

# **Making Gender in Early Schooling**

**A multi-sited ethnography of power and discourse:  
from grade one to two in Durban.**

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A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the School of  
Education, University of Natal, Durban.

May 2002

To

*Adiel and Nikhil*

## **Declaration**

I, Deevia Bhana, declare that this thesis is my own work. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other university

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Durban ..... day of .....2002

As the candidate's supervisor I have/have not approved this thesis/dissertation for submission.

Signed .....

Name .....

Date .....

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## Preface

When it was first suggested that I write a preface to this study and let my story be heard, I resisted. My own story was too dangerous to tell even though my research was concerned with investigating and analysing the gendered worlds of others. I found it extraordinarily difficult to break away from the canonical tradition in which objectivity was a more recognisable and respected academic stance. The actual writing process and the question of what does it mean for boys and girls to be equal were intimately connected with my own experiences and highly generative as I read the theories and read my own life in theirs. This intimacy has shaped my critique, and I want to insist then that this thesis depends on and is limited by this context. Not much remains of my original resistance so that it is often hard to say where the analysis of the Self ends and the encounter with others begins. These are dangerous places of engagement. This thesis is not simply about me. I have been drawn into investigating the world of children and their teachers, and in the process I re-visited and re-presented my own history and I knocked down the conventions of academic writing, which in turn led me to using the personal pronouns (for myself).

In this preface, my personal story is (re)presented and is intricately bound to the subject of the thesis. It reflects the identities and discourses that colour my study. Re-searching the world of young children necessarily engaged my own identity both at the time and in retrospect. What follows, amongst other things, is a telling of myself as a way of introducing the content and purpose of this study.

The thesis being considered is a contextual analysis of gender identity and gender discourses of boys, girls and their teachers in four early schooling sites in Durban, South Africa. On the other hand it is an exploration of the constructions of masculinity and femininity in highly charged and complicated schooling sites and of the possibilities and interrogations of gendered schooling practices. As the thesis develops, these issues are articulated through the readings of the everyday ordinary practices within the multi-sites

of early schooling. But it is not concerned solely with documenting everyday snapshots of what seemed to be happening in the schools, but also selecting what to record. The credibility of that record can be trusted only for what it is, namely particular, partial and specific records of teachers, boys and girls. These records reflect the focus on gender identities and gender discourses and how they are contextually enacted in four schools.

Throughout the research process I tried to remain focused on the task that related to my silent questioning of what it meant for boys and girls to be (impossibly?) equal. How have these children become the gendered persons that they are? How do they appropriate, challenge, maintain and defy this? What has the experience of early schooling in variegated contexts done to construct this gendering and how can these contexts provide the possibility for changes?

I wanted the data to include different schooling contexts. I could have researched one former white school, closest to my place of work, but it seemed so simple to focus on one school. However, I thought that my thesis would be richer for focusing on different schools which have come to mark and reflect South African educational experiences. This could also explain why I selected the schools that I did. I wanted the data to show what happened as schooling interacts with boys, girls and teachers, so that some links could be made between being masculine or feminine and the productions of gender in different ways and in different school contexts. I wanted to hear what teachers and children thought, what they did and the effects of all of this on gender identities. It also seemed to me that all of this had a lot to do with what being a boy or a girl means. And in a different situation who would we choose to be? My concern was different from the ironing-board activities of equality of opportunity discourses (Rhedding-Jones 1997). Rather my concern was to query how teachers and children position themselves and are positioned by certain discourses, of which we are all a part. In this thesis I suggest that the clues to the query lie in a close-focused examination of what people think, what they do and their effects. This is related to subjective positionings, but also to my own fluid positionings. The thesis functions not only as a range of searches into the gendered

mechanisms that teachers and children take up and are positioned by, but it is inscribed by my own involvement in it and should be read as partial and strategic.

I shall now begin to deal with this problematic: my own “coming out”. My coming out, like this thesis must also be read as always partial, fragmented and never complete. I kept wondering about what to include in the preface, whether to write it at all since this thesis is not about me, assessing the risk in revealing, making risky details sometimes available, wondering what to omit, how to avoid certain moments in my life, constantly working and reworking some moments and always wondering how safe this space was in the telling of the pain and desire that has formed much of what I continue to become (Walkerdine 1990; Kehily 1995).

I was born in 1966 and announced into the world as a ‘papli’: a slang word in Gujarati which denigrates girls. I do not want the position of poor me! Rather I have lived my life in more complex ways, which eschew the status of poor me. The fragmented nature of my own identity is captured well by Stuart Hall when he compares subjective experience to a bus ticket (interestingly, my father had business interests in bussing):

You just have to get from here to there, the whole of you can never be represented in the ticket you carry, but you have to buy a ticket in order to get from here to there (Hall, quoted in Watts 1992:124).

Journeying through life from here to there is certainly connected to the contested and contradictory terrain of my gender, race, sexuality, religion and ethnic background together with my own kind of affluent Indian classness. It is so easy to oversimplify these encounters especially in South Africa, where race is so easily simplified. I live(d) my life so differently that I have found it difficult to understand the intertwining nature of those encounters. Partly though I have come to understand how intricately connected they are so that my life as a girl and now woman can never be separated from them.

Growing up in an affluent Gujarati family is often considered a privilege. I do not consider mine to have been a privilege. It has never made me happy. Gujarati-speaking South African Indians are a minority within the Indian community in South Africa, and are clearly distinguished from other Indian South African Hindus; the Tamils, Telegus and Hindis in terms of language, cultural beliefs, religious practices and history. While Gujarati and Hindu suggest primacy of ethnicity and religion, regional, linguistic and caste affiliations are also marked. In the main, Gujarati people were free traders who voluntarily migrated from the Indian state of Gujarat and were identified as the business class in the Indian community. My father came to Durban in 1932 and my maternal grandfather in 1930 both from the Indian State of Gujarat. I have alluded to my own position as Gujarati as it became intertwined with the central question of identity. Surnames are a chief means of identifying Gujaratis from other Indians but they are also a marker of caste within the Gujarati community. My surname is recognition of my ethnicity, and of my class/caste connections which are powerfully exclusionary and provide the filter through which other people are devalued. I grew up having minimal contact with whites, blacks, coloureds and other kinds of Indians except for developing relations in the all-Indian schools. The apartheid system of separate schooling and the Group Areas Act allowed a system of surveillance and control so that within such structures the perpetuation of Gujaratiness and its associated class/caste structures were made simpler.

The caste system was transported from India to South Africa and it found fertile ground in apartheid South Africa since both systems engendered hierarchies and exclusions. The caste system was linked to the village and social structure of India and was reshaped and reinvented in Durban. My father lived in the village of Matvad close to the city of Navsari. His caste is 'kori' which is recognised as a class of people who have varied business interests including transport. This was not very highly ranked in relation to other castes which include the Brahmin (the priests); the vanyas (money lenders); the desais (mostly farm owners); the sonis (jewelers); the darjis (tailors); the kumbaars (furniture makers); mochis (shoe makers), gaanchies (the oil merchants) but it was a much higher caste and class than the dedas who were regarded as the untouchables doing

menial work. Class/caste is relational and exercised in context. I sometimes flaunted my identity against other Gujeratis but especially against the general devaluation of other Indians (Hindis, Tamils and Muslims) and yet at times I felt excluded and marginalized by other higher castes/classes within the Gujerati community. And all of this was happening within the context of apartheid and the general devaluation of black people.

My own becoming moving from here to there is suggestive of a multiple ticketing in a way I hope that I am meeting a range of readers who are themselves subjectively fragmented, as we all are. Race, gender, class, age, sexuality are given credence in the literature about subjectivity. In fact the debate about race and racism continues to be a profound marker of identity in South Africa, but my own positioning suggests that ethnicity and caste also play significant roles in (re)producing inequalities and in circumscribing how we relate to ourselves and to others.

In South Africa race and racial categorizations such as black, coloured, white and Indian limit the understanding of the subject. This does not however deny the powerful means through which my own identity has been shaped by race. Growing up in a divided system as Indian was a key to my early identity formation. My Indianness and affluent ethnic class roots meant more privileges than most black people had and so I grew up with a sense of power/privilege, but in the shadows of the apartheid system they were never enough. I grew up with an aversion to my own dark colour, feeling marked by it, and it is also one of the tickets that I have carried in my journey. This repulsion did not stem only from the terroristic apartheid manifesto, although apartheid incubated and reinforced it. The impact of colonialism both here in South Africa and in India, simultaneously produced the hate/desire contradictory constructions of whiteness. It's not that I wanted to be white. Neither did I want to be black because of what blackness had come to represent in apartheid South Africa. Rather my daily experiences of growing up suggests how lighter skinned and darker skinned Gujerati women had come to be valued by other Gujeratis, and I think other Indians as well. My life has been so complex with so many contradictions, feeling powerful at times and at others feeling undesirable and powerless as a darker-skinned Indian girl (woman). I grew up in a

culture where there was never any doubt that I would go to university. I was learning about education as a power investment. But not all Gujaratis had an education. If you did not have that, you could use the lighter colour of your skin (beauty, as it was considered) to marry well and maintain the class/caste/heterosexual structures that were set out. As a young girl I learned the intertwining relations of race, class, caste, gender and the ways in which power was invested in heterosexual desirability.

Arranged marriages are still a common practice amongst Gujaratis. My mother did not have much of an education but she did have a light skin and was able to marry well –so it was said. Desirability was linked to class/caste, colour and it was within this complex heterosexual matrix (Butler 1990) that ‘Gujerati’ femininity was produced. Race and racism, I had come to realise very early in my life that race was not simply about what white people do to black people. Growing up as a dark skinned Gujarati was painful- a move away from power. In the extended family system in which I lived I have carried the burden of feeling and being excluded. That hurt! I attended Gujarati vernacular classes for eight years at the Surat Hindu School in Prince Edward Street, Durban. They were miserable years. I learnt how to read and write Gujarati but I was learning more than that. I was learning more about the hierarchies of caste/class and the patterns of exclusion. In that context, I was dented brutally. Most of the children who attended the school were affluent and so my position was relative to my caste and colour of my skin. Perhaps this explains why I never made a friend and resisted being drawn into a web of friends where my power was threatened. I quietly withdrew.

Exclusionary learning patterns were thus set out for me in complex ways as I produced and reproduced the patterns of class/caste inequalities. Gujaratiness was also a chief marker of defining and limiting social relations with others outside it. These others included goras, kariyas, madrajis, musalmaan and kalediya through which my identity was produced and reproduced. Some content to these Gujarati words follows:

**goras**, white oppressors with a strange inferior religion, lumped as British imperialists and colonialists who had raped India. In Durban it was easy to lump

whites as English considering their historical predominance in KwaZulu Natal which has been considered the Last Outpost. The white Afrikaners who held power were always looked upon as a lesser devil than the English imperialists, who carried the burden of being positioned as white in apartheid South Africa and as British imperialists who had done much harm not only in South Africa but in India);

**kariyas**, the black labouring class who were subordinate, working class and with whom relations were unimaginable except as labourers. The 1949 riots between Indians and Blacks in Durban was a means through which the Black stereotype was produced as violent and subordinate and against which Indians had to be protected);

**madrajis**, dark-skinned working class Tamil speaking Indians whose language and culture were denounced as inferior and avoided);

**musalmaan**, Muslim Indians whose religion was taboo and any social relations with them was limited;

**kalediya**, Coloured people who were constructed as a terrifying mixture of black and white.

My life as Gujerati was policed and, together with the impact of apartheid and the history of colonialism, this served to produce and reproduce an identity which evades simplistic analysis. I have continually struggled in producing myself against the general devaluation of others, breaking and defying the rules set out for me and at times reconstructing them.

My life has been a complex mess: an irresolvable puzzle; a maze involving complex power relations implicating race, class, caste, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, religion. The damage of colonialism and apartheid have intersected powerfully in the shaping and making of my identity. Nothing has been simple though. I have struggled against ideas that have sometimes successfully circumscribed my life according to its constructions. I have also defied the boundaries set out for me. I have not been able to resolve the contradictions and continually struggle against my own constitution. But I also know a

little more about my journey in life, the tickets I carry and the relations with others: life's production and regulation and maybe a little more about my unhappiness.

The investigation into the world of children and the enquiry into identity has the element of evoking memories of my childhood experiences:

Childhood, says the Children's Encyclopedia, is a time of innocent joy, to be spent in the meadows amid buttercups and bunny-rabbits or at the hearthside absorbed in a storybook (Coetzee 1997: 14).

Stories about childhood innocence, fun, games, play and laughter easily deny that there are other more provocative stories to be told. The liveliness, the hustle and bustle, the clatter, the endless chatter, the energy and excitement or the everyday ordinariness punctuated by episodes of chasing, injury and yearly and sometimes extraordinary events, can easily belie the dangerous stories that can be told or refused to be heard. This is very far from my own lived experiences both at home and at the mainstream primary school I attended in Durban.

At home nothing I have experienced suggests the world of bunny-rabbits and it is mostly with tongue in cheek that I placed the quote above. As the fourth child of five sisters, I have felt the pains of exclusion. Part of the pain in growing coheres around my father. As a young girl I somehow understood my father's losses: the boy that he never had, the name carrier, the heir that would never be. There are great investments in being a boy. Secretly I held this deep desire to be a boy because of the power that went with it. I wished I was a boy partly for my father and in a way I could have had a different kind of experience as a child (and adult).

As head of a family business, my father wielded power and exercised great control over our lives. My clearest memories of growing up are of his angers and tempers- whether to risk them and how to avoid them and feeling contemptuous of him. Looking back I understand how he struggled then to be a particular kind of man: aggressive; loud; and

expressing little emotion; fewer words and no love, a toxic masculinity. I was afraid of him and men like him but continued to respect him. Quietly though as a girl and even as a woman I tried to avoid his spaces which had hurt me. Years later, I am faced with a different kind of masculinity not as a successor masculinity but an elderly masculinity which sometimes but rarely shows signs of the earlier positions but now calmer and more gentle, more caring and seeking me out and more approving despite the hierarchies through which he had excluded others. Is the puzzle here the question of relations, feelings and the process of change, memory or the complexities of life? I can't be sure. Looking back I am able to understand how masculinities and femininities are so intricately related to all of this.

At primary school, I had the burden and the privilege of being identified through my surname and the social relations that went with it. I felt powerful, quite different from the experience at vernacular classes. I was always the teacher's favourite. And this may explain why I was seduced by teaching and became a teacher in 1989. Perhaps it was because I did well at school, and maybe because of what I appeared to represent. Doing that meant greater investments for me-being acknowledged by teachers and having a growing group of friends. It was a powerful position although I remember the many instances in which I contested these definitions defying teachers silently and in insidious ways resisting teachers' control over me.

I was in grade three, and almost nine, when I fell in 'love' secretly. He was a new boy in the school with cabbage patch ears, olive skin and Brylcreem-laden hair. Of course he never knew that and neither did anybody else. The closest I got to him was in the crossword puzzles that spelt his name, scribbling his name next to mine in school books or on the palm of my hands making sure nobody saw, and scanning the playground for his every movement, breaking down the imaginary lines which separated girls from boys. And when I got news through the gossip networks in the school that he was 'seeing' another I was left heartbroken but it never stopped me from glaring and scanning his every move for many years. I was also learning about my vulnerability in the complex world of heterosexuality and romance as I felt the pressure to look in a particular way, to

project heterosexual desirability. Being 'dumped' was painful. I was learning and relearning the powerlessness (and pain) that went with undesirability. Also I was learning about the heterosexual competition amongst the girls. I had lost my first battle but the pressures on me were increasing.

In high school having a first real boyfriend (and somebody who later became the father of my two boys) was a powerful position: working to produce and reproduce my desirability and power. Looking back I wonder about the stolen kisses in school, the hours spent romancing through the glass windows breaking down the rules set down for me a Gujarati and innocent schoolgirl. Being desirable is a highly powerful position and it worked to confirm my power. Having a boyfriend worked to reproduce desirability and power over other girls in the heterosexual competition. And it was in high school, at age fifteen that I was drawn deeply into the love 'n marriage discourse: breaking the conventions set down for me and turning things upside down.

These were exciting times for me and yet looking back I am able to re-tell it knowing how my femininity was so greatly implicated in the choices that I made and the performance that I put on and the ones I didn't. I can see the pressures through which I constructed my femininity (and the pressures that are associated with being a boy) and I am wondering whether a single sex school would have been less pressurizing and safer for both of us, with the possibility of a different life than the one I lead. I have more tools now to understand how my femininity was produced: the performance associated with bodily size, its contours and its capacities which have worked to regulate most of my life as generative/oppressive at the same time.

The most painful part of my life has been confronting the myth of the love 'n marriage discourse and how relations that are meant to be loving can turn upside down. I am able to understand why power and love are intricately intertwined and how exaggerated power is so easily confused with love. Growing up has never been easy for me but neither is being grown up.

Who I am is partial, irresolvable and always involves power. It is so complex. There is no easy positioning for a South African espousing a non-unified concept of the identity – a poststructural concept. I have lived and continually live my life with contradictions and in dynamic ways. The highly complex ways through which I have understood my journey can best be explained by a range of theoretical influences broadly referred to as poststructuralism. It should not be as frightening to those who have insisted that class and race are the determining factors in South Africa. Multiple and shifting positionings have now also become appropriate and so it is these positions that I have put to work in this thesis. I have experienced my life differently, unable to be measured and boxed for who and what I am. Maybe my experience of getting my first son before my first degree, defying the rules of marriage, of Gujaratiness and sexuality (yet being positioned by it) meant that the chicken and egg got somehow reversed and I fell for the idea about the multiple shifting identities as soon as I heard it was around.

This thesis under investigation functions qualitatively through its own descriptions, interpretations and explanations of what happened at the schools; a context that has been part of most adult and children's experience: that of everyday events in early schooling, its teachers and children. The idea that girls (women) only are normatively regulated is not a position that I want or something that I have taken up as an argument in this thesis, although some readers may suggest that this preface demonstrates it. But my voice is also the voice of a girl, an Indian Gujarati woman and heterosexual, a thirty-five year old mother, a daughter, a teacher and it is these positions which allow me to intuit some of the discourses that I do in this study. Others may suggest that this preface serves to demonstrate my own production of identity, my own deep struggle with it but also with the conventions which continually compel a version of me which hurts...and it hurts not just girls. It is really up to the reader to decide which positions seem more credible but I want to suggest that the question of what it means for boys and girls to be equal is certainly not a girls-only question.

Put as simply as possible, the topic of this study are boys, girls and their teachers, the construction of various masculinities and femininities in the classroom and in the

playground in four multi-sited early school contexts. It also puts to work the ideas of power, meanings, and discourse in the making of gendered identities. The subjects who let me into their lives and who came a little into mine may represent the teachers, boys and girls who once were and some of us who still are.

Much of my motivation to write this thesis comes from these rich experiences, my resistance, defiance and memories of being positioned and regulated in different ways and in different contexts. These recollected memories and experiences mirror the complex questions that are so intertwined with the subject of the thesis: gender identity and discourse. In a way I wonder whether I have written this thesis primarily for myself.

As a result this study intimately relates to the life I le(a)d.

## Chapter One

### Seeking Gender in the Early Years of Schooling

#### Introduction

*A schoolgirl has been forced to resign as the first female president of her school's learner representative council because three boys refused to accept a woman as their leader.*

*Ireen Kabini's resignation came after the three Grade 11 pupils from Boleu Senior Secondary in Northern Province –about 15 km from Groblersdal–lodged a complaint with the principal, Ephraim Bashele.*

*One of the youngsters, Tony Motlafi, 19 said this week: "We don't want a woman, not even as the president of South Africa. It doesn't matter what the Constitution says... We won't be ruled by a woman.*

*Motlafi...said that the majority of the school's 1174 pupils supported their view that 16-year-old Kabini was too 'small' and 'still too young to be president of the learner representative council'.*

*Kabini hit back by saying the boys were simply afraid of her changing things at the school which were not right.*

*"Some of the pupils say that a woman can't control them. I think that they are just afraid of my mind, because I am going to lead the school the right way".*

*The matric pupil said that she had stepped down because her parents feared for her safety.*

*"My mother said that I deserved it, but that she was worried my life may be in danger. She said it wasn't the end, as I would be a leader wherever I go."*

*The fracas at the school hasn't changed Kabini's views about women's place in society: "Girls must stand up for their rights. Girls can be leaders. We must be given the opportunity. We can make it," she said.*

*Teacher Donald Morare, who handled the election for the council, said Kabini had won fair and square.*

*Each of the 18 classes nominated two candidates. On election day Ireen won 242 votes. The second contender had 80 votes. There was no irregularity," said Morare ...*

*But not all the boys at the school support the ousting of Kabini. "She must remain president. She is brilliant. She has leadership capacity", said Grade 12 pupil Siphoshe Moshiga.*

*And principal Bashele says the school will have to conduct a third ballot.*

*"We need a result which will bring 80% of the learners aboard.*

*"The boys said they would accept the outcome of the third election," he said.*

*Bashele admitted, however, that he was still worried about whether the boys would accept a girl being elected again. Phaphama Leolo, the Northern Province Education Department's area manager, said local politicians would be asked to give talks at schools as the dispute was about the principal of democracy and gender tolerance.*

*Phumele Ntombela-Nzimande, deputy chairman of the Commission on Gender Equality, said on Friday the commission would take the matter up with the school "immediately".*

*"Here we have a leader in the making. Look what she has to put up with. It is the epitome of what we are up against in terms of gender discrimination" (Sunday Times, 27 February 2000:6).*

I begin this introductory chapter, with gender head-on, inserting a media extract of events in the Northern Province at Boleu Secondary School, an exclusively black school, as illustrative of the highly problematic nature of the gendered positions of boys and girls in South African schools. Schools in South Africa, as the case of Boleu illustrates, are frightening places where violence, the threat of violence and hurt can derive from certain gendered practices. These practices relate to the conceptualisations of positions and personal/power relations that are disadvantageous to girls in subtle and unequal ways, but also to boys. This is made more frightening when schooling does not provide boys and girls with the space and the skills to contest the taboos and the gendered practices, which silence and hurt them.

Putting gender equality and secondary schooling together, as the newspaper clipping does, works because it appeals to our common sense understanding that gender is relevant in secondary schooling. Gender and early schooling, on the other hand, are not considered properly to be connected. This is because we are not expected to think about gender, about the tiny incidents in early schooling with any amount of persistence and seriousness. We assume that children are children and that gender (and sexuality) are not relevant issues in early schooling.

This thesis troubles early schooling and gender. It attempts to explain something of the troubling by examining teachers, boys and girls in multi-school sites. One of the key arguments in it is that the making and remaking of gender is connected with early schooling in rich and complicated ways.

The study asks questions about what it means for boys and girls to be equal. It does so by considering what happens inside early schooling by examining the construction of gender discourses and identities in early schooling. I trouble the everyday happenings in early schooling, the constructions of masculinity and femininity, the contest over its definitions and the extent to which it hurts girls and boys. I show how the question of gender equality is inextricably bound to the different patterns of conduct that are constitutive of masculinities and femininities. In my research gender equality can only be understood in terms of the lived experiences; how people understand who they are and how they relate to others systemically.

I consider teachers, boys and girls generally between the ages of seven and nine in race and class specific contexts. In doing so the meanings, the differing versions and the conjunctural choices that teachers and children provide for gender are considered. As this thesis unfolds, the issues of masculinity and femininity are articulated through my interrogations of complex experiences in schooling sites. I kept asking myself during the research process how has it come to be that boys and girls constructed themselves in the way that they did and how are teachers implicated in this? I search for gender discourses

which position boys and girls in particular ways. How boys and girls become positioned as feminine and masculine is thus a central concern. For teachers there are crucial implications because of the way they know, live and teach gender. How early schooling can nurture the national commitment to gender equality in South Africa and vitalize work for gender reform within is an underlying concern.

Politically, the advent of democracy has meant that we can ask fresh questions about gender equality in education and in early schooling. In the post 1994 period South African education has become crucial to the process of nation building. The national wisdom of democracy, non-racism, non-sexism and equality makes schools in South Africa increasingly 'conscious' about the continual gender inequalities, as the clipping illustrates. Can schools in South Africa and early schooling in particular become the possible sites for encouraging and building of a critical site for engineering gender equality? Education always involves some kind of thinking and some reflection about our practices. The newspaper clipping shows this. What are the conjunctural and differential choices that boys make? What is the power of a girl? In my own study these are questions I try to answer. My assumption is that schooling as an institutional site (and compulsory for boys and girls between the ages of 7 and 15) will continue to be important even if it is in contradictory ways. Particularly, my assumption is that my own research can provide the means through which we can ask more questions and work for gender equality in the early years of schooling.

### **Research Questions**

This thesis explores many research questions. They relate closely to the constructions of masculinity and femininity implicit in the research extract that I started this introduction with. The questions that I developed came to link the data with the theoretical issues I consider and provide a purpose to this research. They are:

1. What are the everyday gendering practices in the early years of schooling?
2. How are teachers implicated in the gendering process?

3. How do boys and girls become the gendered persons that they are within schooling sites?
4. What are the effects of this gendering process in the classroom?
5. What has the experience of schooling done to constitute this gendering? In other words, how is gender articulated and how is it enacted and played out in schools?
6. What are the specific practices that teachers and children engage in to construct this gendering?
7. What are the conditions operating within classrooms, and sometimes in playgrounds which enable this gendering?
8. What are the different ways that boys and girls take up to resist the gendering which surrounds them?
9. How can those conditions within the classroom provide a range of ways that lead to changes in subjectivity?
10. Is there more to this?

The Durban Metropolitan Region in KwaZulu-Natal is the area from which four schools are drawn to examine the above (See Appendix A Map1 and Appendix B Map 2). I try to give greater detail to the educational and gender research context in Chapter 2. The choice of schools reflects the race and class dimensions of schooling. I focus on the description of each school site in Chapter 4. The research sample was purposive and comprises one former white school (Westridge Primary School), one former Indian school (Umhlatuzana Primary School), one former black township school (KwaDabeka Primary School) and one black rural school ( Umbumbulu Primary School)- all pseudonyms. Altogether I visited twelve classrooms- four in Westridge, two in Umhlatuzana, three in KwaDabeka and three in Umbumbulu.

The schools reflect the race and class contexts of schools in Durban, South Africa. The racism of South African education, the consequence of apartheid and the impact of colonialism have produced turbulent social relations. A bizarre formulation of race, class and gender inequalities exists so that the majority of the black people in South Africa live in poverty. The social locations of the schools create the conditions for the relations of

power. My study takes me inside schools but I am also alert to the wider race and class contexts which create the specific conditions for interactions. I wanted to see gender constructions “in the flesh” (Kenway and Willis 1998); however I could not ignore the wider contexts which create the conditions for the relations of power.

My earlier (and premature) attempts at writing this chapter and considering the main focus of this thesis were largely theoretical romps and I ignored the specificities of social locations. Theorising has been my interest, my focus in my earlier degrees and I teach social theory now at university. This is a slightly different approach from that of Robert, the supervisor of this study, who is largely a self-defined materialist whose work in gender acknowledges the broader structures of inequalities, including race and class (Morrell 1992; 1996; 1998a; 1998b; 2001). Morrell (1996:2) claims that his interest in gender issues has not caused him to abandon his “conviction that material forces set limits” and provide the context of the beings and doings of actors. There have been numerous tensions in my attempt to align the micro power politics in the classroom and its related theorizing with the structural contexts. There has been much criticism against research into micro gender politics which sometimes reduces inequalities to discourses which fail to acknowledge wider patterns of power and change (Mac an Ghail 1994; Steinberg et al 1997; Kenway and Willis 1998; Haywood and Mac an Ghail 2001). In the production of this thesis, I have now a heightened awareness of the materialist imperative and political urgency of my work to contribute to better prospects and non-violent ways of living. Some micro gender work fails to consider these important issues and which I too prematurely tried to sideline.

My research does acknowledge the social location. These structural inequalities are important as I have suggested above but they do not fully capture the lived experiences. The clipping I began with in this thesis alerts us to the fact that schooling inequalities cannot be reduced to the broad political and economic realms. Here I go beyond the distant observation of these inequalities. In searching for the micro-constitution of gender, this study shows how identities and discourses are produced, appropriated and

challenged within early schooling sites as daily lived experiences within specific historical contexts.

