

**Gendered Social Relations among Adolescents in a South  
African Secondary School: the Greenvale Case Study**

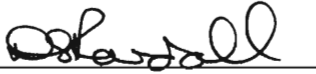
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**Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of  
Masters of Education in the Department of Education, University of  
Natal, Pietermaritzburg**

**- January 1999 -**

## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that, unless otherwise indicated, this dissertation is my own work.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "D. Randall", is written above a horizontal line.

Dianne L. Randall

31 January 1999

## Abstract

*This dissertation incorporates a number of ethnographic case studies done within the qualitative paradigm from a feminist stance (Nielsen, 1995). It served to explore and understand the attributions and aspirations of adolescents in relation to their group association from their perspective. It was important that the voice of the adolescent emerged as central to the findings. The significance of individual freedom of choice as opposed to limited personal volition was also explored. Another aspect of the research problem was to try to establish adolescents' awareness, perceptions and beliefs of gender issues.*

*Integral to the success of the research was honesty and ethics. Hence reflexivity was fundamental to continuous re-assessment of interpretation, an awareness of assumptions and manipulation, which could have occurred if the power relations between researcher and participants were not addressed. To ensure validation of the research findings triangulation-between and -within-methods was utilised. Hence a dynamic interaction among sociometric diagrams, participant observation, interviews, document analysis and photographs resulted.*

*The research study incorporated the environs of Greenvale High School, whose multi-faceted dimensions of co-education, multi-culturalism, dual-medium and comprehensive curriculum, proved to be a boon to the nature of the research. I worked within the Grade 10 standard and ultimately isolated three groups and three "loners". The dimension of ethnicity emerged as pertinent to the study of two of the "loners" and it was therefore necessary to include a brief (if somewhat superficial) exploration of two Black girl groups.*

*Contextualisation emerged as most significant to the findings. The relationship of the groups to the learning environment and its significance in relation to the values and beliefs of the individuals within groups proved enlightening. Anomalies between gender beliefs and assertions and their actualisation were related to the individuals' experience of gender equality within the class situation, their awareness of gender inequality within the learning environment and their*

*perception of gender role perpetuation as unproblematic within the broader context of a patriarchal society.*

*Hence this research advocates “consciousness-raising” (Payne, in Spender and Sarah, 1988) so that issues regarded as unproblematic, can be addressed in order to change the social order. Awareness can aid educationalists in formulating policy that will ensure that the learning environment can be made more worthwhile and meaningful to the “marginalised” adolescent. Methodologically, other researchers would benefit by replicating this study to pursue important aspects, which emerge from ethnographic case studies, particularly within a South African context compounded by race and gender.*



**Dedication**

**To Graham, Philippa and Stuart –  
a testimony to your love and support.**

## Acknowledgements

I entered a class of strangers when I began my Masters of Education, but have subsequently emerged much richer, academically and socially, through interaction with friends, from whom I have had the privilege to learn. Our facilitators were not only encouraging and supportive, but stimulated and challenged one to utilise talents one did not even know existed! Post-graduate study is regarded as a lonely venture, but the class of 1997-98 epitomises empathetic understanding and co-operative support, through the unselfish sharing of ideas and creative solutions to problems. I thank all of them for their contribution to my growth, both academically and personally.

I thank all my friends in education, who were willing to be used as guinea-pigs in my tentative, initial exploration into this new world of research. A special thanks to Viv, who shared with me her Wits experience of Masters of Education and any literature she believed would be pertinent to my research. It was really important to have a personal confidante, who understood all the pressures and “angst” of a virgin research experience.

A special mention must be made of the wonderful people (both adolescent and adult) at Greenvale High School, who were always willing to help me in any way to ensure that my research would develop unimpeded. With such warmth and openness, my research could not fail to reach fruition based on “truths” that would ensure research validation. I hope that this dissertation does justice to the trust they placed in me.

My supervisors were the embodiment of professionalism in their commitment to ensuring that the research would be founded on an understanding of process and a wide-ranging knowledge base. From the outset, they challenged me to think beyond the confines of personal experience and constantly supplied me with literature that expanded my perspective and dimensionalised the research problem. I really appreciated the time and effort expended by Volker Wedekind at a time, which must have been personally difficult for him.

Stella Kaabwe proved to be my lifeline in the tempestuous throes of the research process. She was always available to ensure that I never lost the impetus needed to complete my dissertation, supplying me with prompt and worthwhile feedback, which served to clarify ideas, provide direction and help me to re-assess assumptions and perspective. I shall miss our stimulating interaction and will always be indebted to her insightful comments and unselfish support in the completion of this research.

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## Chapter 1

### Background to the Research Problem

#### Introduction

The focus of the research problem in this dissertation is an exploration of adolescent social relationships as influenced by gender. The relationship between perceptions of self, attribution<sup>1</sup> and aspirations is analysed. This, coupled with the expectations of others within gender-related group dynamics, forms the basis of the research. As the emphasis is specifically on the dynamics of interaction, it is not concerned with a structural analysis of gender within the school as an institution or curriculum\text issues. *The adolescents speak for themselves without any stereotypical intrusions.*

The type of questions, which they were required to think about and answer, pertained firstly to their *self-concept* and how they perceive themselves. The individual within the context of social relations was then explored, when the adolescent considers how this *self-concept is related to the group* to which he\she belongs. Individual choice on life orientation, as opposed to group influence, is an aspect of the study, which re-emphasises the significance of the voice of the adolescent, for this research process does not seek to reify groups to determine an ethos or culture, or categorise into class. (Willis, 1972)

This research is reflective of personal interests, both academic and affective. My fascination with gender is born out of an educational career in single-sex schools (girls for 8 years and boys for 9 years). The artificiality of hierarchical divisions and stratification within Education has always proved problematic for me, and has therefore made it imperative that I continually explore aspects likely to explain the reasons for society's potentially divisive attitudes, especially in gender-related issues. Some understanding of these reasons should be significant

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<sup>1</sup> Potential quality inherent within an individual, which is either acknowledged and used or denigrated. This implies a concept of self, which is related to self esteem.

in working towards more comprehensively empowering attitudes for all persons. (Significance of the study)

Dimensions of the Research Problem see also p21

### *Sex and gender*

It is important to clarify the distinction between sex and gender, in keeping with the postmodern feminist stance (Acker, 1994). The former is a biological fact and is immutable, but the latter is a socially and culturally constructed concept, which invariably portrays the role of male and female as fixed. Therefore, while sex refers to the biological characteristics of male and female, i.e. explicit, immutable, physical differences between the two, gender is a social construct and as such, relates to appropriate behaviour and choices made by males and females. It is influenced by various factors, such as, culture, religion, history and social and economic status and is open to the possibility of adaptation and change.

Within a patriarchal society, the implication of power imbalance in favour of the male sex emerges. Feminists wish to expose the injustices of this imbalance through exploration of these relationships, and to develop an understanding of how, by utilising the strengths of each of the genders, society can only benefit.

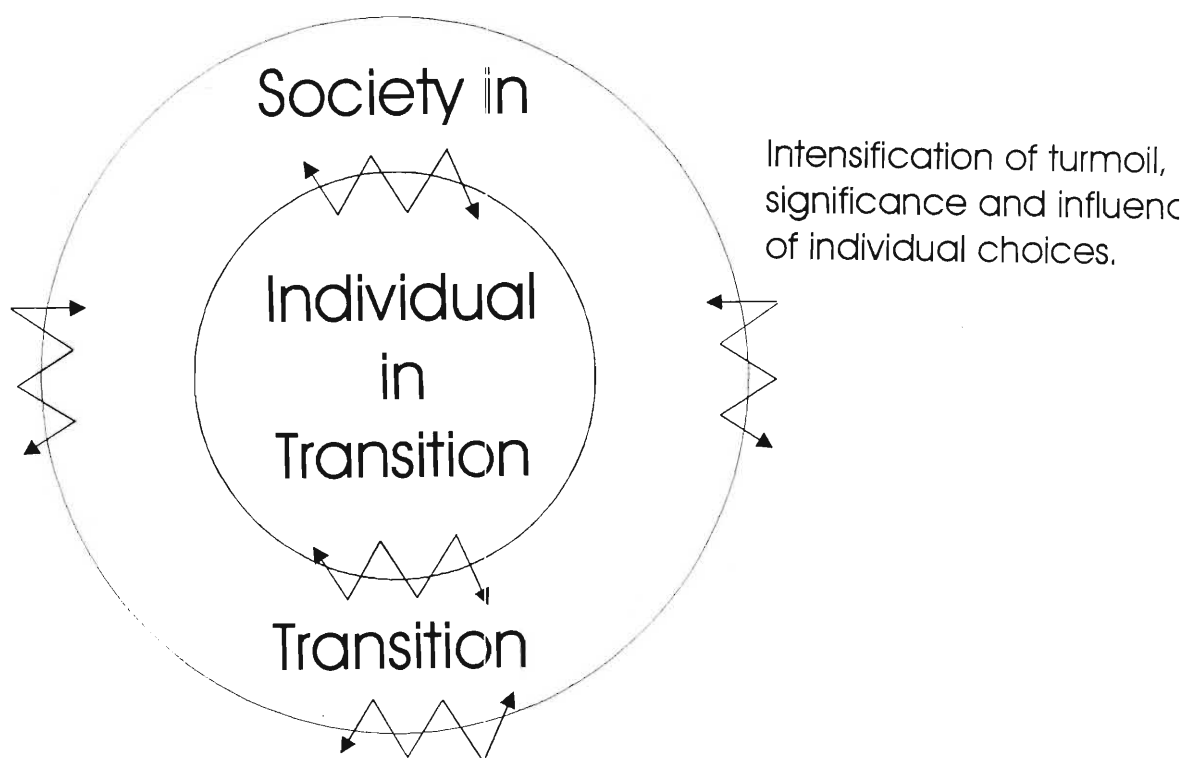
The two aspects, "sex and gender", are of even greater significance for adolescents, who are experiencing important physical changes, while "learning" through the social institutions of school and family, the roles males and females are expected to fulfill.

### *Adolescence*

Adolescents are at the most receptive stage of human development. No longer children and not adults, they hang suspended in the fluidity of transition. This state of flux crystallises into the manifestations of the *decisions* they make at this time. Their choices are vital to the direction of their lives: socially, educationally, economically and spiritually. The South African adolescents' decisions are even more vital for they live within a context of fluidity and transition.

It therefore stands to reason that the macrocosmic influences will impact on the microcosmic, thereby intensifying the *emotional context* within which decisions take place and the significance of the *consequences of individual choices*. *Context* has never been more vital to decisions taken by adolescents, which will affect not only their futures, but also the future of a “butterfly nation” emerging tentatively and nervously from its chrysalis.

**South African Adolescent in Context – a diagram**



At a time when South African adolescents are at the very heart of integration in schools in a transitional society so aware of human rights, it is imperative to allow their experiences, needs and aspirations to be heard. Adolescents possess the key to unlocking the exciting potential for a progressive and prosperous future. This belief dictated that I explore their dynamics, both personal and interactive, to try to understand the volition<sup>2</sup> of both individual and group.

<sup>2</sup> This has to do with the will of the individual. According to Carspecken (1996) it also has to do with the monitoring of actions according to our values, norms and desired identities.

### *Social relations – towards a definition*

Any exploration of interpersonal relationships proves to be problematic because of its complex nature. The idea of relationships tends to be generic and as such is applicable to any type of relationship. Hence the preoccupation in this study with *social relations*, suggests an interaction of *individuals* within *contexts* in such a way that the emergent relationships are particular (possessing their own unique qualities) to that interaction. As such, they defy categorisation. I am therefore hesitant to isolate a general set of principles by which to define the social relations explored in this research.

While researchers recognise that a distinction be made between friendship, personal relationships and interpersonal attraction (Perlman and Fehr, in Derlega and Winstead, 1986), those who attempt definitions, generally do so at their own peril. Derlega and Winstead (1986) only succeed in proving that a definition of friendship per se is an impossibility in their comparative attempt for a definition of love. Because of friendship's pervasive influence and diverse impact, attempted definitions give rise to ambiguities and contradictions. This is so, because each type of relationship within groups is qualitatively different, and basic personal relationship principles are modified in different types of relationships.

### Interdisciplinary Approach

A study of social relations by its very nature requires an interdisciplinary approach, for it involves a psychological understanding of the individual within a social context that contains certain rules. Individuals react and interact differently according to their unique experiences and within the stage of their life cycle (i.e. relevant to this research is the period of adolescence). The complexity of the interaction itself transcends the individual within a contextualised situation and among socio-structural variables.

It is therefore pertinent to this research that while philosophical debate and sociological and psychological theories be interacted with, what emerges is an honest exploration of the unique and dynamic interaction of individuals within “social sites”<sup>3</sup>, which defy exclusive categorisation and definition.

### **Philosophical Debate**

Blum (1980) critiques the Kantian philosophical approach, which follows the Protestant tradition of morality and thereby questions whether friendship can be a moral phenomenon, for any relationship which involves emotions is motivated by egoism and lies outside our will. Kant believes it is distinct from reason and rationality and therefore lacks impartiality and universality, essential to morality. Morality has to do with obligation, duty and self-control.

Blum counteracts this argument by drawing a distinction between “altruistic emotion” and “altruistic sentiment” (1980:29) and grants the former pro-active characteristics, whereby personality traits of the individuals within a relationship are equated with the “altruistic emotion”. Therefore, he argues, friendship is two-fold. It involves a focus on the “weal and the woe” (1980:41) of the recipient and the mutual reciprocation of the dynamic interaction. Morality does not demand that humans regard all their proposed actions from an impartial perspective.

Mayo (in Blum, 1980) argues that personal relations cannot be controlled by morality, as friendship is a natural process and is not something over which moral control is exercised. This argument is undermined by the fact that not everybody has friends in the same way; their relationships are different and they treat friends differently, but all these interactions are morally significant. As Blum (1980:73) states, “ Friendship involves an orientation of our (moral) selves towards another person, rather than a process which merely happens to us and cannot be controlled”.

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<sup>3</sup> Areas of interaction with both spatial and temporal dimensions

This relates to a point of advocacy within my research; that social relations among adolescents are strongly based upon the will and the effort of the individual to make choices in fostering a meaningful relationship. This idea is supported by Blum (1980:7) and Snyder and Smith (1986), who concede that to attain “a deep level of friendship” or “enduring compatibility” conflicts and obstacles have to be resolved or overcome constructively. There must be a willingness to consider the “otherness” (Blum, 1980) within a symbiotic relationship.

### Psychological and Sociological Theories

In all attempts to understand the complexity of interpersonal relationships there is the acknowledgement of the two human points of interaction. Blum (1980:7) recognises this as the “symbiotic attachment to another person; when one person lives through another person,” while Kelley (in Derlega and Winstead, 1986) developed this idea in his Personal Constructs Theory.<sup>4</sup>

Once an individual classifies oneself in terms of similarities one then distinguishes members of a class by noting the contrasts. Through the construction of these constructs the individual is not only able to understand self, but self within a relationship. Duck (1973) extends this idea into “commonality corollary and sociality corollary”, in which the individual’s experiences are similar and they are able to understand why the other person does what he\she does. It requires a blending of these corollaries for a friendship to emerge. In this way the individuals within the relationship acquire a “consensual validation for their beliefs” (Byrne, 1961).

**When one studies the Theories of Interpersonal Attraction an anomaly begins to emerge: the focus on labelling and categorisation acknowledges that individuals**

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<sup>4</sup> “Personal relationships have their own internal dynamics. They are not only affected by persons and by social organisations, they also play a causal role. That is, social relations affect social organisations and persons.” (Kelley, in Derlega and Winstead, 1986)

are involved in the process, but the complexity of the unique personalities is denigrated to “high self-monitoring” or “low self-monitoring” individuals and their social worlds are turned into “empirical maps” (Smith and Snyder, in Derlega and Winstead, 1986). The reasons for group formations based on “attractions” emerge as soulless theoretical linguistic labels, which tell one nothing of the quality of the emergent, dynamic and fluid contextualised interactions of different groups. Within groups themselves there are different types of relationships. I therefore find such theorising pretentious and exclusive, “signifying nothing”.

Relationships are multi-determined and multi-faceted and the theories should therefore be utilised to enrich the researcher’s awareness and as an extension beyond the practical; for to meld theory and practice can only be beneficial to research validation and credibility.

The Reinforcement Theories of Lott and Lott (in Derlega and Winstead, 1986) and Byrne and Clore (in Derlega and Winstead, 1986) are based squarely on the rewards, which a person will receive from the interrelationship with another person.<sup>5</sup> Exchange and Equity theorists go beyond the rewards of the Reinforcement theorists and believe that people are also concerned with the investments of their relationships and the comparison of outcomes. One of the most famous of these theories is the Interdependence Theory of Thibault and Kelley (in Derlega and Winstead, 1986).<sup>6</sup>

For the purposes of this research the distinction between equality and equity as expounded by the related theory of Kahn, O’Leary, Krulewitz and Lamm (in Derlega and Winstead, 1986), is most significant. Here two studies showed sex

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<sup>5</sup> The essence of any relationship is interaction. When people interact their behaviour has consequences for each other. For the relationship to have a satisfactory outcome, the rewards must outweigh the costs.

<sup>6</sup> An example is that of a neo-Sullivan model of emerging social needs and key relationships, in which there is a link between friendship, social competencies and self-esteem. Friendship is perceived as therapeutic. (Perlman and Fehr, in Derlega and Winstead, 1986)

differences in adherence to distributive justice norms. Although men lean more toward the equity norm, women endorse the equality norm more strongly. This theory proves to be significant in the discussion on the “Wheel” group in Chapter 4.

Heider’s Balance Theory (in Derlega and Winstead, 1986) informs Duck’s Reciprocity-of-liking Theory (1973), as well as Perlman and Fehr’s theory of Cognitive Consistency (in Derlega and Winstead, 1986). Both terms relate to a stability and pro-active behaviour on the part of the individuals to restore balance in the relationship when imbalance is perceived. Finally Developmental Theorists (Broderick; Sein; Winch in Duck, 1973) conceptualise their stages along the basis of social needs. This proves to be problematic as it compartmentalises emotion and needs into life cycle stages thereby oversimplifying complexities of individuals and their relationships.

### “What a tangled web we weave!”

To grapple with the existent theories and perspectives is essential in the *clarification* of the research problem. If one is unclear of one’s understanding of the *implications* of the research problem, then the research process can become a maze of red herrings and confusion. Focus is essential to the validated success of an exploration of the stated intent within the research problem. Often the researcher can be caught unawares when data generate a great number of new research issues and Giddens’s (1979) comment, “research raises issues which the researcher had previously not considered”, should be heeded by ensuring that the research problem and processes are initially well-formulated.

### The Research Study

I spent 4 months (April – August) at Greenvale High School. This is a secondary school, which had emerged in 1976 from a Technical High School composed of



boys only, into a dual-medium<sup>7</sup>, co-educational, comprehensive school. It has subsequently moved into the transitional phase of development reflecting the demographics of post-Apartheid South African society. It is today a fully comprehensive, multi-cultural school offering technical, commercial and academic subjects to both boys and girls through the mediums of English and Afrikaans. The school is therefore in the unique position of being able to cater for the demands of pupils, who wish to attend University or Technikon or those who intend following a trade. All subjects are open to both boys and girls.

The school is situated in a Green Belt area and its picturesque environs of forests and open fields exude a rural ambience to an otherwise urban school. While many of the pupils who live in the area attend the school, many more come from further afield. Diverse reasons were supplied for the choice of the school: older siblings had attended the school, technically orientated subjects were offered, cost (it is the cheapest ex-Model C school in the town), the reputation of the school as being a “good school” (this reason was racially –biased, in that this reason was given most frequently by the Black pupils), and the rugby team’s reputation! The school also has a boarding establishment, which caters for pupils from the rural environs.

The socio-economic background of the pupils tends to be similar and is strongly related to the economic factor of the school being one of the cheapest in the city. With the calibre of staff, diversity of subjects on offer and facilities available, many are aware of the value for money that they get at Greenvale. To attempt to convert socio-economic factors into class is invidious in the South African scenario, because for so long the racial issue was strongly related to economic subjugation and power.

What did become highlighted in the interviews conducted, is the emergence of a consciousness of class in relation to education and economic success among the Black families. Many of the Black children at Greenvale come from home

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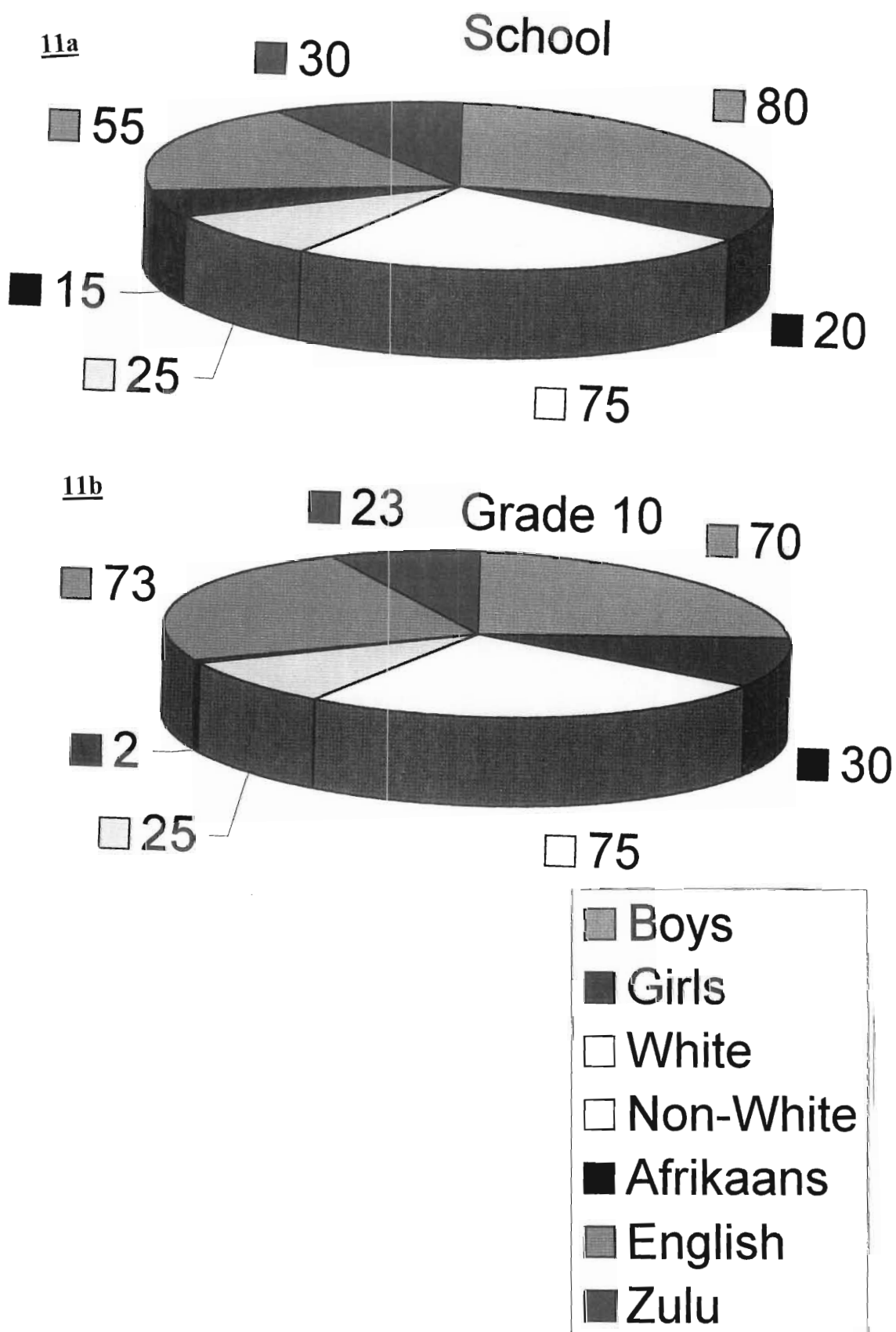
<sup>7</sup> School subjects are taught in two languages, concurrently. In this case English and Afrikaans. This system is also known as a parallel system.

backgrounds where their parents are educated and successful professionals, who wished to remove their children from the township schools. Race is being supplanted by class-consciousness. The Blacks however, still tend to view class in terms of equity with Whites, among whom class takes on other dimensions, a discussion of which, here, will not prove pertinent to this research.

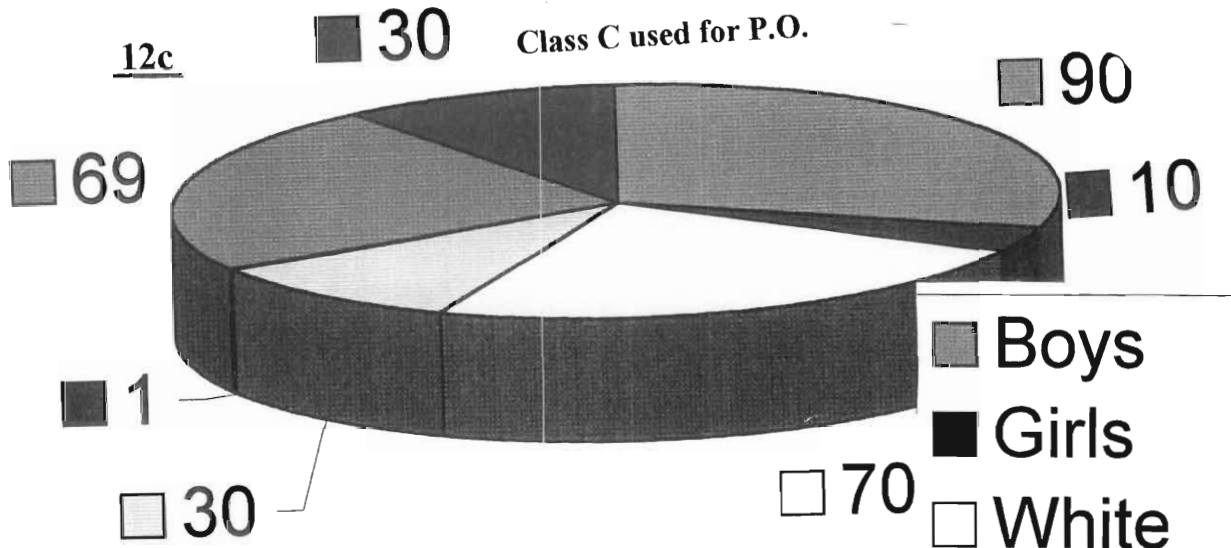
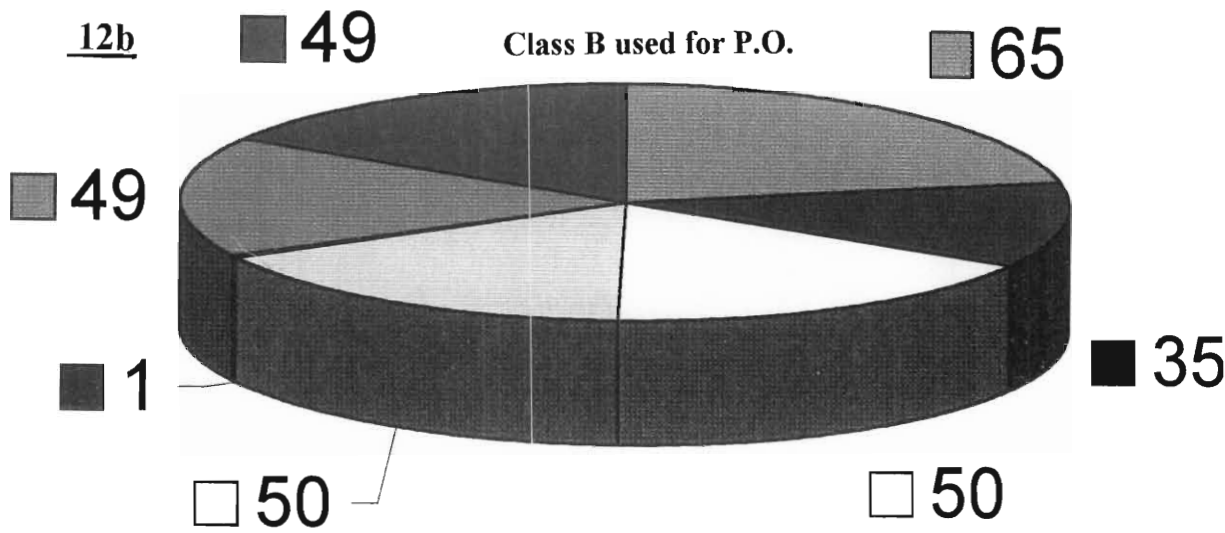
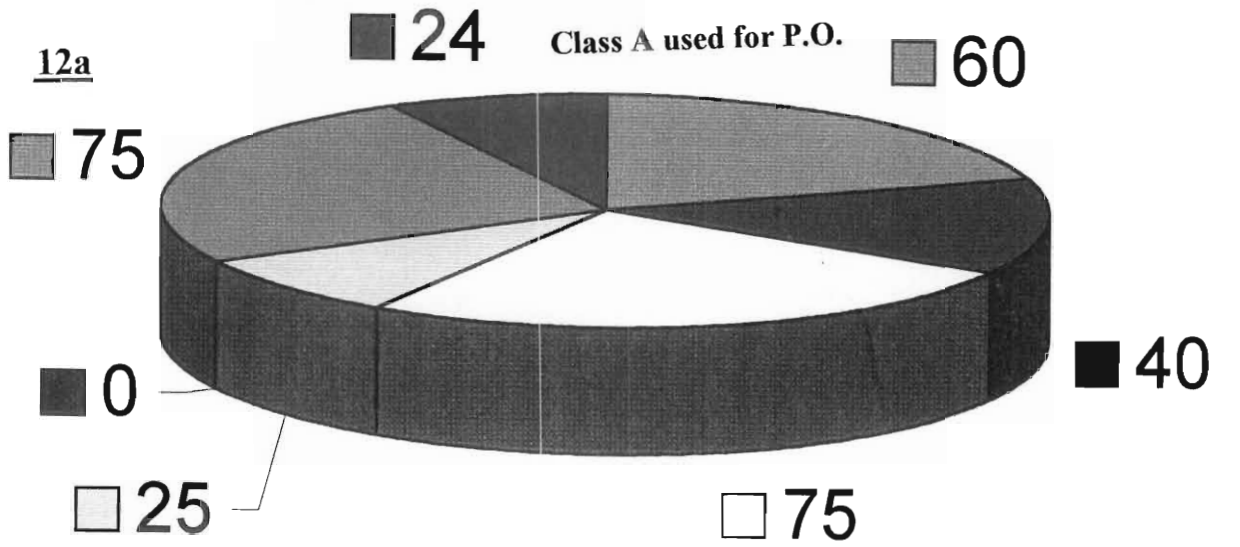
The following table and pie charts reflect the gender, race and language composition of the context within which the study was conducted. The richness of this environment and its complexities of interaction made one a privileged researcher to be allowed access to it.

<b>Composition of the Research Environment</b>						
<b>Estimate % as official records were unavaliabe</b>						
<b>Variables</b>		<b>School</b>	<b>Grade 10</b>	<b>Classes Used For P.O.</b>		
				<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>
<b>Gender:</b>	Boys	80	70	60	65	90
	Girls	20	30	40	35	10
<b>Race:</b>	White	75	75	75	50	70
	Non-White	25	25	25	50	30
<b>Language:</b>	Afrikaans	15	2	0	1	1
	English	55	73	75	49	69
	Zulu	30	23	24	49	30
<b>It should be noted that:</b>						
<b>1. Language statistics do not total 100% as other languages are spoken</b>						
<b>2. Afrikaans so small because of dual medium stream</b>						

Composition of the Research Environment



Composition of the Research Environment



\*P.O. = Participant Observation

- Boys
- Girls
- White
- Non-Wh
- Afrikaan
- English
- Zulu

## Access and Ethics

- see also p 54  
- p 64 - access to documents.

While the research context possessed exciting possibilities for an ethnographic case study, success of the research process relies not only on the co-operation of the participants, but is largely dependant on the support of the institutional machinery. It was therefore my good fortune to be met with an approachable headmaster and an organised and accommodating management team. They were always willing to help in the logistics of the research by supplying me with any requested documentation and ensuring access to classes with a balance of different gender numbers in Grade 10.

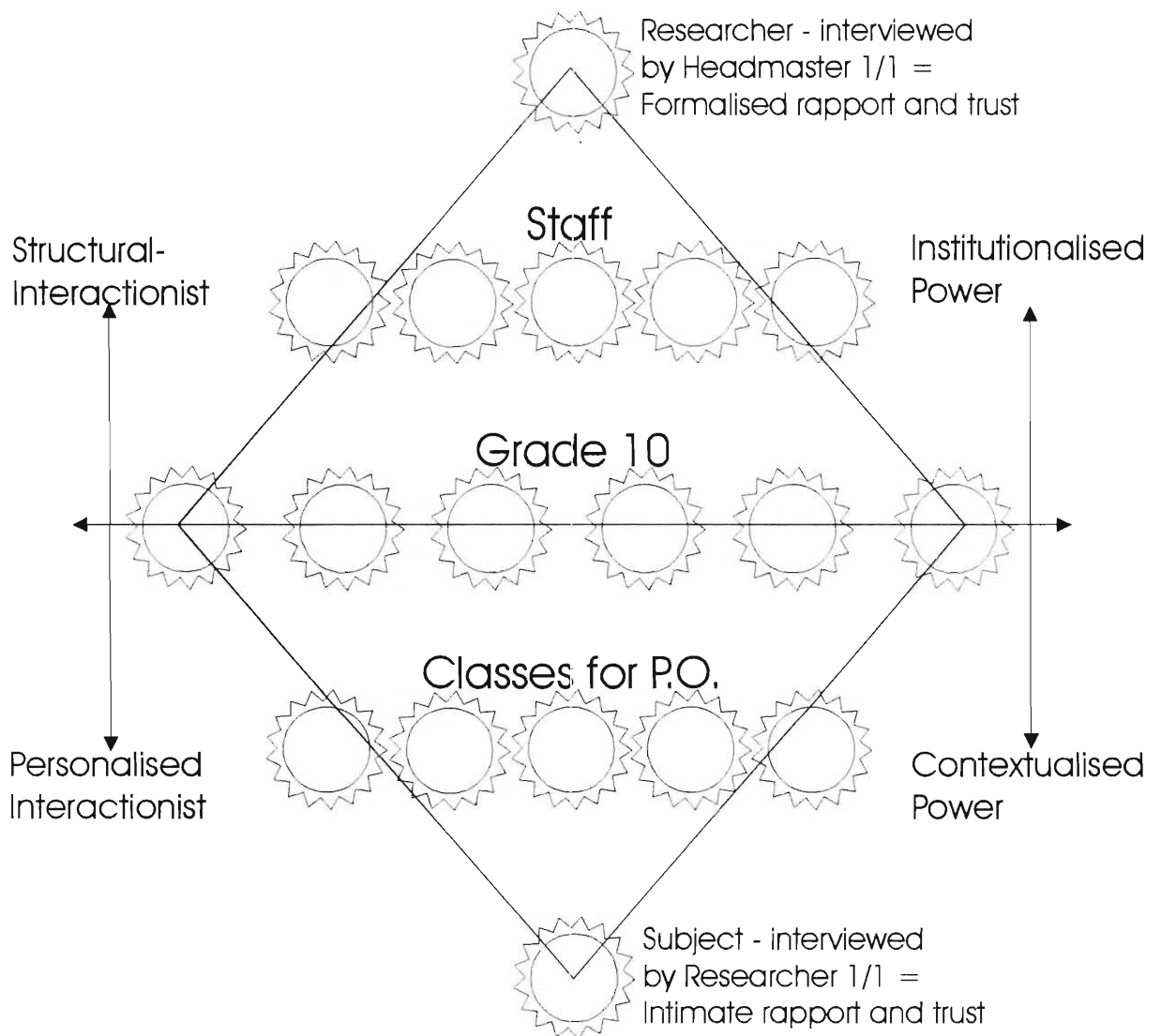
I shall always be eternally grateful to a warm staff, who welcomed me, yet displayed sensitivity to my precarious position as researcher within a staffroom. Their awareness ensured that they never purposely compromised my position of trust, which I had developed with the pupils. Therefore, while I was accepted as “one of them”, I was never *claimed* as a member of staff and polarised from the pupils. The ethical consideration of research became a significant tension for me because of this unconditional acceptance. Honesty became not only essential for the validity of the research process, but a personal moral issue. (This aspect is developed later in Chapter 3).

My position at the point of access in all stages of the research process had to be one of integrity and transparency. What was illuminating for me, was that access had to be sought throughout the research process and was not just an initial concern. I therefore found that different strategies had to be employed when different access was being sought. At each stage though, privacy, confidentiality and informed consent of the participants had to be paramount to ensure that trust and rapport would be established. The “participants” varied from official acceptance in management to official support of the secretarial staff to acceptance and interest from the teachers and finally to the pupils themselves.

As access was proving to be so significant to the success of the research process, I concentrated much of my energy into ensuring that I was creative and sensitive

to the type of access to be utilised within different contexts. What emerged in retrospect is the model I developed as shown below:

## Model of Access and Ethics



 = Interaction Sites

*Commentary on the model of access and ethics*

On entry into Greenvale one had to interact within formal, institutionalised boundaries. Entry into the school was acquired through a formal letter of introduction and explanation, in which a meeting was requested. (The letter was accompanied by my curriculum vitae.) At this meeting I was able to interact personally, thereby developing a rapport with the headmaster.

My introduction to the staff was a formal announcement at a staff meeting, but I had already made contact with my supportive Head of Department at an informal meeting the day before. My status as a teacher of 18 years experience, and hence my age, was instrumental in my quick acceptance by staff members.<sup>8</sup> I believe that the nature of the research problem also negated the threat of my presence in their classes and they were eager to share ideas to enrich the research, which genuinely interested them.

I had interacted within the official structures and utilised my knowledge of power relations within these structures to adapt my behaviour accordingly, so that its acceptability had led to unconditional access. Lest this previous statement smack of sly connivance, let me state that this was a natural and sincere reaction born out of innate knowledge of a system of which I have been a part for so long. I therefore willingly offered assistance to teach in classes where no teachers were available and to help with examination invigilation. This reciprocity on my part was a response to their warm acceptance.

*reciprocal relations*

The pupils were the next and most significant point of access. Access began with a formal introduction by the teachers and as a physical, silent and observing presence. During this time, I familiarised myself with the daily routine of the school and began to identify classes suitable for participant observation (the

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<sup>8</sup> The significance of age can be interpreted at will, as noted by Hammersley in Burgess (1984), who suggests that his youth and relative inexperience posed no threat to staff and subsequently resulted in his acceptance.

emphasis being on gender balance, because there are so few girls in relation to boys).

When the opportunity arose I spoke to each of the Grade 10 classes separately. Honest and transparent explanation was essential. I focussed on three issues:

- the nature and role of the researcher, emphasising my *commitment to them* as adolescents before any other body in the school;
- their *voices* and the significant role they were to play in my research, encouraging them to utilise this opportunity to be *heard*;
- confidentiality.

