense of entitlement and a lack of appreciation of difference which is not deliberately enacted but has emerged over time. This occurred through regular reinforcement of the value of MC culture in the MCG homes, school and their communities and wider society.

This is ultimately not a school based but a wider societal issue. However, the school is the site of study where the cultural struggle is played out for the purposes of this ethnography.

The extent of hegemony is evident in the girls' stage management of their interactions. The MCG presentation of 'self' is guarded and the impression of the 'good' MP girl is carefully portrayed. In contrast, the WCG are more open and explicit in what they say. They have exploited the platform in this research upon which their voices can be heard. This point concludes that there are nuanced differences evident throughout this chapter in the way girls from diverse social classes interact, respond and present their classed 'self'. Differences in accent, language, stress levels and social practices as well as place of origin lead the researcher to conclude that there are many cultural variables beyond this school context which impact school and adolescent experience, but all are mediated by social class.

Chapter 9 Peer Interactions

Friendship is one key theme which emerged during the observation phase as a significant feature of school life and culture. It became apparent early in the study that social class was interwoven with friendship patterns and that some parents influenced friendship choices which has been found in other studies (Devine 2004, Lynch and Lodge 2002). Girls commonly cited friendship and the emotional support it provided as important, which concurs with research on women's friendship (O'Connor 1992). Yet Lynch et al. (2009) assert that personal intelligences which could enable and enhance friendships, are not prioritised in the Irish education system. The girls in MP developed trust and care for one another through informal friendships. Some girls who struggled with attendance or academia at school explained that their real friends were outside school. George (2007) identifies the need for these girls to have their culture affirmed in other cultural contexts outside of school. These contexts are discussed in this chapter.

9.1 Categories of Friendship

The counterculture girls in MP formed a culturally similar friendship group concurring that girls do make friends with girls from similar backgrounds (hooks 1982). Mary explains her need for friends:

> "I definitely think friends are important. I wouldn't be able to come to school without them. I look forward to coming to school to talk to my friends. Even when we have midterm breaks, much as I hate school; I always miss the friends bit and they kinda get you through the day really like."

Similarly, O'Connor (2004) found that girls came to school primarily to meet friends. Ann Marie highlights the supportive nature of friendship stating:

> "I'd say friends are very important like they're there if you need someone, if you can't talk to a parent or a teacher and sometimes people a little older than you can treat you like you're five, so friends your own age give you peace of mind that if you have something wrong you can go to them."

Anne-Marie refers to a power differential between adults and young adults where she feels treated as a subordinate. With friends the power is more equal leading to greater interaction. At times of crises girls resort to supportive peer friendship (O'Connor 2007). Habermas (1984 , p. 286) worked on a concept known as communicative action which occurs when:

> "The actions of the agents involved are coordinated not through egocentric calculations of successes but through acts of reaching understanding."

Taking Habermas's theory, friendships among the girls in MP have the dual purpose of offering real communicative action on the one hand and a form of competitive counterpart relationship on the other. There are also examples of friendships which are pure authentic relationships based on trust (Giddens 1991) and others which are based more on rationality and purpose.

There were two dominant girls' groups apparent in this study; a large MC group and a counterculture group. Other smaller sub-groups could be identified from the dominant MC group. The counterculture group regularly resisted the dominant culture of other groups and the school itself (Giroux 1983). The other large group was comprised of high academic achievers, school leaders and the popular girls. Mixing with many girls was a cultural pattern evident among the girls. Girls would generally be seen in large groups in the social spaces identified as 'cliques'. Closson (2009) identifies a status hierarchy between adolescent cliques but also between individual members within cliques which was also evident in MP. A girl in group interview 1 explains:

> "Friendship is a part of growing up, you shouldn't just depend on one particular group, and you should mix at school although there are cliques at school, but if you depend on one group and anything happens..."

This indicates that girls use their agency to ensure they have lots of friends serving to protect against changes to group structures which might isolate an individual girl. The girls' agency enabled the actions they performed to contribute to the creation of their social setting (Giddens 1984).

The extension of social activities through friendships led to social reproduction as they become bound in a routinization (Giddens 1984). Structures are created out of the recursive nature of the routinization of activities (ibid) and this is particularly seen in the girls' use of social media and sleepovers with friends to repeatedly reconnect with adolescent culture. Agency is a form of power and agentive actions have an element of rational choice alongside intentional and unintentional consequences (Giddens 1984). The girls used agency to ensure the maintenance of numerous relationships, some close, some more superficial, with many girls. The consequence of this was protection but it also led to disagreements, stress and competition for personal attention. Mixing with many different girls was also effective in acquiring social capital; for example, it enabled girls to get insights and information on what was happening in other classes, extra-curricular activities and in wider peer culture. It also allowed them access to resources like notes another teacher may have given out, which would sometimes be shared between friends in different classes.

Social capital facilitates a network of human connections offering support. The greater the social networks, the greater the volume of social capital a person possesses. Social capital is responsible for the production of homogenous groups where these members accrue benefit (Bourdieu 1986). The level of relative homogeneity among the groups in MP enabled a relatively seamless transition for girls from group to group except for girls in the counterculture group who remained a distinct group. As members accrue social capital this leads to a multiplier effect where access to useful relationships ensues a symbolic profit. This is because the accrual of social capital is greater from relationships with individuals or groups well endowed with social, cultural or economic capital (Bourdieu 1986). These benefits were not accessible to the WCG who were more isolated from the dominant cultural group. This illustrates how social class determined friendship even within a relatively homogenous MC institution. It reinforces the difficulty for WC girls to survive the MC environment, even in the domain of friendship formation.

However, the WCG claimed they did not want to be friends with the girls who in their eyes were 'only into school'. The cultural dichotomies which divided the girls' perceptions of each other are evident here. Girls' peer relationships are different to boys' relationships which revolve around hierarchies and dominance in sport. Girls seek connectedness through their same-sex friends (O'Connor 2008). Friendships were sometimes categorised and commoditised in MP according to when and where they may be useful. This questioned the authenticity of some friendships. Shirley articulates the benefits of closer friends:

> "I have two closer friends but they wouldn't be my group at school they'd be outside school. They're completely opposite and I act differently with both of them. One you'd have fun with and the other I would have serious conversations with. In school I'm close to Carrie. I'd still be close to Ann too. I like to get close to a few people cos one friend could annoy you one day and you might need someone else."

Shirley's friends from outside school offer a freedom from the MC culture that her school friends are part of. Shirley, although from a MC background, has resisted the school culture at times, admitting to being too vocal and loud which Archer et al. (2007b) found can be an antithesis to MC expectations of passivity. She has also discussed how she changed her identity to be like the other girls so in the long term she conformed to expectations in this respect. Shirley is adept at modifying her interactions to suit others' expectations, as illustrated in the above comment.

Lynch (1999) confirms that the only way to succeed in a hegemonic school system is to adopt the dominant dimensions by changing oneself. Shirley falls back to her own cultural group, keeping close friends from outside who affirm her when she feels alienated (hooks 1982). It was notable that in MP all of the girls who expressed difficulty with school culture and resisted school norms indicated that they had close friends outside the school. Laura, Mary and Betty (all WC) also mentioned their real friends being from outside. Laura states:

> "I don't think my friends from school are as important as my real friends outside as such, they're not real friends just people you see and stuff."

This indicates that less authentic friendships exist in MP when cultural and social class differences create circumstances where friendship choice is limited. Authentic relationships are important in creating trust, making new friends and expressing feelings (Sammet 2010). Those who were very comfortable and positive about school tended to have fewer outside friends. Shirley used agency to fit into the dominant cultural expectations of the school. She modified her boisterous personality to conform. Agency was also used to preserve her connections with girls from outside the school whom she does not need to modify herself for. She says:

> "You have your different friends who might have no similar personality traits, they're just completely different, and it's like you're acting different but I'd be totally myself with them (show friends). There's a difference it's really hard to explain. I'm not two people like, but I'd be more comfortable when I'd be with my show friends cos you know in school, I'd be embarrassed to sing a song or dance but when I'm there it's like 'no grand', you know they all do it as well. I dunno it's like I feel freer when I'm with them than the friends in school when you feel like you have to be like a swot or something."

Shirley uses interesting adjectives in this quote. Her 'show friends' enable her to be herself but at school she would need to be a 'swot' to fully fit in. This is undoubtedly connected to the pressure of the Leaving Certificate examinations where the girls choose friends who may be useful to them in terms of study and academia. It indicates a level of strategic rational choice where the girls can look ahead to their probability for success and make decisions to assist them in getting there (Gambetta 1987). In this way, the examination structures, expectations of parents and teachers and the girls' own expectations serve to constrain Shirley (she conforms) and at the same time enable (she maintains relationships with real friends outside) Shirley's agency. This demonstrates the durée or continuous flow of action (Giddens 2013) through individual agency as Shirley uses agency to make different friendship choices that help her through school on the one hand and her broader life on the other.

The existence of closer friends can originate from bonds created in primary school, local neighbourhoods or through sport (George 2007). Many of the friendships in MP developed from a common interest such as sport or music. Shirley articulates many of these points saying:

> "Well I've been in shows and stuff and I have a lot of friends, its cos you're interested in the same stuff and you get along with them really well. A lot of my closest friends would be in shows and I have close friends in school as well so it really helps. I balance it out really well cos I do give time to everyone."

Balancing friends from inside and outside school is an effective means of maintaining peer acceptance and there is significant importance placed on considering both types of friendships from a social development perspective (Witkow and Fuligni 2010). Closer friends allow the development of relationships at a deeper level than the bigger group can. Keira compares the tension within the larger main groups and how it is buffered by closer sub-friendships:

> "Yeah I'm really close to two girls really. But we kinda have a group with about eight in it. There's one group in the year that is really big. You can see the tension between lots of them. They wouldn't all get on with each other. I know every group has issues but we really don't fight much at all. Other groups would be more, I don't know if they're really friends at all."

This statement indicates a certain level of competition or rivalry between the members of larger groups. It reiterates the aforementioned functionality of friendship which is supported by research citing adolescent girls' friendships as being unstable (Chan and Poulin 2007). The girls use individual agency to choose a group of friends. These friendship groups contribute to the creation of the girls' social world (Giddens 2013b). However, the group evolves into a collective unified structure which is capable of exercising power over other groups and also individual group members (Gramsci and Forgacs 1988). Over time it seems that these groups then become dysfunctional due to the lack of real intimacy associated with authentic friendships.

Griffiths' (1995) ethnography on girls' culture also identified that friendships were dictated by a cultural code. This code sometimes demanded conformity and social compliance in return for availing of the fun and laughter associated with friendship groups. The exercising of power within the dominant friendship groups was evident, with group dynamics changing as girls had arguments or disagreements. Teachers questioned in the Griffiths' (1995) study pathologised some of the nastiness they identified as endemic in girls' friendships. Laura mentioned preferring her friendships with boys because they were less bitchy. Thomas and Daubman (2001) found that the girls' self esteem was positively correlated with the quality of their cross-gender best friend but found no correlation with the quality of their same-sex friends. The girls in MP did receive affirmation from girlfriends but also experienced significant competition and rivalry and struggles for peer acceptance (Kingery et al. 2011, George 2007).

It would appear that friendship patterns differ among boys and girls (Bukowski and Concordia 2007) with girls tending to engage in far more intimate types of friendships than boys (O'Connor 2007). MP girls made clear distinctions between friendships with girls and boys citing boys as great for having a laugh and less interested in deep meaningful conversations. There were issues of trust expressed around friendships with boys, with the girls fearing that the boys share everything with 'the rest of the lads'. Boys were also deemed superficial and immature yet at the same time it was accepted that it was cool to be liked by them.

There are a number of examples above which indicate that the MP girls are influenced by varied gender constructions of girls and boys. This is supported by Felmlee et al. (2012) whose study on adolescent cross-gender friendship norms found that women had higher expectations of intimacy, emotional closeness and confidentiality, whereas men were more disapproving of a male friend who kissed them as a greeting. Ruth and Julie articulated these views:

> **Ruth**- " There are some boys but very few, like you can't trust them cos they're friends with all the lads and if a big group of lads found out about something then the slagging...that's the way boys are. Boys say it to you, like a girl will say what they heard behind your back where a boy will say it to you, 'Hey I heard...' That's why you'd be careful not to say it. Its worse that a girl would say it behind your back but the boys are so clueless they don't understand girls; they just don't get what they're not supposed to say... I go to study where there are boys and girls so we talk to them there. There are some girls who are always with the boys and they need that like. Most times we just stay in our girls' group and the lads come over and talk to us. There are some girls who'd be following the lads around all giggly. They just love attention off boys some of them, some girls want to be a lad, they want to be in the group of the lads."

> **Julie**- "It's maturity, you can come across some boys and they're so stupid you can't even hold a conversation with them and there are others who are very mature. They would sit down and have a proper conversation with you; they have their head screwed on."

There is an unusual scenario outlined in these quotes where boys are demeaned on the one hand and yet some girls are dependent on the acceptance of boys. Focusing on Ruth's assertion from a Bourdieu (2001) perspective, girls wanting to be a lad could be seen as resistance to the gender expectations they are sub-consciously exposed to at school or alternatively an acceptance of masculine domination. The girls may also identify that there is more prestige to being a boy. The demeaning of boys is indicative of a dominant cultural discourse in school, which does not include boys as social actors. The excerpt also indicates that some of the girls use their power as a group to wait for the boys to come to them almost as an act of gender dominance. This could also be viewed as conformity to gender expectations. The girls are waiting for their prince and not willing to make the first approach as this is not the 'done' thing. Pula et al. (2012) argue that men have a higher group and individual social dominance orientation. Girls in secondary school classrooms have been found to construct themselves as more sensible or mature in contrast to boys who are silly and immature (Reay 2001a) as identified in MP.

It is also inferred that boys would be less trustworthy (Felmlee et al. 2012). However, Betty cites the opposite saying:

> "There's something about girls; you can only trust a few, like I have only three close girl friends whereas I have loads of boys as friends and I prefer it like that."

Mary supports this view stating:

> "I used to trust the girls and then they kinda showed me a reason not to. I still trust them but not with everything."

The MCG portrayed a presentation of their girl friends as absolutely trustworthy but none of the WCG did. They all expressed their experiences with girls as being fraught with disclosures of confidence with other girls and bitchiness. In contrast, there was also a greater degree of trust among the WCG for boys. It may be the case that the MCG are stage managing their presentation of their interactions and friendships as very positive to uphold their sense what MC friendship should look like. It appears that self presentation devolves into many areas of the MCG lives. Zook and Russotti (2013) found that academic self-presentation strategies among students varied according to ability and gender. Many high-achieving students used strategies that hid grades or provided vagueness around grades or amount of study done. Although this study relates to academia rather than socialisation it still provides evidence which confirms the use of self-presentation strategies in schools with high achievers and also indicates girls are more likely than boys to adopt such strategies. Some girls expressed a level of ignorance about boys and an open admission of discomfort around them. They admitted that going to an all girls' primary and secondary school contributed to this unease. This would suggest that spending time within a gendered, classed traditionally strict and academic setting for many years has contributed to a fear of the unknown. A girl in group interview 3 confirms this point:

> "Even my primary school was single sex so I don't know, I feel like I missed out. I think I found it harder because I went to a strict school to make friends with guys now because guys can be a bit crazy like. I don't think I could trust them as much like."

The counterculture girls in MP cited feeling more comfortable in the company of boys from outside the school. Laura says:

> "My friends are mainly boys as I find them less bitchy. Nothing happened me here; I just didn't fit in any way. I think I needed to go to an all boys' school, I grew up with all my friends being boys, one girlfriend and that was it, and then I moved out to the country and I was surrounded by all these ones and it was like so much hassle, whereas I would've happily gone to school like to have a little chat and leave again, but it was like 'watch this one and that one' it was just the bitchiness. I wouldn't be used to that at all..."

In a way Laura is rejecting the femininity of 'those ones' she didn't fit in with from a social class and gender construction perspective. These domains are intersecting for Laura. Where there is evidence of social divisions across certain types of school (Lynch and Lodge 2002) one may expect that friendships would also demonstrate such divisions. However, Brooks (2005, p. 163) finds that 'young people are able to maintain friendships that they perceive to be increasingly socially unequal.' This was not evident in MP; except for social acquaintances there were no real mixed class friendships. O'Hanlon (2010) suggests that a lack of cultural recognition prevents real inclusion of culturally alienated groups in schools.

9.2 Friendship Roles and Responsibilities

Many girls referred to friends as a source of learning or education, there to help you to learn about yourself and how to manage situations. Feminine identities can be socially constructed in schools, families and within youth culture, as can aforementioned masculinities. Hegemonic discourses define femininity for some and marginalise those who fail to conform (Aapola et al. 2005). It is evident in the literature by Brooks (2005, p. 182) that 'Friends informed a young person's sense of self and position relative to others.' One girl discussed how she would observe how her friends studied in the study hall, so she could learn to study better. This is an example of institutional habitus where the vested social actions like studying are unwittingly imposed on individuals. This element of institutional habitus led to homogeneity of practice.

It was not enough to study communally but to study communally well which has an Aristotelian (2004) philosophical sense to it. This social reproduction of study as a practice is beneficial in culturally reproducing high examination results which will maintain interest in the school by parents and thus secure numbers to protect the school's success and viability into the future. The school provides this study service after school due to the demand for it from some parents and students. This is an example of parental agency in requesting their daughter's study needs be met. It also illustrates the collaboration between parents and the school in mutually reproducing the ethos culturally, socially, economically and symbolically. A student in group interview 2 talks about friends for learning beyond academia:

> "Everyone brings different personalities and interests to the group and it makes it interesting you know, cos you get to learn so many different things, that like someone could be totally into music and someone completely into to sport or someone who's mad to go out all the time, it's just its so different cos you're able to touch off all these different topics. You get to meet and discover a part of you that you didn't know about."

Girls used friends to seek comfort or to defend them in conflict and to share secrets. Carrie expresses the practical, psychological and social supports her friends provided her with:

> "It's unbelievable how much your friends help you through. I actually don't think I'd be able to sit it without them. I was talking to a friend the other day and I was saying I'm really screwed for this subject. She said 'listen I will talk you thru everything, I was the exact same a few weeks ago and now I'm fine'. They know where you're coming from cos they've been in the exact same position. You need to talk about it like you can't bottle things up."

Here, the relatively homogenous nature of the group offers a social advantage in having friends who are coming from a place of total empathy. Equally, the students liked being depended on and feeling trusted as much as being able to access support. The reciprocity of friendship was clearly articulated by many of the girls.

Pahl (2000) describes women's friends as important partners in working out emerging identities. Women's friendships are bounded by talk and communication with important qualities such as insight and intuition considered very important (ibid). The girls in MP emphasised their ability to be themselves when they got time to chat together outside of school. Women's talk in a leisure context is also an important space for women to resist traditional feminist identities (Green 1998), although this was not evident in MP.

9.3 Disagreements among Peers

Confrontations among the girls were dealt with differently depending on the girl and the reason for falling out. Girls discussed fights over boys, jealousy of someone's appearance and popularity as contentious topics exacerbated by stress and fatigue. Hey (1997) also identified a lot of pain among girls who feel unhappy about their looks or do not have a boyfriend. Physical violence was rarely used to resolve fights indicating conformity around what a girl should or should not do; yet physical aggression has been identified among girls, particularly those marginalised in the school system (Adamshick 2010) .

The individual and institutional habitus in MP combine to the extent that physical fights are not an acceptable way to sort out disagreements in the school. There was a high level of conformity in accepting this and physical fights were extremely rare. Literature contests that this can be a stereotypical expectation of girls as passive with physical fighting being in direct contradiction of feminine expectations (Wing 1997). Some girls admitted to a shouting match to express their anger, others said they would let time pass and pretend the issue had not happened. Hey (1997) identified pressure on girls to construct the traditional feminine bourgeois ideal which involves avoiding anger. Similar to MP, being disagreeable was the antithesis of the construction of a 'nice' girl. The structures that bound friendships include important social processes where friendships are proactively created and maintained (O'Connor 1992). Girls sense of themselves change as they move into adolescence and their identities are constructed through positive and negative experiences with friends (Lieblich and Josselson 1994).

Besag (2006) discusses the fractious nature of girls' friendships. Girls' social relationships can be quite unstable with girls changing groups as a form of control over each other which was visible in MP. Girls exert power and manipulate each other by varying allegiances which indicates the intensity of emotions involved in girls' disagreements (ibid). Verbal fights between two friends in MP would often be mediated by another group member in order to maintain the status quo within the group. The ability of the girls to use agency to mediate a verbal quarrel transforms a potentially destabilising event by quickly returning to good order. The girls spoke of the difficulties experienced when caught in the middle of a fight. Mary articulates this:

> "It always happens that we start fighting through text and when were having lunch the next day at school one of our friends will try to make it more awkward and say like 'why are ye fighting?' I remember one time me and Jane's birthdays are one day apart and all our friends from 6th year brought us in a birthday cake and we weren't talking at the time and they were like ye're not getting the cake until ye talk. So you know that kinda made us cos they don't like a division in the group cos they like us all being involved. It's not like one of us gets excluded it's just that it's kinda awkward cos one of us isn't talking, we still laugh and stuff even if one of us isn't talking to each other. Sometimes it wears off and we just start talking."

This excerpt is a good example of group agency to solve conflicts, maintain harmony and ensure conformity within the larger group's structure. There is a contradiction between the breakdown of girls' relationships being viewed as a symbol of cultural disorder, yet the solution being seen as an individualised one (Gonick 2004). In the example above a peer group solution is found to end a dispute. This scenario is represented in the micro-theoretical approach of Simmel (2009) whose work focused on types and forms of interaction. Simmel looked at interactions among dyads and triads and discovered social possibilities for the role of mediator in a triad. This would suggest more positive consequences for the mediation of disagreements among friendships within larger peer groups.

Sometimes fights are borne out through text messaging or on social media either publicly or through private messaging. Social media will be discussed in a later theme but it is worth noting here that Facebook was regularly cited as a means of excluding others. Not accepting friend requests sends a very clear message and the setting up of pages for events where only certain girls are invited to 'like' or 'join' has a similar effect. A greater sense of belonging within friendship groups was found in boys but not girl users of social media (Quinn and Oldmeadow 2013).

Where cyber bullying is identified among girls using social media (Ang and Goh 2010) avenging bullying through online acts was cited by the girls in MP. A few girls who bullied another student in one group were promptly removed from the Facebook friends list and left out of the forthcoming social events and parties. This is the use of agency and collective group power to repress a lack of conformity to the group norms and in doing so reduce bullying. This is akin to Bourdieu and Wacquant's (1992) concept of struggles in the field. Social media can therefore be used to differentiate who is accepted by the group and who is not. Bullying is prevalent in schools and bullies who bully alone are more likely to target same-sex victims (Seals and Young 2003). There were very few incidences of bullying cited by the girls and bullying was not tolerated according to the girls interviewed. The literature clearly identifies various forms of bullying, the long term damage bullying can have and the new Irish anti bullying guidelines (2013a) may go some way to highlighting and dealing with school-based and cyber bullying.

9.4 Leadership Roles

There were friends willing to take on informal leadership roles to help maintain 'order' within and among the year groups. This is cited in the literature where Edwards (1994) claims that informal, not elective leadership is the most stable leadership style among school-aged girls. In addition, members of groups were delegated institutional official leadership roles elected by the student body.

School experience can be mediated through a common cultural currency where those aligned to popular school culture will become socially reproduced as leaders to role model for the next cohort of students (Ali 2003). Official school leadership roles are also representative of how social hierarchies are maintained and reproduced (Eder et al. 1995). Where boys' popularity is gained through athletic prowess, girls achieve status on the basis of their parents' social class, their appearance, social skills and academic success and are also selected for roles on the basis of this status (Adler et al. 1992). This is evident in the characteristics of the leaders selected in this study who were invariably MC and generally academic girls. This is similar to Apple (2013) who introduced the concept of a new 'hegemonic bloc' where the power of certain groups dictate the basic goals of society. Here the school has a role in producing knowledge but also inadvertently processes people as agents of cultural hegemony in order to protect a successful tradition and ensure its continuation. In addition, studies have shown that post-primary schools have a significant role in the development of peer relations from a gender and race perspective although the single-sex predominantly white nature of MP girls does not facilitate an investigation of this (Shrum et al. 1988). Nonetheless, MP girls voted for their MC friends for leadership positions and this reinforced the sense of alienation for some WCG. Betty says when asked if their group are represented in leadership roles: 'Definitely not no-one in our group gets picked to do anything.'

The interrelatedness of Apple's (2013) spheres of society enable corporate ideologies to transform schools into agencies for the production of the state's economic needs. This would suggest certain types of female leaders are endorsed more than others on the basis of social class and academic success, as is evident in MP. This is similar to Gramsci and Forgacs (1988) who claim that our very consciousness can be saturated by hegemonic practices. Schools and their students enable dominant cultural production in a myriad of ways including the hierarchical positioning of certain girls to leadership positions without really considering it a problem of equality for others. However, this does have consequences for the long term ability of girls to take on leadership roles in their later careers.

There is a routinization in relation to the selection of certain girl leaders in MP (Giddens 1984). The issues related to power and jealousy within formal leadership positions in the school are discussed in more detail in Chapter 10. Aforementioned informal leadership roles were important among all friendship groups in MP. Many students did not acknowledge the existence of an official group leader, seeing it instead as a negative status to hold. Status in terms of possessing an individual share of social honour was perceived as having an unwarranted position of power (Giddens 1971).

This resistance to acknowledge or support those who vied for leadership of the group may be to avoid being repressed by a girl perceived as equal to them (Foucault 2000). A self-designated leader in MP was perceived as bossy, controlling or wanting to get their way. Laura says 'There are those who like to think they are leaders, but we don't really have leaders we just have groups.' Girls seen as vying for a leadership role were criticised and afforded little popularity. Archer et al. (2007a) found that WCG who adopted ladette hetero- femininities to generate identity contributed to their own disengagement from education. This is because these girls became positioned as alienated from the dominant constructions of the ideal academic female student. Similarly, in MP stepping out from the dominant group expectations of leadership could be viewed as challenging the power of the group. Anne Marie explains the contestation around leadership as dominance:

> "There's one girl and if she says the sky is blue then the sky is blue, but if someone with a stronger voice says the sky is pink then she'll agree the sky is pink. I'll go with the flow kind of. There's another girl and if things get too quiet then she will start a fight to have something to talk about. There's another one and she's the leader of the group and what she says goes, there is no other option. It's my way or the highway. She can be very manipulative. She'll say something and you'll say no and then she'll keep saying it and keep saying it until you think it's your idea and you're thinking 'hold on a minute how did this happen'. There's another girl in that group that depends on that leader thinking 'well if she is not here then I am literally nothing'.

