An Ethnography Exploring how Hegemony and Power Mediate Agency and Structure in an Irish Girls Secondary School

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By

Miriam Doran

To Colin, David, Paul, Samuel and Caroline for your unending patience and love

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

LIST OF TABLES

PREFACE

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 that 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 book explores 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 roles of the key informant, critical friends and confirming voice of the girls are triangulated to counter 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 from personal, social and academic perspectives. 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, but are also the oppressed, as they collude in a conformity, which affects 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,

connections to the agency-structure debate through an examination of hegemony and social class illuminate 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. Therefore, this study highlights the transition from teacher to researcher as a challenging but worthwhile shift, for the transformational and epistemological opportunities it can provide.

This work originates from a PhD thesis supervised by Dr. Angela Canny and Professor Jim Deegan and their supervision and support was crucial during the doctoral process. My acknowledgement of their role in the realisation of this book is important and I thank them most sincerely.

LIST OF 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
MIREC Mary Immaculate Research Ethics Committee
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

Chapter One

Overview of Ethnography

This ethnographic study tells the stories of the lived experiences of Irish 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. It explores how school life and broader peer culture affected the girls' self-identities, peer acceptance and school experience. The girls are a 'culture-sharing group', which is a feature of ethnographic study. The use of this term for the purposes of this book relates to the sharing of school culture, which is classed, and 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 study 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. This ethnography unveils the gendered and classed experiences of a group of girls and their friends. It determines 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 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. It was the shared culture and trust, which enabled the girls over time to disclose personal and educational experiences, and these experiences form the basis of this book.

Ethical Overview

Ethics were important throughout all stages of this study because of the insider's position of power and knowledge of the culture. Professional ethics are the norms that members of a profession adhere to, in the dilemmas and decisions that arise in practice. All ethics is arguably based on the way human beings relate to each other. 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. There is a need for ethical norms to frame the researcher's position and agency, 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. 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. Being a teacher in the school required me to abide by requests from school management relating to the study, as well as a professional responsibility to ensure appropriate actions as per school policy requirements. There is always a continuous decision making process during a prolonged research process. The interpretation of a code of ethics was influenced by my personal moral beliefs and a focus on the welfare of the girls during the research process. 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. When trust is present between researcher and participant, concerns with care, and empathy for the participants are heightened (Benhabib 1992). The care approach in this study was manifested as an acceptance of a level of disclosure with which the girls were comfortable. In addition, there was no attempt to venture into private social spaces, such as the smokers area, the girls' parties, disco's or the girls homes. Ethical theory supports this insider position where the context is acknowledged (Vetlesen 1994). 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). I use my moral voice (as the researcher) to argue in favour of a more personal and situated approach to ethics. This book reclaims a place for the 'partial' researcher. Therefore, 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 within any research.

Theoretical Overview

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 Mount Privet (pseudonym). Consequently, this provides a number of lenses to look through, with an opportunity to interpret from different angles. Through the combined use of Bourdieu's and Giddens' theory, findings are interpreted. Hegemony and equality theory also inform the study and the theory is applied from a feminist perspective. 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 middle class girls in this study. Dominant middle class 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. Gramsci 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 (Gramsci 1973).

The context of Mount Privet is important because it permeates school culture and ethos. Mount Privet is an all-girls Catholic, voluntary secondary school. The girls are mainly middle class with a small working class cohort. 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 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 concepts, with particular reference to 'habitus'. Consequently, agency-structure theory forms a key theoretical perspective for this study. The domestic transfer of valuable capital from parents to children perpetuates the generative schemes that serve to produce dominant cultural values and practices. Bourdieu's work is used to interpret interactions in Mount Privet 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. The theory of structuration also identifies collective interpretative schemes within which actions operate. Giddens' conceptual framework provides a scaffold that frames how context is integral to the production of action. Giddens' theory of structuration is therefore used with Bourdieu's habitus to realise how agency and structure operate in Mount Privet.

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. The focus of many theorists towards process and individual experience rather than systems is evident in the theory underpinning this study. The existence of hegemony is apparent throughout the data gathered in Mount Privet. The neo-Marxist Hegelian foundations that provided Gramsci the means to develop a theory of hegemony inform the findings. It is clear that 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 more than for others. The theory of Lynch on social justice and equality provides a practical framework, which identifies the repeated inequality that results 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 Mount Privet as a school constrained by other superstructures is highlighted throughout this book. There is power evident in the ability of the girls to use agency through critical consciousness and resistance.