Through personal interaction over an extended period of time, the Grade 10's began to realise that our relationship was indeed different to that of teacher-pupil and they began to respond to the equality of power balance.

Once the participants had been isolated for interviews, the “epistemic imperative”<sup>9</sup> (Mouton, 1996) became proper procedure and in the reassurance of confidentiality I managed to establish invaluable ties of trust, which served ultimately to control the “role selection effects”<sup>10</sup> (Mouton, 1996).

One cannot fail to notice the symmetry of both triangles in the model, but this should not assume that a linear process, which begins at the headmaster and concludes with the pupils, occurs. As a researcher working within a qualitative paradigm from a postmodern Feminist stance, access had to be re-visited and re-assessed with each new interaction. A lapse of sensitivity to the other person's perspective or a lack of honesty, and access could be denied. Denial of access is synonymous with research failure.

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<sup>9</sup> Legal statement of intent, in which confidentiality is assured. Trust is legally ensured.

<sup>10</sup> The participant would be more encouraged to be his/her natural self and a far more honest response would be assured.



**It is therefore with heartfelt gratitude that I acknowledge the management, staff and pupils of Greenvale, who not only allowed me access, but willingly explored with me!**

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

The integral nature of an ethnographic research process must be reflected in a literature review, which integrates the initiation and exploration of the research problem with an understanding of the broader conceptual framework within which the interpretations and validations of exposé<sup>11</sup> take place. Hence this literature review focusses on the three areas pertinent to the research:

- the Literature , which clarifies, supports or contradicts the evidence to emerge from an exploration of the research problem;
- the research paradigm within which the ethnographic case study dynamically informs, and is informed by, its theoretical concerns;
- a feminist approach to the research problem and research process.

In keeping with the nature of the research, an integrated approach of these three paramount concerns is developed.

An interest in adolescent social relations led me to realise that, while the study of pupil perspectives and adaptations has been a point of growth in the sociology of education in the past two decades, and much has been written on adolescents in education, there is little emphasis on the *significance of their stage of development*. There is the assumption that readers “know” all there is to know about adolescents. Therefore the nature of the adolescent tends to be ignored and *related aspects* are researched e.g. class (Barton and Walker, 1983; Abraham, 1995), culture (Willis, 1972), pupil power (Davies, 1984) and multilingualism (Cohen and Manion, 1983).

Another focus has been predominantly on deviant behaviour (Hargreaves, 1967; Willis, 1972) or conformity (Hammersley and Turner, in Hammersley and

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<sup>11</sup> This is a reference to the exploration, which heralds an openness and yields meanings, which can be defined as valid “truths”.

Woods, 1984). This invariably results in an over-simplification and caricatures of groupings, which are judged against pro-school\anti-school models. Other researchers have related these antithetical concepts to a notion of culture<sup>12</sup> (Hammersley and Woods, 1984). Some do, however point out the ambivalence inherent in social interaction (Barber and Merton in Hammersley and Woods, 1984; Lang, in Hammersley and Woods, 1984), while Lacey (in Hammersley and Woods, 1984) explicitly comments on the way in which pro-school pupils are committed to values other than those promoted by the school.

These ideas have been invariably extended in the answers sought to pupil failure and resultant research has correlated class<sup>13</sup>, behaviour and academic achievement\failure (Lacey, in Hammersley and Woods, 1984; Ball, in Hammersley and Woods, 1984; Hargreaves, 1967). Werthman (in Hammersley and Woods, 1984) criticises these explanations and stresses the rational appraisal, which pupils make of their situation and the resultant contextual variability of their behaviour. Academically successful pupils also indulge in deviant classroom behaviour.

SH  
conceptual framework

Most work within the qualitative paradigm has focused at a micro-level of analysis and, as such, a social psychological model has been introduced to a study of schools. Thus the process of pupil interaction, their relationships with one another (Hargreaves, 1967) and their interpretations and activities have become significant. But the assumption that all interaction takes place within the context of peer and friendship groups, which have a culture of norms and values, within which the pupils' experiences occur, suggests a fundamental flaw.

RG This approach focuses on assumed conceptualisation and works in reverse to incorporate the pupil – a silent pupil. It does not examine how the pupils themselves perceive their social relations. Researchers have failed to ask the

<sup>12</sup> A system of shared values, which is held by those who have interests in common. This loose definition applies to many forms of group association.

<sup>13</sup> Urry (in Cole, 1989) defines it as a strong cultural bias, which de-emphasises itself in accent, dress, manners and schooling. Sociologists perceive it as closely related to "status".

pupils how they actually interact with each other and how significant contextualisation is to these interactions.

This issue concerns me, as I believe that research using adolescents as participants should not ignore the opportunity to explore the needs and aspirations of the future stakeholders in society. Hence the focus of my research on the “voices” of adolescents. Not the disembodied voices, which emerge after analysis, but authentic voices from the field – voices of both male and female adolescents.

Hargreaves (1967) and Lacey (in Hammersley and Woods, 1984) are the best known in the field of social interaction with the use of the informal group. They assume that friends will interact more frequently than pupils, who are not friends, and in so doing will develop their own norms and values. Their use of the sociometric questionnaire implies a static, generalised conformity to group ethos. This involves an “external” analysis (Wexler, 1997), which ignores the fact that individuals need to interpret the situation and react accordingly.

Interaction, according to Furlong (in Hammersley and Woods, 1984), is constructed by individuals, who continually adjust their behaviour to each other within certain situations, which do not necessarily require consistent norms and behaviour. Therefore, while Furlong acknowledges that adolescents have to be heard, his use of “interaction sets” within anthropological observations, remain limited to the level of description.

R G  
Covering  
the gap

A significant issue in my research, is my belief in the adolescent as an active agent, who makes choices and is the one who will have to deal with the consequences thereof. Furlong (in Hammersley and Woods, 1984) believes that the acknowledgement of a group culture, presents one with an external reality and social behaviour is shown as one person responding to some reified group. The implication is that the individual has little choice in his\her actions, as he\she

is controlled by something external, the group. <sup>RG</sup> This hypothesis ignores personal construction of meaning within situational interaction.

Willis (1972) suggests that “contextualisation” is vital in the assessment of the role and strength of different processes in different situations and at different times. <sup>R/V</sup> My preoccupation was to explore the dynamics, fluidity and contradictions inherent in such contextualisations. What is particularly interesting is to see whether the individual suspends his/her own beliefs or interests as a form of “commitment to the reality of the group and its aims” (Willis, 1972) and whether the group can be regarded as possessing cohesive personal attributes. Willis (1972) claims that there is a “generalisation ... from an individualistic logic to a group logic” and it is this informal group logic of counter-school culture that sexism has perpetuated, “even celebrated”.

<sup>Q &</sup> Although the past decade has seen a plethora of literature on gender research, there exists in South Africa, in particular, a significant gap in the literature on adolescent social relations within gender-related issues. Most research is linear in nature and generally deals with sexuality in terms of male domination and females’ response to male action (Lees, in Wolpe, 1988; Measor and Sikes, 1992; Spender, 1989; Acker, 1994) or tries to explain or seek solutions to women’s subordinate social status (Fitzpatrick, 1976; Unterhalter, 1991; Delamont, 1996).

<sup>R/G</sup> Reference is made to this gap in the literature by Wolpe (1988) when she states that little is known about what boys themselves say and think, particularly with regard to girls. <sup>See also p 41</sup> An attempt to fill this gap is made by an exploration of male heterosexual subjectivities and the role <sup>of</sup> schooling in the formation of male sexual identities (Mac an Ghail, 1994). <sup>R/G</sup> Very little in the literature has paid specific attention to girls in their own right. Most research done on males possesses the implication that it could be extrapolated to be representative of the female experience. Thus, prior research has viewed humans as androgynous.

An attempt to rectify this failing in gender literature has been made by Garber and McRobbie (in Wolpe, 1988) and Ward (in Hammersley and Woods, 1984).

While Spender's (1989) research emphasis is essentially on the female sex, she does acknowledge that:

If we wish to describe and analyse human experience and to formulate explanations of the world which take human beings into account, then we must include the experience and understanding of women, as well as men.

(p.17)

*OK* The main thrust of the literature is to be found in the abandonment of gender dualities altogether; oppressor/oppressed etc. (Derrida, in Blair et al, 1995) There are also attempts to demonstrate that sexism in schooling is destructive to both sexes (Delamont, 1990). It is believed that "we distort the humanity of both men and women" (Spender, 1988) in discrimination and indoctrination. My research, therefore, embraces opinions of both genders within groups as individuals to explore whether different social groupings\individuals demonstrate different gender attributions or aspirations.

While the research problem of this dissertation does not present ethnicity<sup>14</sup> as a concern, the environment of the research study was multicultural, and as such I could not ignore the racial<sup>15</sup> component of gender. It is therefore only utilised as a foil to individual Black pupils isolated as loners (Chapter 7). What is significant within the context of the research problem is how Black pupils in Britain have been found to be regarded as a sexually undifferentiated group (Little, in Hammersley and Woods, 1984).

Hence Fuller's (in Hammersley and Woods, 1984) pioneering work is of great significance in the light of so little research in this area. In South Africa, no

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<sup>14</sup> Gollnick and Chinn (in Cole, 1989) perceive this as an attribute of membership in a group, in which members continue to identify themselves with the nation from which they or their ancestors came.

<sup>15</sup> People who have the same phenotypical appearance: hair type, skin colour. In South Africa geographic location could still be regarded as significant within a definition.

research has been undertaken where researchers are listening to or learning from Black adolescents, so vital to the future of an emergent, fragile democracy. The *meaning* they (Black and White alike) make of social interaction in their multicultural school, struggling to deal with an educational transformation from oppressive rigidity<sup>16</sup> to expressive fluidity<sup>17</sup>, is the most important advice that educationalists, policy makers and administrators can be given in shaping future paths for all aspects of society.

Potential cannot be tapped without understanding adolescent perceptions, needs and ambitions. Therefore pupils' interpretations of school processes and the commonality of daily social interactions within an educational context, are vital building materials in the democratisation and empowerment process espoused by the wider social institutions. Adolescent voices need to be heard and heeded!

To adopt a feminist stance possesses implications not only for the theoretical considerations of the research proposal, but also for its operationalisation. Certain feminist research is therefore essential to the understanding of the implications of the research process and its focus (Stanley and Wise, in Stanley, 1990; Eichler and Lapointe, 1985). A post-structuralist stance not only suggests a more all-embracing approach to gender, but also implies a different research practice: one which actively constructs and interprets social processes and social relations, which constitute everyday realities (Smith, 1990).

This research practice has emerged from a realisation that a theoretical structural functionalist framework assumed that a natural and unproblematised relationship existed between the researcher and the object of the research. This resulted in a one-way conversation, in which the human research object was deafening in his\her silence.

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<sup>16</sup> Christian National Education and Bantu Education within the confines of a divisive Apartheid system.

<sup>17</sup> Initiation of Outcomes Based Education in a democratic system based on equality and human rights.

Hence critical ethnographies began to problematise issues of everyday life, which had previously been avoided, but failed to problematise the research process, thereby reproducing the “essentialist” male perspective. Wexler (1997), therefore *intended research to show the fo* advocates that the researcher undergoes “identity construction” within the research process.

Britzman (in Wexler, 1997) states it thus:

... educational ethnographers must now account for how their constructions of culture produce their identities as researchers. (p. 136)

This postmodern emphasis on discourse and identity remains overwhelmingly the dominant paradigm in school research. As such it proved to be the obvious choice for the nature of the research problem.

Focault’s (in Wexler, 1997) words tend to echo the personal motivation for this research:

I am more and more interested in the ... interaction between oneself and others in the technologies of individual domination, the history of how an individual acts upon himself, in the technology of self. (p.19)

This radical technological self-transformation Wexler (1997) refers to as “re-selfing”. This post modern phase in research is characterised by a new “social ethic of being” and an awareness that the dynamism of social relations is reflective of broader cultural concerns, which transcend particularisms of national and ethnic culture. Integrative ethnology, according to Baszanger and



Dodier (in Silverman, 1997) involves the integration of ethnographic sequences, which encompass global references. This interaction ultimately results in the illumination of each other.

5<sup>14</sup> Carspecken (1996) relates the significance of the role of the individual in the intimacy of social relations by metaphorically comparing it to Gestaltian theory of figure and ground. He refers to this relationship as “pragmatic horizons” and believes that a perceptual object only becomes fully foregrounded when it is located in generalized contexts of possible communication. The relevance of such a comparison became clear to me once I had converted it into the linguistic content of an act and its corresponding analogy of deep and surface structure. Whichever way one seeks to understand social relations, communication involves shared understanding, experience and meaning.

An encompassing global framework is sometimes regarded as the “cultural” perspective to social relations. Csordas (in Smith and Wexler, 1995) reflects on the dereification of culture, which is occurring through the ethnographic research process. He believes that “culture is grounded in the human body” and “the body is not the passive object of an abstract culture”. Barbalet and Lyon (in Smith and Wexler, 1995) see the human body not as a “social artifact”, but as an “active source of social processes and institutions”.

Stoller (1997) reinvigorates ethnography in suggesting a reformulation of the body in the scholar, by awakening the imagination and bringing scholarship back “to the things themselves”(p.xii). He believes it is important to incorporate into ethnographic works the sensuous body – its smells, tastes, textures and sensations. Such inclusion is especially important in the ethnographic descriptions of societies, which are not Eurocentric. Within the South African context I “sang” in response to this work. In response to the preoccupation of the balance of power in a feminist perspective he believes that to “accept sensuousness in scholarship is to eject the conceit of control in which mind and body, self and other are considered separate” (p. xvii).

While an understanding of culture and knowledge as socially constructed is a feature of Hermeneutics<sup>18</sup>, it is in aligning the latter with the commitment of postmodernism, that one emerges with an exploration of the interrelationship between culture and power. An acknowledgement of the significance of this combination is pertinent to the *intention* of the research process.

The concept of power relations within the research process is integral to a feminist perspective. They believe that one's integrity is compromised if one leaves the power relations unchanged in operationalisation; it is imperative to address the imbalance of power (Oakley, in Roberts, 1981; McWilliam, 1994). Giddens (1979) believes that power accompanies all actions and that interactive power is at its greatest when differentiations in decision-making are determined without equal input from all people involved. Fused with the notion of power is that of "truth".

Within the postmodern approach, there appears to be a shift from discourse<sup>19</sup> to an interactional study of beings and worlds, of which the researcher is an integral part. Goldstein (in Smith and Wexler, 1995) refers to this as a movement towards "dharma" – "the truth of the way things are". Feminists believe the researcher to be a "truth-tester", concerned that research become "inquiry made public" (McWilliam, 1994:28) and hence move towards disclosure and change. This reconstruction is based on the premise that, what is "personal is political" (McWilliam, 1994:38) and is informed by the Foucaultian notion (in Wexler, 1997) that every creed is potentially oppressive.

As will become obvious in my expansion on p.39, a preoccupation with the meaning of "truth"<sup>20</sup> and awareness of its various perspectives is essential as a

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<sup>18</sup> This is roughly synonymous with the art of interpretation. Cognisance is taken of the identification of a general philosophical method and a scientific approach to linguistic understanding. (Thompson, 1990)

<sup>19</sup> Jones and Ball (in McLaren and Giarelli, 1995) define this as how men govern themselves and others by the production of truth.

<sup>20</sup> The formation of domains, in which the practice of true and false can be made pertinent.

researcher within this paradigm. Critical epistemology supplies the researcher with certain principles whereby valid enquiries into human experience can be conducted.

The act of conducting research will always be value-driven, but the validity claims of the researcher have to meet certain standards to avoid bias. These standards are rooted in democratic principles in search of “truth”. Habermas’s (in Carspecken, 1996) preoccupation with validity<sup>21</sup> emphasises its significance when everyday human interaction is the focus of the research problem.

Ethnographic narrative can entrap the researcher into concepts and generalisations, which appear “faithfully” to represent the extrapolations from data. Reality should therefore also be problematised, for it emerges from the roots of conflictual struggle and must be regarded as multi-faceted. The questions should constantly be re-visited; Whose truth? Whose reality?

Integral to the reflexivity of the researcher is the realisation that others have a hermeneutical privilege to analyse their situations and should have the first right to articulate how social reality functions (Mihevc, in McLaren and Giarelli, 1995). Ethnographers have to therefore accept the responsibility that comes with giving the world meaning and controlling the cultural mode of the research process, which could shape the direction of theorising.

The awareness of assumptions in research not being critically evaluated and revised is a point made by Acker (1980), and gives rise to the major contribution of feminists to social science thinking, that of “reflexivity”(Smith, 1987). Thus emerges another “voice”, that of the researcher, who must be aware of the thematic interests displayed in the developments of instruments and the interpretation of data (Haggis, in Stanley, 1990).

Coupled with this is the notion of “consciousness-raising” (Payne, in Spender and Sarah, 1988) within a structuralist Marxist critique of sexism in education.

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<sup>21</sup> Habermas’s theory of communicative action.

Both suggest an awareness not only as an attempt to expose dominant ideologies in relation to women, but also to get acceptance for a different approach to contextualised interactive situations within research, in which difference and complexity is recognised (Stanley and Wise, in Stanley, 1990).

The epistemological debate on the ethnographer as participant observer becomes a sensitive issue on the adoption of a feminist research stance and as a researcher one should be aware of the debate of representation and decide on one's own epistemological standpoint (McWilliam, 1994; Kemp, 1993; Funani, 1993; Carspecken, 1996).

The ethnographic paradigm of classroom interaction research is now a well-established element of the sociology of education, especially in Britain. Many papers represent the development and current state of the work in this area (Woods and Hammersley, 1977; Cohen and Manion, 1989; Stubbs and Delamont, in Hammersley and Woods, 1984). Feminist literature is most comprehensive and serves as a useful framework for the incumbent researcher.

RG  
But while citing the available literature on issues related to the research problem, it becomes apparent that certain integral issues are not addressed in the literature. These include: the significance of the participant as *adolescent, whose voice should be heard undistorted*; the adolescent as active agent, making rational, consequential choices; and a focus on gender as complementary, rather than divisive.

Further case studies of pupil knowledge will not only be of interest to sociologists, but could be of practical use to teachers in the preparation of lesson materials to incorporate the needs and experiences of their pupils. In keeping with the new educational perspective of Outcomes Based Education in South Africa, it is essential that educators and community understand and accept the perspectives of adolescents, both male and female, if they are to be effective facilitators of learning. This study should be seen as a small contribution to such understanding.

2  
Rationale  
Significance  
the study

## Chapter 3

### Research Methodology

#### I Conceptual Framework

As an ethnographic case study conducted within the qualitative / interpretive paradigm (Giddens,1989; Mouton,1996), an awareness of the research process should be inculcated. The aim of methodology<sup>22</sup> is to help one to understand in the broadest possible terms, not the products of scientific enquiry, but the process itself. It is a process that involves the observation of human behaviour in a holistic cultural context and, as such, one needs to be conscious of the concentric nature of the observation i.e. there exists a relationship between events relevant in the chosen research social site<sup>23</sup> and the broader socio-cultural milieu.<sup>24</sup> Hence *contextualization* emerges as central to the understanding and meaning of the dynamics of intimate social relations.

#### *The Ethnographic Case Study*

Case Study is the examination of an instance in action.

(Walker, in Schratz, 1993:165)

As such it could be regarded as an initiation of action, which allows contribution to the action to ensure continued impetus within the research process. Cohen and Manion (1989) refer to this as “Step to Action”. The case study approach allows one to capture and portray elements of a situation, which give it meaning. This “meaning” is formulated within an ethnographic approach and as such can be explained epistemologically by Mouton’s (1996) worlds. Case study methods acknowledge that social science researchers are influenced by their previous

<sup>22</sup> This is an orientation rather than a tight methodological school. It incorporates design, data collection and analysis.

<sup>23</sup> These are regions within society in which routine activities, including interactions take place. They can be perceived as a lens to place over social life to adjust focus to meet the interests or concerns of the research problem.

<sup>24</sup> Carspecken (1996) sees this as a relationship between settings and locales.

knowledge and theories (World 2), which guide what they observe and record from the real world (World 1). This implies the intrusion of World 2 (personal knowledge) into the real world. It also implies the acknowledgement that data collected from the case under study are the result of the shared knowledge between what is observed in World 1 and World 2 i.e. the shared knowledge between personal experience and the real world, which breeds World 3. This study fits into this context.

A case study allows one to escape from the language of theory, while contributing to theory, because the researcher makes certain abstractions from one's interpretations of everyday contextualised situations within the learning environment. The research essentially grows out of questions that one asks different pupils in different contexts and assumes they have patterns of experience.

To probe deeply and to analyse intensively the multifarious phenomena that constitute the dynamics of a unit (whether it be individual or group), is the purpose of a case study. Most wish to establish certain generalisations about the macro-dynamics (community interaction), within which the micro-dynamics (group interaction) operates. This case study did not presume to do this. It hoped to probe in order to understand and explain the perceptions of particular individual adolescents in relation to group choices and influences. An attempt to generalise these findings would undermine the credibility and validity of this research.

---, reconstructing meaning is less about creating  
a perfect reflection of a single tangible reality,  
than about seeing the angles, distortions and  
contradictions which make up the myriad of possible  
meanings in one of many reconstructed pictures.

(Jessop, 1996:102)

One should be aware that ethnographic research necessitates the recognition of the complexity of social relations and the researchers' own socially determined position within the reality that one is attempting to describe. The research study

is a multifarious social text that yields multiple interpretations, unique, possibly related, but dangerous to generalise, especially in the light of the significance given to *context* within this research paradigm.

Late Postmodern awareness reflects the wider social structural dynamics of “de-spatialization and de-temporalization” (Wexler, 1997). Wexler (1997) believes decontextualization to result in a “duelist split between objectivism and subjectivism”. Millar (in Steinberg, 1983) highlights the notions of objectivity and subjectivity in response to criticisms on the subjectivity of case studies and concludes with the statement: “Concealment, not subjectivity is the crime” (p.122).

### Ethnography as a Perspective

When choosing to research as an ethnographer one should be aware of the integrative nature of the process and the other perspectives, which one will, by necessity, embrace. Such a choice implies a richness of challenge. Carspecken (1996) would go so far as to state that critical ethnography fulfills a need to address and transform social inequality rather than advocate it as a conscious choice by the researcher<sup>25</sup>. By its very nature, gender within a patriarchal society, implies that there are inequalities which need to be addressed. I was therefore conscious of what adults could learn from adolescents in addressing issues which concern them, especially those gender-related.

When one begins to speak of a world of “multiple realities” and the “raising of consciousness levels” as factors integrated into *understanding the behaviour* of others, one is drawing on Schultz’s (in Carspecken, 1996) existential phenomenology<sup>26</sup>. Mead (in Carspecken, 1996) and Woods (in Carspecken, 1996) as symbolic interactionists<sup>27</sup> focus on the *dynamic activities*, which take place between persons, and as such portray the active image of the human being,

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<sup>25</sup> Carspecken (1996) defines “criticalists” as those who share a value orientation and are concerned about social inequalities, therefore directing their work towards positive social change. “Criticalist” research is used to refine social theory rather than merely to describe social life.

<sup>26</sup> Understanding the meaning of the world of everyday life.

<sup>27</sup> There is a focus on the world of subjective meanings and the nature of interaction.

rejecting that of man as a passive organism. This stance informed most of my research practice, especially when observing adolescent interaction and developing an understanding of perception in what the adolescents had to *say about these interactions* in the interview situation.

Ethnography is also concerned with the world of everyday life. According to Garfinkel (in Carspecken, 1996):

(Ethnography) sets out to treat practical activities, practical circumstances and practical sociological reasonings as topics of empirical study, and by paying to the most commonplace activities of daily life the attention usually accorded extraordinary events, seeks to learn about them as phenomena in their own right.

(p.31)

It was therefore vital that I became a part of the research participants' daily activities as quickly and as unobtrusively as possible, so that their daily habits and interactions resumed as they had been prior to my intrusion into their environs. Ethnography is concerned with *how people make sense* of their everyday world and as such by means of indexicality<sup>28</sup> wish to "understand social accomplishments from within" (Cohen & Manion, 1989).

As an educational ethnographer the use of all three perspectives in one's research can only enrich the process, while an aware researcher is less likely to be influential in structuring, analysing and interpreting the situation. *Which perspectives are those?*

What emerges as concerns for the researcher from the above three perspectives are reflexive, contextualised fragmented multiple images and interactions between active human beings. Given that "leaps of consciousness" are required to cross into the different worlds of "multiple realities", it is small wonder that

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<sup>28</sup> Ways in which actions and statements are related to the social contexts producing them. (Cohen and Manion, 1989)



Giroux (in McLaren and Giarelli, 1995:51) sees research as a form of “border crossing”. I found this to be so, beginning with the use of a personal diary (reflexivity), and developing an awareness of the significance of synthesis in the interpretation of interactive situations.

### The Ethnographer as Feminist

Ethnomethodology shares common concerns with feminists on theoretical and methodological issues. It was therefore pertinent to the research question that the research process be inclusive of both ethnographic and feminist perspectives. Nielsen (1990) cites Strahern’s (1987) disagreement with the analyses of feminine scholarship as a paradigm shift, for it is accommodated within the qualitative paradigm as a stance. Central to gendered social relations among adolescents is the continued recognition of “historical” concerns of sexist inequality and the power relations within patriarchal social institutions, such as family and school. The site of “liberatory struggle” (Stone, in McLaren and Giarelli, 1995) in this study is the adolescent and his/her group within the learning environment.

*- Contextualise*  
*- political*  
*- Objectivity*

Running parallel and integrated with the dynamics of human interactions is that of the research process. It is essential to contextualise the research in social and normative terms and to inculcate an awareness that research is a political process, thereby challenging ‘objectivity’ in research. Feminists therefore, continually challenge the idea that research needs to be viewed as objective, for it to be considered research. For “objectivity” is as defined from a male perspective within a patriarchal society. They therefore emphasise, that at the heart of the research process, lies honest re-appraisal, both personal and public. All participants in the research process bring to the process their own experiential assumptions (subjectivity), which should be openly acknowledged and addressed as part of the research process. *Feminist should have been defined.*

## Dualism and Theory

*dualism* The basic premise of all postmodernist feminist methodology is a rejection of dualisms, which not only affects binary oppositions<sup>29</sup> as defined by society e.g. male/female; individual/society etc., but demands a rethink of the theory/practice structure process rift within research practices. Feminists therefore advocate an understanding of praxis<sup>30</sup> in their research. Theory is therefore not only to be regarded as being derived from experiences, but is seen as being sacrosanct, and as such is continually subject to revision in the light of experience. "Theory must speak to contextually grounded experience and recognise difference and complexity"<sup>31</sup> (Stanley & Wise, in Stanley, 1990:31) This relationship with inductivism as a model of research is often referred to as "grounded theory" (Glaser & Strauss, in Burgess, 1984).

While my research obviously yields theories born out of experience, one cannot ignore the theoretical implications of the researcher and researched in the research process. A researcher is already grounded culturally and emotionally and the research is often grounded in the experience itself. Thus the methodology of this research is reflective of a broad theoretically informed framework.

## Epistemology and Power

*socially constructed marriage* Feminist empiricism relies on the "context of discovery" (Stanley & Wise, in Stanley, 1990) as being just as significant as theories in the construction of knowledge. Feminists believe that all knowledge is socially constructed.

**All knowledge, necessarily, results from the conditions of its production, is contextually located and irrevocably bears the marks of its origins in the**

<sup>29</sup> Binary oppositions are dependent on hierarchy that results in one of the terms restricting, undermining and usurping the meaning of the other with ideologically disfiguring effects. (McLaren, in McLaren and Giarelli, 1995)

<sup>30</sup> Dialectical tension and interactive reciprocity of theory and practice. (McWilliam, 1994)

<sup>31</sup> Fieldsite = the site of the researcher's own embodiment in theory and discourse and his/her own disposition as a theorist, within a specific politics of location. (McLaren, in McLaren and Giarelli, 1995)

minds and intellectual practices of those lay and professional theorists and researchers who give voice to it. (Smith, 1987:39)

As knowledge is produced, the context is no longer peripheral, but is integral to the focus on multiple realities. Foucault (in Smith and Wexler, 1995) believes that to probe meaning is to probe the social relations of discourse, which relate to power.

Knowledge and power are  
inseparable and interrelated.

(p.59)

This should also represent a movement from “prescription (prediction) to deconstruction (disclosure)” (McWilliams, 1994). In so doing, the researcher should question the dominant ideology of a ruling group in the awareness that there is no such thing as a value free society, and that relations of power exist in the framing of the language of research, and in the research act itself. Hence I attempted to empower the adolescents in this study, so that *their ideas and understandings* of situations could emerge. In the interview situation, they aided in the development of the framing of questions, so that I could be assured that our understanding of what the question required was the same, thereby ensuring *revelation*, rather than confirmation of assumptions.

If “critical” ethnographers and feminists are sincere about redressing the power imbalances within society; they must begin with the research process and the individual/s who initiate/s it. Nielsen (1990) addresses this issue when she discusses advocacy in relation to “standpoint epistemology” (p.10), whereby she suggests that less powerful members of society have potential for a more complete view of social reality than others, because of their disadvantaged position. This holistic awareness as subordinates to the perspective of the dominant class as well as their own gives them the potential for “double vision” (Annas, in Burgess, 1984) or double consciousness.

## Reflexivity and the Ethnographer

Feminist methodology is strongly focused on the rights of the participants and the redress of power imbalance in the operationalisation<sup>32</sup> of the research process. Therefore, an awareness of power relations between researcher and researched, as exemplified by the Foucaultian notion of power (Gore, in Smith and Wexler, 1995), is inculcated in this research. Transparency at every “stage” of the research process is paramount. The integrity of the researcher lies in the conscious critique of his/her position as researcher; the limitations and the possibilities, by revealing the research problem and being transparent with findings in the written report. Feminists have developed “internal critiques”<sup>33</sup> (Grosz, in McWilliam, 1994) to ensure that the researcher probes her own texts and develops a new understanding of her consciousness.

It is in this belief that I kept a personal diary, in which I reflected on the birth pangs of the research, the operationalisation, the analysis of the data and the writing of the report. This is referred to as the “reflexivity of social science” (Harding, 1987), in which the beliefs and behaviour of the researcher are part of the empirical evidence for (or against) the claims made in the research. Reflexivity is described as Feminism’s major contribution to social science thinking.

“ Reflexivity recognises that the researcher should be as exposed to public view as those she exposes. It ensures that the contradiction of the researcher who claims to be concerned with emancipatory change and who is “ interested in contesting relations of domination” but who in fact “ uses a method which reproduces the type of relations they so despise” (Gitlin et al, in McLaren and Giarelli, 1995), is nullified.

It is important to acknowledge that the researcher has an impact on the research setting, that her selectivity shapes the data and findings and that it is the

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<sup>32</sup> Research strategies and triangulation.

<sup>33</sup> (Grosz, in McWilliam, 1994) – understanding of one’s own consciousness and a personal framework developed through the probing of personal texts.

researchers' values and interests that inevitably shapes all aspects of the research process. Once I had understood that the artificiality of classroom division did not aid me in the isolation and selection of friendship groups, I became very aware of what criteria I was using to select the groups to study. It was at this point I realised that not only logistics shaped the choices (equal number of boys and girls in the class). I became interested in girls and boys, who reflected my value systems and life experiences. I had to therefore consciously choose other groups, to whom I did not personally relate, in order to enrich the study.

Out of these considerations emerge the significance of the subjective disposition inherent in research. This cannot be viewed in isolation and should be regarded as integral to a wider "political imperative grounded in an ethical discourse" (McLaren, in McLaren and Giarelli, 1995).

### Ethics, the Ethnographer and the "Truth"

An ethnographer is an embodiment of the contextualised dialectics of her research and as such is an extension both physically, theoretically and emotionally of her field site. She is integral to the discourses of her research and as such is both subject and object of her research.<sup>34</sup> This is where ethical considerations come into play, for situations should not be controlled by the ethnographer to ensure that only subjects compliant to the other research agenda participate in the research. Furthermore, the temptation to manipulate (and thereby betray) the participant should be avoided (Stacey, in McLaren and Giarelli, 1995).

I have focused on this aspect of the research as integral to its success and have developed a model on the personal integration of researcher into the ethical considerations of access (Chapter 1, p.14), as well as discussed the significance of confidentiality – its advantages and limitations.

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<sup>34</sup> Hawthorn Effect – effect researcher has on the events she/he wishes to study. (Carspecken, 1996)

For these reasons, the ethnographer needs to understand and transform the way in which her position within the discourse privileges her and to be pro-active in trying to dismantle the “otherness” of the researched. For the assignation of “otherness” is a form of ideological violence and an exercise in the power to dominate (McLaren, in McLaren and Giarelli, 1995). The ethnographer needs to take responsibility for the empowerment of the researched.

I felt that in acknowledging openly to the participants that without their permission and willingness to participate fully, the research study would not succeed, encouraged them to believe that they were essential to the research process. The success of their sense of empowerment became obvious when they allowed me to photograph the group smoking at break time. They were not only giving me permission, but it demonstrated a trust in me and was a manifestation of the fact that they had *claimed the research as their own*. Another aspect of the research, which emphasised the collaborative nature of certain aspects of the research, was the participants’ analysis of the photographs and their criticism of my analysis. This became a significant exploration during the interview situation.

Others have a hermeneutical privilege in naming the issues before them and in developing an analysis of their situation appropriate to their context....

The marginalised have the first right to name reality, to articulate how social reality functions and to decide how the issues are to be organised and defined.

(Mihevc, in McLaren and Giarelli, 1995:289)

In being transparent and honest towards self, the researched and the process, the ethnographer can now begin to grapple with the concept of “truth”. As in the entire research process truth continues to tantalise in its pervasive, elusive nature of concentricity. An exploration of this former statement can be found in the diagrammatic representation, which I developed, to be found on the following page (p. 39).

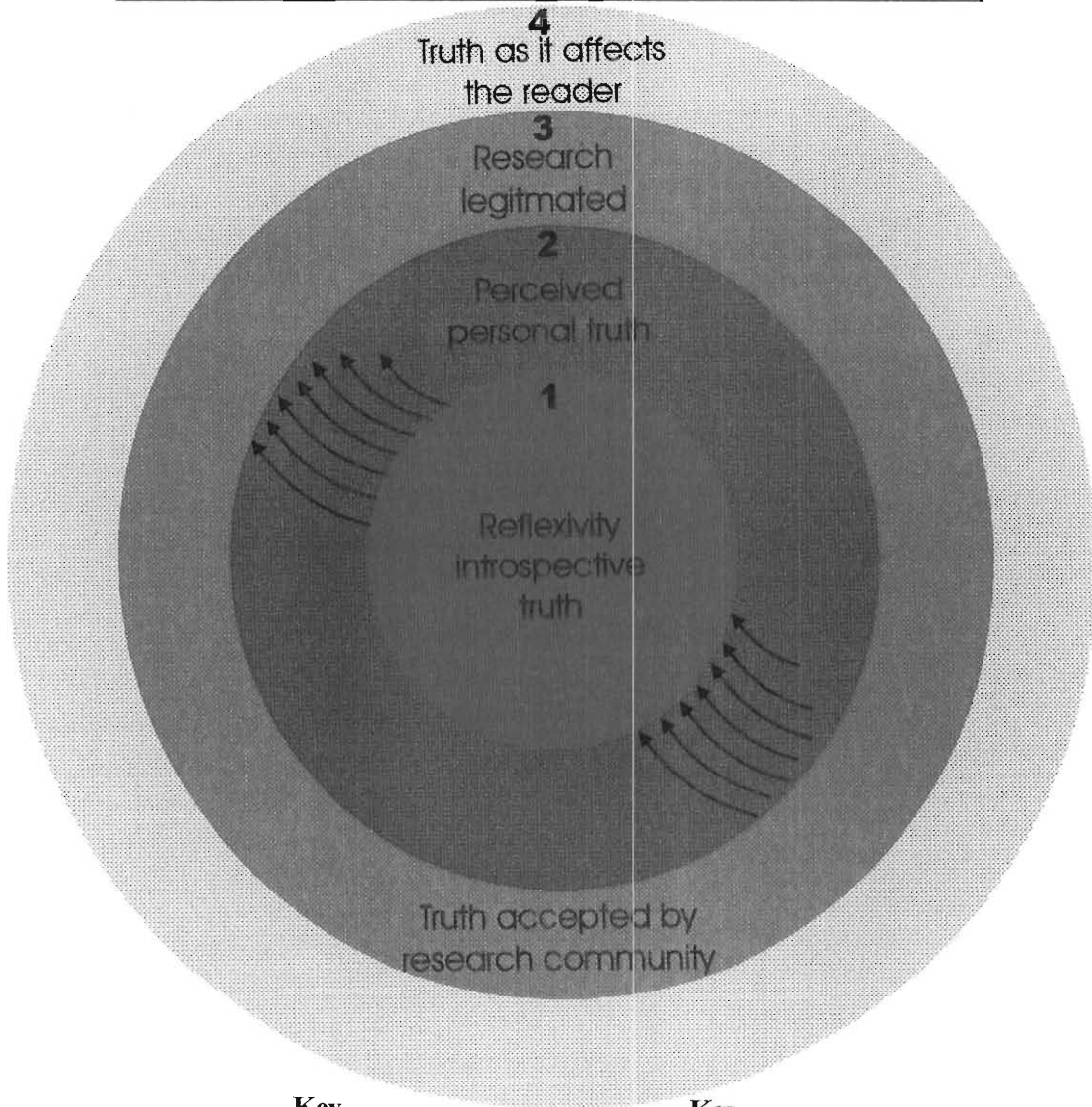
Truth is not what we try to find out,

but what we endeavour to become.

(Patterson, in McLaren and Giarelli, 1995:281)

Truth is not what we know but what we  
are not yet. (McLaren, 1995:281)

Truth (as expanded upon and adapted from McLaren, 1995)



Key

1+2= Research Site

1-3= Research Community

1->3->4= Progression to the

Reader

Key

1+2= Personal Truth Dimension

3+4= General Truth Dimension

Each concentric circle contains its own truth for the interacting individual.

Dynamic interaction between participants within the research process, deepened by reflexivity, imbues one with a motivational need to fulfil the intentions of the initial research problem in the truth one becomes.

### The Ethnographer's Motivation

In one's attempts to explain/understand the "otherness" (McLaren, 1995) and the honest, transparent approach to a movement towards "truth", one realises that certain demands are made on one that encourage the researcher to constantly re-assess what motivated his/her research process initially.

Thus this study reflects my fascination with gender. An elementary explanation of the distinction between gender and sex is necessary to clarify the focus of my concerns on the gender issue within an educational milieu. (This can be found in Chapter 1). Suffice to say here, that as a social construct, one can believe that society's role in developing stereotypical notions of gender can be informed to affect a change to move towards an equality reflective of a society conscious of human rights and social justice.

The awareness of this distinction informed the Post-structuralist Feminist stance taken in the research, as I believe in the abandonment of "gender dualities" (Kenway, in Blair et al, 1995). Rather than focus on the weaknesses of each gender, the real issue for me, is that men and women utilise each other's strengths in society for meaningful development.