> The leader doesn't realise she is doing it because I used to be a bit like that too till I realised, 'hold on a minute you can't talk to me like that and you can't treat me like that and tell me what to do' and that's when she started to not like me and to push me out."

This quote infers the girls prefer to see friendship roles within an advisory capacity but without an obvious hierarchy. This reluctance among many girls to see leadership as a positive entity draws attention to Archard (2012) who claims that student to student mentoring and role modelling is necessary for understanding the skills required for leadership and also to highlight the existing gender barriers for women leaders.

There are many aforementioned barriers to women's promotion in many employment domains and senior levels of management in education are still dominated by men (Lynch et al. 2012, O'Connor 1995). This may be connected to a lack of meaningful leadership opportunities for girls in school as is evident in MP. Anne-Marie's quote demonstrates the power dynamics embedded in seeking dominance. Greene (2000) suggests 'seeing big' where school interactions must be viewed from the vantage point of power. Where the general norms of friendship among friends are complex in MP, so too is peer leadership.

9.5 Gender and Social Class underpinning Friendship

Capital is connected to a person's social class and it is useful to examine how forms of capital and social class act as tacit mediators of friendships among the groups (Bourdieu 1986). Class analysis and relationships of power and domination are well served through a combination of capitalist class relations and Bourdieu's forms of capital (Flemmen 2013). Because MP is mainly comprised of MCG the school population were generally from a similar social background. As mentioned previously, members of the counterculture group were predominantly from WC backgrounds and certainly where the other groups would admit to saying 'hello' to this group they did not become friends with them. This was due to their tendency to get in trouble though, not social class, according to the other girls.

Cait says: 'You'd always say 'hello' to those girls...You wouldn't be as close though.' It was clear those girls were not conforming to the dominant culture's norms around academia and decorum and were unable to access the social capital available to the other groups through networking and relationships (Bourdieu 1986). In addition, the MCG sought affirmation from their parents and the school and it may not have been in their interests to make friends with girls who got in trouble. WCG sought recognition from members of their own groups inside and outside school serving to alienate them further from the MCG in MP.

Laura says:

> "But the girls in here are not really my real friends, they're just kinda people to be with. I think I fell into a wrong group anyway. I always hang around with a loud group at school, people who are in trouble all the time."

The counterculture members were overtly separate to the main year group in their space, attitudes and practices. It is documented that a lack of adherence to or involvement in the daily peer activities regarded as important by the cultural group, may therefore lead to marginalisation for some peers (Bowley 2013, Delamont 2013, Paechter 2007). Some MCG did not consider girls in other schools as potential friends. Ruth explains:

> "In other schools there's way more of a problem. Where I live there are people from disadvantaged estates and my parents were like 'don't hang around with them' and I'm glad I'm not like that. They get into so much trouble, they're completely... they're way different."

While parent influence was not investigated directly in this study it needs to be acknowledged that behind the girls' comments and opinions rest quite powerful and committed parents who can use their influence directly and indirectly to influence the girls' friends. This was also found by Crozier (2000, 2008). There were a few girls like Anne- Marie from WC backgrounds who integrated well with the year group as a whole by adopting many of the cultural patterns of the MCG. These girls conformed to the institutional habitus and experienced relative success academically.

They worked hard academically, behaved well in class and usually conformed to school rules and expectations. The girls in MP had some understanding of class differences and fitting in. A girl in interview 4 explains a girl who left MP due to isolation from peers:

> "She made herself isolated... I was in her class. She was grand in 1st yr and we were all friends and in 2nd year even the friends she was friends with, she turned against them, she was kinda in a different social class though."

Here the blame for not fitting in was placed squarely on the WCG actions. There was no hint of regret or sympathy that the girl was so isolated, reinforcing the lack of empathy for difference. This is affirmed by Bourdieu (1986) who identifies that social class can operate in different ways from specific tastes to certain aesthetics to values. A girl from interview 3 represents the view of WC peers as girls whose: 'Parents have morals that aren't like our parents.' One MC girl said she would go out of her way to interact with girls of a different social class, with a view to finding similarities. This points again to that search for a likeness to one's own position and culture, as Bourdieu (1984) outlines, as opposed to embracing difference. Anne-Marie spoke of a new girl coming into the year group the previous year and her difficulty fitting in due to her association with a socially inferior group:

> "A girl did come in last year and she was in the group I was in but when she started hanging around the 'not so cool' group, (they don't fit in anywhere really, not cool not studious not sporty, just quiet). But when she moved to that group, the group I was with stopped talking to her immediately because she was seen as less of a social class but mind you the girls I used to be friends with speak to no one. They had no right to do that to her."

The MP counterculture group choose not to interact with the other groups appearing to prefer the isolation to the difficulty fitting in. Where school structures kept them together in classes and study, they separated themselves physically within social spaces and culturally in practices, attitudes and rituals. Laura mentions a girl she was previously friends with in the earlier school years who adopted the dominant culture to get on well at school:

216

> "Well recently getting our picture done everyone was 'God you haven't changed at all,' then you look at other people and it's just the way the clique ended up. I know a friend who changed herself to fit into that loud popular group. I think that was sad really cos she'd have been very like me and had her own opinion but the way she expressed it people didn't really like, she just changed herself."

This is an example of rational action to get a desired outcome (Gambetta 1987). This need to change oneself to fit into a cultural school setting has been reported in the literature and is also relevant for boys' schools (Mills and Lingard 1997). Archer et al. (2007b) found that outspokenness countered MC dominant discourses. Lynch (1999) assert that at times, the only way to succeed in hegemonic systems is to change oneself to adopt the dominant dimensions and cultural traditions of the institution. There is habitus evident above where the girl adapted individually to the socialisation effects of the group and the change to the person's individual habitus is a practically conscious one. This is a specific example of conscious agency by an individual to adapt her identity (Giddens 1984) in order to conform to the dominant group structures within MP. This is possibly also mediated by parental and institutional agency.

9.6 Newcomers and Friendship

Many girls acknowledged that coming into a school as a new student would be difficult. They cited examples of two girls who arrived in 5th year, neither of whom fitted in. One ended up friends with a few other quiet girls also alienated from the main groups and the other girl rarely attended school after difficulties with integration became evident. There was a disruptive social dimension attributed to new girls arriving. This is an expected finding in that it is often difficult to come into a place where friendships are already formed. Zorc et al. (2013) highlight social and educational challenges for those who change schools, particularly if this becomes frequent. The difficulties faced by newcomers is indicative of the institutional habitus being effective in ensuring continuity, where a newcomer with a different individual habitus must conform quickly or may struggle to integrate.

There was a pervading sense that a newcomer must adapt to the existing girls' ways of acting rather than a mutual adaptation to integrate someone new. This indicates the ritualistic nature of acceptance of newcomers to schools (McLaren 1993). Knowing some members of a group socially before coming into MP was cited as an advantage to integrating. This reinforces Sorin and Iloste (2006) who claim that school mobility strategies be adopted to ease these transitions between schools. Smyth et al. (2009) examined the integration of newcomers (albeit this solely related to immigrant students) into Irish schools and discussed the social integration difficulties faced by those trying to fit in and make friends. Participants in that study indicated that newcomers coming during first year would find it easier than in later years when peer groups were well established. Recommendations were also made to enhance support structures to assist the integration of the children from foreign nationalities. Supports to assist the integration of any new student may be useful due to the tight knit friendship bonds that do develop among a culture-sharing group over time. The disruption of these friendships can be resisted despite rhetoric of openness to new friends, as this study contests. Ruth explains:

> "We are definitely open to new friends but if they have different views then you may not get on which makes your life and their life harder. We had a girl come in 5th year and I didn't get on that well with her. She had completely different views and I got angry with her when she expressed different views. I would think 'you are in some other completely different new world'. It was also hard to get on because they had different values and you'd be helping them and then it would come to the holidays and they wouldn't bother with you, they wouldn't care."

This excerpt outlines the way in which the group imposes itself as a powerful structure. Newcomers expressing different views had their agency constrained by the group and this maintained and reinforced the dominant group's worldview (Gramsci and Forgacs 1988). Befriending someone from a different group could also be seen as a disloyal act towards the group you are a part of. Anne Marie explains how this issue affected her:

> "The group had a problem with my new friend and they basically told her that she can't be friends with the group anymore and I personally didn't like that so I said I'm going to be still friends with her and they didn't like that so I left. So now there is pretty much the two of us and a few other girls and now I'm much happier. There are 6 of them in the group. But they wouldn't talk to anyone outside their group, no one. If you break the rules you're out. Pretty much that's the way it works."

Goffman's (2009) concept of the 'outcast' and 'stigma' is relevant here. The freedom to express individual views or break the group rules, whether a newcomer or existing group member, is again seen here as countering the dominant MC group structures (Archer et al. 2007b). Anne-Marie managed to exude confidence and assertiveness whilst still maintaining the respect of many of the 6th years. She acquired the title of being 'alternative' by the other girls. Her agency enabled her to preserve her self-identity and resist the constraints of the dominant groups. This would suggest a girl could choose to be different but there could be varying consequences for the individual ranging from being labelled as 'alternative' or facing possible 'segregation'. This links to Laura's outspoken character in first year alienating her from her teachers.

Kosten et al. (2013) attribute high levels of peer conformity into low self esteem and greater social anxiety. Ruth provides an insight to the low tolerance levels evident in 6th year stating:

> "I'll definitely keep in touch with some girls but I'll be glad to see the back of some people at the same time. Six years is a long time and there are certain people in the year I just don't want to see again. Too many different characters and people who don't want to do well. I don't mind the people who don't want to work but those who interfere with those who do want to work. Literally you go to some classes and they're messing and chatting and you turn around and say 'shhh' and they don't care they just laugh at you like so I'll be glad to see the back of them."

Ruth was referring to the counterculture girls here. This quote would suggest that the pressure of the Leaving Certificate examinations impacted on friendship and tolerance of others. It highlights the all consuming nature of academic success for many of the girls in 6th year. Brooks (2007) explores how young adults choose to order their friendships throughout school. She confirms that the intensely individualised and competitive nature of academic work exists alongside cooperative friendship relationships. However, these were not pure relationships of friendship. They were competitive peer groups, manifestations of the negative consequences of the marketisation of education today. These were tensions also evident among the MP girls. The pressure of the Leaving Certificate exams was frequently cited as a source of stress among peer relationships; girls did compare academic progress and achievement and a girl's profile in the school was connected to her academic attainment. It was also clear in MP that real and also pseudo friendships of convenience or necessity existed (Giddens 2013b), primarily around academic issues and study.

9.7 Emos, Goths, Hipsters and Knackers

The girls referred in passing to groups of girls who were sub-groups within their main year group. These groups were more visually evident as trends that existed up to TY. They disappeared in senior cycle due to the exams dominating much of the girls' time and interest and possibly due to a real need to conform to school structures in order to do well. Emos were identified as girls who wore black clothes with pale make-up and listened to a particular form of dark music. Emo stands for 'emotionally in touch'. These are adolescents apparently unaffected by people's opinions of them. There were not that many Emos in the school according to the girls nor were there identifiable Emos in the sample group, but they were criticised during discussions. For instance, a girl in interview 3 explains:

> "I think some of them try to be different for attention...It's a bit annoying that they put a label on themselves, like if you don't care then you don't care, why put a label on yourself...if you are self confident and secure and everything you wouldn't be trying to follow a certain group."

The negative attitudes portrayed suggested a discomfort with an Emo's lack of conformity to MP culture and viewed expressions of individuality as needy or attention seeking. Lara emphasises how many of the girls felt about Emos:

> "Emotional like they listen to emotional music and they kinda have a reputation for wearing dark clothes, a bit like Goths, they want to be different they want to stand out. It is funny cos they'd all dye their hair the same colour and they're all dressed the same so they're trying to be unique but they're not. They're the same as all their friends."

Baker et al. (2013) concur that adolescents claim that Emos hate themselves and Goths hate everybody. The music Emos listen to has been blamed as a risk factor for contributing to mental health issues and suicides among Emo teens. This is because some of the lyrics glorify self harm (ibid). Goths were similar in appearance to Emos and also wore dark clothes and listened to dark music. Shirley describes Goths saying:

> "People who hate life some of them are probably lovely people but when you see them they're always wearing black and their hair is on their face and it's dim and depressing to look at, they're never having fun. You see them in ripped clothes and they don't care, it's as if they don't want to be here."

Hipsters avoided being seen as mainstream by wearing revealing clothes. There were hipsters very like the hippies of the sixties and also a more modern version. Those similar to the sixties hippies still wore flowers and bought hippie music. The others seemed to just wear short skirts and tops and as one girl in group interview 3 pointed out: 'They just look homeless like they're in tatters.' A final group briefly mentioned were the 'knackers'. They put on xxxxx accents, wore gaudy tracksuits and large hoop earrings. There were small numbers of all these groups in the school but they were more common in broader peer culture, in Irish society. None of these groups received positive comments from the girls. They were alien to the MP culture and not known personally by any of the girls. Therefore, there was limited interest or understanding shown towards them by the girls. Here, mainstream MC culture is afforded more status than all other cultural sub-groups in a locality as a form of hegemony (Gramsci and Forgacs 1988).

9.8 Friendship Shaping Identity

Girls saw friends as well as the school as shapers of identity. The school as a structure informed friendship formation. This relates to Bourdieu's (1992) concept of 'field' which provides contextual boundaries which can interrelate to an individual's habitus, shaping an individual's experience or mediating practices. All of the girls acknowledged the impact friends had on behaviour and identity. Ruth gives an example here:

> "Here, you know, you can be completely yourself. Your friends mould the person you become. I think that has formed from the group, we are ourselves."

Ruth provides a synchronicity between the individual self and the group identity. This indicates the power within the structures of the group and how they influence identity. Julie spoke about her friends 'bringing her out of herself' as she was painfully shy on arrival in the school.

Ruth said her friends changed her morals and led her to a much better attitude to school and helped her to have a stronger work ethic. Shirley spoke of the calming influence her friends had on her. Kingery et al. (2011) found a positive correlation between peer acceptance and achievement in school. Shirley expresses a need for acceptance by her peers. For instance she adds:

> "I used to be really loud I was just like ridiculous. I'm still loud, I am, but I've calmed down a lot but I was kinda immature like always looking for the novelty in class.. It was a bad trait I had to get rid of. You know in the retreat every year where we are told to only write down good things well I want to know what people really think. I would love to know what people don't like about me... I think sometimes you should know what other people's opinions are as it's important to listen to what someone has to say to you. Like if someone has a bad opinion of you I wouldn't want someone to think bad of me, you have to be liked I mean imagine if nobody liked you oh my god...I'd feel so bad myself you know."

Shirley is openly sensitive to the group's attitudes and perceptions of her in the last quote. This would suggest she is dominated by the group and modifies herself according to the group's expectations by conforming in order to be accepted. Jordan (1995) explains how self and gender identity is a conception a child brings with them into the school. The pervading culture in the school can then influence the changing identity of the child. This is particularly evident in the last excerpt. The dominant group structures enabled Shirley to use agency to change who she was in order to belong, but also constrained her from being herself. This illustrates the duality between agency and structure where both can be enabling or disabling. The power of the group structures and the power of Shirley's agency combined to make significant changes to her identity possible. Therefore agency is both liberating and constraining, as are structures (Giddens 1984). Shirley is making the decision to fit in as the consequences of being alienated are quite a painful prospect for her. In this way, the dominant or broader peer group norms are shaping and influencing her self-perception and identity.

9.9 Sites and Types of Interaction between Friends

Social media in MP is the primary form of communication and interaction during the school week. Other than a quick chat while eating during lunchtime, almost all of the girls were in school or study elsewhere from 8am until 9pm. There was little time to chat and many expressed being too tired on arrival home to do any more than eat and check notifications and messages on Facebook or twitter. Phone calls or actual meetings with friends during the week were not feasible. This indicates the pressure of state examinations and all consuming nature of education. Texting close friends was still popular but expensive in comparison to free internet conversations via Facebook. This group alluded to the fact that friends are made through Facebook and sometimes conversations took place online before an actual meeting takes place. This comment could have related to communication with boys as well as girls but this wasn't qualified by the girls. Facebook was used to organise events, collect money, invite individuals into a group or keep them out, post photographs and chat publicly or privately.

Quinn and Oldmeadow (2013) found that social media created a sense of belonging in young adolescents. Similarly, Subramanian (2013) identified that gossip over social media sites established a sense of belonging for those inside the group and enabled the negotiation of gendered norms, which can be associated with an individual but also group identity. In contrast, O'Keeffe and Clarke-Pearson (2011) found varying positive but also negative impacts on socialisation associated with use of social media. The MP girls claimed social media made staying in touch much easier and most girls seemed to have little issue with the lack of face to face interaction. The relative anonymity of Facebook in MP did enable bullying or negative comments about a person at times. Carrie explains:

> "We made this group on Facebook and it's all about our events like if we have a movie night we put it up but it's private so no one else can see it...Facebook has been great for putting up links for debs dresses or 'guys what do ye think of this' or it wouldn't be anything like bitching or anything. It tried to happen but I put my foot down right away and I said we didn't make this page for this kind of carry on. Like 'look at what she's wearing, look at her hair' and that sort of stuff. It was the same people again that wanted the gossip. I said what the page was for, just to have it as a page to check on and it hasn't happened now since, so it's good."

There is agency by Carrie evident in the excerpt as some girls used social media to criticise others. Carrie used agency to eliminate the potential bullying but this excerpt also highlights how easily cyber-bullying and a lack of empathy for others could develop online, as highlighted by Ang and Goh (2010). Appearance and clothes as distinct categories of taste are used to make delineations between the girls (Bourdieu 1984) as seen above. Although social media can enhance communication and social networking and technological skills, it also enables potential internet addiction, bullying and privacy issues (O'Keeffe and Clarke-Pearson 2011) as highlighted in MP.

Snapchat was another social media site gaining in popularity. A picture known as a 'selfie' could be posted with a comment and exchanged with friends for laughs. Ask fm was also mentioned as a bullying site where people looked for feedback on some element of themselves and invariably they got abusive comments back. The girls felt it appealed to younger girls who sought attention, but it was not popular in 6th year. Facebook was certainly the most discussed social media site and a few of the students mentioned feeling addicted to it. Julie admits:

> "It's a way of keeping in touch with the world when you're studying; you end up constantly refreshing to see if you have a new notification."

Social media sites enabled social capital to be accumulated among members of the friendship groups and also to exclude those who were outside the group or who did not conform to group norms. It was used as a form of coercion (Bourdieu 1991) where members inherently agreed to conform or were 'unfriended' from the page. This sometimes operated as a positive system in the way it reduced potential incidences of bullying. Bullies could be clearly and promptly given the message that such behaviour was not welcome among the group and would not be tolerated. The school policy on internet use did not permit the use of smart phones in school to photograph or communicate with anyone online or by text during the school day. The school did not have any control over internet use outside the school day but were willing to investigate cases of online bullying that involved girls in the school. Bullying as a distinct theme was not examined in detail by this researcher but emerged briefly in the context of social media interactions. It is an area which clearly offers scope for further investigation.

The girls did manage to occasionally meet face to face but it was usually a monthly sleepover movie night rotated among the girls' homes. All attendants were MP girls as these gatherings were viewed as a school group night in; to maintain friendships, have fun and gossip. Ruck et al. (2011) cite sleepovers as one of three key contexts where peer exclusion is practiced, although this did not appear to feature to any degree among the girls in MP. The monthly sleepovers are, however, evidence of ritual in the girls' lives. Shirley describes her experience:

"Well you know you just munch and chill out, you know you get to know people a lot more, you get to see people, you get to read people , it's good to see the other side of people like the joker, you know inside they're just there to make you laugh. You hear what they're going through and you're like, they're just like me and they have those problems just like me."

At these sleepovers the girls could talk for hours and not even notice. Often the movie remained unwatched. This is documented in the literature where girls' friendships are bound by incessant conversation (Pahl 2000) and this is similar to O'Connor (1992) who describes the types of conversational friendships among women. The girls spoke intuitively about how the conversations were fielded. Sometimes the discussion moved towards dealing with the pressure of the exams but that may also be avoided as a topic depending who was there. The girls knew who could cope with talking about stress and who preferred not to and would alter the conversation accordingly. Cooperation for mutual benefit is a collective act, a form of social capital which invests in human and physical capital (Coleman 1988).

Sleepovers were an act of civic solidarity and social reciprocity but also served to reproduce the social norms of a MC group which enabled cultural reproduction (ibid). The social ties developed during these sleepovers enabled the girls to problem solve and develop a moral resource from the trust developed. This adaptation of social capital into a form of moral capital through friendship and social trust is documented by Putnam (1993). Coleman (1988) asserts that individuals organise collectivities in order to ensure the public good. Individuals come together to achieve personal goals but in doing so contribute to the group goals. This form of social exchange is evident in the sleepovers organised by the girls to support them individually and collectively through a difficult year. The counterculture girls did not discuss having sleepovers but tended to meet outside in their communities, near fast food restaurants or near other local amenities. This suggests that the sleepover may be a MC activity supported by parents, perhaps as a form of social activity surveillance.

The girls' conversation tended to be limited at school to study and exams but on designated social nights out the girls talked about other peoples' lives. Sometimes they discussed girls from other schools, boys and looked forward to the future. The debutante ball (debs), holidays, college and the end of school were also topics regularly discussed. Some of the girls admitted spending a lot of their time discussing appearance, hair, make-up and clothes. Carey et al. (2011) cite appearance-focused conversations as magnifiers of the body-image concerns of adolescents. Music and sport for those with a particular interest would also be talked about. Planning the next social night offered something to aim towards. Discussion was permeated by study and exams with almost all informants, except the counterculture group girls, admitting to talking about little else but study. Keira summarises these points:

> "This year all we talk about is study. Even at lunchtime it's all study and what are you doing. Even if you ask what you did at the weekend it's still all study all day long. Sometimes we might go to the cinema the odd time. Outside of school in the summer some of my friends wouldn't be that close to me so it's harder. You'd like to talk to them but it wouldn't be that easy."

Again, the almost oppressive nature of state examinations in the Leaving Certificate year is evident here. It also indicates how powerful the need to conform to this commitment to study is as well as the pressure of expected examination performance (Hannan et al. 1996).

9.10 Conclusion

This chapter has examined the girls' peer interactions and friendships. It indicates the pervasion of many elements of hegemony, power, conformity, resistance and ritual but also staunch support, collaboration, collegiality and protection of each other. The girls use agency to choose their friends but the formation of large groups leaves the individual girl needing to mediate membership of a group structure as well as creating friendship bonds with a few. In addition, it is clear that parents play a part in the friendship formation of their daughters. This is different for many of the girls.

Some of the girls admitted to making their own choices of friends. Others experienced indirect parental pressure to make the 'right' friendship choices. In a few cases there was direct explicit parental instruction to avoid certain types of girls. It was generally felt that girls from a similar class who were interested in academia were ideal friends for the MCG. The WCG tended to be less influenced by parents in their choices of friends. This suggests there were varying levels of freedom to decision make and varying influences from parents with regard to friendship choice. The group structure can serve to protect and dominate simultaneously and the MCG are more capable of positioning themselves as group leaders (Gramsci 1973). Membership of a social group requires allegiance and conformity to the group and does not support individual agency to invite others in unilaterally. The groups are relatively homogenous which enabled some transition between groups. Breakaway groups form when the leadership of a group is resisted in the MC groups (Giroux 1981). These groups are far less powerful or influential (Foucault and Gordon 1980).

In the friendship groups mediation was successfully used to return harmony to the group (Simmel et al. 2009). Therefore, the need for conformity to group norms and structures restricts individual agency in the area of friendship, irrespective of the social class nature of the group (Giddens 1984). However, this can produce some benefits where those who break non-bullying norms are given a strong message to stop the behaviour or face removal from the group. This could also be seen as transferring the problem away from the group as opposed to dealing with it. The girls' resources to do much more, however, are limited by time and pressure of examinations. While non-conformity or resistance of group norms leads to alienation from the group, resistors sometimes create new groups and in this way agency is associated with the transformation of structures (Giddens 1984). Power dynamics are at play within and between groups where girls vie for leadership and change identities to be accepted into a dominant group (Lynch 1999). There is a physical, cultural and social separation of the counterculture group from the other more dominant groups, although both groups are complicit in this, choosing not to be friends with groups outside their social class (Gramsci and Forgacs 1988).

Within the dominant groups there is a lack of appreciation and understanding of anyone who is different, too outspoken or who challenges the group norms. This could be seen as oppression of other girls (Collins 2000). There is an evident discomfort with non-conformity. Nonetheless and importantly, the girls admit that they need each other and have systems in place to ensure positive connections are maintained. The use of social media and sleepovers as ritualistic activities and the emphasis on appearance culture ensure group and individual identities are created (Jackson 2013). This shared identity formation creates bonds and allegiances between group members. These connections strengthen the power of the group and provide a valuable and positive sense of belonging for group members.

This chapter illustrates through a number of examples how the individual's relationship with self, their relationship with others in their group and their relationship with the institutional habitus combine to reproduce and transform actions and practice (Bourdieu 1998). These three triangulations produce a pattern central to how they merge for each individual. Some girls conform to fit easily into the peer groups. There is little need for agency or change. These girls are members of the dominant culture and there is a 'doxa' which facilitates conformity (ibid). Some students transform themselves to belong to a group and fit into the group and/or institutional norms of behaviour. They change their own habitus to belong and conform to avoid alienation. Others maintain an individual habitus which they use to resist socialisation into the dominant habitus. All of these are acts of agency or transformational power (Giddens 1984). Girls resist the tacit modes of cultural dominance, often making friends outside the school, particularly the counterculture girls (Giroux 1981). Anne-Marie uses her agency to disable the structural power of the dominant peer group. In this way individual agency can enable and disable in a similar way to structures (Giddens 1984).

Therefore, agency is used to conform, resist power, change identity, or exhibit leadership. There is a clear practical consciousness and in some cases a discursive consciousness evident among the girls as actors of this agency (ibid). Agency and structure are interconnected on a number of levels and are also mediated by the school (Giddens 1984). They can both exert power and transform or resist change.

Both can enable and constrain as opposed to structures having the sole constraining power. However, structures have a greater power over those with a conformist disposition. Due to the socialising role of gender constructions which position girls as passive conformists (Adler et al. 1992), such constructions when combined with the power of institutional structures, are greater than the power of the individual agent. This is seen in the conformity to study for such long periods every day. While many of the girls used agency to conform to this most girls still claimed it was very difficult and few resisted. The all encompassing nature of the Leaving Certificate is highlighted in the ways in which the girls exert agency and conform to school structures. It permeates this decision-making process and thus agency for many of the girls.