### **Introducing Methodologies**

The research involved a one-year study of boys, girls and teachers and an attempt to understand the construction of masculinities and femininities in four schools in Durban. I wanted to know how these processes were constructed and how the discourses of early schooling inscribed gender identities. My investigation of the gender processes in early schooling was ethnographic using observations and unstructured interviews and conversations. I made use of audio and video tape recordings and photographs. The methodological multi-sited focus was selected in order to show how different positions of power are lived by boys and girls and how teachers are implicated in this. In order to understand this I had to place myself inside schools. My methodologies attempt to research what usually happens in practice. I wanted to come as close as possible to what was usually happening and what was usually being constructed through everyday classroom/playground activities. The schools and the subjects in this thesis are not representative of early schooling contexts in Durban or the province of KwaZulu Natal. I focus on how people practice their lives, with gendered meanings and how meanings are gendered within specific schools sites, which reflect the schooling experience in KwaZulu-Natal. I spoke to teachers and made conversation with children and observed them in their everyday ordinary worlds. The advantage of ethnography is that children's experiences like adults are taken seriously and I was able to listen to what they say.

A key methodological focus is power relations and how power manifests itself in researching early schooling contexts. Chapter 3 troubles the research process. In troubling it I focus on the researcher in the process and how power relations are constituted in specific contexts.

## **Theoretical Framework**

The study explores how power relations are manifest in all relations and how they impact on the construction of masculinities and femininities. In order to understand the questions that I set out I draw on poststructuralist theorizing as it provides a multidimensional understanding of power. Poststructuralist theories have been useful in moving beyond sex role theories, and theories of reproduction that often assume an essentialist characteristic in men and women who are constructed as rational subjects occupying predictable power positions. Poststructuralist theorising suggests that there is a range of subject positions that may be occupied in contradictory discourses. These ideas are useful in this thesis as they help to understand the asymmetrical relations of power.

The multidimensional modalities of power are put to work as a way of understanding the subjects in this study. In order to do this a full guide to poststructural theorizing is not provided, neither is a full scale analysis of the theories that I use. Thus there is no theory chapter in this study. How I try to make sense of it refuses the notion of a single authorizing chapter on theory which is common in most theses. Poststructuralist thinking and the theories I use are very diverse and highly contested. It is impossible to produce a comfortable theoretical chapter as a foundation on which to situate this thesis. I do draw upon masculinity studies, cultural studies, queer theory, feminist poststructuralism and performance theories. These theories are used as a toolkit to interrogate the very complex power relations in this multi-school study.

### *Rethinking sex/gender models*

There are many other theoretical approaches that could explain the data in my study. I did not want to use an approach that failed to connect to the diverse and dynamic schooling experiences of those in this study. These include those associated with essentialism and biology. While I rely on a multidimensional view of power, there is a range of literature on gender and education which I found was not useful. The latter is

based on biologically determined and psychoanalytically assumed identities; and reproductionist theories. Simple reproductionist theories have focused on what the dominant group does to the subordinated group or what men do to women. This perspective has tended to stress external social structures and the accompanying one-dimensional view of power as repressive. The explanatory trope in this argument slides from domination to freedom involving oppressive social forces versus the human agent. This kind of analysis is based on the notion that power represses, blocks and divides and from which the individual has to escape. The political practices are thus determined by releasing the human agent from the chains of oppressive structures.

In moving beyond the simple interpretations of power, poststructural theories have emphasised that power is dynamic. Rather than offering a static version of power, poststructural theories emphasise complex causality. Foucault (1980) criticises the repressive hypothesis of reproduction theories and the emphasis on the material base in determining all patterns of conduct. The gender perspectives that follow this kind of thinking in which ideology and repression are used to account for gendered identities, are limiting. In this study I was able to avoid assuming that the material contexts were in the final analysis the determining factor in the making of gender.

As far as essentialist versions of gender are concerned, the binary construction of boy or girl remains privileging one over the other. For example it is argued from essentialist standpoints that gender is about what boys do to girls. In other words what underlies a political practice is premised on breaking free from the shackles of male oppression and repression. In this instance boys are perceived to have power. The lack of power was attributed to socialisation that begins in the family and is reinforced in schools. Socialisation and gender development theories understand gender in terms of what society does to children, what parents do to children or what teachers do to children. In this instance children are constructed as passive recipients of received knowledge in which power also oppresses. There is increasingly a mounting critique against these explanations of behaviour (Connell 1995; Yelland 1998; MacNaughton 2000a; 2000b).

MacNaughton (2000a; 2000b) claims that biological and psychological assessments of gender provide a simple deterministic explanation of how people make sense of the world. Such approaches assume that definitions of masculinity and femininity are unchanging, universal and unitary. Power is fixed. Deterministic arguments assume that people become who they are because of socialization. That is, society has power over people. Adults (parents and teachers) have power over children and that boys have power over girls because of socialisation or biology. This way of theorising leads to the perception that boys and girls cannot decide how to do their gender. They are fixed. Worse still, girls are victims. Children do whatever they are told as unprotesting blank sheets. Such a position creates a view that individuals are passive to the social messages around them (Davies 1989).

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There are many flaws in the idea that roles are simply reproduced. The ideas of resistance and change in social relationships cannot be accounted for by theories positing power as a fixed property. New approaches to power have meant that people are not passive recipients of socialisation or biologically fixed and psychologically determined. People actively construct and impact upon the world shaping their lives and others. To understand gender as essentialist or biological is to misrecognise the relations between people as in flux, changing and open to change. Social relations are thus always power relations: masculinity and femininity are relational concepts which have meaning in relation to each other (Connell 1995). Connell (1987) concludes that socialisation and sex role theories are flawed because they do not account for the changes in gender relations. Consequently, this thesis operates from a position which treats subjects in complex and fluid ways, taking into account the multidimensional view of power. In asking the question what does it mean for boys and girls to be equal, I shift attention from the idea that power is oppressive to how power is exercised in specific institutional contexts. How teachers, boys and girls, are positioned and position themselves in these early schooling contexts is a central focus. There exist alternate ways in understanding gender and early schooling. In using poststructural analyses of gender Thorne (1993: 177) notes that "It is time to broaden and diversify theoretical and empirical research on children."

## *Understanding Poststructural Theories*

Recent work in the field of gender and schooling, has used poststructuralist theories of discursive positioning as an analytical tool. I will discuss the central tenets of poststructuralism in this section. My purpose in this section is not to provide a full guide to poststructuralism. Instead I sketch briefly how its major constructs are useful to this thesis including discourse, power and subjectivity. Further I make a little clearer the theoretical leanings described above and finally the key ideas within it which help to build this thesis.

Foucault (1977) has argued that there is nothing fixed about the subject: instead people are positioned and position others in discourse. Discourse interlocks with meanings, power and identity. Burman (1994) refers to discourse as a socially organized framework that defines the limits of what can be said and done. Discourses are those:

...practices, that systematically form the objects of which they speak...Discourses are not about objects; they constitute them and in the practice of doing so conceal their own intervention (Foucault 1977: 49).

Poststructural thinking asks these questions: "How does discourse function? Where is it to be found? How does it get produced and regulated? What are its social effects? How does it exist" (Bove 1990: 54). Once a discourse becomes "normal" it is difficult to think and act outside it. Within the rules of a discourse, it makes sense to say only certain things limiting what can be said and done. Discourses enable particular groups of people to exercise power in ways that benefit them (Weedon 1997). For example, the commonsense assumption that boys will be boys means that violence, aggression, competition are naturalized and its harmful effects for others are concealed because of the power that is attached to these meanings. Put another way discourses are the "viewpoints and positions from which people speak and the power relations that these allow and presuppose" (Best and Kellner 1991: 26). Power is thus embedded in discourse because

of the ability to construct people in particular ways. Discourses point to particular ways of being normal and right (Davies 1993). Boys will be boys, for example, assumes and naturalise boys, violence and aggression. Discourses thus constitute particular ways of **getting gender right**. Being constructed as a sissy is rarely seen as desirable and thus not the right way of getting gender right. What is right and normal is socially constituted and produced in discourse. Discourses are thus constitutive of people and their actions. Rarely do we align children and sexuality. This is because our dominant adult discourses attach power to childhood innocence and at the same time to adults. Boys and girls in schools operate from positions of subordination in relation to age, race, language and ability. But the construction of childhood innocence may not align so comfortably with children's lived everyday gender (and sexual) experiences. There are strong contradictions about how to be a male or female, which inhibit and enable the potential for redefinition (Epstein and Johnson 1998). Identity is actively constructed. This means that identities are produced as people interact. They do so not in linear ways but engage with social circumstances to produce and reproduce identities. Active construction means that certain positions are taken up and others not. These ideas incorporate the notions of contradiction and agency. People are passively positioned in certain discourses but can simultaneously be positioned as active in other discourses.

Foucault (1980: 98) maintains that power is:

Never localised here or there, never in anybody's hands, never appropriated as commodity or a piece of wealth. Power is exercised through a net-like organisation. And not only do individuals circulate between its threads; they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power. They are not only its inert or consenting target; they are always also the elements of its articulation.

We may be powerless in an instance while positioning ourselves (or being positioned) as powerful in another discourse. Power does not come from above nor is it a violence. Foucault points out that power is a complex strategy:

When I speak of relations of power, I mean that in human relationships...power is always present: I mean a relationship in which one person tries to control the conduct of the other...these power relations are mobile, they can be modified, they are not fixed once and for all...[they are] thus mobile, reversible, and unstable. It should be noted that power relations are possible only insofar as the subjects are free...Of course, states of domination do indeed exist. In a great many cases, power relations are fixed in such a way that they are perpetually asymmetrical and allow an extremely limited margin of freedom.

In this sense Foucault argues that power is not reducible to physiological capabilities or labour. According to Foucault, power is not something that can be “acquired, seized or shared, something that one holds on to or allows to slip away; power is exercised from innumerable points, in the interplay of nonegalitarian and mobile relations” (Foucault 1978: 94). Power is dynamic, transient, unstable and tense. A state of domination exists for example when a child is subject to the arbitrary and unnecessary authority of a teacher but power can be productive. Power is a strategical game. Foucault (1987:129) captures this in the following way:

To exercise power over another, in a sort of open strategic game, where things can be reversed, that is not evil.

What is important then is to analyse relations of power in order to learn what is being produced; reversible strategic games. The idea that power is located or emanating from a central given point is misguided, and that it is all evil fails to account for a considerable number of gendered phenomena in the early years of schooling (Foucault 1980). The idea that power is not possessed but exercised in ways that produce and reproduce inequalities in the interplay of shifting and mobile relations appealed to me and best explained what I saw and observed in schools. Power is never stable but in flux:

Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere” (Foucault 1978: 93).

Everyone is ensnared by power but we can modify its grip in specific conditions and as a strategy. The repudiation of a fixed identity means that gender is not fixed but people are positioned in discourse. There are thus clear challenges to essentialist and deterministic accounts of gender. There is no essential male or female; instead the dominant discourses of gender position all people as male or female and provide the narratives about our practices as men and women. In this sense the possibility of creating alternative discourse exists.

There are alternate choices available to be different from the right or dominant ways of being boy or girl. They offer the individual different modes of subjectivity. In poststructural theories the subject is the generic term for what, in lay terms, would be the person, or the human being, and what in psychology is referred to as the individual (Henriques et al, 1984). Subjectivity describes who we are and how we understand ourselves consciously and unconsciously:

By ‘subjectivity’ we mean here the particular ways in which a person gives meaning to themselves, others, and the world. Subjectivity is largely the product of discursive networks which organize and systematize social and cultural practice (Davies and Banks 1995: 46).

However, our choices about who to become, how to give meaning to our lives and others, are shaped by the political strength of discourses. How we live our everyday lives, our social-cultural relations within our world, depends on a range of discourses, the extent to which we have access to them and their political strength (Weedon 1997). There are always contradictory discourses about who to become but because some discourses have more political strength than others, they dominate and put pressure on us to adopt the dominant version. The dominant ideas of how to get gender right are oppressive. They

are oppressive because they are invested with power, involving unequal relations which produce and reproduce borders (Steinberg et al, 1997). Steinberg et al (ibid. 12) claim:

In gender relations it is not only the relations of power between men and women that are the problem; it is also the way in which masculinities and femininities are constructed as separated categories that describe and circumscribe individual persons.

Against the idea that masculinity and femininity are static constructs is the idea that every relation is one of change, flux and instability. The borders between masculinity and femininity can be reproduced but can change and are open to change. This supports the idea that the borders are fragile and fluid, opening and closing to change because they are “points of danger” (Steinberg et al 1997: 14). For example, contrary to essentialist arguments, being a boy and a girl is not fixed. Slip ups can and do occur but they are actively policed through recourse to misogyny and homophobia. This places pressure on people to get gender right by adopting ‘normal’ patterns of conduct.

Certain contradictions or moments of possible disruption are thus constitutive of identities. Being a boy or a girl are not simple constructs occurring in linear ways. Its learning involves contradiction. In other words, power can be exercised for better or worse. It can work in the materialist sense to reproduce identity or it can work in complex ways to disrupt and produce identity. I use the following word **-(re)produce-** to suggest the simultaneous appropriation and disruption of identity within specific social locations. The making of gender is a dynamic process which is subject to contestation and can disrupt our taken-for-granted assumptions.

This idea is useful in this thesis as it points to fresh possibilities and the creation of gender friendly discourses as the work towards gender equality begins. Power relations can be produced and reproduced simultaneously and in contradictory ways. These are generative ideas in the areas of masculinity studies, cultural studies, performance theories, queer theory, feminist poststructuralism. It is for this reason that I find these

eclectic approaches useful in this study. The possibilities build from the potential within a reconceptualised notion of power and make for different readings of boys and girls, for deeper understandings of power relations and for generating change with teachers in the early years of schooling. However, I have raised an important issue in this introduction with regard to the broader material conditions which create the conditions for power. Using the eclectic approach means that I am able to understand the multidimensional view of power in the analysis of identity while being **alert** to the social locations in/through which the conditions of power are created. The eclectic approach of this study is used to think differently about power: to open up what seems natural to other possibilities but also to understand that material conditions set limits to and provide the context of, the everyday world of teachers and children. The making of gender in this multi-sited study takes place within continuing materially-structured asymmetrical relations of power including race and class divisions.

#### *Using a Poststructural Framework in the Making of Gender and Early Schooling*

Emerging recently in the international literature are challenges to the taken-for-granted assumptions about gender (and sexuality) which inform many early schooling contexts (MacNaughton 1997a; 1997b; 1999; 2000a; 2000b; Davies 1989; 1993; Connolly 1995; Jones 1995; Jordan 1995; Boldt 1997; Tobin 1997; Epstein and Johnson 1998; Francis 1998; Yelland 1998; Epstein 1999; Skelton 1996; 1997; Letts and Sears, 1999; Renold 2000; Grieshaber and Cannella 2001). These taken-for-granted assumptions range from childhood innocence, to children are too young to know, gender (and sexuality) do not matter, to theories of biological determinism, gender socialization and developmental appropriate practice (DAP) which see learning in terms of ages and stages of development. These theories, as indicated in an earlier section, serve to (re)produce the idea that children are separate from the socio-cultural context in which they live and are thus separate from gender, race, class or power that is part of the context. In particular, reliance on these theories promotes the idea that children are blank sheets on which gender patterns are stamped. Within these frames children are constructed as powerless, unprotesting and passive recipients of knowledge (Epstein and Johnson 1998;

MacNaughton 2000a). Tobin (1997a; 1997b) suggests that dominant discourses have banished sexuality from their vocabulary. Within gender development and gender socialisation theory power is constructed as repressive. With development theory children develop in stages so that children at age seven or eight are considered less developed. Dominant assumptions follow from this construction, including the idea of childhood innocence and that children do not know but with age and stage of development they will come to know. A common sense example following this approach is that children are sexually innocent. Gender socialization assumes that children do not have the competence to make meaning of their lives but are socialized by others, including their parents as adults who have power over them. The overall assumption is that children in the early years of growth do not possess the competence to make sense of their behaviour. Power is made to be negative. Adults are considered to have power over children and ultimately shape who children become.

An over-reliance on developmentalist, structuralist and biologically based theories has led to gender (and sexuality) and early schooling being unthinkable. Gender is thus constructed as immovable which renders boys' and girls' experiences as fixed without the capacity to change. Boys and girls are naturalized. Aggression and violence become a way of excusing boys and men's violence. Passivity and gentleness encourage familiar roles for girls.

A persuasive argument has been made against multiple oversimplified theories which take for granted the definitions of masculinity and femininity, and which assume that they are universal, unchanging and ahistorical categories (Mac an Ghail, 1994: 4) and which cannot explain the complexity of everyday lived experience and its incapacity to handle issues around power. Rather, the school as a site which deploys specific gendered practices and engages with constructions of masculinity and femininity is more conflictual and contradictory than essentialist models of the school have tended to suggest (Connell 1989). Understanding the complexity and the dynamism of power is key. In recognizing primary schools as sites of historically varying contradictions that actively construct gender identities, Thorne (1993: 199) argues against the ideas of

gender as static and ahistorical, postulating that “power is central to the social relations of gender.” Gender power in primary school sites is thus fluid and changing, which essentialist models tend to discount.

Poststructuralism, as a loose framework, has provided fresh ways of thinking about gender identity and children which broaden the existing frameworks that guide thinking about children and gender (Davies 1989; 1993; 1995; Tobin 1997a; 1997b; 1997c; Yelland 1998; Cannella and Grieshaber 2001) thereby acting as a corrective to the multiple oversimplifications of gender socialization, gender development and biologicistic accounts of gender and power. Poststructuralist perspectives argue that a person cannot exist outside the social and is therefore always socially constructed. People cannot interact with others independently of the social world in which they live. Poststructuralist thinking is concerned loosely with discourse, power, meanings (knowledge) and identity. Power, discourse, meanings and identity are key concepts in this thesis. Different meanings circulate at any given time but which meanings are considered ‘right’ are always struggled over and impacts on identity (Kenway and Willis 1998). Meaning is influenced by power and power influences meaning. Identities are thus never fixed but are constantly produced. Identity is not transparent and simplistic but has to be constantly won in the interplay of power, meanings, culture and history (Mac an Ghail 1994). Gender identities are thus always formed in and through complex interaction with race, class and sexuality. These aspects are constitutive of identities. Gender is thus always socially and culturally constructed. How race, class and sexuality invest gender identities is a concern in this thesis.

Meanings, power and identity are always changing in social and cultural circumstances. A person cannot stand outside the social world and wield power (Epstein and Johnson, 1998). Power is thus always shaped and limited by systems of meanings. Some meanings that circulate are more powerful than others. For example, boys will be boys, is a powerful dictum. It is not “true” but power has been attached to it and therefore it becomes a common-sense powerful argument. In the same way apartheid (re)produced the idea that white was right. Childhood innocence is presumed in early schooling

contexts (Epstein 1999; Tobin 1997). It is not “true” but power has been attached to it and it has become dominant in the circulation of meanings about children. In the same way meaning is attached to the social categories such as boy and girl. Some of the common sense meanings that are associated with particular boys are: brave, aggressive, violent, competitive and sporty (Gilbert and Gilbert 1998). They are not true but powerful. The meanings about what is ‘normal’ in the constitution of the category “boy” places pressure on all people, to position and be positioned by these constructs because they are invested with power. In this sense power and meanings in/through discourse makes gender identity. Such a view becomes feminist poststructural when gender differences and unequal power investments are made a central focus of analysis but also when gender(sexual) power relations are challenged (Kenway and Willis 1997). My thesis does both as it interrogates power, identity and meanings in/through discourse.

This thesis will show that children’s lived experiences cannot fit with simplistic and deterministic explanations. Such explanations are misguided understandings of power which make invisible the dynamic relations in children’s lives. Power can be turned and sometimes turned upside down (Steinberg et al 1997). The messy, sometimes upside down everyday ordinary experiences of the subjects in this thesis can best be understood by theories which recognize the complexity of living. In the thesis I hang on to the eclectic approach in/through which power is manifest, but also hold on to the material realities which create the conditions for power and through which we can understand the differential access to power, its practices and the effects of power. This approach recognizes the complexity of the process of living in and through which power can turn and return almost instantaneously.

In order to show the complexity of living gender, I use the idea of momentary discourses to describe the episodic and shifting means as children make gender. I constitute children’s subjective worlds as momentary discourses in/through which knowledge, power and identity are associated. In the interplay between domination and freedom there are moments that are modified, mobile, not fixed once and for all. These are the moments when children articulate in ways which suggest the instability and fragility of

fixed ways of thinking about children in the making of gender (and sexuality). These are powerful moments which are fluid, shifting and episodic. I call them momentary discourses because they emerge as quickly as they disappear. Significantly the momentary discourses shake the habitual ways of thinking about children and gender but can at the same time reinforce it. Children actively construct their gendered identities. Chapter 7 provides content to children's momentary discourses.

There are specific contexts where power relations work in such a way that allows for extremely limited moments of power and which reconstitute the asymmetrical and unequal nature of gender relations. Some voices are made more silent than others. KwaDabeka Primary School receives special attention in this regard. The material context provides clues to the marginalisation of certain voices. It is for this reason that I hold on to the tensions between the materially structured asymmetrical relations of power and the idea that there is a range of positions that may be occupied within contradictory discourses.

For boys and girls in this study, the momentary discourses mean understanding what they think, what positions they take up, how they do so and evaluating their choices. It also means identifying the discourses which position them in certain ways and not others. Moreover, it means that there are positions available that can be taken up which may not be harmful to those experiencing gender inequalities. Research has demonstrated that children can and do take up positions within a context of constraint and possibility (Banks 1989; Epstein 1993; 1999; Davies and Banks 1995 Skelton 1996; Tobin 1997a; 1997b; MacNaughton 1997a; 1997b; 1999; 2000a; Epstein and Johnson, 1998; Cannella and Grieshaber 2001). For example Epstein (1993:130) in her study of race, shows how "very young children (under the age of seven) can engage with difficult issues and reflect on their own feelings and reactions, provided they are given the appropriate opportunities, encouragement and scaffolding to do so." Similarly Banks (1989: 46) argues that children aged four to five learn to take up their maleness and femaleness as if it were an "incurable element of their personal selves, and they do so through learning the discursive practices in which all people are positioned as either male or female."

This study is useful in that it claims the agentic possibility of boys and girls at ages four and five. Thus meanings, power and identity are made in/through discourse. Power relations are always maintained and disrupted in discourse.

Butler (1990) also refers to the disruption of identity. Using the idea that gender is a performance serving the interests of heterosexuality, Butler (1990: 33) argues that gender is a “repeated stylization, a set of repeated acts.” However, in the performance there are slip ups (disruptions) or violations of norms and this poses a threat of gender (and sexual) performance as less than real and normal. What is useful about Butler’s idea in this thesis is the notion of power which can be turned against itself to produce alternate complex modalities of power.

These ideas of identity and sexuality are also broadly understood as queer theory. I do not enter the debate about what constitutes queer theory and the debate rages from whether it works in the interests of lesbian and gay identities or whether it works under the banner of toppling heteronormativity. What is interesting about queer theory for this thesis is that it involves the constant questioning about the ‘normal’ identity of children in the early years of schooling and the struggle to get gender right. Queer theorising questions the normal ways of getting gender right including the heterosexual compulsion and the norms attached to the category boy and girl best summed up in the following way:

Queer theory is linked to a form of politics which deliberately seek to break down the fixed boundaries between hetero/homo, gender and other binaries, to multiply sexual categories and ultimately to dissolve them, insisting that ‘queer’ itself is not some bounded community, or not only so, but is everywhere (Steinberg et al 1997: 9).

The important idea here is the questioning of fixed categories and the idea of power as not unidirectional, but everywhere. Whilst constant questioning and critiquing of sexual

(and gender) boundaries are important they must also take into account social and cultural processes.

How people work on their identities and how identities are worked upon is a key concern of cultural studies. The question in cultural studies is: how are processes produced and circulated within material, social and cultural conditions which impact on the production of identity? Issues of race, class gender, sexuality that constitute cultural dynamics are significant. Thus, whilst performative, queer/ sexual theories question the normalization of gender discourses it is important to recognize the social locations and the material realities as they impact on identity and create the conditions for power relations (Mac an Ghail 1994; 1996; Connell 1995; Salisbury and Jackson 1996; Steinberg et al 1997; Kenway and Willis 1997; Epstein and Johnson 1998; Grieshaber and Cannella 2001). Within specific circumstances, race and class impact in different ways on identity. Identity is produced in everyday schooling contexts which help shape and reshape these wider structures of inequalities.

The next part of this section focuses on masculinities and outlines the key concepts through which masculinities are understood in this thesis.

### *Understanding Masculinities*

Internationally the simplistic understanding of masculinity has come under increasing criticism with its incapacity to handle issues of power. I have referred to these debates earlier with regard to biology, gender development and gender socialization. Increasing attention has been given to the construction of masculinities within specific sites and this provides a corrective to the simplifications of gender development/gender socialization theories which limit the understanding of power. In this section I do not explore the huge literature that has burgeoned in the field of masculinities and schooling. Rather this section explains the following key concepts which help build this thesis. They are the following:

*Diversity of masculinities:* Masculinities are multiple. There is not just one pattern of conduct in all times and places. In different contexts masculinities vary according to different cultures and different periods of history (Connell 1998; 1995) and masculinity changes over time. There are different patterns of masculinity, different ways of being a boy (man). These differences relate to the interlocking dimensions of race, class and sexuality (Mac an Ghail 1994). More than one kind of masculinity can be found in a given cultural institution. There are different masculinities. These differences mean differential access to power, practices of power and effects of power (Haywood and Mac an Ghail, 2001). Masculinities are thus fluid, constructed and cannot belong to one person or group. There are socially constructed and involve a constant battle between rival meanings of being a boy(man).

*Hierarchies and Exclusions:* There are definite relationships between the different kinds of masculinities. Differences depend on categories of hierarchies, inclusion and exclusion. Masculine and feminine identities exist in relation to each other. The gender processes propose masculine and feminine identities as distinct and then privileges a hegemonic form of masculinity in relation to femininities and other types of masculinities. In contemporary society, one pattern of hegemonic masculinity is most respected. The patterns of conduct that are associated with hegemonic masculinity are usually authoritative, aggressive, heterosexual, physically brave, sporty and competitive (Connell, 1987; 1995; 1998; Mac an Ghail, 1994; 1996 Connolly 1995; Salisbury and Jackson 1996; Gilbert and Gilbert 1998; Lesko 2000). This hegemonic masculinity is more respected than other patterns. It is celebrated, presented as an ideal and invested with power. Connell (1995) identifies four types of masculinities including the hegemonic form. The other three are non-hegemonic forms of masculinity: which is a move away from power. They are subordinate, complicit and marginalized masculinity and a pecking order of masculinities is established. The non hegemonic forms of masculinities are not revered and implicate race, class, sexuality and ethnicity. For example, being a boy in a black dislocated township school in Durban may be quite different from being a rich white boy in an elite school in Durban. However even within specific contexts there is a range of masculinities which exists. The important point is

that different forms of masculinity exist together and the hegemonic form has to be constantly struggled for and is subject to challenge. Not all men embody the common form of masculinity. All men live in a state of tension with, or distance from, hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1995; 1998), but the patterns of exclusion and hierarchies are an important source of conflict and violence. Hegemonic masculinity can be quiet and implicit but it can also be violent, as in the case of racist or homophobic violence. In this thesis I use the idea of masculinities in terms of (re)production which attends to power within the micro contexts and which acknowledges the wider structures of inequalities and the broad patterns which serve to reproduce power between men and women in unequal ways.

This brief sketch of masculinities provides correctives to oversimplified discourses which render identity as fixed and incapable of changing. In the thesis I also try to make meaning of how boys are positioned and position themselves as particular kinds of boys. One of the purposes of this study is to give some meaning to these experiences.

This section has provided a loose theoretical framework within which to understand the thesis. It must be noted that the work I have referred to is highly contested and many variations exist. My purpose though is not to enter a theoretical debate but rather to provide a basis upon which I could build my study. I hang on to different theories- queer, performative, sexual, cultural and feminist poststructural theories which make gender power a central focus of analysis and which move away from simplistic and determinist arguments. Who we are is not simple and automatic, but a constant site of struggle over power. As this thesis develops I want to show how teachers 'talked' theory, how they explain gender, how they explain the boys and girls in their classrooms and why things happened the way they do. I try to show also the ways in which boys and girls explain and chat about who they are and the social practices they engage in. I wanted to know what types of positions were taken up and which were not. How did boys and girls (re)produce gender identity? How did they challenge, maintain, appropriate and contest dominant meanings of gender?

It can be asked how children use gender as a category in early schooling? How do specific children practice gender? What are the daily practices that give meaning to their understanding of themselves and others? What type of investment do children have in a particular way of being masculine and feminine? Do they have access to alternatives? What are these discourses and how do they benefit boys, how do they benefit girls? Who could benefit through alternative discourses? (MacNaughton 2000). For teachers there are more questions. How do teachers use gender in their classrooms? What constitutes masculinity and femininity? How do issues of race and class manifest in the construction of gender identity? Who benefits from these discourses and who could benefit if children's discourses were challenged?