*Single sex* In my personal experience in single-sex education of both sexes, I found gender stereotyping was accepted as unproblematic, especially in the boy's school, where chauvinistic attitudes towards women were encouraged. It is this concern that has led me to explore, and possibly explain, some adolescents' attitudes to and opinions of gender stereotypes, within a co-educational context, aware of the patriarchal nature of society as macrocosm.

My belief that adolescents embody the potential for society's progress (both materialistically and philosophically) dictates that I explore their gender-related



social interactions within the educational milieu. Adolescents are unique and are at a transitional stage of their development; not children, yet not adults. It is in this state of identity flux where the rational choices they make become their direction in life and as such affect society.

It is therefore crucial to investigate their opinions and beliefs as regards issues such as gender relationships, so that educational strategies for the future may take cognisance of the ideas of the people these very strategies affect. In the light of my previously stated standpoint on gender, I believe that through such knowledge certain interventions may be designed to counteract hierarchical structures of power of a patriarchal nature to encourage a co-operative, egalitarian approach to gender in all aspects of social interaction.

R G My interest in gender issues revealed a significant gap in the literature when it comes to research done on adolescents in Africa and in particular, South Africa. At a time when adolescents are at the very heart of integration in schools in a transitional society so aware of human rights, it is imperative that their experiences, aspirations and beliefs be heard, in order to formulate new strategies/designs in efforts to ensure equality becomes a reality.

This research focus provided a different perspective and added dimensionality to a Departmental Education Research Project, headed by Volker Wedekind on Adolescent Social Relations. A substantive database already existed on the pupils whom I researched. *triangulation* As my research is qualitative by its nature, the quantitative data were triangulated by this research, while interviews with those already having volunteered their services enrich the initial research process. I benefited significantly from the “collegiality” (Glickman, 1990) offered by such a position.

### Voices and Silence in the Research Process

This research also demonstrates awareness that even though adolescents tend to be *labelled* as such, each one participating in the research process is an individual who constructs his/her meaning in a unique way within his/her own context. Therefore, the “context of discovery” (Stanley & Wise, in Stanley, 1990) and

“voices” (Haggis, in Stanley, 1990) in research are of central significance to me. Because the adolescent is perceived as belonging on a lower rung of the hierarchical societal ladder, it becomes imperative that as researcher one *empower* them within the research process, in the belief that, *what* they have to say and the *manner* within which they say it, is accepted as *meaningful* and is enough to be *heard*.

Their voices are the authentic voices as heard on the site, not those disembodied by adult “correction” or dehumanised by data analysis. The “voices” of the adolescents within the case study need to emerge as undistorted as possible in the findings. Clough (in McLaren and Giarelli, 1995) highlights as problematic the “ocular centrism” of Western ethnographic practice and perceives a need to move beyond “visual witness to the construction of a liberatory dialectics of hearing (*as opposed to listening*), touching, tasting”.

As an ethnographer acknowledges the complexity of the contextualised interaction explained and interpreted, so he cannot fail to acknowledge that the complexity emerges in words and *being*. The *being* is for me as significant as the discursive formulates, for it is in the silences that experiential richness lies.

Silence constitutes part of the metaphysics of presence...”something being outside and anchoring the symbolic relations of the text.” (Wexler, 1997:135). This ‘anchor’ that Wexler (1997) speaks of could be perceived of as physical, ideological or spiritual. The researcher cannot presume to be silent and edit himself/herself out of the text for he/she brings to the research process culturally imbued experiences, which affect the choices made throughout the process.

As a participant observer<sup>35</sup> I was a part of my instrument of research and as such my “voice” must be acknowledged as an integral part of my interpretation, interests (personal and thematic) in decision-making throughout the research

<sup>35</sup> Goetz and Le Compte (1984) define four categories of participant observer:

- “participant-as-observer”
- “observer-as-participant”
- “complete observer”
- “complete participant”

process, and the style of written report. As already stated, reflexivity was an integral part of the research. The emergence of the internal voices from silence gives credence to honest appraisal.

Ideological perspectives inform the research process and theories emerge from interactive experiences within certain contexts; but such conceptualisation occurs in pervasive silence.

Ideology is present in the text in the form of its eloquent silences.

(Eagleton, in McLaren and Giarelli, 1995:89)

For silence to emerge and possess a spiritual significance one needs to choose one's research techniques carefully. It is for this reason that I have chosen the still photograph as an eye to capture that moment when "truth is beauty; beauty truth"(Keats, *Ode on a Graecian Urn*). Body language and emotions are contextualised to yield a subtle complexity, limited by words.

## Conclusion

*paramount* The methodological approach in this research portrays as paramount the idea of process. This is a fluid and fluctuating context in which the complexity of dynamic human interaction takes place. Contextualised, knowledge and truth cannot be viewed as limited and essential totalities. The perception of knowledge and truth as contextualised social constructs necessitates a transformation of power relations both at the macro-societal and micro-research level. Such a transformation requires an awareness and need on the part of the researcher to understand, analyse and explain in such a way as to ensure the honest emergence of "truth" (as explicated on pp.38-39) in the research.

Reflexivity is an essential part of the validation of an ethnographic research process. Hence, there is the acknowledgement that the researcher cannot separate oneself from the research process. Such integrative features are significant in their rejection of dualisms by feminists, in particular, who

advocate a development of praxis in their research, while perceiving human behaviour within a socio-cultural milieu as holistic.

All of the aforementioned aspects of the research methodology developed as natural responses to best explore, understand and explain gendered adolescent relationships within a specific context. In this study the nature of the problem informed the methodology (Giddens, 1979).

## **II Research Methods**

*The research is qualitative in nature, the quantitative data were triangulated by this research and interviews used to enrich the initial research process.*  
As has already been expounded at some length in the first half of this chapter, the ethnographic case study within the qualitative paradigm lends itself to methods, which acknowledge that contextualised interactions are significant to the emergence of socially constructed realities and truths. These should not reflect the assumptions and perceptions of the researcher, but should honestly interpret the experiences of those being researched, so that understanding of their perspective is developed. In this case study, it was the perspectives of adolescents, so important to the progressive growth of a country in transition.

The operationalization of the research process is a logical culmination of the nature of the research problem compounded by the motivational factors for the research. How the research is carried out, depends on why it was initiated at all. An ethnographic case study by its nature demands a multi-method approach.

**This (triangulation) is at the heart of the intention of the case study worker to respond to the multiplicity of perspectives present in a social situation. Case study needs to represent and represent fairly, these differing sometimes conflicting viewpoints.**

(Adelman et al, in Simons, 1980:82)

The multi-method approach utilised in this research process is what Denzin (1970) refers to as “methodological triangulation” where the same method is

used on different occasions (“within methods”) or where different methods are used on the same object of study (“between methods”). This is later explicated as each triangulated method is explained within the context of the research.

### Participant Observation

Whatever the problem, approach or the operationalisation, at the heart of an ethnographic case study lies a method of observation. The use of this technique requires careful planning, for the validation of one’s research hinges on the utilisation of this procedure to:

- ensure clarification in the continued focus on the research problem;
- achieve a “correct”, delicate balance within sensitive contexts;
- understand that the success of one’s role within the classroom situation is intimately linked (and could prove vital) to other methods of triangulation.

The trust engendered by the participant observer with the subjects of the research process must be nurtured in order to ensure that valid findings emerge from the situations created by other methods, such as the interview.

The role of the observer is as flexible and complex as the fluid context of the dynamic human interaction being observed, and as such should defy categorisation. I therefore, balk at the artificial distinction made by Cohen and Manion (1989) between participant and non-participant observer and find that Goetz and LeCompte (1984) make only slightly more subtle distinctions. Personality and context were two factors that emerged as most significant in this research. A participant observer emerges as an extension of a certain unique personality and therefore interacts within certain contexts differently to any other individual, who adopts the role of observer. Hence King’s (1979) personality – “polite but private” – was suited to non-participant observation.

The context of an infant’s school also required such an approach. Personality and context were two factors that emerged as most significant in this research as well.

## "Participant-as-observer"

HB

My roles as participant observer alternated between that of "observer-as-participant" and "participant-as-observer" (Goetz and LeCompte, 1984). For a period of two weeks I was "participant-as-observer" and taught one of the Grade 10 classes that formed part of my research. Within this particular learning environment, it was an incredibly difficult challenge to reconcile the role of teacher with that of researcher. Discipline tended to have to be externally motivated and as such involved interventionist techniques, sanctioned by institutionalised rules, to alter behaviour that would be regarded as more socially acceptable. This particular class was regarded as the "problem class" and I was the stopgap until their new, third teacher of the year arrived.

switching  
roles  
difficult.

My dilemma was two-fold:

- I could not be perceived by the pupils as an ally of the staff and, as such, their enemy, and I did not wish to be seen as perpetuating the institution's prejudices against them as a class.
- At the same time I had to create a productive educational environment, in which some sort of discipline had to be inculcated.

It was essential for me to build up a trust and rapport with these pupils. My sense of the significance of this proved justified, as this class proved to be the key that unlocked the "pupil-power-grapevine" of all of the Grade 10 classes and secured my entry to "their world". I had explained honestly my role and the dilemmas with which I was faced, thereby appealing for their aid. This appeal subtly acknowledged the power they held in relation to my research and my presence in the school. My disciplinary approach included a transparent verbal communication and the determination not to react with shock or to punish in any way any behaviour, which would normally be regarded as unacceptable.

gaining  
in access

did they  
agree,  
what does  
informed  
consent  
say?

So, when a burly six foot rugby player (who specialised in self-mutilation) confronted me within the first minute of my introduction with these words:

“The last teacher lasted one day. How long do you think you’re going to f..... last?”

I ignored the expletive and responded by re-explaining my role, emphasising that it was not one of a teacher, and encouraged him and the class to use my research as an opportunity to allow their “voices” to be heard. Cynics may comment that adolescent egocentrism is a powerful tool when manipulated, and yes I do not deny that I was conscious of manipulative techniques at the point of access, but adolescents are also highly sensitive to hypocrisy. They accepted as honest my belief in the rights of adolescents, and began to see the research as a form of validation of their opinions.

Unfortunately my approach with this class was so successful that two weeks later the same burly rugby player apologised for allowing “shit” to slip out in class. Thus dawned the realisation that in some subtle way my presence had become interventionist and had thereby nullified the participation of any of these students in my research process. It became apparent why Cohen and Manion (1989) describe this method as a “high risk, low yield adventure”. After a considerable investment of time, energy and personal “angst” new links with other pupils had to be established using a different approach.

This became possible when for 3 of the 4 months I was able to develop a more detached, as opposed to aloof, stance, as an “observer-as-participant”.

### Observation Technique

5/4  
What about observation  
schedule?

An immediate concern was to place the observation within a certain context and as such brief notes were utilised, in which subject, date and time featured. I later realised that the “type of teacher” also needed to be specified as this related to pupil behaviour within the classroom situation. Three different teacher scenarios emerged; regular teacher, student teacher and substitute teacher during “batting”<sup>36</sup> classes.

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<sup>36</sup> A system, whereby pupils designated numbers, know where to go to other teachers to sit in their classes to work, if the teacher of the subject is absent.

I then drew a detailed diagram of the structural environment and numbered the pupils, according to position within the classroom. Interactions were denoted by means of coded arrows to represent their different nature within a particular lesson. The interactions were also defined prior to my entry into the classroom. While coding ideas are suggested by various researchers (Hargreaves, 1972; Hopkins, 1993), I felt that a personalised system would be more successful, as it could be developed according to the unique requirements of the research problem.

Note-taking developed from a basis of familiarisation of process and subjects through an understanding of the research problem to a honing in on contextualised incidents, which were strongly reflective of the research's concerns.

Three basic levels emerged:

1. Personal notes were at first thick descriptions to serve as a primary record of verbal and non-verbal incidents within the classroom situation.
2. From this detail, emerged the focus of my next approach, strongly informed by the research questions based on the research problem. I would record a particular incident and then look for the occurrence of others that were the same or similar. Cohen and Manion (1989) refer to this method as "snowball sampling". The other focus became subject-centred, whereby I would isolate certain pupils and record all their actions and interactions within an half-an-hour period.
3. After one month of participant observation, (and with the help of the socio-metric diagrams), I isolated the groups and individuals on whom the case study would focus. "Priority Observation" (Carspecken, 1996) now became significant. Observation and notes became strongly focused on particular actions and interactions related to:
  - individual's personal reactions to group-orientated activities;
  - the group within context (syntactically and semantically) and



- uni-participation\non-participation of individual

Throughout all these levels an observation code was utilised to make personal comments in the margins next to the observation notes.

### Informal Participant Observation

Other more informal type of observation served to triangulate the more formal classroom observation. This was less obtrusive and its nature was highly dependent on context. These contexts related directly to the macro socio-cultural milieu and to the parallel experiences of the subjects of the research process in an extra-mural capacity. Examples of such sites were; parents' evening, sport\cultural matches\practices, art exhibition evening. I would also position myself as inconspicuously as possible in the corridors in between periods and casually walk around during break time.

During this time I recorded my observations in a journal, where field notes were of a much more flexible, personal nature. I tended to integrate incidents with perception and opinion into a type of social commentary.

### Advantages of Participant Observation

This method proved most valuable in the collection of data on non-verbal behaviour and, as such, complemented the still photograph as a triangulated technique. One was able, over a protracted period of time, to hone analysis skills and perceptions in the discernment of behaviour, which became characteristic of specific individuals, either isolated or interactive. The most significant result was the development of intimate, informal relationships with the students. This aided the success and rich participation of those, whose lives and relationships were to be probed within the interview situation.

While acknowledging this as an advantage one should be aware of the dangers as a researcher in mistaking "understanding" for a tendency to think that as

researcher one needs to become a “saviour” and to “forgive” certain behaviour. If one is aware of the fine line between “understanding” in research terms and “understanding” in terms of behavioural change through cathartic experience, one is able to guard against the situation occurring. For this could prove interventionist, and as such invalidate the data gathered in the study.

### Sociometric Diagrams

The introduction of this research method while doing participant observation aided the research process in two ways:

- it served as a tool of selectivity, by means of which groups as entities could be crystallised and captured in a diagrammatic representation, while alienated individuals were highlighted;
- it solved a spatial problem by leaping boundaries, which I could not physically (time constraints and number constraints)<sup>37</sup> cover, thereby clarifying unexplained anomalies in participant observation.

### Sociometric approaches and techniques

According to Cohen and Manion (1989) two kinds of sociometric techniques have been used in the study of peer group friendships: *the peer nomination method* and the *roster- and- rating scale questionnaire*.<sup>38</sup> The peer nomination technique was favoured in this research. By means of this technique the adolescent is asked to name or identify any number of peers with whom he/she would, or would not, choose to be associated with in a given number of situations.

Two approaches in the implementation of this method were used. This was not a planned triangulation on the part of the researcher, but emerged as a response to the problems encountered in the use of the first approach. While the first

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<sup>37</sup> I only had ten minutes with each class during registration period. To select the pertinent pupils from a possible 208 Grade 10's was proving to be a logistical nightmare.

<sup>38</sup> In this method the pupil gives a rating on a numerical scale to all members of the class. Since each pupil is rated by all classmates, the technique provides an indication of the pupil's acceptance by all group members.

approach was pragmatic, it relied on the permission of teachers and the presentation of opportunity. Often pupils who had already answered the sociometric questions were in classes, which contained many who had not answered the questions yet. A systematic approach was needed to eliminate duplication, while ensuring that the entire research population participated in the sociometry method.

### The two approaches.

In the initial approach questions were written informally on the blackboard in different situations where different group dynamics came into play. Examples of such situations were: batting periods, substitution for ill/busy teachers, 10 minutes prior to or at the end of lessons as arranged with the teacher.

The second approach consisted of a formal questionnaire, which was handed to each pupil in one class during registration period.

What emerged from the use of these two approaches within one method was the significance of triangulation “within methods”. The nature of the responses in both approaches differed substantially, both in content and emotion.

*5 in  
retrieval  
research.* *NB* → The flexibility of the first approach allowed for intimacy between researcher and researched and empowerment of the subjects. Pupils were much more aware that participation in the research was their choice and as such responded by refusing to participate or aggressively demanding to know of what value their response would be. *informed consent* Only after careful explanation of the intention of the research had clarified it for them, were they willing to participate. Often in these situations, it was imperative to mention the ethical foundation of the research and my commitment to confidentiality.

In the latter situation, the formal contextualisation of the process led to meek acceptance on the part of the pupils. There was no apparent dissent to the answering of the questions and nobody questioned me as to why they were answering the questions. The pupils who had already answered the questions in

different situations mentioned in the initial approach did not even consider not doing them again. It was the discrepancies in these pupils' replies and the nature of their responses in particular which made me aware of just how significant the "research-constructed-environment" is and the role it can play in the collection and analysis of data.

The responses in the *initial approach* proved to be far more emotive and inclusive of the pupils with whom the subjects were interacting at the time. The answers incorporated a far more diverse choice of positive and negative social interactions, thereby registering a much more intense emotional response within a less structured, formal research context.<sup>39</sup>

### The Sociometric Questions

The questions cannot be regarded as stark, isolated entities, but should be interpreted against the background of the clarification requested by the pupils and the role I played in making this "task" appear less threatening (to their self-esteem in particular) and of import to their lives.

(See Appendix 1 for the Schedule on the Sociometric Questions)

In summarising this section, it should be noted, that while this research method proved invaluable in isolating subjects for the case study, it proved through triangulation "within method" to be susceptible to contexts, emotions and memory<sup>40</sup> of its participants. Its limitations also lay in the inflexibility of the instrument to further explore and explain the subtleties inherent in the dynamics of human interaction. Acceptance, tolerance and rejection possess qualitatively different responses within different contexts at different times, which defy portrayal as unchanging, static totalities. Hence, inherent in the completed product lies the inability to respond to the changes that occur in human relationships through human choice or emotional response.

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<sup>39</sup> The collection of data is reliant on the context and can be susceptible to manipulation.

<sup>40</sup> The point has been made in footnote no. 5, how the *roster- and -rating system* could counteract this.

## The Interviews

The interviews in this research process proved imperative as a triangulation of what had been (and was being) observed. They allowed me to probe and clarify perceptions of interactions and continually deconstruct theories, which I had perceived as legitimated by the findings of the sociometric diagrams and the participant observation.

The use of this method signified an entry into a period of intimacy, unexplored and not experienced as yet in the research process. In developing the semi-structured questionnaire as instrument I realised that there could be no such thing as a prescribed interview format, for every interview schedule should reflect the natural inclination of the researcher. It also needs to take cognisance, not only of the research problem, but the personalities of those interacting within the context of the interview (Oakley, in Roberts, 1981).

Each interview is as unique as the problem it wishes to explore and the relationships developed within this exploration. Therefore, while I had developed a semi-structured questionnaire to utilise in the interview situation I found that, although the format remained constant, the emphases and the types of questions explored, had to be adapted to the context, personality type and emergent “revelations”.

(See Appendix 2 for the Semi-structured Questionnaire and Interview Schedule)

I found this method climactic in the development of trust and respect, which I had attempted to engender with the Grade 10's throughout my prior interactions with them during participant observation and the collection of data using sociometry.

## The Physical Setting

The majority of the interviews took place in one of the Heads of Department's office. The fact that a place so sacrosanct and private had become the domain of

privileged research-students was a source of pride and satisfaction. Most of them had been unaware of its existence, even though it was situated in the hub of student activity and movement. The sense of secrecy tended to add to the intimacy of the venue. I had deliberately turned it into a place where they could “escape” to drink coffee and relax. It was reflective of the nature of support received from the staff, and in particular this Head of Department, that the setting proved to be such an asset in the success of the interview situation, for she allowed me uninterrupted access to her office for the full 3 months.

### Access and Power

This topic has already been developed in the light of the broader research study in the introduction of this dissertation, but in this case the finer details in relation to the interview situation, will be considered.

*Each potential participant had to be approached personally to assess whether they were not only willing, but, desired to commit to the research process.* Such volition<sup>41</sup> was important to ensure that the participants would be honest and open in their responses, as they believed in the significance of their contribution to the research. The purpose of the research and the significant role the participants’ responses to the interview questions would play in the success of the research, were clarified.

*As the interview was to be taped<sup>42</sup>, the participant’s permission was acquired. It was essential that I assured the participant that all information would be regarded as confidential and that trust formed the basis of the interaction. I was most conscious of establishing the basis of a moral contract or, what Mouton (1996) would regard as, an “epistemic imperative”.*

As is exemplified by a feminist stance, the power relations inherent within the dynamic interview context had to be considered (Stanley and Wise, in Stanley,

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<sup>41</sup> Volition is a concept already discussed in footnote No.2, but one should be reminded of it here.

*equal status* 1990). I therefore attempted to democratise the process by focusing on the interview as an exploration for both the researcher and the researched. This situation was to provide the participant with an opportunity to clarify and vocalise thoughts on personal opinions and beliefs. Through an awareness of self, “revelations” occurred not only for the researcher, but also for the participant. Exploration yielded not only answers to questions on the research problem, but served as a cathartic learning experience for those involved in the interaction.

### An Instrument Developed.

The procedures used had to be reliant on careful analysis of the research problem. The resultant statements of purpose and approach of the interview schedule provide the clarification of the procedures used. The nature of the research methodology and problem required the questions to be focused on the personal, without losing sight of the fact that the individual is always a person interacting with others within a certain community.

Emphasis was on opinionated answers and essentially demonstrated that process and evolution is important. Therefore, provision was made for the exploratory aspect in open-ended questions. The use of *prompts* and *probes*<sup>43</sup> (Jessop, 1996) not only encouraged the more reticent personality, but served to clarify questions for the participants and enabled them to consider aspects, for which even the researcher was unprepared. While prompts and probes provided uniformity in the questioning process, they encouraged flexibility in individual response. The interaction between researcher and participant became more relaxed in the natural use of language, which emerged; often, adolescent jargon was used to explain an idea, which arose from a probe.

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<sup>42</sup> The advantages of taping include: focus on developing a rapport with the participant, every word can be recorded and memory recall does not have to be relied upon to fill in gaps and nuances, hesitations and emphases of significant points for the participant can be noted.

<sup>43</sup> See Interview Schedule and Semi-structured Questionnaire in Appendix 2

The initial questions were devised so as not to intimidate the participant into feelings of anxiety or inadequacy. This resulted in a natural progression of questions: from those that were of a personal factual nature, to an exploration of the participant as individual, to an opinionated development of gendered social relations. The questions were conscious of a need to explore what the participant knows, values and believes and to relate these to how they emerge within contextualised relationships. According to Tuckman (in Cohen and Manion, 1989), it is important to use the interview as a method to provide access to “what is inside a person’s head”. Hence the semi-structured questionnaire successfully placed the participant within a socio-economic-cultural milieu, while exploring his\her self-concept, aspirations and specific beliefs in relation to interaction with others of his\her peer group.

#### Triangulation “within-methods”

Just as the interview was used to triangulate “between-methods”, so I found it necessary to utilise other interview approaches, once I had analysed the data from the first interview, in order to validate certain findings by conferring with the participants. This also demonstrated my “good faith” in encouraging the participants to view the research process as a co-operative venture. Glaser and Strauss’s (in Burgess, 1984) recommendation that the data be analysed during fieldwork to shape the data collection process and to develop the analysis process, resulted in a natural expansion of the process, thereby enriching the data collected.

#### Focus Interviews

These grew out of the necessity for verification of data transcribed and analysed from the first more formalised individual interview. Two approaches emerged:

#### Individual Focus

A personalised interview schedule reflected:



effectiveness of  
research  
tool.

- a need to either collect information pertinent to the problem, which had not emerged in the first interview;
- or expansion and clarification on discrepancies that had surfaced in the transcript.

### Group Focus

relationship  
of trust

These interview situations were the least formal and were initiated by a discussion of photographs taken of the group. While providing another opportunity for triangulation “between methods”, they were most significant in providing me with the opportunity of observing the group dynamics within a confined space. As each individual was aware that they had told me things that they would not have the others know, (and I had subsequently proved trustworthy), I was perceived by each of them as an ally in these sessions.

willingness to divulge information

### Non-directive Interview

This interview emerged from the participant’s personal need and the availability of the researcher in an accessible, yet private venue. Those who had been interviewed often felt the “need” to initiate another idea that may have been of some use to the research process, and often directed the course of our encounter. I often felt that this interview served more as a therapeutic device for the participant than of real value to the collection of data in an exploration of the research problem.

### Time and the Interview.

The non-directive interview highlighted the contrasting tension of *time* as a constraint and a unifying, emancipatory device within this research technique. The significance of time as an issue in the use of this instrument lies in the understanding of the integration of linear, chronological time and its temporal concerns. As the nature of the instrument is open-ended, divergent issues arise. It is therefore imperative to remain focused on the research problem and the questions pertaining to it. It is also important to ensure that the participants’

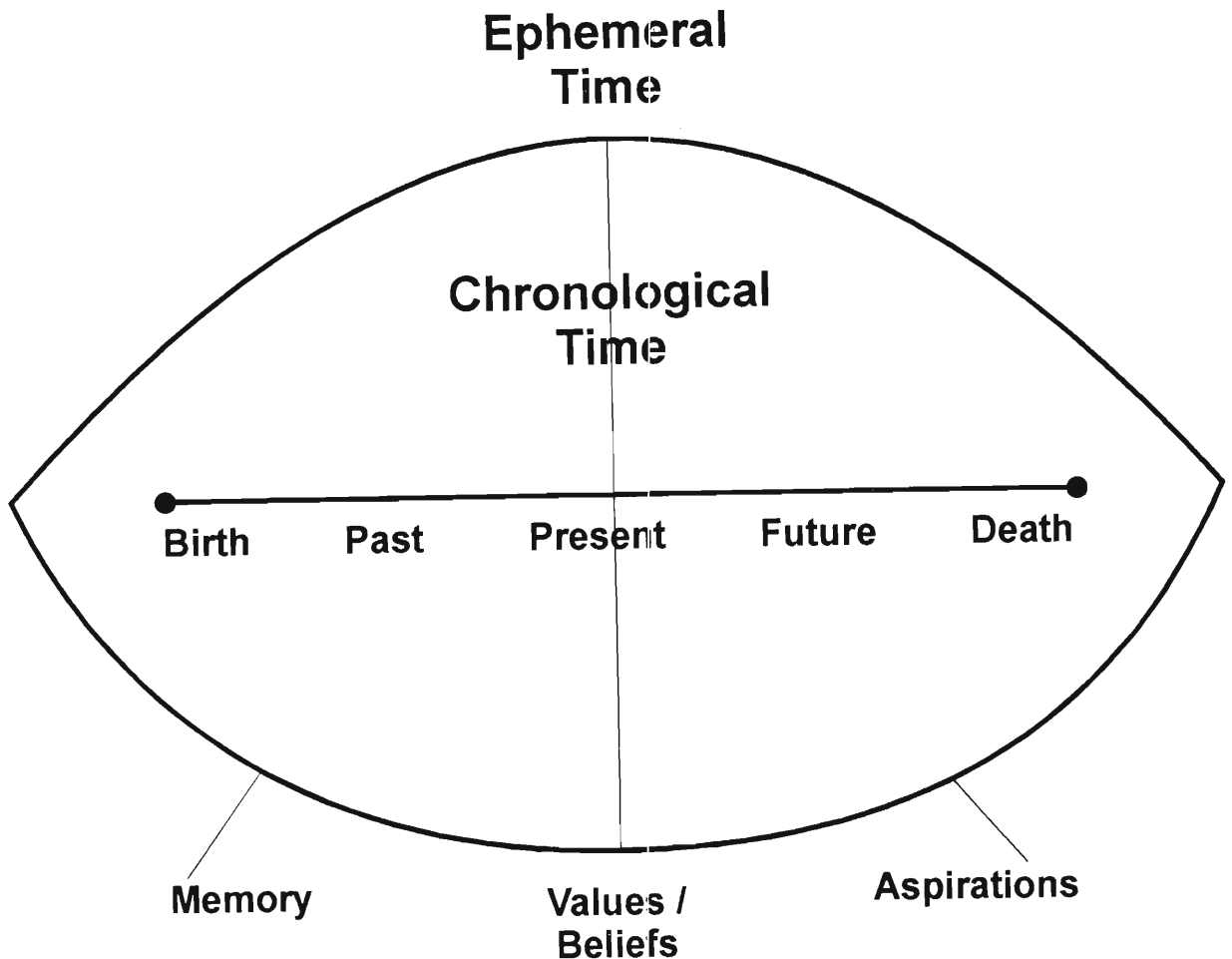
keeping the  
vision in  
mind.

stick to  
points  
.....

responses are pertinent and are not wasting time. The practicalities of transcription demand a tight control on the length of the interviews.

Tension occurs when one realises the physical nature of time is compounded by the ethereal quality of memory, which informs one's beliefs, values and aspirations in which past, present and future merge. The diagrammatic representation below best epitomises the tension between physical, linear time and ephemeral, spatial time.

Time and the Interview



## The Still Photograph

*Comment on the use of photograph and the possibility of the breach of ethics*

With my emphasis on “voices” in the research process, it was appropriate to use as an integral part the still photograph. As Schratz (1993) observes:

critical issues can be approached visually and it allows access to the understanding of educational problems at a profound level of subtlety and complexity. (p.35)

*but what about identity of the participants appearing there. This sec. -> to the breach of privacy*

Walker (in Schratz, 1993) believes that the photograph “belongs within the realm of the lived experience” and as such would relate to the school classroom as research site, for memory association emerges as instances of fragmented experiences that lack coherence. Photographs should be approached as one would approach a text to be explored and understood to reveal meaning. However, the still photograph has the ability to go beyond language and offer the possibility of triangulation on the use of language itself.

Walker (in Schratz, 1993) explains:

We are tuned to see photographs as illustrations and we neglect the power of the photograph to engage thought, extend imagination and to undermine the implicit authority of the written word. (p.73)

## The Use of the Still Photograph within the Research Process

Photographs exemplify the ethnomethodological processes of remedying and filling in, for they exist on the boundary between what is familiar and what is unknown. (Walker, in Schratz, 1993:90)

The still photographs were utilised in three ways in the research process:

1. *as an ice-breaker*: All pupils were eager to be photographed and this method encouraged them to not only accept, but enjoy, the research experience. A couple of films were therefore shot without any specific pupils or research problem in mind. (This subsequently proved useful, though expensive! to the research.) By the time the photographs with specific objectives in mind were taken, the pupils had ceased to be conscious of the camera's presence and far more natural photographs, epitomising greater reality-within-situation emerged.
2. *in a capacity of responsiveness*: In the initial interviews I utilised a few of the first photographs for what Collier (in Schratz, 1993) would call the "can-opener effect" in order to open conversation with the participants and to develop a degree of familiarity and trust as insiders. This would be done by the natural response of the participant to the situation/personalities depicted within the photograph.
3. *as a collaborative process*: In the focus interviews the photographs were utilised extensively to initiate discussion, but most importantly as a means of democratic evaluation" (MacDonald, in Schratz, 1993), in which participants and I would analyse and attempt to construct meaning co-operatively. This was particularly useful in dealing with the tension that emerged between the image in the photograph and what both the participants and I expected to observe.

All of the above approaches proved useful in the moral dilemma with which one is faced when using this method. In the selection and interpretation of photographs, the ethical risk of confidentiality required that I entered the process between what was personal and social. This raised the other ethical dimension of the dissemination of data. (see Chapter 8) Therefore the triangulation "within methods" helped to establish a focus on the continuous awareness of reflexivity and validation throughout the use of this method.

## Confidentiality

In the use of such a research method it becomes essential that the researcher not only ensures that the ethical considerations of the research process have been fulfilled, but that as researcher you hold yourself accountable should confidence be breached in any way. This proved of great concern to me as photographs of pupils smoking at break time were seen by a Head of Department, who had proved to be most supportive of the research. So emerged the multi-dimensions of moral dilemma should the ethical component of a research process such as this be breached. *This is a situation which could result in a blockage.*

1. The Head of Department was faced with her duty to enforce the school rule of no smoking on the school premises, while realising that she had inadvertently broken the confidentiality requirement of the research.
2. I felt inordinately guilty at having “betrayed” the participants and at having placed them in a position of risk of retribution.
3. In the broader context of the school, that trusted my assurances that it would have access to all my research, I now realised that that would be impossible.

I felt the tensions and contradictions of the pain and “angst” experienced by a researcher, who, while wishing to realign the power relations within the research process, had come to realise that research was essentially a lonely process. I realised that because ethnographic research deals with real, rather than manipulated situations, such problems are common, yet require an honest response from the researcher.

The choices taken by the researcher were vital to the outcome of the research findings and its validation. I therefore spoke to the Head of Department, whose professionalism and knowledge of the research process, ensured that her confidentiality was a factor, on which I could rely. This served to strengthen my ties with her, as I realised that within the research process a willingness to trust was an attribute that the researcher also had to inculcate.

## Reflexivity and the Role of the Researcher

### The Diary

The interpretative nature of the research process from a feminist stance demands continuous awareness of personal assumptions on the part of the researcher (Stanley and Wise, in Stanley, 1990). Hence the significance of *privatised, internal reflection*. At the same time the researcher is exposed to the opinionated construction of meaning through others' interpretations of situations and must constantly assess these perceptions. Hence the *interactive, external reflection*. This *diverse nature of reflexivity* occurred to me once I had begun to read over the daily entries in the diary, which I started when the fieldwork was initiated. It then became apparent that reflexivity in the research process was going to require a systematic, structured approach if the desired effect was to be achieved. I had to therefore clarify what desired effect I wished to achieve through the use of reflexivity, and only then devise methods by which to utilise the diary entries to achieve success.

*Ethics* The basis of reflexivity should be honesty and accountability. These two concepts embody as core the ethical considerations of the research process. In a process where objectivity cannot be made as a claim of validity, the subjectivity of the researcher within the process should not only be acknowledged, but perceived as an aspect to be encompassed as integral to the research process and findings.

Dishonesty comes into the picture when we don't challenge the privilege that enables us to be the re-presenters, when we leave the power relationships unchanged in our actions... The key is to acknowledge that you are travelling, that you are not striving for authenticity but honesty. Be critical of the power that allows you to be the re-presenter. Honesty means that you recognise your points of difference and limitations. (Kemp, 1993:25-28)

Credibility - as an  
obscure  
sociology  
technique

Throughout the research process “informed choices” are made. The credibility of the researcher remains in tact if choices are made in the light of accountability to the participants and those with whom one interacts within the broader research community. It is therefore important not only to question the assumptions and perspective of the culturally-grounded researcher, but one should also question how the external contextualised interactions influence one’s “patterns of explanations” (Toulmin, in Wexler, 1997). From the silence of reflexivity emerges voices vital to the credibility of the research findings; collaborative and contradictory voices of a multiplicity of viewpoints, which blend into understanding.

I grew into the realisation that the need for a diary was not only for purposes of self-reflection, in which only my voice would be heard. It also enabled me to recognise the complexity of the social relations of the research problem as well as the role I was to play in them. I could not pretend that I was in some way miraculously cocooned from the dynamics of the contextualised interactions I was observing. I was part of it.

It was through the writing of my diary that various factors, which could have undermined the research, were brought to my attention. These were:

- just how interventionist my presence had become in the class I had taught and the subsequent decision not to use any of the pupils as part of the case study;
- how immune I had become to things which had made an impression on me on entry into the school. I began accepting physical entities, habits and events as the norm and forgot for a while to *question*.
- how I discovered myself predicting pupil behaviour as typical, instead of focusing on the dynamics of interaction within the situation. I found that I was making judgement calls and not accepting behaviour in an attempt to explore and understand. An extract from my diary will exemplify:

*22 May: Art class quite a scream today! Stuart threw clay at Michael; can't leave him alone. Terence laughed and I thought, "Typical!" (Why did I do that?) I was then so surprised when Stuart, without being asked, got 3 plates of water for all the boys at the table to keep their clay wet. I had assumed he would never do anything that unselfish or kind. (What's happening here?!) Will need to re-assess my predictive assumptions.*

- I became conscious that although it was important to assess my role within the research process, I should not become self-absorbed and focused on self. McLaren (1995) refers to this as the "narcissism of the researcher".
- while it was important to understand and to raise the levels of consciousness (both privately and publicly) through the research process, the diary could not be used as a tool of personal psycho-therapy. It made me aware that at times my role in the non-definitive interview was becoming one of a psycho-therapist or social worker. I had to take preventative steps to ensure that role-confusion did not take place.

The diary as an instrument of reflexivity proved most useful in re-directing a wayward research process, thereby ensuring an accountability, from which could emerge findings, which could make honest claims to validity. It was the personal diary that made manifest the research process as a non-linear and "painful" experience (Woods, 1987).

### Document analysis

As already acknowledged in the introduction, I was able to gain access to official documents on absenteeism and academic achievement through the co-operation of an organised management team. Hence computer printouts were readily available if I needed them. The resultant tables of these analyses are to be found in comparative findings on the groups studied, in the concluding chapter of this dissertation.



*This looks like its a historical method of research*

Other documents used included the findings of a prior research on “Relationships in Schools” conducted by the staff and students of the University of Natal’s Education Department at Greenvale in 1997.

### Triangulation

As has been exemplified in the above multi-method approach to a particular research problem, each method possesses its own peculiar characteristics, which make unique contributions to developing understanding and validating the research findings. The same problem is approached in a multi-faceted way, thereby acknowledging the value of different perspectives in the construction of the meaning of the dynamic processes involved in social relations. Multiple definitions give rise to different understandings, which by being cross-referenced in the use of different research techniques, ultimately clarify and validate emergent interpretations and “truths” (McLaren, 1995).