Although power dynamics are evident, ritualistic solidarity and the creation of identity through peer interactions is also present in MP (Lieblich and Josselson 1994). This is still mediated by social, cultural and contextual similarities between the members of the school groups (Gramsci 1971). Some ritualistic activities like social media use and sleepovers are used to exclude negative behaviours and include and support mutually agreed group norms. It is clear in this chapter that friendship, which the girls deem critical to their school experience, could benefit from a greater understanding and acceptance of difference. This is appreciably difficult where the majority of the girls' peer experiences in MP are with girls like them. As long as this is encouraged, facilitated and accepted by parents, institutions and society as an issue of rational individual choice, it will be difficult to address. Baker et al. (2009) claim that the social movement model of egalitarian change could offer gains for both groups, but only where there is an acknowledgement and will that diversity provides mutual benefits to our understanding and appreciation of each other. The school are shackled in initiating this change though. The uncertainty that MC parents would remain loyal to the school and its ethos combined with the fear that success in academia might be compromised by embracing greater diversity leave the school vulnerable. In such a situation one must also empathise with the predicament the school is in and acknowledge its relative powerlessness.

Chapter 10 Power and Inequality

Power is a feature of all institutions where individuals, groups and authorities interact together and can be used to bring about cohesion (Foucault 1980). The effects of power are seen in actions (ibid). Power can also be exercised with varying levels of consciousness in different ways in MP. Sometimes the power brings positive outcomes for some of the girls. Where power is exercised the effects of that power can be unpredictable because power operates between the written, spoken and symbolic discourses in all the structures of society (Foucault 1980). This chapter examines power structures within MP but is more interested in the girls' use of agency in response to this power. It also focuses on the girls' use of power within the peer group. The teacher-student power dynamics in MP are explored. This chapter examines the social reproduction of norms, discusses examples of conformity and assesses the level of awareness the girls have of this conformity in relation to conscious agency. It explores resistance by girls across all the groups with a comparison of the level and types of resistance observed and described. Conformity and resistance are steeped in a struggle for power between the girls, their peer groups and the school authorities. Finally, the role of parents as partners in the girls' education is teased out.

10.1 Conformity among the Girls

There were two types of conformity evident through the actions of the girls in the study. Firstly, there was a need for girls to conform to their group norms and there was also conformity to MP culture. This aligns to the idea of a personal and institutional habitus working together in a 'field' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). The theory of hegemony provides a lens to understand the high levels of conformity observed in MP as discussed in Chapter 8. Gramsci and Forgacs (1988, p. 399) divide conformism into two forms, namely Jesuitical and rational stating:

> "Jesuitical is an artificial and fictitious conformism created superficially for the interests of a small group or clique and not those of a vanguard...a rational form of conformism corresponds to, to the minimum amount of force needed to obtain a useful result."

Both forms of conformism were evident in the actions of the girls and their peer groups in MP. The school ethos and MC culture in MP fulfils a traditional function to maintain certain expected norms which tended to be culturally bound. The recursive historicity of an institution's values, practices, actions and rituals subordinates those who do not display or conform to them as they are expected and routinised, according to Giddens (1984). Laura expressed that she no longer got along with many of the girls from the counterculture group but as she had been with them for so many years she did not want to break friendships with them now. Betty spoke about how some girls had completely changed to fit in to groups, but she herself had avoided this saying:

> 'It depends on your personality whether you change yourself or stay true to who you are.'

This is supported in a study by Kosten et al. (2013) who identified varying conformity dispositions. These points illustrate a connection between conformity and agency and a variation on Gramscian (1973) Jesuitical conformity. Rather than this conformity being solely for the interests of the group it also serves Laura's individual interests to fictitiously remain part of the group. Laura admits conforming to membership of a friendship group with girls who are no longer friends, as a conscious, rational act of agency (Giddens 1984). This is in keeping with Gambetta's (1987) claims that rational choice is deeply connected with an agent's plans and ambition for the future. Laura assesses the situation and decides that leaving things as they are is preferable given the contextual and situational circumstances. She is soon to leave the school and so the investment to end things, which could prove emotionally difficult, is not worth the effort. Betty's quote above raises questions as to whether the group is exerting power on individuals to change in order to fit in or whether the girls are using agency to change in order to fit in. It is likely that both are in operation together indicating a duality in the way agency works.

Agency and structure overlap as dual exercisers of power (Giddens 1984). Betty uses agency to resist changing herself to fit in with a MC group. If Betty changed to fit in, this would be a denial of her cultural and personal identity. It could also be that the power of Betty's individual habitus and cultural difference constrains her from conforming (Bourdieu 1986) or that she is so far from the MC cultural habitus that it would take a lot of effort to close the gap. These enabling and constraining elements of agency and structure appear to operate on either end of a continuum where they interact together at varying levels of consciousness for the individual agent. Here the power of individual agency operates as resistance of conformity.

Is the agency authentic or perceived here? Is the agency enabling real choice or is the habitus disabling real agency? The rational argument is that individual habitus operates as a structuring structure with a level of agency within it, as Bourdieu (1998) suggests. Betty uses agency but it is constrained by her individual habitus which is informed by her WC culture and social class. Agency and structures do operate together but there is an important issue to raise here. The extent to which the individual believes they are making a reflexive conscious decision is akin to Giddens' (2013) conceptual framework where context interacts with human action. Betty's decision was based on the context at the time. She says:

> "I think it's harder to try and fit in. Is it not just easier being you rather than being a certain way to fit in with them? It depends really on yourself...I know I only have to last another few weeks to be honest and then I never have to see these people again so it kinda like I don't care anymore."

Oppression and dominance are key issues of structural injustice within education which distributive justice approaches cannot solve (Young 2006). Yet Betty reclaims the oppressive power she has exerted upon her by nature of her difference. The use of the word 'them' is powerfully distancing in this excerpt. This conscious act of authentic agency may relieve the sense of structural group oppression and build emotional capital so that Betty feels a sense of control amid a dominant hegemonic peer environment.

For many girls it was easier to conform to the 'signification' structures of the school (Giddens 2013). This is akin to Gramsci (1973) who asserts that hegemonic dominance relies on the consent of those exploited. There are macro and micro power dynamics also evident here. There was an acceptance among many students that there was not a great impetus for girls to express individuality in the school. The institutional habitus succeeded in constraining agency but there is 'doxa' here. The girls felt it was not that they could not be different, but that they had no real interest in doing so. Perhaps the success of the school in maintaining discipline and order through codes of behaviour and vigilant supervision of the girls eliminated such resistance. It is also possible that parent were co-collaborators in supporting a collective homogeneity in school to ensure academic success was the primary focus of their daughters.

A routinization of practice is evident here as is Giroux (1983) who contends that dialectic thinking and critical consciousness can lead to resistance but also a decision not to resist, despite the dominant ideology being seen as restrictive or unfair. Certainly, remaining friendly with group members required certain conformity to actions dictated by the group. Anne Marie describes her difficulties conforming to her initial peer group and how she resisted using voice:

> "The girls that we used to hang around with wanted it to be 'you think like me you act like me' and that was it. Really like I'm not a sheep like. I'm not one of these people who sit there and say 'ok'. I have my own opinion and I like to voice it frequently."

This transition period from sixth class to 1st year is well commented on in the literature. Smyth et al. (2004b) point out that MC schools draw from a wide variety of feeder primary schools which corresponds to the context in MP. Girls tend to be more nervous than boys during the transition but WCG are less positive than MCG on entry to second level, as was the case with Mary in the present study. O' Brien (2003) cites similarly that differing class distinctions between girls influences their ability to negotiate the transition, with WCG finding the transition most challenging. This is compounded if the WCG struggle to accept the MC norms.

In addition, MCG with high prior attainment tend to be the most likely to engage and achieve in school according to Smyth et al. (2006). These points are reinforced by MP girls. Mary recounts how she managed the transition into 1st year:

> "I remember when I was in 1st year I wasn't shy at all. I was kinda wild like and I just used to talk to everyone. I was kinda being different and I didn't show them that I was pure wild. I was kinda acting shy so they would like me. I started talking to them and then we kinda became friends and stuff. Once I was friends with them then I was myself."

The stage management of identity has been discussed in relation to the MCG but here it is also evident in Mary's initial presentation of self. Being shy was quickly identified as a likeable trait indicating the dominant gender construction adopted by the MCG upon entry to the school. This would suggest that social and cultural reproduction strategies were at play in wider society prior to admission to the school. This cultural discord can affect school experience and can impact performance for students, as found in a recent study by Xu and Hampden-Thompson (2012). There was evidence of expectations of MP girls to be feminine and to avoid tomboyish behaviour; yet there were tomboys. These expectations were mediated both by the peer group and the school. There is much previous and current literature examining elitist girls' schools in particular that categorise a well-rounded girl as demure, feminine and conformist (McRobbie 2007, Wardman et al. 2013). Anne Marie gives an example of femininity expectations among her peers saying:

> "If a girl is rough they would be like 'what?' they wouldn't say it but they would be looking at them kinda strange."

Yet Ruth saw a role for the tomboys in the school. It was described that these tomboys fulfilled the absent boys' role in the school. A girl who was a tomboy was constructed as being male with characteristics similar to those assigned to boys in a previous interview. Ruth explains:

> "You can definitely be a tomboy. There are girls in our year and the year below us who are tomboys. People find it funny the fact of girls being boisterous because boys aren't in this school so when girls behave like that people find it funny. Tomboys balance the dramatics which some girls thrive on. They calm people down and they tend to be people you can have a laugh with. You can chill out with them and talk about normal things as they wouldn't be so dramatic."

Tomboys are positioned in a similarly superficial way to how boys were in Chapter 9. This positions tomboys as accepted on the one hand but alienated from 'real' girl interactions on the other. Tomboys resist the dominant gender discourses and suffer a subtle form of alienation as a result. There is a space to present a different gender construction among the girls but ultimately peer conformity brings the majority into line. In the literature girls acting like boys are devalued during play (Blakemore 2003). Betty confirms a culture of gossip among the dominant group towards those outside the group:

> "They talk about everyone, like as in you say one wrong thing you wouldn't even mean to say it, but they would twist it into a point where you'd say 'are you serious I didn't say that', they just talk about you for no reason."

The accusation of other girls twisting the meaning could also be due to cultural differences in understanding the intention behind certain comments. Nonetheless, the need to say the right thing indicates a cultural power and dominance to conform or face punishment by the dominant girls (Foucault 2012). Ruth was initially best friends with a girl in the counterculture group but explains how her critical consciousness led her back to becoming a deputy head girl and an exemplary student.

She demonstrates a discursive consciousness where she uses agency to adhere to the institutional habitus (Giddens 1984). Ruth says:

> "I've had a few good friends over the years. They've been in different groups actually it's really weird. My old best friend now sits at my table at lunch. As best friends we were inseparable she was always at my house, me at hers. At the end of 3rd year, 4th year we stopped being friends. She was going down different routes, she wanted to be hanging around with people I didn't.

> I felt I was always texting my parents and lying about where I was. I didn't like that and I was getting into trouble with my parents over that because I was getting caught. We stopped being friends then because I felt it wasn't good for me. She wanted something else and I wanted something else...There were times afterwards where although we weren't angry with each other we weren't rushing over giving each other hugs. There was a distance there and we knew it."

This quote suggests that parental surveillance induced a self regulation within Ruth to conform. It raises the expectation that proper friends need to be 'good for you' as opposed to just being themselves. Choosing academically focused friends is a form of social capital (Goldring and Phillips 2008) which seems to be controlled by parents to some degree. Yet Gramsci's (1971) collective will is also evident here. Ruth and her parents had the power to collectively shape Ruth's reality through acquiring her consent rather than coercion. This shows low levels of individual autonomy for Ruth despite being a young adult.

Shirley expressed a similar experience where she admitted observing some of her group getting into too much trouble and made a conscious decision to move away from them without the advice of her parents. She claimed it was the school that initiated her decision, which she made out of a fear of becoming labelled a troublemaker (Goffman 1971). In both cases these decisions were borne out of the exertion of a dominant power beyond the self. MP as an institution reinforced the dominant culture through control and reward of behaviours and actions they deemed important to maintaining excellence in education (Gramsci 1973). The school ensured power was maintained among those possessing the 'right' forms of capital due to pressure to compete in an educational market which they are part of and relatively powerless to change. Shirley identifies the importance of academia among the peer group who vote for these leaders saying:

> "They do pick the kinda intellectual girl even for head girls and stuff. They're lovely girls like, but they are all like into their books and I'd prefer if it was someone who'd interact with the year and tell us what's going on."

The preservation of power in the form of knowledge is evident in the quote where the girls in power do not share information (Apple 2013). Lynch and Lodge (2004) assert that the focus on academics endemic especially in single sex girls' schools is likely to militate against the development of leadership skills among girls. This is because the opportunities to develop the personal and social elements of education are minimised in favour of independent study and a focus on points for college. The pressure to maintain a status of excellence and the constraining nature of the points system reduces the agency of MP to address this issue for its girls. In addition, middle-class parents place high value on extra-curricular activities as integral to their child's future success (Gutiérrez et al. 2010). MP is an active agent in encouraging and facilitating extra-curricular opportunities like sport and music. However, these sometimes feed into a cycle of achievement and excellence and are often, but not always, based on competitions rather than pure participation. Furthermore, these activities tend to be populated by girls who are already very successful in school, despite them being open to all girls. These points indicate the willingness of the school to offer broad opportunities to all girls but also identify invisible barriers to participation and engaging just for enjoyment.

Also evident in the discussions on conformity were the thought processes that ensued among the girls when they identified themselves as different. For example, Shirley spoke of the need to get rid of 'bad traits' and Betty felt lazy for not giving her whole evening to study. Laura blamed herself for the way she was, because despite supportive parents the exams just did not mean everything to her. Deviant patterns were found to be a means of coping with self rejection or failure (Kaplan and Peck 1992). The WC girls' habitus induced guilt for not conforming and for using agency to resist. It acted as a form of internalised self regulation. The temporal aspect of the everyday practices and social experiences of the girls rarely led to innovative constructions (Bourdieu 1998). Consequently social reproduction continued. Laura reinforces this saying:

> "At the end of the day school rules are to stay in school and I used to take off so ...I am bold as such. I wouldn't be cheeky or anything but once I do break the rule that is being bold isn't it?"

Sometimes when she resists school culture Laura is seeking the social power denied to her by her peers, due to class differences. Reay (2001b) identifies WCG as seeing 'nice girls' as lacking the toughness and the right sort of attitude to compete or stand up to boys and authority. They chose to be 'spice girls' playing pranks and flirting with boys, in a bid for social power. In this study, Laura plays the 'messer' or deviant role, all too often, acquiring little social power and damaging her ability to learn which is akin to Willis' (1977) boys. She states:

> "We formed a sort of us against the school pact even at lunch now you know the girls who do and don't go to class we'd be kinda in that group but we'd be good enough for going to class . I dunno but I find that this school is very strict so I rebel from that and our group stick together and just be bad together."

There is a discursive consciousness (Giddens 2013) identifiable here in the way Laura describes her deliberate resistance. The conscious unity of the counterculture group to rebel is expressed as a conscientized step towards praxis (Giroux 2004). This group's agency to resist is made due to knowing how to use their power to take action against their oppression. This is in keeping with a pedagogy towards freedom (Freire 2000a) although it does not have any other effect but to alienate these girls from their formal education. There is a lack of power to transform their educational direction due to the girls' minority status and WC backgrounds (Giroux 1981).

10.2 Types of Power in Mount Privet

Post-structuralists recognise power as a major feature of social life. However, post structuralism is criticised for de-centring the individual in sociology and dismissing human agency or intuition (Ritzer and Goodman 2003). Yet Giddens (2013b) sees agency as a form of power and this was evident in MP peer groups. The girls who chose not to make friends with the peer leaders were disconnected from the decision making in the school but those who ingratiated themselves with the head girls were rewarded with information. There was a clear hierarchy between the head girls and deputy head girls as to who had responsibility for what and particularly who had direct access to the principal. The head girls were afforded the most exciting roles like organising the debs' ball and the graduation whereas the deputy head girls felt they had a supporting role at best. The girls used individual agency to access knowledge by ensuring connections with more powerful peers. There was a definite power dynamic in operation between the head and deputy head girls where the head girls obtained and kept information and only shared snippets with chosen close friends, sometimes not sharing it with the deputy head girls. This is similar to Lansford et al. (2009) who found that in order for peer leaders to retain power it was important they remain accessible and responsive to close group members. There was evidence of meanness between girls of similar social class and culture. Ruth, a deputy head girl explains:

> "Yea like they're nice girls I don't want to look jealous like 'why are ye getting to do everything? If they're working grand at it, I suppose fine, if they needed our help they'd ask for it. They were the girls that were voted first I suppose? At the beginning of the year we were involved and then sometimes we'd go and it would be...Oh he (principal) only called the head girls."

The use of power to repeatedly repress others, as Foucault and Gordon (1980) describe, is evident here, even among apparently equal peers. Gramsci (1973) discusses how a group's enhanced awareness of their own interests can lead to conflict in the quest for the upper hand. The head girls' cultural dominance is central to their power but there is a crisis of authority here (Gramsci and Forgacs 1988) as other dominant girls challenge that power.

Within peer groups, there were leaders and these leaders dictated group activities and group membership. The chances of being ostracised increased if you vied for power (by expressing an alternative view). There were aforementioned power plays between the years, with 1st years expected to move out of the way for everyone else by virtue of being new to the school.

As you progressed up the years the power you theoretically had increases. This is in keeping with Freire (2000b) where the oppressed become the oppressors.

Table 10.1 illustrates the status hierarchies among the girls in 6th year

| Head Girls |
| Close friends of head girls |
| Deputy head girls |
| Student Council members |
| Other middle-class girls |
| Counterculture group, comprising mainly of WCG |

As the girls moved up the years they were in possession of greater cultural capital and social capital due to enculturation to the dominant cultural norms leading to an expectation and realisation of greater power. This accumulation of embodied cultural capital is identified by Bourdieu (1986) where he explains *bildung*. This is where a personal investment of time and labour is required in the inculcation and assimilation or the cultivation of culture. It was a source of annoyance to the 6th years that despite reaching the pinnacle in terms of expected power they felt it was not materialising. A few students even admitted feeling intimidated by some of the younger students which suggested pockets of resistance existed throughout the school and that hierarchical power was contested.

This is connected to Foucault's (2000) belief that there is always resistance irrespective of the system and resistance is co-extensive with power. Even facilities like toilet blocks were sites of power between 6th years and other years and also between 6th years as a year group themselves. This is an example of heterotopias or spatial control of power as described by Foucault (1984). The 6th year toilet block was the only one in the school not used by other girls. In addition only certain 6th years were welcome to socialise there and the space tended to be occupied by the counter culture group, especially if they were using the space while skipping class. Laura illustrates this saying:

> "I think we're the most disrespected year. Last year if you went to the 6th year toilets you'd be petrified to go up there you'd run to another bathroom, but like a 3rd year was in there the other day and one of the girls said 'this is the 6th year bathroom' and it wasn't said meanly and she said 'who says ye have the right to own anything in this school?' The years younger than us are getting worse. When we were in 1st year everyone hated us the whole way up and the years below us are getting bolder and bolder."

This quote indicates anger and frustration that the current 6th year had to wait to have their hierarchical long awaited status as top of the school and feel the climate is changing now they are there. There is a strong expectation of conformity to hierarchical deference towards and by the older girls. Younger girls use agency to resist the power and dominance of the older girls by occupying their social spaces and questioning their perceived authority (Giroux 1981).

10.2.1 Teachers and Power

Alongside power struggles between the girls and other year groups, there were also power plays between students and teachers. Laura was frustrated with feeling unable to disagree with some teachers and consequently resisted by skipping their classes, ultimately compromising her own education. This is similar to Willis's (1977) and Fagan's (1995) studies where students were complicit in their own educational demise. Laura says:

"I've gone into a few classes and it's been 'who do you think you are, you're younger than me and you shouldn't be talking like that'. It's not that I'd be getting smart, cos I don't get smart with teachers, but I think they think they're teachers and like they're better than students and they're there to tell you what to do like. Fair enough if they're teaching me that is grand, but if I have an opinion just listen to it and if you don't agree fair enough and that's it really... If the teacher is disagreeing with you, you just get thick with them and that's happened to me as well and I've not bothered going to their class anymore like."

This quote points out that there is a time and space for speaking out and in the teacher's classroom or in their subject area the teacher maintains authority and control. There are parameters here which Laura did not adhere to which caused conflict. Archer et al. (2007b) cite that girls generate identity through speaking their mind as it highlights agency and promotes visibility. There is a paradox here as speaking out counters the MC hegemonic discourses and can lead to conflict as experienced by Laura. If Laura was to be accepted she would need to generate greater self surveillance by using her agency reflexively to present a more conformist attitude (ibid) which many of the MCG have chosen to present. Laura resists the domination she feels she experienced from some teachers but alienated herself from her education in the process. Teacher power was found in Lynch and Lodge's (2002) study where teachers exerted greater power over girls than boys. Some girls complained about overly disciplined approaches to classroom management and levels of condescension towards them. This resulted in poorer relationships and less enjoyable classes. This is supported by literature by Fagan (1995) citing that if a hierarchical relationship between teachers and students is prevalent this is likely to cause conflict within such power relationships irrespective of social background. The use of power by teachers was not considered widespread or prevalent among the girls. The girls frequently mentioned the consideration shown by teachers in 6th year and most girls spoke openly about their fondness and gratitude for their teachers' guidance and support. This confirms that most teachers did not abuse their power or exert authority. It would have been interesting to get the perspectives of teachers but this study only focuses on student perspectives.

10.2.2 Power Structures

The total ban on wearing make-up in MP was seen as unfair particularly if girls had acne or were self conscious about their facial appearance. Body dissatisfaction and a strong appearance culture exists for adolescent girls, according to Clark and Tiggemann (2006). The compulsory skirt in MP also facilitated a physical constraint to boisterous movement or rough play. The elements of a traditional girls' uniform in a school can promote an image of femininity and in a practical way limit boisterous behaviour (Lynch and Moran 2006). A study by McDaniel (2013) asserts that school authorities believe uniforms promote improved school climate and social responsibility. The Department of Education in England and Wales (2013) have recently issued guidelines on the lowering of costs and simplifying of school uniform specifications to deal with economic barriers to uniform purchase and similar surveys have been conducted in Ireland by the Department of Education and Skills (2013b) in order to assess the support for uniforms. The MP uniform was a domain of contested power within the school but most importantly a visible and physical domain used to regulate conformity. A girl in interview 2 states:

> "They want everyone to be prim and proper even with the uniform they want us all to be the same. Now, not that I would want to be the same as everyone else but I would try to kind of conform ...I feel if you're gonna be here for 6 years you have to."

This quote suggests again that conformity is a rational choice (Gambetta 1987) and a deliberate act of agency to succumb to school structures. However, many girls found ways of individualising their appearance and resisting homogeneity. Some had their skirts so long their socks could not be seen and many wore a different colour or design of sock than the uniform required. Others wore hair bands or hair accessories with lots of glitter and colour although these were banned when they became too obvious.

A few resisted both the uniform and the culture of the school by wearing their pyjamas rolled up under their skirts. Some girls in MP considered the uniform an affront to their personal expression. One girl in interview 4 says:

> "The shoe thing is pointless like you are being told what colour shoes to wear, you should have comfort in what you're wearing it's a bit weird like that they're insisting on a certain coloured shoe... It's nothing to do with school; it's not like it's affecting your education, what shoes you wear."

It was widely identified among the girls that leniency on uniform rules was a privilege as you went up the school years where a blind eye was shown by some teachers to many breaches of the code. This is evidence of teacher agency where the constraints of disciplinary structures can be modified once compliance has been achieved in earlier years. Stickney (2012) cites that teachers practice freedom from power by re-negotiating and critiquing school rules over time. Patriarchal power in relation to uniform was described by Anne Marie with regard to her lack of correct school shoes. As stated previously school shoes must be all black. 'Recession shoes' are cheap canvas shoes that some of the students began wearing in defiance of the black shoe rule. By buying really cheap black shoes, the girls felt they could not be reprimanded but could annoy authorities whom they knew would not approve of them as they were of poor quality, thus they inherited the name 'recession shoes'. This was overt resistance by the girls. These shoes were subsequently also banned by the school despite being black, because they looked cheap. Anne-Marie admitted using agency to directly challenge the principal's authority by wearing the wrong coloured shoes when she felt the school rules were unfair or impractical. This is an example of discursive agency and active resistance (Giddens 1984) and a sign that as some of the girls prepared to leave the school they developed greater confidence in arguing a point. Most girls admitted they would not challenge authority as they felt this was the wrong thing to do. Wardman et al. (2010, p. 259) concur with the existence of passive conformity for girls stating:

"...it raises questions about the taken for granted discourses of feminine achievement and discourses that equate femininity with passivity and subservience in the patriarchal order".

Anne Marie chose not to conform to this gender construction of passive compliance having weighed up the time left in school and the practical argument against buying new school shoes with a few weeks left.

10.3 Patriarchy and the School Management Structures

Patriarchy is described as the inherent subconscious subordination of women by men in order to sustain unequal power (Goldberg 1977). Social class divisions, such as those which exist in this study, can reproduce patriarchy by dividing women into separate social class groups (Millett 2000). Socialisation from an early age contributes to some women accepting the dominance of men and adopting roles, practices and careers expected of women. It also positions women as the natural carers (Lynch et al. 2012). Laura expressed a preference for speaking to the female deputy principal when it came to emotional issues. She states:

> Ms xxxxx (deputy principal) would kinda understand you, if you were stressed out to your gills, you know how girls get more stressed than boys or whatever you know over stupid things ..."

The reference made to girls getting stressed over 'stupid things' and the references to emotionality is indicative of the power of negative gender constructions of over-emotionality imposed on women. Clarke et al. (2011) argue that schools need to hear and respond to adolescent girls' voices expressing emotional difficulties in purposeful ways. This is linked to Lynch et al. (2009) whose work on the neglect of the affective domain in Irish schools. The teaching profession is divided hierarchically by gender with less female representation as the post becomes more senior (Lynch and Lodge 2002). The neo-liberal government politics in Ireland and the male dominance and control of educational management is an area of significant inequality.

It has relevance to this group of girls embarking on their careers in the real world as the girls exhibited an acceptance that male principalship was just the way schools were organised as opposed to there being a potential issue of equality for women who aspire to educational leadership.