It is argued in this thesis that early schooling is associated with the complexities of everyday living in rich and complicated ways and is most evident as an active maker of a range of femininities and masculinities (Henriques et al 1984). This is what I saw happening and is best explained by the theories described above. I show that this approach can provide the tools to understand gender in the early years of schooling as it is (re)produced and at the same time how it can also become a critical site for encouraging and engineering gender equality. I ally myself with Thorne (1993) in trying to bring "children into the center" (4) in ways that "are grounded in the concept of possibility" (5). I show, like Thorne (ibid. 158):

...how kids construct 'the girls' and the 'boys' as bounded and rival groups through practices that uphold a sense of gender as an oppositional dichotomy. But I also examined practices that have the effect of neutralizing, or as in situations of "crossing" even challenging... gender.

The approach that is taken is important in the understanding of gender power relations. Let us go back to the clipping I began with in this introduction.

Power can be conceptualised as oppressive. This approach may suggest that it is the boys who are the problem. They make it extremely difficult for the girls like Ireen to take on

dominant masculine roles. The boys have power over girls. The boys have harassed Ireen into resigning by being aggressive. The aggressive nature of boys is a further reason for their power over girls. Ireen is afraid of the threatening violent behaviour of boys – violent state of domination which limits the exercise of power. The boys' behaviour has meant that girls, like Ireen, have not been given a fair opportunity at Boleu. The action resulting from this approach is: intervention from the Department of Education and consequent talk by political leaders on the importance of “gender tolerance”, indicating their dissatisfaction with the action of the boys. So the problem is the boys whose aggressive and bully streaks must be changed. This is done through reinforcing the goals of democracy and pointing to modeling the significance of democracy. Girls like Ireen are victimised. Power is one sided.

How do we begin to understand the connection between boys and aggression? There is a widespread view that boys align to violence because of their genetic make up and are influenced by their hormones especially testosterone- a biological determinist argument with the inevitability of boys' power over girls. If this was true then nothing could be done about the high levels of gender based violence in this country and especially in schools which are hotspots for gender violence (Morrell 1998; Human Rights Watch 2001; Jewkes et al 2002). Biological arguments are absurd. If boys are the problem what is then required following from biological science is gene therapy to make South Africa more peaceable and gender friendly. This argument is not good science (Connell 1995). Patterns of conduct and social processes must be examined. This thesis tries to do this using the eclectic approaches that I have taken

My reading of the incident in Boleu Secondary School is that both the boys and girls are strongly positioned by dominant gender discourses. Tony's rejection of Ireen as leader, as woman and the contestation of the election result is a means through which he displays a macho image. The support of the other boys suggests how they position themselves within a macho boyhood. Ireen's contestation suggests that she is not a victim but she does not have access to alternative positions, because these are limited and closed as soon as they are opened, because of the threat of violence which she fears from some of the

boys. But all boys do not position themselves within the macho position, like Sipho, and here it is indicative of the different types of boyhoods that are formed which are not necessarily macho and which do not hurt Ireen although they are complicit. The action to ensure that both boys and girls experience schooling in fairness, requires them to expand their understanding of what it is to be male and female. For example, there needs to be an understanding of their gender position within the gender order and its implications for Ireen. Non-traditional ways of doing gender are powerful also and this could be encouraged through dialogue between the groups. This will be a long-term goal in which rules have to be established about ensuring fairness in the school. The significant point is that between freedom and structure, there are powerful moments which threaten domination. We need to work to open and rejuvenate those moments of power. That is also a goal in this research.

I use the approach of power described above to generate questions about what happens in the early years of schooling and how it happens; and to provide an understanding of it. It also provokes debate as I have tried to show in the above example about what could and should happen to gender and the early years of schooling.

I want to show how teachers understand gender, how boys and girls take up their gendered positions, and the effects of this; and pose ways in which we can try to challenge the dominant way of understanding by elevating alternative, less discriminatory ways of being, rejuvenating moments of power which do not hurt others. To construct such challenges, there is a need to understand what are teachers' and learners' ways of being, seeing and doing, the norms and the ideas and patterns of conduct which are set out in getting gender right. And what better place to start than in the early years of schooling where putting gender and children together appear to be unspeakable and frivolous concerns (Tobin 1997a; Yelland 1998; Epstein 1999; Letts and Sears 1999).

Poststructuralist theorizing and the theories which use the idea that power is generative has been important in moving beyond role model, social reproductionist and resistance theories which often assume that boys and girls are fixed subjects occupying predictable

power positions. The suggestion that there is a range of subject positions that may be occupied within contradictory discourses is useful. This helps in understanding the local contextual specificity in the production and reproduction of children's schooling formations (Haywood and Mac an Ghaill 2001). On the other hand, the development of gender identities and discourses takes place within continuing materially-structured relations of power, and these too are important to understand.

Thus far this thesis is being set up to search for the gendered discourses and practices inside schools. It has been done by clinging on to a range of theoretical frameworks which best explain the complexities of living gender. The theorizing in this thesis arises from what happens in the classrooms in Durban. It is used to generate questions about what happened in their everyday lives, how it happened and to provide ways of understanding it. Particularly it is used to explore the political intent about what could happen about gender equality in the early years of schooling. My work is thus generated by notions of shifting mobile power relations and materialist conceptions of change.

## **Structure**

This introductory chapter has sought to make clear my research project. It presents the theoretical assumptions, introduces the methodology and it considers the important questions to be explored. To do so it introduces a newspaper clipping as an example of gender inequality in school as a means through which to build up my own thesis. In doing so, I provide the focus, the purpose and justification for this study.

Having introduced the study in Chapter 1, Chapter 2 sketches the broader context of this research. The background of research and policy context is important to show why it has been possible, even necessary, to ask these questions about gender in the early years of schooling. Chapter 2 elaborates on the research, theory and policy context in South Africa. Here a chronological survey of gender literature is provided which shows how the literature has tackled race and class with issues of gender. This survey also points to what is missing in the literature in South Africa with regards to poststructural work and

gender in the early years of schooling. Additionally, this chapter elaborates the research context with regard to some of the major policy changes which came to bear on the study.

Chapter 3 examines the methodology and the implications of ethnographic research. I describe the methods I use and the implications for the researcher in the research process.

Chapter 4 presents the background to Westridge, Umhlatuzana, KwaDabeka and Umbumbulu Schools. It is intended to give a picture of the schools where I conducted research in 1999. It presents a common sense view of the research in everyday language. It also gives factual information about the schools and the people in them. It allows me to speak as an Indian South African woman doing research. Additionally, I present some data from each school as a way of introducing the schooling sites.

Chapters 5 and 6 involve a close-up examination of shared and specific teaching discourses, respectively. The primary concern in Chapter 5 is to explore the shared teaching discourses across the four school sites through which gender identities are produced and regulated. This chapter identifies six teaching discourses. These are, making difference biological; children are children: gender doesn't matter; parents are the models; just kids: still young; presumed innocent, and teachers are mothers. These shared patterns of discourses are related to the conceptualisation of gender power as oppressive and the one-sided view that children are acted upon without agency.

Chapter 6 refers to the complexities of race and class in the formation of teaching discourses. This chapter is a search for the specific teaching discourses as crucial aspects of the gendering process. The bizarre construction of apartheid has meant a highly unequal and turbulent society in which gender relations are being made. To understand more comprehensively how gender is understood we need to look at the different social situations in which people are placed in society. The schools in this study are reflective of different social situations. In this context, I show how cultural dynamics involve recourse to the dominant teaching discourses that regulate and produce gender identity.

Additionally I identify some patterns in teaching discourses which may generate better prospects for gender equality.

Chapters 7 and 8 draw attention to children's momentary discourses: their subjective worlds, which serve to deconstruct earlier teaching discourses and shows that children's gendered (and sexual) cultures are powerful in the making and the elaboration of schooling relations. The concept of momentary discourses is utilised to explain the rapidly shifting, elusive and episodic moments in children's lives across the schooling sites. Within these discourses are moments of power, through which children produce their gendered selves in the interstices between freedom and structure. Drawing on momentary discourses, this chapter explores how children's gender (and sexual) identities, are responding and contributing to dominant definitions of gender.

Chapter 8 further explores children's momentary discourses at KwaDabeka School which elaborates the contextual specificity in the enactment of gender identity. The context of violence and poverty provide the major backdrop against which violent gender relations are constructed at the school. I show how masculinities and femininities are mediated and contested in violent relations.

## **Chapter 2**

### **South African Education: Context and Gender Research**

This chapter sketches the broad policy context against which the study was conducted. The broad national level is important as gender is lived and mediated in/through these contexts. Additionally, it sketches how gender and schooling have featured in the research in South Africa with the aim of identifying some of the major concerns, shortcomings and omissions. This thesis makes a contribution to that literature by offering fresh ways of thinking about gender and early schooling in South Africa. These new ways of thinking about gender and schooling derive from the gaps and the shortcomings in the existing research. The first section deals with the broad policy context.

#### **Broad National Context**

The democratic election in 1994 was significant politically in ending white domination and apartheid in South Africa. Democracy, non-racism, non-sexism, freedom and equality have found expression and are finding their way into all legislation. Policies are now oriented to addressing past inequalities including those of race, class, gender and sexual orientation, which is one of most striking features of South Africa's gender "evolution". Democracy has brought the heightened expectation that political change will facilitate the eradication of social and economic inequalities. The democratic Constitution (1996) obliges the state to address these inequalities.

The new Constitution integrates a full range of political, social and economic rights in the Bill of Rights. The Constitution protects equal access to these rights. Unfair discrimination is prohibited on a number of grounds including race, class and gender. The need to take measures to ensure equality has thus been recognized in South Africa's democracy. Political and economic systems have been changing to address these issues.

In terms of gender equality the democratic legislative framework has meant that South Africa adopted the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) signed on 29 January 1993. Gender equality is supported by the Constitution and many structures have been created to help that process. Some of these are the Office on the Status of Women in the Deputy President's office, the Commission on Gender Equality (CGE) and gender desks in various government departments, including that of education. The emphasis of new policies has been on the affirmation of women, and much debate about gender in the country relates to women's subordinate position and how to improve it. Race and class are crucial in the debates about women's subordinate positions in South Africa. Apartheid and colonialism provided fertile ground for the inferior position of women, especially black women, who have suffered from race, class and gender inequalities. We are left with a legacy which means that over a third of all Black women employed in South Africa in October 1995 are domestic workers (Liebenberg 1999) and domestic work is characterized by poor wages. South Africa is committed and obliged to address the conditions of socio-economic inequality.

The broad policy context and concern is thus on women's inferior and subordinate position. Given the status of women in South Africa, the political focus on women is easily justified. Women and girls in South Africa have generally felt the brunt of patriarchal, sexist and cultural norms. South Africa has the highest rate of gender-based violence in the world. In South Africa the critique of sexism is still a major issue. The everyday practices of "women's work" means that traditional roles are congruent with deeply held views about women's roles. These attitudes threaten almost every dimension of women's lives (Walker 1990). Women continue to experience discrimination in all facets of their lives and with high levels of violence (Lessing 1994). South Africa is in fact considered to be a particularly dangerous place for women and girls (Mama 2000). While the focus on women is crucial, the study of boys and men has been marginal. This thesis serves to contribute to the debate and infuse policy with the focus on boys and girls.

It is the hope of the national government that policy will drive the process of gender equality. However, the distance between hope and happening, as illustrated in Chapter 1 with Boleu Secondary School, suggests how gender is negotiated with

competing interests and with contradictions. Laws do matter. This study has been conducted against the backdrop of the policy described above but everyday living cannot be fully understood solely within the confines of the political realm. Micro-power relations are important particularly as they involve a wide range of competing interests. To speak about gender equality is not a given, and cannot be taken for granted. Significant to the fuller picture are the norms and the patterns of conduct, the contested and competing meanings through which children enact their everyday gendered lives. My research tries to show this. The next part of this section focuses on the national educational context as it is relevant to this study.

### **Education and Gender Context**

Education, like all features of South African life, is undergoing large-scale changes. These changes are a consequence of the wider transition to democracy. In the first instance, official educational policies which were historically geared to building a united white nation under apartheid are now geared towards democracy, social justice, nation-building and equality.

In South African schools, for example, gender inequalities have been identified as a major hurdle to the transformation of the education system (GETT 1997). Women and girls have become a crucial focus in education. This is captured in the following extract:

Within the education system there are worrying disparities between boys and girls and many girls and women suffer unfair discrimination and ill treatment....In many schools and other education institutions, including the most senior, social relations among students, and between staff and students, exhibit sexism and male chauvinism. Sexual harassment of the girls and women students and women teachers, as well as acts of violence against women, are common... (Department of Education 1995:46).

With democracy has come the heightened expectation amongst many that gender equality will become a substantive concern with the new education system. The

legislative framework of this process was the South African Schools Act (SASA) of 1996.

The SASA outlines the need for a new national system for schools which must serve their educational requirements without unfairly discriminating in any way, while redressing the past injustices in education. It aims to:

provide an education of progressively high quality for all learners and in so doing lay a strong foundation for the development of all our people's talents and capabilities, advance the democratic transformation of society, combat racism and sexism and all other forms of unfair discrimination and intolerance, contribute to the eradication of poverty and the economic well-being of society, protect and advance our diverse cultures and languages, and uphold the rights of all learners... (Department of Education 1996a).

Additionally, the legislation makes schooling compulsory for every learner between the ages of seven and fifteen years and prohibits corporal punishment. Any person who contravenes the law with regard to corporal punishment is liable to a sentence for assault. Educational policy is aimed at eliminating political, economic and social hierarchies and asserting the need to change so that education becomes a representation for equality and social justice (Kallaway et al 1997). Early schooling is not excluded from the commitment to equality:

✓ The care and development of young children must be the foundation of social relations and the starting point of human resource development strategies from community to national levels (White Paper on Education and Training 15 March 1995).

An Interim Policy for Early Childhood Development (ECD) drafted in 1996 has recognised the critical importance of ECD as a fundamental pillar of the foundation for lifelong learning. The White Paper (1995:33) defines Early Childhood Development (ECD) as "an umbrella term which applies to the processes by which children from birth to nine years grow and thrive, physically, mentally, emotionally, morally and socially." ECD in South Africa has referred largely to the debates around

pre-school, although its umbrella term refers to children that are in grades 1 and 2 as well.

ECD in South Africa is geared largely towards providing resources for pre-school children between the ages of 5 and 6, which has been called the reception year or grade 0. A central concern in ECD policy is a focus on provision. Unequal provision is the direct consequence of apartheid education where ECD was designed to be the responsibility of parents and families and not that of the State. Race and class were determining factors in shaping the current fragmented, inadequate and unequal nature of ECD in South Africa, so that only between 9 and 11% of South African children have access to ECD. The gender pattern in early attendance, according to the Nationwide Audit of ECD Provisioning in South Africa, is equally divided between males and females (Department of Education, 2001: 170). In KwaZulu Natal for example, there are 90 528 males and 92 489 female learners in ECD.

The Interim Policy for Early Childhood Development (1996:8) claims that:

one in three White infants and children receive ECD services, compared with about one in eight Indian and Coloured children and one in sixteen African children;

in urban and rural areas full-day care facilities, community-based crèches and pre-schools for the children of Black working mothers are scarce, generally unsubsidised and poorly resourced.

Race and class are thus major factors in determining the form of dividends that come to children. My research is not focused on grade 0 but the race and class issues are crucial in determining why black children younger than seven years enter grade 1. This is due to the skewed provision for ECD under apartheid education, which meant that black children did not and do not have the resources to receive an appropriate pre-school education. This explains why many children who are younger than the school entrance age are in grade 1, as it is the only possible source of free formal schooling. Many children do not live with their parents who have either died of AIDS or are too ill to look after them. This may also explain why children who have no day care support attend school earlier than legislated. These are some of the conditions

which explain why black children in this study could have been younger than seven years old.

Redressing race and class inequalities and creating a more equal ECD for all children in South Africa is one of the main reasons why the Interim Policy on ECD has focused on adequate provision. Overall, the new policy presumes that ECD will be based on democracy and developmental opportunities for all irrespective of colour, race, class, belief and sex:

The vision for Early Childhood Development is that it will serve as the bedrock for child and family life, as well as for future learning. It will be concerned with the holistic development of the young child and ensure an environment characterised by safety, protection, anti-bias and cultural fairness, so that attitudinal and psychological healing, reconciliation and the start of nation-building can take place at a young age (Interim Policy on ECD 1996: 8).

South Africa's policy commitment to children is thus well established and is reflected in the Constitution and in the Interim Policy. Additionally, South Africa is a signatory to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), The World Conference on Education for All (1990), and the World Summit for Children (1990). They are all based on the primacy of the child and on the principles of equality which include race, class and gender equality. Included in these international conventions is the need to provide adequate health and nutrition for children. Health and nutrition are also included in the principles which guide ECD in line with development in the international scene. In South Africa, however, living conditions and life trajectories are strongly raced. Black children live in situations characterised by domestic violence, rape, sexual abuse, continuous threats on personal safety, high rates of crime, unemployment, lack of housing and sanitation, overcrowding, lack of transport, lack of adequate food and absence of domestic water (GETT 1997, 61). The focus of ECD on provision is part of the government's aim to turn things around.

In terms of nutrition in schools, the school feeding scheme has been implemented as part of the humanitarian need and was designed to benefit those who needed it most. (Kallaway 1996). The National Education Policy Investigation (NEPI 1992), reported that provision of healthy food in South Africa was a priority since up to one-third of

urban and half of rural black children are undernourished. The Primary School Nutrition Scheme was introduced by former President Nelson Mandela in 1994, with the explicit aim of improving the quality of life of all South Africans, in particular the most poor and marginalised groups of the community. These policies are put to work at KwaDabeka and Umbumbulu Schools as they are located within economically depressed areas.

Overall, educational policies are envisioned to transform the educational legacy of the past into a democratic education system which will contribute to the development of productive human beings in a country free from violence, discrimination and prejudice. Redressing inequalities is thus a major political force of all policies in education.

Curricular change is another key area in the transformation of South African education. When I went out to produce data for this study, Curriculum 2005 and outcomes-based education (OBE) were inescapable aspects of school life. At times teachers had to attend OBE workshops called by the Department of Education to explain new methods of teaching and assessment. Many teachers in this study complained about the extra work that arose with the new curriculum. At the very practical level, the classrooms were divided into groups which teachers had interpreted to be part of OBE. The following section describes the policy context as it is relevant to my own study.

Released in January 1994, the African National Congress's education policy framework listed curriculum-change as one of its major initiatives in addressing the biased educational context in favour of a democratic structure. This meant an overhaul of apartheid style, Christian National Education (CNE). CNE was constructed for all children black and white and was based on the patriarchal authority of the adult. The teacher as adult was constructed as an authoritative producer of knowledge, generating power over the child who was constructed as deficient (MacLeod 1995; Suransky-Dekker 1998). Black people were constructed as infant-like and thus in need of assistance. The new curricula attempted to rid the education system of racism, dogmatism and outmoded teaching practices and CNE. The ANC's educational policy Framework affirmed that:

The curriculum under apartheid has perpetuated race, class, gender and ethnic divisions (ANC 1994: 67).

Moreover, as part of its commitment to create a national learning framework, the aim was to accelerate the redressing of past unfair discrimination in education thereby contributing to the full personal development of the nation at large (Department of Education 1995) shifting the values and practices of apartheid education into a democratic and rights-based approach to social development (Christie 1998: 208). The structural changes experienced most specifically at the schools in this study were in terms of the new Curriculum 2005 in South Africa. As an alternative to apartheid education, Curriculum 2005 promises to provide the values and the attitudes for democratic nation-building. This type of nation, it is assumed, will be different, preserving and extending the national commitment to democracy. The grand-national metaphors for social change profoundly shape the new curricular context in South Africa.

Underlying the new Curriculum, is the idea of a “paradigm shift” (Department of Education 1997: 6). A paradigm shift is described by the Department of Education as:

A move from one paradigm to another; from one way of looking at something to a new way;

A move to a new mindset, a new attitude, a new way of thinking;

A change to a new game with a new set of rules, when the rules change then part of our world changes (1997:6).

From a policy perspective, OBE and Curriculum 2005 can be seen as a plethora of policy initiatives adopted by the post-apartheid government to restructure and transform education and training under one system. Education and training will be integrated under a system of lifelong learning that would articulate all levels of education. An outcomes-based curriculum would allow different pathways for learners in different contexts, and assessment methods will be articulated through outcome statements (Christie 1999). In this reform process it is assumed that the demand for social justice and for human resources development will be brought

together to shift South Africa, paradigmatically, from apartheid to a democracy based on social and economic upliftment.

The Department of Education notes that the OBE approach is driven by the outcome displayed by the learner at the end of the educational process. Such outcomes are based on the idea that all learners can learn and succeed. The outcomes approach defines what learners are to learn in terms of knowledge, skills understanding, attitudes and values. In order to achieve these outcomes, various types of teaching strategies can be used, which may include group work, and learners should be given enough time to meet their potential.

There are two types of outcomes in OBE: critical and specific outcomes. The critical outcomes underpin the Constitution and are then in the first place gender friendly.

Learners will:

1. Identify and solve problems and make decisions using critical and creative thinking.
2. Work effectively with others as members of a team, group, organisation and community.
3. Organise and manage themselves and their activities responsibly and effectively.
4. Collect, analyse, organise and critically evaluate information.
5. Communicate effectively using visual, symbolic and/or language skills in various modes.
6. Use science and technology effectively and critically, showing responsibility towards the environment and the health of others.
7. Demonstrate an understanding of the world as a set of related systems by recognising that problem-solving contexts do not exist in isolation.

(Department of Education 1997: 13).

Additionally, there are five more outcomes which support developments which encourage the “participation of responsible citizens in the life of local, national and global communities” and “being culturally and aesthetically sensitive across a range of social contexts” (Department of Education 1997:13). These outcomes, which

emphasise a critical citizen, are congruent with the creation of a more gender-fair society. These general outcomes are to be realised through specific outcomes applied to learning areas.

The Foundation Phase (Grades 1, 2 and 3) encompasses the following areas: Literacy, Numeracy and Life Skills. None of the specific outcomes refer specifically to gender but they are guided by the broader constitutionally-based critical outcomes, although an anti-biased approach to assessment is stated in which assessment must be “bias free” and be “sensitive to the gender, race and cultural backgrounds and abilities of the learner” (Department of Education 1997:27).

At the level of principle, Curriculum 2005 acknowledges the important challenge at the intended level, that of bringing an ‘anti bias’ approach in the first years of schooling in which gender is a recognised form of ‘bias’. While the implementation of Curriculum 2005 continues in grade 8 this year (2001), the extent to which it can infuse gender in all aspects of schooling remains open (Unterhalter 1999). Not surprisingly, not one teacher in this study saw the interconnections between gender equality and the new curriculum. These concerns are echoed by Chisholm and Unterhalter (1999) who claim that much of the policy work in South African education has proceeded as if there were no gendered issues involved in curriculum and assessment. The extent to which the new curriculum can foster deeper understanding to break down race, class and gender stereotypes is questionable. Unterhalter (1999: 26) claims that the ability of any curriculum has more power in rhetoric than reality:

The curriculum as a policy text cannot of itself explain how it will be put in use in the classroom, and in the curriculum in use cannot easily be disentangled from other educational processes like for example, the pedagogies utilised, the learning materials and the ways they are read, and the assessment system in operation. But all these processes are gendered and intersect with socially constructed views of race, ethnicity and sexuality.

In Chapter 1, it was argued that gendered meanings in early schooling can be explored at the everyday level through which they are (re)produced. My research is thus a

closely focused examination of the social construction of gender. The curriculum and its learning materials and assessment strategies is not the concern, rather my intention in providing some detail with regard to OBE is to provide a context through which gender is lived in schools. When I sat in the schools, OBE was inescapable for teachers and children, as both grades 1 and 2 had begun its implementation in uneven ways. It is against this backdrop that gender identities are being produced and maintained.

In this section thus far I have sketched the broad policies that are relevant in this study. It is clear that at the level of policy, gender equality is considered a salient feature. The Department of Education recognizes this. The Gender Equity Task Team (GETT) was established in 1997 by the Ministry of Education to study the gendered state of education and make recommendations on how to promote gender equality. The GETT's brief was to advise the Department of Education on the establishment of a Gender Equity Unit (GEU) and how gender matters in education could be dealt with. Amongst the recommendations was the establishment of the GEU. The GETT recognized the early years of schooling as significant in challenging gender stereotypes. The GETT also drew attention to very limited research into gender and early schooling in South Africa. Nevertheless, using anecdotal evidence and international research as a yardstick, many areas requiring efforts to bring about gender equality in the early years were identified at the policy level, at the district level, and at the school level, including the need for in-service programmes to contribute to teacher's understanding of gender concerns within the framework of gender equality. Violence, sexual harassment and aggressive forms of masculinity, gendered constructions in the playground and gender stereotypes in the classroom were highlighted as being significant areas of concern in the early years of schooling. The broad context of race, class and cultural differentiation were also highlighted as significant in the production of gender relations. The GETT document was impressive but, to date, its recommendations have not been translated into school reality. This study will attempt to give some explanation for this failure, which is hydra-headed.

Changing meanings is not easy and involves many issues. It involves a consideration of the structural conditions of contemporary South Africa emerging out of colonialism

and apartheid; it involves the fiscus and the extent to which it can fund the alleviation of poverty and social and other inequalities; it involves social issues and the hierarchies (racial, gendered and classed) that were created and exist and the bizarre formulation of race and class patterns, it involves the history of patriarchal privilege in South Africa, both white and black men “made decisions, earned money, held power” (Morrell 2001: 18). Gender is multi-faceted and involves cultural definitions of gender, childhood experiences, and patterns of relationships between men and women and among men. Crucial in all of this are the patterns of violence which place South Africa on top of the chart with regard to gender violence. These issues are not easily explained and require multi-level examination in understanding the patterns of gender inequalities. This thesis identifies early schooling as one significant arena through which gender is produced and reproduced, stepping out of policy but putting it to work at the same time.

Within the existing educational context, the social objective of justice and equality competes with economic imperatives. Currently working within the policy of Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR 1996), South Africa has focused on reduced spending and market driven policies. South Africa’s transition has occurred within the context of global changes which promote economic competitiveness (Chisholm 1999). The main elements of this context are cuts in public expenditure, privatization, and thus fiscal discipline.

In education globalisation has meant reduced spending and cut-backs while simultaneously addressing the need for equality in education. I focus here only on teacher redeployment as it affects my own study. South Africa has sought to work towards social changes even though it is committed to limiting its expenditure. Instead of increasing the education budget, South Africa has been working towards redistributing resources from better resourced schools (generally white) to black schools (Chisholm 1999). This is closely linked to the reduction in public expenditure. Teacher salaries are the highest expenditure in education. National policy between 1995 and 1997 sought to redeploy teachers from areas of over supply (white and urban black) to areas of under supply (rural black and poor). Areas of over supply and under supply were calculated according to the national teacher-pupil ratio in secondary schools at 1:35 and 1:40 in primary schools. Teachers were also given

the option of a Voluntary Severance Package if they did not wish to be redeployed. The process began in 1995 and it was expected to be complete in 2001. During this study teacher redeployment became a concern for some teachers at Umhlatuzana Primary School. Schooling identities are thus produced in relation to these broad changes. So, while South Africa's transition has been premised on humanistic goals, there are contradictions as the rising goals of equality and justice compete with invigorated economic policies. Better placed middle-class schools are able to afford additional resources at their own costs and pay for education, accentuating the class divisions. The fees in the schools under study for example range from R4000 per annum at Westridge Primary School to R80 at KwaDabeka Primary School. All schools are managed by governing bodies and, with race-class constructs in South Africa human resources are skewed to privilege existing patterns of inequalities. It is against this backdrop that schools are expected to deliver to South Africa a just society –improving the quality and building a peaceful and democratic society. The problem with market-led policies is that sustaining a commitment to social justice issues becomes increasingly challenging when “gender justice is last on the list of social equity concerns despite official rhetoric” (Friedman 1999:5; Unterhalter 1998).

This section has provided a broad context in which this study was conducted. It is by no means an exhaustive account of all educational policies but rather draws attention to those that are relevant to this study. The broad context is important to consider as it permits fresh speculations about gender equality in education. The backdrop alerts us to the structural and political conditions under which schooling operates. However, everyday living cannot be understood exclusively through that realm. In this thesis I step out of policy and focus on the ordinary, everyday makings of gender.

The last part of this chapter deals with South African gender research and education.

### **Gender Research and Education in South Africa**

The purpose of this section is to sketch the broad research into gender and education in South Africa, to identify some of the major concerns in education and gender in South Africa, and to point to the gaps and the shortcomings, which serve to support this study. A chronological mapping of the major concerns in the literature follows.