Literature Overview

Themes and strands within the literature were based on the site of study being a single-sex, middle class girls' school with a particular historic school context and ethos. This study elicits insights about how agency is enacted through the cultural patterns that inform the girls' interactions. The literature relates to the major themes of social class, gender, the construction of identities, girls' culture and friendship. The main trends emerging from the literature include an assertion that hegemonic middle class culture is prevalent in many schools. This serves to alienate working class students. The acquisition of cultural and social capital is a significant mediator of success in school (Smyth and Banks 2012). The power of parentocracy cannot be underestimated and working class parents are positioned as less powerful for a variety of reasons (Reay 2013). Social mobility can navigate working-class families into the middle classes, but can implicitly diminish and undermine working class culture in doing so (Brown 2013). The academic success of some girls and underachievement of some boys is related to social class. It is mainly white middle class girls who are succeeding at school (Lynch 1999). Consequently, women have a dual relationship to the social class structures. In addition, 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 related to many of these themes, as gender 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 concept of self-rating varies for boys and girls with Thorne (1993) indicating that early maturing boys enjoy status among peers while early maturing girls did not. Social class, social mobility, parentocracy, cultural resistance and sexuality are all deeply connected to hegemony (Gramsci 1973) and elicit how dominant cultural expectations influence actions and practices. Literature on gender highlights the perspectives of a woman's access to education, gender stereotyping, aspiration, leadership and examination pressure. These themes create tensions highlighted within

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 among the girls in Mount Privet.

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 my invitation to abandon power and authority, to speak openly as young women. This study 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. In this book, literature and theory reviewed prior to and during the study are included in the discussion chapters rather than given significant attention in advance of discussion. This gives the reader a context, which relates to these theoretical and literature references. In this way, the ideas generated by existing research inform the findings across the themes of social class, gender, identity, friendship and youth culture throughout the book from a both a broad and more in-depth perspective.

Methodological Overview

The need to acknowledge and challenge bias is integral to this study due to my insider positionality. This was done by triangulating three elements of the research to address this issue. Firstly, I 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 the space between me and the girls, giving advice, direction and critique where necessary. Secondly, the way in which Whyte (2012) employed Doc as his gatekeeper, 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 my biases.

Thirdly, Poles' (1999) 'confirming voice' is incorporated in the way I used the girls' voices as the dominant voice in this research, whilst also employing my reflexive voice as teacher-researcher. This triangulation forms the foundation to the research design, which upholds the teacher-researcher approach.

This study began with a holistic look at the school as a whole. This enabled the development of 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). The study focused on the 6th year girls as a discrete group once this initial contextual profile was complete. Therefore, the methodological lens was on the complete 6th year group initially and it then narrowed to a key group of fourteen girls nearing the end of the study. The choice of school undoubtedly influenced the type of data and findings that emerged. Schools differ in many ways from historically to culturally to gender composition (Smyth 1999). There are implications for research that 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 middle class minority. However, as Willis (1977) contends, middle class students tend to have the middle class 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. 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, this book does not assume a completely homogenous set of findings would have emerged elsewhere.

The study sets girls' stories within the framework of Mount Privet's socio-cultural, political and historical context. 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 (Atkinson et al 2007). My intention was to explore and extensively study an intact cultural group in their school setting over a prolonged period. This study involved significant attention to reflexivity due to my

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. 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. However, sociologists from the Chicago school adapted anthropological studies to examinations of American culture. Most notable was the ethnographic study by Whyte on gang culture in an Italian slum in Boston. It demonstrated the organisational structures that 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. 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.

I was mindful I was an insider in a position of authority as a teacher in the school. 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 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 the school required balance at all times. This meant I acted as an ethical agent throughout the research. Ethical rational choice (Gambetta 1987) was employed alongside quality processes to ensure ethical and moral reflexive choices were made. It was important to me 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 participants, and myself, there was a need to give up the identity of teacher and develop an identity as a researcher. I balanced myself 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 my behalf when moving daily between the two roles as outlined in the following research diary excerpt:

"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 I 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.

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. Midway through the observation phase, I 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 confirmed these friendship group allocations. Friendship groups were identified during the observation phase and I had prior knowledge of these groups from my 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. Allowing the girls to choose to participate enhanced the ethics as there was no point where I pressured any girl to participate.

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 I may have had. 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 I 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 Mount Privet. She had occupied a leadership role as a deputy head girl and had served on the school student council. She also interacted 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 her studies. She had an interest in sport and participated in extracurricular activities. If I needed to see Ruth separately, she was asked when she might have time to meet. There were numerous opportunities to meet, as there would often be a teacher out on school business, which freed Ruth's time. 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 someone with good conversational skills and insights.