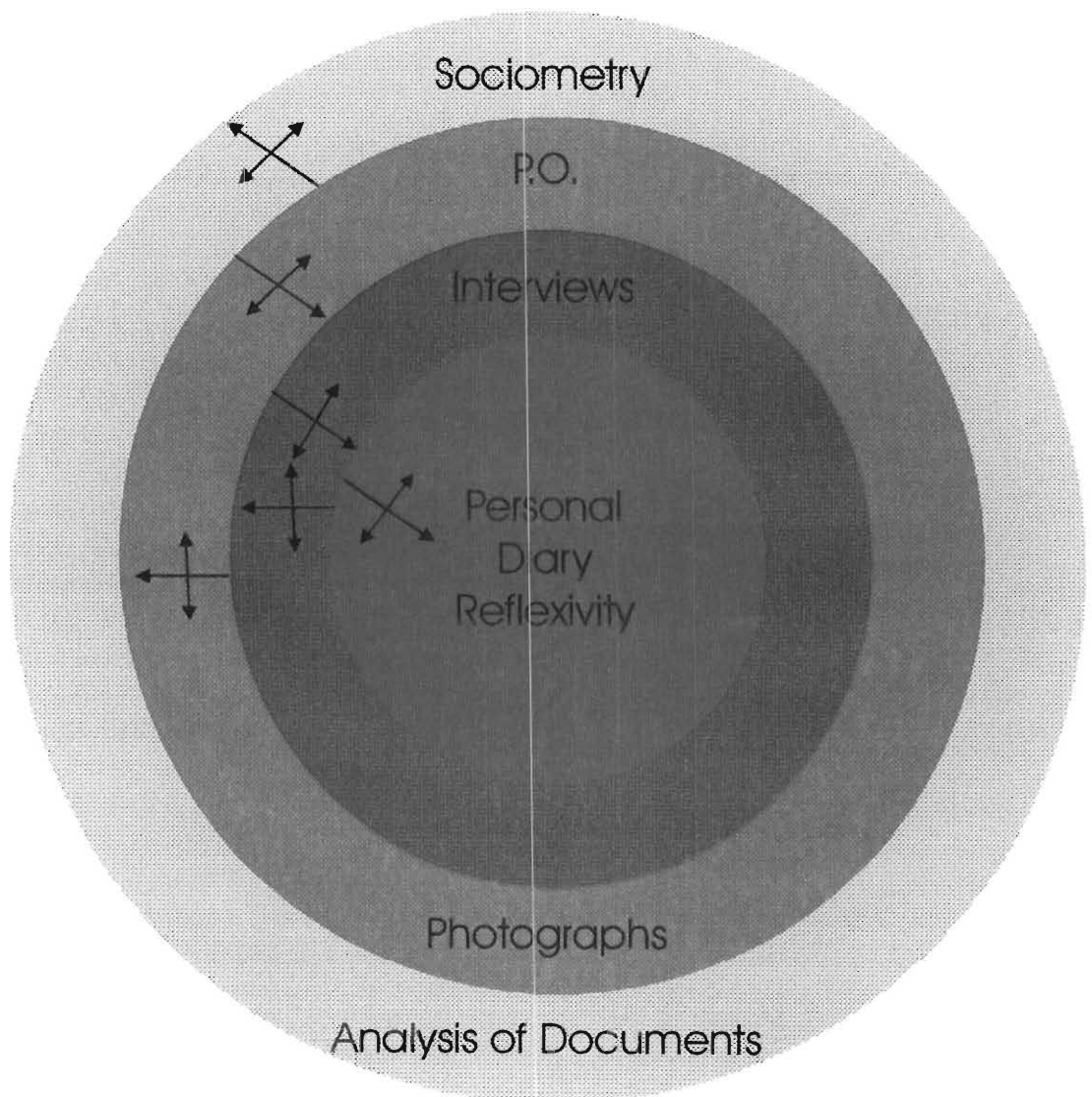
### Conclusion

The methods used in this research process are reflective of a *concentric* approach to acknowledge the complexity of the issues involved in the research problem, while providing tools necessary for a depth of exploration. The diagram on the next page (p.66) best exemplifies and summarises this.

# The Complexity of Research Operationalisation

A movement from outer circle to inner implies an intensification of personal commitment by both researcher and participant to an honest interpretation of open exploration. This is a not a linear - but concurrent process.

Researcher's honesty lies at the heart of the validation of findings.



Arrows reflect triangulation "between" and "within" methods, thereby adding to validity of research findings.

## Chapter 4

### Presentation of the Research Findings

Three groups were isolated and in-depth case studies were done on each of them. In order to dimensionalise these groups it became necessary to explore why some individuals do not join groups. Hence, three “loners” were isolated and similar case studies resulted. In the course of the case studies on the “loners”, ethnicity emerged as pertinent to the research findings and I therefore isolated the two most significant Black girl groups and did brief (if somewhat superficial) case studies on each of them as comparative perspectives to two of the “loners”.

To each of the groups and the “loners” I gave names to personalise them and to encapsulate what, for me, epitomised their major characteristics. Therefore, each case study begins with an explanation of why that specific name appeared to be the most relevant to my findings. I also feel that the naming of the groups was symptomatic of research as a “birth experience”, where subjectivity cannot be denied, but is acknowledged through honest reflexivity.

### I The “Wheel” Group

#### Group Composition

No: 5

Gender: Female

Age: 15

Race: White

Language: English

## A Definitive Approach to the Power of the “Wheel”

The group revolves around the *fulcrum* of a relationship between Mary and Tamryn. The suggestive strength and permanence of this friendship is founded on the religious “critical incident” (Goodson, in Goodson, 1990) experienced by Mary, within which Tamryn was instrumental. Mary was going through a rebellious stage and mixing with a “crowd that cause trouble”, when by accident she met Tamryn at Bridget’s house and they discovered that they “had a lot in common”.

It was Tamryn who took Mary to NC Fellowship, where she “gave her life to the Lord”. Mary therefore perceives their friendship to have been *predetermined by external spiritual forces* manifested in Tamryn. Gratitude and a growing conviction that they “have everything in common” allows Mary to accept that she often needs to be “controlled” by Tamryn. (“Tam has to say; No, Mary, you’re doing something wrong. Control yourself!”)

It is the fulcrum around which the group revolves and it is through this relationship that both Mary and Tamryn exert their power on the group. Tamryn herself said, “We seem *to suck* people into our group.” I found it particularly interesting that she used this particular infinitive in the light of Greer’s perceptions of why she belongs to the group. Greer is in conflict over where she “wants” to be and where she “should” be. She would like to be with the “in-group” (“Spinning Top” Group), but is aware that she is easily influenced and she therefore chooses to stay with a group that she perceives will be safer and indulge in less anti-social behaviour. She therefore finds protection from self within the group.

This power that the ethos of the group exerts is regulated by the actions of Mary and Tamryn. Greer speaks of the pro-active behaviour of Mary when she senses that Greer is “straying”. Greer can rely on her to chastise her and ensure that she returns to the safety of the group. This raises an interesting dimension of peer-pressure: for Greer the members of the group do not exert pressure on her to remain, but the very existence of such a group provides her with personal

pressure to make the “better choice”. It is Greer, who is reliant on Mary to ensure her adherence to certain principles, and not Mary’s determination to keep the group together. While Greer demonstrates indecision in much that she does and says, she is very conscious of remaining above being stereotyped. Her “belonging” in the “Wheel”, she feels, prevents this from happening: her individuality remains unthreatened.

Greer is one of the *hub* of the wheel. The other two are Pippa and Leigh. Both demonstrate puritanical, uncompromising positions on the question of morality. But, while Leigh uses Biblical reference as justification, Pippa does not feel the necessity to rely on Christianity to lead a morally righteous existence. In fact, she views Leigh’s dogmatism as “irritating”. Pippa tends to reject an externalised control and is exasperated by any members’ need within the group to exercise control over the other members in any way (refer to photograph analysis p.70). She recognises the power of Tamryn, but is willing to patiently wait for her to “stop going over the top and come back down again”. Pippa does not demonstrate any anxiety about group membership, but she, in her own way, demonstrates a need of the group. Whereas Greer needs protection, Pippa concedes that she needs motivation and “people to push her”.

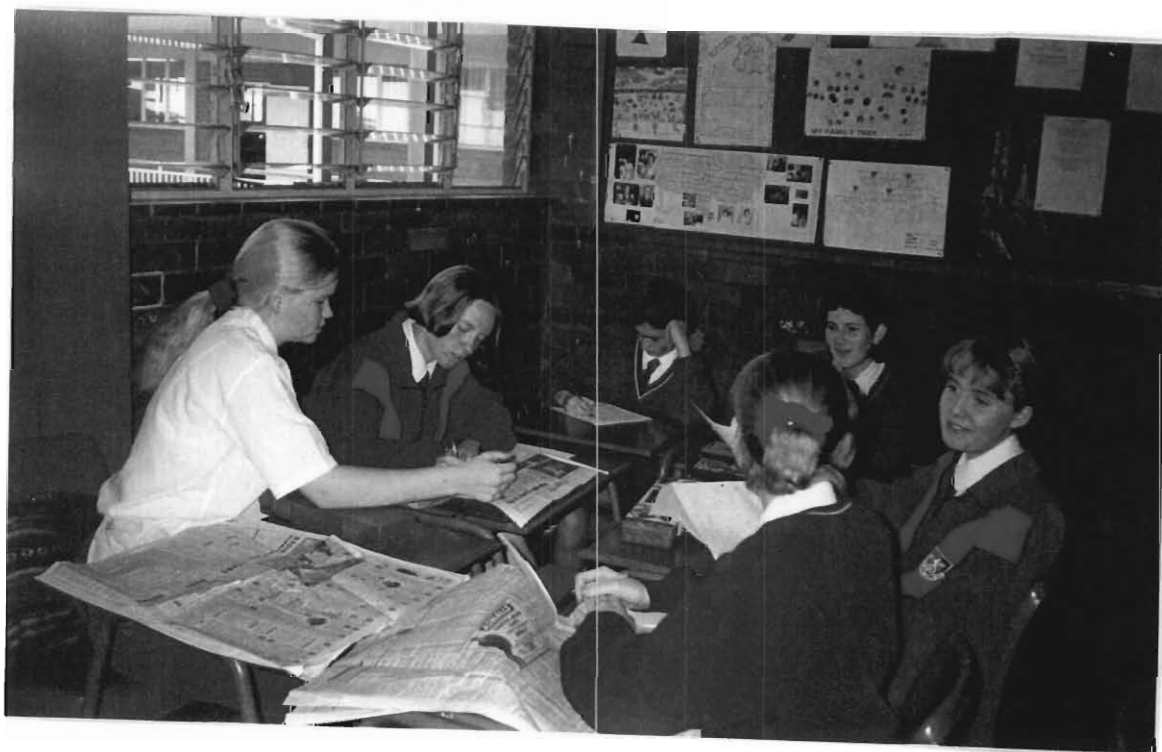
Leigh *chooses* to belong to the group because there is an inherent moral standard to which one has to adhere, to “belong”. It should be noted here, though, that this moral standard is not absolute. As Tamryn put it; “We can be cool, but we have our limits.” For Leigh the moral standard is an absolute and the Bible is the standard against which it is measured. This is therefore the tension, which emerges at times in the group. This tension is well handled by the group in acknowledging that Leigh would not approve of some of their actions. For example, when somebody has a smoke or a drink, they do not speak of it in front of her. Leigh, herself, is aware that there are certain group activities from which she is excluded and does not feel threatened by this. They admire her for her irrevocable focus on her Christian beliefs and accept her for it, even though it is a disruptive (but not potentially destructive) element within the group.

The manifestation of Leigh's uncompromising nature often emerges in power role situations within the learning context. An analysis of a photograph taken during an English lesson is a significant revelation of the power relations at play within this group.

### Contextualised Photographic Analysis of Power Relations in the "Wheel"

#### Context

Pupils had been asked to work in groups of their choice to develop a newspaper. An editor had to be democratically elected within the group. The group had elected Tamryn.



#### Analysis

From what has been previously mentioned, the obvious deduction is that as the group chose to work together, the criteria for their leader would be strongly reflective of the leadership role within their group dynamics – hence Tamryn. Four plus one (Elaine is on the periphery of the group) of them accepted this, but

Leigh objected strongly, as she perceives herself to be the strongest English student and was aggrieved at not having been chosen the leader. She proceeded to physically separate herself from the group and sulked in the corner. Pippa was furious with her for upsetting the group equilibrium and turned to Elaine to “escape” from confrontation with Leigh. Greer “ignored” the tension and attempted to heal the breach between Leigh and the rest of the group. Mary’s reaction was two-fold: a physical rejection of Leigh (note the cold shoulder) and encouraging support of her friend (note the strained smile). The support of Tamryn was not only indicative of their intimate relationship, but also of Mary’s ongoing academic competition with Leigh. Tamryn is sufficiently secure and confident within the group to face the crisis and determinedly proceed in her role as editor (note the clasped hands and unrepentant body position).

### Result

Each member negotiated the task allocations within the group and all emerged satisfied with what they had to do. The motivation of the individuals within the group to succeed supercedes concerns of control. (This aspect will be the focus of discussion at a later stage.)The resultant product was the best in the class and was awarded an A symbol by the teacher.

The *periphery* of the wheel presents an interesting scenario. The presence of Bridget and of others, suggests that the group is not perceived by others as threatening or exclusive. In all adolescents there is a moral ambivalence, of which this group is representative. Therefore those who belong to the “in-group” (“Spinning top” Group), yet who do not wish to flout school rules by smoking at school, will attach themselves to the “Wheel” during break time. Others include pairs or loners, who relate to the “We can be cool, but we have our limits”-philosophy.

## Analysis of the Break-time Group

### Photograph 1



### Photograph 2



Those on the extreme right and extreme left of the photograph are pairs, threes or loners. For example in Photograph 1 on the left, standing are Elaine and Kirstin, while in Photograph 2 two of the three belong to the “in-group”, but do



not smoke regularly at school. Also, as the third member is not accepted by the “in-group”, they tend to stay with her during break. Ceri (the one pulling a tongue in Photograph 2) relates well to Pippa and Greer and at times joins the group. The positioning of Bridget in the group is of major significance to the role she plays in relation to the group. (She is lying in the middle of the haphazard circle – Photograph 2). The “Wheel” members form a fairly tight core onto which the others attach themselves. (Tamryn was absent, but I was assured she would have been sitting between Mary and Leigh.)

### Bridget

While the group appears to accommodate her when she wants to be with them, each of them has had their own experience with her and none of them trusts her. She has either taken away a good friend or competed for the attention of a boy (and won!). Tamryn appears to be the reason why Bridget is still accepted, for she is able to adapt to the other dimension that Bridget brings to the group dynamics; but even her adaptations have their limits. An analysis of the following photograph will exemplify this statement:

### Context

Art class in clay pot making. The group members, prior to the photograph, were interacting comfortably with one another and all working consistently. Tamryn and Bridget had been communicating the most and I remember being most surprised at Tamryn’s animated responses to Bridget. The group was not perceived as being conspicuously divided into the pairing of Bridget and Annabel - Greer and Tamryn.



### Analysis

As the photograph was taken Annabel bent towards Bridget and Bridget's reaction is captured for posterity! The significance of Annabel's position relates to behavioural and attitudinal choice taken by an individual interacting with her. (Or conversely, Annabel's power that manifests itself in involuntary actions of the individual to behave anti-socially.) It is Annabel's body language and what she whispered to Bridget that results in her actions. In that second the group dynamics changed and the pairings emerged. Tamryn appears to accept,(but is actually shocked, as seen by her reaction after the photograph) while Greer ignores the action. This photograph depicts the difference between what is considered the "in-group" ("Spinning Top" Group) and those who belong to the "Wheel".

It is this type of anti-social behaviour and Annabel's influence over Bridget that make members of the group dislike her. Pippa, having known her since Primary School, believes she "exploded" on coming to Senior School. She perceptively sees Bridget's friendship with Clint as understandable as he is a "troubled child" who is reflective of the "male part of who Bridget is".

Tamryn's comments on Bridget's membership of their group reflect two things:

- the individuals within the group possess principles strongly reliant on trust and honesty;
- membership of the group requires an adherence to principles of commitment and morally acceptable social behaviour.

**“We don’t want her to be part of us because you don’t know how long she is going to be there. Sometimes you can’t trust her at all.”**

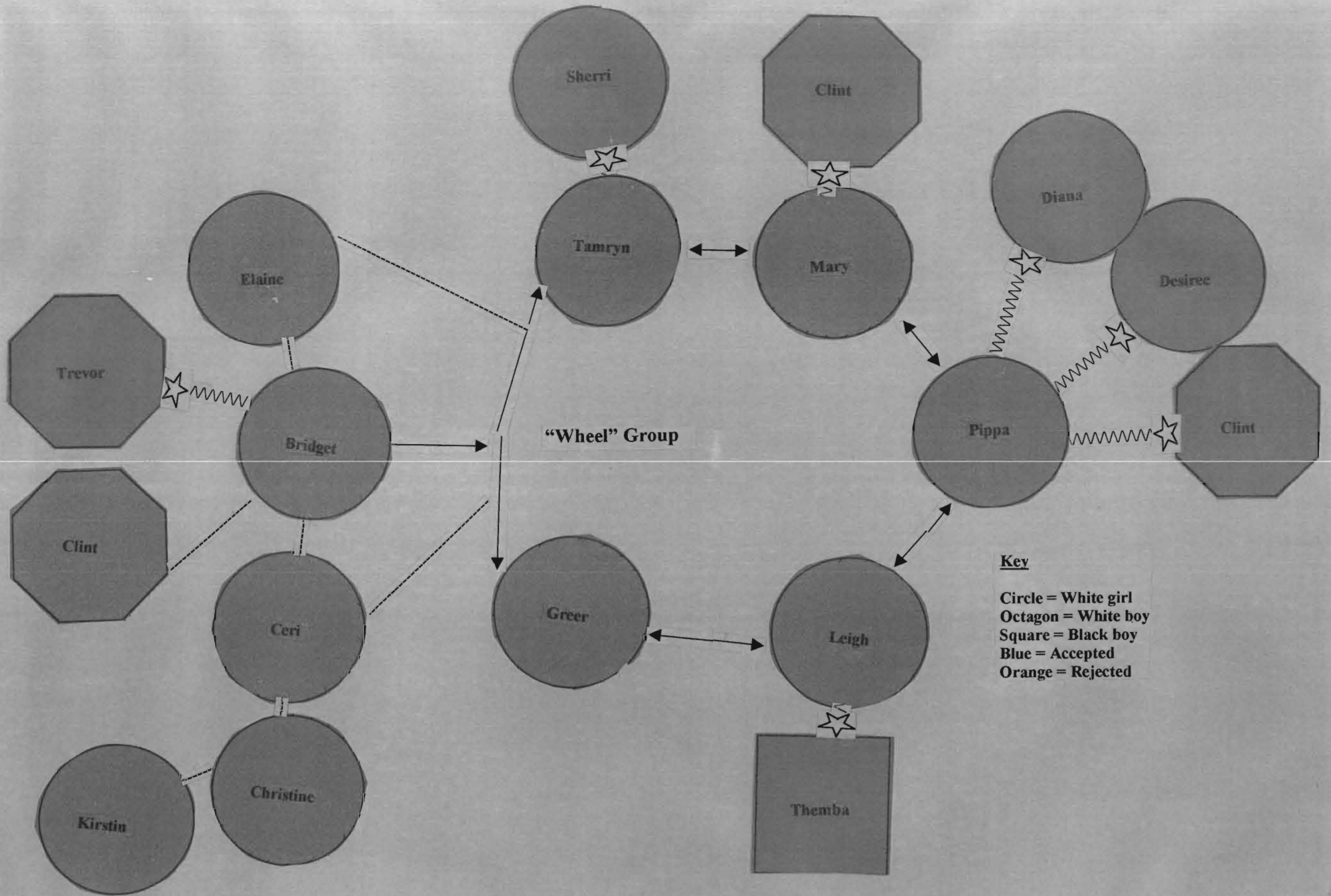
**Bridget’s intermittent attempts to join the “Wheel” do prove disruptive, but are powerless because of the group’s awareness of her flippant, careless attitude to relationships.**

**This is a “Wheel” which inexorably moves forward towards a clearly perceived future along a path that is firmly connected to socially acceptable values, but which is susceptible to punctures and diversions as it moves cautiously towards its destination.**

**(See the next page (p.76) for the sociometric diagram of this group)**

### **Motivation as a Principle**

**All the individual members of the “Wheel” are highly motivated in some sphere of interaction, whether it be sport, academics or social activities. They are, therefore, each confident of social acceptance and acknowledge that their group is perceived as possessing certain attributes of which they are not ashamed. (“It doesn’t bug us what people think of us.”) Inherent in this statement is the fact that the members of the group do *perceive the group in relation to other groups*, especially to the group in which the members have made the “other choice. These contrasting choices are made manifest in levels of commitment and approaches to the school as an institution.**



## Work Ethic

Findings { There is a definite Calvinistic influence in their approach to their work. It is morally unacceptable not to work hard and each demands of the other commitment in group-work situations. Each accepts the idea of equity rather than equality.<sup>44</sup> This work ethic ultimately translates itself into inter-group competition. While some acknowledge their academic limitations, others compete openly and vigorously with one another.

This work ethic translates into good behaviour in the learning environment and ultimately results in academic achievement, but this cannot be simply equated into *consistent* good behaviour, and bad behaviour should not be perceived as rowdy and disruptive. This naïve generalisation is to be found in Lacey's (in Hammersley and Woods, 1984) work, who correlates good behaviour with academic achievement and then goes on to say that it is in this student's interests to support a system that gives him high prestige. These girls do not always behave well and their bad behaviour manifests itself in much more subtle ways.<sup>45</sup> One of their teachers perceived it as a challenge of her authority, a supercilious acceptance of her views, which they silently challenged by means of meaningful glances amongst each other or body language.

They all accept that Greer excels at sport, but are quite happy to participate at their levels of competence. As a group they participate in "fun" school activities, such as 7-a-side soccer. No matter what the activity, though, they all are committed to giving of their best. Success and winning is also of significance, but they all reject the idea of "winning-at-any-cost".

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<sup>44</sup> A contradiction of Benton's (in Derlega and Winstead, 1986) work on sex and interrelationships, who perceived males as focussing of equity, while females are content with equality in group situations.

<sup>45</sup> Werthman (in Hammersley and Woods, 1984) stresses the rational appraisal pupils make of their situation and the resulting contextual variability of their behaviour. Academically successful pupils also indulge in deviant classroom behaviour.

## Absenteeism

Official: Numbers of days absent over a period of two terms: Tamryn =3;  
Leigh =1; Pippa = 2; Greer = 19 (mostly due to sport commitments); Mary = 12  
(genuinely very ill)

Unofficial: Number of hours missed. Minimal – only one girl reported “bunking” for one lesson in the two terms. The others do not see it as an option in relation to their reasons for attending school. This would correlate with the findings of Humphries (in Wolpe, 1988) and Wolpe (1988) on truancy, who found it not related to gender, but more to motivation, academic achievement and doing what is right in relation to abiding by school rules.

A valid reason for missing school is indicative of the commitment and responsibility displayed by the individuals of the “Wheel” towards their schoolwork. For four of the five, their choice of subjects is seen as instrumental in their choice of career. Their focus is therefore on a future, which is strongly predetermined by what one does in the present. (A more detailed analysis of their plans for the future shall be presented at a later stage). To attend classes is reflective of the conservative nature of their recipe for success. Inherent in this belief is socially accepted norms, which are success-related.

The *principle of trust* – of teachers and parents – underlies the unspoken ethics of the group and therefore illegal absenteeism is regarded as far more serious than an adolescent prank. The attendance is not just a neutral acceptance, but is proactive and founded on a positive relationship with certain teachers. Pippa believes that the teachers at Greenvale are “a lot more caring and committed ... makes it more special”.

## Morality as a Principle

This is a group that “has its limits”, but is by no means homogeneous on this issue. Where they do concur is on a *rejection* of those *girls* whom they perceive to be sexually promiscuous, smokers of “stash” and those who reject Christian standards (“dabble in Satanism and Witchcraft”), but *the reasons for their rejection* are what prevents one from speaking of a cohesive group ethos. From Leigh, who judges all from an uncompromising Biblical position, to Greer and Pippa who need the group for protection and motivation, respectively; each of the individuals reflects different levels of acceptance based on their own understanding of certain principles.<sup>46</sup> A group composite emerges.

Maybe this is why none of them (except, possibly, Tamryn - for reasons of power and control) do not demonstrate any fear of a group under threat. It is a certain understanding and acceptance of moral principles as an attestation to longevity that binds these girls. So much so, that little traumatises the members about the possible dissolution of the group. There is a calm acceptance of their existence, which states emphatically – WE BE! As far as they are concerned, they are the group that makes the “right choices”.

## Parental Influences

All the girls come from relatively stable family backgrounds, in which they are nurtured and within which definite parameters of control are exercised by both parents. (Mary is brought up by a father and two grandmothers, as her mother died while she was quite young.) Leigh is regarded as the one who is allowed the most freedom by her parents because she is the one with the most self-discipline. They perceive this freedom as exemplifying the *trust* her parents have in her; a trust which she has earned. They understand the fairness of this, as they feel that often they have failed their parents and perceive freedom as trust-earned.

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<sup>46</sup> Morality implies conscious choices (Niblett, in Wolpe, 1988). There can be no morality without rational and personal decisions.

Secure in familial support and operating within the dynamics of a highly motivated group, based on sound moral principles, it stands to reason that these girls would espouse the rights of women in a just and equal society. This belief is undermined when one considers their antithetical standpoint on their views on the roles of their parents. While acknowledging their mothers' roles as significant within the family, it is their *fathers' power* that is accepted, admired and appreciated.

*NB* This *dysfunction between belief and behaviour* is not perceived as problematic, because the individual, who can objectively analyse between right and wrong, will then divorce *self from others*, who are indulging in *appropriate* social behaviour. Hence reality becomes socially constructed and if one is not dynamically interacting within a situation, one fails to understand it, thereby failing to fulfil one's beliefs.

## Gender Issues

### *NB* Co-education

There appears to be different reactions to the position of girls and boys in the microcosmic and macrocosmic scenarios within the school. Within the learning situation the girls work compatibly and well with members of the opposite sex. It is interesting to note that their choice invariably is from the "4-Wheel Drive" Group (Chapter 5). Both groups possess similar motivational and moral principles, while both groups are perceived in a similar way by those outside the groups as "bofs\nerds". (Here it is interesting to note that while the "Wheel" is regarded as "bofs", the boys are regarded as "nerds". Certain characteristics are contextualised differently by society when gender-related.)

Pippa views co-education as an opportunity to sustain the balance in social relationships. She believes that it is essential to have "guys" in the class so that you can learn to appreciate and understand "what happens on their side ... what they go through and everything". Wolpe's (1988) study substantiates this viewpoint, where the majority of pupils found co-education to be more



interesting and natural. None of the girls spoke of the boys' presence as oppressive. I also found this to be the case in my study, which contradicts much of the feminist literature prior to Derrida's (in Blair et al, 1995) preoccupation with the distortion that arises from dualisms. *But an important distinction, which emerges in my study, is that of the classroom as a dynamic context of gender - interaction and the school as an institution representative of a patriarchal society's traditions, which encourage male domination.*

Greer, while enjoying a co-education situation, displays frustration at the immaturity of the boys in relation to the girls. She is also the most vocal about women's rights within a male-dominated institution.<sup>47</sup> ("I know that Greenvale was traditionally a boys' school, but girls are here now and we also have rights".) She cites as an example the high profile given to boys' rugby in relation to girls' hockey in the school. This is acknowledged as the case by all group members; for it is made manifest in the number of trophies presented for rugby in relation to the one hockey trophy and the manner in which rules are adapted for rugby when it comes to sport policy. Pippa believes that boys are definitely "praised the most" and receive many more "awards and honours" than girls do.

The girls within the classroom situation do not see gender as an issue of contention, but within the broader context of the school as an institution, they are frustrated by the obvious bias in gender-dominated extra-mural activities. Within the classroom-scenario they are able to negotiate a position of equality within the interaction, but beyond the classroom walls, they are faced with the traditions of a hierarchical, patriarchal society, against which they feel helpless.

### Sexuality

All the girls are sexually aware and all, but Leigh, have had boyfriends, but these relationships are set within the confines of their moral principles and are

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<sup>47</sup> Works which document in detail the way in which girls are subjugated in various ways through male privilege in schools is Spender's *Invisible Women: The Schooling Scandal and Learning to Lose*

harmless explorations in the first tentative steps of boy-girl sexual attraction. Leigh is adamant that she is too young to have a boyfriend and to indulge in any physical contact whatsoever: an attitude strongly reflective of the constricting nature of her Calvinistic religious beliefs. She is a very attractive girl, who uses her religion to ward off potential suitors. (I have already mentioned that all the girls hold sexually promiscuous girls in contempt).

Wolpe's (1988) study proves to make too generalised a comment when she equates sexual awareness during adolescence with an adverse effect on girls' commitment to studying. She does not make allowance for other factors, which counterbalance this sexual awareness and which are possessed by the individuals in this group.

### Careers

While the girls are all career-aware and are focused on definite career paths (except Greer), the conservative nature of their principles is strongly reflective of the "something to fall back on-theory". The diversity of the personalities within the "Wheel" becomes evident on probing this aspect. Leigh believes that God is to "call" her into something musical and her career is therefore inextricably linked to the will of God. (She, in no way, construes this as gender subservience). Pippa, Tamryn and Mary are dependent on their control of future blueprints (even devising contingency plans), while Greer will "just see what happens" and hopefully "get an easy job, with lots of money"!

What is apparent, is that none of these girls views gender as a limitation on what they wish to achieve. In fact, they are quite scathing of society's stereotypical career roles for women. Leigh says she has never had any inclination to be "*The Nurse*" or "*The Air Hostess*".

They all echo Pippa's sentiments that:

**Women should have the same success as  
a man has. Just because men were dominant**

in the past, ... that it should stay that way.

Women should have the same rights as men.

Only a longitudinal study, such as Wolpe's (1988), can validate whether the girls' beliefs will become a reality, but one feels that Furlong's (in Hammersley and Woods, 1984) and Sharpe's findings (in Hammersley and Woods, 1994) will be vindicated in this case, because of the apparent anomaly which exists in "the Wheel" between rejection of male dominance and an assertion of gender equality, coupled with their perceptions and acceptance of parental roles. Furlong (in Hammersley and Woods, 1984) argues that girls' occupational aspirations are not related to school, but to family experiences, while Sharpe (in Hammersley and Woods, 1984) states that the occupational horizons of girls are restricted by the feminine role, which is strictly familial and emanates from their mothers.

### The Role of Women in Marriage

All accept the social institution of matrimony as the normal and natural culmination of a relationship between a woman and a man. They view this as a partnership, in which economic and domestic responsibility will be shared equally. There does emerge an awareness of the difficulties inherent in such beliefs within our patriarchal society in Leigh's assertion; "I want to enjoy my life before I get married"!

Greer's insistent repetition that "he must realise that I will have my own commitments and that I will want to do what I want to do, even if I want to look after my own children", echoes the timeless frustration she fights so desperately against in the macrocosm of the school as an institution – recognition of women's aspirations and achievements in the face of male domination and privilege.

### Conclusion

The "Wheel" Group are five girls who refute the stereotypical claim of earlier feminists that girls are quiet and devoted to schoolwork, subservient and passive

victims of boys' oppressive behaviour. On the contrary, these young ladies, are highly motivated, vociferous challengers of the traditional patriarchal roles formulated for men and women in society. Their self-confidence is founded on a belief in their abilities to achieve their aspirations, for they do not perceive their futures as encompassing a world dominated by antagonistic males, determined to oppress and control their female counterparts.

On the contrary, they perceive themselves to be in control of the choices they make in their lives. Therefore, while the group is a reality, it is perceived of as a composite of individuals, who have chosen to abide by certain moral principles in the present to achieve certain objectives in the future. What appears to be their greatest challenge to the achievement of their ambitions lies within themselves and their interpretations of the social construction of family structures and parental influences, of which they are not yet aware.

## Chapter 5

### II The “4 - Wheel Drive” Group

#### Group Composition

No: 4 core and 2 peripheral = 6

Gender: Male

Age: 15 -16

Race: White

Language: English

#### Why “4 – Wheel Drive”?

The core of the Group chosen to explore consists of *four well-balanced* boys; Warren, Peter, Robert and Stuart. Their friendship status tends to be paired into Peter-Warren and Robert-Stuart. Robert and Warren are twins and therefore consciously try to ensure that each maintains an individual identity founded on independence from each other, while acknowledging the obvious genetic ties. Three of the four demonstrate an awareness of the choice they have made in the fulfilment of long-term objectives and are *singularly focused* on their individual, specific *direction*.

Their *drive* will become apparent as the nature of the Group unfolds in the Case Study, but could be characterised by the nature of their inner motivation (defiant determination) and the nature of their physical activities (adventure within secure parameters). The 4-Wheel Drive vehicle exemplifies just such characteristics. Given that Stuart’s father works with 4X4’s and the family

holiday is reliant on the possession of such a vehicle, it seemed appropriate to symbolically “tag” this Group.

It was also a wonderful opportunity to challenge patriarchal society, who use such a vehicle as a macho-image of rugged man physically taming his environment, to represent a Group of boys whose sensitivity and gentleness is at odds with caricatured masculinity. The exploration of the nature of the individuals within this Group; their motivation and aspirations should explode the notion of gender-attribution exclusivity.

#### “4 – Wheel Drive” Discovered

The initial research technique of the sociometric diagram proved to be invaluable in clarifying an amorphous mass of 26 students. It isolated pockets of core relationships within dynamic interactive situations. (See Sociometric diagram on p. 90). What eventually emerged were two distinct groups linked by one boy – Alan. Alan vacillates between the two groups. What connects these two groups is not only Alan, but the similarity of their interest. Most of the members of both groups play War Games. The nature of this game is significant, for it is an all-consuming past time that requires a certain personality type. Not only is its focus a mental activity in strategic planning, but it requires a long time commitment from its participants.

I chose to focus on the “4-Wheel Drive” Group (represented by the grouping closer to the centre of the sociometric diagram). The other group’s leader is Mark and I shall therefore refer to this group as Mark’s Group. Significant distinctions will emerge between the two groups in an analysis of the photographs on the following pages (pp. 87-89).

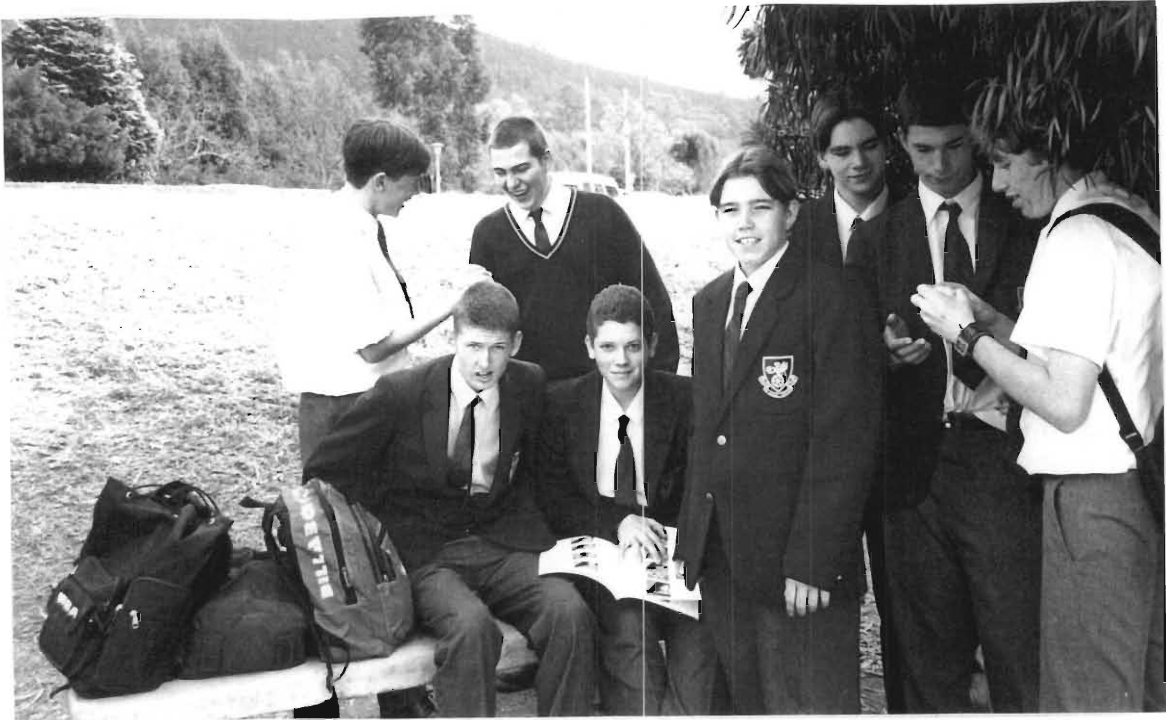
#### Context

Break Time. The groups are no more than 25 metres apart, but a bank, physically and visually separates them. Hence Alan refers to them as the

“bottom” and “top” groups, between which he moves in the 20 minute recess.<sup>48</sup>

### Photograph 1

#### Mark's Group



#### Analysis

#### Mark's Group

The manner in which the boys are grouped suggests a relaxed demeanour. Their space is not protected as their own and their natural interaction often results in humour. Alan (on extreme right) says that he feels less pressure to conform to the Group's wishes in this group than when in the “4-Wheel Drive” Group. The Group possesses elements of reckless mischievousness coupled with still sobriety (note the contrast of the two boys seated and the two directly behind them). This Group do regard themselves as more masculine than the “4-Wheel Drive” Group. When asked to substantiate this belief they referred to the relationship

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<sup>48</sup> The spatial aspect of both groups is very similar to that of the girls at break time and tends to dispute Spender's (1989) statement that boys take up more space in the playground. Behaviour is not static and will vary according to interaction (as will space needed for the interaction), rather than gender.

some of the “4-Wheel Drive” boys have with their mothers and termed them “Mommy’s Boys”.<sup>49</sup>

Members of this Group are more likely to be less committed to schoolwork and many do smoke (but not at school). There are those in the Group who declare openly a strong aversion to smoking.

## Photograph 2

### “4-Wheel Drive” Group



## Analysis

### “4-Wheel Drive” Group

The grouping of these boys is more formal and rigid. This is not, however, suggestive of their relationship, as the intimacy among the members of this Group is far greater than the other Group. The linear formation is indicative of

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<sup>49</sup> While some in the group are labelled “mommy’s boys” they are not regarded as “poofers”(p.170), a correlation which Wolpe (1988) found emerged in her study.



the status each is accorded within the Group. The possession of their own space is indicative of the individuality accorded to each within the dynamics of the Group. This is why I feel that Alan's impression that he is pressurised by this Group to rollerblade\skateboard arises from his fringe status within the Group and is actually self-imposed pressure so that he can "belong".