There are cultural codes embedded in the appointment of senior managers in schools. This culture of 'new managerialism' (Lynch et al. 2012) follows the competitive nature of schooling, values long hours, and insists on intense dedication. These demands are very similar to the pressures felt by the girls in Leaving Certificate year, which suggests the homogenisation of candidates for this sort of work by schools. Yet, it is clear that chances for women to succeed in acquiring management positions are opportunistic (Lynch et al. 2012). This is in part due to women being seen as having responsibility as carers in families and care being an absent concept in neo-liberal capitalism. Lynch et al. (2012, p. 83) state:

> "The ideal type of neo-liberal citizen is the cosmopolitan worker built around a calculating detached self...Neo-liberal thinking in education subordinates and trivialises those aspects of education that have no (measurable) market value."

The care prerogative for women manifests a position of constraint for women's ambition and is internalised into the identity of some women. The sense that women must juggle family and career in a way not applicable to men serves to restrict agency by gender and position particular barriers for women that are not positioned for men. The 'self selection' (Lynch et al. 2012, p. 153) out of certain management roles is possibly institutionalised from some girls experiences in school.

Some girls who were elected onto the student council felt that their power and responsibility was in name rather than practice. Significant barriers to effective student councils in Irish schools were also cited by Keogh and Whyte (2005). Ultimately without the school management's support the girls could make no changes and over time they claimed they gave up trying.

Ruth recalls the realisation of having a position of theoretical power on a student council whilst having no practical impact:

> "On the student council last year I felt whatever we tried to do the answer was 'no we can't do that'. There was always an excuse when we were trying to do it. We couldn't have a fun day or anything like that cos there were windows being put in, stuff like that, excuses. We were trying to do stuff and it was really annoying cos we felt we weren't doing our job properly and we were getting fed up and people starting messing in the meetings and the teachers weren't really that interested last year in our group and we just didn't get much done."

The failure to act enabled subservient gender hierarchies to be reinforced with the girls rendered powerless and frustrated (Lynch and Lodge 2004). Many girls accepted the school's authority from the point of view that it was providing an excellent academic environment within which they could achieve. Lara indicated that she saw male leadership and principalship as natural. She believed the use of power was a necessary requisite to running a good school and was happy as she put it to have 'a good strict principal'. Teacher and principal practice impacts on the socialisation of young people and can have an effect on gender justice issues when males reinforce gender segregated work roles, positioning men as disciplinarians and women as nurturers (Haase 2008). Lara supported the school management's authority as she was benefitting academically. On the other hand Shirley was less content saying:

> "When it comes to it, it is always said, two percent of the school got this in their Leaving Certificate and you're just like, what about us who are just like nice people who actually have a balanced life and aren't just studying..."

This quote indicates pressure on the school to maintain MC market advantage (Ball et al. 2010) but this pressure is then filtered down to the girls. Parental pressure is also part of the pressure students' experience (Lynch and Lodge 2002). Verbal messages as well as symbolic ones have left the students under no illusion regarding the academic aims of the school. The way schools and indeed countries are now compared (PISA 2002) could encourage competition among schools for the most academic students, often from the MC.

Sometimes the talks by the school management and/or teachers to the girls which were intended to be motivational and encouraging, served to cause stress and frustration. Julie felt cross about this pressure reminiscing:

> "They tend to go on about how a few girls last year got their academic scholarships and how we get above the national average and the highest grades in the country. All of the girls last year were so smart; lots of teachers referred back to them being so good. Once xxxx said 'At the end of 5th year last year, those girls would all have been well able to sit their Leaving Certificate, a year early, but I wouldn't be able to say the same about ye as ye are not working'. If you are trying hard as I was, that is a bit mean. When people says stupid things like that we are 'here hang on'. People would love to say something but we don't."

These competitive comparisons brought the girls together as a collective unit and have been commented on in other studies (Lynch and Lodge 2002). This example is indicative of Foucault's (1980) claims that power can repress individuals and in this case larger groups. However, the use of group resources and agency served to minimise the damage done to the group as they subsequently dismissed the comments in their peer group discussions. Weissbourd (2011) problematises this issue of projected pressure on students, citing damage to perceptions of happiness and lower morality due to a competitive ethic. In this instance the girls came together and bolstered their own resilience using their personal qualities to support and reassure each other.

The girls spoke about losing their privileged 6th year lunch room space it if it was not maintained and kept tidy. This had the effect of putting some peer pressure on the counterculture group to conform and help keep it tidy. Here the dominant groups are engaged by the school to use peer pressure to coerce the counterculture group into conforming. However, in keeping with Foucault's (2012) theory that power can be positive, this power is being used as a persuasive force used by the school in the maintenance of a shared space.

The constant threat of losing the space meant the dominant group cleaned up after the counterculture group because the counterculture group still refused to help tidy despite the threat of losing the space. This was an interesting shift in power with the counterculture group caring less for the space and resisting both the school management and dominant peer groups' power by refusing to share the cleaning of it. Some of the girls accepted a male-dominated relationship with their boyfriends outside of school. Shirley comments on her friends' relationships with their boyfriends and her single status:

> "I'm having fun but they're restricted when they go out having fun cos they've a boyfriend at home texting 'what are you doing?'...The boys are always so dominant, the girl is never the head of the relationship saying what they want, so I think it's a joke."

There is conformity to patriarchal ideals evident in how some girls adopted a subservient role in social relationships with boys. The need for there to be a 'head' in the relationship points to a perceived hierarchy between girls and boys. Holm (2010) identified that while girls now enjoyed improved agency they still remain lower status in the gender hierarchy. Some of the girls avoided having boyfriends in Leaving Certificate year because boys presented another pressure. In addition, it was difficult for the girls to find time to spend with them. Others avoided the power dynamics they had in previous relationships with boys. Some girls mount challenges to male dominance, as Reay (2001b, p. 164) points out:

> "Girls are accruing power in both the male and female peer groups and providing spaces for girls to escape gender subordination by the boys"

However despite 'girl power', boys are still positioned as powerful. Boyfriends are discussed more fully in Chapter 11 from a youth culture perspective.

10.4 Resistance to Power and Inequality

Resistance is evident in MP among the lower socio-economic groups and to a lesser degree among the MCG. The latter group only have small pockets of resistance and then only with issues that ultimately will not negatively affect their academic image and outcome. Radical democracy and cultural production theory examine the nature of power in relation to cultural difference. Power is seen as an aspect of all cultural production and, according to Fagan (1995, p.97) 'Culture produces power, knowledge, identities and ways of life; it therefore has the power to reshape social life.' The examination of schools as institutions of inequality suggests that schools' orientation particularly through curriculum can be gendered and classed. Lynch (1999, p.16) argues that:

> "It perpetuates particular cultural traditions at the expense of others, and in doing so reinforces images of what is or is not culturally valuable in a given society. If one's cultural traditions and practices are not a valued part of the education one receives, if they are denigrated or omitted, then schooling itself becomes a place where one's identity is denied or one's voice is silenced."

These perspectives mirror the context of the study site, in terms of hegemony, social and cultural reproduction and the mediation of agency and structure. There are many manifestations of resistance in MP as cases of counter-hegemony among the culture-sharing group (Lynch 1999). Resistance occurs where there is a sense of inequality or a cultural alienation from the school, its structures or the school's dominant social class (Willis 1977). This is significant for the small group of WCG in the year group. The hidden curriculum or relational life of the school is often a perpetuator of inequality. Individual competitiveness and control in schools is hugely influenced by the gender and class composition of the school (Lynch 1989).

Schools distribute and produce culture and in doing so can reproduce class relations and inequalities. This happens as students resist, contest and contradict elements of the school system.

Their resistance results in partial penetration of the system but little change, resulting in the social reproduction of the class structures as they exist. In this way, schools' hidden curricula are inherent in social and cultural reproduction (ibid). The following examples of resistance in MP support many of these points.

The counterculture friendship group grew out of a common bond of getting in trouble and then sticking up for each other. Spending every lunch time together in detention assisted the creation of these close bonds. The group also indicated another habit they had in common, in that they all smoked. Tucker et al. (2012) found that discipline problems at school often initiated smoking as did having poor grades. Laura spoke of the loyalty shown among the members. If one girl did not get her homework done or decided to miss class then the entire group would skip class or pretend to have forgotten in solidarity. They had worked out early on that teachers are much more likely to punish two individuals harshly for breaking school rules rather than a large group. This is an example of Gramsci's (1973) force of collective unity. Laura explains:

> "It's worse if there's two caught together. Big groups are too hard to punish and investigate. Being caught on your own you won't get in trouble either. We could just say we were sick or depressed or something."

Betty admitted struggling socially at school having difficulty settling into a very traditional school with mainly white Irish girls. She was readily accepted into the counterculture group who by their own admission was full of girls who didn't fit in for lots of reasons. There was no mention of racism being experienced by Betty. This counterculture group were a powerful force throughout the school years truanting regularly. Truancy is described by Smyth et al. (2008) as a form of resistance or challenge to the power of a MC institutional habitus and values. It is more prevalent where students find the discipline unfair and where relationships with teachers are poor. Truancy was not a common occurrence in MP tending to be exclusive to the counterculture group. This incident of truancy occurred just weeks away from the high stakes Leaving Certificate examination described by Laura:

252

"Well our group, people don't want to associate with them cos they're scared they'll get in trouble or something. Even yesterday we got in trouble, we were in xxxxx and someone sent an email. Two of the girls were driving and they said 'come on we haven't done anything big all year we'll take off' and we were saying 'we have no clothes where will we go' and we said 'Feck it who's going to catch us out there'. The rest of us we parked up at a beach and there was no one around. So then one of the girls put up a Facebook video and they looked like a pack of tinkers. Thank god I wasn't in it. I said if you put that camera in my face I'll kill you and they were revving the car. Boom, boom, turning up the music and fists pumping in the air. Got an email to the school, some teacher saw it, it was Facebook that caught us, out in xxxxx no one saw us, and we didn't get out of the car all day. Then they found a bottle on the floor and ran around pretending they were drinking, they weren't like but if the school seen that bit we'd be gone like..."

This quote indicates the need for the counterculture group to make their final act of resistance prior to leaving school. The use of social media ended up being the reason the girls were caught which indicates its role as a form of surveillance where girls' whereabouts are accessible online. Nitzburg and Farber (2013) found that Facebook intensified adolescents' surveillance behaviour as well as jealousy. Even though this was the most extreme example of resistance discussed by the girls it was interesting that Laura was very keen to point out that even though there was a bottle in the video there was no drinking of alcohol. There is an unconscious consensus among the group that the individual agency or group agency is still strictly bounded by the institutional habitus and it illustrates how the girls still conform to some degree within their resistance activities (Bourdieu 1998). The girls did not want to be accused of drinking during the day in uniform. Some staff members believed the girls in question enjoyed the attention and notoriety of being known as troublemakers. However, interview discussions with the group dismiss that idea. Mary spoke at length about her impulsive nature and how she failed to think before she acted disruptively. She was full of regret for becoming a troublemaker and far from being proud, was mortified and upset at her notoriety saying:

"I'm always in trouble like and I hate getting in trouble like. Anything I do I get caught. If I was eating my lunch they'd find out about it... whenever I do get in trouble it's not just one teacher that knows about it it's the whole school like it's broadcast and it does annoy me cos I know that teachers always talk about me in the staffroom and stuff like I'm not the only one. I think it's unfair cos teachers who don't even teach me know my name...Now I don't think I'm a good role model for younger students cos I don't have high grades or anything and I'm always in trouble and I'm always on the intercom . When I hear my name on the intercom I feel a knot in my stomach. I can just feel, I know all the reactions of the teachers in their class and they'd be like throwing their eyes up to heaven."

This indicates how some practices which schools inadvertently use to communicate with students can induce an intense emotional response. It also raises the issue of public humiliation being experienced, albeit unintentionally. Finally, something as innocuous as the use of an intercom system can be unerringly used as a form of coercion or control. Despite Mary's regret, the members of this counterculture group all admitted that their best memories would be of the times they got away with doing the things they were not allowed to do. The adrenaline and thrill of the deviation seemed for this group to surpass the guilt and short lived remorse that would inevitably follow.

Browne (2013) highlights that the causes of challenging behaviour are complex but connected to the environment and context for students. The girls disrupting together and sharing a counter-culture bond is reflected in the literature where Griffin (1985) argues that the management of being a young woman adhering to the culture of the school and also being a 'normal' member of the adolescent peer group is challenging. The romanticised impression created of girls and their expected morality can put pressure on some girls to resist this construction (Henwood et al. 1998). The public announcements (PA) system Mary mentions may also serve to ensure the MCG relay to their parents that ill-discipline is dealt with and punished. It may also identify the counterculture group in order to make them known to staff and students so that there is vigilance with regard to their behaviour.

However, this was not the intentional use of the intercom, which was to make contact with girls needed at reception or in the school office. In this way the PA system operated as both a mode of communication and a disciplinary power structure, aimed at repressing resistance and encouraging conformity among the girls.

10.4.1 Resistance beyond the Counterculture Group

Feminist sociological theory contributes to the agency-structure debate by seeing it as a conflict between liberation and domination (Smith 2012). Human agents are acting within the power of the social structures. Social life becomes a series of responses by individuals and groups to resist or challenge agents of domination. Beyond the counter culture group, the remainder of the girls who were observed and interviewed resisted in less damaging ways to their education. These included wearing the uniform incorrectly, with the tie loose or extra jewellery or makeup, or non regulation shoes or masculine behaviours. Gender-related resistance is identified by Lynch and Lodge (2002, p. 106) who point out that MCG although mainly conformist will 'challenge and subvert some of the traditional feminine ideologies promoted by schools'. Kim (2010) sees resistance as a communicative act where understanding the meaning of the acts could enhance teacher-student relationships.

The girls were asked in the interviews whether they resisted, by voicing concerns or dissatisfaction. A student in group interview 3 saw voice as a limited means of resisting saying:

> "You have a voice but only to a certain extent. It might not be heard first time. I think you have to keep saying it."

Some girls were struggling to keep everything going with their study and consequently saw no reason not to conform. The path of least resistance made life easier as highlighted by Giroux's (1983) critical consciousness where students use agency not to resist despite acknowledging elements of unfairness. This is enculturation and acceptance of the dominant culture, a form of 'doxa', the way things are and should be.

Cait praises the school for building her confidence yet highlights significant reluctance to speak her mind compared to her sister when she mentions:

> "Yeah they build your confidence here which is good. Everyone's here for the same reason you know. Well I'm just really quiet so I just go with the flow. Rules wouldn't really bother me. School rules don't really apply that much as you get older. Obviously you need to be disciplined in the younger years. I'd be much quieter in school; I'd never go against the flow I wouldn't be that strong. Sometimes I would have a different opinion but I'd never say it. I'd be way too shy and then if they asked me to explain or anything like that I'd die. My sister is way stronger."

This indicates a certain conscious choice to conform but through a sense that resistance is futile and also unnecessary in any case (Giroux 1981). There is an acute awareness in Cait of her lack of power or agency to transform (Bourdieu 1998). The doxic nature of school culture is evident here however in the way Cait sees no need for an alternative to conformity. Cait attributes her individual conformity to her character as opposed to it being connected also to the power of her MC management of self and the power of the institutional habitus (Bourdieu 1998). It reflects how schools can be successful agents of enculturation.

10.5 Alienation at School

Alienation is encountered by the girls through being left out or not feeling they belonged in MP. This was sometimes expressed as feeling different or unlike the other girls. Alienation of the counterculture group in particular led to resistance as they tried to express their frustration with not fitting in as a key means of communication (Kim 2010). As discussed above, resistance actions do not come without consequences and these serve to encourage conformity for many girls. Fear of punishment in school or at home can serve to repress resistance activities (Foucault and Gordon 1980). Theories of alienation are linked with Marxist theory (1967). MP could be seen as a site of capitalism where there is evidence of competition for admission and pressure to elicit a quality product in the form of high examination results and a well-rounded girl. In other words there are capitalist market forces at play.

Carrie links her education to wider society saying 'I think the results are really good here and you can see that MP girls are well groomed and ready for the outside world.' Alienation is more particular to the low numbers of WCG attending the school and a few girls who are MC but extremely quiet or new to the school. Carrie acknowledges these WCG girls are different but is reluctant to admit that this might be on the basis of social class:

> "I don't look down on them as a lower class or anything like that they just have different views and cos they don't have an interest in school, they're different, not intimidating to me, just different to the rest of us."

Laura felt the single-sex aspect of the school also left her feeling alienated because her primary school was mixed and her friends had been all boys. The counterculture group mainly interacted with each other, merely acknowledging those outside their group due to their cultural difference. Some of the MCG were reluctant to talk to them other than passing pleasantries. This was partly due to feeling intimidated and also because of these girls' poor attitude to school work and disruptive behaviour. They may also have felt reluctant to be seen by school authorities associating with these girls. Anne Marie describes the division between the two main groups of girls:

> "Well I wouldn't talk to the anti-school group although I might say 'hi' or something. Or you might start a conversation if there were only two of you in the room. People are kinda intimidated by them. There are a few now and you'd know they have a temper as hot as lightening. You'd be thinking 'god don't lose your temper just relax'. There are a few girls in that group and they are so funny. They could be funny one day and as mad as a hatter another day. If there's any trouble in our year you look to them."

This quote could be seen to 'other' the counterculture group where having a temper is not considered a trait a middle-class MP girl would have. Feeling alienated did not restrict itself to the counterculture group and did not always lead to or result from resistance.

Lara was from a very affluent background and found the girls in her year rough and un-ladylike. She was also culturally different to the main group of girls. She feels alienated because she came from the upper middle class. She describes her alienation saying:

> "Yeah I've always felt different to everyone else I don't know. Sometimes you can get so bogged down in petty things. Half the time I don't even notice it I'm different like that."

Lara also believes her values are more moral than others in the year. She will speak out against inappropriate behaviour like a girl two timing a boy or a boy cheating on a girl. This, she adds, can get her in trouble and she has been called a 'rat'. She is adamant that her religious upbringing gives her the moral high ground and a moral obligation to do something if it is the right thing to do. She explains:

> "I feel so guilty all the time if I don't do something. My primary school was really religious it may come from that. The parish priest would come in every day pretty much and give us a big lecture and he scared us into it I suppose."

It would appear that this need to tell on girls may alienate Lara from broader peer culture where loyalty and confidentiality were important qualities among friends in MP. Shirley maintains her popularity in order to avoid alienation. She does this by being a people pleaser. She admits to being unable to say 'no' to her friends and keeps her own personality under continual scrutiny even seeking feedback from peers on what they think of her. This indicates a fear of alienation or isolation and the power of the dominant cultural structures operating in the peer groups (Gramsci 1971).

Feeling different physically led to fears among a number of the girls that they would not fit in (Carey et al. 2011). Girls, who were tall, wore glasses or had skin conditions like eczema or acne expressed real fear of coming to school and fear of being isolated. However, these fears never seemed to materialise with girls admitting that making friends and fitting in was more to do with behaviour and personality. Emer explains:

"In 1st year I used to cry coming to school as I had eczema round my neck and it used to get worse when I got stressed. I was really conscious of my glasses too in 1st year... It was fine I still made friends but I thought I wouldn't cos of the way I was."

This is similar to Thorne (1993) who found that girls and boys at school also feared isolation through looking different. However, there were different issues for girls and boys. Early maturing girls were less popular while this was not the case for boys. Alienation from peers appears to be a cultural phenomenon whereas fear of alienation can be manifested by an individual's consciousness of physical difference. The key difference here was that cultural difference did lead to alienation or a sense of alienation but physical difference or perceptions of such difference did not materialise into being alienated in many cases. In this way girls in MP seem to be more tolerant and understanding of physical difference (perhaps because adolescence brought physical challenges to all the girls at some point with acne etc.) but less enabled to manage cultural difference. Where the girls did look down on Goths and Emos this was more aligned to a denial of mainstream culture than an issue with the physical traits.

10.6 Parents as Educational Surveillance

Parents were collaborators with the school in encouraging their daughters to conform, behave and do well academically in MP. This ensured the transmission and reproduction of embodied, institutionalised and objectified cultural capital as well as social capital (Bourdieu 1986). Roth (2013) identified that acquisition of Coleman's (1988) social capital in the forms of social networks, parent school interaction and intra-familial capital all influenced school performance. According to Roth (2013) it is the endowment of many forms of social capital that pertain to mechanisms of educational inequality. Darmody et al. (2012) similarly assert that the acquisition of social capital is a negotiation between the individual's self and their social context. It can serve to ease transitions from primary to post primary especially if the enhancement of social capital is synchronized with that of school management, teachers and peers already in the school.

There is a positive correlation between parents' level of education and parental help and involvement (Lam and Ducreux 2013). Ruth's parents were clear about what they wanted from her academically and she would frequently had her grades critiqued by her mother. Ruth's mother worked in education and in this way had an insider view and opinion of Ruth's educational potential. In Ruth's case this involvement was expressed as pressure at times. The MCG cited greater collaboration with mothers in educational decisions while the WCG had more autonomy in making decisions. David et al. (2003) cite that girls enter into collaborative subject choice processes with their mothers more than boys do with either parent. She asserts that in this way gender becomes interwoven generationally through familial social networks. In addition, mothers of all social classes were interested and involved in their daughter's progress in school, although fathers tended to sometimes control the decision-making stages (ibid). Mothers' actions are contextualised to material struggles, especially WC mothers (Vincent et al. 2010). Emotional capital can quickly be used up in difficult circumstances for WC mothers who manage also to be earners and carers of other family members (Lynch et al. 2009). This may explain the WCG greater autonomy in comparison to the MCG. However, this did not mean they were not interested in their girls' educational success but it was expressed differently.

The wishes, aspirations and power of parents are widely recognised as an integral and important factor for school agency, decision making and policy (Ball 2003, Brown 1990). MC mother-daughter dyads come together to mobilise a range of forms of capital to ensure access to higher education institutions of their choice and to influence school actions. This poses a risk for greater marginalisation of disadvantaged girls as the MC can more easily mediate higher fees and greater competition (Cooper 2013). These examples illustrate the power relationship between the social world and individuals in realising social change. The structures of the social world constrain some and positively shape the actions of others. Davies (2003) asserts that individuals are constituted repeatedly as they construct society rather than being socially constructed.

In this way agency transforms social structures but in doing so also creates the identities of the agents. MC parents exert agency to ensure success for their children in a range of emotional and practical ways (Lareau 2000). Emer spoke about when others in the year stopped coming into school and began studying at home, but mentioned that her mother insisted she continue attending. MC parents gain knowledge of the importance of school attendance through their own experience, networking and attending school functions and associations (Crozier 2000). Home advantage is greatest when parents invest cultural and social resources into their child's education (Lareau 2000) such as providing a range of supplementary educational supports. Laura compares parental attitudes for girls in the counter culture group discussing her own mother's attitudes to her education:

> "In our group now one of the parents couldn't care less, another is struggling with money a single parent or whatever, another one has no interest in school and her mother is like 'yeah sure' and doesn't care and that's kinda our group, but my mother really would care, it's just my fault the way I am."

Betty continues to say in defence of her and Laura's WC parents:

> "Our parents really do care they're really keen about education, but we don't put in what we're meant to put in so... I think that's how we get along as friends well, cos we just don't do anything. We're both lazy about it cos we both really are smart we know we are like."

Mary also reiterated parental interest in her education and regret for her resistance in MP. This regret for resistance activities and subsequent conflict in school was also highlighted by Archer et al. (2007b) in their study of inner city girls. Mary says:

> "It always affected my home life cos I was always getting in trouble in school and then I'm always grounded even if I didn't hand up homework I'd be grounded for ages for that. My parents were very strict about school. Like if I was on my death bed I wouldn't be allowed take a day off school. They are so into school and everything. I missed out on loads of opportunities concerts holidays and everything for getting into trouble in school.

It wasn't worth it in the end. It was childishness really, stupidity got me into trouble like and it was my own fault."

It is clear above that even when girls are aware they have resisted school, they are also aware of the long term consequences. A level of agency is evident here. In addition, parental interest is perceived differently by MC and WC girls to some degree which connects with their varied cultural habitus. The MC reliance on qualifications to get ahead is very evident in MP. Shirley discussed how her parents do not overtly pressure her. However, she notes that when she mentions she is leaving study on a Saturday at three instead of four her mother would 'guilt trip' her into staying on the extra hour. This illustrates the level of control the parents have on their daughters. It has also been suggested that parental pressure can be detrimental to wellbeing (Lareau 1997, Weissbourd 2011). Sarah also admitted her parents pressured her to succeed academically leaving her difficulty managing their and her friends' expectations. Her friends often tried to persuade her to come out to socialise on a Saturday when her parents would insist she studied. This left her conflicted.

The transmission of valuable capital is an active process mediated through the understanding of different types of parental involvement (Epstein 1996). The WC parents would tend to be asked to come into the school when problems arose as cited by Laura. MC parents in MP supported the school in fundraising and attended all school events. This would not be the case for WC parents. A MC girl in interview 3 reflects on this:

"I always feel sorry when I hear stories where parents aren't supportive in education but I don't know what other aspects I have missed out on because my parents were so educationalist orientated."

This would suggest awareness of differences between parents' level of support and a lack of appreciation or empathy of the reasons or barriers for some parents being less able to offer such support. Time, confidence, work constraints, money to attend functions are all factors which mediate WC parental involvement which are not understood by the MCG (Symeou 2007).

In addition, educational policy is highly classed with the state working as an agent in supporting MC parents' choice to the exclusion of WC families (Ball 2003). MC choices and interventions become embedded in the culture of the school's pedagogy over time and ascribe a cultural identity to the children who attend.

There is strong evidence that parentocracy contributes to school segregation with MC parents fleeing from diverse urban public schools, a phenomenon referred to as 'white flight' (Kimelberg and Billingham 2013). This is not as relevant in the Irish context. However, this relates to the fact some parents want their daughter associating with certain types of children which is connected with school choice. Ruth comments on the variation between parent's attitudes and its connection with friendship choices:

> "If I did badly my parents were like, why did you get that? You're well able to get that so I'd keep pushing myself and then school became a big part of my life. That's where I probably fell out with some of the girls cos they didn't want me hanging around with them and getting their bad habits."

This quote is aligned to the claims that there is an emergence of a bourgeois individualism among the MC. It also elicits the all consuming nature of education. The excerpt also indicates that that the nature of the social and cultural reproduction is gendered with the work of mothers often positioned as maintainers of social status (Ball 2003). Despite parents of all social classes having an interest in their child's educational achievement, WC parents can tend to place the responsibility for education in the hands of the teachers and schools (Lareau 2000). MC parents see education as a partnership, an enterprise to be shared with the school more so than WC parents. This is because MC families may have greater cultural resources transformable to different forms of capital (Lareau 1997). This point is evident in MP when Laura truants from school and her mother looks solely to the school to address it:

> "My mother said: 'so you come and go as you please and no one does anything, you do not go to class and nothing is said'..."