Work in gender and education has only recently been undertaken in South Africa (GETT 1997), burgeoning only in the past decade. The literature though is not expansive and there is a mixture of detail and silence. There are gaps in analysis and a lack of information in key areas (Chisholm and Unterhalter 1999). A well-documented feature of apartheid was the race and class inequalities of the education system (Nasson and Samuel 1990; Unterhalter 1991). The debates around race and class centred on differential expenditure, the black working class struggles against apartheid and the debate about apartheid education as a system of economic and social reproduction, which perpetuated race/class inequalities. Gender inequalities and schooling were not well delineated because they were more diffuse (Unterhalter 1998; Truscott 1994). Nevertheless, there has been significant work within the field of gender and education, especially in the last decade.

In the first place, our understanding of the position of women teachers and girls has burgeoned and some detail exists in this regard. The anomaly of apartheid education was that it provided better access to girls than most of the education systems in Africa (Truscott 1994; Morrell 1998a; Unterhalter 1998). During apartheid the enrolment of girls, particularly black girls expanded (Unterhalter 1991; 1998; Truscott 1994). For example, Unterhalter (1991), shows that numerically the number of girls of all race groups in South African schools increased. Unterhalter (1998b) shows that black girls were more likely to complete primary school than boys and to remain in school until the end of the secondary level despite the existence of non-compulsory schooling, poverty and apartheid. Access, however, cannot fully account for the experiences in schooling. There are many problems and this too is noted in the literature and will become clearer as this brief review unfolds.

In the early 1990's strong political reasons had a large part in determining what constituted some of the research into gender and education. The unbanning of political organizations in South Africa in 1990, made better prospects for changes in the position of women and girls. In this period research was geared to the process of transition to democracy (Chisholm and Unterhalter 1999). In the transition to democracy the focus moved to equal opportunities for men and women. The political

aim was to move towards the equitable distribution of the genders across the various divisions of labour and through the social structures.

Ten years ago, Robert Morrell (1991) raised the key issue of gender and education in the conference on Women and Gender in South Africa in the period of transition to democracy. In this paper, Morrell noted the absence of gender and gender research in the politics of education. Additionally, he argued that the debate about gender and education must be raised with key constituents including policy makers, teachers, children and parents to improve the position of women (and girls) in post-apartheid South Africa. In particular, he raised the significant point that very little was known about the gendered dynamics of classroom life. Rejecting the view that schools are agents necessarily of social mobility, Morrell attempted to grapple with the relationship of gender and education by linking its class and race formations. Specifically he focused on what happens to black girls and women in South African education, which perpetuates violence and sexism in schools. Morrell (1992) argued that the democratic transitional period provided fertile ground for the inclusion of gender-sensitive policies and raised some of the issues which policy could consider with regard to gender and education.

The issues that Morrell raised with regard to black secondary schools vary from the debate about single sex schools, subject choice, the sexual division of labour, corporal punishment, rape which make schools particularly black schools “not safe places” (ibid:5). Additionally, he refers to the wide-ranging discriminatory practices that face black women teachers, including poor promotion possibilities as well as the teacher-mother double bind, which credits men for work done by women. Moreover, Morrell argues that the harshness of black schooling and the experiences of black women teachers and girls are important to address:

The qualitative aspects of gender discrimination, which are allied to the deeper effects of Apartheid assisting in the cultivation of violence and sexism amongst the youth, demand attention (8-9).

Significantly, schools are seen as violent and sexist sites which are allied to broader structures of oppression including apartheid. The framework used resonates with

linking systemic issues with gendered dynamics in the classroom. Identifying violence, the legacy of apartheid, class and gender formations within schooling, Morrell's framework does not rely on exclusive structural considerations, but also on the classroom dynamics in the interplay of structure and institution. Morrell opens the debate about single sex schools especially for black girls which may offer a safer, less pressurizing space with regard to sexual harassment. Almost ten years later Morrell (2001) shows that the debate is still relevant. Morrell (1992) argues that access to education and removing barriers to girl's education cannot account for the problems that girls and women face in schools. Understanding must go beyond equal opportunities and focus on the quality of education received by girls. Several questions are raised including the need to research the experiences of girls and teachers in schools and classrooms and how teachers are implicated in the perpetuation of sexism. However, the debate about single sex schooling must remain open. Associating sexual harassment and violence to males implicates men and boys. Given the range of gendered positions that both boys and girls take up, girls too have the potential for violence and sexual harassment. These are important areas for further research.

Morrell's (1992) study maps some of the key issues in the research on gender and education, including the need for ethnographic research and the importance of classroom dynamics, the association with external structures like the sexual division of labour and the apartheid capitalist social structure, which more fully explain the subordination of women and girls. Politically, Morrell's focus on girls resonates with the broader national concern with women's equality in the transition to democracy, which had a large part in determining and developing research in gender and education in South Africa. This in part precluded a fuller treatment of the concept, gender. The focus on gender in South Africa, particularly in the early and mid 1990's was on women and the related meaning of power as oppressive both institutionally and structurally. Clearly, this was not the only way in which gender could be conceptualized, but the focus on power as negative and possessed limited the ways in which gender could be researched and thought about. However, Morrell's work remains very significant in identifying some of the major gaps in gender and education, the difficulties of gender equality within a new democratic framework and the need for classroom-based research as a basis to inform policy. For the purposes of

this study, one of the most significant questions which he raises is: "Does primary school education advance women's interest?" Except for the broad arguments which problematise access to education, the questions of the gendered dynamics within early schooling remain un-confronted.

Truscott's (1994) work is also significant in the identification of gender patterns and trends in education. Her work establishes the correlation between race, gender and educational access. While these concerns overlap with Morrell there are clear distinctions. Truscott notes that apartheid education reproduced unequal race, class and gender inequalities and served the interest of the apartheid-capitalist system. Apartheid education was conceived as the reproduction of the division of labour generating race and class inequalities through which black people suffered the most. Truscott points to some of the gaps in the literature on gender and education in South Africa. She argues that while attempts were made to explore the race/class dimensions in education because of the process of capital accumulation and the general reproduction of labour power, it was "striking that the education debate has not included a single contribution attempting to integrate a gender analysis with that of race and class" (ibid:8). Strong political reasons operated which easily precluded the fuller treatment of race/class and gender in the literature in South Africa. Many of the writings on education were focused on race/class links, because the political concern was with removing the apartheid government using reproductionist arguments with black equated with worker and, therefore, the working classes. Truscott adds to the debate about gender, race and class and the absence of gender in the race-class link is seen as a major shortcoming.

Truscott's study focused on statistical data regarding school attendance, the labour market, school drop-out rates and the matric pass rates. Among the significant results of her study, she shows that girls, across all race groups, attended apartheid schooling in greater numbers than boys. She does acknowledge other factors like violence, pregnancy, affordability as crucial in understanding why black girls drop out of school, which statistical data cannot fully describe, but she provides only anecdotal evidence in this regard. With regard to teachers, Truscott notes that whilst many women occupy teaching positions, hierarchies exist with regard to senior posts most of which are filled by men.

Truscott's study, despite its over-reliance on statistics, is useful and adds to the literature in pointing to some of the major aspects of gender inequalities including structuralist dimensions and the hidden curriculum which domesticates girls. Numbers and figures do matter, but they cannot explain the everyday dynamics of gender relations. They must be troubled. Truscott identifies curriculum bias, and the hidden curriculum as perpetuating massive inequalities with regard to the structures of male authority, corporal punishment, physical violence, sexual harassment and rape and the general prescription of domestic responsibilities for girls.

Arguing for gender-sensitive educational policy, Truscott critiques apartheid education for reproducing the unequal patterns of race, class and gender which reflect women's oppression:

The class system, the sexual and racial division of labour in the economy and the differences in the way patriarchal relations have been structured historically in different cultures means that there are differences in gender bias between the races (29).

Truscott's study is significant in mapping the position of women and girls in the education system and integrating race and class into it. The recognition of gender differences within historically specific sites is important to my own study. Like Morrell, the focus on women and girls has important political implications. One of the implications is that it focuses on women and girls as victims. It is suggested within this approach that women can only be free when they are liberated from something. These include the exaggerated emphasis on structures, in particular the role of the apartheid capitalist state and sexism, and it does limit the ways in which gender could be researched. Truscott's study points to the need to remove the constraints which contribute to institutional gender biases, which include race, lifting of economic barriers like fees (which discriminate on the grounds of class) and the promotion of girl-friendly schools and non-dominant teaching styles. Questions like what happens inside classrooms have been raised as a significant issue in the literature, but remain un-confronted and marginal.

Other studies too have also focused on girls and enrolment patterns and the problems that girls and women face regardless of improving enrolment numbers. I review some of the studies below not for their direct impact on mine, but rather to illustrate what the major concerns have been with regard to gender and education in South Africa. Fuller, Liang and Hua (1996) have shown that even though enrolments for girls have improved, literacy levels has declined. The study shows that although the percentage of girls in high schools is higher than boys, female literacy was lower than male literacy. The study also found differences in literacy levels among racial and ethnic groups. Literacy amongst Tswana-speakers and Tswana-speaking girls is high. Ethnicity as a social location is thus an important variable in understanding gender. The review thus far, points to the need to move beyond the question of access and enrolment patterns. What happens inside the classrooms is also important. Fuller, Liang and Hua show that there is much wrong with an education system that provides better provision but poor literacy for girls.

Some other indications of the problems with schooling have been documented. These include the poor translation of enrolments patterns to higher education (Badsha and Kotecha 1994; Budlender 1994). Badsha and Kotecha (1994) show that despite the relative success at enrolment in schooling, similar success was not translated into tertiary education. Taking the debate even further into the labour market, Unterhalter (1998: 51) points out that successful survival in schooling, and even progress in higher education for South African girls has not translated into labour market advantage. She argues that the fractured nature of the labour market, discrimination at work, the lack of social welfare and childcare could explain the patterns of gender differentiation. Sutherland (1999) also shows the gender differential patterns of performance of students entering higher education. Sutherland argues that improving access to education is not enough to achieve the same outcomes for male and female students. Further she argues that the unequal outcomes are in part a consequence of the way in which boys and girls are treated and the socio-cultural expectations that teachers, parents and learners have which render different ways of responding to the world and making sense of it. These studies identify one of the major concerns in the literature which confirms that gender equality through access cannot on its own guarantee better prospects for women and girls. The studies are important in outlining the structural dimensions of schooling and their relationship with issues of race, class

and ethnicity. They are essential but insufficient and do not take heed of Morrell's (1991; 1992) call for the exploration of gendered local classroom dynamics, which remains largely unexplored.

A different approach to understanding women's lives emerged with a study by Unterhalter in 1998. Unterhalter argues that democratic initiatives in South Africa are based on the assumption that access to education is key to the well-being of girls and women. This poses a challenge to the research cited thus far and eschews the simplistic access/equality equation. Unterhalter argues that policy initiatives are based on scant local knowledge and ignore the importance of classroom dynamics including the link between education and subjectivities. Using autobiographies of six South African successful women (four black and two white) remembering their schooling between the 1920's and 1930's, Unterhalter explores the process of identity construction which implicates not only the broader structural features, including apartheid but also the formation of identity in schools. While her study focuses on women remembering their schooling, it is significant for the purposes of this study, as it emphasizes the lived experience and knowing of gender by addressing some of the major shortcomings in the development of gender and education in South Africa. Unterhalter, highlights their ambiguous experiences and contradictions and points to several important aspects in the re-remembering of schooling and girls' experiences of it. These include the formation of "racialized, ethnicized and gendered identities in schools" (ibid: 59) which provide rich details in the construction of femininities. The creation and formation of gender identities has a great deal to offer in the understanding of schooling, and has the potential to yield great insight. Unterhalter's study opens up many more possibilities in the understanding of gender and further research. Her use of autobiographies have the potential to raise key issues in the debates around gender in South Africa because they analyse the intersection of race (and apartheid's brutality), class, gender, religion, sexuality and violence while providing understanding for the theorisings of identity as fluid, contradictory and ambiguous.

With regard to violence and the sexual harassment of girls, Mukasa (1999) in a study of a school in the black township of Khayelitsha outside Cape Town in 1997 and 1998, investigated the nature and practice of sexual harassment in secondary schools.

Mukasa shows how attitudes about sexual harassment are intertwined with culture, gender stereotypes and socialisation. She reports that modes of discipline and violence and widespread abuse of girls by male pupils and teachers have been documented since the early 1990's.

Morrell (1994; 1998a; 1998b; 1998c) has been key in opening the debate about gender inequalities, violence and masculinities in South Africa and provides a refreshing view in the development of gender and education in South Africa. Morrell (1998a: 219) suggests that the focus on women and girls in education is a legitimate part of the process of gender equality but points to the wide and neglected aspects of gender in South African education with regard to masculinity. Apart from the focus on colonial school-boy's tough and cruel experiences in KwaZulu Natal, no other research exists with regard to boys' experiences of schooling.

An important departure in the development of research in gender and education came with the focus on masculinities. Using the theoretical advances made internationally, Morrell argues that gender is a relational construct involving boys and girls who make meanings in schools and who are moulded and shaped by the school environment and the social structures. This was a significant departure from Morrell's earlier work and the emphasis of girls and women. Using the work of Connell (1987; 1995), Morrell argues that gender power is not linear with boys and schools acting against girls. Girls are thus not victims alone. Power is exercised in different ways relating to the school environment and the wider social structures. Morrell argues that there is a clear connection between violence and boys (men). He identifies South Africa as the most violent country in the world. Rape, sexual harassment, corporal punishment are identified as key features of school life in South Africa. Deacon, Morrell and Prinsloo (1999) argue that in South Africa, the discourse around equality cannot be assumed because of the everyday practices and persistence of corporal punishment and homophobia. Using the responses of teachers studying a part time B.Ed Honours degree, the writers argue that familiar patterns of corporal punishment and homophobia are more constitutive of teacher identities than discourses on equality enshrined in legislation. These identities occur within the legacy of apartheid, violence and poverty.

Morrell (1998b) articulates similar views about the place of masculinity in schools and the idea of hegemonic masculinity. In this work Morrell draws attention to the history of apartheid, the violent struggles against it, the subordinate position of black men, and the violence in townships which have fed violent relations in schools, including sexual harassment. Put simply, Morrell notes that understanding these issues cannot occur in isolation of masculinities and the struggles for hegemonic masculinity. Significantly Morrell points to the importance of differences between categories of schooling in South Africa including rural, township and public and the class/race dimensions which mould masculinities and gender relations in particular ways. He cites the example of the prevalence of sport in former white boys' schools through which masculine ideals are developed. In black schools the sexist division of labour means that girls are responsible for the cleaning. Overlapping with this position is the argument developed by Mthethwa-Sommers (1999) who examines the persistence of sexism in black high schools and the hidden curriculum which reproduce the subordination of girls:

Schools in the townships did not have funds (and still do not) to employ custodians or janitors, so it was incumbent upon us girls to make certain that the schools were in a habitable condition (45-46).

Mthethwa-Sommers argues that girls are victims of continued sexist practices. Her argument may lack the theoretical advances regarding power, the understanding of masculinity, and the general sophistication with regard to the social structures but it does contribute to the literature as it identifies gendered practices in black township schools.

Overall Morrell's work highlights the important issues in the future development of gender and, in particular, the place of masculinities in understanding the persistence of gender inequalities. In addressing the institutional constructions of gender, his work highlights the theoretical understandings of power which transcend the construction of women and girls as victims. However, Morrell cautions that this does not move the focus away from the legitimate concern with girls and women in education. For example, Morrell (2000) focuses on the need to open the debate with regard to single sex schooling in South Africa. Currently former white secondary

schools in KwaZulu Natal are mainly single sexed. Morrell (2000) suggests that with the climate of escalating cases of rape and sexual harassment in black schools, the debate around single sex schools should consider as a short term measure the possibility that single sex schools are safer environments in which black working class girls could succeed. Sex-based and gender-based violence has been identified and overlaps with many writers in gender and education in South Africa. Mlamleli, Mabelane, Napo, Sibiya and Free (2000), add to this debate by identifying sexual harassment and gender violence as a key area of concern in South African schools. The particular strength of their work lies in their call for parental and teachers' involvement in creating safer schools. They acknowledge that each school's intervention programme would be different as the manifestation of violent behaviour differs from school to school. These programmes can only work to the extent that they are fed with data from specific schooling sites and the kind of data that allows for the identification of the norms of practices through which sexual harassment and violence are enacted. Close focus methods exploring the classroom and school dynamics are useful in this regard but they remain an under-researched issue in gender and education research in South Africa.

Another important development in the literature has been the work of Chisholm and Unterhalter (1999), which charts the development of gender theories, policies and education in South Africa and highlights the gaps in the institutional constructions of gender. Looking at different periods in education, Chisholm and Unterhalter argue that democratic educational policy development in South Africa has privileged access and girl-friendly approaches which seek to remove barriers to women and girl's social and material success. This is, they argue, despite the emphasis in the research in South Africa which shows that access does not guarantee equality. Whether policy takes heed of the fuller picture in gender and education is questionable, given the extent of the girl friendly bias in policy.

The authors identify three positions in the development of research and policy in South Africa: women and development (WID), gender and development (GAD), and the poststructuralist approach. Briefly, WID is premised upon equality of opportunity for women that is a girl-friendly approach in the belief that the real problem was with the oppressive barriers to women's employment and development. This approach

analyses the institutional barriers that face women in development. The question for education is, how does education as an institution, hinder the development of women? GAD focuses on the relationship between men and women. The focus of GAD is on the entire social, economic and political system and policy impact on both men and women across different socio-economic groups. Men are recognised as playing a key role in advancing gender equality. The focus here is on the wider social forces that structure the relationship between men and women. Understanding gender as a social construction is deemed more pertinent in understanding relations of subordination and domination. GAD attempts to address the gaps in WID approaches by stressing the importance of structures and experiences of women in analysing oppression. A socialist feminist perspective underpins this approach where race, class, gender, ethnicity and patriarchy are seen as important in analysing oppression. A major focus of this approach is to transform rather than reform oppressive social, economic, political and gender relations. Such a conception requires the transformation of oppressive practices in all institutions. The GAD approach does not discount ethnographic work, but there is an overemphasis on gender reproduction. Ethnographic work in this tradition is based on how external social structures mould and shape identities, ignoring the power dynamics within, across and between relations. In short, such work discounts schooling sites as highly generative producing dynamic relations capable of making meaning while also reproducing, appropriating and maintaining dominant meanings. The constructed/structural features of gender identity provide a rich understanding of the complexity of the schooling experience. The focus on subjectivities, discourses and the micro working of power are important to consider in the work towards gender equality, and this falls within the ambit of poststructural work.

Chisholm and Unterhalter (ibid) see poststructural work as attempting to problematise the constructions of gender:

It[poststructuralism] looks at changing regional and historical constructions of masculinity and femininity, and poses questions not only about the structural and institutional location of gender inequality and its changing configurations, but also about language, culture and subjectivity and the ways in which gender is constructed and reconstructed... (5).

We thus have theoretical frameworks available that enable us to begin to explore more systematically and document coherently how masculinity and femininity is (re)constructed in schooling: structurally, institutionally and culturally. All are clearly essential aspects in the understanding of gender identity and potentially they offer a great deal in the understanding of gender in South Africa, but they do remain the least developed in the literature.

Chisholm and Unterhalter point to what has been missing from gender research in South Africa. For my purpose, thus far one of the most important omissions cited in the study above is the theoretical advances of poststructural work and the related understandings of power which shifted away from power as oppressive. These fresher frameworks eschew the simplicity of access, equality of opportunity debates as well as the overemphasis of reproductionist arguments, which make power oppressive and do not adequately account for change and dynamism in the (re)production of identity. This also explains why I have chosen to work within the poststructural framework which deconstructs power as possessed, essentialist and instrumental. The literature has become aware of this shortcoming in South Africa:

We can construct the silences that exist in the literature in terms of what exists in developed countries. Thus we can note how little research is being conducted on important areas such as gender identity, sexuality...classroom dynamics... Interesting work in the USA, the UK and Australia looks at the complex ways in which gender intersects with other politically and economically constructed social divisions and identities like race, ethnicity, sexual orientation or disability to shape educational processes. This educational encounter in turn entails a reciprocal reshaping of intersecting unjust divisions and correlative intersecting identities... There is little work on these intersections in South Africa and barely any work critically examining the understandings of gender justice in the transformation project (Chisholm and Unterhalter 1999: 17).

I have quoted this lengthy extract as it captures best the omissions and shortcomings in the literature on gender in South Africa. For my purposes I detect that there is more missing in the literature. These include silences in

- Literature focusing on gender (and sexuality) in the early years of schooling,
- The gendered experiences of boys and girls in the early years
- Exploration into masculinities and femininities in early schooling
- Teaching discourses and their implications in (re)producing gender identities, meanings and power relations

They remain uncharted, overlooked, unexplored, unthinkable, and forgotten. The major focus in this study is the formation of gender identities in the early years of schooling using poststructural approaches in understanding the interplay of identities. The focus on the early years of schooling in this thesis thus tries to fill the lacuna identified in the South African literature. Politically, the demand for gender equality in South Africa is clear. The early years of schooling cannot evade its focus.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter sketched the broad policy against which this study was conducted. The premise of equality and social justice are embedded in all policies in South Africa. Gender fair policies in South Africa are considered to be the most favourable in the world. In education the policies are broadly based on the constitutional promise of equality and OBE. The broad policy contexts provide a backdrop for this study and justifies its social imperative. Additionally this chapter mapped the broad context of research in South Africa, identifying key research issues in gender, the theoretical perspectives, and some of their shortcomings and gaps. Early years of schooling, the everyday lived experiences and poststructural work are major gaps in this literature. The dual purpose of the chapter (context and gender research) justified my study against the backdrop of gender equality and in terms of the existing lacunae. Chapter 1 outlined the theoretical framework. The rest of the chapters put these theoretical issues to work. Chapter 3 provides a methodological focus.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Researching the Early Years of Schooling**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter analyses the methodology used to show how gender identities are appropriated, rejected and re-worked in early schooling. A loose poststructural framework is utilized in this thesis to provide a critical interrogation of gender power relations and the constructions of masculinities and femininities. The rest of the thesis deals with this question in particular schools and with particular teachers and children. Here I explore how gender power relations are constructed in schools and how race, class and sexuality are also key differences through which gender inequalities are structured. I argue that early schooling is an active site for the making and re-making of gender identities and gender discourses. In this regard both teachers and children are intrinsic to the making of gender in early schooling.

The methodological focus in this chapter is intended to show how gender power positions are lived in early schooling social contexts. I draw on qualitative research processes and use a close focus examination of teachers, boys and girls to answer the questions set out in Chapter 1. The work of collecting the data and producing it was ethnographic using interviews and observations. I pay particular attention to my own role as researcher, and trouble it. This thesis is not about me, but I am an inescapable part of it and the “me” in it troubles and disturbs the neat process through which traditional research is constructed. In this chapter I introduce the study by troubling some of the accepted assumptions in research providing some critical internal reflections. Ethnography provides the basis for the final section of this chapter in which I examine how interviews with children and teachers were conducted, some of the concerns and some details with regard to the analysis.

## **Describing the Study and Troubling the Process**

### *Describing the Research*

I got to know the teachers and the children who populate this thesis during 1999 when I spent one school calendar year with them. 1999 was significant in that it marked the second democratic elections in South Africa and the government's renewed commitment to social and national emancipation. In terms of curricular change OBE was in its second year and was introduced in grade 2 for the first time in 1999. As part of its social commitment to change, delivery to the poorest of the poor has meant providing access to roads, electrification and water. In his opening address to parliament after the second democratic elections, Thabo Mbeki had stated:

...to improve the quality of life of all our people, especially the most disadvantaged, the government will maintain its approach to reprioritise public spending to maintain and improve the safety net available to the most disadvantaged in our society. It is, however, vital that we improve the quality of spending in these areas and therefore the delivery of services to the people. (Daily News 30 June 1999).

In the year of this study, delivery of basic needs and services was most evident in the vicinity of KwaDabeka and Umbumbulu Primary Schools as most disadvantaged areas. During my visits to these areas the structural changes most visible were the electrification process, provision for water was being made, small houses were being developed and roads were being built.

Inside the classrooms, my research in 1999 had involved a one-year study of boys, girls and teachers and an attempt to understand the construction of masculinities and femininities in the everyday world of early schooling in Durban. I wanted to know how these processes were constructed and how the discourses of early schooling inscribed gender identities. My investigation of the gender processes in early schooling was ethnographic using observations and unstructured interviews and conversations. My methodologies attempted to research what usually happened in practice. I wanted to come as close as possible to what was usually happening and

what was usually being constructed through everyday classroom/playground activities. I wanted the schools to reflect the experience of early schooling in Durban and in the province of KwaZulu-Natal. Thus, I needed to access schools in terms of their race, class and geographical specificity. In South Africa these factors continued to determine the apartheid constructed schooling experience. The following schools participated in the study:

- Westridge Primary School (a former white, well resourced urban school in a rich area).
- Umhlatuzana Primary School (a former Indian school in an urban area serving middle to low income children).
- KwaDabeka Primary School (a former African peri-urban, newly renovated school in the economically depressed and poverty stricken black township area of KwaDabeka); and
- Umbumbulu Primary School (a former African semi-rural school, structurally dilapidated and serving children from poor, semi-rural areas).

Chapter 4 provides a fuller description of the school sites. Purposive sampling was used in the selection of the schools. This meant that I handpicked the schools on the basis of their typicality, their location and accessibility and in this way built a sample based on my specific needs (Cohen and Manion 1994). Race, class and sexuality shape gender, but gender also shapes these relations. I needed to access schools that reflected the race and class context in Durban and which were accessible.

Gaining access to the schools was not difficult. The Centre for Research Evaluation and Policy (CEREP) at the University of Durban Westridge where I teach, had links with Westridge, Umhlatuzana and KwaDabeka Primary Schools for research in curriculum. Using my position as lecturer, I made contact with the school principals who allowed me access. In my interviews with the principals I told them that my research was about gender and I wanted to observe and talk to children and teachers for one school year. At Westridge Primary School I was asked to formally present the research proposal to the school staff. Teachers from grades one and two could then volunteer their participation. During the presentation, I was asked why I had to

research children and gender when it was more relevant to the “higher standards”. After a vibrant discussion, the principal asked teachers to volunteer to be part of the research project. The principal had said this:

Teachers, I think Miss Bhana needs all our support. If her research is going to make a difference to policy regarding gender, then I fully support her.

I wrote this down as soon as I went back to my car as an indication of the power relations between the school’s gatekeeper and the teachers, and through which my research was enabled.

Four white teachers volunteered. I refer to them as Mrs. A, B, C and D. Fuller descriptions of all teachers are provided in Chapter 4. In Umhlatuzana Primary School, the principal consulted with Mrs. E and Mrs. F, grades one and grade two teachers respectively, and they agreed to be part of the project. Both are Indian. The same process occurred at KwaDabeka Primary School. The principal consulted with teachers in grades one and two and Mrs. G, H and I volunteered to participate in the project. All are black. Through the process of snowballing I gained access to Umbumbulu Primary School. I asked students that I taught in the undergraduate programme to suggest the name of a rural/semi-rural black primary school. One student agreed to accompany me to the school close to her home in Umbumbulu. I am highly aware of the student-lecturer power relations in/through which access to Umbumbulu was facilitated. The principal allowed access and consulted with Mrs. J, K, and L who then became part of the research project. Mrs. J, K and L are black.

In this way I managed to gain access to twelve teachers in twelve classrooms across the race, class and geographical boundaries in Durban. It is important to realize that this does not constitute a representative sample of teachers and children in early schooling. I have no problem with the lack of representativeness since I am interested in the situated formation of masculinities and femininities and how they are produced, appropriated and rejected in early schooling. I sampled these discourses through my conversations, interviews and through my observations of teachers and children that reflect schooling experience in Durban, rather than trying to get a representative sample of schools, teachers and children. The schools were chosen on the basis of my

specific research interests. The teachers who agreed to participate did so through the official intervention of the principals as gatekeepers. This meant that for different reasons teachers agreed to be part of the project. The power relations between me, principals and teachers shape how and why teachers agreed to be part of this project. I do know that my position as a lecturer in Education was a power investment.

My intent as ethnographic researcher was to understand the everyday gender power relations in early schooling sites in Durban. I was free to come and go as I pleased as I took on the role of ethnographic freelancer. I spent time inside the schools in Durban and proceeded to produce and record data from interviews and observations. Doing ethnography means that the data can be described as observations, interviews, field notes, photographs, video and audio recordings (Lincoln and Guba 1985). I spoke to teachers and made conversation with children and observed them in their everyday ordinary worlds, in the playground and in the classroom and investigated the production of gender discourses and gender identities. The advantage of ethnography is that “children’s experiences are taken just as seriously or lightly as adults” (Thorne 1993:6), not absorbing them as ungendered but “listening to what they say” (Epstein and Johnson 1998:196). My study also recognizes that teachers are a significant part of the gendered dynamics in schools. I tape-recorded interviews with teachers but sometimes found it ponderous, which inhibited the interviews. I made video-recordings of some sessions and took descriptive photographs of the school sites to provide details of specific schools that I have considered relevant.