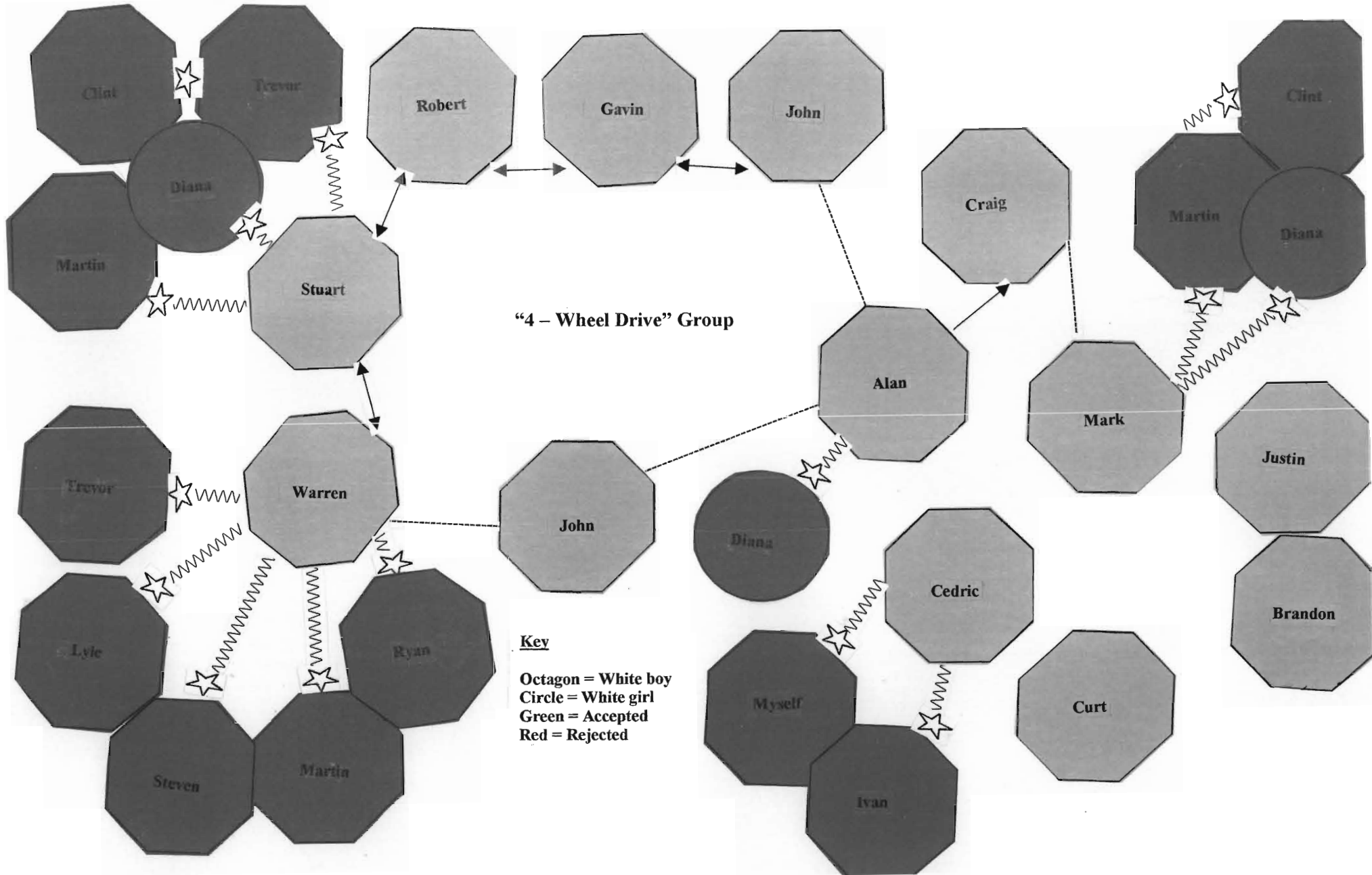
Another fringe person to the Group is John on the extreme right of the photograph. In contrast, notice how comfortably Warren relates on the extreme left of the photo to Peter and his twin, Robert. The physical presence of Tim separates Stuart from the other three core members of the Group. Tim's position belies his status within the Group -- he is accepted, but is not spoken of as a participative member.

### Photograph 3



### Analysis

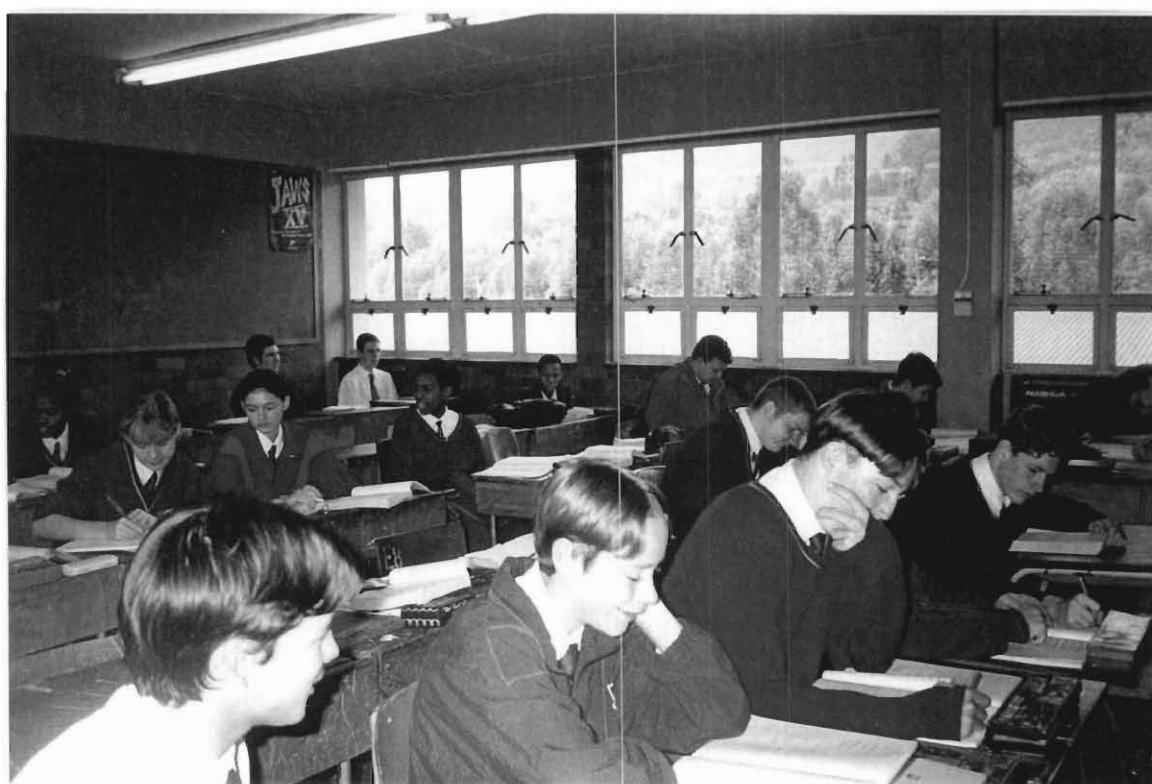
Alan's introduction into the Group a few minutes later had explosive repercussions. The Group reacted physically in a clown-like manner. An element of Mark's Group had been added to the "4-Wheel Drive" Group and had evoked behaviour expected of boys in a patriarchal society. The body



movements of Robert and Stuart could be regarded as effeminate in relation to those of Alan's. Note how John and Tim have moved into the background, while the other four react to Alan in pairs; Peter and Warren look on amused at the antics of Stuart and Robert.

### School is Career-focus

A major distinction between Mark's Group and that of the 4-Wheel Drive Group can be epitomised in the following photograph of a Mathematics class:



All of the 4-Wheel Drive boys, who are in the class (Warren, Stuart and John - circled) sit in the front row, demonstrate exemplary behaviour and are highly motivated.<sup>50</sup> They also work naturally with the girls from the Wheel Group directly behind them. Mark and Alan sit in the back row on the right hand side of the class, work intermittently and indulge in disruptive behaviour. Alan often reacts to the teacher's praise of the boys in the front row, often with sarcastic comments, thereby demonstrating his link-status between the two groups.

<sup>50</sup> Good behaviour is corellated with academic achievement. (Lacey, in Hammersley and Woods, 1984)

Interesting to note in this photograph is the positioning of the boys, girls and other race groups. The boys in the front are often very demanding of the teacher's attention<sup>51</sup> and are a physical barrier to her interaction with the rest of the class. This often proved to be a frustrating factor for the highly motivated Wheel Group, but as they were often quietly confident and the female teacher did not gender-differentiate, it did not prove to be an insurmountable problem. It did often prove to be a major problem for the Black girls in the back row, who were not heard and often were not confident enough to ask questions. They were further blocked off from the teacher by the disruptive elements in the row directly in front of them and in the same row as themselves.

The direction of the "4-Wheel Drive" Group, unlike the "Wheel" Group is not on a morally conscious level. Their motivation is not always to do with academic success or what behaviour would be rewarded as "right" by the school or society. These boys are confident that in their choice of subjects they are on the correct career path: a direction in which they will ultimately achieve success and contentment.

They are therefore not totally focused on short-term success in the classroom and admit to becoming bored easily and not being as motivated as they should be when it comes to schoolwork. This correlates with the findings of Hammersley and Turner (in Hammersley and Woods, 1984), who found that pupils who were committed to academic success, would complain of boredom and become restless if they felt that the work was irrelevant to their goal.

They are however committed to attending school, exhibiting acceptable behaviour and remaining focused on their careers, which are strongly reflective of and supported by their fathers.

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<sup>51</sup> Boys demand for attention in class. (Spender, 1989)

## Absenteeism

Official: Number of days missed. Robert = 1; Warren = 2; Stuart = 6; Alan = 1; John = 0

Unofficial: Number of hours missed. None of the boys had bunked any lessons in the period of the first two terms.

Their *drive* to succeed has more to do with an inner belief that what they are working towards is not only essential, but is unequivocally the *only* choice in life.

Stuart: Electronics engineering and --- Computers. That's *definitely* the future.

I *have* to go to Tech. Then maybe I'll go overseas and study – you *have* to do that nowadays!

## The “4 –Wheel Drive” Group - An Anomaly Explored

This group demonstrates direction along definitive lines. Rigidity of purpose that it would be tempting to regard as devoid of insight (stubborn single-mindedness) and singularly naive, but which rather strongly suggests the determination of *destination reached*. Hence while child-like in approach, the clarity with which the objective to be achieved is expressed, bears testimony to mature consideration and an understanding of the incumbent personal responsibility on the achievement of the objective.

So, emerges the anomaly on which this group balances: *an immature social perspective (made manifest in social behaviour) and a sense of promised personal, individual commitment to the expectations of an adult world, which demonstrates a maturity beyond their 15 years. Such an anomaly, I feel, must lie at the basis of the definition of what society terms a “nerd”.*

In order to exemplify the above observation I shall focus on THREE areas, which emerge as pertinent to the individual's participation within this group.

## 1. “We Have Roots”

There is a comfortable acceptance and understanding of each of the core individuals within this group because of the history they all share. The twins (Warren and Robert), Stuart and Peter have lived close to, and have known each other “like forever”. Their families are close friends and their link after school is a homemade ladder over the fence. The geographical proximity and their shared growth experiences have ensured that the learning environment is immaterial to their prolonged friendship. Their knowledge of one another extends to an understanding of their intra-group interactions. Hence they are able to contextualise their relationship in order to make sense of the qualitative differences within interactions.

Clarification of the above statement would require an explanation of the nature of the methodology used and the significance of triangulation in the maintenance of credibility when dealing with an attempt to encapsulate something as fluid and dynamic as interactive relationships. For example: from the initial *sociometric diagram* I drew of the group with its interlinked parallel group (see sociometric diagram p.90) it became possible for me to isolate a pattern of interaction of the “4-Wheel Drive” Group in which the core of Warren, Robert, Stuart and Alan emerged, but this pattern subsequently proved to be misleading in the quality and intimacy of interaction I surmised from the diagram. I sat in Warren and Stuart’s Maths class for 3 months and during this period of *participant observation* would have classed them as best friends, but this is what emerged in my *semi-structured interview* with Stuart.

**Stuart:** Warren is the type of friend where we stay together in class because we’re very similar at work standards. He’s good at most things I’m good at and bad at most things I’m bad at; so we kind of hang together in class and Robert and I – we go together after school.

**Researcher:** So, who would you say is your best friend?

**Stuart:** Definitely Robert. We're similar, but actually quite different – ja, he's quite social. I'm not very social, but I try to be – hang in there with the group.

And in my *semi-structured interview* with Robert -

**Robert:** Stuart (is my best friend). If I need advice, he's always there. He's more sensible than me. He's loyal and he's never ever done anything wrong.

An explanation as to why I never realised during participant observation that Robert and Stuart could possibly be best friends, is as Stuart says: “In most classes we get separated because we talk too much”.

And in my *semi-structured interview* with Warren –

Warren's comments on Stuart are interesting in the light of their peer's perceptions of the group as nerds:

Stuart is a bit of a nerdish ou, but he's my friend  
and I've known him for a long time.

When Alan was trying to explain why he was torn between this group and Mark's Group, he mentioned their inability to speak in a worldly way about sexual issues of adolescent interest and dwelt on their interaction with their mothers.

**Alan:** The Top Group are really boring, like the things they talk about are childish. Stuart and John are real Mommy's boys – Ja they tell their mothers everything. ... Our group seems to have matured faster than theirs, especially with this sex thing. Simon squirted litchi juice in the air and said that it looked like “come”. Robert couldn't believe we were

talking about this!<sup>52</sup>

Hence the anomaly emerges from the different perspectives on what can be considered as maturity and the subtle distinction to be made between childish and child-like behaviour. Possibly the members of the “4-Wheel Drive” Group demonstrate maturity beyond their years on how sexual issues should be discussed, but a social immaturity does not allow their behaviour to reflect an understanding of this maturity. The perception of their peers is therefore a naive immaturity at which they can scoff.

I found that in all the comments about self and each other, the individuals in the group demonstrated an understanding and acceptance of self, an awareness of their individual differences and an ability to respond to different interactions between\among members of the group as demanded by different contexts.

This became even clearer as the group’s activities were analysed.

## **2. Activities**

The generic qualities of the activities play a vital role in the intimacy levels of interaction between individuals within the group. While the core group is linked by the extra-mural, extra-school activities of rollerblading, skateboarding and rock-climbing, it is the significance of institutionalised social perceptions about certain sports that divides the group. Stuart, Robert and Alan play War Games (the link with Mark’s Group –see sociometric diagram p.90), and Peter and Warren play school rugby. The latter carries with it a macho image “sanctified” by the South African school system, while the former could hardly be regarded as a “blood sport” and is considered a mental exercise unsanctioned and unrecognised by the school, but played on school property under the auspices of an interested teacher.

Therefore, while similar activities are participated in by all, it is actually the *different activities and their significant social perceptions* that define the quality of relationship between individual members. Hence Peter and Warren’s belief that

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<sup>52</sup> Wolpe (1988) found that there was more talk than action when it came to sex and often it was spoken of jocularly among the boys interviewed.



they are far more the outdoor – type. There is an acknowledgement that Robert and Stuart prefer to play on the computer than skateboard with Warren and Peter. However, activities centred around the computer are related to career aspirations and their mathematical ability and therefore link Stuart, Warren and Robert.

They all demonstrate an understanding of the fluctuating qualitative nature of different contexts and respond to the different dynamics accordingly. Essentially their activities are reflective, not only of similar interests, but beliefs and value systems that are linked within the broader context of the extended family. If the anomaly is to be explored further it can be best understood in the nature of the activities in which the individuals in this Group participate and to which they aspire.

### The Nature of Core Group Activities

Most of the group's activities can be characterised as possessing an adventurous element of danger within the controlled parameters of social acceptance and safety measures in which danger is minimised. Therefore, while they all possess a *drive* to fulfil the ambitions of flying, parachuting and bunjee-jumping, they do not exemplify reckless, rebellious James Deans indulging in death-defying feats! They will experience the exhilaration of exploration of physical danger within the confines of careful consideration and planning.

At face value, one would never associate the individuals in this group with these sporting aspirations and yet their comments reveal an interesting defiant determination. Their “want to” comments make manifest an *inner motivation* that appears to be compounded by an *external expectation* in their “have to” comments.

Stuart: *I want to parachute – I have to do that! Bunjee-jump. I'm going to do that – and I'm gonna dive!*

Warren: *My dream is to fly aeroplanes – have to fly jets –ja.*

And then they begin to speak of the influence of their parents and families and the reasons for their attitudes and aspirations become a lot clearer.

### **3. Institutionalised Extended Family and Gender**

Strongly related to their choice of activities and the manner in which they approach them is the admiration they demonstrate for their parents' interests. Warren and Robert wish to emulate the entrepreneurial spirit of their father, while Stuart excitedly speaks of exploring Africa with his parents in their landrover. Stuart wishes to emulate his *mother's* feat of parachuting. Their relationships with parents is compounded by the fact that each of the boys' mothers is the other's godmother. Family influence pervades and reinforces the Group's interactions.

Parental roles are clearly defined for all these boys and home background reflects stability and security. Open communication exists within all these families, but there is a strong maternal link, which is made manifest in the traits demonstrated by the individuals within this Group and in their views on gender issues. What emerges in analysing the data gathered on the gender issue from this group, is a fascinating study of the conflictual dilemma of sensitive boys, who demonstrate feminine traits within an intolerant patriarchal society.

#### **Gender and Self**

This all-boys group does not consciously inculcate societal definitions of gender because of a naivety demonstrated in relation to gender relations. This naivety defies the inclination to define self in terms of gender binary opposition. They tend to focus on interests, beliefs and personality which emerge from their interpersonal relationships with family and friends and are not pressurised by the societal role play of a patriarchal society.

They are aware that manifested in the choice of activity are masculine\feminine socially defined characteristics. Hence Warren states that he and Peter are "much tougher than Robert and Stuart" because of their interest in rugby and

that they choose outside, physical activities before computer games. Coupled with this is an admission by Warren that he is “not generous enough”, while Robert perceives himself in this way in relation to his twin:

I am kind. Warren is a lot harsher than me.

Because the members do not blindly accept (and hence fulfil) the masculine role engendered for them by a patriarchal society, gender emerges as a far more complex phenomenon. They accept that they are complex beings, who possess both masculine and feminine traits, within interactive situations involving both same sex and mixed sex individuals.

What does this inter-  
to tell us

Stuart’s comments about self in relation to Warren are insightful and reflect just how significant the gender issue is to this group.

Stuart: Maybe I can’t bully kids because I’m smaller, but no, I would never bully anybody, not even psychologically – that’s not the way I do it. Warren is more of a bully – can’t call it that - he’s more (pause) *masculine*. He tends to try to be *dominant*; almost.

### Maternal Ties

All of the boys openly admit to a closer relationship with their mothers than with their fathers; a relationship, which involves verbal communication and demonstrates an understanding of and sensitivity to the significant role their mothers play within the dynamics of the family.

Stuart: My mom is very nice; she’s very, very nice. ... Ja, we talk about things at home. Our relationship is based on trust. My mother’s easier to talk to – she’s at home most of the time.

Alan: My mom really works long hours – from 6 in the morning to 6 at night. She’s like so bugged at night, she’ll just like pass out in the chair. I get

along well with my mom.

It is interesting though that this maternal relationship does not in any way detract from their interaction with their fathers, which includes helping with their work or recreational past-times.

**Stuart:** I can talk to my dad about certain things, but not about other things.

Some things you don't even want to talk to your parents about and then you can talk to your friends – like I can talk to Robert about *anything*.

**Alan:** My dad and I have basically got the same interests – sea-fishing and we do wiring together.

The aggressive confrontational and competitive nature of the relationship between the boys in the “Spinning Top” Group and their fathers is contrasted by one of cooperation and respect in the “4-Wheel Drive” Group.

### Relationships with Girls

All, except Alan, do not have relationships with girls as they feel they are not ready for various reasons:

**Robert:** I'm not really interested in a relationship during school 'n stuff.

I haven't actually got *time* for it. I have to paint my army.

(for War Games)

**Stuart:** Girls? Not quite yet. I'd rather enjoy life for a while. I've got other things to consider first. A relationship with a girl is quite serious and involves quite a lot of commitment.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> “Elliot seemed to represent a number of boys' views when he said “I'm not ready for it yet.” (Wolpe, 1988;160-1) Elliot was only 12. Adam, at age 15, found that girls could be disruptive to his studies, which he had prioritised (p.162).

And so emerges yet again the anomaly I spoke of at the beginning of this chapter – the discrepancy between gender role perception in a patriarchal society, which demonstrates maturity beyond their years, and their immaturity in active social interrelations. They are aware that a relationship involves responsibility and commitment on their part. It appears, though, that they will remain undeveloped, inexperienced and immature in relation to the opposite sex because of their very adult perception of what such a relationship entails. Their single mindedness does not allow for a creative understanding of the complexities and diversities of interpersonal relations and could therefore be construed as immaturity.

However, the awareness of responsibility and commitment a relationship entails could also demonstrate a lesson well-learned. It could be argued that they already perceive the role of the male to be that of the incumbent breadwinner in a relationship. Therefore, within their youth, they feel ill-equipped to cope with what is expected of a male in a relationship within a patriarchal society. There is an unconscious perpetuation of patriarchal societal roles as related to their relationship with their parents. They perceive their parents' roles as qualitatively different – their interaction with their fathers usually involves physical activity, while their mothers' is an emotional and communicative interaction role.

This latter interpretation is fraught with flaws when considering that their mothers demonstrate an adventurous spirit (Stuart wants to parachute because his *mother* did) and they perceive their mothers as hard workers. The personalities of the individuals in this group are unashamed of their sensitivity, but do feel embattled by the typical macho-male (see sociometric diagram p.90).

I therefore tend to favour the first interpretation, for their kindness and enjoyment of less physical past-times are suggestive of feminine traits. Alan's comments about his first sexual experience, best exemplify why I believe that the individuals in the "4 - Wheel Drive" Group are not atypical males within a patriarchal society, and are genuinely concerned that they will be unable (at this

stage of their life) to commit to a relationship with a girl for reasons, which they perceive to be valid and very real.

*Alan's intimate revelation about his first sexual experience is a surprising inversion of the gender-related physical and emotional responses perceived of as normal within a patriarchal society.*

**Alan:** I lost my virginity in about the third month of this year, so it's like pretty recent for me. It just like happened, 'cause I was half-pissed out of my bracket, and then Sam's like that anyway – she's like that sort of related – she's basically like that. I'm actually thinking of breaking up with her, because we aren't getting along too well. Sex puts a lot of pressure on the relationship.

**Researcher:** Are you saying that Sam took the lead?

**Alan:** Ja. It was actually surprising because I never knew what was happening. I like woke up the next morning and thought, Wow, what happened? It sort of scared me because I never knew what was going on, but now it's like in the past. So I was real traumatised about that!

**Researcher:** So, is this a real problem for you?

**Alan:** Ja, it's like I was supposed to be like – I never wanted to until I was older. Like 18 or something stupid, like older. Everybody carries on like this is nothing for teenagers, but we suffer in the background! ---  
People describe it as it's supposed to be special and I like agreed with that, So that's basically stuffed my memory. I can't even remember it.

This group is a complex mixture of traits defined within this patriarchal society as masculine and feminine. While Warren and Peter regard themselves as more masculine-activity related, Robert and Stuart regard as uncontroversial their more sensitive natures, which relate to mental activities. To the extremes of these pairs one finds John, whose sensitivity is compounded by Christian

principles of morality and Alan who provides the link with Mark's group; a group whose members perceive themselves as much more worldly and more masculine than the "4 - Wheel Drive" Group. All 6 members do possess a child-like naivety, which is nurtured by a sensitive understanding and by a maternal bond of communication.

### An Embattled Group

*A pictorial representation of the impression of this group as an "embattled group" is made dramatically apparent by the sociometric diagram on p.90, from which it becomes apparent that they intensely dislike many people, especially other boys, whom they view as "macho" and girls, whom they perceive as "sluts".*

One should not automatically assume that because I speak of the group members as "sensitive" that they are angelic and self-sacrificial, but what is interesting is that the very image which a patriarchal society insists boys portray, is reflected in the boys they reject. They are definite in their rejection of males who are aggressive and who do not demonstrate normal reaction to retribution i.e. those who do not show remorse or contrition when punished after a misdemeanour. They will not accept such behaviour and scorn the culprit. Generally, their reaction is against those males who thrive on a macho image and use their reputations to manipulate power situations. (Contrary to what Lacey, in Hammersley and Woods, 1984, believes they do not *fear* these boys).

The girls they reject, include those whom they perceive to be "sluttish", have a "bad attitude" and do not demonstrate kindness in any way.

Warren: I don't like Bridget because she does not show any *respect* for boys.

What was clear from the sociometric diagrams drawn of each of the chosen groups is that this group had very definite ideas about the people they liked the least (Appendix 1, Question 5). They also disliked many more of their peers than any other group.

**This is suggestive of many things:**

- **They are aware that they do not demonstrate the normal macho characteristics expected of boys within a patriarchal society and react petulantly and defensively;**
- **Part of the affirmation of their moral stance (as opposed to religious morality) is to reject those characteristics in people they perceive as wrong;**
- **They are confident in whom they are and what they believe and consciously choose not to acknowledge those who do not possess characteristics they admire;**
- **They are possessed by an irrational fear of all that they know they are not and what they do not understand e.g. aggressive males and females who represent everything their mothers do not.**

### **Conclusion**

**The Group demonstrates a definitive direction based on long-term plans and supported by stability of family and the extension of this institution into the other families of the Group. Commitment and responsibility are perceived as not optional in how one lives one's life and therefore relationships are not to be entered into lightly.**

**Various attributes affect their attitude to the role of women in society, the two major ones include:**

- **a personal integration of feminine and masculine traits, in which the former are regarded as attributes to be nurtured rather than scorned; and**
- **relationships with both parents, but in particular their respect and love for their mothers, with whom they have open communication.**



Equality in gender is a significant belief, as they actively reject those boys who inculcate a macho-image and they express as obvious, the *partnership* of marriage. Their rejection of “sluttish” girls should be seen in the light of their own views on sexual promiscuity and can not be classified as representing a chauvinistic attitude towards the male and female role in sex.

Warren: I want to wait until I get married. It’s a matter of morality and respect for self. ... You degrade yourself if you sleep around.<sup>54</sup>

The individuality of the members of this Group is made manifest in their confident espousing of independent beliefs, which are rooted in their shared growth experiences. An inner motivation and external expectation combine to drive each of these members towards the fulfilment of aspirations. If this path and drive contain a single-mindedness that could be construed as stubborn naivety, society will ensure that they will learn significant lessons. One hopes the lessons will not include the destruction of their sensitivity and kindness.

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<sup>54</sup> In Wolpe’s (1988) study Adam condemned boys of his age who were sexually active.

## Chapter 6

### III: The “Spinning Top” Group

#### Group Composition

No: 9

Gender: Female – 4

Male – 5

Age: 15-17

Race: White

Language: English

#### Why “Spinning Top”?

The volatility of this group is its major characteristic. Strong emotional interaction among members usually arises out of the consequences of their activities. Often the prolonged activities within a specific place begin to pall and the members of the group begin to experience frustrated boredom. These activities usually take place in a secluded area, bound either by physical parameters or the unspoken rules implied by the group participation. Therefore, *boundaries* are clearly delineated; physically (i.e. Pamela’s house as meeting place) or by the fear of discovery and an avowal of secrecy. This dual confinement intensifies the tension and emotional reaction and interaction.

An enforced unity ensues from the nature of the activities, which are usually anti-social and therefore remain exclusive to group participation. The group is not single-school centred (members are at three different schools), which emphasises the significance of the similarities of the choice of their activities and

the attitudes to social rules that this choice reflects. This unity manifests itself in contradictory, irrational statements about their relationships:

Annabel: I trust Pamela a lot. Most of the time we hate each other, but then we'll still look out for each other, no matter what happens.

There tends to be a loss of freedom of individual choice when it comes to the activities; for the focus is essentially on *action rather than beliefs or principles*. Annabel states that there was a danger of the group disintegrating at one stage because everybody started "to do their own thing". The group existence is reliant on the participation of all in certain activities. *All of these perceptions translate into the body of the spinning top.* *Which perceptions are these?*

The decisions about the activities depend on strong leadership. *The metal tip of the spinning top relates to this leadership.* Both Luke and Pamela are accepted by the other members as the leaders: Pamela because of her strength of personality and the geographical location of her house and Luke because of his willingness to "take the fall" for any of the group members if need be.

Pamela: Most of us think that the leader of the group is Luke. But Luke says that I am the leader, but I think that Luke is the leader,...'cause he thinks everything revolves around me.

The movement of the group (*like a spinning top*) is not linear and is unfocused on a specific destination. Most are unsure about what they want to do career-wise and their subject choice is unrelated to any definite career path. In contrast to the "Wheel" Group their movement is erratic and reliant on the repercussions of their activities at any specific time.

Annabel's quote encapsulates this difference:

They (Tamryn's group) are *so* different to me. They've got their lives set – education's first, then comes sport, then comes having fun and I'm just whatever comes first, comes first.

(See the next page (p.109) for the sociometric diagram of the “Spinning Top”.)

### Power Relations within the “Spinning Top”

The power relations within the group are explicit and is an issue of which the members are not only aware, but discuss as an important clarification of group dynamics. There is an acceptance of its significance to the existence of the group. The members of the group have experienced incidents, which have clarified the control factor within the group. This has crystallised into an acceptable hierarchical formation. It also demonstrates the irrelevance of gender distinction within the group.

Both Pamela<sup>55</sup> and Luke are regarded by members of the group as their leaders, but most tend to think that Luke possesses the qualities that most of the group needs in a leader – sympathetic loyalty and decisive action.

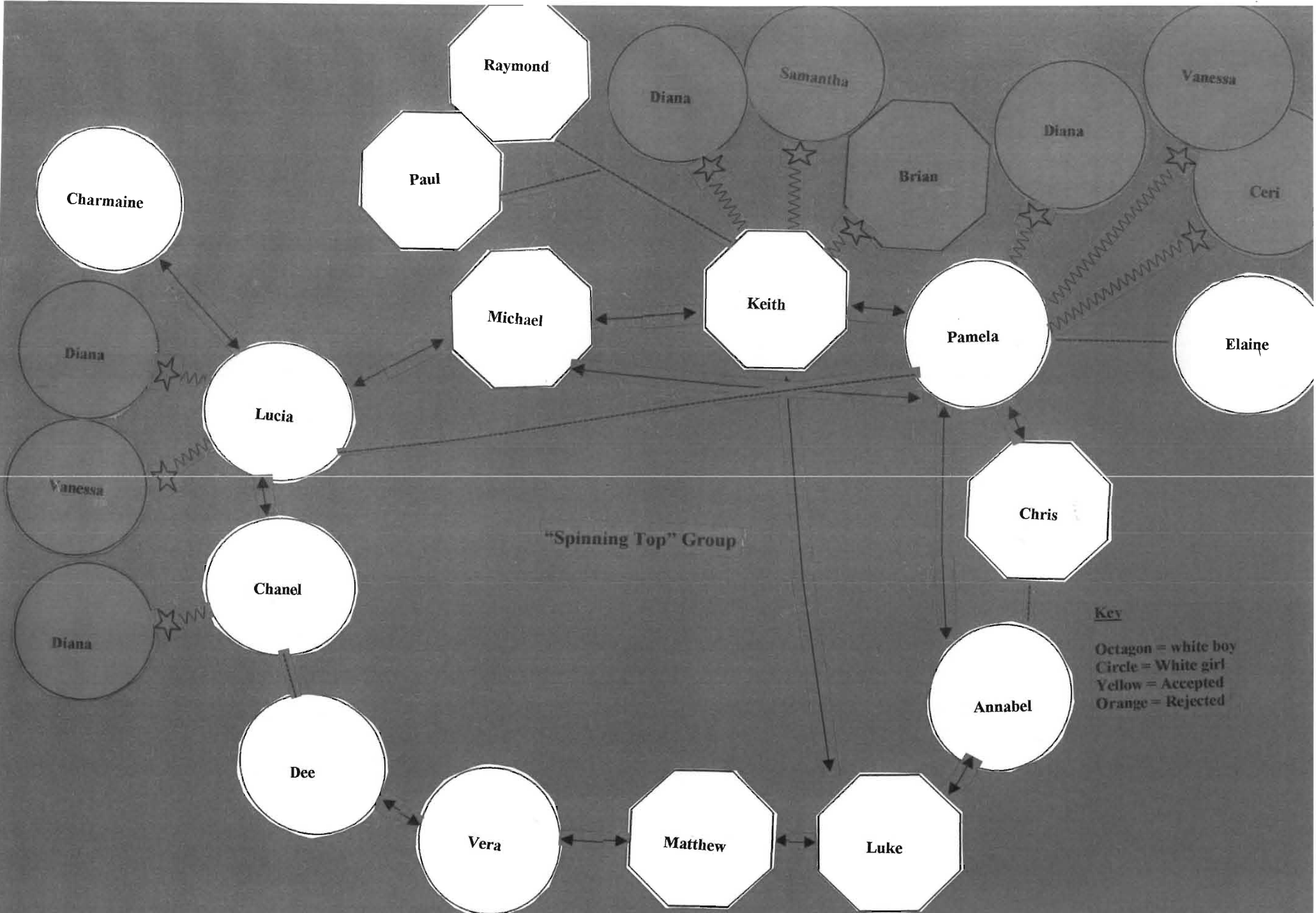
**Keith:** I think Luke is our leader. You can go to him with anything – if you’ve got problems – if you don’t want to do this, you can go speak to him about it.

This comment is suggestive of great power on the part of Luke, who appears to make decisions for Keith on whether he may or may not participate in a group activity, even if he as an individual is loath to participate. Obviously, he generally decides in favour of the individual’s preference.

Pamela’s power within the group is not based on loyalty and admiration, as is Luke’s, but rather on a combination of the geographical location of her house and her personality type. Pamela’s house is central and is therefore a convenient meeting place for the group. This has given her control over the limits of the

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<sup>55</sup> While Pamela leads the group, her role is essentially one that typifies the social role of woman in a patriarchal society – maternal sympathiser and protector.



group's activities, as within the venue are implicit the rules of her family. In light of the nature of the group's activities Pamela's house is also representative of a safe haven and secure environment. The group often have the house to themselves and her mother is someone whom the group regard as a confidante (see Parental Involvement, p. 121). The location of the group's activities is highly significant, for the nature of the activities requires seclusion and privacy.

Lucy's comment to Pamela within an interview situation indicates a begrudging acknowledgement of this. She appears to object to the control this venue exerts on her brother, Michael:

Ja, I think Pamela is the leader of the group sort of, because every single day my brother gets up and he says he's going to Pamela's house. I asked him, Why? ... because, he says, that's just where everyone goes. So I think you are.

This power converts into social control through Pamela's personality type. She could almost be regarded as a prototype representative of the group ethos. Having been "sobered" by a particularly bad drinking spree experience, the death of a friend by a drunken, driver and a father, whom she perceives as alcoholic, she accepts the uncontrolled drinking of the group, but no longer participates in this activity. She therefore emerges as a non-judgemental, understanding mother-figure, who will support and protect those no longer in control of themselves.

Pamela is secure about whom she is and has definite opinions on certain issues. *family rules same ground* She is therefore unafraid to let it be known to the group that while they drink and smoke, dagga-smoking and benzine-sniffing are unacceptable within the confines of her home. These boundaries are respected by those, who do participate in these activities and, subsequently, are done away from the group situation in pairs or alone. She sees no contradiction in her wish to eventually work for SANCA – within the context of her role within the group, this is

possibly an extension and a natural progression for her. Her future career emerges from her role within the group rather than as a choice of school curriculum. *Hence the significance of the group as a process of socialisation into life choices.*

While she will defend her right to be in the company of others the group regards as “uncool”, she accepts that the group’s exclusive nature is not easily altered. The leaders tend to play an important part in group membership, which results in anxiety and times of crises. Most believe that Luke’s power relates to decisions about group composition, which results in his control over who “belongs” and who doesn’t.

Annabel: Luke will say one day that he doesn’t want Michael in the group and then he’ll say I don’t want Annabel in.

{ Such comments lead to insecurity within the group and there is often a preoccupation with the life span of the group. Belonging to the group does not offer security. Yet the *need* to “belong” remains.

Annabel: I don’t think it will last much longer. I’ll go with the flow. If I go with the group and the group splits up ... and I sit with no one. That’s why I try to make friends with most people. *(This is her safety valve against isolation and loneliness).*

Ironically, the threat of the destruction of the group appears to come from within. The dynamics of this group possess the potential for self-destruction. One of the major flaws lies in the necessity of leaders, while the other is in the secrecy that binds them. The flawed, brittle quality of group existence is exemplified by the following incident and the change in status of one of the leaders.

Pamela was instrumental in having Mandy expelled from the group for a time, as it was believed that she “cuffed on” them when they were smoking and drinking at her house, while her mother was away. She did this by writing a letter (of

which the whole group approved) to her, stating explicitly that she was no longer regarded as a member of the group. Subsequently it was discovered that it had been her 12-year old brother who had turned traitor and she was forgiven and re-instated. While there is no ritual involved in this re-instatement, her change of status is made explicit and accepted by the group.

gender diversity { It is Pamela's change of status within the group that is now causing problems. She has recently begun a sexual relationship with Chris (whom she brought into the group), with which group members are finding it difficult to deal. Some see Pamela as a traitor as she now "doesn't care about anything else", as she has put Chris above the group. They are angry about this and feel she is "pulling blind and ditching us for Chris and stuff". Annabel and Michael have spoken to her, but "she won't listen". They felt that before her relationship with Chris the "group was cool, but now the group is one big mess; one big fight".

The other aspect to this relationship is Keith's reaction, which focusses on the sexual activity. He has always had a special relationship with Pamela for she is a protective factor in his life and a comforting ear to listen to his problems.

He acknowledges her strength and has never associated her with the gender issue, thereby not really understanding that while he perceived her strength in the leadership role as masculine, her role within the group was essentially what society perceives, as feminine. His bewilderment arises from her change from virgin-status. For she has now altered the belief system which they both shared i.e. to remain virgins until they feel they are ready for it. Obviously she has arrived at this point before him.

He also demonstrates confusion about the male domination factor in sexual relationships, as he can't reconcile Pamela's power with the sexual act; as perceived in the following quote:

Keith: I don't understand why she *allows* him to do that to her.



While acknowledging her control over her actions, he perceives her position as one of subordination to the male within the sexual act.

Obviously the altered status of one of the leaders is having a negative effect on the group's unity. There is also the problem of finding a new venue to meet as Pamela is now often at Chris's house.

### Analysis of Group Work within the Classroom Situation – focus on the role of Pamela

In both situations Pamela is working as an individual as the “Spinning Top” Group is not represented in these photographs. In fact this is a significant point to make: *that the group is not reliant on classroom situations and the academic scenario to bind them as in the case of the “Wheel” and the “Skateboard”.*

#### Photograph 1



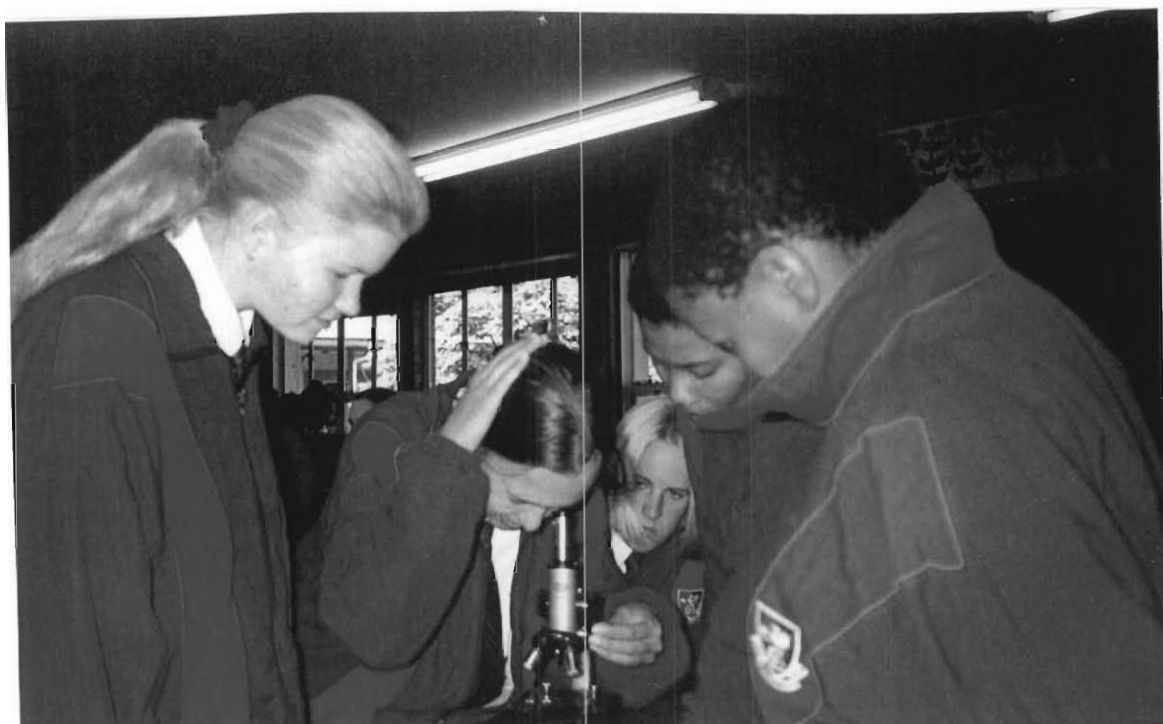
**Context: Informal group work in English class**

#### Analysis

Pamela is the focal point of the group interaction and has obviously taken control, for she has the paper and pen. While Lucy (left with back to camera) is accepted as a fully-fledged member of the “Spinning Top” Group,

Chanelle (blonde on the left) is only a member during certain classes. (She has rejected their overtures to join the Group as she was concerned that she would lose her individuality and become “like them”. She expressed *fear* at joining them.) Desiree’s (right front) closed hands and body position are suggestive of the exclusion she is experiencing from the group. It is only Pamela’s acceptance that forces the other two girls to tolerate her presence.