Mary's mother 'grounds' her continuously for skipping school but does not liaise with the school in the matter. Neither Laura nor Mary's parents attend parent-teacher meetings and often refuse to come into the school to discuss a behaviour issue. Hassrick and Schneider (2009) found that MC parents had a partnership with teachers while WC parents had a mentorship relationship, indicating entirely different power dynamics. In addition, MC parents engaged in greater surveillance of teachers' performance. This lesser agency within the educational process for WC parents ultimately reinforces the culturally and socially reproduced dominance of the MC. This grind culture operates in tandem with formal schooling. MC parents buy education in areas where the girls feel weak or feel they have poor teachers. Teachers often mentioned girls saying they didn't get their homework done because they had their grind homework to do. Girls sometimes contradicted their teacher's advice because the grind teacher told them otherwise. It was as if because the grind cost money it was of higher value and in this way was portrayed as a form of objectified cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986).

Teachers in MP felt girls used grinds as a lazy way of learning when they were capable but did not want to sit down and do the work themselves. Grinds were also opportunities to meet boys down town and also get some extra study done. Parenting practices are also blamed in part for perceived poor attitudes and behaviours among the WC girls. Caz speaks in relation to the behaviour of counterculture girls:

> "It could be the parents on how they're raising them. Maybe it's the group they're in. You never really know what's going on in the home. It could be peer pressure as well though. They have an attitude on them as well and you'd be like, they'll probably change when they grow up."

This affirms how some of the MCG use blame to account for behaviours and attitudes they see as different to theirs. There is evidence of a lack of real understanding of the varied circumstances of these girls' homes. It positions Caz and girls like her being defined as being well brought up and also in the process relieves the school of any responsibility for WCG resistance.

This is similar to Gramsci and Forgacs (1988) who assert that members of homogenous dominant groups unite consciously to expand their power and subordinate the power of others. Girls who do not conform to MP culture threaten the academic focus endemic and central to the school's need for success for its own survival. Girls who do not conform also make classroom management difficult at times for the teacher, which reduces their sympathy for these girls' predicaments and can lead to negative labelling and a reinforcing of MC conformist culture which is driven towards examination success. This emphasis on academia is supported by Walkerdine et al. (2001, p. 164) who suggests that:

> "Educational success is perceived as a symbol of overall healthy normality against which all else is measured."

The implications for all the girls in MP are significant pressure to achieve academically or risk becoming alienated from school culture. In many ways the power of parentocracy can serve as a constraint to a school's agency to make decisions that are seen to endanger the academic ethos. If MC parents expect a predominantly academic focus and a school decides to widen their focus by actively admitting more children from WC backgrounds, parents could and do use their agency to choose another school which fits their expectations. This illustrates the powerlessness of the school to make radical changes and ultimately it ensures the continuation of the status quo, which unfortunately makes dealing with potential issues of equality more challenging. Spicer (2011) argues that collective teacher agency can enact reform through mutual adaptation of the institution but there must be collaboration and willingness towards transformational change. This is a challenge for schools like MP due to the focus on the Leaving Certificate culture and also the power of parentocracy.

The girls themselves who were exhibiting resistance to school life tended to take personal responsibility for their actions, seeing their parents as relatively powerless partners in their choices. When the WCG broke the rules, they diminished their parents' power by colluding in the idea that there was nothing their parents could do to stop them. Therefore, WC parents were portrayed as either responsible by the MCG or powerless in their daughter's eyes.

Glatz and Stattin (2013) argue that impulsive adolescent behaviours can induce powerlessness in parents who lack experience in how to respond. WC parents' agency to effect change is negligible in MP where they are positioned as complicit or powerless in their daughters' negative practices and in this way they are devalued and demeaned as a group. MC parents on the other hand are positioned as powerful, able to enact change thus choosing to be agents in their own daughters' conformity. This would suggest that hegemonic dominance of the MC is arbitrarily accepted by the girls in a consensual way, as described by Gramsci (1973). It seems the WCG oppress their own parents by excluding them from their educational experience. This study suggests that the WCG render their parents powerless to intervene in their resistance which enables recursive agentive resistance. It was mainly mothers the girls spoke about among both the WCG and MCG in their references to parents' involvement in education. This is interesting and would be worth exploring but beyond the scope of this study.

10.7 Conclusion

Power is visible and also operating invisibly in all the relationships the girls describe. There are power struggles within and across the peer groups but many of the power struggles are centred on conformity or resistance of the dominant institutional discourses. The institutional discourses are in situ as a result of historicity and also in continued response to constraints imposed upon the school by the system and parentocracy. These include issues such as funding, expected examination success and good discipline. Nonetheless, these institutional examples of power are important to the lived experiences of the girls and they influence the peer group structures, peer group power and individual power.

The dominant groups exert a hegemonic power (Gramsci 1973) on other groups to be like themselves. The enabling and constraining elements of agency and structure could be seen to operate on either end of a continuum where they interact together at varying levels of consciousness for the individual. This has connections with rational choice theory as described by Gambetta (1987). The dominant groups' conformity is rewarded by the institution and reinforced through increased leadership opportunity and hierarchical power.

Institutional and MC social group power operates as a collective unitary force. This structure enables maximum expansion of the MC power through subordination of the WC culture. Those who are outside the dominant groups suffer alienation but that is not exclusive to the WC, with Lara in the upper classes struggling to fit in. Therefore, the repressive nature of power is seen through the girls' agency to conform or to resist. Conscious conformity of the MC and conscious resistance of the WCG are evident as rational choices bound by cultural constraints. The agentive choice for both groups of girls is discursively conscious yet constrained by personal and institutional habitus (Bourdieu 1998). These are choices but not free choices (Gambetta 1987).

Resistance and alienation are seen to work in a reciprocal way in MP. Those who feel alienated from the dominant culture are likely to resist most. Those who are not culturally alienated resist least. The effect of the counterculture resistance is not transformational change or even partial penetration due to their lack of power. It results in further alienation and punishment. The greater the alienation the greater the need to resist and this has a multiplier effect where Mary, Laura and Betty have a poor school experience resulting from their resistance actions. Alternatively, those who are culturally similar to the dominant school culture resist less even if they feel unfairly treated as Giroux (1983) has identified. Therefore, hegemonic dominance relies upon consensual coercion which is essentially conformity (Gramsci and Forgacs 1988). Therefore, hegemonic power induces different forms of conformist and resistance agentive responses based on social class. The field is being managed by the school but with the tacit and required agreement and support of the parents.

Patriarchy is a visible form of power within the school through the enforcement of uniform rules and the limited opportunity to express physical individuality. Parents who chose the school for their daughters, are complicit in reinforcing and supporting the schools rules and regulations and in doing so willingly reinforce the patriarchical structures. This is mediated by social class though. MC parents insist on adherence to the rules and in doing so add to the cultural power of the dominant MC in the school.

WC parents are alienated by the school culture and their own daughters' agency in maintaining their disconnection from the school by rendering them powerless. In many ways WC parents are both intrinsically and extrinsically powerless as agents in their daughters' education. The dominant cultural capital as a means of producing hegemony is most powerful when parents, peers, patriarchy and institutional habitus's come together to reinforce the extent and scope of the dominant patterns of practice and ritual. In this way the girls' conformity acts as a form of agency to reproduce dominant discourses. The immense power of the structures in place and the powerlessness of the school's agency means that transformation is not possible and those girls who attempt to resist become victims of their own agency, through further alienation.

This chapter clearly identifies that in many ways MC agency perceived by the school to be more valuable than WC agency. Therefore, the power of an individual's agency is connected to their parents' social class and the collective structures of the school. This is seen in some girls' use of agency as a form of surveillance of self. MC agency serves to act collectively as a structure to ensure individual conformity. When large numbers of agents collectively assert power a form of collective agency ensues. Agency becomes a collective entity (Gramsci and Forgacs 1988). Hegemony and parentocracy are key structures identified in MP which enable cultural and social reproduction of MC culture in schools. Therefore, an inequality of condition as described by Baker et al. (2009) for the WC arises and their lack of power to repress this effectively though resistance or conformity is evident in MP. The school's ability to address this is limited by parents' expectations, reinforcement of MC culture and the girls' lack of understanding of the different issues WCG face and most importantly the school needs to maintain it's position in the educational market place.

Chapter 11 Youth Culture

Youth culture for the purposes of this chapter relates to the shared values, beliefs practices and norms relating to the everyday life of youths. Youth culture extends to particular appearance styles, interests and behaviours among adolescents (Giddens 1997). Some of these shared entities emerged as important discussion items among the girls throughout the study. These included norms around boyfriends and romance, beliefs about sexuality and gender and, practices relating to appearance culture. The girls discussed their views on popularity within this youth culture domain. This chapter also explores the pressures on the adolescent girls in MP to merge elements of youth culture with preparation for the Leaving Certificate. Therefore, the components of this chapter all relate directly to, or as an underlying concept to youth culture. Youth culture is the means through which this researcher seeks to understand and interpret some of the everyday peer experiences of the girls in MP. Youth culture is mediated by social class and cultural differences between youths as highlighted in the section below on adolescent language. Bennett (2011) regards youth culture as a lifestyle project which draws resources from socio-cultural environments. As the girls in MP transition into adulthood, it is the views of the girls towards elements of youth culture which is the focus. This chapter also explores connections which highlight how material accessories, boys and heterosocial competence, serve as indicators of status and attractiveness, but also hegemonic dominance and power. This chapter links directly to many themes and issues discussed in Chapter 9.

11.1 Adolescent Language

Collective structures, according to Giddens, are like the rules or resources of a social system. Language would be one example as it is a rule which has a relationship with speech and without language speech is meaningless (Giddens 2013a). The examples in this section illustrate that structures such as language are not only constraining, they can also be enabling. Similar to the evolution of a dominant culture is the acceptance of a dominant and legitimised language.

Varying social classes engage in 'linguistic unification' particularly the ruling classes (Giddens, 1991, p.6). Once dominance is achieved over time other local dialects are lost as alternative instruments of expression. Elements of Bourdieu's (1991) theory of practice apply to language where dispositions impact an agent's linguistic practice and the value attributable to linguistic products in other fields. There were only a few particular dialectic or language examples identified during the course of the research and these examples were used almost exclusively among the counterculture group. Bernstein (1973) and MacRuairc (2009) see language as a cultural field for difference between socio-economic classes. There can be significant differences in linguistic habitus. This leads to differences in linguistic capital (ibid). Language transmits the values of a person's social and cultural structure. Different cultural codes operate in different contexts. These linguistic codes imbibe meanings specific to diverse contexts and these meanings are then realised within the linguistic rule systems embedded in the culture (Bernstein 1990). Language can be seen as a structure as it is a resource which helps us understand meaning and has rules (Giddens 2013a).

Laura and Mary had their own verbal descriptions unique to themselves. These descriptions were a combination of language, expression and accent. In other words, what the girls said, how they said it and how it sounded. This language clearly played a role in the making of meaning for them and was symbolic of their 'self'. It was also used as a sort of linguistic resistance against the dominant linguistic habitus. They referred to tough girls as 'hard eggs', girls they had little time for as 'muppets'. Those exhibiting poor manners or being vulgar were 'pure dirtballs'. If someone had a bad reaction to something they 'freaked the bean'. Someone different or alienated was termed an 'outlier'. Hiding from someone (while not in class), they 'dodged them like a bullet'. Linguistic utterances or expressions are forms of practice as outlined by Bourdieu (1991).

They are a product of the relationship between an individual's linguistic habitus and a linguistic market, a place where the language is exchanged. This linguistic habitus is learned as a disposition related to a cultural site. Laura's and Mary's language was culturally different due to their varied individual habituses.

Bernstein's (1973) theory of language asserts that there is a direct relationship between social class and language and spoken language reinforces relationships with a person's environment. Furthermore, the language code an individual uses is symbolic of their social identity.

There were only a few references made to language by the MCG, both of which have been discussed in previous chapters. One was the reference to the 'bogger' accent of the country girls and the other referred to 'knackers' accent in a derogatory way. Therefore, there were isolated instances of a devaluing of language that did not fit into MC expectations of how a girl should sound or should speak, but this is an area for further exploration, beyond the scope of the current study. It is included as an acknowledgement that adolescent language is an element of youth culture which is mediated by social class.

11.2 Boyfriends

Boys emerged during discussion about male friends where it quickly transpired that relationships with boys were usually as boyfriends. While girls in 6th year talked about having boyfriends, many had decided consciously not to be in a relationship this year. This was due to study and exam pressure. There were some girls who were yet to have a first boyfriend. Having a boyfriend had associated social power and prestige among girls (Bentley et al. 2007), explaining why some girls chose to maintain their relationship with a boy. Laura was juggling a boyfriend, part-time job, and school and was under pressure to manage all of these commitments. Her school work was first to be neglected when the pressure got too much as she valued pocket money and her boyfriend more. The school were not in favour of girls having a job in 6th year as they felt it would add to the time pressures of 6th year. Where this was not written in any policy it was communicated to the girls verbally in assemblies or via teachers to parents in parent-teacher meetings. Part-time work is discussed further in the section on pressure and stress below. This also indicates that boyfriends were more important to some girls than others as is discussed below. The type of boyfriend MP girls chose was a significant issue.

For a boyfriend to be a status symbol he had to be a popular good-looking boy. Getting a boyfriend was not about getting any boy but one your friends would be impressed by. This would suggest MC surveillance of peer agency in the selection of a boyfriend. Underwood and Rosen (2009) highlight how girls' gendered friendship qualities help shape early romantic relationships. Laura explained it was usually the popular girls who got the popular boyfriends. In addition the MCG had more romantic relationships with boys from a MC school a few miles away even though there was a more socially diverse boys' school much closer. In this way the MCG tended to choose boyfriends of a similar social class and also choose boys from other single-sex schools. Thorne (1993) suggests early adolescence as the time where relationships with boys begin to take precedence and this is affirmed by the girls in MP. Girls' sense of their identities from this point on can be shaped by how popular they are with boys romantically and with girls as friends. However, Underwood (2007) found that gender segregation throughout schooling has been found to cause gender relational divergence which requires significant negotiation in the formation of romantic relationships. Gender separation in school made cross-gender romantic relationship more challenging. This is affirmed by some girls who admitted a lack of understanding of boys and a greater confidence around girls.

Griffiths (1995) and Hey (1997) identified a strong culture of girls homosociality particularly among WCG who managed feelings of cultural alienation partially through the support of girlfriends. The WCG in this study cited strong relationships with boys as friends and also as boyfriends. As mentioned in Chapter 9, Laura preferred boys to girls as friends and admitted to always having a boyfriend. Mary got her first boyfriend in 6th year and chose to spend a lot of time with him but did acknowledge the importance of her girlfriends too. It was commonly acknowledged that when a girl got a boyfriend, invariably she tended to spend less time with her girlfriends. This often caused friction with existing friends unless they too had boyfriends.

Similarly, Griffin (1985) found considerable difficulties around ownership of friends when girls got a boyfriend and these ownership issues needed careful negotiation. Carrie explains:

> "Girls who don't have boyfriends they kinda feel it in a way cos if they're bored or something they've no one to talk to cos some of their friends might be off with their boyfriends or something. You've nothing to do perhaps when you want to rewind or something. It's hard having a boyfriend because I do and it's really hard to balance study my friends and my boyfriend."

This indicates that a juncture emerges during adolescence where boyfriends replace some of the intimacy of girl friendships. Adams and Berzonsky (2005) describe the diversity of romantic experiences with the ideals established in friendship often carrying over to romantic relationships. Romantic partners like friends offered support and influenced identity formation. There is a contradiction here as the girls also viewed boys as immature and stupid (Chapter 9). It would appear that boyfriends are still desirable as a form of symbolic power as well as a physical presence. They were there to afford status rather than for a deeper relationship. Heterosocial competence developed following varying levels of heterosocial anxiety in early dating experiences, as outlined by Grover et al. (2007). The girls in MP who enjoyed peer popularity dated earlier and had many boyfriends whereas it was the lack of a boyfriend by 6th year that caused considerable anxiety.

Many of the disagreements within friendship groups in MP were linked to jealousy over boys. Divisions emerged between those with boyfriends and those without. Jealousy among female students was found to be lower among girls with higher self-esteem and those in steady dating relationships (Khanchandani and Durham 2009). Girls in MP spoke of feeling left out as a result of the change in the existing girl relationship dynamics, which demonstrated a level of insecurity. Indeed, Keira mentioned that friends without a boyfriend wondered what might be wrong with them, creating huge insecurity amongst them. Gilmartin (2005) also identified heterosexual romance as one of many relational networks from which self or peer-esteem could be derived.

Lara admitted never having a boyfriend but said she would really like one and Ruth regularly imagined having someone totally detached from school and study she could spend time with. Caz was very much of the opinion that a boyfriend would get in the way of her life. Yet, all these girls were popular among their peers with high self-esteem. It would appear that an intersection of sporting prowess, academic ability and/or having a boyfriend could bolster self or peer-esteem. In this instance having a boyfriend is less important to a girls' sense of self. Some girls felt it was a choice whether to have a boyfriend, whereas others saw getting a boyfriend as a serendipitous event, an act of agency versus a sort of pre-determined fate.

Eisenhart (1990) identified a cultural system of romance, with the rules and norms associated with this system being learned in a developmental trajectory. There was a prestige for girls in romantic relationships with boys and it was seen as a significant contributory feature to self-worth. In addition the 'right' social relationships were crucial to advanced learning in romance and the peer group had a huge impact on how the romance trajectory was realised. Having a boyfriend was sometimes perceived as a deviation from study and connected to risky peer activities (Adams and Berzonsky 2005). Caz explained that TY was the period when peer pressure to find a boyfriend commenced. It coincided with the onset of a drinking culture which she attributed to girls having no academic work to do and too much free time. Caz used agency to defer the romance until a later date. She also refers to the intrusion to existing friendship groups caused by boys, which is similar to what Griffin (1985) found. She says:

> "Yeah definitely there was huge pressure in Transition Year. It was such a break that everyone was going out drinking then and I wasn't into it at all as I knew it was going to affect me sport wise. They probably didn't realise what they were getting themselves into. Now they're maybe regretting it as they are so tired and everything. Having a boyfriend is a status anyway 'cos there is a girl in my group who has a boyfriend at the minute and the rest of us don't. Sometimes it's kinda bad 'cos when we go out she wants to just go out with the boyfriend now. We're like 'okay you're ditching us now for your boyfriend'.

> She uses us sometimes and she often picks the boyfriend over us. He's okay but if we go to the cinema she'll bring him and it's kinda awkward."

This quote illustrates both the status associated with having a boyfriend and also reinforces the jealousy and resentment when a boyfriend impinges on girl friendships and events. The fickle nature of teenage romance where falling in and out of love can be spontaneous and disruptive was discussed by the girls (see also Eisenhart 1990). At times boyfriends were commoditised or accessorised a little in the discussions. Lara explains:

> "A lot of the girls in my group would have boyfriends and that's a big thing in their life but then there's a lot of stress around it crying and everything like that over fights like 'he didn't talk to me this morning' and stuff and giving out about that . You would kinda want it a bit when they talk about their boyfriends you think oh it would be nice to have one and stuff like that. I'd like one I think definitely, but I don't feel the pressure anyway."

The dominance of the boy in the relationship was discussed by the girls. This relates to a study by Bentley et al. (2007) on adolescent relationship power and functioning which found that males tended to be the dominant partner in such relationships, as suggested in the quote above where a boyfriend chooses to make contact or not and the girl does not initiate such contact. In addition, Bentley et al. (2007) also found some girls will concede personal power if they perceive their boyfriends to be of a high social value among their peer group. In this way a high status peer group operates as a valuable resource worth conceding power to be a part of. The school had no policies with regard to boyfriends or youth culture outside the school. If the girls were in school uniform they were expected to uphold the reputation and ethos of the school. This would include behaving in an orderly way down town, not drinking or smoking and being aware of being in a public place identifiable as a MP girl when with a boy. Again, this wasn't written in a policy but was communicated to the girls during assemblies and in class and also communicated to parents on information evenings. Mary describes getting her first boyfriend in 6th year and how that felt.

Although she says she did not actively pursue a boy she was extremely conscious of the social pressure to have one and felt previously isolated having not experienced that. She says:

> "If girls don't have a boyfriend or never had a boyfriend they're kinda looked down on. I never ever had a boyfriend up until a few weeks ago and then everyone was like 'you have a boyfriend, how have you gotten a boyfriend' and I was like 'what'? They were like 'it's weird cos you never had a boyfriend' cos they all had boyfriends and still do and whatever but like it was a big change for me. Now I didn't go out there and get one but I did feel really singled out when I didn't have a boyfriend and all of them did like. They'd all be talking about their boyfriends and I couldn't like. Other girls feel that too cos girls that have broken up with their boyfriends are like 'stop talking about boyfriends I don't have one.'"

Julie agrees that loneliness especially on a Saturday when you might want a break from study could be filled by a boyfriend. Equally, that quick text wishing you 'good luck' before an exam was considered special and nice. Shirley relates to the all-subsuming effects of having a boyfriend:

> "I just want to have fun while I'm young, if I had a boyfriend I'd crack. They come to school and they're crying and giving out about them. I can't listen to it, it's so annoying. One day they're telling you all their problems with him, the next day they're perfect. One of the girls was with this guy from when she was twelve and it broke up there last month. It was a waste of her time. I'm having fun but they're restricted... All the girls are breaking up with them now and two weeks before the Leaving Certificate, they're devastated."

Interestingly, there was no evidence of any of the girls abandoning school work for boyfriends as academia was still positioned as the main priority in these girls' lives. In this sense boyfriends were used by some girls as listeners to their woes about school and as encouragement to keep going. In addition, parental surveillance seemed to ensure that social activities were predicated on the basis of schoolwork duties being central, as confirmed by the girls. Keira made an interesting point that getting a first boyfriend cut down on all the fascination and obsession, leaving a girl able to relax and have a better relationship with a boy next time round.

This also connects with Eisenhart (1990) who claims that romance is learned over time as a gradual phase within peer culture. A level of peer competence is associated with an ability to do romance which is also identified in MP. Negative peer and personal consequences are possible if this romance competence is not acquired and negotiated effectively. There was a visible public display and ritual of a MP girl going out with a boy. He would meet her beyond the school gates and they would walk hand in hand down town. This ritual positioned the MP girls as academic but also desirable in a symbolic way.

11.3 Body and Appearance

Girls admitted they abandoned interest in their appearance at school due to lack of time in Leaving Certificate year. Mary used to wear make-up in earlier years but was amazed that some girls still found the time to put make-up on and do their hair to come to school. There was a policy which insisted on no make-up and limited jewellery in school but this was difficult for the school to police and was certainly a form of resistance used by many of the girls. Those who broke the make-up rule were extremely adept at wearing the make-up so naturally that it would be difficult to be sure they were wearing it at all. Mary reserved wearing makeup in 6th year for social activities and meeting boys. The use of sexual and physical attraction as a form of power or erotic capital is described by Hakim (2011). The girls admitted that back in TY when the boys and social scene took off, some girls became very conscious of their size, shape and weight. They inferred there were unhealthy eating patterns among a significant number of the group. Carrie describes this saying:

> "Transition Year hit and she got a boyfriend and she was bulimic and literally so underweight and we were all so worried about her. It's kinda disgusting like. She'd sit at lunch and hide her lunch behind her bag and she'd maybe just eat fruit and stuff. She'd throw her lunch in her locker and her mum would think she was eating it. We have talked to her about it but she's like 'this is what I want to do; this is my way of controlling what I eat'. It affected her study as well last year. Like she was in study till 8 o clock every night but she was asleep for three quarters of the sessions.

> You know if she ate something she would go straight into the toilet and be sick. She's changed over the last few years she used to be so outgoing with a bubbly personality and everyone sort of craved her attention cos she's a gorgeous looking girl, then when all this started happening she was getting so tired and coming to school where you were getting no laughter."

Ruth remembered a night in TY when she and a few friends were getting ready for a disco. One of the group members asked another if she was bloated as she put on her dress. Ruth remembers the stricken look on the girl's face and how within weeks she was losing drastic amounts of weight. She attributed this to the comment made that evening. Lara mentioned feeling that there was intense jealousy among members of her group when one girl turned bulimic. Although they were feigning concern, they were also envious of her weight loss. She felt a few girls secretly wanted to be that skinny. Discipline, achievement and healthism are three virtue discourses prevalent in secondary schools that can play into the formation of an anorexic girl (Halse et al. 2007). Sarah admits openly that she was on a permanent diet and using sun beds to have a 'healthy' colour. She also indicated she had a friend who has lost a lot of weight in recent times saying:

> "Our group are always starting a diet. I'm very bad for it; I'm always like that, always was. One of the girls was very heavy and she just stopped eating and she lost about four stone. She's a normal weight now. She was my best friend and there was one summer where we hadn't seen her for two weeks and we called to her house and I couldn't get over what she looked like. It happened in the summer so no one noticed till she came back; she's ok now but she still talks about diet all the time."

This indicates the nature of peer pressure and societal pressure on girls to be thin. The use of the term 'normal' is likely to be constructed as good looking, thin, yet healthy looking, as the image they measure themselves on. It indicates the darker side of growing up as an adolescent girl. Feminist theory is used by Mensinger et al. (2007) to highlight conflicting gender roles for girls and an endorsement of the superwoman ideal, which they argue is related to eating disorders.

Similar to the virtue discourses, desire to excel in academics, appearance and dating were all positively correlated to eating disorders and were all factors present in MP. Peterson et al. (2008) claim that objectification theory is connected with poor body image and eating disturbances. They see the role of empowerment of girls in reducing self-objectification. Feminist theory sees a relationship between rapid social change and body dissatisfaction, a phenomenon relevant to this Irish study (Jung et al. 2009). Julie says that girls checking their belly in the mirror would be a common occurrence, as would only eating one pack of crackers a day. Coleman (2008) purports that girl bodies become known and understood through images or visuals. The 'becoming of bodies' can be mediated in relation to images, which serve to limit or extend what becomes of girls' bodies (Coleman 2008). The girls would constantly compare their figure to other slimmer girls in the year and try to emulate them. Emer lost weight due to the stress of 6th year without even trying, but recognised the large numbers of girls who admitted trying very hard to look slim. There was no sense in the discussions with the girls that they were overly aware or influenced by media or celebrity culture. It seemed to be an issue which they propagated between the peer groups, possibly un-consciously mediated by the media portrayal of girls as thin.