The description thus far on managing entry and sample selection serves to introduce my ethnography and suggests linearity. However the ethnographic encounter in this study oozes with power, “unequally initiated and situationally lopsided” (Katz 1992: 496) and through which identity is forged in class, gender, race, age and sexual relations. The next section troubles the legitimate conventions in the thinking/writing and doing of research such as mine.

### *Troubling the Research*

In this section I trouble the traditional research processes that are not usually accounted for and are generally considered out of bounds. The section arises from my

own struggles to produce this chapter and it is based on my reflections of the research process before I consider ethnography.

Writing this chapter has been difficult as I transgressed the legitimate linear conventions of traditional methodology which goes something like this: “categorization, crystallization, codification, making things clear, taking a line, logical, clear...tidy” (Thomas 1998: 142) and in the case of traditional ethnography: “first we employ methods, such as interviewing and participant observation, which produce data; then we code, categorize, analyze, and interpret those data; finally from that analysis and interpretation we develop theories of knowledge” (St. Pierre 1997: 180). I know that my struggle to produce this chapter has been the fear of breaking the conventions and prescriptions that methodology chapters demand. I feared that I would commit a blunder. I worried about the irrevocable damage to the teachers and the children who came into my life as agentic beings.

In my struggle to produce this chapter I have read the methodology chapters of other theses, consulted with visiting scholars who had arrived in the latter part of 2001 and were based in the School of Educational Studies, where I teach. These scholars included Noel Gough and Patti Lather, both renowned and established in the field of methodology, and I felt inadequate and struggled to articulate to them the methodologies that I thought produced this thesis. Reading about methodologies from texts and other theses was sometimes formulaic and sometimes generative:

The dissertation is an odd form, and in the end, it does not count for much. Its reality seems in doubt because it is a becoming genre, a text on its way to becoming something else, good for nothing but a Ph.D. (St. Pierre 1999: 272).

I know a little more about why I have struggled to produce this chapter trying, so hard to find what is required, what are conventions and what is authentic for passing a Ph.D. that I was missing my own ethnography while trying to make it good for nothing, but a Ph.D.

I share with St. Pierre (1997:178) the following:

I struggled to write a traditional description of my ethnographic practices, my fieldwork and to insert those practices into the categories provided by the grid of traditional qualitative method...that I experienced what Spivak (1990) calls “moments of bafflement...”

Thinking and writing this chapter has baffled me. In my first attempt at writing an introduction to this thesis using data from the school sites, I got the following response from Robert:

This is an unconventional opening –I like this because it gets the reader’s attention, but its not appropriate for a Ph.D., which requires that you follow conventions (See Appendix C)

In writing part of the methodology in this introduction Robert wrote this

Deevia...you can’t fly solo and rely on your feelings and observations. It’s a conventional thing. Sampling; description of the research sites, problems of data collection, issues of ethics, etc-all have to be tackled systematically (See Appendix D).

My own research went something like this: I wanted a Ph.D. and as a new academic I was learning that having a Ph.D. was necessarily a power investment. I thought gender and early schooling in different contexts in Durban would make interesting research and developed a clumsy proposal. I pick up on the proposal-writing in the paragraph below. Epstein and Johnson (1998) make an interesting claim that those who end up as doctoral students are the ones for whom the metaphorical seduction by ideas of teachers (and I add supervisors) has been most successful. Seduction is invested with power. Like power it is highly ambiguous, generative and repressive at the same time limiting what can be said and done. The professor is not yet dead as Lyotard claims. Rather the narratives, which construct the professor, have effects on the nature of student-supervisor relations. These relations are necessarily power relations and through which identity is constituted. So what are the kinds of student-supervisor relations that operate to constitute it? I have felt included/excluded all at once. It is in these contact zones that student identity is created, shaped and

perpetuated. How little is written about these issues like this in the making/writing of a Ph.D. and how little of it is troubled! The traditional narratives of knowledge production in research methodology, assumes structured orderly relations. Of course many things can happen when the linear process is interrupted as the student enters this narrative (re)producing the relations of power. Why should this not be part of the troubles of producing a Ph.D. thesis? Is the absence part of the process of sanitization?

There are definite cleavages in the writing of a research proposal and the processes of doing research. Writing about what you want to do and what you do are different. My clumsy proposal, for example, was amongst other flaws, formulaic. I re-wrote the proposal only to fit the requirements for funding. I got the funding making the proposal almost good for nothing but Ph.D. funding. This brings in the question of ethics but that requires another thesis.

Foregrounding my own subjectivity in this study of others' enabled me to deflate the neat tidy processes of research. Rhedding-Jones (1996: 33) states that "there must be overt statements: a coming out" of the researcher. The Preface is a coming out and here I make overt statements about the research process. I have orchestrated this research and I am positioned in it. I do exercise power in it and that cannot be evaded. I have been the researcher and researched and my experience reflects what it means to be an Indian middle class woman doing research with/on teachers and children in multi-school sites in Durban.

When I started the research process in the four schools, I had a vague understanding of the issues in gender and early schooling. Like Thorne (1993) I did not think too hard about what I was bringing with me into the research. I did become a little more focused as I proceeded with the research. The specific strength of qualitative research with its focus on located meanings is that it facilitates the "development of substantive areas of concern and research questions in the ongoing design development of the research" (Mac an Ghail 1994:174). This applies to my own study. As I inserted myself more into the gender literature, I was able to read my experiences into the research, and in the theories of gender. This helped me become a

little more focused and gave me a better understanding of the issues of masculinities and femininities

I wrote in my journal how I felt in the schools and in this way made my subjectivity central. I could not avoid how I felt, and I have no doubt that what I felt influenced the interpretation of the data. St. Pierre (1997) calls this emotional data. The schools I went to are very different in their structural/social conditions as the first section described. It was in these contact zones that I was constituted and reconstituted revealing the horror and the pleasure that I derived as researcher in early schooling. Apartheid has perpetuated a social distance between people and, as ethnographer, I was going into black and white school contexts, which were new contact zones for me.

In the very early days of the research I remember sitting in a classroom in KwaDabeka Primary witnessing corporal punishment. I wrote in my field notes: "I cry for these children", "I can't stand this pain" but I deleted these from my notes very soon thereafter, as I thought it was tainted data. It was not part of what I read before. But I am indebted to the changing patterns of research which makes space for emotional data and troubles the subjectivity of the researcher (Lather 1991a; 1991b; St. Pierre 1997; 1999; 2000; Rhedding-Jones 1995; 1996; 1997; Katz 1992).

When I sat in the classrooms, tugs of memory of my own mono-racial schooling pulled at me. In Westridge Primary School, for example especially in the early days of the research, the material resources struck me, the expansive playing fields, the paraphernalia in the classroom and the material excesses were not familiar memories for me as a schoolgirl in an all-Indian primary school. I felt envious/angry but fascinated with the world of children who came a little in my life as protesting, zestful agents. I went into black schools in areas of economic deprivation and squalor. I feared for my life as I drove to the schools; feeling repulsed by the poverty, yet paradoxically sad for the children I saw without shoes, without sandwiches, and I was filled with a great desire to help. Getting into these zones necessarily makes and remakes identity as I reconstituted my own in dangerous and disturbing ways, scrambling to make sense of what I saw and hooking onto my own identity, producing and reproducing inequalities and forging it through race, gender, class, age and sexual

relations. What I saw and experienced and made sense of was everyday power positioning in social contexts. My observations were always coloured by my memories and intertwined with my identity. The me who used to be a schoolgirl in a mono-racial school, the me who use to be a teacher in a former Indian school, the me who is a mother, the me as woman and Indian living in middle class Durban were constantly engaged in what happened in the research process. I pick up on these experiences in Chapters 4 and 6. All of the issues I have described, thus far make my research journey very messy, non-academic, very troubling, perhaps considered irrelevant and frowned upon by other more sanitized research inquiries. What I have discussed I know is usually construed as outside the bounds of appropriate academic genres requiring clear sanitized processes. My ethnography has been relational, moving and unstable without the neat practices of traditional research. I have sought to make this location clear, suggesting that the lingering attachment to tidy and orderly research in Ph.D. methodology chapters hinders the question of “What is going on here or what is happening here?”

Foregrounding my subjectivity was crucial to my theorizing and my methodological practices. Using ethnography in this way is a concern in the next section

### **Ethnography: Theoretical/Methodological Positionings**

This section picks up on the issues raised in the troubling of this research study and provides an understanding of how my ethnographic inquiry proceeded, why I considered it as appropriate, and why I have privileged the methodologies I used in the understanding of the everyday experience of gender in early schooling. The methodologies I use reflect the issues that I have described and troubled in the first section.

The main argument in this thesis is that early schooling is an important arena of power where masculinities and femininities are acted through the dynamic processes of contestation, refusal and appropriation. In advancing the argument that gender is actively constructed in the early years of schooling, I necessarily examined the construction of my own subjectivity in dangerous and fruitful ways. I share the view that ethnography is created in contexts which ooze with power (Katz 1992). It is the

intersection of social interactions within and against which lives are inscribed in the search for meaning (Visweswaran 1994; St. Pierre 1997; 1999; 2000). I could not separate myself from the research. One way that I made this happen was to write myself at times into the ethnographic record, as I sat observing events in the classroom or later as office work (Van Maanen 1988:4; Rhedding-Jones 1996; Clifford and Marcus 1986), and I wrote myself into this thesis. I agree with Clifford (1997:7) who claims that the “making and remaking of identities occurs in contact zones.” In my study the contact zones and relations had contextual specificity implicating gender, race, class and sexuality. The social relations with teachers, boys and girls and the meanings through which race, age, class and gender worked, produced this ethnography.

I share Connell’s (1995) view that gender and the related meanings of masculinity and femininity are not fixed in advance of social interaction but constructed in interaction. These interactions occur in the contexts of race, class and gender configurations (Thorne 1993; Mac an Ghail 1994; Haywood and Mac an Ghail 2001; Connell 1987; 1995). My engagement with teachers and children in different schools reflecting the race and class experiences in Durban had effects on the research process and on my own subjectivity. I do not claim that my research is representative of any thing but involves power relations in/through which I engaged the study and through which others engaged me. I cannot also claim that macro theories of gender in early schooling can be read off my ethnographic study of four schools, but I do show how different relations interrelate and inform specific gendered practices.

This goes against the stoic and logical patterns of traditional categories of “fieldwork, textwork and headwork” (Van Maanen 1995: 4) that are set out in advance following linearity and tidiness. Inserting myself in this research is a way of struggling against the normalizing boundaries and categories in the research process (Lather 1992). Amongst those who struggle against the normative constructions and are part of the changing research patterns are poststructuralists’ and feminists’ methodological critiques of knowledge and power. These theories are not unified but they do intersect at the point of identifying the body as a site of power, both see discourse as a producer of power (Rhedding-Jones 1996). Both these theories are identifiable by the preference for qualitative, close focus research strategies.

My enquiry makes power central and is close to the following understanding of ethnography:

...ethnography and the subject are organized in relations; thus, neither can be secured in advance of such relations...each ethnographic project is necessarily different from the next because the participants and their cultures are different (St. Pierre 1999: 269)

The specificity of my own research makes it ethnographic in/through which the making and remaking of identities takes place. I am inextricably bound up in it:

Poststructural critiques encouraged me to trouble the traditional description of the subjectivity of the ethnographer as a conscious, present, rational, stable, unified, knowing subject who enters the field (some place “out there”) with a fairly well-framed research problem and a fairly well-articulated research design which plugs the action into that pre-existing grid, follows the linear process of research from data collection to analysis to representation, and – presto produced some truth about a culture (St. Pierre 1999: 268).

Far from seeking to plug into a well-ordered, linear process, my own research in early schooling has been a plug out. Researching the everyday world of early schooling, understanding how teachers, boys and girls think, live and know gender in social context necessarily meant that I have been in the middle of things, in the tensions, the conflicts, the violences, the play, the laughter and the voices. I have had to deal with the messiness of it all. How I felt, how I constructed children and teachers in their historical moments is important to consider and to trouble although the researcher and her feelings are often subjugated in traditional research as fugitive data (Thomas 1998).

Locating the researcher firmly into the research is part of the changing research patterns. Power is a central concern and dealing with the messy conundrum of researcher in the research is also part of the changing patterns in ethnographic research (Lather 1991; St. Pierre 1997; 1999; Arber 2000). Far from being something

transparent, this research is something contracted and contested, something presented and re/presented in a process of translated, moulded and negotiated codes of understandings (Henriques *et al.* 1984). My own identity has been negotiated and inscribed in unstable ways in the course of this research. Identity is about:

...using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being: not 'who we are' or 'where we are' so much as what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves. (Hall 1996b)

My research thus resists being summoned to transparency and representivity.

My methodology attempts to research what usually happens in the everyday world of early schooling. I am highly alert to my presence and the nature of power relations. I wanted to come as close as possible to what was usually happening and what was usually being constructed through everyday classroom /playground interactions. As freelancer, I hoped to provide a snapshot of the everyday struggles, the everyday, ordinary worlds of children and teachers. In selecting what has constituted the research data in this thesis I have followed the poststructuralist notion that "including everything and presenting the truth are impossibilities" (Rhedding-Jones 1994: 84). My observations, conversations and interviews with children and teachers are power relations in/through which meaning is always constructed. I have explained that I orchestrated this research; I set the agenda and I have the ultimate power in its interpretation (Epstein and Johnson 1998). This fits in well with the idea that knowledge is contingent and bound up more with power than truth (Butler 1992). My research is not about the truth, but is shifting, thus it cannot adequately solve the problem of truth and subjectivity (Flax 1990). But making visible the power relations operating within this ethnographic research process (and on myself) highlights the limits of research.

My choice for the theoretical/methodological positionings is made evident by discussing some of the methodological issues raised in relation to other exemplary studies of early primary schooling.

## **Exemplary Practice**

In this section I provide some examples of ethnographic research theorizing gender from primary schools. I looked for other ethnographic research that followed the gendered constructions within primary schools. Thorne's (1993) ethnographic work in two primary schools in the USA shows how 'kids' and adults in primary schools actively construct gender. Thorne raises complex questions about the ways in which girls and boys seek to replicate or disrupt the gender meanings as they live in their everyday worlds. In her work, she opens up the space of children's play cultures and offers dense visual data in understanding the agency within the narratives of schooling and gender identities. Thorne depicts the game plays of boys and girls as they struggle over claims for power within social interactions. She follows a deconstructive approach in understanding gender discourses in the context of social practice (ibid:5).

Thorne's attention to what children are doing is important. Thorne took the role of a freelance ethnographer documenting the everyday world of "gender play" and attempting to catch episodic moments from children's lives. Thus, she points to the need for primary school-based ethnographies in order to recognize agency in children's lives. Additionally, she inserted herself into the research and she claims that "within the ethnographer, many selves were at play" (ibid:11) identifying with teachers as adult woman and with children as she remembered her experiences in primary school. Like Thorne, my own study followed similar paths. Thorne also points out that in her fieldwork with children she approached them with an open ended curiosity with the assumption that "kids" are competent social actors, taking and listening to what they say seriously rather than constructing children in trivial ways. In trying to understand and listen to what children say requires a close focus examination. Thorne writes herself into her work. This is evident in the following excerpt:

Rita's hair was quite dirty, greasy at the roots, and it smelled. There was dirt on her cheek, and her hands were smudged.....The smell, the incongruous clothing...of poverty set her apart.... (22).

In another example, Thorne (1993: 24) writes:

I felt aversion rather than envy toward Beth, a quiet fourth grader, who continually asked me to sit with her at lunch.

My research adopts a similar methodology and provides details that inscribe my subjectivity. I found that it was impossible for me to ignore my emotions. I felt different emotions, but when I saw violence, kicking and slapping, it hurt me. Thus Thorne's writing about the methodological significance of attending to the voices and actions within the research endeavour parallels my own experiences in researching children.

Thorne documents the everyday ordinary worlds of children from in-depth observations and conversations that she had with teachers and children. These ranged from the scenarios of play to the classroom social arrangements. In her observations of the classroom and the playground she focused on specific groups or individuals documenting their private and public performances. Thorne's (ibid: 136) research also resonates with my own. This is evident in her recollections:

...when I stand in a crowded area of a school playground, I am overwhelmed by a sense of the physical: the din of noisy voices and the surround of rapidly moving bodies; constant poking, grabbing and pinning from behind; chanting and swearing with sexual themes; occasional eruptions of violence.

Thorne highlights important themes in the ordering of empirical and deconstructive strategies and in the selection of particular instances of analysis. Like Thorne many of my observations concern the evocation of gender in everyday life. These themes concern masculinities, femininities and heterosexuality. My research follows similar methodological patterning in the empirical and deconstructive strategies and in the selection of particular instances for analysis. In doing so, I locate discourses and identity. I too focus on the localized processual nature of gender as socially constructed, challenging the idea that power oppresses and that girls are victims.

Thorne's ethnography is densely populated with everyday conversations that she had with children. For example, in the section on heterosexual teasing, the following is described:

Nicole volunteered, "I like running, boys chase all the girls. See Tim over there? Judy chases him all around the school; she likes him". Judy, sitting across the table, quickly responded, "I hate him. I like him for a friend" (53).

My ethnography follows similar patterns as I observed and made conversations with children capturing snatches of their everyday worlds. Like Thorne, I did not set up situations with them or take them to a separate room for interviews. I tried to sit with children in their groups in the classroom on the mats, or chat to them during lineup or at the vendors, and on the playground.

Like Thorne, I too have struggled to name children. Not one child in my study referred to each other as 'child', 'kid', 'learner', 'pupil' or 'peers'. Thorne chose to refer to the children in her study as "kids". In the thinking and writing of my study I wondered how it came to be that we take for granted that kind of naming. I struggled to name the children in this study. I thought of young children as Connolly (1995) does in his study of gender and racialised identities in Britain. However I felt that the word young reinstated the adult-child binary. Webster's Dictionary (1971: 388) defines children as:

...an unborn or recently born human being...a young person of either sex between infancy and youth...one who exhibits the characteristics of a very young person (as innocence or lack of restraint).a son or a daughter: the immediate progeny of human parents.

None of these descriptions could adequately capture who the participants were in my study. Young children could be between infant and youth. The boys and girls in my study were not infants. In the writing up process I use the word children, however I am aware that this label has been criticised for being non-gendered and for rendering both boys and girls invisible and by ignoring difference (Yates, 1993: 48-70; Rhedding-Jones, 2000: 263-279). For my research I thought of "junior primary boys

and girls” which is also not the most appropriate way of describing who and what they are. Junior primary suggests children’s age and their location in the school system. What I thought it did is to capture my relations with them inside school hours. During the course of the research the whole issue of naming was never clear although I unassumingly believed that they were all of these: boys, girls, cute, horrible, poor, rich, dirty, small, tall, kids, learners, pupils, brats, lovely. While I have settled on referring to them as children I am aware of the entire problematic of understanding who they are, the adult-child binaries, what category they belong to and the complexity of understanding children. As a woman researcher working with boys, girls and teachers, I am highly aware of the contradictions and the difficulties that the discourses of age add and accrue to my research, but I am not certain of any kind of solution. As my research in the schools proceeded, I asked Tom in Westridge Primary School what he would like to be called; child, pupil, learner, boy or kid? He said: “Tom”.

My study is also different from Thorne in other ways. Thorne (1993: 26) has found how her study resonated with her own childhood experiences:

I felt closer to girls not only through memories of my own past, but also because I knew more about their *gender-typed* interaction. I had also once played games like jump rope and statue buyer, but I had never ridden a skateboard and had barely tried sports like basketball and soccer. Paradoxically, however, I sometimes felt I could see boy’s interactions and activities more clearly than those of girls; I came with fresher eyes and a more detached perspective. I found it harder to articulate and analyze the social relations of girls, perhaps because of my closer identification, but also, I believe, because our categories for understanding have been developed more out of the lives of boys and men than girls and women.

My greater interest with boys grew not out of identification with them in the way that Thorne identified with girls. Unlike Thorne my perspective on boys was not detached. My understanding of social relations had developed more out of the lives of boys and men. My pre-occupation with boys reflects my identity as I set out in the Preface. I am also a mother of two boys and this may explain my identification with

boys. I'm not sure how this has worked to re-exclude girls but I do know that it impacts on the data.

Additionally, my study focuses on race and class issues as they impact on gender.

Thorne states that:

The topic of children and gender should be considered in close connection with social class, race, ethnicity and sexuality and not artificially stripped from these other contexts (1993:9).

Thorne does admit that she has been less sensitive to these issues in her observations. In my study I do try to locate gender, race and class as permeating each other to show how power relations are lived.

Another difference in my study is the emphasis I have placed on teachers. I foreground teacher discourses in/through which identities are produced. Doing this has meant interviewing and videotaping teachers and children together. Thorne constructs teachers as just the people in the corner issuing instructions. My focus on teachers follows MacNaughton's (2000) poststructural study, which attends to the discourses through which teachers construct gender. These link to the pedagogical ideologies and teacher practices which form meanings about children.

But MacNaughton's study is also different from mine in that it was conducted in Australia. She used action research to trace what happened when twelve early childhood pre-school teachers tried to challenge traditional gender relations among four-and five-year olds in Australia. My research is not action research. My study tries to capture the everyday constructions of gender in the primary school. My study is set in Durban South Africa and I seek to understand how teachers understand, know and live gender in early schooling. Teachers chatted to me during the lessons if they had time, in their classrooms after 12h00 or in the staff room. They are very specific locations. The discourses through which I present teachers' understanding of gender in this study are not innocent but they are organized within relations of power.

## **Doing Research in Early Schooling**

The aim of this section is to justify the general methodological approach that has been utilised in this study, which is shaped by the concerns and discussions that have been raised in the discussions thus far. My research favoured a methodological approach which provided the means through which the empirical and theoretical data could focus on power relations, and capture the multi-sited school contexts in terms of race, class and geography, as reflective of the gendered experiences in early schooling in Durban. Through examining such contexts my study attempted to understand how gender power relations are lived in early schooling. This is elaborated by focusing on the situationally specific gendered dynamics of both teachers and children. Having established the methodological and theoretical positionings of this study the next section maps out methods that have been employed in producing the data.

### **Observing in Schools**

In schools I was an observer jotting down notes throughout the day. Note-taking was a central way of documenting the research. About 70 % of the data collected was through notes. As the research commenced I noticed that several teachers were a little apprehensive about what I was doing. I had to make them understand that I was documenting incidents that were specific to the study. Initially I showed teachers what I was writing down and eventually many teachers became less concerned about it. However, curiosity about note-taking was a greater challenge with young children. I would move from group to group in the classrooms and, during the initial stages of the research, young children were always curious about what I wrote, why I wrote and the pace at which I wrote. Occasionally, I would allow children to look through what I had written and then they became curious about cursive writing as well the difficulty in comprehending cursive writing. During the initial stages of the research I noted children's real names but as they peeped into my notebook they would burst with surprise to see their names. I always assured them that I would not reveal their names or tell their stories to the teacher. Of course, their concern was not about the broader debate about confidentiality and ethical considerations in research. It was not long before my note-taking was taken for granted by both teachers and children. In fact as the research proceeded children were delighted to see their names in my notebook.

As I questioned one child in a group others would try to interrupt and ask that their stories too be included in the notebook. I also had a small tape recorder and when it proved to be a hindrance, I took down notes. About 25% of the data was produced through audio-tape. In addition I made use of the video recorder once in each class and taped entire day sessions. 5 % of the data was produced through video recordings. While this method was useful it was not particularly desirable for some teachers and children. The presence of a large video camera did distract children. They were very curious about how the camera functioned. Many children had never seen a camera before. They became very self-conscious during taping sessions. Even the teachers asked me how I (as woman) managed to use it. So the presence of the video camera, on its tall tripod, was imposing. However, after a while the children did become less concerned with it. For the most part it filled children with interest and excitement and a few would beg to watch through the view- finder.

#### Interviews with Teachers

The main reason for using interviews was to provide a means through which the fluidity and contingency of gendered dynamics/discourses could be explored. Through using such an instrument it was possible that specific knowledge about teachers could be produced. In this way, a basis could be established for identifying teacher's gendered constructions. Thus, the data produced was used to explore how teachers know, live and teach gender in early schooling and enabled an examination of the manner in which they negotiated and produced particular relations of power (Foucault 1982).

My relationship with teachers was based, firstly, on establishing social relations with them. I found this strategy useful in developing relations with teachers rather than becoming impositional. In this way this thesis drew on these social relations to trace their specific effects in the formation of gendered discourses in early schooling. In a sense, this provides the methodological basis for understanding everyday teacher gendered practices. Here the approach is premised on *how* gendered practices are manifested in teacher discourses. During the year that I produced the data, I conducted interviews with teachers in their classrooms or made conversations with them during the short breaks between lessons and in the staff room. Most of the

interviews with the teachers were audiotaped although the tape recorder did prove to be a hindrance during specific moments when situations arose in the classroom. I took down notes and found this to be a very effective strategy. At times some teachers reminded me of their desire for anonymity. The informal issues that I raised with teachers probed:

- gender related issues pertaining to masculinity and femininity in early schooling.
- their understanding of the gender and their gendered practices/discourses.
- their understanding of children's gendered lives.

All the teacher informants were women and this reflects the teacher prestige pyramid. The questions were unstructured, and although I had a vague sense of the questions I was asking, this was dependent on the flow of conversation, how I was related to as Indian, woman lecturer and the power relations through which these relations were invested.

I am always implicated in the research process, thus my analysis is both partial and interested. In establishing social relations with the teachers, I was able to share experiences and through which power relations, including race and class, were negotiated. It was in these interactions that our meanings were constructed and reconstructed. Some examples of how the sharing of our experiences helped to challenge power relations are provided. Teacher autobiographies were not the concern of this thesis but, through sharing, it was possible to get closer to participants and as the study proceeded, I was able to chat more freely with them.

In February 1999 Mrs. A (Westridge Primary School) and I had 8-month old sons and through sharing our experiences of nappies, day care and other commonalities, social relations were established which worked to challenge the asymmetrical relations of power. I also learnt that Mrs. A was able to bring her baby to school at 12h30 which she did daily. I was envious of that and wondered whether other former white schools allowed this practice. Sharing experiences meant that I was able to re-work and re-constitute race and my imagined constructions of whiteness in South Africa.

However, not all teachers in Westridge Primary School were willing to share their personal details with me. I pick up on these issues later.

My experience as a former teacher was very useful with most teachers as I was able to sympathise with their complaints about the burdens and the passions of teaching. Listening to teachers discuss their everyday living, their pains, the difficulties and their desires meant that I was always reading my own life in/through theirs. I did not think that I should report the pain/desire until I read that “we might be made somewhat more comfortable if less of our efforts were devoted to the avoidance, denial and control of emotions and if more of our efforts were directed to the understanding, expression, and reporting of them” (Van Maanen, Manning and Miller quoted in St. Pierre, 1997:181). In reading their lives I was forced to re-read my own thus blurring the public/private boundaries and working to reconstitute myself. I provide a few more examples to illustrate these blurs. In KwaDabeka Primary School Mrs. H told me that she had been raped as a grade 8 school-girl in Ezakheni High School, close to Escourt in northern KwaZulu Natal by a school teacher. The sexual relations continued and she mothered a child in grade 8 and another in grade 11. She explained to me that she keeps wondering why she dislikes children. She attributes this dislike to her history as an abused schoolgirl. She explained to me that she lived in a rural area, her mother was illiterate and accepted lobola (dowry) as payment for the children that were conceived. Mrs. H also told me that the father of her children is currently a principal in a school in Pietermaritzburg, in KwaZulu- Natal.

Mrs. F was hospitalized for three weeks during this study. When she returned to school she chatted to me about the stress at home and school, which made her life unbearable. Mrs. F was very unhappy that she had not been promoted as head of department despite her nineteen years of service. Additionally, she found it difficult to manage her life at home being burdened with woman’s work. Mrs. J in Umbumbulu Primary School shared with me her pains as she recalled her five- year old son’s drowning in Johannesburg in 1997. During the course of the study, Mrs. J became pregnant with another child and she told me that she hoped it was a boy. I read my life in this desire. Mrs. K indicated to me that she had hated Indians most of her life. Her mother worked as a domestic worker for Indians and they had treated her with indignity. But she said that since the 1980’s she had changed so that her views

were now less radical and more accepting of Indian people because she had realised that all Indian people were not the same. There were many other examples. There is not the space in this thesis to describe them all. Neither can all be described, as I am compelled to respect confidentiality. This thesis is not about teacher autobiographies, but sharing experiences was strategic in eliciting information about teacher discourses concerning gender and early schooling. My intention in disclosing some of it here is also to suggest that through the sharing of experiences, I was able to trouble my own identity in disturbing and fruitful ways. I was also able to challenge some of the asymmetrical power relations.