Photograph 2



Context: Working with microscopes in groups in a Biology Class

Analysis: Yet again Pamela leads a disparate group, none of whom belongs to the “Spinning Top” Group. Elaine (blonde girl; left front) believes herself to be a friend of Pamela (see Sociometric Diagram, p.109), but she is not mentioned by any of the members of the “Spinning Top” as belonging in any way. Pamela again in this case is sensitive to others’ needs and is secure enough to accept their friendship without her position being threatened within the “Spinning Top” Group.

In both of the group situations the members are responding to Pamela's personality in accepting and choosing her as leader, rather than her status within the "Spinning Top" Group. It should not be forgotten though that the perception of the "Spinning Top" Group as the "in-group" is one acquired from, and accepted by, the wider adolescent group of the Grade 10's. The disparate groupings could therefore be responding to the fact that she is a member of a group that they regard as courageous and unafraid of the rules created by adult society. (*This does not necessarily mean that they admire or fear this group, but they do recognise a reckless strength, which many care not to confront.*)

### What Price Individuality?

As implied by the above title there exists a tension within the group where individuality is usurped by group contextualisation. They have even given the group its own identity by naming it: Drunken Sots Association (DSA). When Pamela suggested another name, Keith was adamant that that name belonged to Annabel, and as such, had no right to be regarded as a group name. The tension which exists between individuals within the group (and there is no one who does not have "a problem" with someone in the group) is blanketed by the "Spinning Top" Group ethos.

This ethos emerges from the perception of the group as the "in-group".<sup>56</sup> Such a title is reflective of:

- certain activities for which the group is known;
- "devil-may-care-attitude" that disregards rules of institution and society;
- exclusivity of membership.

Hence the Group's ethos has not only been inculcated from within the group itself, but is developed into an ethos by *peer perception and expectation*.

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<sup>56</sup> Willis (1972) refers to this as an "informal status system" among adolescents

## Image

This dual development of ethos relies heavily on the inculcation of an *image*. The boys in the group openly admit to the conscious development of a “macho image”. Their interpretation of such an image is related to aggressive behaviour and the ability to protect or avenge members of the group. Loyalty is strongly associated with retaliation for injury to one of the group and the courage to commit to this. Willis (1972) found that many cultural values are expressed through fighting. Masculine hubris, dramatic display and group solidarity is made manifest in aggressive behaviour.

The inculcation of this image requires a subversion of individuality. This can be exemplified by the girls’ comments on how the boys change when they are by themselves as compared to when they’re with the group.

Chanelle: Keith is so different when he’s by himself – in a nice way – he tells you everything and he’s so funny.

Pamela’s comments are of a different tone: she, unlike Chanelle, accepts that this *must* be so, for she understands the ethos of the “Spinning Top” Group; whereas Chanelle “hangs out” with them at school, but has rejected their overtures to join them out of school.

Pamela: In the Group he’s *main*. I got drunk this weekend. I smoke. I’m *main*. But when we’re alone he says, “I’m really having problems with my dad”.

The tension between individuals is verbalised in the contextualised group, but the accepted image is the mask behind which open confrontation hides. The commitment by all to the Group ethos in choosing to participate in the Group activities prevents an explosive situation from developing.

Hence the hurt, which pervades the following comment by Annabel is assuaged by being accepted as a member of the Group:

All of them always rip me off. Michael is a really nice guy when he's by himself and then as soon as he's with his friends, he is so nasty to you. If you tell him something then he'll use it against you when he's with his friends - and stuff.

The girls' image is a far more gender-related issue. Because the activities of the Group are more accepted by society in the old adage "boys will be boys", the girls regard themselves as courageous in their rebellion. They proudly reveal the Group's connections with aggressive elements of society that, by association, give wider social power to the Group. It is interesting that they pride themselves on being "tom-boys" and do not dress in a feminine way at all.<sup>57</sup> Their image relies on participation in activities that the Group degenderises, but which society deems a more acceptable male-activity.

#### Hey, you can't live without rules!

All of the members of the Group demonstrate a dependence on the Group because their interaction initiates and implies tacit approval of certain activities each of the individual's desires, and in some cases, needs. The activities centre around smoking and drinking (as suggested by their name) and the related games which ensue.<sup>58</sup> These activities do however, possess broader dimensions and deeper implications for the members of the Group.

They are physical manifestations of a belief system, which underlies the Group ethos. However, the subtleties of the individuals' own beliefs, which *are*

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<sup>57</sup> Hargreaves (1972) discovered that in adolescents there is a movement towards a breaking down of sharper definitions in social sex roles, particularly noticeable in the clothes they wear.

<sup>58</sup> Willis (1972) addresses this issue when he states that "the lads" understand the symbolic importance of drinking as an act of affiliation with adults and opposition to the school. Whereas, Hargreaves (1972), speaks of a mismatch of the way pupils are treated at school (children) and outside (semi-adults), this is not the case in my study. Parents generally concur with the school view in South Africa, thereby explaining the intensification of familial conflict and a desire to escape on the part of the members of the "Spinning Top" Group.

qualitatively and dimensionally different, are lost within the participation of Group activities in two ways:

- the parameters of an individual's participation need to be adapted or compromised in the face of the approval/disapproval of the leader;
- by the perception of those within the macrocosmic environs of their adolescent "world", who in order to explain and understand the activities of the Group, stereotype its members into the type of characters who belong to the "in-group".

The "Spinning Top" Group's belief system is based on an analytical rejection of certain institutionalised moralities and an uncompromising position on the rules of Group membership.

### Morality

*What does the instrument say regarding the breaking of the laws of society?*

While the Group's activities break most of society's rules on adolescent behaviour, none of them are guilt-stricken. They reject society's preoccupation with "correct behaviour in certain contexts and at certain ages" and openly admire people who don't care what other people think about inappropriate contextualised behaviour.

Keith: ...He's funny. (I know it's rude.) Like, he picks his nose in front of people. He doesn't care what people think. He doesn't wear matching clothes.

They are critical of the insensitivity of adult ignorance when dealing with an adolescent problem and will not accept somebody, who goes back on their word. This hypocrisy they perceive to lie in the Christian Youth Group scenario (which they all tried at one stage) and in the messages they get from an adult-governed society.

Sex between members of the Group is viewed as potentially destructive (as cited in Pamela and Chris's relationship) and is therefore limited to experimentation.

There is the suggestion of physical interaction at different levels of intensity and appears to be part of the natural experimentation within which the Group indulges. It has little to do with a liking of one another and definitely does not imply any form of commitment. This is best exemplified in Keith's comment about his encounter with Annabel (whom he dislikes for being too loud):

She really pulled blind when she mocked me  
in front of the Group and tuned, ja, that I kissed  
like a washing machine.

The sexual aspect of morality is regarded in a matter-of-fact manner. There is a focus on the unwanted repercussions of pregnancy and commitment, rather than the moral implications.

Lucy: You can't just sleep with a guy and then fall pregnant – I mean, that's the end of your life!

Annabel: I've had a chance to sleep with people, but I'd rather not. It's not a major important thing in my life -- it's not going to change me if I all of a sudden sleep with somebody, but my sister fell pregnant so young; it scares me a lot. ... I can't handle a relationship, because I can't handle being suffocated. I can't handle commitment – there's a plug in my air and I can't breathe, you know.

### Rules

The Group is a volatile interaction of individuals, who indulge in activities, which society regards as anti-social at this particular life-stage. As these activities transcend the definition of "pranks" and border on the criminal, the ramifications are far more serious and as such require a bond of loyalty bound by secrecy. Here the dichotomy between society's rules and those of the Group emerges as an indication of how much freedom the individual possesses to follow the macrocosmic rules once the decision has been taken to participate within the microcosmic context of the Group.

- **loyalty**: - secrecy translates into the term “no cuffing”; and
  - unconditional support of one another in times of crisis.
- **limits**: - activities regarded as criminal e.g. dagga-smoking, benzine-sniffing and pill-popping\spiking are not tolerated as group activities; and
  - uncontrolled destructive behaviour, which could translate into vandalism, is condemned openly by those not in favour.

### **Affective Domain of the Group**

What essentially binds the “Spinning Top” Group is the emotionalism. It is significant that the Group was actually founded on a “critical incident” (Goodson, 1990) and has subsequently been “forged” in the turbulent heat of other illicit activities, for which they are often exposed.

The initial activity of the Group involved the stealing of a large amount of money from the safe of Matthew’s parents, for which they were subsequently caught and punished (as a Group). It was not the act of theft or the exposure that united them, but the emotional experience with which they could all identify. Subsequent experiences have intensified this emotional bond and their “rush” at the fear of being caught.

Willis (1972) found similar reactions to illicit actions, where “the lads” saw “thieving” as a source of excitement, where successful theft challenges and beats authority. The defiance of conventions gives them a strange sort of freedom, even though it is a private knowledge. This is how my participants reacted to their exposure.

**Annabel:** When it happened ... all of us were busted and all of us know what it *felt* like when we were bust – all of us had the same *feeling* – we were all there for each other, all of a sudden. We didn’t even know Luke and Matthew very well. Gary left the Group because he was scared to get



into trouble. Because we're very prone to getting into trouble. We're always caught for everything. (Giggle accompanied by wry smile).

The latter comment on this incident by Pamela, will serve to demonstrate how the parents' reaction to the incident serves to supply the Group with a cause, and they emerge as an embattled Group (from within their families and from without against society's rules and demands), determined to survive in the face of adversity.

Pamela: Everybody's parents came. Then Luke got stuffed up. Matthew got stuffed up. By their dads.

The sense that as a "Group in Crisis" they share a common destiny supplies them with the support they need. Why they need this support could be explored in the parental influence and involvement within the Group.

#### × Parental Involvement in the "Spinning Top" Group

While all the group members possess similar socio-economic backgrounds, I found that their unity could not be attributed to class, but rather inherent in their perceptions of the dynamics of their particular family units is a shared insecurity and alienation. This appears to be one of the aspects of the acceptance of the Group membership - an experiential link. It is essentially the members of the Group's reactions to their parents' perceived weaknesses, which affect their behaviour and ultimately supply reasons for the individual's need of the Group.

Two of the Group's members are from broken homes, both having to deal with the adjustment to their mothers' new relationships or rejection. While, the other Group members live within relatively stable family units, they also experience rejection in a more subtle way other than the absent parent:

Keith: I don't think my dad cares about me that much. He said, "Ja, you'd better start doing things for the people that love you". So I said, "Ja, I know that Mom does love me". So, I said, "What about you?" And it

was a hard thing for him to say that I love you. "Ja, I love you too" (like that!).

The macho image of the boys in the Group relates strongly to the attitudes of their fathers, who issue gender-related challenges to their sons:

I can still wind Keith up, even if he's bigger  
than me. I can still beat him up!

Often in this Group there emerges a scenario of adolescents burdened with the guilt and problems of their parents, which manifests itself in behaviour of escapism (no fewer than 7 of the 9 have run away or speak of running away at some stage).

The "Spinning Top" Group's activities are perceived to be socially acceptable adult behaviour, therefore parental involvement in either condonation or rejection of their behaviour, is far more real than stereotypical. Therefore, interaction between parent and child about Group activities cannot be pursued through normal channels and in a normal manner. Tension arises in treating them like "naughty children" when the activity embodies the double standards of the adult world, against which they react. These parents are not only dealing with anti-social behaviour, but are up against an ethos, which has wider implications for the individual's behaviour.

Much of the emotional turmoil is inherent in the anomalies between parental behaviour and their reaction to the Group's activities. This is best exemplified in Mandy's case where her single-parent mother often leaves her to care for a younger brother while she vacations (as far afield as overseas), but on her return will admonish her daughter's anti-social behaviour and threatens legal action against Group members. Both parents and members of the Group are openly critical of the mother's behaviour and, by implication, empathise with Mandy's situation.

**Michael:** My mother said, “You aren’t much of a mother. You go away for weekends and leave your daughter and son alone.”

The parents of the Group members have volatile relationships with each other because of the repercussions of Group behaviour, with which they have to deal.

**Annabel:** My mom doesn’t really like Pamela. She says that Pamela’s mom buys me smokes. ... Both our moms hate each other, but they tell each other a lot when they see each other.

Ultimately the parental involvement hinges on the apportionment of blame. Ironically it is the Group members who understand their parents’ dilemma, but do not sympathise with it. The parents will blame other parents and the Group rather than seek answers in the roots of the family and their behaviour, as to why their adolescent offspring indulges in certain anti-social activities. This would be too dangerous an avenue to pursue.

So, it is left to one of the “Spinning Top” Group insightfully to encapsulate this anomaly. The following quote by Annabel also emphasises the idea that outsiders to the Group, in order to explain and understand its activities, need to imbue the Group with its own volition, under which the will of the individual is perceived as submerged.

And all of our parents have said, “Ja, get away from the Group; get away from the Group!”

I think your parents just try to blame it on your friends, because they don’t want to admit that *their* daughter is drinking or *their* daughter’s smoking. They don’t want to admit it. They blame it on the Group.

Parents blame peers for their children's bad habit like smoking. They perceive their own children innocent and have been influenced to smoke.

In this way people on the outside view the Group ethos as usurping the will of the individual, but Annabel is adamant (as are the others) in her affirmation of her individuality. She has made a *choice* about where she belongs because of the individual she is:

You are the same person, no matter where you are  
or who're you with.

### School's Not Cool

#### Motivation

The individuals in the “Spinning Top” Group are hedonistic and, as such, are unmotivated by any task which does not give them pleasure. The affective domain possesses far stronger an influence than the mental. The activities already mentioned as the pivot of the Group, alienate the members from the activities regarded as the norm within the school as a dynamic learning environment or institution. From these activities, the Group members will receive no affirmation within the school context.

It is vital to understand how significant the activities become to the Group members, so that smoking at school cannot be dismissed as aggressive rebellion and a flaunting of the institutionalised rules, but should be acknowledged as the addictive *need* it has become for many of them. Willis's (1972) association of the valorisation of cigarette smoking as an act of insurrection against the school by its association with adult values and practices, while having some relevance, cannot be equated with the reasons for smoking of the “Spinning Top” Group.

There is the temptation to re-affirm their “cool” status, especially in an environment, within which they experience failure.

Michael: Ja, well, it's from like trying to act all cool and stuff, then you start smoking and you *can't* quit.

*Ethics*  
*I was to analyse a photograph of a disparate number of pupils smoking at break time in the school grounds here, but could not in terms of the ethics of the research utilise a photograph, which would place the willing and trusting participants at risk of retribution. I also felt that it would compromise my position in relation to the official admission to the school, as I would have had to edit certain elements prior to sharing this research with members of management and staff. I therefore felt it better not to utilise it at this time.*

### Work ethic

The “Spinning Top” Group’s lack of work ethic leads to academic mediocrity and failure and ultimately requires an external motivational factor. Three of the Group members are on Daily Report following the failure of the June Examinations. They accept this as necessary for they understand their lack of inner motivation to succeed academically. This lack of success is two-fold:

- a genuine inability to cope with academic work; and
- a failure to see the relevance and significance of school rules and activities (none of the Greenvale pupils in the Group participates in any extra-mural activities).<sup>59</sup>

### Absenteeism

**Official: Number of days missed:** Pamela = 24; Leigh = 27; Michael = 29; Chanelle = 16; Keith = 5

**Unofficial: Number of hours missed:** All of them attest to many periods missed through bunking. They have lost count! We agreed to an average of 40 hours over the two terms.

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<sup>59</sup> This could be symptomatic of the school, for an analysis of data collected in the University of Natal’s Education Department’s study on “Relationships in Schools”, involving this standard at Greenvale, revealed that 89% of them were a member of a sports club or society not connected to the school.

The choice between school activities and the suggestions of friends is one of “no contest”. The individual is unaware of any conflict between the macrocosmic rules of the institution and the benefits of participation as opposed to the activities suggested by friends. They do not perceive themselves as actively rejecting a particular value system in favour of another, but focus on what the majority is going to do. This demonstrates that while the individual has chosen a particular group, freedom of choice becomes limited by commitment to the Group.

Annabel: If I had a choice to bunk school and go with my friends, I’m going to bunk school and that’s not like they are. They’re all set rules they stick by and stuff.

In the above comment an important distinction is made between the “Wheel” Group and the “Spinning Top” Group: whereas bunking is a trait of the latter Group, it is not for the “Wheel” Group. One should question whether this suggests that *individual choice* in the “Wheel” Group is *less limited* than in the “Spinning Top” Group. The other issue is that since the group does not rely on the formal structure of the learning environment to meet, absenteeism does not weaken the group in any way.

### Career Orientation

Time appears to be a significant aspect of the Group ethos. While the roots of the Group formation are vital to its existence; the Group tends to feed off its experiential past. This past translates into the continuity of similar activities in the present. Immediacy and certainty of the present is important, as most appear insecure about their futures and demonstrate a lack of commitment to anything other than the reality of the Group’s activities.

Annabel: Nothing –don’t know what I want to do or where I want to go.  
Wherever! ... I think I want to work.

**Keith: If I make it to Matric, might go overseas and be a barman or even work on a farm – picking strawberries.**

**It is significant that their futures are not reliant on their subject choice or their performance at school. In fact, Pamela’s relationship with Chris is already dictating her future, for she speaks of setting up home in a rural environment with him. The tension of this relationship within the Group causes Lucy to contemptuously dismiss these dreams with the following comment:**

**Some people just wanna get out of school, marry and have children and that – and I don’t think that’s *right*.**

**Her use of the word *right* implies a judgement of Pamela’s relationship and an awareness of women’s rights to their own freedom. Yet she wishes to au pair overseas after school (a gender-oriented choice).**

**Pamela’s role in the Group as leader and protector (especially when a member of the Group is inebriated or “high”) has extended itself to incorporate her career-choice of working for SANCA.**

**There appears to be an interesting anomaly drawn between focus on success in a career and snobbishness. They believe that an obsessive focus on work, which leads to the exclusion of fun, is unhealthy and is to be avoided, for an accumulation of too much money leads to unhappiness and “being stuck up”.**

**The Group members’ future represents the erratic movement of frenetic interaction, which will ultimately develop into crises in the uncharted paths of a “Spinning Top”. Most of their energies are expended on seeking solutions to immediate crises and ultimately spiralling into others. The crises tend to be manifestations of the repercussions of their activities – and so the top spins!**

### Assumptions questioned – a footnote!

In relation to other work done on delinquency in adolescents (Willis, 1972; Hargreaves, 1972), I was conscious of the very distinctive nature of the “Spinning Top” Group, who could not be termed “delinquent” in relation to these studies. Various factors emerged, which attested to these distinctions:

- their relationship with the teachers in their classes could be described as co-operative; Pamela, in particular, is admired for her confidence and commitment within the classroom situation;
- their “style” as a group could not be equated with that of a counter-school culture;
- while theft brought them together, it is not a past-time in which they indulge;
- their home backgrounds could not be regarded as encouraging anti-social behaviour; and
- their parents are genuinely concerned about their academic records.

While, they do indulge in what is regarded as “adult-activity” and do not conform to behaviour, which corresponds to academic success or acknowledgement from the school as an institution, they defy categorisation as “delinquents”.

### Gender Issues

The “Spinning Top” Group is a mixed-gender group, which superficially presents one with a façade of gender equality:

- the leadership appears to be shared by both a female and a male, yet it becomes apparent through comments by Group members and the leaders themselves, that the ultimate power lies with Luke. He possesses both the sensitive influential suggestive control, as well as the overt power to decide on the activities to be pursued. Pamela is losing her power because of the perception of her lack of control in her relationship with a male member of the Group.



The gender implications here are powerful: as long as Pamela (a girl) remains on her own, she can draw on her own sources of power to lead (warmth, listening skills, empathy, mothering). She abandons this when she chooses to be subordinated to a man. This is the future in a patriarchal society.

- The girls share in the activities with the boys and are accepted in all that is done, yet their membership of the Group requires a physical cue on their part to demonstrate that the activities of the Group are more acceptable to the macrocosm of society as male-oriented activities. This cue is physically made manifest in the clothes that they wear. A “tom-boy” image is inculcated. Interestingly enough, this is how Pamela describes herself (and the others concur), but it is an image the other girls, especially Annabel, feel they have had to develop in order to fit into the male image of a playmate.
- There is the suggestion in their experimental sexual encounters that both the genders participate with equal control (physically and emotionally). Both also feel confident enough to mock the other after such an encounter. With the risk of ridicule so high it is small wonder that these encounters occur within definite physical and emotional boundaries. This has served to intensify the volatility of the interaction among members.
- Unlike the single-sex group of the “Wheel”, the girls in the “Spinning Top” Group, live in the shadow of the “macho image” of the males in the Group; an image which is sexist by nature. The girls believe themselves to be on an equal footing with the boys and see themselves as complementing a partnership, but it is a partnership firmly entrenched in the roles formulated by a patriarchal society.

*gender inequality* } This is what perpetuates gender inequalities – *the perceived power of the powerless*, despite the obvious to the objective observer. This is also what strengthens the power of the ethnographic research method; the feminist

approach as used here, without seeking to be unaffected (only aware) allows one to point out the contradictions. We need to see this if change is to occur.<sup>60</sup>

**Obviously we've all got different qualities, but I believe that males are physically stronger, but females are mentally stronger. In that way we're both equal, because we both have our stronger points.**

Hence Pamela is already planning the traditional role of women in her “dreams” with Chris, while Chanelle believes that the commitment of marriage is serious, because “you can never get divorced”. (The role of the parents in the Group is again evident, as her father lives in Dubai and her mother lives here. They see each other twice a year.). While Lucy is to travel and not “just get married” she remains focused on a traditionally female role in au pairing. It is only Annabel who wants to surf, but is hesitant to tell the other members of the Group this, as she believes they will not understand this dream of hers. (Possibly because it is seen as a male domain by those in the Group.)

The girls of the “Wheel” Group possess a sense of independent achievement, which they believe will result in individual success, while the girls of the “Spinning Top” Group do not possess the motivation or belief to view themselves as moving towards independent success outside the Group. When forced to think of life beyond school (and the Group) they tend to think in terms of partnerships and community activity, rather than individual success. There is ultimately a sense of the inevitability of their movement into the role prescribed by society for women!

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<sup>60</sup> Stella Kaabwe, as my supervisor, clarified certain issues and dimensionalised certain ideas with insightful commentary.

## Conclusion

This mixed-gender group is not reliant on the learning environment for its cohesion, but on the *nature of the activities* in which the group members indulge. These activities are regarded as *adult-related* and as such imply a rejection of the school system's values and beliefs, which regard adolescents as children. The parents' support of the school's view compounds the emotional repercussions of the consequences of these actions and often results in alienation on the part of the group member, whose response is made manifest in the form of "escapism". This "escapism" can be a physical removal from the retribution or indulgence in hedonism or anti-social behaviour.

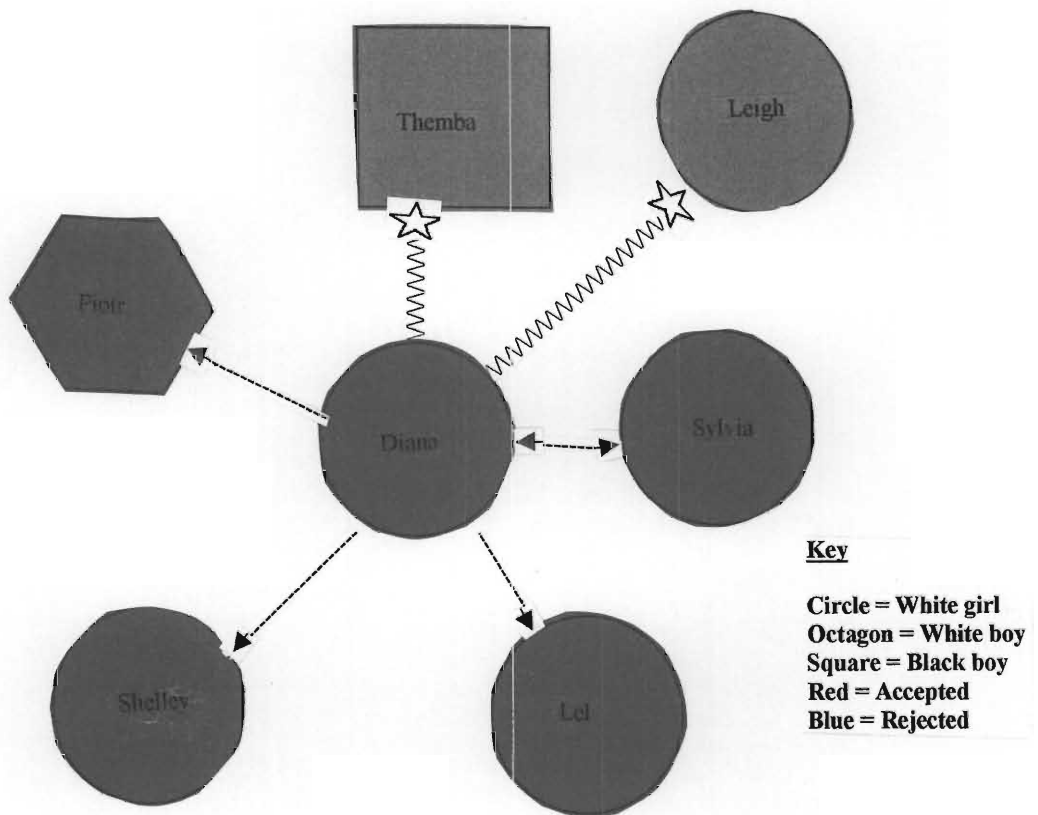
This group is a very volatile group and as such is reliant on strong leadership to ensure its longevity. Relationships among members are based on fickle, emotional response to a situation, and yet the Group's unspoken, inherent ground rules, based on loyalty and limitations (ironically) develop an ethos initiated from within and sustained by peer perception.

## Chapter 7

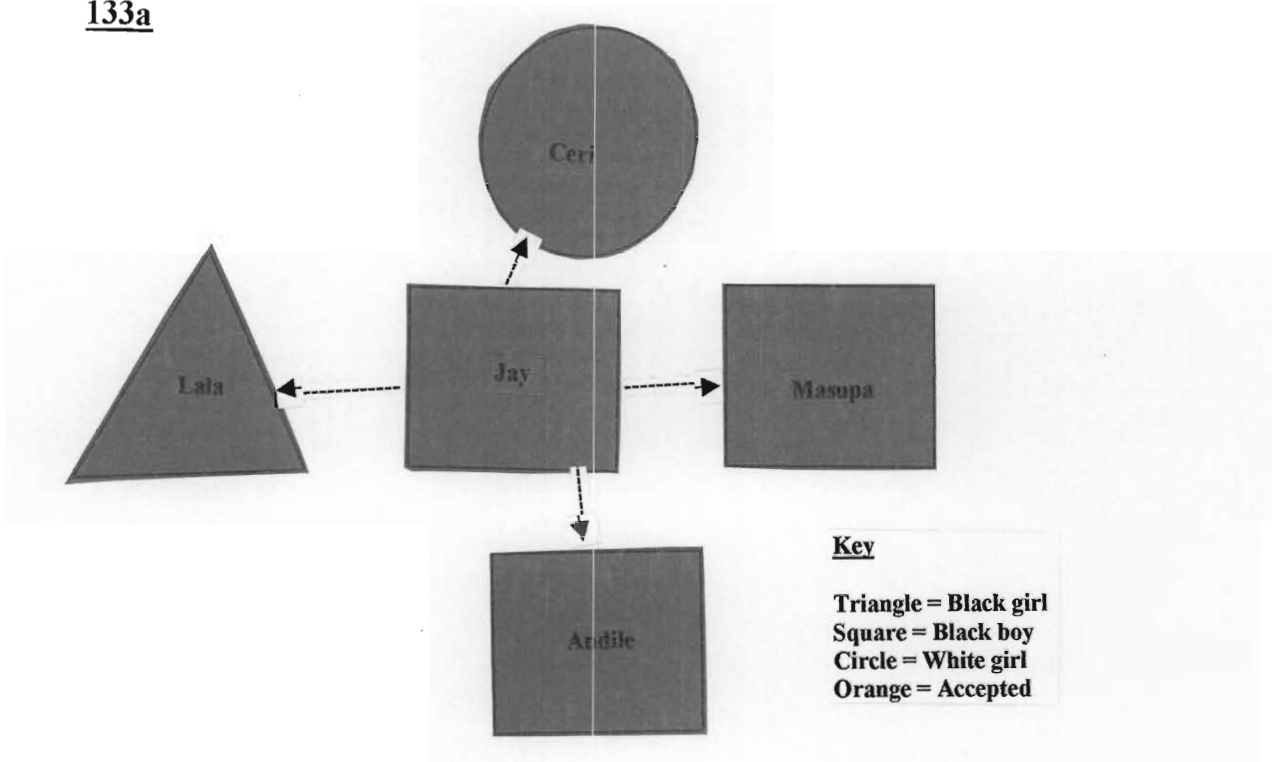
### IV: The planets – profiles of loners *Black pupils isolated as loners*

#### Introduction

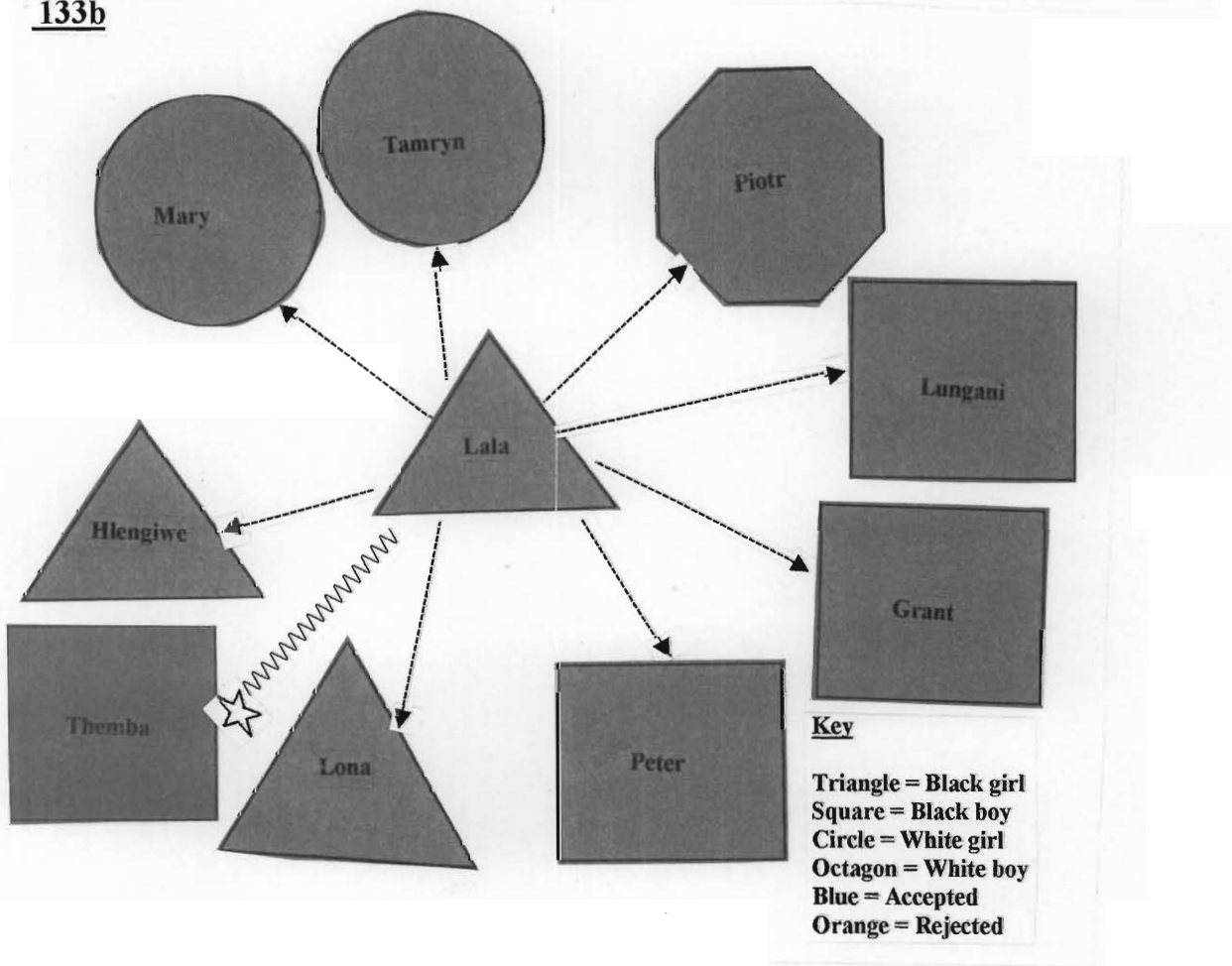
In order to dimensionalise the concept of groups, it became necessary to focus on individuals, who were obviously not part of any group and yet who interacted with individuals and groups on a daily basis. Three such pupils were isolated during participant observation and after the analysis of the sociometric diagrams. (The latter are to be found below and on the next page (p.133a and 133b). Their significance lies in the similarity of pattern, which is depicted, in contrast to those of the groups' sociometric diagrams.) They were a Black boy, Jay; a Black girl, Lala and a White girl, Diana.



133a



133b



I conceptualised them as entities within a *planetary system* for various reasons:

- They are all focused on a path with a specific destination and set objectives, but at the same time there was evidence to suggest that circumstances beyond their control were either supportive of or conflicting with their goals. In Lala's case, one was quite sure that goals would be achieved, while the latter cases were largely dependent on the *predestination of the planet*.
- They all spin along this path through the *spatial darkness* of isolation, but how they viewed this darkness was largely determined by their perception of the context within which they existed. Their perceptions were in turn dependent on the reactions of others around them. Did they see the vibrant colours of swirling, shooting planetary phenomena or the endless, dark abyss of alienation? For Jay and Lala, the former existed, but for Diana, the latter was her reality.
- Very seldom did any of them *initiate* interaction with any of the other pupils, but interaction was often sought by others. How they dealt with this interaction was dependent on the nature of the *meteoric* impact. For Diana, the nature of the interaction was usually abusive, aggressive or non co-operative. Her response was generally defensive aggression. Jay and Lala experienced affirmation in popularity and acceptance and responded with benevolent tolerance. Their friendly reaction was non-committal and their tolerant acceptance of friendly overtures in some way accorded them a powerful status in the eyes of the others. Their "singleness" was admired.

What emerged was that while each possessed similar beliefs, attitudes and attributes, their loner-status within the research site was *qualitatively* different because of how others perceived them and their reaction to this perception. This reaction was strongly related to their cultural-socio-economic background, and how the experiences each had had within this context had affected them.

## Planetary Similarities

### Family Influences

All of the three are the youngest in their families and have older siblings. These siblings possess great influence over their younger siblings. The older siblings are of the opposite sex and this has affected how their younger siblings relate to the gender issue. All feel more comfortable when relating to members of the opposite sex. These relationships have been largely instrumental in developing a maturity beyond their years for these three in qualitatively different ways.

Jay has always felt the need to protect and support his sister in her continual battle for “freedom” from an authoritarian father. Lala’s maturity is of an intellectual nature, as she grapples with the controversial ideas, with which her university student brother challenges her, while socially she has to deal with the jealousy of an overweight sister. Diana’s brother’s influence perturbs even her mother, and is a socially negative one, involving what society determines as “adult activity”.

Despite the cultural differences between all three, their parental structures have, co-incidentally, developed similar patterns. Diana’s father died of cancer four years ago, Jay’s father was murdered in the line of duty six months ago and

*what is used  
is sense of  
stability mean  
the next  
person.*

Lala’s father is dying of cancer. Yet despite these single-parent homes, there is a strong sense of stability of family for all three. The role of their mothers in relation to their development is of paramount importance. The significance of their older siblings has already been discussed. Possibly there are elements in the above - mentioned family dynamics, which offer explanations for their loner-status. Similarities are explored further in other aspects to try to emerge with a composite picture of pupils regarded as loners.

### Motivation and Leadership

All three demonstrate a goal-orientated approach to their work within the learning environment. As such, they are exemplary workers and cause no

problems within the class situation.<sup>61</sup> They prefer working alone, but when they work in group situations the following scenarios tend to emerge:

- Jay works naturally with any race group and with any gender. When he worked with boys of the same race he led the group, but when he was in a mixed race-gender group, he worked co-operatively under a leader. This is suggestive of his poor academic record, which seemed to be of more import in this type of group.
- Lala is naturally accepted into any group, but tends to stay with boys of the same race and was not necessarily chosen as leader in all situations. Generally, she prefers to be perceived as a member of the group and not have to shoulder most of the responsibility.
- The composition of the groups within which Diana works is immaterial, but usually incorporates more boys than girls of disparate races. Diana always leads the groups in which she works. This leadership is through sheer force of character and belief in her academic ability. The others also recognise her academic strength and succumb to her incredible focus on the task in hand and determination to meet the objective well.

Whereas the other two blend into the group, Diana remains an isolated entity.

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<sup>61</sup> Correlation of good behaviour with academic achievement (Lacey, in Hammersley and Woods, 1984) is contradicted by Jay, who behaves in an exemplary manner, is class captain and who struggles academically. In Jay's case this can be attributed more to personality, attitude and family background. Werthman (in Hammersley and Woods, 1984), disputes Lacey's and Hargreaves' (1972) theory on this correlation and emphasises the rational choices made by pupils.



## Analysis of Group Photographs

### Photograph 1

Context: Informal preparation for an English lesson.