Other girls in MP also confirmed that eating issues and wanting to be skinny were pertinent issues. The school were aware of the eating issues some girls suffered from and were proactive in referring those girls to the school counsellor and to outside agencies for medical or psychological treatment, if deemed necessary. Griffin (1985) identified a lot of pain among girls feeling unhappy about their bodies or looks. Clark and Tiggemann (2006) found in young adolescents that peer conversations had a strong positive correlation with girls wanting to achieve the media-portrayed ideal of thinness. Wolf (2013) details the destructive obsession with beauty for women and highlights that beauty has become a form of social control. This was evident in MP. Girls in MP mentioned that clothes and style to go out in became popular in 6th year as did online shopping for those with any spare cash. This is in keeping with stereotypes regarding popular culture, where style as portrayed by the media is very influential in marketing a type of femininity through fashion (Jackson et al. 2013).

Seeking out designer dresses was evidence of conformity to a well rounded femininity based on a subservience to fashion trends. It also provided a form of MC objectified cultural capital while out socialising (Bourdieu 1986). This designer clothes trend is similarly identified in feminist research on elite MC school girls (Wardman et al. 2010). There is no doubt that femininity is marketed through fashion. Jackson et al. (2013), found that girls used fashion and clothing to engage or disengage from feminist identities. The girls in MP identified 'girlie' girls according to their dress. The 'sexy' girl construction through clothing was not visible in MP but it was not possible to see what the girls wore going out. According to Jackson et al. (2013) social class and age regulate dress discourses and perhaps the MC culture precluded this construction. The girls in MP claimed they favoured the 'classy' designer and 'girlie' feminine construction to the 'sexy' girl one.

Appearance culture, according to the girls, is an issue in MP from the perspectives of looking pretty, wearing the best clothes and being slim. Carey et al. (2011) assert that high school is a major site for the discussion of body image worries. In MP this appearance culture does not affect all girls equally. Keira who admits being immersed in sport rarely thinks about her weight. Sport provided a buffer for coping or avoiding many of the adolescent challenges, as highlighted by Bailey (2006). It reduced the time available to become as immersed in broader peer culture and provided a physical and emotional break from the hype and tensions surrounding Leaving Certificate year. Ivinson and Renold (2013) draw on materialist feminist theory and assert that girls' agency can go beyond spirit or mind but into moving bodies which can 'become' dynamically. In addition, context and place had an influence on teen body movements with some girls enabled by contextual structures to imagine expansive futures and others constrained and unable to envisage a moving on. This suggests that agency is much more complex than generally envisaged. This relates in some respects to some MP girls 'becoming of body' being through sport and their agency in how they use and view their bodies being connected to dynamic movement.

11.4 Sexuality

In terms of an equality of respect and recognition, the subject of sexual orientation is largely ignored in Irish schools (Baker et al. 2009). This study indicates evidence of homophobia in some of the girls' responses. The counterculture group were the most open in discussing the topic of sexuality. Laura intimated that while most girls were heterosexual, there were a few suspected gay girls who were seen holding hands at times in 4th year and 5th year. She felt her group had no particular issue with girls being gay and it was acknowledged there were girls in relationships with other girls. Where Mary also agreed that she had no problem with accepting differing sexualities, this is not reinforced in her quote where she says:

> "I don't think there's anything wrong with that and I don't think any of my friends do but I think sometimes in the past we have questioned we'd be like is she or isn't she, not in a negative way just wondering you know. Just the way they act you know they're very isolated and kind of the way they look at you. They kind of have eeriness about them. It's not a bad thing like...It's not awkward at all. I don't think people really care anymore cos like, I have so many homosexual friends male and female and so do all my friends so ..."

There is a level of impression management (Goffman 1971) in this comment to indicate no prejudice with the mention of having loads of homosexual friends, but the signs of homophobia are clearly evident in the description of these girls as 'eerie'. This discursive agency to portray an acceptance of sexual difference was prevalent within a few of the girls' responses. Yet, Caz tells a story of a girl accused of being a lesbian behind her back where homophobia is explicitly evident:

> "Probably last year there one girl that everyone said she's a lesbian stay away from her but they didn't know her at all and it kinda backfired. Loads of people were saying, I'd stay well away from her she's probably a lesbian. And I was like 'lads ye don't know her so stop'. It was a negative thing definitely."

This evidence of heteronormativity and homophobia among the girls is supported by an Irish study by O'Higgins-Norman (2009) who also found significant homophobic behaviours in schools. The need for greater discussion in RSE in Irish schools is apparent in the lack of acceptance of sexual difference. Carrie also shows a distinct distaste for homosexuality saying:

> "It's something we've talked about but it's kinda looked down upon really. It's not cos it's not accepted it's just kinda done weirdly in front of you and in school inappropriately. It's not that it's just... I'm one of those people who just would be uncomfortable around it I'm not gonna lie. It's not that I'm against it it's just uncomfortable for me."

The sense that homosexuality induced feelings of discomfort was possibly reinforced through the dominant culture and historical Catholic ethos which did not accept deviations from heterosexuality (Gowran 2004). This pervades the school culture, teachers and parents' attitudes, and has a reproductive effect on the girls' attitudes. Heterosexuality and heteronormativity underpins educational ideals in Irish schools (Baker et al. 2009). Single-sex schools have been found to reify false notions, of gender and sexuality (Jackson 2010). There is an equality issue (Baker et al. 2009) inherent in an expectation of heteronormativity and homophobia and bullying are potential issues for schools who struggle to address sexuality through the curriculum (Minton et al. 2008). Some literature claims that there is increased agency with regard to sexuality and the norms of social life. Kenway and McLeod (2004) identify a view that agents make reflexive decisions on the conditions of their existence. Where Bourdieu attributes a structured durability to gender norms, others recognise a growing instability (McNay 1999). This instability was not visible in MP nor was increased agency to be different evident. Ruth mentioned that some girls would pretend they were okay with lesbian girls, but secretly would be uncomfortable them. Sneering, spreading rumours and whispering are all tacit examples of bullying as they contribute to a sense of exclusion (Simmons 2011). Where there was no direct evidence of bullying there was certainly a high level of discomfort with homosexuality which would indicate the possibility of isolation or bullying of a lesbian girl. Ruth highlights this negativity towards homosexuality saying:

> "A lot of the girls they'd shiver or would appear definitely uncomfortable with it. Some girls would accept it but would hate to be around it. Other girls would be totally against it. I'd be fine with it but I remember having a conversation with a girl who asked me about it. Some girls were 'never ever no' and feel that it shouldn't be accepted in Ireland. And I'd be oh my god that's 1950s thinking. And they'd be saying 'oh my parents would be against it."

Parental power and influence is strong here as is the reference to Ireland, meaning Catholic Ireland. Cait was unsure about the issue, presenting a contradiction by saying she felt it would be totally accepted by the girls, but at the same time admitting that if someone were gay they would be too scared to admit it or to even discuss it. Lara says her parents would be dead against homosexuality, indeed indicating it was a contentious topic at home during the gay marriage debates in the media. This is evidence of cultural imperialism as described by Foucault et al. (2000) as a form of power and governmentality. Cultural imperialism is linked with hegemony in that this power is visible in the social relationships between people. Dominant cultural groups have their 'truths' which regulate through power the counter views of others. It is evident that parents, schools, peers and society via a Catholic ethos can have a big influence on young girls' attitudes to sexuality, some of whom are struggling with prejudices. Many of the girls said they saw nothing wrong with homosexuality but were not going to be raising that issue at home or in school, in case it was not well received. This tension and confusion about what to say is depicted in Shirley's comments on the topic:

> "It's not that it's not normal it's just different. I don't know if there are any at school, you might question it with a few. With some people they might be a bit too close I don't know. It's talked about but horrible to say we don't think it is normal it's not seen as normal in any society's eyes. I wouldn't have a problem with it, it's just different. I don't like it really."

The contradictory nature of Shirley's comment again illustrates the tension between honesty and her attempt to avoid a prejudicial response.

In terms of how sexuality is taught in MP according to the Relationships and Sexuality Education policy (RSE) it is delivered at junior cycle through religion, science, home economics, CSPE and particularly SPHE. It is also stated that RSE is delivered in accordance with the values and beliefs enshrined in the school's ethos which is as a Catholic school. At senior cycle RSE is covered as part of the religious education programme. There is no teaching time given to RSE specifically at senior cycle such is the overloaded Leaving Certificate curriculum. Similar challenges faced by schools in dealing with sexual difference through the RSE programme are outlined by O'Carroll and Szalacha (2000). Similarly, studies have found that teachers do not like dealing with issues such as sexuality for fear they could be labelled themselves (O'Higgins-Norman 2008). In addition, although SPHE provides an opportunity to address homophobia there is inequality inherent in the differing ways in which schools implement this programme and consequential implications for homophobic bullying (O'Higgins-Norman 2008, O Higgins 2009).

Heteronormative masculinities and femininities in schools as well as socio-economic circumstances inform relationships and conflicts between genders. Ringrose and Renold (2010) argue that individual, gendered, classed and sexualised relationships of power among young girls and boys operate within a bullying discourse. The social and cultural reproduction of homophobia is mediated through school ethos, parents' influence and curriculum, which all contribute to facilitating an environment that fails to adequately enable discussion and thought. In addition, the dominant MC group tend to be the most conformist to school structures and attitudes and this also applied to sexuality. Their power succeeds in influencing some of their peers into a sort of moral acceptance of their view of what 'normal' relationships look like (Mora 2013). Evidence shows that non-heterosexual youths can experience rejection at home and at school leading to severe isolation and ostracism (Neary and Joseph 1994). Taylor (2007) posits that within white secondary school girls' groups there is a powerful attraction and pressure among the girls towards heterosexuality as the predominant cultural form.

Furthermore, WC lesbians experience the intersectionality of sexuality and social class inequality. There is evidence in MP which concurs with many of the findings in the literature and it is clear that heterosexuality is the dominant and acceptable form of sexuality among the girls in this study. No girls mentioned they were homosexual or suggested anyone else in the year group was homosexual, other than vague mentions of speculation. This indicates the hidden nature of sexuality in MP.

11.5 Masculinity and Femininity

In the previous section we saw how embedded the heterosexual environment was in MP and this section explores the notions of masculinity and femininity. Some girls felt there were some masculine traits exhibited by the sporty girls, with others saying there was no masculine behaviours at all. Masculinity was seen by many girls as a negative thing. Research indicates that schools act as sexualising agencies issuing a range of sexual meanings and identities which become powerful gender constructions (Allen 2013). Expectations of femininity were resisted most by the counterculture group. Laura explains:

> "Yeah there are far more who act like girls but down in my group they'd be burping and farting the whole lot and you'd be like... I'd be roaring laughing sometimes but when someone lets out a huge fart it's like come on now like. Two of them now are pure dirtballs slapping food at you and everything, it's disgusting."

There are still cultural constraints on the girls' actions, evident in this quote indicated by the limited level of tolerance towards certain practices. There is also evidence of acting in opposition to the school culture through the take up of alternative positions as a form of resistance (Giroux 1981). Mary sees some girls as being too prim and proper, unable to relax in MP, and admits to feeling pressure to be feminine saying:

"I think some girls do behave very feminine like they're very girly, even the way they eat their lunch like they're very, I dunno they'd be afraid to move their face in case it cracked. There are some people and they can't even crack a smile. I don't know why it's just ...There might be masculine behaviour at our table like all the laughing and stuff but maybe it's a bit stereotypical now like but maybe the sports people might be masculine. They wouldn't be as into their hair and makeup as other girls. I think I'm a bit of a tomboy to be honest. I try to be feminine though. There's nothing wrong with being boyish like but I get sick of people saying it to me so I try to be feminine."

There is pressure exerted by Mary's peers to encourage conformity to feminine ideals. Wardman et al. (2013) note the constitution of femininity as 'natural' and they problematise its interconnectedness with beauty fragility, passivity and vulnerability in elite girls' schools similar to MP. Wolpe (1980) also uncovered many incidences, where girls were both implicitly and explicitly encouraged into feminine behaviour by their teachers. The comment on the masculinity being most visible among the sporty girls was mentioned by a few girls. Sport provided a freedom from gendered expectations with allowances made for some portrayals of masculinity in MP but again this resulted in further reinforcing of gender stereotypes. Steinfeldt et al. (2011) are cognisant of the need to create space to address constraining societal gender ideologies of femininity. They identify a dichotomy between the enhanced muscularity associated with success in sport and feminine body expectations of school girls.

Anne-Marie believes that if you are good at a sport you are more like a boy and can't really be feminine. The implications for female athletes based on societal attitudes is that they can be alienated from femininity though participation in sport, as explored by Steinfeldt et al. (2011). Masculinity seems to fall outside the gender expectations of a group of MC academic girls. Carrie exhibits quite a stereotypical and prejudiced view of sporty girls saying:

"There's a girl now and she has done rowing for ages and she's followed her sister and its gone down the generations and she's kinda big big built and she's big and strong but like she has real determination to do well in this sport and she isn't looked down upon at all (surprised expression).

> Masculinity is mostly associated with sporty people cos that's what boys like and tend to look like but I don't think masculinity...well what else would you associate it with, really?"

This quote indicates gender oppression (Tong 1989) towards girls who do sport. It is another example of the dominant cultural hegemony which dichotomously positions girls as feminine and passive or masculine and strong. Shirley admits that boisterous behaviours do occur on occasion:

> "If you're in a giddy mood you'd bag people or pull them to the floor. Or take off her tie or mess with her, it's funny, we wouldn't do it every day.''

A few of the girls explained that as you become friendlier and more relaxed with a group it becomes more acceptable to 'be rude' because you are more comfortable. This indicates occasional resistance of the dominant cultural and social norms once sound relationships are formed. However, it was never acceptable in public and certainly never around boys to exhibit masculine traits. At school similarly there is pressure to be ladylike:

> "They do like us to look prim and proper like ladies. One day I had my legs crossed and the lunchroom supervisor told me 'ladies don't do that' and I had to uncross them. Is your tie and your shirt closed is your hair perfect? A lot of that goes on at school."

The school exerts a symbolic control of gender behaviours in the quote above. Gender-differentiated cultures are identified in Irish literature and those that link feminine practices such as caring and relationships solely to women serve to devalue both the activities and the women who practice them (O Connor 2009, Lynch et al. 2012). Caz says it is better to try to be who you really are and finds elements of femininity an enigma:

> "Some girls are very girly like they just love going out getting the hair done and makeup and all that but me I'd be the opposite, now I'd be a bit of a tom boy 'cos I love the tracksuit pants and just being comfortable. Sometimes I don't get why they like going out so much and getting all dressed up, but that's more who they are."

There was a general sense as depicted by the quotes that it was more acceptable to behave in a feminine fashion, but maintaining a range of behaviours which was socially acceptable to the peer group and the school culture was also important. Renold (2001) suggests connections between achievement and femininity. Girls who enjoy academic success can be seen as less feminine and in rejection of dominant cultural modes of femininity, although her study was on WCG specifically. In MP the counterculture group appeared to use masculine behaviour as a form of resistance against what they perceived as MC femininity. They rejected femininity because it was associated with both academia and school acceptance, both of which they were not as interested in, compared with the MCG. It is likely to be the case, as highlighted by Wing (1997), that girls can be keenly aware of gender expectations. While femininity was recursively reinforced by the school culture it was also continuously reinforced by the girls in their peer groups.

The socialisation of boys also has implications for girls when relationships develop. McCormack and Gleeson (2012) discuss the 'Exploring Masculinities' programme which was developed in the late 1990s to serve the social and personal needs of young men. Having received critical attention from the media and some influential parents it was abandoned on the basis that teacher competence in delivering the programme was questionable. This indicated a resistance to explore issues related to gender stereotyping and sexuality. Roberts (2012) asserts that young WC men are capable of resisting traditional masculine identities and cultural ideals to demonstrate a softer masculinity. This is evidence of an inclusive masculinity (Warin 2012), a sense that there is more than one type of masculinity, as is the case for femininity. Martino and Meyenn (2001) agree that boys cannot be seen simply as a homogenous group in opposition to the interests of girls. Similar to femininity, there is a hierarchy of masculinities where some are more valued than others. It is important that gender identities for girls and boys become more fluid and less constrained in order that they can construct their own identities and relate more freely with each other. Bukowski and Concordia (2007) concur that friendship is an effective way for young people to explore issues related to gender, so that greater understanding ensues.

Browne (2004) calls for the need to treat children fairly by treating them differently so that they avoid the pressures of conforming to particular gender identities. She asserts that placing males and females as oppositional or mutually exclusive should be replaced by thinking of multiple masculinities and femininities. Davies (2003) also seeks to avoid the use of binaries and identifies a huge struggle for children who are expected to position themselves as male or female whilst being deprived of the means to signify their male or femaleness in order to avoid sexism. There is evidence that gender constructions in MP would benefit from further exploration at home or in school. This opportunity is constrained in school by the pressure of a crowded curriculum and the Leaving Certificate examinations.

11.6 Accessories

Girls were asked about what possessions were most desired and popular. The marketisation of youth culture is cited in the literature where cultural possessions can operate as a sub-type of cultural capital which can induce educational benefits (Xu and Hampden-Thompson 2012). Cultural possessions in MP had a role in helping a student fit in. The most popular possession was an iphone. This was an example of objectified cultural capital among the group. An iphone was a phone accorded special status. A clear distinction was made between a phone and an iphone. Shirley gives an example of this saying:

> "I got an iphone for Christmas and they'd be like, 'where's Shirley and her iphone?' I don't think of it as my iphone it's just my phone. If I forgot my phone they'd say 'oh Shirley you can't sit with us today you haven't your iphone!' People want to have a good phone."

Here, there is a hint of jealousy and a sense of perceived self importance and hierarchy as Shirley introduces her new iphone, indicating the status associated with it. Even though the girls joke, there is an underlying message that possession of certain items enables and facilitates inclusion into certain groups. Laura, a member of the counterculture group was offered her father's iphone but refused it stating:

> "I have this piece of crap at the moment, it rings and texts and it will do me, I'm not into material things."

This was another form of resistance, a way for Laura to distance herself from the school and the peer group. Caz confirmed that an android phone did the same thing but girls want the iphone to impress others. Carrie says she would never have dreamt of spending €600 on a phone but that she has been influenced by the iphone mania and really wants one now. Carrington (2012) argues that artefacts and the individuals who use them can co-construct lived experience. She also purports that the choice of mobile phone can be contextually linked, with the role of an iphone acting as a conveyor of social and cultural power, as was evident in MP. The most surprising accessory cited was that many of the girls already had or wanted a car. Julie describes this wish list item:

> "Everyone's starting to get cars. I know it's stupid but that's what I want, the freedom of starting driving. Everyone's in a rush to have their lessons done. Certain girls are getting cars and we are so jealous. For college my parents will have to get me a car 'cos I couldn't rely on buses bringing me in."

The jealousy is openly admitted in this quote where 'certain' girls have cars. These accessories indicate to some extent the MC nature of the group and the desire and need to belong. Feeling left out is a significant issue for adolescents at school and can contribute to stress and disengagement with school (Simmons 2011). There was a lack of empathy towards those girls, particularly the WCG who may have been unable to afford these items. Accessories are part of a culture which reveres certain lifestyle products which these girls consequently want to possess. Milner (2013) argues that peer inequalities in secondary schools are linked to status as defined by fashion consciousness as well clique formation. There is an argument that social advantage may accrue through having ownership of the 'right' kind of accessory. Maintaining the latest fashions and remaining up to date is much more accessible to MC youths (Read et al. 2011) due to the costs of the latest accessory. Maintaining status through accessories was important to many of the girls in MP but more feasible for the MCG.

Kosten et al. (2013) identified strong style conformity among MCG. The presentation of self to others is not only based on a dominant construction of femininity or masculinity but also based on membership of a classed consumer culture.

11.7 Popularity

There was a distinction made by the girls about popularity. On the one hand lay peer group popularity and on the other hand there was popularity with the school authorities. It transpired that popularity was not always universal to both. A girl could be popular within her own particular friendship group. A girl could be popular within this group and also within the majority of the whole year group. A girl could be popular among the school authorities. It seemed possible to cross two of these three categories but more difficult generally to be popular with everyone. This is supported in a longitudinal study on friendship and popularity by Dijkstra et al. (2013) where it was found that adolescents maintain and seek out friendships with other popular or high status peers. Peers were also found to become more similar to their friends over time and this increased their individual popularity. This was also evident in MP where girls conformed to the dominant friendship group norms and decisions.

The popular girls were generally those who were really involved in school life and as previously mentioned were picked for leadership roles which invariably caused some jealousy. Currie et al. (2007) identified relational aggression among the popular girls which was partially identified in this study between the head girls and deputy head girls as discussed in Chapter 9. This aggression was seen as a form of agency accruing from social power associated with popularity. A number of the girls felt that a kind girl could be very popular. Caz says:

> "To be honest I think the popularity is just being you. Ruth, she'd be very popular 'cos she's bubbly and stuff. She's always there for someone who's upset like. Being popular doesn't always mean you have to be popular with everyone but she is always there for someone if they're down."

Factors such as 'being with it', 'up for a laugh' and 'right up to date' also played a role in popularity. Going out with boys was also mentioned as a factor related to increased popularity. Reynolds and Juvonen (2011) found increased popularity for girls who matured early among boys and also girls, which differs from Thorne's (1993) study which found lower popularity for early-maturing girls among their female peers. In MP, early maturing in terms of going out with boys led to increased attention and a level of popularity but with a hint of disdain. Anne-Marie states:

> "When you say popular girls I think of a few, they're very bubbly, since 1st year they were always the girls that if there was a mess with a teacher in the classroom it was them. They always started banter rolling or craic. They never quietened down; they always had boyfriends since they were 12 and were going to discos. They fit the universal image of a girl at 17. The coming of age kind of thing, they did it, like the movies do it in a kind of Americanised way. They're lovely girls and I get on with say most of them like to pass in the hall and say 'hi' but... Some of their behaviour is an act and some of it is 'oh my god you're actually like this.'"

It is very interesting that while Anne-Marie admires and acknowledges the popularity of this type of girl she is not friends with them. She enjoys them from a distance and with an element of disbelief. The acknowledgement of identity portrayal being an 'act' has resonances with Goffman (2005). Carrie reinforces the idea that popularity is subjective saying:

> "See everyone has their own opinion on who is popular and who are not you see. You see the girls that got elected as head girls; I was surprised they got elected cos I was kinda like 'really' and obviously other people saw that they'd be really good at it. But popularity wouldn't be the thing as such, it's more who's best for the job, I mean. There are a few people in every clique that would be associated with the most popular one."

This quote is interesting in that it highlights the girls' ability to disassociate leadership and popularity. Approaching the end of school, Ruth claimed popularity had lost its superficiality and was much more about being nice.

This is reflected in a study of younger adolescent girls who cited the importance of authenticity among peers (Read et al. 2011). Girls behaving as themselves were popular where girls who tried to be cool to elevate their status failed to become popular. This may also reflect a type of conformity where the girls in MP have realised 'being nice' is expected as part of the ethos of a girls' school. This conformity has become internalised by the girls and understood by them as maturity when in reality it could be viewed as an example of cultural hegemony (Gramsci 1971).

Cait distinguishes between confidence and popularity. She claimed confident girls are required to fulfil roles but popular girls do not always need to be that confident. At the same time, Shirley points out that there is no individual with universal popularity and reinforces the importance of authenticity stating:

> "I don't think there's anyone in the year that everyone loves. There are a lot of cliques. You wouldn't talk to everyone in the school. I think if you're nice and say hi and you laugh. I don't think it's very superficial, if you're a nice person then people will like you. Yeah popularity is the person that is there for everyone and talks to everyone. Girls that don't start rumours or dramas are popular."

The power of the institutional habitus over the girls is very evident in the similar responses to popularity that were given by many of the girls. Julie describes popular girls as those girls who retain their identity, confidence and ability to express an opinion saying:

> "Popular girls are not afraid to go up and talk to somebody. They definitely have their own opinions and they wouldn't be afraid to put up their hand in class. Not in a rude way or anything. They can still be themselves though."

In the above quote, individuality is mentioned but in relation to being academically involved and an active participant in class as opposed to expressing a controversial or alternative view.

Duncan and Owens (2011) found a competitive popularity among school girls where gaining personal popularity meant demeaning others. There is a clear dominance associated with popularity in MP where girls who fulfil the ethos and academic expectations are elevated in social status. Zook and Russotti (2013) found an academic self presentation was mediated to enhance popularity depending on the context. Getting picked was seen as a reward and form of recognition for the academic girls in MP. Many of the girls indicated an envy of those girls who were picked, honoured or selected as representatives for the school. O'Sullivan (2005) contributes to the agency-structure debate when he writes of an agential/ politics dynamic. In this dynamic, culture is an internal construct and individuals can act to maintain or change that culture. However, this change operates within the constraints of social structures produced out of the dynamics between the agent and the politics. This theory informs what is happening here with certain girls getting picked and others failing to be picked for status roles. Girls cited examples such as: being in the school prospectus or a photograph representing the school or being asked to enter a leadership programme or competition as times they experienced certain girls being picked over others.

Again the valuing of a dominant cultural capital and the rewarding of those in possession of such capital as well as being able to access social capital is relevant here (Bourdieu 1986). There was a certain type of girl who would be most successful in getting picked, according to the girls. She would often be an all rounder with successes in many areas. This encouraged compliance from those girls who were selected and also those who aspired to be selected for roles within the school. Julie was also one of these quieter girls who felt she was never picked as she did not shine enough. However, she found her involvement in sport created greater bonds with a lot of the teachers and so she received positive reinforcement in a different way. This indicates there were varied areas of school life where the girls could seek affirmation. Julie, like Caz believed it was up to the individual to put the effort into school to get more out of it from a social or personal perspective.

294

This suggests an understanding and uncritical belief of the meritocratic view of education. Sport conferred on these girls a status and an identity beyond the classroom. This association with sport and status in the literature tends to apply more to boys (Bowley 2013). The value of sport is multi-faceted in MP affording the girls relief from stress, status with teachers, popularity and a greater freedom in terms of gender constructions.

11.8 Pressure and Stress

Negotiating a path through school is difficult but no year is as tough it as Leaving Certificate year according to the girls. Not alone are the girls examined continually from Christmas tests to mock exams to orals and practicals but then have to face the actual Leaving Certificate in June. Alongside this are issues connected to making choices for third level. In addition, there is making time for friends, boyfriends and family alongside the prospect of leaving school. Where many of the girls felt ready or even desperate to move on, others were fearful. All of the MCG had given up any part-time work outside of school except babysitting where it was still possible to study once the children were in bed. The only girls still holding down a part-time job were WCG. Lalor et al. 2007 cite that Irish WCG work longer part time hours and depending on the intensity of the work this may have an effect on exam performance. Taylor et al. (2012) found a relationship between the quantity and quality of part-time work and its effect on school performance. Longer hours had a negative impact on attainment in school. The girls who worked part-time felt it was important to them to provide a balance from study and to earn money to ensure a level of financial independence.