There are ethical considerations in discussing the lives of others. Whatever I have disclosed has been on the basis of anonymity. I had to make critical decisions about what to put into this thesis but also about what stayed out. There was only one teacher who asked me why I had to tape the interview. Once I convinced her that confidentiality and anonymity would be guaranteed, I was able to proceed. Many teachers were quite happy to allow the use of real names instead of pseudonyms. I have chosen rather to maintain the anonymity of the teachers who came a little into my life as I came into theirs. Whilst the teachers were generally comfortable with me there was also a tendency for them to produce specific responses because they realized what I expected. In these instances they may not have produced responses that corresponded to their particular social experiences. Despite these limitations, what cannot be denied is the benefits involved in sharing experiences with teachers in this present study.

Sharing experiences were not all the same and were forged in relations of race and class. White teachers in Westridge Primary School made race “invisible”. There was a very formal and individualistic mode in this school. I could not escape the racial constructions of whiteness. The effects of apartheid meant that I imagined what white meant. Sharing our experiences helped to challenge the distance apartheid had created, but I was always aware of the power relations. I did not feel quite like the insider because of what I had imagined white to be in post-apartheid South Africa. My own fears were my imagined constructions of how I was being perceived as an Indian woman in relation to white teachers. I kept wondering/imagining whether my power was being eroded. So what does it mean for an Indian woman doing research

in a largely white primary school in post-apartheid South Africa? It means working through imagined data as part of the process of inquiry. This imagined data must be acknowledged in the production of knowledge.

In terms of an Indian woman researching Indian women teachers, what must be addressed is the implicit knowledge and understandings that produce power relations. For example, I was able immediately to identify Mrs. E and Mrs. F's ethnicity in terms of their surnames. They did confirm their Hindi and Tamil ethnic locations respectively and they too were able to identify mine. However while there are implicit ethnic/class relations, race was a point of identification and offered a space for "safe talk". In many instances overt racist remarks were made in my presence in the classroom and in the staff room.

There were similar considerations in researching black teachers. There were complex sets of power relations in operation. I identified with black teachers as women and we shared many experiences together. My knowledge of fanagalo Zulu meant that sometimes I chatted to teachers using fanagalo and they were fascinated at my ability. The fact that my father ran a business meant that many of his employees were black and this had facilitated my learning fanagalo Zulu. I found this most useful in black schools. All teachers spoke English very fluently although Zulu is the mother tongue. I breached the racialised constructions of being Indian and challenged the asymmetrical power relations. Sharing some of the pains/desires in my life meant that I was also able to breach some of the imagined constructions of being an Indian woman. I shared with teachers the cultural practices that worked to constructed gender, ethnic, class-caste practices as part of Indianness. Through my discussions with black teachers I was also able to deconstruct the assumed middle class positions of all Indians. I also realised how much we do not know of and about each other, the similarities and how imaginations work to construct race, class and gendered identities.

### *Conversations with Children*

My conversations with children were designed to prompt girls and boys to discuss aspects of their lives related to gender and the gender-related issues pertaining to masculinity and femininity. My intent was to explore the enactment of gender as it occurred in the everyday world of early schooling in four contextually specific schools. In my interactions with children I wanted to document the way in which power positions are lived in early schooling.

I went into the classrooms of the twelve teachers in four race-class- and geographically-specific schools. I sat with children inside and outside the classroom, observed and listened to what they said, which I wrote down. I also wrote how I felt about children, either in the classroom or when I went back to my desk. Like Thorne (1993), I too roamed around the four schools and the playgrounds during breaks. I used a video-recorder to help me make inventories of each school. This helped me to gain a broad perspective on all four schools. This strategy enabled the descriptive analysis of the schools in Chapter 4. In the classrooms I sat with children in groups. I did not have a regular place, but sat wherever a seat was available, especially if someone was absent. Sometimes I moved available seats around to sit with children in their groups. Doing OBE in South Africa has meant that teachers in grades one and two have re-arranged their classrooms to suit the pedagogical emphasis on group work. This meant that when I sat with children in all the schools I sat with groups of children catching snatches of their conversations trying not to disturb them too much, asking questions based on my gender inquiry and listening and writing as fast as I could. I made conversations with girls and boys, boys and boys and girls and girls in the group. The number of girls and boys in each group differed in each class and varied according to the number of boys and girls in the class. In some classes there were more boys and this explained the existence of an all-boys group. This was the most appropriate way to observe and analyse the power constructions in children's interactions and their group constructions of gender. When I went inside the classrooms, as ethnographer, I had a vague sense of the questions I would ask. The questions were largely spontaneous and dependent on the context. For example, I tried to make conversation based on questions like:

- What are you doing in the playground today?
- What do you like doing best?
- Do you like girls/boys?
- Do you like pink?
- Do you think girls and boys are different?
- Who do you play with? Why?
- Do you play with girls/boys Why?
- Are you working with the boys/girls?
- Who is your friend?
- Sometimes I fitted the gender conversation into the lesson. For example if the children had talked about breakfast, I would ask: “Who makes your breakfast?”
- Why do you hit each other?

This method of chatting and making conversations provided a means of recording children’s everyday interactions and conversations. The questions were intended to provoke discussion among the children. I was interested in the dynamics and power positionings constructed by the children with girls and girls, girls and boys and boys and boys. The chatting and conversations happened as children in the groups were getting on with their everyday school lives. I captured the fleeting moments in the groups, and the questions enabled and encouraged a chatty atmosphere. Thorne (1993: 15) refers to the ephemeral and fleeting nature of children’s interactions as those of “bumblebees”. The methodological engagement with children’s construction of gender was fleeting and ephemeral like bumblebees. It is for this reason that I name children’s discourses as momentary, and not interviews but chats and conversations. It is the momentariness in the methodology which led to the title in Chapter 7 as Momentary Children’s Discourses. Momentary discourses are used to explain the rapidly shifting and elusive moments of power, through which children construct their gendered selves. These are ephemeral and episodic spaces that exist in classrooms in the shifting balance between production and reproduction of gender identity. The fleeting conversations related to the children’s constructions of gender (and sexuality) but occurred within the overall asymmetrical relations of power. In my conversations with them I probed children’s answers and often asked them to

explain the reasoning behind their responses. Although I tried not to contradict the nature of the conversations, I did try to question their reason for making certain choices. For example, I asked why could girls not come to a boy's party? There are many benefits to having chatty conversational-like talks with children rather than proceeding in a detached manner through a list of questions. The flow of the conversations was interrupted, not by detached questioning, but as children got on with the business of schooling and as teachers asked for their attention and getting on with Zulu, English, numeracy, literacy, drawing, colouring, counting with the abacus or tin caps, reading, writing, teasing, pulling, fighting, laughing, punching and mocking each other or walking about in the classroom.

In the playground I sat and observed children. Sometimes I would engage in conversations with children learning about gender in the context of their interactions. In the playground the ephemeral and quickness of children's movement was evident in their games, their clapping and the girls' singing rhythmic tunes. My interaction with children was always a power relation. In the next section I focus on some of the power dynamics in researching children.

### **Some reflections on power plays in researching children**

My relations with children were inscribed with power. A range of discursively constructed positions police public spaces, such as the classroom and the playground and, in the world of seven-eight-and nine-year-olds, age relations are clear. Thus my ability to relate to children was restricted within such spaces by adult-child power relations. For example in the playground, many children would come to me as adult and complain about the behaviour of others. I did say that I was not on ground duty but that did not stop the constant flow of complaints.

Sitting with children and observing them in the playground challenged power relations. It was decipherable to the child who was visibly thrilled about that. Sitting with the children and squashing into the small chairs meant that the power relations were challenged. Since the interviews worked more like chats and conversations, children were able to talk to me about personal issues. I was often asked if I had a boyfriend or children and if I did the French kiss. These incidents worked to

challenge the power relations that exist. I was also asked about my children, where I lived, what car I drove, where I worked, what I liked to eat and about my dress. I answered the questions and I feel that this approach worked to challenge the relations of power. During the period of my school research my dog died and I shared this knowledge with children. Sharing this knowledge was so important because it brought me closer to them. They wanted to know about the dog, where it had happened, how and why. I also developed a strategy of expressing amazement, using clichés like “o no, gross, wow, gee wiz, sis or yuk and yuki, haaibo, we mame, ai wena”. This strategy worked to position myself closer to the children. This method has been suggested by Francis (1998) who says that in her study of primary schools, using colloquial speech was a means to position herself as less of an authority figure. When children gave me information about science, or sport, or kissing, I expressed emotion and surprise and this seemed to make children more relaxed about having me near them. They felt that their contributions were taken seriously and respected. I knew a little that power relations were challenged when I was given information and asked not to tell the teacher. If a teacher had to walk out of a class for a while there was a more relaxed atmosphere, sometimes too noisy for me but I knew that the relations of power were slightly blurred. When I was given important information about disease and science, I expressed ignorance and provided children with the space to talk and be heard, and this worked to challenge power relations. Children appeared to relish the situations where they were taken seriously and were listened to. This is supported by the findings of Davies (1993) and Francis (1998) who argue that children enjoy respectful conversation when their views are taken seriously.

The above section serves to establish the extent to which I was able to develop a rapport with children while slightly blurring adult-child relations and trying to let children breathe in this thesis. However, I orchestrated this research. I produced the data and I am responsible for its representation. Nothing is innocent and everything is dangerous. My ethnographic work concerns relations of power. Race, class, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, and age impacted on my study and the children that I studied. It affected the discourses one has recourse to and the positions of power within it. However, it is important to point out that researching children necessarily means reconstructing the identity of the researcher. I was highly aware of my preference to focus on boys, but at the same time I did not wish to “re-exclude” girls. Many times

the boys demanded my attention. But I am also a mother of two boys. I do know, for example, that as I sat in Westridge Primary School I constantly considered my older son's tender masculinity and how it would fit into the boys' patterns of conduct and the hierarchies. I imagined his comparative schooling experience in a nearby school. When I saw patterns of white boy sporty masculinity I sought recourse to race, as I imagined how it would breach my son's tender masculinity. Gender and class were also intertwined here. My imaginations of my son's tender masculinity were less visible in working class contexts. In contexts of poverty my identity was forged in contradiction, as I felt repulsed by the squalor, the smell, children's dirty noses with scabs on their bodies, while feeling emotionally overwhelmed by the poverty in which children had to live. Especially important is the extent to which I supported particular kinds of masculinity in the context of violence. For example, when I saw violent masculinities I knew that I too had the potential for violence if I had been on the receiving end. More examples are provided as this thesis unfolds and as I am implicated in the making and remaking of identity in the context of race, gender and class relations. My underlying agenda was to explore children's understanding of gender, and these were themes that I would particularly focus on in terms of encouraging children to elaborate on these issues. In other words, in my conversations, I had an agenda and I would incite them to reveal more about these issues. In doing this I was wary of the ethical dimensions of the questioning. I was aware of the means of inciting children and attempted purposely to encourage them to think about what they had just said, and to question them in such a way as to leave them with the idea that I neither agreed nor disagreed with what they had said.

However, this was not always the case. Some children were supported and strengthened through their participation in this research but some were undermined by my responses to them. For example, when two girls in KwaDabeka Primary School told me about violence in the school, they received my sympathy and I preached anti-violence. However, when I sat with them during another visit they told me that the boys did not stop. I did find violence highly challenging and those who were victims of violence received my sympathy, whilst I felt anger towards those who used violence as a means to resolve conflict.

Another issue in this research which impacted on power relations was language. In KwaDabeka and Umbumbulu Primary Schools, Zulu is the first language. My methodologies were designed to capture the lived gender power positions. I did think about a translator but I knew that what I wanted to find out had to be snatched. A translator could not serve my purpose. Having rudimentary knowledge of Zulu was a big advantage. Whenever I went to the classrooms I greeted in Zulu and tried to speak to children using fanagalo. The children were amused and in a way the power relations were challenged as they corrected me with the right pronunciation of words. In the earlier days of the research I was aware of how the power relations were somewhat challenged by this. When I sat with children I had to communicate in fanagalo. This was not always the best way. However, in KwaDabeka Primary School some of the children were articulate in English. Some had lived with their mothers in the domestic quarters of white and Indian-owned homes and this explained their familiarity and competency in English. There was less English language mobility in Umbumbulu School, and I had to rely on fanagalo and on specific children whose knowledge of English was better. Without some understanding of Zulu my task would have been very difficult at both schools. All the data was thus coloured by my own subjective positioning as researcher visiting the school.

Fanagalo enabled me to engage with children, although having first language ability is best. A possible solution to this might have been to have had a Zulu-speaking co-researcher, but as I have explained above, this did not suit my purposes. The person who analyses the data is also the person who snatches children's everyday interactions. Familiarity with the informants as well as the way in which the conversations had proceeded is essential when the focus of the research is the investigation of discourses and identities. I do not claim that only people who understand the behaviour and experiences of others based on race and gender can only conduct research. I find this argument unconvincing, but the difficulties experienced highlight the need to develop academics and researchers to be empowered to write their own stories and research their own cultures. Martinez (1998:128), for example points to the need:

...for students and teachers to become involved as researchers of their own cultures and values, to bring to conscious level the dimensions of hurt that may derive from seemingly natural practices...

### **Analysing the Data**

The analytical work of considering the data has been deconstructive. Deconstructions are poststructural ways of examining discourse and they can uncover what appears to be 'natural' in cultural constructions (St. Pierre 2000). For example, in my own study I had to deconstruct the conventional and common sense assumptions through which identities are produced in early schooling. Deconstruction is about looking at how a structure has been constructed, what holds it together and what it produces. I wanted to know how gender is produced in early schooling, how meanings about it are held together. In doing so, I tried to deconstruct the dominant definitions of masculinities and femininities.

In analyzing the data, I have tried to work against the usual meanings of the data. I follow Lather's (1991) suggestion that we must be aware of our own positioning as subverter and inscriber in the production of knowledge.

In practical terms I intended producing deconstructions from the events and practices researched. I transcribed the data from all school sites. I separated the data according to schools so that I had four separate data files. I sorted the files according to colours. They are

- Westridge (Blue)
- Umhlatuzana (Green)
- KwaDabeka (Yellow)
- Umbumbulu (Red)

Within each file I had a setting code which provided descriptions of the school. The setting code provided details about the setting, the number of children in the school, the staff populations and largely descriptive and quantitative statistics. Bogdan and Biklen (1998) point out that coding is a crucial step in data analysis.

In each file the teacher interviews were separated from the children's conversations. In this way I managed to search for the common phrases, words or ideas about children and gender that ran across all the school sites. For example, I found that "children are children" was a major construct through which teachers positioned children. In this way I managed to come up with six common teaching discourses across the school sites.

In order to uncover the specific teaching discourses which are inflected by race and class, I referred to each teacher in the file and focused on the construction of difference. I read and re-read the data and searched for certain words, or phrases through which I could deconstruct conventional assumptions. For example, I found that gender and race did not matter much at Westridge Primary School. However, I worked with the data in ways which challenged the common sense arguments.

I selected the conversations and focused on the constructions of masculinities, femininities, and girls, boys and heterosexuality. Additionally I focused on heterosexual games that I had observed in the schools. Violent gender relations in KwaDabeka Primary School are the specific focus of Chapter 8. I provide a critical interrogation of discourses, identifying and naming the discourses and showing the effects for gender equality.

The analysis of the data did not take linear steps but analysis occurred as I produced the data in the schools, when I left sitting in my office and as I read and re-read the gender literature, forcing me to theorise my own life, and in the process, reconstitute my subjectivity. The analysis is thus an invention, a re-presentation and reflects my power in it.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has introduced the research practices that I engaged in this multi-sited ethnographic study of schools in Durban. The methodological focus is intended to show how gender power positions are lived in early schooling social contexts. This chapter has also shown how the choice of ethnographic method provides the basis of a

methodology that is sensitive to the complexities in understanding gendered identities. I have paid particular attention to my own role as researcher, troubling it as this chapter unfolded. This goes against the sanitized research methods which efface the role of the researcher. In this chapter I have raised methodological issues that are considered out of bounds of traditional research methods. Foregrounding my role as researcher, I have argued that my ethnographic work oozed with power relations in/through which race, class, age and gender identities are forged. I have shown how I am implicated in the research process both with teachers and children and in the representation of this study, which must be read as always partial. Nothing is innocent and everything is dangerous. In this chapter I have raised issues about what it means to be researching schools in Durban.

The next part of the thesis introduces the school sites and puts to work some of the methodological issues that have been raised in this chapter.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Schooling Sites**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter presents the background to the schools where I conducted research in 1999. The main purpose of it is to provide structural descriptions of conditions at the schools in the study. The schools are highly specific in terms of race and class structures. These are salient factors in the production and reproduction of gender discourses, as will become apparent as the thesis unfolds. This chapter also gives factual information about the schools and the people in them, using pseudonyms instead of real names.

The Durban Metropolitan Region in KwaZulu-Natal is the area from which four primary schools are drawn. Referred to by pseudonyms they are one former white (Westridge Primary), one former Indian (Umhlatuzana Primary), one former black township (KwaDabeka Primary) and one black rural school (Umbumbulu Primary). Each is described in terms of its race and class context, providing brief information about the surrounding areas, the school itself, its structural conditions and a brief portrait of each teacher. Detailed descriptive information is provided about the everyday world in each school as a way of preparing for the analysis in Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8. In the next section a brief sketch is provided of the regional context of KwaZulu Natal before describing each school site.

#### **Kwazulu-Natal: Brief Context**

Durban is the largest city in the province with more than 4 million people. The province is the most populated in South Africa with more than 20% of the country's total population. However it occupies only 8 % of the country's landmass. 80% of the population is black, most of whom speak Zulu, and 61% live in rural parts of the province.

KwaZulu-Natal has had a complicated history. The Zulu identity of the province only began to emerge in the latter part of the 1800's (Wright and Hamilton 1995). At that time there was lack of political and ethnic unity. In the colonial world, though, the word 'Zulu' was used to categorise all black people in the Zulu kingdom. British colonial rule was established in 1843 and it was a powerful military presence in the area that was called Natal. The British colonialists assumed superiority and changed the social and physical landscape of the province. Their identity was forged around British cultural symbols and language. Schools were based on British public and grammar schools and cricket, rugby and soccer were dominant sports. White settler identity assumed racial superiority.

Black people were encouraged to work on white farms and to enter into waged labour. This changed the fluid identity of the black population. From early on in the colonial times, black men had to work in towns in return for wages. Black men, though, preferred to invest their labour in their own homesteads and this resulted in importation of indentured labour from India. Indian workers arrived in Natal in 1860. The Indian labourers who brought their families with them were housed in compounds on sugar estates, which allowed Indian people to retain a cultural distinctiveness (Morrell, Wright and Meintjies 1995). Assimilation between Indian labourers and black people did not occur.

The impact of colonization and apartheid has meant fractured, uneven patterns of living which provided fertile ground for the creation and maintenance of ethnic and racial identities. Familiar apartheid delineations of identity as black, white (English and Afrikaners), Indian and coloured continue to be markers in post-apartheid South Africa. The circumstances around colonization and apartheid left the Zulu monarchy intact, making possible strong Zulu ethnic identification among the black people in KwaZulu-Natal. The Zulu monarchy is today headed by the Zulu king, Goodwill Zwelithini. The Inkatha Freedom Party has enjoyed political power in the province since democratic elections in 1994. The Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) was formed as an exclusive Zulu national party in 1975 but over the years has been able to woo white and Indian

politicians and supporters into its fold. In the 1980's and early 1990's violent clashes between the IFP and the now ruling African National Congress (ANC) produced a turbulent and violent context which created binaries between the political parties/ethnic identities. The IFP, whose founder and central spokesperson is Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi, centred itself on being the representation of a culturally and historically discrete Zulu nation. Inkatha was thus a vehicle which promoted and reproduced Zuluness with the king being its symbolic head. Through the IFP, cultural tradition and Zuluness perpetuates patriarchal privilege- "the blood and stock of kings, chiefs and warriors, of men, was seen to infuse the Zulu nation with genetic continuity and cultural traits (Waetjen and Mare 2001: 198). Inkatha's appeal must also be seen against the context of apartheid, the general powerlessness of the majority of people, the struggle for access to basic resources such as land, water and shelter and the cultural constructions of being a Zulu.

Poverty and apartheid legislation created unevenness and a sense of powerlessness for the majority of the people. Historically it is the rural black population which lives in harsh conditions with minimal access to resources. Migrant labour created the context where blacks in particular were limited to working class positions in the cities and, with racial hierarchies, their lives were miserable. Townships close to cities were engineered by apartheid to keep Black people separate, apart and economically impoverished. The influx of rural people and general proletarianisation created a burgeoning context of economic misery. It is in the townships specifically, that official apartheid violence was used to quell the struggles against it. Apartheid thus validated violence as a way of dealing with power inequalities, producing gender relations prone to violence (Morrell 1998c).

The social distance between people in KwaZulu Natal, the consequences of colonialism and apartheid, served to reproduce race and class hierarchies and hostilities. White was associated with power and privilege, but Indian-black relations and hostilities have also produced contradictory relations. The most salient feature of the demography in this province is the high concentration of Indians, artificially maintained in the apartheid era

when the national policy prohibited Indian people from settling in other provinces in South Africa. Whilst Indians and blacks have been subject to racial domination, tensions have existed between them. The 1949 African and Indian riots produced a stereotype especially among Indians about black people, and engendered racial hostilities. The rioting began when an Indian shopkeeper in the city centre slapped a black. It turned into looting and destruction of Indian-owned shops and about 142 people were killed in it (Freund 1996). The race card was drawn as Indian and black hostilities increased. In 1985, the Inanda Riots produced violent outbursts. Many Indian businesses were destroyed and homes were plundered. The Mahatma Gandhi Settlement was destroyed and an exodus of Indians from its area occurred. The vacated areas were occupied by black people who were escaping the violence in the townships, especially between the IFP and the ANC-aligned United Democratic Front.

The history of apartheid has meant social distance between people. The Group Areas Act in 1950 had meant that Indian townships were intentionally placed between white and black residential areas, creating a buffer between black and white people. Apartheid created the condition of differential public spending, so that many black people lived and still live in squalor and informal settlements around major cities in the province. The provision of schooling also reflects this differentiation and is historical. White schooling reflects the material and human resources of privilege. The schooling experience for the majority of black schools reflects their particular class experience.

There are huge inequalities in this province and in the country. It is not incidental that the experiences of teaching and learning differ and that there are currently many discrepancies in the experiences. This is part of the pathos of South African history, that race and class overlap to the extent that they do. In education, as in other social structures in the province, there are huge socio-economic fissures. The democratic government is trying to address the issues of equality both at national and provincial levels. The most concrete example of this was seen as I periodically drove to Umbumbulu and KwaDabeka Schools. From the start of the research to its end I saw the increase in the number of homes being built. They are tiny, block bricked, unpainted and

within close proximity to other homes. They are not ideal homes but they do represent the government's long term efforts to change the harsh conditions, which have so severely circumscribed black people's lives.

In the next part of this section I describe each school site and focus on race and class contexts. I also consider some data from each school site as a way of beginning to theorise from the research data.

### **Westridge Primary School**

Westridge is a well established, affluent, former whites-only suburb with many palatial, well-secured and high-walled homes. While black homeownership was prohibited, Indians were allowed to own property in demarcated areas within the boundaries of the suburb before the Group Areas Act was scrapped. The high prices of these homes meant that only very wealthy Indians and whites could afford to live here. Westridge is a thriving suburb. The population is about 35 000. With the end of apartheid new home owners (Indian and black) are slowly moving into the area, many of them professional or entrepreneurial. The average price of a three bedroom home is R280 000.

Westridge also has the greatest number of educational institutions (preschool to high school) within any suburb in Durban. It's about a fifteen minutes drive to the city centre. Westridge is self-sufficient with most of the needs of the people being catered for through shopping malls, recreational facilities, Christian religious churches and cultural facilities.

The largest shopping centre in the province of KwaZulu Natal is situated here and it serves a large regional population. There are two significant mixed commercial sites in Westridge: Westridge Mall and Westridge Village Market. Both house retail sites with offices, a hotel, restaurants, and shops. There are also several convenience facilities as well as corner cafés. The Jimmy Bellows Field allows for extramural activities like athletics, soccer and cricket. An Olympic size pool can also be found in this suburb. There are several restaurants; fastfood outlets (MacDonalds made its entry here in

September 2000), a fire brigade, large police station, post office, several business premises and many churches.

The schools in Westridge are recognised as “good” schools and maybe they are if one looks at the fact that Westridge Boys High School produced the top candidate in the Senior Certificate Matric examinations in 1999 in the province of Kwa Zulu Natal. Three boys were placed in the top 30 in the 2000 examinations. Westridge Boys is also one of the most expensive public government school in KwaZulu Natal.

### **The school**

The primary school under study is one of three public primary schools in Westridge. The school is opposite Westridge Senior Primary School and in close proximity to Westridge Girls High School. Most former white secondary schools in Natal are single sex schools.

For visitors to Westridge Primary (initially like myself) parking is available at the entrance of the school on the main road with cars swamping the parking lot at the end of the school day. Insiders (19 female teachers and principal, all white with the exception of one Indian female temporary teacher who joined the staff in March 1999), have access to the motorised gates and parking within the school boundaries. The staffing ratio for primary schools in KwaZulu Natal is 1:35. However, Westridge School is able to employ extra teachers at their own cost because of the high fee structure of R4000 per year per child. The Indian teacher who came to Westridge Primary School was an excess teacher in a former Indian school who moved as a result of a vacancy that arose.

The school is well secured. The office area is large. There are two secretaries whose offices are opposite each other. Fax machines, photocopier and the main keypad for the alarm system is located here. Behind these offices is the very smart office of the principal, Mrs. Davey, who retired at the end of 1999. In our brief conversations she told me that she was surprised but welcomed the fact that men had begun applying for junior primary posts but mostly at departmental head level. We also talked about the separation

of the boys and girls on the playing fields and she said: “boys get rough with soccer and that... and the girls get knocked all over. We have to separate them”. She also said that boys were now becoming interested in first aid and that the school offered cricket for girls, which, she regarded as “quite an innovation”.

The staff room is linked to the front offices and has a pastel lounge set and several chairs in the same shade. It also has a fridge, microwave and two kettles. Adjacent to the staff room is a toilet and basin area in pastel colours with the fragrant smell of potpourri. The school building is a well- maintained brick structure-three black cleaning staff always made sure of that.

The school tuckshop is closest to the big hall where assembly is held, and that’s a dense place at the start of the break. Here you can see the racial make-up of the school. It comprises largely white boys and girls from middle- to upper-income families and a small group of 85 Indian and black children whose parents can afford the school fees. When I did my research here and in the classrooms, I was consciously aware that, by marking out the Indians and the blacks, I was leaving the whites, the dominant group, unmarked. I wasn’t sure to what extent I was giving the racial categories a relevance that may not have been there. I knew though that there were some kind of markings. I did think about it as I considered the evocation of gender in the everyday experiences of the school. The principal at assembly would say: “ Good morning boys and girls”; the teacher or teacher-aide on ground duty would say: “Boys be quiet” or the teachers in the classrooms would say: “You girls better get going” or “Boys I am watching” or “You boys behave” and sometimes even “Grade two’s you are not behaving very nicely this morning” and so age was also implicated.

I made several visits to the tuckshop while I observed the playing fields. The delicacies were always tempting: chocolate covered doughnuts, decorated multi-coloured cupcakes, slices of marble cake, Simba and Willards chips, a variety of chocolates, fruit juice, sweets, hotdog rolls, pizza slices, toasted sandwiches. Prices ranged from 50c to about R3.50 for the hotdog roll. A parent operated the tuck shop and a percentage of the day’s

takings went into the school's coffers. As an occasional adult visitor to the school I simply and very unfairly walked into the tuckshop helped myself to the popcorn, put the 50c in the paper plate which had become a kind of till, took my change and walked out.

Some of the 515 boys and girls of the school stood patiently in the lines to purchase their snacks on a first-come-first-served basis without even thinking about the gender-differentiated lineups that so regulate their lives in the classroom, in assembly and at the end of break. When the buzzer sounds for the start of the break there is always a rush, a panic, an excitement with a sense of bursting energy and a pandemonium which is very much part of the primary school experience. In Westridge Primary School, where the classrooms open into a passage, the boys and girls rarely moved from the classroom unless they were in carefully regulated lines. When the boys and girls head for the library, computer studies, physical education, music or practice sessions for the annual athletics they form boys' lines and girls' lines. Thus when I saw the undifferentiated lineups outside the tuck shop, I was surprised, but equally fascinated by the amazing possibility that it held for all lineups.