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. 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 me to record ideas and was critical for reflective thinking. A consecutive 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). 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 1-1 Overview of Fieldwork Phases

Sept. to Nov. 2012	Nov. 2012 to Dec. 2012	Jan. to March 2013	April to June 2013	June to August 2013	Sept. to Oct. 2013
Initial gathering of data re physical structures and school environs.	Observed 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 to check career plans.

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 visits were agreed with the girls at an assembly. I agreed to visit the lunchroom three days a week and to observe other social areas 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 me being free from class or other commitments.

Table 1-2 The Observation Sites

Varied 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 first observation took place in November 2012 and the final observation was in May 2013. Observation was necessary as it enabled me to look for rituals, practices and actions that underpinned the girls' interactions. It also enabled identification of the social peer groups of the girls. 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. This sustained bout of observation, did serve to desensitise the girls toward my presence and it allowed them to act naturally. During observation, I tried to look for patterns of what was and what was not happening. Note taking of observations was critical and involved writing the day and date and including a brief description of the scene. An important element of the field note phase was the inclusion of my own feelings, reactions and thoughts. Developing good observational techniques took practice and indeed became easier with time. This was because I became more familiar with the site and the activities. The observation phases continued until no new material was emerging.

Group Interviews and One to One Interviews

Table 1-3 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 other 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 these interviews 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 into three pure friendship groups and two groups that 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 girls 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 is important that the reader gain an insight into the identities of these girls to appreciate the discussion chapters, where individual excerpts of narrative from each of the girls are included.

Table 1-3 Overview of the Interview Structure and Schedule:

January 2013	March 2013	May 2013 One to one interview 1	September 2013 One to one interview 2
Group Interview 1-**Counterculture group**	Follow up Group 1-**Counterculture group**	**Counter culture group** Mary, Laura, Betty	**Counter culture group**- Mary, Laura, Betty
Group Interview 2-**Loud popular group**	Follow up Group 2-**Loud popular group**	**Sporty group**- Emer, Keira	**Sporty group**- Emer, Keira
Group Interview 3-**Quiet group**	Follow up Group 3-**Quiet group**	**Quiet group**- Cait, Caz, Sarah	**Quiet group**- Cait, Caz, Sarah
Group Interview 4-**Mixed group 1- 5 girls from all groups except counter culture group**	Follow up Group 4-**Mixed group 1- 5 girls from all groups except counter culture group**	**High achievers group**- Ruth, Julie **Loud group**- Carrie, Shirley	**High achievers group**- Ruth, Julie **Loud group**- Carrie, Shirley
Group Interview 5-**Mixed group 2- 5 girls from all groups except counter culture group**	Follow up Group 5-**Mixed group 2- 5 girls from all groups except counter culture group**	**Posh group**- Lara **Alternative, member of no group**- Anne Marie	**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. These came from the observation phase where ideas and thoughts emerged and branched into areas that were highlighted by the theory and literature researched on education and peer culture. 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. 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 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. 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 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.

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, the shared interpretations and findings with the girls were useful indicators of quality. The approach to interview as a data collection method in this study used interviews as emergent techniques to enable the interviewer to immediately pursue new leads. This flexibility enabled me to explore a number of interesting areas which may not have been accessed had structured conventional interviews been used.

Analysis of Data and Grounded Theory

Data analysis was conducted in concurrence with data collection and analysis findings 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 analysed at the end of the process. This facilitated me 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 (Glaser and Strauss 2009). Theory was developed inductively from emerging patterns in order to be 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. The stages of analysis in this research, are closely aligned to the accepted stages of grounded theory methods in ethnography. 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. As the interview transcripts were read, the text was annotated with a code.

This code was recorded using the transcript page number, respondent name in one to one interviews and interview number manually. No software was used at any stage, as I wanted to become as familiar as possible with the data. As new codes emerged, I 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'. 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 based on 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' group analysis methods and Glaser and Strauss' constant comparison method. The initial themes and sub-themes are tabulated below.

Table 1-4 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	Mount Privet 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. I 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). I chose to represent themes that had enough valid data to enable comprehensive rich description and interpretation (Chang 1992).

The validity of ethnographic study is enhanced by immersion in the field over a significant timescale. 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. I was mindful of my 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. Reliability concerns were continuously addressed by checking and cross checking transcripts, field notes, coding and other data collected for accuracy (Flick 2009). Acknowledging researcher bias is a significant part of all ethnographic research. The importance of being continually aware of my own selective perception, personal biases and theoretical predispositions was recognised. 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 that were dually respected during the data collection and analysis. In the findings, the voices of the participants are prominent in the discussion, which ensures student voice and moderates researcher bias. This introductory section serves to briefly overview the ethics, theory, literature and methodology encompassed within this study and revisited throughout the main discussion sections of this book.