Ruth made an interesting comment that she felt the school was secretly preparing them for motherhood saying: 'It is excellent practice particularly in 6th year, for having no time to yourself at all.' McRobbie (2007, p. 718) sees girls' immersion and success in academia as a political tool. The expectation of perfection in academics, motherhood, body and image is an oppression of women. She describes this scenario as an:

> "Economic rationality which envisages young women as endlessly working on a perfectible self, for whom there can be no space in the busy course of the working day for a renewed feminist politics."

This quest for perfection was intensely stressful for the girls. Shirley felt angry when others took their stress out on her. Some girls spent thirteen hours at school every day during 6th year. Mary was adamant she would not conform to these expectations and again resisted school culture stating:

> "Well I think this school has high expectations for everyone because our principal and all our teachers want us to achieve high grades. I think they definitely do put too much pressure on us because with study and everything. There are some people in my year that do study up to 9 o clock. I don't think that's right at all. I really don't know how you'd have time to eat and shower and everything. I go to bed at 10.30 so I don't understand how they find the time to do that. I will only study until 6 o clock and then I'm exhausted and I go to the gym and everything. Their life is just completely taken over by study and it's so stressful."

The MCG see the long term benefits of studying and defer gratification. This is not the case for Mary and this is a key example of why MCG do well in education. In addition, the MC parents operate surveillance of time spent on study and support the school in this respect. Brunborg et al. (2010) found that perceived academic control had a positive effect on achievement. In addition, when academic control was combined with a preoccupation with failure the number of hours spent on study increased considerably. This mirrors the context in MP and may partially explain why the girls do so much study. Mahoney and Vest (2012) identify significant psychological distress in adolescents whose time is over-scheduled with extra-curricular activities or study. This over emphasis on study also links with theory claiming a capitalist imperative to assign long hours to study. The individually competitive nature of Irish schools, the long day and emphasis at second level on homework could be seen as having an economic imperative. It could be seen as being complicit in the training of productive, compliant and hardworking individuals for the labour market (Lynch 1989).

These issues question the role of education, positioning knowledge as a commodity to be acquired for personal gain as opposed to education serving the common good. This situates elements of the inequality debate firmly in education as the type of knowledge valued in Irish schools is not accessible or culturally valued by all groups in society (Baker et al. 2009). This highlights again the relative powerlessness of the school as an agent who is operating in an educational market place where schools are competing for league table positions and high academic results. The expectations of success for Ruth, a very academic student, were such that she was dreaming and daydreaming of the day the Leaving Certificate results would come. She acknowledges that while this is stressful, it is to some extent also motivating her to keep working hard. This view is shared by many of the girls. Ruth fears disappointing the school, her parents and herself by not living up to expectations:

> "At the moment all I think about is getting that results envelope on that morning and being in the office and wondering (I don't know if it's for the school or myself) will I be disappointed? I don't want to be disappointed in front of them, I don't want to. There are expectations as the teachers would say you're good you're going to get this and I'd be 'oh my god I hope I'm going to get this'. At the same time that needs to be there cos if it wasn't you wouldn't care, you need that at school. If the teachers didn't care it would be worse, you wouldn't care but it's still pressure. A certain amount is helpful definitely."

This illustrates the high pressure placed on MC children and indeed the pressure they place on themselves. High expectations of teachers and parents surrounding exam performance indicated the belief that a little pressure can be used to motivate (Booher-Jennings 2008). The higher the level of education parents have the more involved they can be in their child's education (Lam and Ducreux 2013). Indeed, a distinction between WC parents and MC parents was that the WC hoped for educational success rather than expected it, as was the case in MC homes (Devine 2004). Sarah and Cait felt they were coping on a personal level with the stress quite well but it was family who were pressuring them directly and indirectly.

There was a tradition in Cait's family to compare cousins and since she had a few cousins doing the Leaving Certificate the same year there was huge competition among the family members. This really annoyed her and stressed her when the dinner table conversation came round to wondering what 'x' and 'y' relations would get. Lareau (2000) documents that during dinnertime in MC homes, education dominates everything. Anne Marie tells a frightening story depicting the effect exam stress had on her health in recent weeks. There is a form of MC stress, as outlined by Lareau (2000), where examination pressure can be triangulated from the home, school and the student themselves. Anne-Marie explains her stress in relation to the education system:

> "I am under major pressure I'm actually on tablets at the moment for school pressure especially after the pre exams. I remember just the day before my geography pre I was sitting on my mother's lap with my head on her shoulder crying, I could not cope. I was out for a week from school. I was so tired I couldn't even walk. My house is 20 minutes from town and it would take me an hour to walk it. I could not walk and could not move so I went to the doctor and he said it was stress and gave me the tablets. I'm feeling much better since I started taking them. There's an awful pressure to be studious and get good grades. Your parents want you to do well, my parents say your best is good enough but I know my best isn't good enough cos I need a certain number of points and this is the only thing I ever wanted to do and I would be heartbroken if I didn't get it. There's also then the pressure that you need to have a social life as well. You need to be seen out so that you are seen by your peers to not be a social recluse either."

Managing the dual roles of adolescent and scholar indicates the complexity of pressures experienced by some girls. The girls admitted that much of the pressure was being placed on them by themselves to get the points they wanted. Sharp (2013) highlighted a link between severe examination pressure and suicide ideation. Sharp (2013) also found evidence of higher self harm and mental illness in countries with strong examination pressure cultures which is a concern given the number of comments made by the girls in this study in relation to exam stress.

Weissbourd (2011) cites exam pressure as contributing to young people being less happy. The triangulation of parents, girls and school pressure is reinforced by the higher education admissions system. Successful access to third-level is connected to how academically effective the school is (Smyth and Hannan 2007). Long hours of late-night study could arguably be seen as effective academia, at least by the MC seeking such services. However, in second-level the stress is partly due to the large amounts of rote learning students have to do in a wide range of subjects. In higher education the study is also intense but is a different type of studying with less emphasis on learning off. The influence of the institutional habitus of the school is significant in third-level decision making but is combined with the agency of the student (Smyth and Banks 2012b). Here is an example of wider educational and indeed political structures (Ball 2013) influencing schools into the provision of long study hours. It appears even if mental and physical health is threatened by such actions some girls feel compelled to endure this pressure for Leaving Certificate year because they want a particular course in third-level. This personal stress is then compounded by school leaders who are publicly judged based on league table results and who face similar pressures and pass them onto the students. Carrie captures this compounding of pressure when she says:

> "The school are like 'our results have been very good to date'. Like, 'last year we had this many girls with this many points'. Now that it's getting closer people are just winding down 'cos they're so tired and just want to get it over and done with."

Ruth deliberately changed friendship groups at the beginning of 6th year in order to cope better with her stress levels. There were too many arguments because the previous group was too big and there were too many characters leading to a lot of tension. Brooks (2005) asserts that new friendships' are rarely entered into for friendships sake in the final years of school. There was usually an alternative motive for changing beyond real friendship. This concurs with Ruth's explanation as to why she moved groups:

"I wanted less drama especially in 6th year; you don't need all of that. I was finding school was stressful. I was finding my friends were stressful and sometimes home was stressful so I wasn't able for all of that."

This is an example of agency which was likely influenced by institutional cultural capital (Bourdieu 1998). Ruth is making a rational decision to facilitate a calmer 6th year for herself. However, in doing so she is able to access the cultural capital available to make the decision, which will help her. However, this in turn reinforces the institutional cultural capital of the school when she achieves high grades in the exams. This illustrates how social reproduction can have very clear connections to individual agency. Individual agency has also an influence on structures whereby they can be maintained or changed (Giddens 2013a). Those MCG with the dominant forms of capital are most complicit in the pursuit of academic excellence and also most exposed to the examination pressure. However, they are eventually rewarded educationally and occupationally. This link is evident in the literature where members of dominant groups tend to have enhanced access to the various forms of capital and this enables greater access to third level (Smyth and Banks 2012b). This illustrates again the inequality of power among the MC.

The idea of a power discourse which is evident in this study is a central theme in Foucault's (1980) writing. The key effects of power are seen in actions and this is evident in the discussion on study hours and conformity to academia in MP. This repeated practice of studying for long hours at the expense of wellbeing in some cases, repeats itself every Leaving Certificate cycle, normalising these actions and reproducing them. This scenario is difficult for the WCG who find themselves alienated for not conforming to the dominant cultural requirement to study hard. A concept broadly known as transformative agency education has been addressed by a number of theorists (Apple 2001, Freire 2000b, Giroux 1981) and is relevant to the pressure and dominance the girls in MP are coping with in school. Ball (1994) believes in social reform to counter all systems of domination in education. This idea is based on individuals reaching a deep level of understanding of the world and themselves.

Transformative agency calls for an education steeped in democracy and empowerment, where difference is accepted and celebrated. Transformative agency education is underpinned by critical theory where it is understood that relationships involve domination. Giroux (1981, 2004) analyses how schools produce ideologies and then examines how students accept, negotiate or resist these ideologies. Transformative agency could enable the development of pedagogical strategies to challenge or understand the dominance experienced by the girls in MP. However, this is a challenge for schools under the current Leaving Certificate regime and the tradition of rote learning that still prevails. The all consuming nature of academic success which exists as a phenomenon for many MC schools, means academic success has to be achieved at all costs even above health, happiness and friendship. This focus on academic success is reinforced by the state, school, parents and even the girls themselves.

The girls were asked about what they did and did not enjoy in their lives and discussed some of the positive and negative memories they had over the years. The majority of girls could not speak more highly of the school feeling at home, comfortable, happy and well looked after. They spoke of looking forward to coming to school every day and were very positive about teachers and peers. Laura was less positive about her experience remembering how she cried for three years coming into school as she just wasn't happy settling in. Her mother agreed to move her eventually but she felt by then it was too late to start again in a new school. Laura summarised her experience saying:

> "I hated it. I just don't think this was the place for me to go. When we were small it was like we had to be these perfect little persons like shirts, ties, why isn't your hair tied up' and you're groomed properly and this, that and the other. I never got it but it was really horrible for other people or when you were smaller the other girls would say 'she's not even washed' or like 'Oh my god look at her' and I'd be thinking 'you're pathetic, why do ye care?"

Laura identifies on a personal level with the girls judgements of the WCG appearance and hygiene and it is clear incidences like this with her peers have tainted her experience of school.

Girls with less peer power can be less popular and are at greater risk of bullying behaviours related to their appearance (Duncan and Owens 2011). Mary's response recounted memories of finding peace in religion at school:

> "I like when we have masses you know I like school masses. I like going to church and everything because you can clear your mind and forget about school and it's just totally stress free and it makes you realise that everything is not about school out there."

Julie felt none of the day to day things would be remembered but the one off things like teachers' jokes would. Similarly, DiCamillo (2010) found that a teacher's sense of humour enhanced enjoyment of and attention during lessons. Keira loved the school saying:

> "I like the way when you come in you wouldn't feel uncomfortable. You could say 'hi' to anyone or whatever. I don't enjoy studying the whole time this year. When you come into school you just think straight away you have so much study to do. There is days when you're like oh it's never going to finish. It's not really the school itself but the system."

Many of the MCG particularly expressed their joy and relief at being admitted and cited that they would never have wanted to go anywhere else. The girls were quite similar in their likes and dislikes of school and life in general. They did not look into the future too much, as if blinkered by the immediacy of the exams, which was the overarching pressure the girls felt.

11.9 Conclusion

Patterns in this chapter revolve around the dominant culture's effect on girls' views of youth culture and school life. The need to experience a relationship with a boy was a social pressure felt by many of the girls who were still to find a first boyfriend. Having a boyfriend was a sign of heterosocial competence (Grover et al. 2007). The study regime seemed counterproductive to finding or maintaining a relationship with a boy due to lack of time. The girls had their own dating structures akin to Eisenhart (1990) who identified a romance trajectory.

There was a form of hegemonic conformity to activities in 6th year centring on study for exams. Yet fitting in with dominant youth culture also had to be mediated. Management of the dual identities of scholar and youth were difficult. Having a boyfriend enhanced peer esteem and self worth but those who were academic or talented in sport maintained their self esteem without a boyfriend. The examination expectations in terms of points and the expectations in terms of youth culture acted as a collective union of forces, leading to intense stress and pressure. This collective unity relates to hegemony theory (Gramsci and Forgacs 1988).

The themes in this chapter where hegemony was clearly present included: popularity, sexuality, academia, femininity and parental involvement. The girls were all partially complicit as agents who consented to stay at school to study for long hours although they also admitted to parental and school pressure to do so. This indicates the dominant practices of the MCG being realised through consent (Gramsci et al. 1971). Those who fulfilled the academic conformist brief most effectively became popular with the teachers and school authorities more so than with their peers. Those who succeeded in popularity among the peer group needed to be nice, funny, supportive and authentic as well as academic. Authenticity is identified as important in peer interactions (Read et al. 2011). It was challenging for the girls to mediate popularity across these two domains. This was illustrated by the unpopularity of the formal girl leaders due to jealousy and the manner in which they were seen to covet power. There were also resistors to the long hours of study. This was seen as an agentive lack of conformity to adhere to study protocols by girls primarily from the WC group.

Masculinity, femininity and sexuality were themes which were influenced by the dominant social norms of a Catholic school. The church provided a historicism which influenced the girls' social processes and practices. This historicism also operated as a social power (Gramsci and Forgacs 1988). It was apparent there was pressure on girls to be feminine unless they were involved in sport which freed their gender construction and identity formation to some extent.

Heterosexuality was the only accepted form of sexuality among most of the girls, with a few girls aware of the sensitivities around admitting distaste for homosexuality. The girls used agency to manage their responses although their views were evidently homophobic. This presents a concern for homosexual girls' experience in MP and possibly indicates a potential towards hidden forms of homophobic bullying (O'Higgins-Norman 2009).

The conformity to MC cultural expectations is reflected in the accessories the girls sought. The acquisition of objectified cultural capital included a need for cars, iphones and designer dresses among many of the girls. In addition, the variation in the adolescent language used by the WCG operated as a cultural barrier to being accepted within the dominant MCG groups. It acted as a linguistic signifier of difference (Bernstein 1990) or a structure which constrained those who spoke differently from fully belonging (Giddens 1984). The idea of a linguistic habitus (Bourdieu 1991) brings the issue of language as a symbolic power and a form of identifiable cultural capital into the groups' culture. The cultural transmission of stereotypes and prejudicial attitudes towards difference is evident in the girls' internalised struggle to be politically correct yet culturally conformist. This concludes that difference in terms of social class, language, possessions, appearance, sexual orientation and gender associated behaviours are seen as a symbolic resistance of the dominant culture by the WCG (Giroux 1983). In order to maintain power there was evidence among the MCG of a subtle verbal alienation of those girls who are not like them.

The attempts to examine youth culture beyond the school context was unsurprisingly challenging due to the receipt of continual responses related to the school setting. This is due to the girls' absolute immersion in the school culture and reinforces the idea that social processes can be contextualised to a significant degree. This is a limitation to the study but positive in terms of an ethics of care for the girls where they only disclosed and shared what they chose to. Finally, this chapter indicated a careful management by the MCG of what elements of their peer culture they were willing to discuss even within the themes explored.

There was clear use of agency in how the girls did not allude to issues such as alcohol, drugs, and sex, although the researcher did not pose any questions with regard to these areas of youth culture. The girls may have wanted to reinforce the image that MP girls did not engage in the darker side of adolescent culture and perhaps the girls did not engage in these activities. Yet the research on Irish substance abuse among adolescents has seen a change in use from being marginalised communities or vulnerable youths to a high prevalence in rural and urban settings (Van Hout 2009).

The power of the dominant culture is such that the MCG collectively managed a presentation of self that upheld the 'clean' image of MC culture. This dominant ideology protects the prestige and reputation of the school and deters acknowledgement of less savoury activities beyond the school gates. It also presents a limitation of the teacher-researcher perspective in that this image would have been presented to me as a member of the culture too where it may not have been for an outsider. At the same time it provides interesting information on the nature of hegemony and the power of the institutional and personal habitus in regulating the girls' agency in deciding what to and what not to divulge. Finally, it reinforces for the researcher the lack of power used over the girls during the study and the ethical way in which coercion and probing were avoided. This was aided by due cognisance of the existing power dynamic there by nature of the teacher-student relationship.

Chapter 12 Conclusion

The findings across the substantive chapters elicited some key messages in areas such as agency-structure, hegemony, and inequality. This chapter highlights the key conclusions which are reviewed across each of these theoretical perspectives. The contribution to existing theory is identified explicitly following the discussion of the thesis conclusions. A number of broader issues relating to this study and wider educational debate are also considered. These issues point to directions for future research. The methodological contribution to the insider-outsider debate is addressed through defence of the role of the teacher-researcher throughout this study. Finally, this chapter addresses the important limitations of the study via a scrutiny of the dilemma's, ethics and possibilities of the insider-researcher.

12.1 Social Class Mediates Agency and Structure

Agency-structure theory was used to inform this researcher's understanding of the lived experiences of the girls in MP. This thesis concludes that social class mediates the girls' use of agency in response to oppression. The agentive resistance of the WCG appears to operate through some level of critical consciousness (Freire 2000b) where these girls have a discursive understanding that they are oppressed. This was evident in their ability to explain and express clearly how they as a group experienced different interactions with teachers and the other girls. These girls are not however able to articulate why this may be occurring. They expressed feeling different and inferior but they blame themselves for this, suffering further self-oppression. The need for the WCG to resist stems from the domestic transfer of more valuable capital from MC parents to their daughters. This perpetuates the generative schemes which serve to produce dominant cultural values and practices (Bourdieu 1986). The WCG attributed their alienation in MP to their resistance activities and poor academic performance. Therefore, there is ambiguity for these WCG in fully understanding their alienation from a cultural perspective.

This limits their agency to transform the structures which constrain and them. This is similar to Willis's (1977) and Fagan's (1995) study. Their agency is constrained by their own interpretative schemes, the knowledge which helps them understand through experience (Giddens 1984). This would also suggest that reflexivity is mediated by the power of one's habitus which can render recursive actions doxic. The duree or continuous flow of actions can become un-reflexively arbitrary as seen in both the resistance and conformist action in MP.

Giddens (1984) asserts that our actions naturally become less reflective and more habitual over time. Routinization in MP became a constraining structure where the girls were aware of their actions but were not totally free to select them, due to habitus. Therefore routinization is connected to habitus. This point is further supported by the inability of the MCG to reflect on their privilege or appreciate difference throughout the study. They are unaware of how the system privileges them in all sorts of little and bigger ways. They are unable to empathise with the WCG as a result. They have internalised the concept of meritocracy for themselves. This would suggest they are not practically conscious of their prejudicial conduct and are also reflexively constrained, perhaps more than the WCG. This is because the closer alignment of their personal and the institutional habitus elicited greater powers of conformity and a naturalisation or routinization of oppression. Yet there are some instances where conformity is discursively conscious. The girls admitted to conforming because it was easier and were rewarded for conforming through roles and recognition. This is not real agency but agency constrained by the power of hegemonic structures and the combined effect of the personal and institutional habitus (Bourdieu 1998). This concludes that Bourdieu's theory of practice and Giddens structuration theory can both inform the girls' agency in MP. This is possible in how reflexivity, agency and consciousness intersect with the personal and institutional habitus.

12.1.1 Triangulation of the Individual Self, Group and Institutional Habitus

There is a triangulation in how the individual's relationship with 'self', their relationship with others in their group and their relationship with the institutional habitus combine to *reproduce* actions and practice (Bourdieu 1998). These three triangulations affect agency but this is dependent on how they merge for each individual. This is in concurrence with Giddens (1984) assertion that all persons are positioned in a multiple way. Some girls conform to fit easily into the dominant peer groups which align to the institutional habitus. There is little need for agency or change. These girls are members of the dominant culture and there is a 'doxa' which facilitates conformity. Some girls use agency to transform themselves to belong to the dominant group. They change their own habitus to conform to avoid alienation. Others maintain an individual habitus which they use to resist socialisation into the dominant habitus. All of these are acts of agency with varying transformational power on the individual and the structures (Giddens 1984).

It may appear the girls use agency to choose their friends but the formation of large dominant groups leaves the individual girl needing to mediate membership of a group structure as well as creating friendship bonds with a few. The group structure is constraining agency but also enabling, as it serves to protect and dominate simultaneously. The MCG dominant capital positions them as group leaders reinforcing and reproducing their dominance (Gramsci 1973). The groups are relatively homogenous which can enable some transition between groups. Breakaway groups form when the leadership of a group is resisted (Giroux 1981). These groups are far less powerful or influential (Foucault and Gordon 1980). Therefore, the need for conformity to group norms and structures restricts individual agency in place of group dominance, irrespective of the social class of the group (Giddens 1984).

Group structures are the result of human action and also hegemony. Non-conformity or resistance to group norms or legitimations leads to alienation from the group, although the subsequent creation of new groups aligns agency with the transformation of structures (Giddens 1984). This dialectic of control (Giddens 1984) causes a shift in social structures as the girls intervene or refrain from acting. Some girls resist the tacit modes of cultural dominance, often making friends outside the school (Giroux 1981). These friendship interactions in a particular space and time reconstitute the frames which regulate activities, causing temporary ontological insecurity (Giddens 1984) and compounding stress.

12.1.2 Agency-Structure as a Duality bound by Habitus

Agency and structure are interconnected as a duality on a number of levels (Giddens 1984). Agency and structures both exert power and transform or resist change. Structures have greater power over those with a conformist disposition. Due to the socialising role of gender constructions which position girls as passive conformists (Adler et al. 1992), such constructions when combined with the power of institutional structures, are greater than the power of the individual agent. This is seen in the conformity to study for such long periods every day. While many of the girls used agency to conform to this most girls still claimed it was oppressive, yet few resisted. Therefore, the repressive nature of power is seen through the girls' agency to conform even when they would like to resist. Many girls cannot act because they are neither fully knowledgeable nor able to rationalise (Giddens 1984) due to the power of their personal and the institutional habitus. For others their contextual knowledge informs them through reflexive monitoring that resistance is futile, such is the power of habitus. Also the girls are aware of the potential consequences if they do not conform. For many of the MCG there will be a personal gain to conformity in the form of points, status and in this way they are rational actors (Gambetta 1987). The dominant cultural capital as a means of producing hegemony is most powerful when parents, peers, patriarchy and institutional habituses come together to magnify the extent and scope of the power and produce dominant patterns of practice.

In this way the girls' conformity is agency which reproduces dominant discourses. Capability constraints such as the girls' age, pressure of exams and habitus all facilitate the decision (for the majority of the girls) to adopt homogenous conformist actions (Giddens 1984). MC agency is positioned as more powerful in reproducing practices than WC agency in MP. External structures like social class constitute the agent culturally and memory traces akin to personal habitus act as internal structures. These combined structures interact with individual agency illustrating a duality between the two but this agency is constrained or enabled by the internal and external structures working together (Giddens 1984). MC agency acts collectively as a structure to ensure individual conformity and advantage. WC agency is resistance based, conferring disadvantage in MP. The MCG used their agency to manage their responses collectively (Gramsci 1973). While the hegemonic structural significations constrained frank responses at times this illustrates the power of Giddens' (1984) interpretative schemes. Therefore, there are elements of rational choice evident in the study. The girls are neither pushed nor do they jump but they are guided by their rationality within the constraints of their habitus and the institutional habitus.

12.2 Hegemony as a Visual and Aural Force

The conformity to MC cultural expectations is reflected in the agency of the girls to acquire accessories as a form of objectified cultural capital. These expensive items created a structural status which the WCG could not attain and is an outward way in which the ruling class display and maintain dominance (Gramsci 1971). MCG could assert dominance socially, culturally, politically and economically. This illustrates the connection between political and civil society and how power diffuses across society (Gramsci and Forgacs 1988). Language is bound to the dominant culture and social structures operating within MP. The variation in the adolescent language used by the WCG operated as a cultural barrier to being accepted within the dominant MCG groups. It acted as a linguistic signifier of difference (Bernstein 1990) or a structure which constrained those who spoke differently from fully belonging (Giddens 1984).

The idea of a linguistic habitus (Bourdieu 1991) brings the issue of language as a symbolic power and a form of identifiable cultural capital into focus. Differences in language and accessories in MP are also integral to class domination due to the prestige and status these entities provide to the dominant fundamental group.

12.2.1 Hegemony from a Feminist Perspective

The historical ethos of the school was to provide education to wealthy MCG. This ethos has been sustained through social reproduction over many years. The school is somewhat powerless as an agent due to the historic legacy upon which the school was founded and which remains integral to its ethos today. In addition, the marketisation of education leaves schools like MP financially vulnerable due to old buildings needing regular investment in order to maintain them and inadequate funding. This leads to MP actively seeking out MC families who can support the school financially and maintain the historical ethos.   Equally, examination results have become a form of objectified cultural capital which the school must use and maintain in order to survive the market. These issues impact on the lives of all the MP girls in varying ways. The effects of the hegemonic environment on the MP girls are mediated by social class and are discussed below.

The subordination of women through hegemonic and patriarchal practices is a key theoretical focus for this study. The role of MP as an oppressing structure, itself oppressed by other superstructures is highlighted above. Hegemony is produced and reproduced in MP via the maintenance of a MC intake. Gramsci (1973) sees hegemony as dynamic rather than passive where it is recreated and defended as well as being resisted. Parents use their cultural, social and economic capital to ensure a place for their daughter and once admitted this highly valued MC culture continues to confer advantage through the conformist actions of their daughters (Lareau 2000). This advantage is identified in selection for roles such as prefect or head-girl. More significantly the use of conformity by the MCG enables better relationships with teachers and greater attention. This is a liberal egalitarian issue where some individuals are not afforded the same equality of care (Baker et al 2009).

The quality of the uniform, how it is worn and prefect badges also serve to demark the MCG from the WCG and portray another physical dominance. The uniform acts as a very public display of privilege.

Hegemony is most visible as oppressive 'othering' of girls in neighbouring schools, communities and within MP due to difference socially or culturally. Difference in terms of social class, language, possessions, appearance, sexual orientation, values, gender behaviours are all seen as a symbolic resistance of the dominant culture by the MCG (Giroux 1983). In order to maintain power there is evidence of a subtle dominance regime experienced as a form of alienation of those girls who are not like them. This is a basic inequality which denies that all human beings have equal worth (Lynch et al 2009). This is a result of MP institutional practices and also parents who want their MP daughters to mix with other MCG. It indicates lack of empathy for those less fortunate among these MC parents, but also a fear that in a volatile economic situation like a recession, their daughters must be afforded every chance to succeed and they see this as their role. The promotion of homogenous actions serves to reinforce prejudice towards others and prevents an understanding of cultural dominance. This supports Gramsci's (1973) idea that power diffuses across the institutions of civil society. Hegemonic discourses in MP have become a self regulatory disciplinary mechanism among the MCG. Those who feel alienated from the dominant culture are likely to resist most and vice versa so resistance and alienation work in a reciprocal way in MP. Hegemonic dominance relies upon the consensual coercion of peers (Gramsci and Forgacs 1988). Therefore, hegemonic power induces different forms of conformist and resistant agentive responses based on the girls' social class.