What I also observed were clusters of friends forming and reforming, breaking up and making up as the break proceeded. It was also during this time that I was often sought out by boys and girls from the classes I researched. Some would offer me their snacks. Some, especially those without a circle of friends, would spend the whole break with me just talking. Often girls would enact certain roles of femininity, like hugging or holding onto me (and sometimes I would get annoyed at that). Others would also complain about the "rough" boys or seek my consolation if someone was injured. I also observed that girls generally sang quietly or clapped hands to the sounds of rhythmic tunes about girls, boys, marriage and love. These included among others:

*Double double*

*Love love*

*Double double*

*Boys boys*

*Double love*  
*Double boys*  
*Double double*  
*Love boys.*

Chapter 7 provides a detailed analysis of heterosexual games.

One day I spoke to a teacher on duty, Mrs. Tate:

Mrs. Tate      You will be very interested in the theme on Bugs that they [grade two] are doing, because the difference between the male spider and a female spider is that the web of a female spider is neat while the male spider is untidy. Its amazing with boys, they just seem to be so naturally like bugs. Thank god I have two girls and they wouldn't go near bugs!

I kept wondering about the web.

Inside the classrooms there are small desks and chairs. In Mrs. B's classroom, though, there are round tables with chairs. There is a green board at the front of each classroom and a teacher's desk either at the front, like in Mrs. D's classroom, or at the back in the case of the other three teachers. The rooms are bursting with colour and sounds and crammed with the paraphernalia which primary schools accumulate. All the boys wear grey shorts and white shirts. The girls wear turquoise pinafores. In the summer months they are allowed to wear brown sandals or a closed black school shoe. In winter, both boys and girls are allowed to wear a blue and white tracksuit. The following data is used to illustrate some of the above:

I walk into Mrs. B's grade one classroom, knowing that the children, about six or seven, will be immediately distracted by my presence. So will Mrs. B. It's been eight months since I first started the research, but I am still fascinated by the

abundance, the colour, and the excess in the classroom that so vividly distinguishes one school from the other. As I greet Mrs. B, almost immediately the chorus of the children's greetings follows. I quickly manoeuvre myself into the first available scaled-down seat. It's been like that since the start of the research, finding the first place that's available, observing and talking. All the desks and chairs are arranged in groups (as a result of OBE) so it is always easy to sneak a chat and listen to the children. Both the children and I are always wary of Mrs. B.

In Mrs. D's classroom I noted the following:

The children are working with the theme on food. In the classroom there are attractive displays of the children's art, which are made from various materials glued onto paper plates. Beneath each one, the boys and girls have written a sentence about the food that they like. There is also a collage of food items that have been cut from magazines. In their math's books the boys and girls have completed sums that involve food. There are also recipes that involve simple measurement. There are stories in their books about their outings to the supermarket. On the charts (some have been made by the children) are various pictures which show the food groups, and at the reading corner there are abundant books on food, recipes and cooking. This morning the teacher discusses breakfast. The boys and girls are called to the mat in front of the class

Mrs. D.           What does breakfast mean?

Judy               Snacks.

Mrs. D.           Your mum does not wake up in the morning and say "have your snacks", does she?

In a chorus the boys and girls say, "no".

Laya (interrupting) I know, Mrs. D.....cereal time.

The discussion in the classroom continues about breakfast and it ranges around discussion about bacon, rice-crispies, eggs and waffles. Kent says to Mrs. D that he has noodles for breakfast. Mrs. D looks in astonishment at that suggestion and asks the class who eats noodles for breakfast? Nobody raises their hands. The question about noodles and breakfast is quite clear.

Kent is mocked.

Later.

The pupils are given a worksheet. It reads:

*Tom is hungry. Draw a good breakfast for Tom.*

The boys and girls are free to walk around in the classrooms, call out to each other or their teacher, work outside (though not very often), sit on the mats, suggest that the buzzer is late for break or home time, tell on their friends, complain, snigger at each other, sometimes make lurid gestures. And they do. They also learn to do many things, to value each other, to argue, to work hard and not to work hard, to fight, to copy others' work and then to work not very hard either, to compete with each other as individuals and as groups, to relax, to giggle and laugh together and at each other.

### **The teachers**

The boys and girls refer to the teachers as Mrs. B. or Mrs. C. or Mrs. D. or Mrs. A. So I was called Miss Bhana. The teachers in this study are all white, married with children and English speaking. They live in Westridge.

Mrs. A has 12 years of teaching experience. She studied at the local teachers' training institution, Edgewood College, graduated with a teaching diploma and has a class size of 30. Mrs. A says that she treats both boys and girls equally but she "does have expectations of girls who must be neat". She doesn't see gender as important for the "little ones".

Mrs. B. has 29 years of teaching experience and a diploma in teaching. There are 20 boys and girls in her grade one class. She is a senior teacher in the school in terms of her years of experience. She told me that she had “no idea that gender was important to kids”.

Mrs. C has 14 years of teaching experience and a teaching degree and a diploma in remedial education. She has taught physical education in the past and has been at Westridge primary for three years. She has a class size of 31. She describes herself as sporty and prefers boys to girls. She says that she treats “everyone the same”. She does claim, though, that the boys are “more competitive” and she encourages that, but girls she says are “lethargic”.

Mrs. D became a qualified teacher in 1977. She also studied at Edgewood College and received a diploma in teacher education. Additionally she studied part time and gained a BA degree through the University of South Africa (UNISA). She has been a junior primary teacher for 22 years and has been teaching in schools around Durban. There are 29 boys and girls in her grade two class. Mrs. D says that with all the meetings and changes that have taken place in education she has not thought about gender and teaches as “always”. Additionally she says that “girls and boys should know that they are different”.

When I first entered Westridge Primary, I had a superficial sense of teachers’ understanding of gender. I was invited to present a case for my research to grades one and two teachers. I told them that I was researching gender. During questioning time I was told that they were not responsible for what the boys and girls learnt about gender. Rather, they asked why my research didn’t look at the children’s parents, children’s culture and society for answers. A central point in their argument was that “children were innocent”; that I “should research the secondary school” because that’s where “gender happens”.

## **Umhlatuzana Primary School**

Umhlatuzana is a former Indian area adjacent to Chatsworth, the largest Indian township in South Africa. Chatsworth is adjacent to the black township of Umlazi. Whilst Chatsworth is largely working class, Umhlatuzana has largely an Indian mixed middle and low income population. There are many architecturally designed large homes with high walls. Other homes though are smaller. A common practice for many of the homeowners in the area is to divide their homes and sub-let the smaller section. Many of the tenants who live here are low- income earners. The homeowners are mainly Indian with Indian tenants and very few blacks. The average price of a home in this area is about R180 000.

There are two state educational institutions (Umhlatuzana Primary and Umhlatuzana Secondary) and several privately run crèches. There are no central shopping malls in this area and residents have to travel to other areas to shop. There are many Indian-owned green grocers and corner shops which service the area. Blacks work in these small businesses as cleaners, drivers and assistants. A local Indian-owned bus service operates from the area to central Durban, which is about 25 minutes away. There are no sporting facilities here. There are religious places of worship: mosques, Hindu temples, and churches which reflect the religious diversity of the area.

### **The school**

There is only one primary school in Umhlatuzana. The school is in a side street. It has a driveway. I discovered in my many visits to the school that the school gates are always open. There are several cars belonging to the teaching staff in the parking lot immediately adjacent to the driveway. There are 13 staff members including the principal, Mr. Pillay. He is the only male principal in all the schools in this study. All teachers are Indian and live in the surrounding areas, which include the suburbs Chatsworth, Malvern and Queensburgh. The school population stands at 373 and the numbers are dropping. Mr. Pillay was particularly worried about the decreasing number

of children in the school. He blamed the drop in the number of children on the fact that many of the wealthier Indian parents in the area had enrolled their children at former white schools in Malvern and Hilary and many had moved to these areas. He also said that it was very expensive for black children to come to the school as they had to take about three buses from Kwa Mashu, the closest black township area, to get to the school. The lower numbers has an impact for teachers who face redeployment.

The entrance to the school from the car park leads to the secretary's office adjacent to the principal. In my conversations with him he said that he "was all for gender equality," but that children in the school have "their set ways". He was positive, though, that teachers in his school were aware of gender and taught in a "manner that did not discriminate against girls".

The school staff room is below the office of the principal. It is here that I listened to what constituted teacher "talk". The talk ranged from discussion about families, the principal and the burdens of teaching to teacher redeployment, and the fear of being redeployed to black areas. Mrs. E told me that it was possible that she could be redeployed though during the course of 1999 she remained at the school. She taught grade one.

There is no school tuck shop or hall. Assembly is held on the grass field. It is here that the racial makeup of the school becomes clearer. It comprises a majority of Indian children, with 56 black and less than ten white children. A vendor from the area sells sweets, chips, chocolates and pies. There are not many long queues and it is clear that not many children could afford luxuries. Those that patronize the tuck shop are largely Indian. At break a few children rush to the vendor who has set up in the small field where they are served on a first-come-first-served basis. The school charges R100 per year for fees but many who cannot afford it are not compelled to pay.

During breaks it was clear how groups of boys and girls clustered around each other in a gendered and sometimes in a racial fashion. Since they were continually forming and reforming it was difficult to keep track of them. The swiftness of their movement meant

that I lost sight of a child almost as soon as I had set eyes on them. Sometimes as I stood observing and taking down notes many of the children asked me what I was doing in their school. The black children generally avoided asking questions and I kept wondering about race and language and about the culturally appropriate adult-child relations.

It was the girls who were keen to talk to me during the break and often offered me their snacks. Even in the small field the boys and girls were separated by an imaginary line. There were many occasions though when the line was broken through chasing, playing ball or simply running from here to there with no thought about the imaginary lines. Generally, the girls clapped hands to rhythmic tunes about being girls, women, love, marriage and boys. Here are two examples:

*My mother  
Your mother  
Walking down the street  
Eighteen Nineteen Marble Street  
Every time I go there  
This is what I hear  
itsy bitsie lollipop  
itsie bitsie boo  
itsie bitsie lollipop  
the boys love you  
Or.*

*When Suzie was a baby  
A baby a baby  
When Suzie was a baby then she used to go like this  
Wa wa wa wa  
When Suzie was a child, a child a child  
When Suzie was a child she used to go like this  
I want this I want that*

*When Suzie was a teenager a teenager a teenager*  
*When Suzie was a teenager she had a boyfriend*  
*When Suzie had a boyfriend, a boyfriend she used to say this*  
*I love you I love you I love you*  
*When Suzie got married married married*  
*When Suzie got married she used go like this*  
*I don't believe it I don't believe it I don't believe it*  
*When Suzie was a mother*  
*A mother a mother*  
*When Suzie was a mother*  
*She used to say this*  
*Cook Cook Cook Cook*  
*When Suzie had a baby a baby a baby*  
*When Suzy had a baby she used to say this*  
*So cute so cute so cute*  
*When Suzie was a grandmother a grandmother a grandmother*  
*When Suzie was a grandmother*  
*She used to say this*  
*I'm sick I'm sick*  
*When Suzie was a skeleton a skeleton a skeleton*  
*When Suzie was a skeleton she used to go like this*  
*Rattle rattle rattle*  
*When Suzie was a ghost a ghost a ghost, a ghost*  
*When Suzie was a ghost*  
*She used to go like this*  
*Boo, boo, boo*  
*When Suzie was nothing nothing nothing*  
*When Suzie was nothing she used to go like this*  
*....*

I kept wondering about the significance of these rhymes and the games that are played. Some of the songs were specific to each school although many, like the above, were generic. This becomes part of the focus of Chapter 7.

Inside the classrooms are small desks and chairs with the general paraphernalia that one comes to expect in the early years of schooling: charts, abacus, colouring pens, crayons, a reading area, cones, and lots of colour. The scale of resources cannot be compared to that of Westridge Primary but they do reflect the typical setup to be found in former Indian schools in middle class areas. Mrs. E and Mrs. F, the two teachers in this study, have classrooms adjacent to each other and on the ground floor of the last double-storey block. Both classrooms have some of the paraphernalia associated with grades one and two: colourful charts and pictures, a reading corner with books on OBE. The girls wear white dresses and the boys wear grey flannel shorts and white shirts. Boys and girls are expected to wear black jerseys. As I discovered, though, a variety of colours became part of their uniform. On cold days especially, different jackets were worn which reflected the class structures. Some of the girls wore white pants with their dresses. This dress style is usually associated with the dress code for Muslim girls. However, in Umhlatuzana, it did not matter. Muslim girls, white girls and black girls fashioned themselves with the pants and dress. I was able to tell their religion from their names.

### **The teachers**

Mrs. E and Mrs. F were called 'mam', as is the common practice in Indian schools. I was called 'mam' too. Both teachers live in Umhlatuzana.

The teachers in this study told me that they were surprised to hear that my study was about gender. What could it mean to the "kids" was a common question. Mrs. E said that she "never thought that there was a link" with gender and children. Mrs. F suggested that in her nineteen years experience as a junior primary teacher, she didn't think that it was important and "they are just kids". I did wonder in the early days of my research about the type of meanings that arose in different schools as far as gender and children

were concerned; and how teachers' understanding of gender and early schooling affected their practices.

Mrs. E. qualified at the Springfield College of Education in Durban. When Mrs. E qualified it was an Indian only tertiary college which offered teaching diplomas. She has been teaching for twelve years and is in her thirties. Mrs. E complained to me about her huge class size which has 47 children- 25 boys and 22 girls. She said that the class size frustrated her and that she could not cope with it. She never thought about gender in her class, she said. "If you had not come here, I would have never looked at gender," she added.

Mrs. F has a Junior Primary Education diploma also from the Springfield College of Education. She told me that she had one outstanding course to complete in order to get a BA degree from UNISA. She has nineteen years of teaching experience. When I told her provocatively that the principal believed that gender was integral to the ways in which they taught, she laughed. Most senior positions in the schooling system are occupied by men. Mr. Pillay represents this in Umhlatuzana Primary School. "The principal does not know anything. Gender does not matter to us", she said. (That gender does not matter becomes a focus in Chapter 5).

### **KwaDabeka Primary School**

Kwadabeka Primary School is situated in the economically deprived area of KwaDabeka. This is a black peri-urban township about 16 kilometers from the city of Durban. It is adjacent to Clermont: a freehold black township established in 1931. The apartheid government created the township of KwaDabeka in 1974 on land adjoining Clermont and moved the shack population which had been developing in Clermont to the new township in the 1970's and early 1980's (Swanson, 1996).

In many respects Clermont and KwaDabeka are extensions of each other. But there are differences. In Clermont the houses vary in style and reflect the means of the builders

and owners with regard to what they can afford. Single family dwellings predominate among the multi-unit buildings. Interspersed between and amongst the brick dwellings are many informal dwellings. In KwaDabeka, the dwellings are mainly informal with few houses. Small concrete-styled housing is slowly beginning to develop as part of the changes in the South African government commitment to provide for the basic needs for its people. During my regular visits to the area I quickly become aware of the increasing number of government-sponsored brick dwellings near the highway that took me into KwaDabeka. It is not a common sight to see Indian, white and coloured people in townships. This is largely due to the social distance that apartheid had created. It is very uncommon to see people other than blacks in townships. It is also uncommon to see me (an Indian woman) in a township. I did notice people other than black. These were largely employed by telephone, technical, electricity and housing construction companies who undertake the reconstruction and development of township life in post-apartheid South Africa.

The development is taking place amidst an enormous hostel which was built in the 1980's to house migrant workers and people who had been removed from the shacks in Clermont. The hostel blocks with a capacity of 10000 look like a "fleet of stranded ocean liners minus their glamorous superstructures" (Swanson 1996: 275). The thousands of informal dwellings around the school are mainly tin structures closely knit together. The residents use innovative means to ensure a solid structure. The informal settlements are made out of old corrugated iron sheets and planks or old broken blocks. Heavy objects are placed on the roof to ensure a balanced structure. It is not uncommon to see large tyres, large stones and blocks and sometimes pumpkins on the roof tops. This also explains why the sale of used tyres is a huge trade in KwaDabeka.

Electricity supply is limited to solid brick dwellings and is contingent on whether the adequate structural connections have been made. Depending on where a shack is located, access to water is also a problem. Residents have a central tap and water is collected from here. The carrying of water is a major activity for residents here and it does appear that this task is usually done by women, as I observed during my drives to the school.

Goats and cattle wander here and there amidst the dense shack development. Some of the households maintain gardening to supplement budgets. Many others keep poultry. That race and poverty are so aligned in KwaDabeka illustrates the history of apartheid legislation with the general social and economic dislocation of black people. But there are a few middle class traders in the area: Mthimkulu's Liquor Store, Gogo's Bake and Take and a black owned Spar supermarket.

As I journeyed to the school, I saw hawkers selling fruit and vegetables. Others offered services like shoe repairs. A "spaza" shop offers groceries to the residents who are largely dependent on taxis for their transport. The material circumstance of the people is depressing. There is a high degree of unemployment. In the context of massive economic and social dislocation KwaDabeka is also a hotspot for violence. It is from this context of poverty, crime, malnutrition, lack of sanitation, bad water and the consequent health risks that boys and girls come to school as gendered beings. The girls walk to school in nicely coloured bright green dresses and the boys in grey shorts and white shirts. I also noticed how children wandered around the areas on schooldays and during school times. I constantly wondered how people in such poverty- stricken circumstances could afford uniforms but I learned that the school made it a rule that without a uniform the children could not come to school.

### **The school**

Visitors to KwaDabeka Primary School quickly become aware of its distinguishing characteristics that separate it from the dwellings which surround it. The perimeter of the school is surrounded by high and barbed wire fences and a gate which is manned throughout the school day. This however does not prevent it from being a frequent target for theft, vandalism, and even violent attacks. Officially re-opened in 1997 after renovations, by Professor Bhengu the then national Minister of Education, the school caters for 1071 black children from grades one to seven. The renovations are part of the massive government injection into improving apartheid-constructed black schools.

The renovated school provides a structural anomaly to the area. Perched on the edge of a hilltop, its face-brick structure is different from the hundreds of informal dwellings that spread down the hillsides.

There are 26 teachers of which 22 are female and this includes the principal, Mrs. Dlamini. There are 25 black teachers and one Indian female teacher who joined the school as a head of department in the senior primary phase in 1998. According to the teacher, she had applied for promotion to this school as it was close to her home in Reservoir Hills. The school has single storey structures within which is a tarred play area and shrubby playing areas. The tarred section is used for school assemblies. The grades one and two classrooms are in two of these structures. Missing in their classrooms is the paraphernalia associated with early schooling primary classrooms; however, the desks are small enough to remind one that this is an early schooling location.

There are only black children in this school and the play area immediately reflects this. Part of the play area is also the place where two or three hawkers sell snacks to the children. The price of snacks ranged from 20c to R1, 00. The snacks are also reflective of their material circumstances. Chips were not the foil clad Simba variety but orange and brown coloured chips purchased by the hawkers in bulk and placed in small transparent plastic packets, and sold for 50c. The broken biscuits, which also sold for 50c, had a similar history. Coloured bubble gum was sold for 10c. Then there was “gwinya,” commonly known as vetkoek. This deep fried home made snack is made from flour, sugar and water and a firm favourite among the children. Ice blocks that are placed in a huge bucket were sold for 20c. Another favourite was spicy chicken heads and feet. Their look and smell repulsed me. Recently another school, Phephile Primary in the area, had attracted media attention. Sweets and chocolates sold by vendors were poisoned. A vendor had sold cheap sweets and chocolates that she had picked up from a waste dump in Durban (Mercury 28 June 2001: 3) which resulted in several children being treated for poisoning.

The hawker area within the school was not well supported although there was always a hustle and bustle around it as children watched, wishing and hoping for, I assumed, the snacks they could not afford to purchase. But it also meant that those with the means to purchase items had a number of friends following them. I also observed the squabbles that arose out of this; which sometimes had a violent ugliness about them. One such incident, of which there were many, involved Philisiwe, an older girl who had purchased a snack but refused to relent to Siphos demand for it and he grabbed it and ran away while hurling slanderous words at Philisiwe.

I spoke to Mrs. G about this since in my observations there was no adult supervision of children in the play areas:

- Mrs. G            In this school it is the survival of the fittest. The stronger you are, the harder you fight. If you are weak you lose.
- Me                Who wins?
- Mrs. G            It depends on the grade. Usually the boys in the senior phase, it's them that wins.

I thought carefully about what Mrs. G had said, and I kept wondering what it meant for violence and the construction of violent masculinities and femininities which forms the focus in Chapter 8.

Food and its provision or lack of it is crucial in KwaDabeka Primary School and meanings around gender and class are mediated in/through it. The entire school timetable is framed around the Feeding Scheme so that the first break for children only begins at 11h00. The Scheme aims to prevent malnourishment in poverty-stricken schools. I briefly described the policy around this in Chapter 2. In KwaDabeka Primary School that meant that children were given meals that ranged from mielie meal and mince meat to rice and cabbage. Whether the food itself could alleviate the health risks is problematic. In the first place children in KwaDabeka come from dwellings without water and sanitation. Bad water has been a problem in this province and a cholera epidemic is

growing. But the eyes of children tell another story as they take their meals and many are happy to come to school because they get food, I am told, even though they have to fight to survive.

Hitting and fighting are means through which boys and girls try to survive in KwaDabeka. But they also play to rhythmic movements of their bodies, clapping, and singing. Here are examples of the tunes to which their bodies moved.

*Ije Ije Ije*  
*1,2,3 hehelele*  
*7 up to 10*  
*ije ije ije*  
*1,2,3, hehelele*

Or

*a, b, c, d, e, f, g, h, i, j, k, l, m, n, o, p,*  
*(name of a boy starting with p)*  
*Petros*  
*Nomvula, do you love Petros?*  
*Nomvula, will you marry him?*  
*Yes*  
*No*  
*Yes*  
*No*  
*How many kisses will you give*  
*1, 2, 3, 4,*  
*How many boyfriends have you got*  
*1, 2, 3, 4, 5,*  
*How many babies have you got?*  
*1, 2, 3,*  
*plastic*

*gold*  
*plastic*  
*gold*  
*van motorbike*  
*van motorbike*

Or

*There's a party round the corner*  
*Will you please please come*  
*Bring your own cup and saucer*  
*And your own cherry bun*  
*And what is your boyfriend's name*  
*Brutus*  
*Brutus will be there blowing kisses in the air*  
*And O U T spells out*

So the girls sang songs of love, marriage, and babies. While Zulu is the mother tongue of all the children, it amazed me that many of the songs and rhymes were reproduced in English. The boys watched and sometimes wanted to join in but were met with resistance. The older boys played soccer in the shrubby areas of the school. During the breaks the children constantly followed me around. But not being a native speaker of Zulu proved to be a hindrance but I drew on “fanagalo”, which I discovered was very useful. Zulu is the teachers’ first language but all of them have a good command of English, which is their second language. As an English first-language speaker, on some occasions I had to clarify myself for the teachers to understand what I was saying. It was especially difficult to communicate with the children, many of whom had no knowledge of English. Sometimes other children translated but that also highlights the fact that my data was coloured not only from what happened in the schools and my interpretation of it, but also filtered through with translation. My research is only partial and not representative of all children at KwaDabeka Primary School. Boys and girls whose knowledge of English was better approached me and asked me questions about the research. Sometimes I communicated with children who had lived in the domestic quarters of Indian and white

English speaking homes but who now had to school in areas where the fees were minimal. (KwaDabeka Primary School charged R80 in 1999 for school fees). The language barrier highlights the need to develop black academics and researchers to write their own stories. I do think that data can be more generative if language is not a barrier in the understanding of the everyday nuances in schools. These are quite the same problems that I experienced at Umbumbulu Primary School.

### **The teachers**

The boys and girls refer to Mrs. G, Mrs. H, and Mrs. I as “teacher” but it sounded like “tisha”. I was also called tisha. All the teachers are blacks and have a tertiary education.

Mrs. G articulated how gender did not matter to children. She said, “I never heard of this thing called gender with the kids. I don’t think you’ll see anything with them. We are like mothers to them”. Clearly, gender and early childhood were not considered to be relevant ways of understanding children.

Mrs. G has eight years of teaching experience and gained her diploma in teaching from the Mpumalanga College of Education to provide training exclusively for blacks. These institutions were not, until recently, an integral part of the tertiary educational sector. Admission to students was granted even to those without a matric pass. Pedagogically, these colleges were closer to high schools than universities. She teaches grade two and has a class size of 48. She regards herself as a mother to the children and does not know this “gender thing”.

Mrs. I is a grade two teacher with a class size of 39. She qualified at the Umbumbulu College of Education and is trying to complete her degree with UNISA from where she has five courses to her credit. She says that she treats all the kids the same.

Mrs. H qualified at the Appelsbosch College of Education. She has eleven years of teaching experience. She is a mother of two children. She tells me that her first child

was born when she was a grade 8 pupil and fifteen years old. Her second child was born when she was in grade eleven. The same teacher in her school in Ezakheni in the northern parts of the province fathered her children. She has had very bitter experiences with men and she claims to be “bitter to children”. She teaches 42 children in grade one and here is a glimpse of what I have observed in her class:

As I walk alongside the classroom, the kids peep through the class window without much noise...as usual. An unpleasant smell around the school: the smell of cooking. I greet Mrs. H. and the classroom. And they all say “sawubona tisha”. I look around and try to find a place. Don’t want to sit next to a kid with a dirty nose. But I have to, that’s the only place available.

Two desks are attached to each other. It’s meant for two but there are three and sometimes four kids to a two-seater. Sometimes they write on the floor. There’s no space. Most times I am given preferential treatment and Mrs. H. asks a child to move over. But I decline to take the seat and squeeze into another.

I put my tape recorder on. Shuffle around. The class is so silent. All eyes are on my tape recorder. I taped part of the lesson this morning and the battery gave up on me. Mrs. H. has divided the class into three groups. The Zulu lesson is in progress. I wished again that I knew better Zulu. My rudimentary fanagalo Zulu helps a little. In one group Mrs. H. has separated the boys from the girls. They are learning vowels. I hear: “ ma me mi mo mu; ba be bi bo bu”. Mrs. H. hits the children with a stick...on their heads. This is repeated several times. I should have counted. The 4 girls are closest to the teacher. The ten boys are huddled behind the girls.

Another group stands together. An older boy leads the group. He has a stick in his hand. They repeatedly say:

*Isikole sakithi sihle*

*Sinezindlu zokufundela  
Kunezimbali ezibomvu  
Kunothisha besilisa nabesifazane  
Amantombazane agqoka eziluhlaza*

Translation

*Our school is beautiful  
It has classrooms  
There are red flowers  
We have male and female teachers  
The colours of the girl's dresses are green.*

The last group sits at their desks...writing. Teacher hits all children on the head repeatedly as they recite ma me mi mo mu. I am scared. I notice that the children who have been working with the teacher are instructed to leave the group from the board area. They do so quietly, they sit quietly. They are terrified. They do not smile. They are afraid. The teacher walks to the group that has just been seated and slaps a boy on his face. I wonder why. The teacher leaves the class. I enjoy this time. There is shuffling, talk and chat. I can't understand all of it. I talk to Siphso. He says, "I am afraid of the teacher".

Later.

Mrs. H. walks in the classroom. Quiet. She picks on two children. They have not done their work. Mrs. H. shouts. She gets the stick from the table. It's a branch from a tree. She hits them on their back and legs. Stick breaks. Teacher gets another stick. This time it is not a branch. They call it a pipe. Mrs. H. continues where she had stopped. They are crying, sobbing quietly.

I wrote nothing.



given is also related to my own experiences. The violence in the classroom and outside it has been emotionally highly challenging for me and this may explain why I have inserted so much description on it. Children's construction of violent gender relations in KwaDabeka Primary School is the focus of Chapter 8.

### **Umbumbulu Primary School**

Umbumbulu is a semi-rural area about 45 kilometers away from Durban. Hawking is a huge trade here as the closest commercial stores are in Isipingo, about twenty kilometers away. The area's topography is typical of the KwaZulu-Natal landscape with dwellings set amid trees and shrubs on hilltops. There are large unoccupied plots of land, though housing development has started. These developments are in line with the government's initiative to improve the conditions of black people who have suffered under the ravages of apartheid. The housing development has meant a new feature in the way in which dwellings are styled. The new homes are modern brick dwellings. Single dwellings predominate. Largely though, the people in the vicinity of the school live in dwellings made out of mud, grass and corrugated iron. Electricity, drainage and sanitation are undeveloped. This makes life very difficult for the residents in the immediate vicinity of the school and in the school itself.