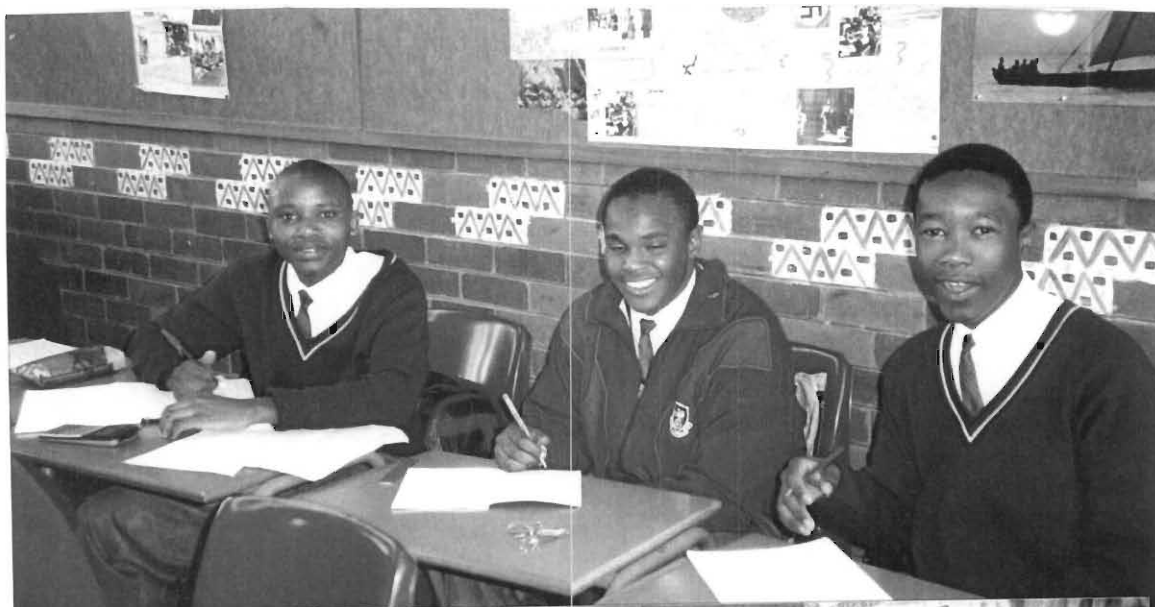


Comment: While Diana is surrounded by a gender-race mixed group, the circle does not suggest intimacy, by the fact that it is not an enclosed circle and the boy behind Diana is standing out of the natural inclination of its circumference. All are postured in polite acquiescence and not enthused interaction for the task in hand. Note the front boy's hands are in his pockets and his head is bowed, listening intently. Though he has entered Diana's "space" his attitude is one of cold, clinical reception of what she is reading. Diana's white shirt stands stark, contrasted against the surrounding shadowed colours, while her position on the bench and her body language suggest a compact, confident self-dependence. She is a leader in isolation.

### **Photographs 2 and 3**

**Context: Informal group work in an English lesson**

**Comment: Photograph 2 reflects all three boys of the same race writing and participating equally in the completion of the task. Jay's central position establishes him as the leader of the group. While the spirit is one of friendly camaraderie, there is a lack of intimacy in the linear structure of their seating arrangement. An interesting contrast with Jay's group is the one working in front of them (Photograph 3). Note the relaxed intimacy of the body language and the group structure. In the top right hand corner Jay interacts naturally with the teacher. This epitomises how comfortable he is in his interaction with adults.**



**Photographs 4 and 5**

**Context:** Informal group work in an English lesson and informal discussion in a Mathematics lesson.

**Comment:** Lala's body language in both photographs displays a natural co-operative inclusion in the group interactions, while at the same time she is physically positioned on the outskirts of both groups. In both cases her facial expressions do not suggest that this is an exclusive position, but instead one becomes aware that her position within the groups is her statement of independence.



## Maturity

“Maturity” is a concept, which allows for many definitions and as such needs to be clarified in relation to the specific attributes peculiar to all three of the research participants. Their maturity focuses on a knowledge of self: their potential and limitations. This self-knowledge is made manifest in the expression of definite goals. There exists a temporal fusion of present and future, clearly demonstrated in the conscious choices they have made of school subjects and their extra-mural activities in relation to their set objectives.

Lala’s choices are only academic, and as such prove to be the most insular and goal-directed of the three. Her school subjects are the direct link to a university degree and a career in physiotherapy. This choice is strongly supported by family and she, therefore, could be regarded as the least “free” of the three in her independent choices, as these future plans suggest that she could experience resistance should she make a choice, which does not feature University. The influence of her brother is restrictive, gilding her future goals with an inflexibility, of which she is unaware.

The other two experience a tension between the goals linked with school and extra-mural activity. This tension is not necessarily conflictual, but is indicative of a confusion that could undermine the successful fulfilment of their stated objectives. Their extra-mural interests and scholastic strength (or lack thereof) could manifest themselves in different possibilities of career choice. Diana’s ballroom dancing and her interest in its professional status could take precedence over a career as a physiotherapist. Jay’s extra-mural activity is a part-time job as a physical instructor in a local gym, but he expresses a desire to pursue his artistic talent in a career of clothes designing.

There does exist an overlap in their extra-mural interests and their career choices – a preoccupation with physical appearance. Herein lies the anomaly on which their “maturity” is based: a tension between adult self-dependence and pubescent egocentrism. All three of these research participants emphasise the significance of physical appearance. Their self esteem is firmly linked to

remaining thin and developing a good physique. This preoccupation is not only reflective of a desire or need inculcated by their interests and career choices, but is rooted in the psychological and social concerns of their lives.

Lala's consciousness of her physical attributes is symptomatic of her relationship with her overweight sister. Her sister's jealousy is further compounded by Lala's academic success and her close relationship with a very successful, academic brother. Diana's desire to be thin and to possess a body of which to be proud, is not only necessary for her dancing, but is used as an instrument of sexual power in relation to her interaction with members of the opposite sex. Her dietary preoccupation is obsessive and manifests itself in bulimia, which is an extension of a history of depression since the traumatic ordeal of her father's death, and subsequent sexual abuse.

Jay's preoccupation with physical perfection is not only reflective of his job and interests, but is an extension of his insecurities (which he recognises):

One of my weaknesses is that I like people to like me.

He likes to help others, but in turn needs them to affirm him. He works very hard at getting people to like him and then is genuinely surprised when they do.

Egocentrism is often perceived as a characteristic of immaturity, but in the case of these goal-directed, self-sufficient individuals it tends to be the very characteristic, which coalesces their individuality into "singleness". Their egocentrism is the social cocoon, which others need to breach. What emerges in the qualitative nature of their egocentrism is that, while they react to the initiated overtures of others (and development of self is obviously related to these contextual interactions over an extended period of time) their perception of self is one of "immediate self-living" and is unrelated to others.

There appears to be two centrifugal forces, which work to compound their loner status:

- *Egocentrism* is the internal core on inward-looking forces of vanity, which serves to contain.
- The outer force is the aura of *self-dependence*, which is projected to others and serves to protect the inner core.

The nature of this projection is dependent on the initiation of interaction by others and the quality of these interactions. Whatever the initial interaction and the type of response it engenders, it serves to inculcate the *isolation* of these three because of the dynamics involved in the relationship between their egocentrism and self-dependence.

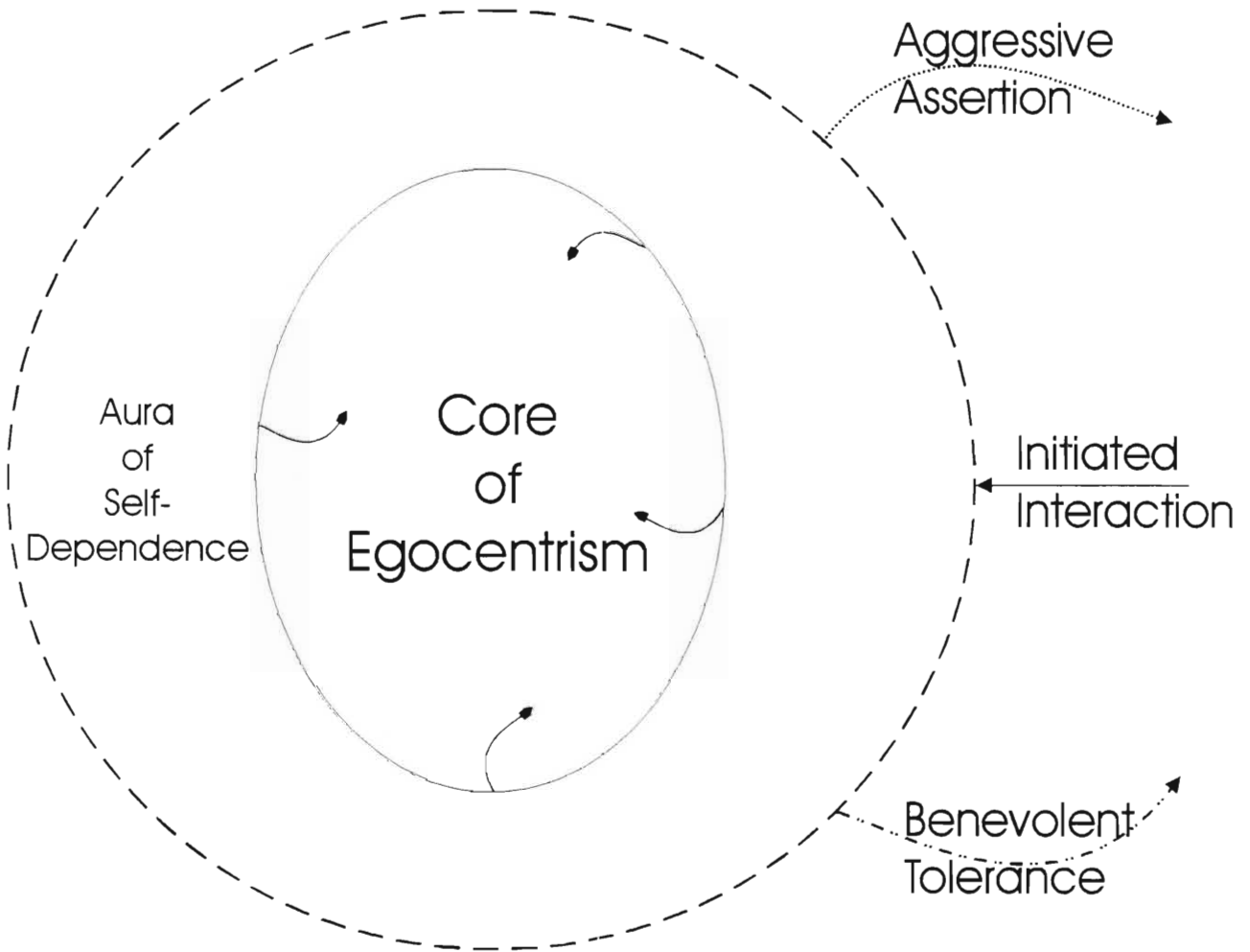
This dynamic interaction can best be exemplified in the diagrammatic representation depicted on the next page (p. 143).

### Religion

Synonymous with independence and little social interaction is an introversion, which gives rise to introspection on issues that are generally accepted according to social norms. Religion is one such area. All three of the “loners” reject the socially accepted norm of Christianity as sacrosanct and question it in an intensely controversial way. Their reflective intensity causes them to pursue religion as a contentious issue and they refuse to accept irrevocably what Christian society claims to be the “truth”. This questioning of religious “truths” is common to all of them. The catalyst of these questions is rooted in the sibling and family influences mentioned earlier.

For the two Black participants, Jay and Lala, the confusion about religion is largely related to the macrocosmic influences, to which their cultures have been exposed in the turmoil of colonial missionary influences and the revolutionary dismantling of an oppressive regime. The macrocosmic influences are compounded by the microcosmic influences within the family. Lala’s family has been able to take advantage of the new-found freedom in the post-Apartheid era, as a family of professionals, who have entered the world of Western academia,

# The Dynamics of Loner-Status



= Reactions from Loners

No matter what type of reaction, isolation is the result.

and as such, now question Faith per se in their discovery of Dalton's theory of evolution. Lala's mother is still steadfast in her Christianity, but is constantly questioned by her children, especially her older son, who declares himself an atheist.

Jay's confusion arises from his mother's staunch Christian stance and her visits to the Sangoma for healing powders and to be at one with her ancestors. He is sceptical about the merging of two distinctly different culture-based religious beliefs. Subsequently, he has always questioned Christianity, but has only since the death of his father (six months ago), become anxious to understand it and to grapple with its core of love and predestination. He has been influenced by a cousin, who has come to live with them and who takes him to a Christian Youth Group.

Diana's religious experiences are founded on extremities and are influenced by two diverse, conflicting quarters, both of which she respects. Religion is a traumatic experience for her and tends to compound the instability of her life and her personal turmoil. Her uncle and aunt are Jehovah's Witnesses, while her brother encourages her to play Dungeons and Dragons with a group of friends. She emerges confused, as she attempts to find justification for both points of view because of her affiliation to both sets of people.

What emerges from the interpretation of the comments of all three is that religion for them is a contentious issue to be questioned and not to be accepted as an answer to whom they are as people – that answer lies *within you*. Religion is therefore not perceived as an integral part of who they are as people, but a theory to be objectively examined. It is not perceived as a pervasive influence, but an entity from which one can stand aloof. They tend to personify religion in terms of the people they know and as such choose not to become those people e.g. Lala's brother is the atheist; Dianan's brother is a Satanist (she questions this); Diana's uncle is a Jehovah's Witness; Lala's mother is a Christian; Jay's mother is Christian and worships ancestors. Herein lies their continual questioning; they are not on a quest to choose to be socio-religiously stereotyped.



## Planetary Differences

### Socio-economic cultural concerns

While all three of the “loners” come from very different socio-economic cultural backgrounds, the significance of this background relates to how it will affect their participation within the wider cultural milieu of post-Apartheid society. They all demonstrate an awareness of this fact. Economic necessity plays an important role in Jay’s preoccupation with his part-time job at the local gym, as well as the realisation that such experience for a Black boy will open many doors previously closed. He is aware that the specific clientele could support his aspirations in the field of clothes design.

Diana also has to find part-time work as an economic necessity. Unlike Jay, she perceives this as a hardship rather than an opportunity, and is aware that as a White girl she may not go to University if she is unable to afford it. Her dancing is perceived as another option to physiotherapy. Lala neither has to work nor has any concerns about personal financial responsibility for the fulfillment of her aspirations, for she is supported by her family. This aids her to move into her future with confidence. This confidence allows her as a Black girl to voice opinions that isolate her from those still struggling to emerge from a race-dominated society, in which self was synonymous with race. (This will be explored in the latter half of the chapter.)

These concerns explain why Jay and Diana reject commitment in relationships, as they have had economic responsibility thrust upon them and are therefore loath to take on responsibility for somebody else. This serves to intensify their isolation.

### Personality

While each of these “loners” is an intense person, their intensity is qualitatively different and is manifested in significantly different personality traits. Lala’s intensity is focussed on a will to succeed as a Black girl within a “brave, new

world” and is determined to escape from the entrapment of race, boldly declaring her independence in opinions and actions. This declaration of independence lacks aggressive insolence because she accepts success as an achievable goal within the macrocosmic context of a democratic South Africa and the microcosm of a supportive family.

In contrast, Diana’s assertion of independence is characterised by an aggressive anger in the face of adversity. Her intensity converts itself into a determination to force her motivation and will onto others. This is partly due to the frustration and anger, which she experiences in her inability to control her home situation and is also a way to cope with the rejection of her peers; a rejection she cannot understand.

Jay’s intensity is founded on a tension between two urges: an anger, which he needs to channel into harmless aggression (he believes rugby helps him in this area) and his romantic nature, which admires gentleness, especially in men. Both girls and boys recognise these traits in Jay and respond accordingly. Hence the boys see him as a physically powerful rugby player, whom they admire, while the girls react to his gentleness. These traits are aracial. (I found it fascinating during participant observation to note that race and gender were not exclusive issues when his peers related to Jay).

This tension is a source of confusion for Jay and although he wants all to like him he is still surprised when they affirm him (his election as class captain) and he sees this trait as a weakness. This is why, although he is popular with his peers, he only *tolerates* their overtures to him. These concerns for him are voiced in his opinions on gender. He believes that men should have the right to be gentle and romantic, while communicating with women on an equal basis. He therefore has a problem with the reason why he is accepted by the boys in his class and prefers interacting with White girls because they are less submissive in their social roles in a patriarchal society. He also admires Lala for the way she speaks her mind.

## Loners and Groups – Ethnicity in a changing society

*NB* Jay and Lala have made significant statements as the new generation of aspiring Black youngsters in a post-Apartheid society. Therefore, when one explores their loner-status within the context of the school, one cannot do so without demonstrating an awareness of the dimension of ethnicity. The focus of this research problem does not allow for an ethnic diversification, but it does become appropriate when one considers that gender plays a significant role in the comments of the Black girls interviewed.

This “digression” also becomes appropriate in the light of observations made of interactions between boys and girls within the classroom situation, which when related ethnically, were palpably different. These observations were triangulated in interviews with nine Black girls, who were representative of the fulcrum around which the two major Black girl groups in Grade 10 revolved.

During my four months of participant observation, it was observed that interaction between different sexes of the same and different race groups, while possessing similar attributes, was qualitatively different. There was considerable good-natured teasing between the genders of both races, but when the interaction became abusive and manipulative, the “oppressed Black women of Africa” emerged.<sup>62</sup> Often aggression of Black boys on Black girls was physical, while the White boys tended to verbally abuse White girls, particularly those whom they believed to be of dubious reputation. Subsequently, these comments were often of a sexual nature. (I observed a particularly nasty incident during a Biology lesson, which involved abuse on Diana.)

Girls of both races were manipulated into supplying the boys with work to copy. This occurred more often in the Black boys’ case and often the Black girls would

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<sup>62</sup> Fuller (in Hammersley and Woods, 1984), emphasises the gender rather than the race when discussing the subordination of Black girls in a London comprehensive school and states: “There are no *a priori* reasons for assuming a greater importance for either sex or race in this respect, and no certain guidelines between the two.”

capitulate angrily. They would then be assertive in other ways, often mocking the Black boys when they were on public display in oral work and could not immediately retaliate. While generally academically stronger and more motivated than the Black boys, the Black girls never entered into open competition with the boys and were sensitive to the preservation of the male ego (even while asserting equality and the will to fight against the oppression of the Black women!).

The interaction between the Black boys and the White girls in the classroom situation was fascinating. It was characterised by natural co-operation in the solution of an academic problem, sharing of stationery and gentle ribbing, while for the White boys, the Black girls do not exist. They are non-people! They do not display any emotion towards each other: neither rejection nor acceptance. On asking Black girls in Grade 10 to supply me with the names of a few of the White boys in their class, they could not do so and vice versa.

**Lungile:** In *this* school you can't even think of going out with a White boy.

**Zama:** I haven't had a conversation with a White boy this year.

**Agnes:** I get on well with the Black boys, but I don't speak to the White boys. Maybe it's because of Apartheid – it's still going on.

**Balele:** I find I used to get along in Primary school with some of the White boys, like Warren, but now it's not so close. But when we see each other, we say hello. My mother says, because when you're younger you don't see race, but now ...

### Profiles of the Two Black Girls Groups in Relation to Lala and Jay

From the sociometric diagrams (see p. 151 and p.154) I was able to isolate two Black girls' groups, diametrically opposed to one another. This opposition was made manifest in the names of people they liked least (Question 5 in the sociometric questions in Appendix 1 and represented on p.151 and p.154), which

were often members of the opposing group. They perceive themselves in relation to a contrast with the other group.<sup>63</sup>

**Balele:** The other group takes life so seriously. We're fun-loving.

**Ekuseni:** They're not my type – all quiet. For me they're just wrong –  
Not open. You can't trust them.

**Thandi:** We don't like hanging around at the tuckshop – it's too noisy!  
(This is where Balele and Ekuseni sit!)

### "What a beautiful noise"

The members of the smaller group, led by Balele, characterise themselves by their noisy, fun-filled approach. Talking is a manifestation of honesty and openness. In contrast, those who are not loud are not to be trusted. Their aloofness is symptomatic of underhandedness. This Group's cue is signified by the type of clothes they wear. This uniqueness is gender-related, as they pride themselves in their tomboy – look, which unifies them.

**Balele:** We dress in our own way – like tomboyish and we belong together.

**Ekuseni:** We dress like boys. Tsiki is on the edge (of the group) because of the way she dresses – more like frilly.

*Disciplined group* This group is exclusive and does not encourage movement in and out of the membership. To join is to commit to the group. (Maybe that is why they were far more concerned with and antagonistic towards the other group.) All feel that while they do make individual choices within the group situation, the group ethos is so strongly reflective of their individual beliefs and attitudes that group and individual choice generally correlate.

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<sup>63</sup> Rosenberg and Simmons (in Hammersley and Woods, 1984) found that Black girls saw themselves as a separate group by comparing and contrasting themselves with other Blacks.

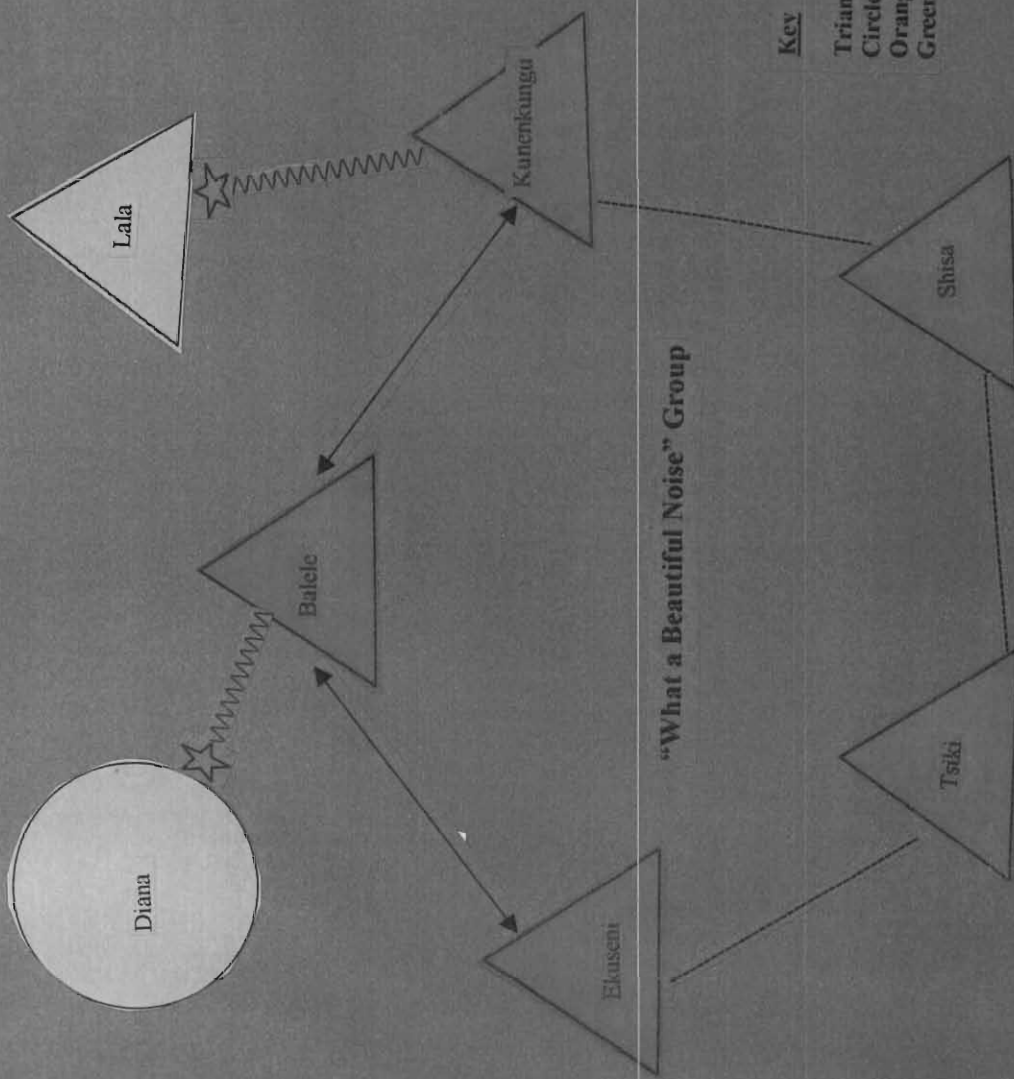
**Balele:** If I think its not part of me, I won't go along with the group's decisions, but I've chosen a group that is like me – like part of me.

**Photograph of “What a beautiful noise”**

**Context:** The end of the second term when pupils from different classes were allowed to visit their friends. The atmosphere is one of relaxed interaction.

**Comment:** The ready smiles are reflective of the group's joviality, while the physical closeness is testimony to the generic nature of the group. Intimacy is signified in the eye and finger contact of Ekuseni and Shisa, which incorporates rather than excludes, the other two.





**"What a Beautiful Noise" Group**

## VI “Silence is Golden”

This group has a much larger composition (at times reaching 9 girls) and the composition is far more flexible than the other group. What tends to link them is the consensus that they are a group composed of individuals who don't like talking and therefore regard themselves as quiet and sedate.

**Lungile:** I don't like talking very much. We're different from the other group.

They talk very much. They like chaos and stuff. We just sit, you know, and we don't talk very much.

Their perception is that idle talk leads to hurtful comments about others and they are vociferous in their protestations that they do not gossip about others. Yet as a group, they do not strike one as happy or content, for they are strongly individualistic and there is a wide diversity of beliefs and attitudes. Most of them profess to being Christians, but are confused by the judgemental, fundamentalist approach of most of their mother's churches and are consumed by guilt of sin; one claims to have visions and portents in which “the good fight” with the devil is central.

**Swezi:** I want to do what's right for me. I just want to believe in myself and not do what others do. I want to do what's right – not follow my friends all the time because if they do something bad and I'm there. If I think it's bad I tell them and if they don't agree with me, I just leave them. I'm a Christian.

**Zama:** We're all strong individuals. Nobody controls the group. I won't go along with the group's decision that goes against my decision.



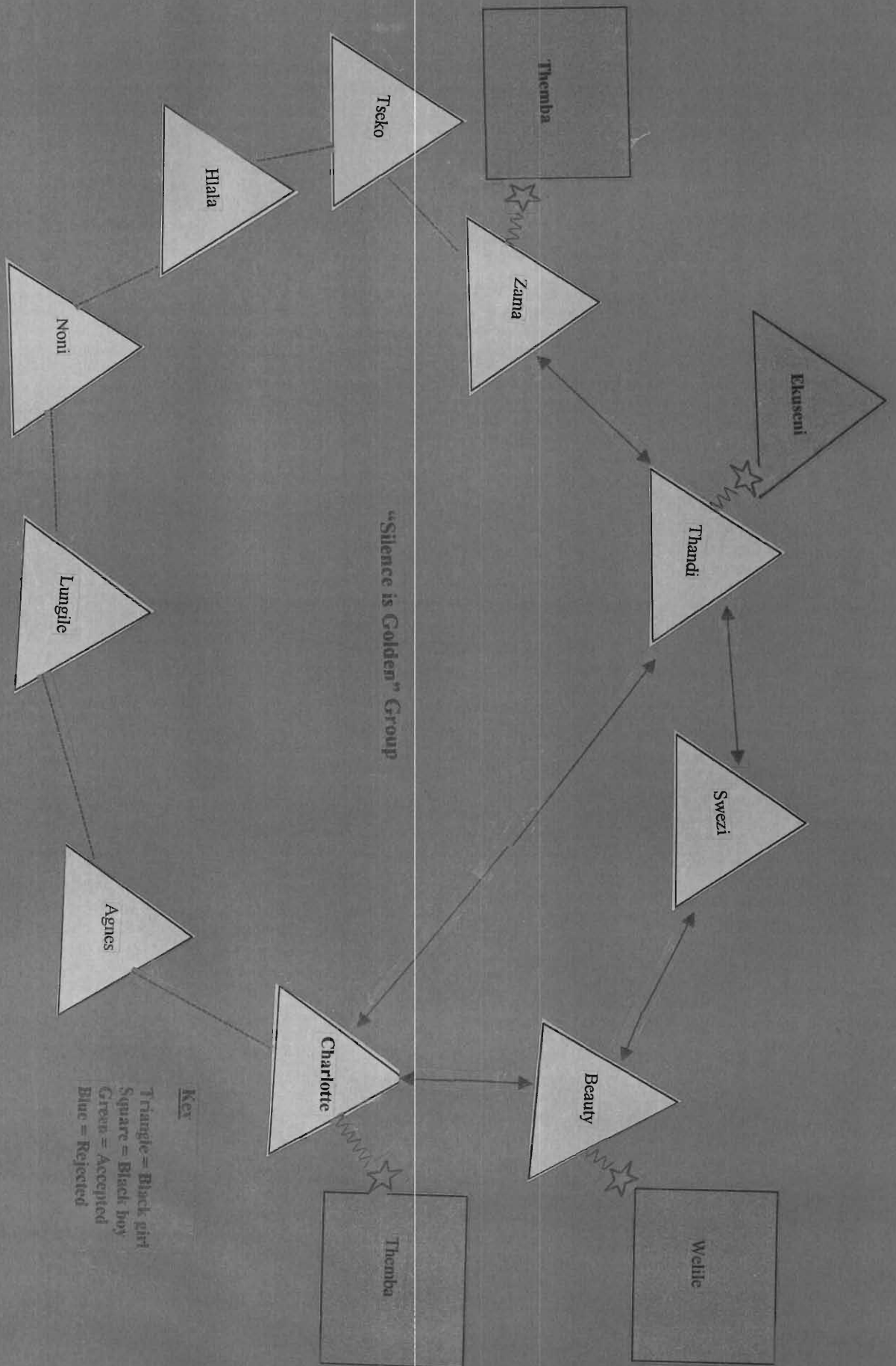
## Photograph of “Silence is Golden”

Context: An English lesson, in which informal group work was being done.



### Comment:

While the group is comfortable with one another, the circle is not conclusive, as each maintains her own space, and by implication, her own ideas. While it appears that Thandi is the leader (centre), the dynamics changed often and the spokesperson, ultimately, was Lungile ( front right). It is interesting to note the group in the background – two of the “Silence is Golden” group had to join two of the “What a Beautiful Noise” group - the grouping speaks for itself. Only two are interacting, while Balele (back left obscured) is listening politely. Swezi (right front) has removed herself and listens aloof from the sidelines.



## The Groups' Views on Lala and Jay

Within both groups there is an ambivalence in their attitude towards Lala; some members admire her, while others do not like her for various reasons. Those who admire her, do so within the complex context of race and its significance within the South African scenario. For so long Black South Africans have, through necessity, united in the face of oppression and perceived freedom as a political and social status. Individual freedom is a new experience, which some are experiencing sooner than others – such is the perception of Lala, that those who admire her, have. The following are two comments about Lala from girls from the two different groups:

**Lungile:** She minds her own problems. She's always in the library. She doesn't interfere with anyone. I'd like to lead a life like that, especially in this school. Just be your own person.

**Balele:** Lala is totally different. She gets along with both colours. Ja I like her. She sits near me in Maths, but she doesn't talk to the others, only me. Race is not a big issue with me – it's about people you talk to and get along with.

This admiration for Lala is an acknowledgement that in a democratised South Africa founded on basic human rights, there exists the opportunity for Black girls to become free as individuals; an opportunity, which Lala has managed to utilise.<sup>64</sup> There is the dawning realisation that political freedom is not to be naively equated with personal freedom.

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<sup>64</sup> Ethnocentrism in friendship choices is reported by Durojaiye (in Hammersley and Woods, 1984) and Bhatnagar (in Hammersley and Woods, 1984), and Fuller (in Hammersley and Woods, 1984) believes that sex and race in this choice emphasises how important these aspects are to the girls' identity. *Lala does not demonstrate such a need in the creation of self – a point which could explain her loner-status.*

In each of the groups, there are girls who dislike Lala. Ekuseni named her as the girl she liked least in Grade 10 (Sociometric question number 5, Appendix 1 and p.151), while Thandi described her thus:

She's clever. I don't like her. She believes she's up because she's clever.

Without exception, all the girls in both groups expressed unequivocal admiration and liking for Jay because they perceive him as possessing the courage to be his own person.

Zama: I like Jay because he doesn't care what people think of him.

There is the suggestion here that the Black girls demonstrate greater acceptance of, and sympathy with, Jay's striving for personal freedom because he is a boy, while some perceive Lala as an upstart.

WB

#### Ethnicity – language and acceptance\rejection

Both Lala and Jay are library monitors and use this area as their sanctuary. The nature of this choice allows others to perceive them as quiet and studious, but Jay's limited academic achievement is not a cause for jealousy, while Lala's academic achievement, is. This reliance on self and individuality is also seen by the Black boys and girls as synonymous with *language*. Jay and Lala speak much more English than the others because of the nature of their interaction within the library at break time when the Zulu children communicate in their language. Jay is aware that when with the other Black boys he should speak Zulu and is therefore accepted by them, unlike another boy whom Lungile describes:

This boy's always speaking English and the Black boys have a problem with him. I think the Black boys are being very unfair because it's what he wants to do and they shouldn't interfere in his life. I've always wanted

to go to a Private School because you can speak English any time and you can be an individual.

Therefore, it appears that the pressure to conform racially is brought to bear from the same gender source. Lala only experiences jealousy and rejection from members of her own sex and race. Other Black boys also do if they don't possess the same qualities as Jay i.e. his will to be liked, and therefore knowing when to speak Zulu and when English will be considered acceptable by his peers of the same race and gender.

Ethics  
Socio-economic factors are playing a significant role in the perception that race-peer-pressure in group-formation is less of a factor and greater awareness of individual freedom is emerging. This, even the Black groups interviewed at Greenvale have all already experienced from the reactions of Imbali adolescents, who go to school at Sobantu High.

**Thandi:** Other people at Imbali think that I think that I am better than them.

Some get angry. They say, you think that you're high because you go to Greenvale and you speak English.<sup>65</sup> *This should have been edited.*

### Conclusion

This brief analysis reveals that a spectrum of Black adolescents is gradually emerging from the chrysalis of official Apartheid designation of race and the social entrapment of unity against the racial oppression of their race. What many have realised is that the fight for freedom is not yet over, but has merely changed its nature. Political freedom has been achieved, but the fight for personal freedom presents them with even greater challenges.

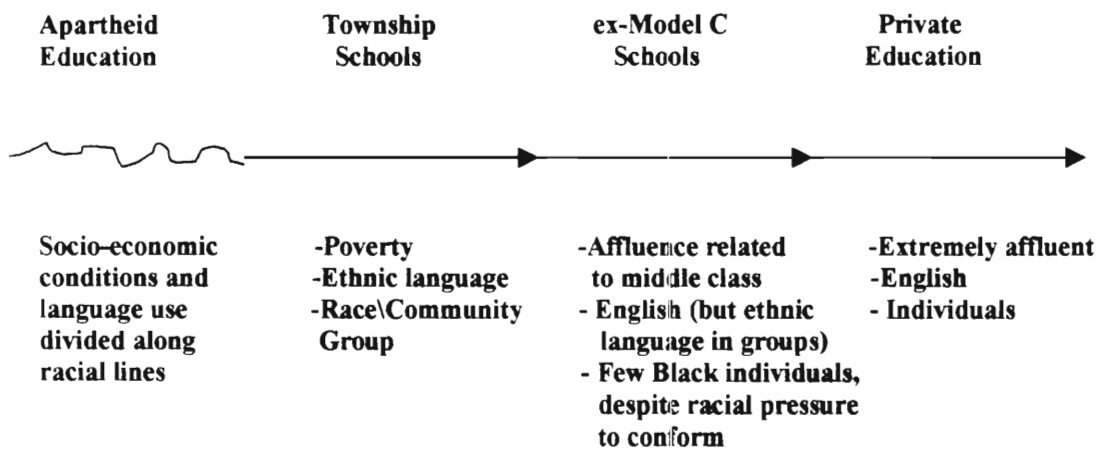
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<sup>65</sup> Whereas the West Indian girls found school to be trivial (Fuller, in Hammersley and Woods, 1984), I found the Black girls at Greenvale extremely proud of their school, convinced that all they did there was worthwhile to their futures.

It is therefore most significant that the loner-status accorded Jay and Lala is not one of alienation and isolation, but tends to accord them affirmation. Yet in the case of Diana, loner-status is alienation and isolation, despite her motivation and sound academic record. Whether this can be attributed to an ethnic perception and definition of “loner-status”, is another research problem; not to be explored in this dissertation.

The striving for personal freedom is strongly related to the fight of women (especially Black women) for equal rights within a patriarchal society. What emerged from the interviews with the Black girls, was a perception that a socio-economic continuum exists within the different strata of education, which relates directly to the development of personal freedom in a South Africa moving from a racially divisive and oppressive system to one of equal rights for all. I feel it can best be explained by the diagram below:

**Socio-economic Continuum in Education Related to Language Use and the Development of Personal Freedom – Black Girls’ Perceptions**



In an Apartheid South Africa, the education system was equated with the subjugation of one race in favour of another, but in post-Apartheid South Africa the complexities of normalising social relationships are becoming apparent. For now the Education system is being correlated with economics, language and group-individual-conflict, especially for the races previously oppressed. The continuum generally relates to the assumptions of Euro-centric and Afro-centric characteristics, which are reflective of the concerns of democracy and socialism. The South African adolescent (particularly, the new Black middle class adolescent) now has to deal with choices based on the perceptions he/she has on the continuum as represented on the previous page (p.158).

Group membership does not necessarily have to be a prerequisite, and group membership of the same race is no longer linked to the “struggle for freedom”. This struggle has become a more personal issue. Choices now exist, which open up new possibilities for individual freedom, which can be admired for its strength of purpose and responsibility for self, as exemplified in the characters of Jay and Lala.

## Chapter 8

### Conclusions and Recommendations

#### Introduction

The nature of the research approach and the nature of the research study have demanded an integrative approach throughout this dissertation and it is no different with the conclusion and recommendations. It therefore developed naturally that in this final chapter the *researcher-participant relationship* be a fulcrum around which the dynamics of process develop and from which the interpretations as product emerge. To speak of “product” is to categorise and place dangerous definitions on fluid interpretations, demanding of sensitive and aware understanding. I therefore caution the reader not to assume that this final chapter neatly compartmentalises the analysis of data. As already explained in Chapter 3 on “Conceptualisation” and “Research Methods”, analysis of data was an ongoing process, constantly re-visited throughout the research process.

This chapter will therefore review not only the data, which emerged as the *voices of adolescents*, but also the researcher’s *positionality*<sup>66</sup> in relation to these data. Hence, as in the initial stages of access and informed choices (Mouton,1996), so must *reflexivity* be a part of the conclusions and recommendations of the researcher. Because one’s “biography, politics and relationships become part of the fabric of the field” (Bell, in Wolf, 1996:41), this must be confronted and considered in a conscious manner, so that honesty remains central to the process. According to Karim (in Wolf, 1996), reflexivity is not only related to the researcher, but is of two kinds and involves an awareness of “self” as both subject and object and the “other” as the observer and the observed.

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<sup>66</sup> Enslin (in Wolf, 1996) encourages Feminist researchers to pursue the politics of positionality in their texts. Gordon (in Wolf, 1996) relates this to interpersonal, local and global levels. Caplan (in Wolf, 1996) suggests researchers ask themselves “who are we for them?” and “who are they for us?”