MC parents insist on adherence to the rules and certain MC cultural practices. This adds to the cultural power of the dominant MC in the school and serves to maintain this power. These parents act as members of Gramsci's (1973) 'political state' stepping in wherever there is a threat to hegemony and moulding their daughters 'free' consent to the needs of a political economic base. WC parents are alienated by the school culture and are not part of the power elite.

In addition, their daughters use agency to maintain their parents' disconnection from the school by rendering them powerless. In many ways WC parents are both intrinsically and extrinsically powerless as agents in their daughters' education. Hegemony also influences the girls' stage management of their interactions. The power of the dominant culture is such that the girls can collectively manage a presentation of self that upholds the 'clean' image of MC culture. This dominant ideology enables prestige and advantage at school and deters acknowledgement of less savoury activities beyond the school gates. It illustrates how the force of certain homogenous groups unite consciously (Gramsci et al. 1971). The result of all of these points is that the MP girls are rendered blind to their own unearned privilege and they embrace the unethical meritocratic notion of success.

The need to experience a relationship with a boy was a social pressure felt by many of the girls who were still to find a first boyfriend. Having a boyfriend was a sign of heterosocial competence (Grover et al. 2007). The hegemonic school discourses and the expectations in terms of youth culture also acted as a collective union of forces (Gramsci and Forgacs 1988). These combined powerful forces manifested among the girls as expressions of intense sustained stress and pressure particularly in managing both. The rural/city divide provides evidence that cultural heterogeneity does exist outside of social class in MP. City girls and country girls exhibit differences in how they engage in sport, with country girls centralising sport as a significant cultural phenomenon. There is also a fundamental but tacit battle for dominance between the rural and city girls which would benefit from further exploration in future studies.

12.3 Inequality due to Hegemony and Structures

There is a multiplier effect evident in the dearth of valued capital available to the WC which serves to compound inequality of respect and recognition for these girls on the basis of social class (Baker et al. 2009). Those girls who resist the hegemonic dominance are exposed to a form of symbolic violence by becoming invisible even in resistance activities, nearing the end of their time in school (Bourdieu 1998).

The recursive reinforcement of the MCG' dominant cultural capital indicates how difficult it would be to exist outside of the dominant culture and explains why conformity is the prevailing pattern among the peer group. The eventual ignoring of the resistance means that there is no incentive to cease these actions and this serves only to encourage greater acts of resistance. This is highlighted by the incident of joyriding weeks before the state exams as the girls 'had not done anything big all year'. This alienates this group further and also enables an escalation in the damage to these girls' educational chances which is an inequality of learning and condition (Baker et al 2009).

It is clear that in MP some WCG succeed (Anne Marie) and some WCG do not succeed academically (Mary). Similarly, some MCG succumbed to stress and did not reach their potential academically either, albeit they did get a college place. Notwithstanding the fact that examination success whilst important is not the end of the story, WCG culture was robust. It is clear that some WCG do not want to be MC, they resist because they are comfortable with their culture. Despite it being arguably more socially acceptable in the eyes of some to be MC, this was not the case for some of the WCG, particularly Laura who did not want to be MC. This was evident in the small ways she used agency like refusing the offer of a smart phone, and admitting to preferring her 'piece of crap phone' because it delineated her from the possessions the MCG sought.

12.3.1 Care Challenges to Inequality

The girls admitted that they needed each other and had systems in place to ensure positive connections were maintained. There was care evident amongst the girls. The use of social media and sleepovers operated as ritualistic activities where support can be provided. This shared identity formation, created bonds and allegiances between group members. These connections strengthened the power of the group and provided a sense of belonging for group members. Therefore, although power and oppression were evident, ritualistic solidarity through peer interactions was also present (Lieblich and Josselson 1994). This was still mediated by social, cultural and contextual similarities between the members of the school groups (Gramsci 1973).

Some ritualistic activities like social media use and sleepovers were also used as forms of dominance enabling acts of inequality towards other girls. It is clear that friendship which the girls deem critical to their school experience could benefit from a greater understanding and acceptance of difference. Baker et al. (2009) suggest that a social movement model of egalitarian change could offer gains for both groups. This transformation would still enable agency for girls to choose friends but from a wider more diverse social mix.

12.3.2 Inequality and Pressure

Oppressive pressure was evident throughout the girls' cultural experiences. The perspectives where such pressure was present were popularity, sexuality, examinations, femininity and parental involvement. It was apparent there was pressure on girls to be feminine unless they were involved in sport which freed their gender identity formation to some extent. Heterosexuality was the only accepted form of sexuality among most of the girls, with a few girls aware of the sensitivities around this issue. This is an inequality in respect and recognition of gender and sexuality (Lynch et al 2009). Patriarchy was also an implicit structural power with subordination of the girls' opportunity to express individuality, an inequality of power (Lynch et al 2009). Those who succeeded in popularity among the peer group needed to be nice, funny, supportive and authentic (Read et al. 2011). It was challenging for the girls to mediate popularity across these two domains. This was illustrated by the unpopularity of the formal girl leaders due to jealousy and the manner in which they coveted power and their oppression of others through withholding knowledge as power.

12.4 Contribution and Limitations of this Study

This study explores MP as a homogenous group with a minority group of WCG. The social class distinctions within this group indicated a substantial level of heterogeneity in terms of the school experience on the girls. Those closer to WC culture were less successful in making the transition to higher level and the regret cited by these girls is significant. While they resisted due to cultural difference the consequences are stark in that this is a missed opportunity which will not be presented to the girls again. This loss of a life chance to succeed educationally is out of proportion with their resistance actions. The stress experienced by many of the girls at school was very much down to the nature of the Leaving Certificate examination. This system was responsible for many of the power issues that existed in the school in relation to the girls, teachers, parents and school management. In a way the Leaving Certificate system was the driving force of the examples of oppression experienced by the girls. Because MP acts to protect its place, it uses surveillance and control in order to achieve this. The MC parents were co-conspirators with the institution, to ensure their daughters' educational advantage.

The role of this research was to contribute epistemologically and theoretically to a particular research field. The theoretical contribution lies in the use of Bourdieu and Giddens' theory to analyse agency and structure from a feminist perspective. The role of social class as a mediator of agency and structure is significant. The role of hegemonic power in MP as a perpetrator of inequality on individuals and groups as well as by individuals and groups is important. This use of existing theory through refinement and combination of perspectives combined with the middle-class school context is important. The exploration of peer interactions and the contextual and cultural negotiation of school success as informed by the theoretical frame are unique features of this study.

Figure 12.1 provides an overview of the particular contribution to agency-structure theory.
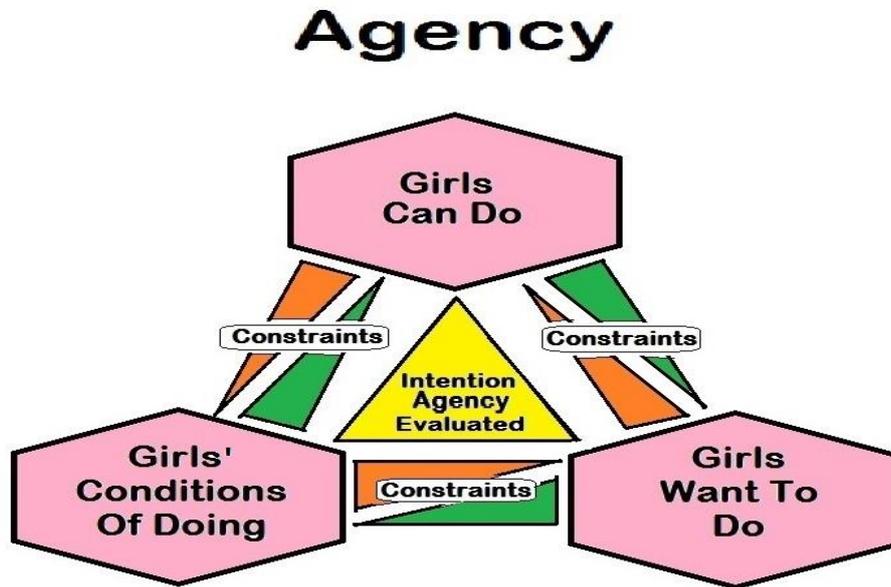
This figure illustrates that intentional agency is evaluated by what a girl can do, wants to do and the conditions of doing. This triad is mediated by constraints such as habitus, structures (school, state, and peer group), and economic, social and cultural capital. Rational choice agency is particular to a given time and space and varies with context. Therefore, agency and structure are neither discrete nor asynchronous entities. They are interconnected and operate conceptually for this researcher on a continuum, where they intersect to influence, rather than dictate the actions of human conduct for each individual. This intersection is interceded by habitus as a key condition of doing. The personal and institutional habitus converge to shape the level of real agency or freedom to act. This researcher contends that evidence of a group habitus emerged in this study as another cultural formation which also mediates rational choice of the agent. The more complex the conditions which bound individual agency become, the greater the challenge to an individual's reflexivity and consequently their rational choice. It is evident in this study that actions are influenced by a myriad of structures but agents act on these structures and in doing so also construct the social world. This occurs in a continuous duree or flow of actions.

These actions are partially enabled or constrained for the girls in MP through a triangulation of the personal, group and institutional habitus, their conditions of doing. This contribution builds on existing theory by delineating a range of habitus including a group habitus as key conditions of doing for rational agents. Real intentional agency is impacted by habitus in the way it enables and constrains and also in the way it challenges reflexivity and practical consciousness. This merges elements of the agency-structure theories of Bourdieu, Giddens and Gambetta as a contribution to this theoretical debate.

The role of parents as powerful agents of surveillance and influence over the girls also emerges. Parents are integral to a familial habitus which determines the girls' self habitus and in this way exerts control. In addition, parents use their agency to dictate their wishes to their daughters in overt and more subtle ways. Parents' capacity to affect the girls' rational choice and agency is evident throughout the study. Decisions with regard to admission to MP, adherence to the school rules and protocols, study practices, friendship formation and examination pressure are influenced by the girls' parents both directly and indirectly. Group habitus and parents are additional conditions of doing which bound the rational choice of the girls to make their own autonomous decisions and therefore form part of the contribution to the agency-structure theory. There are potential research opportunities to examine the idea of habitus intersection further. The way in which self, familial, group and institutional habitus operate as an integration of converging structural forces, for the individual agent is interesting. In addition, the causal connections between Bourdieu's habitus, Gidden's practical consciousness/ reflexivity and Gambetta's intentional rational choice could have implications for further theoretical development.

This study does point to many satisfactory elements in that there were girls from the MC and WC and also from the liminal space between the two who had considerable success academically and socially in MP. This supports the argument that both WC and MC parents have academic aspirations for their daughters.

The literature review positions many elements of this study within educations' broader landscape where similar issues that arose within MP have been highlighted (Bryan and Bracken 2011, Lynch and Lodge 2002). This would suggest that the depth and quality of data within this study has a contextual generalisability to other schools like MP. In light of this there is a need for discussion with young adults around issues such as gender stereotyping and sexuality. SPHE is an evident curricular space for this to happen but it must be taken seriously. This could be a space where sensitive topics could be discussed. Outsider facilitators could be used but the state would need to resource this. Currently, the academic nature of education precludes this. Only the subjects that attain points are valued, as seen with SPHE, PE and RE in MP. Even within academic subject areas this researcher experienced reluctance among the girls to discuss issues that were not directly related to the curriculum syllabus. The narrowing of even subject content knowledge was evident. If the girls and the teachers had the time, space and inclination to engage in subjects like SPHE and RSE then the likelihood of the school hearing many of the issues raised in this thesis would be increased. In this way MP would become more aware of important messages from the girls through both direct and indirect practices. These are not messages for MP alone, nor are the issues discussed in this thesis unique to MP. These are important messages for Irish education which could challenge MC dominance of the status quo.

There was also an ontological element in this study for the researcher and also the girls. The relationship of respect, trust and reciprocity developed over time was one of support and care for the girls during difficult times. This respect precluded the researcher from crossing the boundaries of comfort for the girls which could have limited the data obtained. This study does not generalise to whole populations nor compare girls' experiences with boys, nor evaluate an action research intervention which might have yielded different results. However this researcher contends that this thesis provides very good data which enables the researcher to generalise in a contextualised way. The theory and literature underpin this claim with some similar findings in other studies highlighted throughout the thesis and mentioned above.

Although this study does not provide a total picture of the girls' lives, it offers glimpses which when synthesised provide a partial picture. It also leaves many spaces to be filled and the opportunity to extend the study to a longitudinal one following the girls through college remains a possibility. Another possibility arising from this study would be to examine the cultural transition of students from 1st year through to 6th year in terms of experiences, patterns and outcomes.

The real life transition from the role of teacher to researcher was one which was bounded by ethics and care. This study contributes to the insider-outsider debate by acknowledging the limitations but defending the benefits of the teacher-researcher role throughout this thesis. This is an area worth further exploration and certainly is not an easy research option. Teachers who embark on this trajectory will find that access to the site may be easier and trust may also be present to a greater degree. However, the transition to researcher is fraught with worries such as potential implications for failing to remain in the role of the teacher with regard to discipline procedures. The unanticipated responses with regard to individual teachers, criticism of the school management, disclosures of a sensitive nature that require action, all require the researcher to consider their role as ethical teacher and researcher simultaneously at times.

The acknowledgement of bias is significant as no teacher-researcher enters the field without biases and assumptions. Careful interrogation of these assumptions throughout the research process is crucial to ensure the research is as rigorous as it can be. The write up phase requires balance in every decision that is made, from what to include and what to omit, while still maintaining the integrity of the study. Being fair to both participants and school whilst choosing the most ethical and valuable data is difficult. Researcher integrity is required from the outset and must be maintained throughout. Authentic responses from students take time to elicit and certain areas cannot be ethically explored as a teacher in the school. Preserving the anonymity of school and participants is important and requires judicious selection of material.

Disclosures with regard to drug taking or bullying would not remain confidential as there would be a professional duty to report these disclosures to the school authorities to ensure the safeguarding of the student. There are a myriad of ways that the teacher-researcher differs from outsider research but also from other insider researchers as this section highlights. There are particular forms of insiderness which are also mediated by the type of research being conducted. Ethnography exposes the limitations of the teacher-researcher perspective more than survey or action research. This is because of the interactive nature of cultural study and the range and types of methods employed. The importance of the rapport and relationship between participant and researcher predicates good data and this is not suited to authoritive hierarchical positionalities which can exist between students and teachers. Researcher positionality is important, as outlined in chapter 7.

Nonetheless, where there are clear limitations there are also excellent possibilities such as the opportunity to understand another's lived experiences. The act of listening, reliving, empathising, reimagining and giving voice has the potential to be valuable too, for participant and researcher. This study did create much dialogue among the girls in relation to issues they found little space to discuss in school. It developed a sense among the counterculture group in particular, that teachers can understand, resonate and create a space for girls to voice their experiences on an equal footing with others. This study created a thinking space beyond the pressures of school life. Yet there are dangers in ensuring the welfare of the participant remains above the research aims. Teachers would need to avoid going native and protect themselves from potential and unexpected consequences of the research process. This thesis defends the role of the teacher-researcher as a creator of dialogue, an active listener to the voices of the girls and a means to dismantle power barriers that exist between girl and teacher. This thesis values the voices of the participants but also values the valuing of voice. It insists on the researcher taking ethical responsibility for the work in this thesis by positioning their subjective self within it.

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Appendices

Appendix A-Letter to the Board of Management

Xxxxx

Xxxxx

October 1st 2011

To the chairperson of the Board of Management,

I am writing to ask for the Boards permission to conduct research in xxxxxxx Secondary School from January 2012 to September 2013 as part of my Doctoral studies thesis. I would like to carry out an ethnographic study of the senior cycle cohort as members of a culture sharing group. I am interested in the emergence of patterns around domains such as leadership, ritual, norms, values, friendship, popularity and ethos. The approach requires significant periods of observation to examine interactions of students in settings ranging from curricular to sporting to special events, e.g. (graduation). A smaller group will be invited to participate in interviews to validate or assist with interpretation of data collected.

Any students involved will be guaranteed anonymity and will be asked for written consent and given a full explanation of what the research entails. They would also be absolutely free to cease participation at any time. Subsequent to receiving school clearance the research proposal will be examined by the Mary Immaculate Research Ethics Approval Board to ensure an appropriate ethical approach is being taken.

I would be more than willing to discuss this proposed research with the other Board members at our next meeting if time allows and to answer any queries or questions they may have. I am very aware of the importance of beneficence in research and I believe this could be a positive experience for students that will add to their own knowledge base and school experience. I would appreciate if you would consider this request and I am happy to supplement this letter with a further verbal or written explanation or clarification if required at a future date.

Thanking you,

Miriam Hamilton

Appendix B-Letter back from the Board of Management

Xxxxx

Xxxxx

Xxxxx

Date 15/11/2011

Re: Research within the school

Dear Miriam,

Further to your letter of October 2011 regarding doing research in the school the Board of Management have approved your request.

Anonymity for the school around this research is important however should this cause difficulty for you in publication the Board will consider this again if necessary,

Keep up the good work and looking forward to reading it,

 xxxxxxx

Appendix C-Letter from Mary Immaculate College Research Ethics Committee

<u>MIREC Executive Review and Report</u>

Name: Miriam Hamilton

Department: Education

Position: Student-Structured PhD in Education

Date 08/11/2012

Ethical Considerations Relating to this Project:

- Potential feeling of exclusion for students not selected for group interviews

- Researcher may become aware that a student is at risk

Decision and Conditions on Award of MIREC Ethical Clearance

- Ethical clearance is granted with the following recommendations:

- Due care be taken to explain the selection for the group interviews to address potential feelings of exclusion

- Findings are dealt with in a way that is consistent with the protocols of the school and statutory requirements

- Researcher seeks written permission from the school

Signed: xxxxxxxx

Appendix D-Letter of consent and information sheet for participants

Participant Consent Form

You are invited to take part in my research as part of my PhD in Education programme at Mary Immaculate College. There is no obligation to take part and should you choose to take part you are equally free to withdraw from the study at any time.

Your anonymity is guaranteed and all information gathered will remain confidential to me. No real names will be used and data will be dealt with in accordance with the Data Protection Act (2003). Data will be securely held in a locked filing cabinet or a password protected and retained for 7-10 years (as required by MIC Ethics Committee).

If you have any concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independently, you may contact the MIREC Administrator, Mary Immaculate College, South Circular Road, Limerick, 061-204515, mirec@mic.ul.iePlease read the following statements before signing the consent form.

- I have read and understand the participant information sheet
- I understand what the study is about and what the results will be used for
- I am aware that participation is voluntary and withdraw is free any time
- I am aware that I will remain anonymous during the research process.

"I have read and understand the information sheet and the aim and processes associated with this study. I am clear on my role as a participant of the study, particularly that participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time"

Signed:
_____*Date:*_____

Appendix D-Student Information Sheet

<u>What is the study about?</u>

This study aims to explore the interaction patterns among girls. I intend to observe and interview students to evaluate how and where friendship and leadership can be developed or witnessed in a school setting. Therefore I am looking for patterns over the length of a school year. I will be observing students in social spaces, sports, some lessons and also interviewing students to get their views on their school experience.

<u>What is required of the participant?</u>

- A willingness to allow me observe interactions in the settings mentioned above such as in the classroom.

- A willingness to allow me to interview you as a participant following periods of observation

- There will be no significant impact on your time as I will be observing mainly so you will need to do nothing but give permission.

<u>Right to withdraw</u>

You are free to withdraw from the research at any time

<u>How data will be used?</u>

The data will be written up as a thesis for my PhD in Education degree and may be used in research publications in summary form not identifiable as individual participant data. All information gathered will be securely stored and will remain confidential.

<u>Contact details:</u> Please feel free to contact me if you have any queries or concerns at any time: Miriam Hamilton: email <u>miriamhamilton_26@hotmail.com</u>. If you would prefer to contact someone independent then contact: MIREC Administrator, Mary Immaculate College, South Circular Road, Limerick: 061-204515, email; <u>mirec@mic.ul.ie</u>

Appendix E-Parent consent and information forms

<u>Parent Consent Form</u>

Your daughter is invited to take part in my research as part of my PhD in Education programme at Mary Immaculate College. There is no obligation to take part and should she choose to take part she is equally free to withdraw from the study at any time.

Your daughter's anonymity is guaranteed and all information gathered will remain confidential to me. No real names will be used and data will be dealt with in accordance with the Data Protection Act (2003). Data will be securely held in a locked filing cabinet or a password protected and retained for 7-10 years (as required by MIC Ethics Committee).

If you have any concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independently, you may contact the MIREC Administrator, Mary Immaculate College, South Circular Road, Limerick, 061-204515, <u>mirec@mic.ul.ie</u>

Please read the following statements before signing the consent form.

- I have read and understand the parent information sheet
- I understand what the study is about and what the results will be used for
- I am aware that my daughter's participation is voluntary and she is free to withdraw at any time
- I am aware that my daughter's identity will remain anonymous during the research process.

"I have read and understand the information sheet and the aim and processes associated with this study. I am clear on my daughter's role as a participant in the study, particularly that her participation is voluntary and that she is free to withdraw at any time"

Signed:

_____*Date:*_____

Appendix E-Parent Information Sheet

<u>What is the study about?</u>

This study aims to explore interaction patterns among girls. I intend to observe and interview students in your daughter's school (including your daughter with consent) to evaluate how and where friendship and leadership can be developed or witnessed in a school setting. Therefore I am looking for patterns related to school experience over the length of a school year. I will be observing your daughter with her peers in social spaces, sporting settings, some lessons and also interviewing students.

<u>What is required of the participant?</u>

- A willingness to allow me observe your daughters interactions in the settings mentioned above such as in the classroom.

- A willingness to allow me to interview your daughter as a participant following periods of observation

- There will be no significant impact on your daughter's time as I will be observing mainly so you will need to do nothing but give permission.

<u>Right to withdraw</u>

Your daughter is free to withdraw from the research at any time

<u>How data will be used?</u>

The data will be written up as a thesis for my PhD in Education degree and may be used in research publications in summary form not identifiable as individual participant data. All information gathered will be securely stored and will remain confidential.

<u>Contact details:</u>

Please feel free to contact me if you have any queries or concerns at any time: Miriam Hamilton: email <u>miriamhamilton_26@hotmail.com</u>. If you would prefer to contact someone independent then contact: MIREC Administrator, Mary Immaculate College, South Circular Road, Limerick: 061-204515, email; <u>mirec@mic.ul.ie</u>

Appendix F- Schedule of Sample Questions Stems:

Is friendship important to you and why?

Tell me about your friendships

How have the groups of friends developed in MP?

What values and qualities would you expect in a friend?

Are there important friends outside of school?

How do you get together socially as friends and what do you do?

What do you talk about when you get together?

Is it difficult this year to manage time for everything study, socialising...?

Are your friends similar to you or different, in what ways?

Did friends come into MP with you or have you friends from primary school?

How did you feel when you got a place in MP, what about your parents?

Have you got friends who are boys or mainly girl friends?

Are there girls in this school who you are not friendly with?

What leadership opportunities do you have in the school?

Tell me about the head girl and prefect system

Have you enjoyed your time at school?

What have you least/most enjoyed?

Have you felt under pressure this year, how do you cope?

Is image important to you all, weight, appearance, clothes?

What are the most sought after accessories for 6th years?

How are your relationships with teachers in the school or other pupils?

What type of school is MP, how would you describe it?

Appendix G-Interview Schedule for one to one interviews

1. Categorisation

Do you think friends are important – what are the main things you do with your friends? What do you talk about?

Do you have a 'best friend' in the school?

Tell me about your friends: What group of friends/ girls do you belong to? Loud/ sporty etc

Why are you friends with this group, how did that come about?

Tell me about the characteristics of the group, type, leaders etc?

What do you mainly talk about when you meet? How often do you meet up – outside school etc

How do you communicate with girlfriends, at school, out of school?

Are there other friendship groups in your year – how would you describe them?

Taking the whole 6th year, would you say that you are friendly with most or are there significant division – why do you think that is the case?

Are there popular girls? What makes them popular – are you friends with popular girls?

Do you think it is easy to make friends in MP? If no why not Do you think it would be easy for a girl to come into MP in 5th or 6th year and make friends

Does the school look up to particular girls –are some seen as important, picked for things etc

What about social media – why do you think it is so important, do you think this has affected friendships either positive or negative – do you use facebook etc to stay connected? To what degree does it facilitate friendships

What sort of accessories are important for young girls? (IPad etc Is there significant pressure to have these)

2. School Culture

How would you describe the school and teachers?

How has the school environment influenced your 'self' identity?

Have you felt free to be yourself at school, explain?

How have you felt restricted or controlled at school, how?

Are there people like you at school or have you felt different in any way?

How would you describe a 'MP girl', is there such a thing? How do outsiders (students in other schools etc perceive MP girls?

Do you think power exists in the school – in what ways do you think the school has exercised power over you? Have you been able to resist this?

Does the school facilitate friendships – in what ways – extracurricular activities

Do you think the school has high expectations for you – in what way do you see this – does this put pressure on you

What do you like and dislike about the school

3. Body and Boys

Is your appearance something you are conscious of, in what ways?

Do girls exhibit feminine/ masculine/ both/ traits in school?

Where do you place yourself in this regard?

How do the different groups emo's etc. portray themselves physically?

Have you felt that certain traits are preferable at school?

Is there overt and covert pressure on girls in the school to look and behave a particular way? Who exerts this power

How does the school monitor, control etc body? Do you think it is not enough/too much – should 6th years have more control over

4. Pressure and Stress

Do you think school is pressurised? Academic, social, social media, looking good etc – tell me about this? Who else puts pressure on you (parents) – tell me about this?

Parental pressure/expectations – does this affect time spent with friends, studying, pressure to do extracurricular activities etc

Is there pressure to have a boyfriend?

Are those who have no boyfriend perceived differently?

Has school life impacted relationships with others?

Is there an awareness of varying sexualities among the groups?

How is this fielded/discussed/ ignored?

5. Hierarchy

Is being a sixth year different than other years, how?

Do 6th years distinguish themselves from other years, in what ways?

Are 6th years treated differently than other students?

What memories, events, will stay with you when you go?

How do you feel about moving on from friends and the school environment?

Do you think school is a happy time for you? Explain further