Therefore central to an interpretation and understanding of the research data is the redress of the power relations between the researcher and the researched – hence my allusion to this relationship as the fulcrum of this chapter. Accompanying the different aspects of this relationship is the personal experiences of both parties in the research process, making a fusion of research methodology, data collection and personal interpretation a natural *welt* emergent from the weaving of triangulated strands.

All of these concerns need to be seen within *context*. It is only after contextualisation has been perceived as integral to the analysis, interpretation and understanding of the individuals and their interactions that findings can be regarded as valid. Conscious assessment and re-assessment of the research process and its findings must have honesty as its pivot, if expose is to be regarded as validated meaning that can justify the research as worthwhile.

### The Significance of Context

The environment of the research study proved to be a boon because of its multi-faceted dynamics. It contained all the elements necessary for a study on gender within the South African context – comprehensive education, co-education, dual-medium instruction and multi-culturalism. It is essential to emphasise that while the macrocosmic context presented one with a wealth of research opportunities, it was the *adolescent individual and his/her interactions*, which were the emphases of the research process. As such, the physical dimensions within which the research was conducted had to be carefully assessed, so that through the *awareness* inculcated by a feminist ethnographic stance (Wolf, 1996), one (as researcher) could grow to understand that context is *multi-dimensional*. i.e. it does not merely imply a physical setting, but is essentially the *spatial and temporal dimensions of interaction*.

This is why I balked at studying the South African adolescent as class or culture-related entities. These designations become reified and certain characteristics are attributed to *them*, rather than to the individuals, whose interactions being

situation-dependant, give rise to a myriad of characteristics, each creatively unique and context-specific.<sup>67</sup>

### *The classroom as a physical dimension*

Many researchers of pupils in schools focus on the physical, static and artificial dimension of classroom division. These venues are representative of administrative control over the pupils and can not be automatically accepted by a researcher wishing to study natural friendship *choices* of pupils. Pupil social interaction is often not reliant on the physical context of classroom division at all. Possibly in the Primary phases of education this may be a more viable and credible research context,<sup>68</sup> but I found this not to be the case at all in the adolescent friendship groups I studied. In fact, this was one of the incorrect assumptions I had made and which emerged in the initial research methods.

What emerged from the analysis of data for the sociometric diagrams was that classroom divisions would not yield automatic friendship choices. This made me re-assess the approach I had assumed would work for participant observation. I had only focussed on the variable of gender, thereby making assumptions about the physical context of social interaction, which had emerged as incorrect. Hence triangulation of participant observation and the interview situation became essential to isolate friendship groups as realistically as possible, and then develop an understanding of the *nature* of these groupings and the *reasons* for individual *choices*.

### *The learning environment as macrocosm*

Just as the classroom as environment can prove to be deceptive in the collection of data on social relations, so too should the researcher demonstrate a similar

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<sup>67</sup> Cohen and Manion (1989) make reference to indexicality within ethnographic research, whereby actions and statements are related to the contexts producing them, but not necessarily stated explicitly. Hence the significance of context-specific awareness, particularly in the use of the photograph.

<sup>68</sup> King (1979) , *All Things Bright and Beautiful?* Chichester, John Wiley

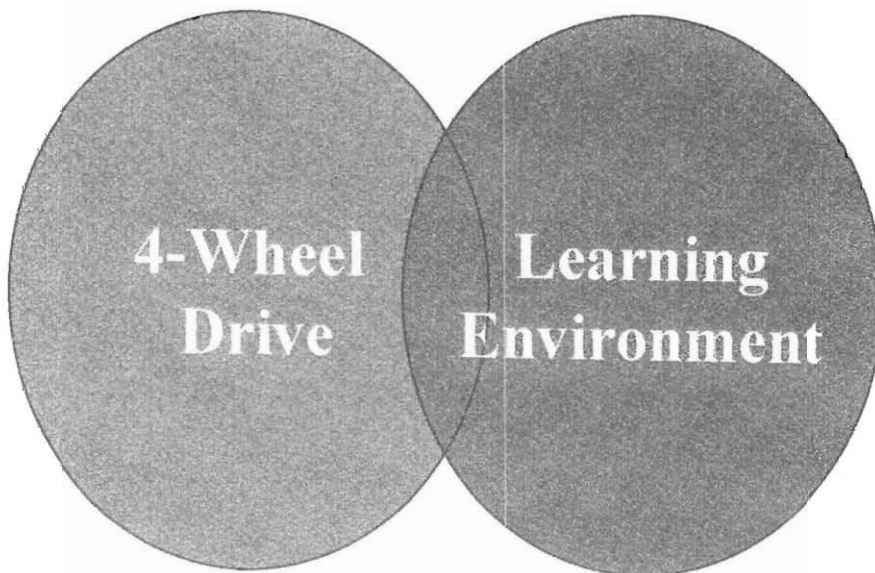
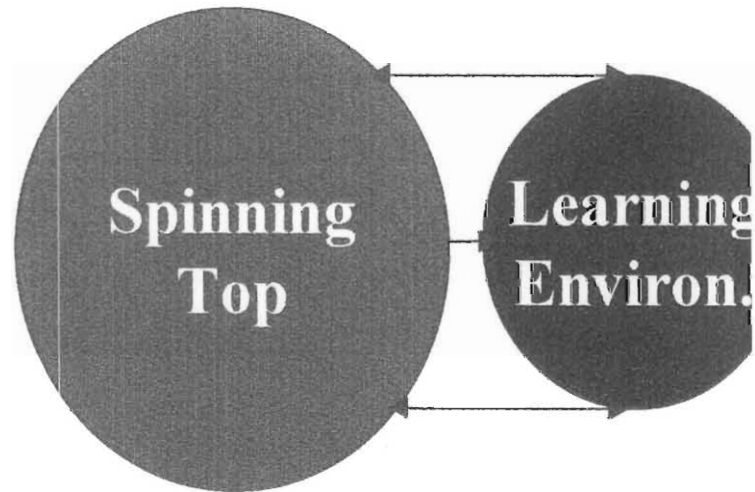
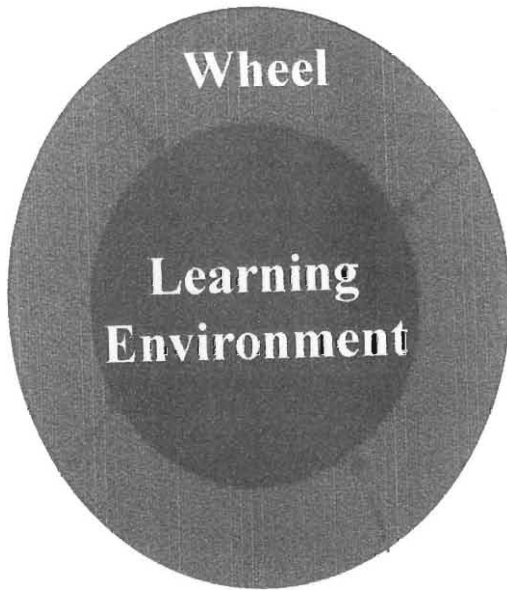
awareness of the influence of the macrocosmic setting of the wider learning environment. I found that in only the “Wheel” Group of the three White groups studied, was the learning environment of significance in the formation of their group and in the development of the nature of the relationships. While the learning environment proved to be decisive in the formation of the Black girls’ groups, the *nature* of their relationships was significantly different to those of the White girls in the “Wheel” Group.

The latter’s relationships were reliant on the competitive spirit of the academia characteristic of the learning environment and as such, proved to result in a far more cohesive unit. The Black girls’ groupings indicated a preoccupation with personality and were symptomatic of racial groupings based on language spoken during break time (Zulu). There was little to indicate that their groups were not only exclusive to the learning environment scenario and were a form of racial convenience (an Apartheid-psyche-hangover). *Hence the learning environment as context should not be regarded as unproblematic and static.*

It subsequently proved vital to understand its context in relation to the groups, before one could attempt to interpret and understand individuals’ interactions. To reiterate: the learning environment for the “Wheel” Group was vital to the *nature and development* of the group and formed the basis of interaction and development of relationships beyond its boundary, while the Black girls’ groups used the learning environment as the exclusive context within which to interact. This limited the development of the nature of the interactions between individuals and there existed the suggestion that, while broad similarities (silence versus noise) and interests (Christianity) kept the groups together, there was little personal interaction on an individual level.

The following diagrams on p.164 represent the significance of the learning environment in the development of the friendship groupings in the three White Groups studied.

**Diagrams Depicting the Relationship between the Learning Environment and the Groups**



**“Wheel” Group**  
*Friendship is strongly  
 reliant on learning  
 environment. It serves  
 as basis and as affirmation.*

**“4 Wheel Drive” Group**  
*The friendship link is  
 reinforced by the  
 learning environment,  
 but is not essential.*

**“Spinning Top” Group**  
*Learning environment  
 serves as physical meeting  
 place, but is rejected per se.  
 Irrelevant to group unity -  
 extra-learning environment  
 activities important.*

Just how significant this relationship is to the learning environment, becomes apparent when one notices how reflective it is of other individual values, beliefs and group activities.

### *The temporal aspect of the learning environment*

These values and beliefs are made manifest in the pupils' attributions, aspirations and subsequent career choices they wish to pursue. Both the single-sex groups, the "Wheel" and the "4-Wheel Drive", are strongly focused on career-orientation. Their subject choice at school is directly linked to their aspirations in tertiary education and career choice. *Hence for them the present is only important in terms of their futures.* The girls in the "Wheel" are far more competitive amongst each other, far more so than the boys of the "4-Wheel drive" group, who admit to an inability to complete a task in hand due to boredom.<sup>69</sup> The girls, on the other hand, are known for their consistent motivation and work ethic. (Pippa attests to this as one of her reasons for choosing to belong to this group.)

This motivation and career orientation is singularly lacking in the "Spinning Top" group. *For them the present is far more important than the future.* It is ironic that while the setting of goals and the responsibility for one's actions and their consequences are regarded as signs of maturity, the group which indulges in adult-activity displays predominantly immature behaviour in terms of this definition. They reject culpability and refuse to acknowledge what society would regard as the normal channels to pursue if one wishes to achieve career success.

They also refuse to acknowledge that there could exist a causal link between academic results and career success, often scorning those who work, so that they can achieve success because this leads to "snobbishness and there is nothing worse than having too much money and being snobbish" (Annabel). This type of

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<sup>69</sup>Bamson (in Hammersley and Woods, 1984) believes that pupils who find work irrelevant to their goals become restless and complain of boredom. I found this explanation simplistic in relation to my observations on the "4 - Wheel Drive" group.

comment should be seen as an attempt *to rationalise* their lack of success in the eyes of the school and (possibly?) within society later on. It could also be perceived as a *preparation for failure*, with which this group is all too familiar already.

### Socialisation into Life Choices – the Learning Environment and Academic Achievement

How the Groups relate to the learning environment plays a significant role in how they are socialised into their choices for Life. It became apparent that the learning environment was central to the “Wheel’s” preparation for their futures. But while they were able to perceive gender inequality within this context and actively work to negate its influence, they do not perceive this as a “problem” with which they will be faced once they have moved beyond the confines of the learning environment.

There appears to be a strong correlation between the values and beliefs of the “Wheel” and those reflective of the learning environment, which ultimately suggests academic success and fulfilment of career options. While the Table on p.168 reflects comparative average percentages between groups, it is also significant to notice how *similar the results are of the individuals within the groups*. The girls in the “Wheel” are all in the Top 10 of the grade. This suggests a number of possibilities of group formation, but does demonstrate clearly the importance of the role of the learning environment, especially in groups where academic success appears to be a prerequisite. Hence in the “Wheel” group, Pippa acknowledges her academic limitations in relation to the others and her need of the group to “keep in touch”.

In the “4-Wheel Drive” Group the learning environment is less important in their life choices, whereas the family as institution plays a more significant role. In this case, the perpetuation of paternal role predominates, even though their inclination is towards a more feminine sensitivity and they claim that the communicative relationship they have with their mothers is a significant influence in their lives. Their results also reflect similarities, but of those who

are not quite up to the high academic standard, one is the other twin and Alan is on the fringe of the group.

The life choices of the members of the “Spinning Top” group are not priorities because of their temporal focus on *present hedonistic activities* and their lack of academic success and *present failure*, which does not encourage a positive belief of future success. Therefore, those who do look to the future, do so unrealistically and in a strongly group-related way. Hence Annabel dreams wistfully of surfing and Pamela speaks of helping addictive persons, and the setting up of a rural home with her boyfriend.

This group rejects the learning environment per se. This rejection could either be symptomatic of poor academic results or vice versa. The fact that at least three of the group are achieving far below the percentages they were used to getting prior to this year, suggests that there are other factors, other than lack of academic ability, which result in the individual’s poor results. Hence the rejection of the learning environment can not be simply equated to the inability to achieve and a sense of failure. (Some of the weakest pupils, who have experienced failure throughout their school careers, *do* belong to this group.)

The good behaviour of the individuals in this group and the teachers’ positive attitude towards the majority of the group members, demonstrates that this group’s relationship to the learning environment cannot simply be explained as aggressive rejection.

What is apparent, is the closer the Group is to the learning environment, the better the academic achievement of the group members. Possibly an acceptance of its values and beliefs and intimate knowledge of a system will give those individuals greater advantage over others. Motivation and work ethic coupled with a competitive spirit (fed by an awareness of gender inequality) are also factors to be considered. As all these pupils come from similar class structures, it

is simplistic to suggest that individual achievement be attributed to a “class – thing”.<sup>70</sup>

**Comparative Table of Aggregates within Groups and between Groups and Loners**

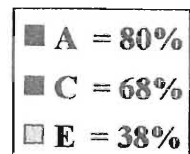
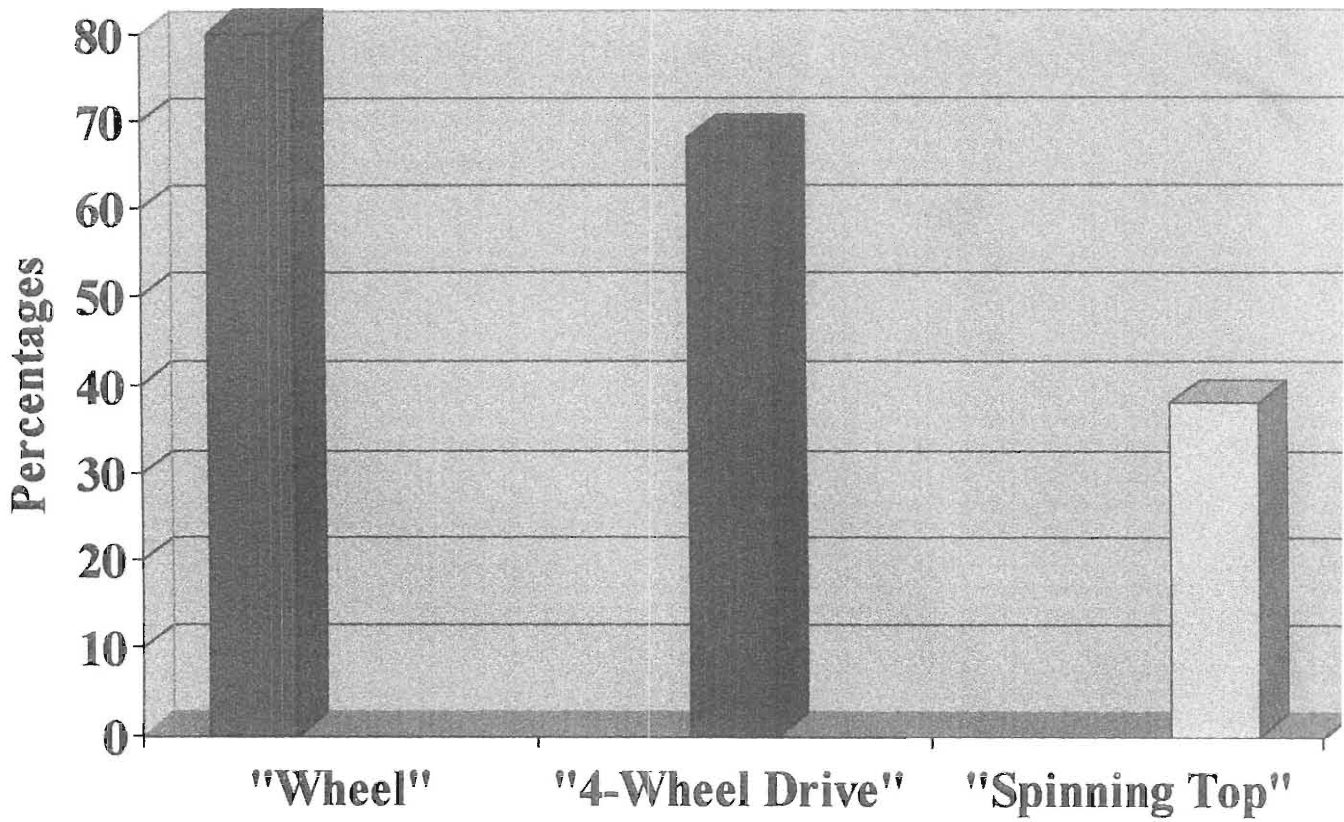
Aggregate	Wheel	4-Wheel Drive	Spinning Top	Planets
86	Leigh			
84	Mary			
79	Tamryn			
78	Greer			
76		Warren		
76		Stuart		
76				Lala
73	Pippa			
72		John		
65	Bridget *			
64		Allan *		
54				Diana
51		Robert		
47			Annabel	
46			Pamela	
40			Chanelle	
37				Jay
36			Lucia	
33			Michael	
23			Keith	

\* = Periphery Members

<sup>70</sup> Bernstein’s (in Gould, 1965) theory that middle class pupils achieve better because they are able to understand and apply successfully the “codes” of the system, does not apply in this case. See also Bourdieu’s (in Young, 1971) “cultural capital”.



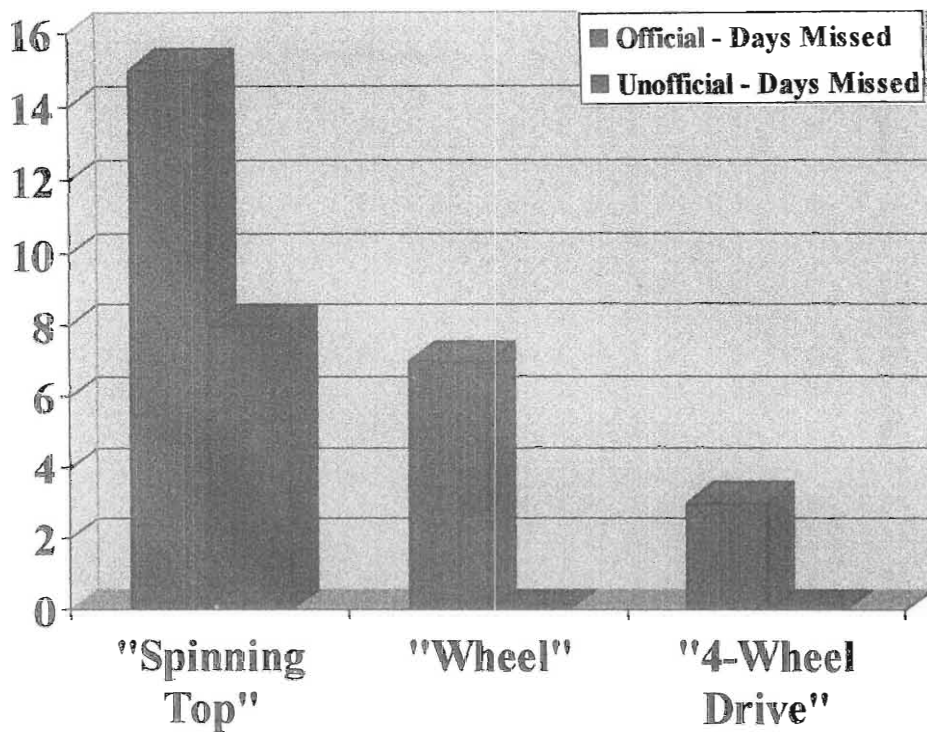
Comparative Graph on the Averages of Academic Results between Groups



## Absenteeism

Obviously an acceptance and rejection of the learning environment will be reflected in the official records of absenteeism acquired from the school, but what is more telling is the unofficial absenteeism, which the pupils estimated in hours during intimate revelations in the interview situation. What becomes quite startling is that the "Spinning Top" members spend very little time in the classroom, which could explain their extremely poor academic results. There is a correlation between academic failure and attendance at school. (If one relates the graph below with the Table on p.168 this becomes apparent. However, if one compares the attendance and results of the "Wheel" with the "4-Wheel Drive" one becomes aware that the correlation cannot be regarded as perfect.)

### Comparative Graph on the Averages of Absenteeism between Groups – both Official and Unofficial for Two Terms



There is concern over the work ethic within South African schools and therefore attendance should be regarded as a priority by all those affected by academic failure (the individual, community and society as a whole). When it is so easy to highlight the problem and isolate erring individuals by means of statistics, certain programmes should be put into place to confront and improve the situation. Counselling of the errant individuals would result in the exposure of reasons and individual problems could be dealt with. Dealing with the reasons for absenteeism takes little time to *listen to the very real problems of the adolescents.*

With the preoccupation with Whole School Development<sup>71</sup> in South Africa, absenteeism would be an apt place to start, and parents and the community should be encouraged to take a pro-active stance on pupils not attending school. Within the South African scenario, one should be aware that often parents are not present or communities are too geographically distant to form a cohesive unit. It is noticeable from the findings, that both Black and White children come from single parent homes, yet each cope differently with his/her situation.

Therefore, a proactive stance on absenteeism should not be a punitive response to the problem and emerge as a management decision based on scholastic non-achievement, but should evolve from a collaborative venture of pupils' aspirations and career orientation, familial expectations and the school's perceptions. Often the objectives of all three are conflictual. Open co-operation could result in negotiated objectives, which would focus as central the needs and interests of the adolescents, whose futures are at stake. Educationalists, parents and communities would finally *hear* what it is that adolescents' believe in, value and aspire to. They may be pleasantly surprised! Educators can capitalise on such interaction to make attendance worthwhile and meaningful.

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<sup>71</sup> Otherwise known as School Improvement. Fullan (1993); Dalin (1993); Vilakazi (1995)

## Contextuality and Meaning – the Learning Environment and Beyond

An awareness and understanding of the multi-dimensionality of context for the educational researcher is essential, especially if the participant observation method of research is to be employed. The physical confines of a research study need to be creatively chosen and consciously assessed if its inherent dynamics are to be honestly interpreted and understood. One should also try to be sensitive to the *interrelationship of contexts* and how they affect each other. The research participants within different contexts relate differently, which ultimately results in the emergence of different perceptions and behavioural manifestations reflective of personal meanings.

This statement can best be exemplified by the anomalies, which emerged on gender issues in the groups studied. These anomalies are perfect examples of how the adolescent interacts and develops aspirations in the personal context of the learning environment and individual success, while expounding conflicting ideas, which are representative of societal roles within a patriarchal society.

Without an awareness of the importance of contextuality, the researcher could blindly generalise findings, thereby undermining the validity of the research and fail to sensitively respond to such anomalies.

Example: The girls in the “Wheel” Group are successful academically and therefore do not perceive their gender as a disadvantage to career success. They are strongly vocal on gender equality and yet are oblivious to the role they play in the perpetuation of sexual stereotyping in their views on the roles of their parents. They do not see as problematic their separation of the microcosmic from the macrocosmic context. Without an awareness of this anomaly, it is questionable whether their aspirations so clearly perceived at 16 (within the learning environment) will ever be actualised later in life (within the broader context of a patriarchal society).

There tends to be a blind acceptance of gender inequality role perpetuation. Hence there arises a mismatch between belief and actualisation, and context tends to play a significant role within this anomaly.

A similar anomaly arose in the “4-Wheel Drive” Group, whose attributions suggested a feminine sensitivity. They openly advocated gender equality, yet through parental role models they are to follow unquestioningly in the footsteps of their fathers. Alternative interpretations also suggested in their reticence to become involved in a relationship, is that it is too large a responsibility as they perceive it in terms of the male as provider and protector. They do not perceive gender role perpetuation as a perpetuation of gender inequality.

While the family as institution is a significant context beyond the learning environment for the “4-Wheel Drive” and the “Wheel” groups; the group - its rules and, indirectly the roles it prescribes, is far more responsible for the gender role development in the “Spinning Top”. The gender anomaly in this group, is that while the girls dress in a masculine fashion in order to be accepted into activities regarded by society as male-orientated (and therefore acceptable), their roles within the group remain maternal – those of confidante and caretaker. The males’ image is one of machoism, while Annabel keeps secret her wish to surf, for fear of ridicule from the boys. Hence the group serves to perpetuate the traditional gender roles.

While the “4-Wheel Drive” group consciously strive to emulate their parents and the “Wheel” group openly admire their parents, the “Spinning Top” group’s relationship with their parents is conflictual and there is the constant desire to “escape”. It is ironic that by indulging in the activities they do, there is the probability that they will ultimately unconsciously emulate their parents. A cyclical structure of perpetuation will occur. If this happens one can begin to understand why human behaviour is so different from human utterances, even

when these are based on beliefs and values. Only a longitudinal study will ultimately validate whether these probabilities will become realities.<sup>72</sup>

The recommendations of feminists that research should involve “*consciousness-raising*” (Payne in Spender and Sarah, 1988) on the part of the researcher and the participants, makes sense in the light of the above examples. What we are socialised through institutions into accepting should be constantly challenged in the context of power relations. A focus on equality and human rights should inform our re-assessments and one should be made aware that one need not just blindly accept what has always been. However, reproducing the past is easier in the absence of practical options to be implemented, based on visions for the future.

Payne (in Spender and Sarah, 1988) suggests that there should be a reconceptualisation and reconstruction of the social order. Through such critical awareness the researcher is able to develop as “self”, while developing the “other”. If research is to be truly feminist “someone other than the researcher should benefit” (Geiger, in Wolf, 1996:178). Thus, as indicated earlier, by making these contradictions clear, this research and others on similar issues, can begin to change the social order.

### Context, Research Methods and the Addressing of Research Issues

Once the researcher understands the multi-dimensionality of the research context, it becomes imperative to utilise different research methods. Hence while sociometric diagrams served to sketch the basic outline of group membership and participant observation exposed anomalies and substantiated findings, it was only through the triangulation-within-method in the interview situation that power imbalances were redressed and subtle exploration gave rise to worthwhile findings. The validation of these findings could develop an understanding of adolescent choices and give meaning to their behaviour, which hopefully will be

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<sup>72</sup>I have subsequently approached the research participants to request permission to follow their progress over a period of 3 years and have had a most positive response.

of interest and aid educationalists, particularly within the South African scenario.

The different types of interview approaches used emphasised the collaborative nature of the research procedure. The initial interview served to focus on the individual:

- his\her attributes and aspirations and the individual's perceptions of gender within the learning environment and society;
- what the individual believed his\her group composite to be;
- the individual's perception of group ethos;
- and whether this ethos was reflective of or influential in personal, individual choices.

It was interesting that in both the "4-Wheel Drive" and the "Spinning Top" groups the group composite was not as clearly delineated as in the "Wheel" group. One or two names not mentioned by all group members were either added to or omitted from the core. Fluidity of group membership is a reality and hence longitudinal studies in this type of research would prove to be most worthwhile. However, a distinction between *delineation of group membership* and *exclusivity* should be made.

While the "Wheel" group's membership is clearly delineated, they are not perceived as exclusive; it has already been noted in Chapter 4 (pp.72-73) that others feel comfortable sitting with the group at break time. It became obvious in the "Spinning Top" group that there was little casual interaction with members of this group; one either made a conscious decision to be in or you were out. Pamela always had to defiantly defend her inclusion of Desiree in class group work. The "Spinning Top" group demonstrates exclusivity, although members are invited to join or leave (but not without some trauma!) Delineation therefore implies a numerical clarity of membership, while exclusivity implies the dimension of social acceptance or rejection and is value-laden.

I believe that the distinction between the “Wheel” group and the “Spinning Top” group when it comes to exclusivity lies in the basis upon which each group is founded. The “Wheel” is sustained by a *conceptualisation* of whom they are; i.e certain morality and behaviour are understood concepts and only individuals, who attest to these standards would want to belong. The “Spinning Top”, on the other hand, have *implicit rules* (pp.117-118), which require obedience, conformity and inculcate a definite sense of belonging, which ultimately excludes those who do not know the rules.

The triangulation-within-methods in the interviews was also crucial as it honed in on group fluidity and validated my perception that the individual remains central and is able to resist peer pressure to conform to group decisions. It should be remembered that conformity itself has perspective. Hence a member of the “Spinning Top” group may decide not to bunk or a member of the “Wheel” group may decide to smoke, even if the other members don’t. There is therefore conformity to the norms of the school or conformity to anti-school norms, depending on one’s perspective.

My research has revealed both the importance of the group and its weaknesses in shaping the life choices of its members. This knowledge can be used positively, but selectively, by school administrators when devising policy on adolescents and also by educators, who know that the group can be used when it is desirable to do so, and the individual when it suits his/her needs.

### Positionality of the Researcher

Within the interview situations, particularly within the group focus interviews, my position was a highly sensitive one. Accepted by individuals in the initial interviews, I was now treated with suspicion, because of what they had revealed in trust. They now felt vulnerable, as the dynamics were now different in the group situation. Some members of the group trusted me more than others and they often openly remonstrated with one another over what they could or could not tell me. Obviously the “Spinning Top” group was the most cautious in the



Group Focus interview, as their group is built on the secrets of illicit activity and there was initial uncertainty over whether I would betray their confidence.

71/6 { Once assured of my trustworthiness, they began to claim me as their own. (I had become party to their secrecy code.) I now had to become careful not to become “exclusively theirs” and alienated from the other groups. There was a struggle between the groups for my allegiance. Once they all realised that each in their inimitable way was essential for the success of my research, they accepted that what I had to achieve as researcher was “acceptable commitment” (Riddell in Burgess, 1989) and not the sort of bias, which would invalidate my research findings.

Opportunities for the search. This balancing act of the researcher between objectivity and subjectivity is an issue that deserves more attention in ethnographic research, particularly in South Africa, where race and gender compound the context. It would be useful to determine the extent to which White male or Black male researcher would obtain similar co-operation. For this purpose even replication of this study would be useful.

### Context and the Research

The relationship between researcher and participant so reliant on openness and trust gave rise to other ethical issues about the dissemination of data. I became aware of the manipulative potential of the nature of the information supplied to me by the participants. It became traumatic for me to transcribe private and personal revelations into bald data. Confidentiality became a limitation and much that was “rich and real” had to be edited so that the participants would not be exposed to exploitation.<sup>73</sup> Stacey (in McLaren and Giarelli, 1995) acknowledged that feminist ethnographic research methods “exposed the informant to far greater danger than the positivist, abstract and masculine

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<sup>73</sup> Here I experienced a major limitation because of the ethics involved in the use of the photograph as research method and the assurance of confidentiality. It proved almost impossible to meld the two. It became important to edit in order to prevent the harming of reputations and hurting of feelings. (p. 113)

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## Appendix 1

### Schedule for the Sociometric Questions

The first four questions are of a positive nature and relate to:

1. personal trust and loyalty:
  - acceptance of a close relationship  
OR
  - rejection thereof  
OR
  - self-delusion  
OR
  - self-confidence and self-acceptance

*Question: Whom would you regard as your best friend? (More than one person may be named. Please state where they attend school.)*

I explained that it was not problematic not to have a best friend and that they could state that they did not have a best friend, and if they wanted to, could supply a reason. Many interesting reasons emerged.

2. social acceptance and academic\achievement acceptance

*Question: Whom would you choose to sit next to in your register class?*

Most teachers separated friends as this tends to keep down noise levels and force integration of race and gender, hence the word *choose*.

3. academic\achievement acceptance

*Question: Whom would you choose to work with in your chosen subjects? (You may supply reasons if you so wish.)*

I suggested they list their subjects and couple them with a person's name. They also needed to be aware that they did not need to supply a name if they wished to work alone or did not wish to choose anyone.

4. gender and social acceptance

*Question: With whom do you mix out of school? (Please specify if they go to Greenvale, are at different schools or are out of school.)*

5. personal rejection and social isolation
  - deliberately contained within peer group (Grade 10) and within case study context (Greenvale High School).

*Question: Whom do you like least in Grade 10 at Greenvale High School?*

## Appendix 2

### Interview Schedule and Semi-structured Questionnaire

#### Purpose of the Interview

An exploration in order to develop an understanding of individual adolescents; their values, beliefs, attributions and aspirations. These aspects will then be globally related to:

- their interactions with their peers, both positive and negative;
- their understanding of these interactions, which will be developed into a *meaning of group* i.e. why they belong and what values they perceive as being important to the members of their group;
- whether they believe that their *will* is subjugated to the will of the group ethos, or whether individual choices remain pertinent;
- their views on gender: the co-educational context, relationships between adolescent boys and girls and the role of men and women in a patriarchal society.

In true Feminist style (Oakley, 1981), I shall seek to address the imbalance of power inherent in the researcher-researched dynamics and utilise an approach, which will *empower* the participant. The *voice* of the adolescent will be heard and will serve to validate the interpretations of prior methods, such as sociometry, participant observation and the still photograph, by commenting on my interpretations. The interview, will therefore, be used as a form of triangulation, as well as a tool of exploration, clarification and enrichment.

#### Interview Approach

As already mentioned in the purpose of the interview, the participants are to be encouraged to be critical of interpretations and pro-active in the re-formulation of language, so that they will understand clearly what the question requires of them. Prompts and probes (Jessop, 1996) have been used in order to put the participants at ease and to encourage them to think creatively about their

why prompt



replies. This relates to the open-ended nature of the questions, which will ensure that different dimensions are added, for which the researcher is not prepared.

The formatting of the questions has been structured in such a way to ensure that the participant is able to develop confidence, so that when the opinionated answers are required he\she has relaxed sufficiently to express his\her views openly and honestly, aware that any answer they supply is of worth.

Question format reflected the following pattern:

- Personal factual information;
- Self concept and aspirations;
- Interpersonal Relations;
- Gender-related issues.

While the question format was followed, the interview often developed into an integrated exploration of all these issues, as the life of the adolescent unfolded.

### Semi-structured Questionnaire

#### Personal Information

1. How old are you?

2. Where do you live?

Prompt: Area?

Would you regard this area as urban or rural?

Probe: Are you happy living where you do?

Do you see yourself as living in this area (or a similar environment)  
for most of your life?

3. How do you get to school?

Prompt: Mode of transport?

Probe: With whom do you travel\walk?

Is this a regular arrangement?

4. How long does it take you to get to school?

5. What is the size of your family?

**Prompt:** How many brothers and sister do you have?

What are the ages of your brothers and sisters?

What do you mean by extended family?

**Probe:** Do you think your position as sibling (oldest, youngest etc.)

is significant to your role within the family?

How do you get on with the rest of your family?

Does your parents' relationship \ being in a single-sex family affect you and your views in any way?

6. What do your parents do?

**Prompt:** Careers?

Hobbies?

**Probe:** Do you see yourself as emulating your parents\siblings in any way?

Are you proud of your parents?

7. What is your subject choice at school?

8. Why did you choose these particular subjects?

**Prompt:** Like\dislike for any reason (content, teacher etc.)?

Are they closely related to your career-choice?

Did any of your peers or family influence you in your choice?

**Probe:** Do you see certain subjects as more prestigious than others?

*Do you think certain subjects are representative of certain social classes?*

How does this subject choice relate to your aspirations?

9. What do you do extra-murally?

**Prompt:** School-related or unrelated to recognised school activities?

10. Why did you come to school at Greenvale High?

**Prompt:** Had other members of the family been to the school before?

(Family tradition?)

Was the position geographically convenient?

Does the type of school relate strongly to career-choice?

Does the school curriculum cater to your needs and strengths?

**Probe:** Are you proud to be at Greenvale?

Do you at times feel defensive about being at this school?

### Self Concept and Aspirations

11. What would you like to do when you leave school?

**Prompt:** What career would you like to pursue?

Would this involve further study? Would you like to study further?

**Probe:** Do you feel that you have to make a decision on career soon after leaving school?

Would what you'd like to do within your career be considered your dream or would your dream be totally divorced from career?

12. What would you consider your strengths to be?

**Prompt:** Personal characteristics e.g. kindness, etc.?

Self-belief e.g. motivation, etc.?

Relationship with others e.g. thoughtfulness, loyalty, etc.?

13. What would you consider your weaknesses to be?

**Prompt:** Personal characteristics e.g. selfish, etc.?

Addictions e.g. smoking, drinking, drug abuse, etc.?

Socially unacceptable behaviour e.g. stealing, vandalism, etc.?

**Probe:** *These were related to what had emerged in the prompts and were extremely sensitively handled. I was cautious not to be in any way judgemental or interventionist. My comments were sympathetic responses, encouraging intimate revelation based on trust and the promise of confidentiality.*

14. What is your idea of a good life?

## Interpersonal Relationships

15. Who would you say is your best friend?

**Prompt:** Do you think it is necessary to have a best friend?

Does a best friend change quite often?

**Probe:** What important attributes should a best friend possess?

*What attributes do you admire most about your best friend?*

16. Would you say that you “belonged” to a group?

**Prompt:** What is the composition of the group – gender, culture, etc.?

**Probe:** *Here the sociometric diagram was used to question whether the participant believed it to be a good reflection of group composition.*

✓ 17. Does the composition of the group usually remain the same?

**Prompt:** Do you see the group as relatively stable?

Does the group fight quite a lot or not at all?

**Probe:** Who would you say does not really fit into the group?

✓ 18. What do you most enjoy doing with the group? ✓

✓ 19. What would you say keeps the group together?

**Prompt:** The things that you do together (activities)?

Do you all hold the same beliefs?

Do you have certain secrets that only you know?

**Probe:** What do you think these beliefs are?

Do you feel that the group will last forever?

✓ 20. Do you always go along with decisions made by your group?

**Prompt:** Do you thoroughly enjoy the activities the group does together?

Are your ideas and interests taken into account in the group?

**Probe:** Do you find your lifestyle any different from the other members of the group e.g. times for meals, bed; videos you watch, musical interests, etc.?

Do you find that your beliefs are strongly reflective of the group's beliefs?

### Gender-related Issues

21. Do you like being in a co-educational situation?

**Prompt:** Do you feel that boys and girls are treated equally in the classroom?

**Probe:** Do you feel that boys and girls should be treated as equal?

Do you see any area in the school where you feel there is gender discrimination?

✓ 22. What characteristics do you look for when you choose a boyfriend\girlfriend?

**Prompt:** Do you have a boyfriend\girlfriend? Why\why not?

**Probe:** Do you see yourself as playing a specific role within a relationship?

✓ 23. Do you think that men and women should be regarded as equal within society?

**Prompt:** Do you think they are equal? If not, what measures should be adopted to ensure equality?

24. What is your opinion on the roles of men and women in society?

**Prompt:** What do you see the roles to be?

Do you think they need to be different?

**Probe:** Do you think the roles change when men and women marry?  
Should women work after they get married? Why\why not?