This is a poor area, although there are many people who farm their own crops. Sugar cane is the chief means through which people make a living. They work in the fields or are owners of land who have contracts with the sugar mill to provide cane. To supplement budgets, householders maintain gardens and keep poultry and goats. They are able to do so on a large scale because the land is large enough for them to do so. It is not uncommon to see gardens with cabbage, tomatoes, sweet potato, corn and yams. Cattle wander over the fields and on the hilltops. The number of cattle in each household is an indication of social position. Umbumbulu is very poor and it is from this context that migrant labour is reproduced. In order to gain employment many people, especially men, leave the area to work in bigger cities in the province and in South Africa.

Visitors to this area will see some boys practice “ukungcweka”, where herdboys play-fight with sticks and demonstrate their fighting prowess in preparation for manhood. Cultural practices of deference and respect, especially for older men, are valued here and is part of what is called ‘ukuhlonipha’.

### **The school**

The Umbumbulu Primary School structure is typical of black rural schools in KwaZulu-Natal. It is impoverished and reflects the economic conditions of the 577 black children who attend it. Structurally dilapidated, it is perched at the centre of a hilltop and is surrounded by huts and dwellings made out of iron and wood. Despite its poor structural conditions, visitors to the area become aware of its characteristics which distinguish it from its surroundings; that is, it is the only brick structure with portable toilets and glass windows (though many are broken). There are four single-storey structures which form a shrubby enclosure and this area also serves as an assembly and play area. It also houses a water tank (see Appendix H). There are no fences to separate the school from the gravel road. The rest of the school is surrounded by a mixture of gravel and red sand and also serves as the play area. The school is an easy target for theft.

There are 15 black teachers, four male and eleven female, including the new principal, Mrs. Makhaye. I provide a further description of the school by inserting some field notes that I made during my first visit to Umbumbulu Primary School.

I checked my meter reading. Its nine kilometers of gravel road from the tarred road. Pole 98, then left turn to the school high on the hill. A herd boy delays me. About nine cows cross over. The boy waves at me. Some children stare at me. “Its almost eight and there are no teachers in sight”, I write. I wait outside the principal’s office. Greeted by two big girls. Grade 7 I wonder? Ask them for the principal. Not here yet. I ask, “How do the teachers get to school?” “ With the taxi,” they say. Girls are cleaning the office area. They bring water in a bucket. Outside a whole activity of cleaning and clearing this morning. Little brooms,

water buckets. Some boys take the rake and spade and clear the small garden patch area. It's also the school assembly area. Those girls are now scrubbing the entrance to the principal's office. Cleaning chairs and now polishing the floor. I ask for the toilet. One of the girls shows me the toilet on the periphery of the school. Pit. "There's no water" she says and offers me the bucket. Repugnantly I say "no."

This flurry of activity greets any visitor at about 08h00. Another significant greeting is the mission statement of the school which hangs in a dark and dilapidated office:

[Umbumbulu] School aims to educate appropriately motivated, sensitive and competent children. Dedicated to the empowerment and self-sufficiency of the children, the school has embarked on a vigorous nation-building programme with a view to promoting a sustainable, peaceful, skilled and prosperous society. It seeks to achieve this by taking a holistic view of the child.

The new principal, Mrs. Makhaye, who took up her position in 1999 had the following to say about gender equality:

In our society the cleaning, sweeping and washing is done by girls. We are so set in our ways about what girls do and what boys do. The new South Africa will help to make things right. We have a new system in the register that does not separate the girls from the boys...In this school both the educators and the children didn't want to accept me when I became principal here in the beginning. Now there is a change and they do. In Umbumbulu, the children think that a doctor is a man. What they see is what they believe.

Mrs. Makhaye points to the strong patriarchal and cultural practices in the rural areas which makes her role as woman principal difficult, but she does have hope:

Women are selling and they are trying on their own. Some are making blocks for building houses to earn a living. Bit by bit there will be change.

There were three issues which Mrs. Makhaye had set out to achieve: security, school renovations and running water. Toyota South Africa has pledged support for renovations and computers. During the course of my research, the computer area was demarcated and renovations had begun. Teaching material including transparencies, crayons and charts were donated by the Netherlands government. As for security Mrs. Makaye had complained about the theft of a fridge from the office, but with the support of the community she has hope that theft and vandalism will be reduced:

It's the people here in the community who are stealing. If they steal they will pay for it. I say to the parents: "All the school fees are yours, I will repair the office and I am going to use your money. If you steal I will replace it with your money". The school fees are R80 a year and if they steal then I will increase the school fees in a meeting with parents.

Provision of taps, toilets and water to the school remain unattended and I kept wondering about the hygiene, the smell around the toilet areas, the girls and menstruation.

There are three female vendors who eke out a living selling snacks to children. There are no queues to follow. The snacks are quite similar to those sold at KwaDabeka Primary School which are made up of broken biscuits which sell for 20c, vetkoek, orange and brown chips in clear plastic packets. I observe how children cluster quickly around friends who purchased snacks because there is always a possibility of sharing. Not many children bring lunch to school and some who do, bring brown bread wrapped in newspaper. At Umbumbulu Primary School the poverty and the lack of food was emotionally challenging. I felt contradictory feelings of repulsion and sadness while hoping that I could have helped. During one visit to Mrs. J's classroom only 5 children had brought lunch to school and the responses ranged from "granny was too sick, to their being "no food" but generally they said that they had to "keep the bread for supper".

The School Feeding Scheme provides mealie meal and beans, bread and meat, cabbage, rice and dumplings or potatoes and rice and sometimes chicken. The children bring their own utensils and some share their utensils with others. The saddest moment for me was to see the food being dished by the grade seven girls as the children anxiously awaited their meal. Shabby old plastic containers are placed on the floor and once the food is dished into all the containers, the children collect their food from the floor and eat either at the table or outside.

Chairs in the classroom are broken, as are the windows. There is a drab uniformity in the classrooms. No colourful charts, no early schooling paraphernalia, except for broken crayons or tin caps used in numeracy lessons. But the sight of children and their voices are significant and remind me of my location. The school compels the children to wear a uniform and grandmothers who in 1999 were receiving R500 per month in pensions help support the children with food and clothing. This is especially so when parents are migrant workers or unemployed. The girls wear green and mustard uniforms. The boys wear white shirts and grey short pants. Most of the children do not wear shoes. A visitor can recognize the school uniform from a distance since the children can be spotted making the long walk to the school. Many children habitually hold their knapsacks on their backs throughout the day. It is not uncommon to see children writing, sitting at their desks, eating and even playing with their bags and knapsacks attached to their backs. This is perhaps how they protect their school possessions from theft or loss. Amidst the poverty and economic misery children reproduce the patterns of rhymes, singing and clapping during their breaks. During the breaks some of the children followed me but generally it was difficult to communicate with them without translation, as many have not spoken English and contact with English is limited to school subjects. This again points to the partiality of my research.

## **The teachers**

The boys and girls refer to Mrs. J, Mrs. K and Mrs. L as “tisha.” All the teachers are blacks and have a tertiary education.

Mrs. J has nine years of teaching experience and gained her diploma in teaching from the Mpumulanga College of Education. She teaches grade two and has a class size of 38. She regards herself as a mother to the children. She describes herself as a teacher who is “very concerned with gender equality.” She says that she treats all children the same.

Mrs. K is a grade two teacher with a class size of 34. She has a teaching diploma from Mpumulanga College of Education, and a higher education diploma from Vista University. She says that she treats all the kids the same. She says, “it’s the parents who must change because in school everyone is the same”.

Mrs. L qualified at the Appelsbosch College of Education. There are 40 children in her class. She has ten years of teaching experience. She says, “gender is not a big thing in my classroom. Everyone is the same”. She teaches grade one.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter presented the background to the schools. It gave a picture of the schools where I conducted research. Further it allowed me as an Indian woman to present a descriptive view of the research, highlighting the race and class dimensions in each school. Additionally, I have presented some data from each school as a way to introducing the schooling sites and beginning to prepare for the analysis of this thesis. The data that has been presented in this chapter foreshadows the gender issues that arise for teachers and children as they live gender. My choice of different schooling sites reflects the different race and class conditions that mark the early school experience of children in KwaZulu Natal. My concern is the situatedness of discourses through which teachers and children give meaning to themselves and others as gendered beings in early

schooling. This chapter has provided a background to the structural conditions of early schooling contexts: the context of race and class, the context of poverty in/through which childhood experiences are constructed. How the gender norms and patterns of conduct for boys and girls are constructed in the classroom comes to bear upon the context. Meanings are always limited by the structure of social relations operating at a particular time and place and can be represented through a variety of discourses. By identifying the forms of discourse and the patterns of conduct that teachers and children engage in, it is possible to understand how discourses constitute and organize social relations in institutions like early schooling. I am consciously aware of the wider structures of inequalities through which gender norms and patterns of conduct are enacted. This chapter serves to acknowledge the wider structures through which specific classroom interaction can be understood.

## Chapter 5

### Shared Teaching Discourses

#### **Introduction**

The early years of schooling are associated with gender in rich and complicated ways that produce and regulate gender identities. This chapter focuses on the shared patterns of teaching discourses that were found at each of the schools. The focus of the chapter is on how teachers constructed gendered discourses and, in so doing, positioned children. In the next chapter, I examine discourses that were specific to the individual schools. By providing an analysis of teaching discourses, Chapters 5 and 6 presage children's gendered experiences in Chapters 7 and 8.

The primary concern in this chapter is to explore the shared teaching discourses through which gender identities are produced and regulated. The chapter identifies six teaching discourses. These are:

- making difference biological;
- children are children: gender doesn't matter;
- parents are the models;
- just kids: still young;
- presumed innocent and;
- teachers are mothers.

The discourses above are currently dominant ways of constructing gender in the early years, legitimating the early years of schooling as a gender-free political arena (Tobin 1997; Francis 1998; Yelland 1998; Epstein 1999; Lett and Sears 1999; MacNaughton 2000; Renold 2000; Grieshaber and Canella 2000). The different discourses are not separate and are configured in ways that constantly interact dynamically. They are interdependent and mutually constructing, forming an overall strategy which regulates gender identities. The six teaching discourses are conservative and hegemonic and work against the articulation and practice of gender equality. These shared patterns of

discourses are related to the conceptualisation of gender power as oppressive. These common sense ideas have currency at a time when South Africa is a forerunner in providing constitutional protection for gender equality. Such protection does not necessarily eradicate the hegemonic discourses that are associated with early schooling contexts. The conservative discourses set the parameters for what is possible in schools but they also open up the contradictions especially in the ways through which children love their gendered (and sexual) lives. Chapter 7 and 8 explores these contradictions in greater detail.

In moving beyond the traditional concerns of teaching discourses, this chapter shows how the shared discourses are constraining and conservative. Gendering is an integral part of the routines of everyday life, “not an escape from it” (Connell 1995: 3). Gender power relations inscribe the routines of everyday early schooling contexts and issues of masculinity and femininity arise in these relations. By understanding early schooling as complex gendered arenas, it is possible to show how teaching discourses are implicated in the regulation of gender identities. The data from the schooling sites is read in a variety of poststructuralist ways. These range from performance theory to queer theory, to feminist poststructuralist literature, to cultural studies, and sexuality studies. The result in the analysis is a resistance to common sense traditional constructions of gender. The theory is used to explore how gender happens in its everydayness and to provide ways of understanding it. I try to delineate the argument that gender is actively contested in early schooling to produce an analysis of who benefits from the articulation of particular teaching discourses and how they do so. Understanding how teaching discourses are articulated, what strategies are deployed and what the effects are, are crucial to the creation of fairer gender relations in schooling, which is also the intention and thrust of policy protection in South Africa.

### **Shared discourses**

This section is a search for the shared patterns of teaching discourses as they interact with gender in four early schooling contexts. The shared discourses interact and are common

throughout the school sites forming an overall strategy in the construction of gender and early schooling. This is different from the specific teaching discourses which are race and class specific. My intention is to draw out the shared patterns of discourse, which produce gender identities in particular ways, highlighting some of the overall strategies in managing, making and (re)producing gender identities and gender relations. No claims are made here concerning the generalisability or representative nature of the discourses identified. Nevertheless, it is my contention that identifying these discourses will be useful in understanding the making of gender, the manifestation of gender (in)equalities and, in particular, how gender becomes an organising matrix for these manifestations in four early schooling contexts. This section confronts the prevalence of teaching discourses across four schooling sites which embody a particular understanding of gender and which are expressive of the production and regulation of gendered identities in early schooling contexts.

Some of the data is lengthy. I do cut off the data at certain points to explicate a particular discourse, though there are several meanings that can be made from data such as mine. While I consider individual teachers (a brief biography has been provided in Chapter 4), I am not theorising individuals but identifying the teaching discourses that frame the gendering of early schooling. Sometimes I use a range of interviews to represent a discourse, at other times a single interview suffices as reflective of teaching discourses. The discourses I identify are measured in terms of how they have been identified in the international literature and through my own experiences as teacher, mother, woman and researcher.

### **Making Difference Biological**

The regulation of gendered identities in the early schooling contexts occurs through a shared discourse that positions boys and girls as biologically different, articulated here by Mrs. G:

Mrs G            **By nature** most boys are aggressive. The girls are talkative **by nature**. (emphasis added)

Making difference biological is a primary means through which teaching discourses execute and regulate gender identities. The overarching view that boys, for example, are naturally prone to aggressiveness is traditional and limiting. If it is true that boys are naturally violent and girls are genetically coded to do the “talking”, then little can be done to change this. In South Africa, gender-based violence rates amongst the highest in the world, with men and boys specifically involved in violence (Chapter 8 shows how violence is enacted). Making difference biological helps to reproduce a natural masculinity and a natural femininity. This does nothing for reducing rates of violence. In fact biological determinism is the same kind of rationality that has been used to explain white intellectual superiority over blacks. The regulation of identity in this way invariably produces negative outcomes in the work towards equality and specifically gender equality and limits what the teacher can do in violence related incidents. Making difference biological works in other overarching ways with negative outcomes for gender equity:

Mrs. E            You saw the maths lesson. It’s the boys who are better both orally and in written work. The boys gave the answers and they are quicker. On the whole the girls are better in reading. I don’t have any clue why that’s so. Maybe it’s the way we use our brain. Do you know that there are different ways we use the left and right hand side of the brain?

Making difference biological obliges one to “achieve the ways of being that appear to be implicated in a particular set of genitals they happen to have” (Davies 1989: 237) as Mrs. E illustrates. Achieving mathematical prowess, for example, is associated with the kind of brains that boys have. The outcome is the same by making biological difference reside in the structure and function of the brain. Mrs. E suggests that male and female brains are structured differently and so the tasks that are executed are different. Since the

processing of tasks is different, different outcomes are achieved. Math becomes suited to boys' brain structure and reading to girls. This dichotomous position can be explained in terms of man/woman; reason/emotion; math/reading; left/right use of the brain (Walkerdine 1989; Usher and Edwards 1994; Gilbert and Gilbert 1998; Paechter 1998). Mrs. E felt that young children might be born with a set of essentially female or male behaviours associated with the left and right hemispheres of the brain. She claims that the left and right brain dichotomy provides a basis through which she can differentiate between the strengths and capacities of boys and girls, therefore it describes what boys, and girls can do. This is not an unfamiliar discourse parading as legitimate, as Alloway (1995:14) suggests with the "left-right brain hemispheres." The left-right structuring of the brain is used as biologically different processing structures with different outcomes for males and females (Gilbert and Gilbert 1998: 37). The adoption of this discourse makes pedagogical sense to Mrs. E when she explains that boys "are better and quicker in maths" orally and in written work. Girls, she says, are good at reading. A particular set of genitals obliged a particular kind of brain structuring to achieve a particular way of being. The idea of the left and right hand brain differentiation contributes to the binary biological ordering of the sexes connecting itself to the construction of gendered identities. In other words, her theory about left and right brain structuring translated into explanations for girls' ability in reading and boys' advantage in mathematics. Boys and girls become genetically and dualistically predispositioned to perform or not in mathematics and reading. Sex role theory based on biological difference permeates most thinking as is further illustrated in this extract:

I ask Mrs. B. how she perceives difference in boys and girls. Mrs. B. says, "Boys and girls are different, physically they know that they are different". Mrs. B. asks me: "Have you ever seen how boys and girls play with a ball?" I had never really thought about it, even though I had spent several years observing my older son play cricket and rugby. Mrs. B. says "boys dribble and kick the balls whilst girls roll the balls". I raise my eyebrow in amazement and will certainly watch my sons the next time around. Mrs. B talks about a recent outing with the children to a park. She says, "I wish you were there to see what I'm talking about. The girls

went out to collect pretty little things whilst the boys jumped and crossed over the river”.

According to Mrs. B, a simple cause and effect relationship exists between girls rolling the ball and “pretty little things” and boys who “jumped and crossed the river,” and kick and dribble balls. A persuasive argument has been made against biologically based sex-role theories (Connell 1987; 1995; Davies 1989; Mac an Ghail 1994; Weedon 1997; Epstein and Johnson 1998; Gilbert and Gilbert 1998; Yelland 1998; Cannella and Grieshaber 2001). Yet they are pervasive means through which the sexes are ordered in the schools and through which unequal power relations are perpetuated. Knowing that I wrote the data and the story myself means also that I must face the issue of this discourse head on and not only from Mrs B’s point of view. Carving through the discourse meant necessarily carving through the biological hindrances in my own life, as I set out in the Preface. I (re)searched my own life in the process of this study.

In a world of two sexes, distinct and complementary ways of being are translated into explanations that girls might be dainty, and boys rough. The effect of these discourses is to determine in advance what constitutes normal femininity and masculinity.

Normalising identity means rewarding some, attacking others and creating judgments about what constitutes a “normal” identity. This sets the limits of what is possible and permissible in schools and hides the unequal power relations that exist across either ends of the dichotomy. Moreover, the power plays that exist in everyday life lose their significance through the finite construction of the self as static and fixed.

An overarching effect of making difference biological is the “boys will be boys” discourse which assumes biological determinism. My observations and interviews were suggestive of this:

Mrs. D            The boys like to get up to some mischief at the back of the classroom.

*Mrs. D asks the class to be quiet*

*Most of the children put their pointer fingers to their lips*

Mrs. D            Thank you children for sitting so politely. Just those boys playing swords spoilt it.

Mrs. A            They're[Boys] real causers hey! In my class, they just want to have their way. It's in their personality.

Mrs. F            Look at the class now, the girls are carrying on, on their own and the boys...look. They are the main culprits. They have to be given more attention. But some boys are sweet and obedient. With the girls, you tell them one thing and they listen. See how the girls work. You can see for yourself....like the naughty boys you have to keep talking to them.

Mrs. L            The boys are the naughty ones.

Mrs. H            **Boys will be boys.** (emphasis added)

Mrs. G            By nature most boys are aggressive (...) They[Boys] are always naughty, just like boys' behaviour (...)Boys will remain boys. They are just like that (...) Boys are always rough. They do kick and throw things down (...) If work is demanded the girls give it on time because they know they will be punished. The boys are not afraid because they repeat the mistake and they don't do the work.

Mrs. G            Everybody is free now with the ANC. But the boys are more free. They are always naughty, just like boys' behaviour because boys speak out. The girls are shy.

'Boys will be boys' creates the idea that boys are the problem. The following is an observation of this at Westridge Primary School:

At the end of the play break all children in grades one, two and three have to line up before being dismissed by the teacher on duty. They do so in orderly gendered lines. The teacher on duty expects silence and order before she could allow them to move to their classrooms. This demand for order takes time, so that a lot of time passes from the ringing of the bell to the time that the children leave for their classrooms. Inbetween all of this there is chatting, nibbling, laughing, closing up lunch boxes, gobbling leftover snacks, hiding behind others as they did so. This was despite the teacher's insistence on straight lines, order and silence. I heard her say: "Boys be quiet otherwise, I will bring the black book." The black book is the ultimate punishment. As observer, this was the clearest example of how teachers secure boys' visibility through naturalising their behaviour.

The 'boys will be boys' cliché is based on biological assumptions and homogenizes the boys in ways which suggest their less-than-satisfactory behaviour: culprits, causers, mischievous, want their way, naughty, aggressive, fearless and rough. The impact of their visibility in the above observation does not work in their favour. This tendency to homogenise boys is to locate the problem with boys, blaming the boys for discipline problems. Girls are the models through which boys' behaviour is constructed. It also encourages and rewards a passive and gentle femininity. The boy's behaviour demands more teacher attention. Mrs. F says that she needs to "keep talking" to the naughty boys. This resonates with the international literature that teachers privilege boys in the classroom because those who cause discipline problems there are predominantly boys (Jordan 1995: 70; Gilbert and Gilbert 1998:14; Salisbury and Jackson 1996; Martino and Meyenn 2001). However, boys' visibility does not always work to their advantage, as the observation above shows (Epstein and Johnson 1998).

The visibility of boys as problems is tied intimately to teacher constructions of masculinity that is biological. It is assumed that there is a core personality and character-

defining masculinity which all boys actually or potentially share (Gilbert and Gilbert 1998). Boys are constructed as naturally equipped to be, for instance, “causers” as Mrs. A suggests. These essentialist arguments work to constrain teachers in exercising power and ensuring a more harmonious classroom that benefits all. If boys and roughness are naturalized as unchangeable, hard-wired and violent, then the possibility for change in boys (and men) is erased (Salisbury and Jackson 1996:2; Foster et al 2001: 17), and unequal power relations remain unchallenged.

The ‘boys will be boys’ pathology is intimately connected to and shaped by the discourse which makes difference biological, and is intrinsic to the formation of gendered identities. Mrs. G says that boys do not give in work on time. They are “not afraid because they repeat the mistake and they don’t do the work”. This is a clear example of the ways in which boys re(create) systems of masculine power. In this way, the production of identity is linked with the production of particular discourses, such as biological determinism that serve to legitimate masculine power. The ‘boys will be boys’ discourse thus makes “boyhood... the entitlement to and the anticipation of power” (Foster et al 2001: 16). However, all boys are not the same. The ‘boys will be boys’ discourse is open to contradictions.

For example, some boys according to Mrs. F, are “sweet and obedient”. Mrs. G explains that some boys kick and throw things down- a violent masculinity. This suggests the existence of masculinities and points to the complex ways through which boys try to get their gender right. Clearly, biological definitions of the self limit the work towards gender equality, and when discourses lump boys as ‘boys will be boys’, they serve to work against the varied forms of masculinity. They also work against the idea that masculinities are in fact forged in social circumstances. In particular, they work to (re)produce unequal power relations, which privilege boys:

Mrs. C            You know, its very seldom that the boys and girls play with each other in my class. The boys are very competitive. You will notice

the boys dominate most of the top groups in reading and maths. The girls are really overshadowed in the class. Even if you ask them to team up they choose friends of the same gender.

Me Why is it that way?

Mrs. C It's typical. The boys are the lively ones. You must have heard the noise. It's them. They just love to scream and shout, quite typical you know.

Me What do you mean?

Mrs. C Boys tend to have a strong character. The girls are quiet- more the dolly type. Not that they don't have those amongst them that scream and screech. There are ringleaders. Look at Linda she's one of them yet she is so quiet in the class because the boys just overpower her...

Mrs. C names power as a central means to explore the nature of gender inequalities but boys' hegemonic pattern of conduct (hegemonic masculinity) is celebrated. This positions boys collectively as privileged over girls (Connell 1995; Davies 1996). These patterns of conduct for boys are strong, lively, shout, and scream which Mrs. C constructs as "typical". Typical girls' behaviour implies passive, weak and hushed:

The girls are pathetic. They don't take risks. They're really not the adventurous sort.... My girls are just so happy with following what I say. .. The boys are so energetic. Much more enthusiastic. They challenge me all the time...really confident. The girls are real screechers. Always coming to me with tales ...so and so did this or that. It's so annoying.

The 'boys will be boys' discourse serves to overshadow girls, producing judgement about what constitutes an ideal. Mrs. C is aware of boys overpowering girls, but she fails to see it as disadvantageous to any particular group because she relies on biologically based difference. Mrs. C was able to position boys in terms of a common sense approach, but it

involved the denigration of femininity. These are damaging social relations and hinder the work towards equality. In fact they work to produce the skill of adventure, confidence, mathematical prowess, sport and competitiveness for the boardrooms in which men have a history of success in the material world. Are girls at the age of eight moving into a quiet world where they follow orders and are overpowered and overshadowed? Is this what South African schooling enables? This section has offered an analysis that moves beyond the traditional concerns of biology and focuses on the effects of a 'boys will be boys' discourse.

### **Children are Children: Gender doesn't matter**

'Gender does not matter' is a major currency in all the schools in this study. The skepticism in linking gender and young children developed during the initial stages of the research while I was establishing access and building social relations with teachers.

'Gender does not matter to young children', was for me another central discourse in the schools under study:

Mrs. D            Actually I haven't thought about gender. I tend to treat **children as children** and not consciously think that that's a boy. I do think that they need their own roles. A girl is definitely different from a boy and a boy is different from a girl, and they need to be aware of it. But I don't think I've thought very deeply about it (laughing) as affecting anything. [emphasis added]

Mrs. I            In my class they are all the same whether they are boys or girls.

Mrs. G            I treat them all the same. They are all equal for me. In God's eyes everyone is equal. Do you know what makes them not equal? It's their behaviour. Look at Siyanda. He's so aggressive. By nature most boys are aggressive. The girls are talkative by nature.

- Mrs. L            They are the same. These are just kids. The boys dominate the class. It's the same. The girls are the shy ones...
- Mrs. F            Boys still follow fathers and girls follow mothers, like boys are interested in cars. Girls will be different with different interests. It's how children are in general.
- Mrs. H            I see all pupils as the same. They are all the same to me.

The above conversations that I had with teachers substantiate the micro matters in the classroom. In the initial stages of the research teachers suggested that I should research the "higher standards" where the yields would be high. I kept wondering about yielding any dividends since I was talking to teachers who had between nine to twenty-nine years of experience in early childhood teaching. I had none. They should know more about young children, I thought. Most teachers were older than I and I was conscious of my age in relation to what they said. Yet, what has been unsaid in these conversations is as important as what has been said, and attending to the unsaid makes my analysis poststructuralist.

Making gender escape in the lives of young children is related to dominant discourses that tend to construct children as biological, passive and unprotesting, without agency and renders both boys and girls invisible. By using the term children (and I use it cautiously) as I have pointed out in Chapter 3, there is a danger of ignoring difference (Walkerdine 1986; Yates 1993; MacNaughton 2000: 150; Rhedding-Jones 2000: 263). The identification of "children as children" makes gender power invisible. Identifying with the discourse that children are "all the same to me" precludes complicity in gender (and other) inequalities. Moreover, this position assumes that all boys are the same and all girls are the same. This is linked to the assumed biological distinctions that I described in the previous section. Why should gender matter when children are biologically inscribed in advance? This makes the ability to identify against the association of gender and young children easier. The competing discourse over gender in early schooling

constantly interacts and creates regimes of truth. Foucault (1982) believed that all social institutions survive and thrive through creating truths about how we should think, act and feel towards ourselves and others. The teaching discourses hang together through the creation and maintenance of certain truths about how we should think about gender in early schooling. For example teachers are able to position themselves in discourses rendering gender invisible in the lives of young children. These truths are woven together into a regime that governs what are seen to be normal and right ways of being a teacher in early schooling. Biological determinism and 'gender does not matter' interact positioning people as male or female and provide narratives about the ways in which people should behave. The shared teaching discourses are not independent of each other but are circuits connecting with each other, as they create particular configurations in early schooling. For example, Mrs. B suggests that "children are children...a girl is definitely different from a boy and a boy is different from a girl..." Her categorisation of children involved recourse to biological definitions of difference. Similarly, Mrs. F adopts a gender-neutral position by suggesting that boys and girls have different interests but that's "how children are in general". The children are non-gendered precisely because their differences are assumed to be fixed and biological. This overlaps with the previous section as the discourses interact and are woven together.

Gender-fixing also happens through recourse to God and religion: everyone is equal in God's eyes so why should gender matter? The gravity of biology and religion are based on naturalising human beings as fixed and immovable. Getting gender right involves the coherence of the self. The dominance of this discourse means that particular practices "escape" early schooling contexts. This was articulated by Mrs. B: "I don't think I've thought very deeply about it [gender] (laughing) as affecting anything".

The "children are children" discourse naturalises human behaviour. For example, Mrs. G claims that "most boys are aggressive", while Mrs. L notes that the boys dominate the classroom. Aggression and domination in the classroom is the naturalization of masculine power. Naturalisation works to create and sustain masculine power that benefits males and this has specific consequences for girls. Girls are constructed as the

“shy ones”. Power is a central dynamic in children’s relations, boys are constructed as aggressive and dominating, but power is naturalised within a dominating discourse which frames children as children and assumes the naturalness of girls’ and boys’ behaviour.

Teachers often fail to see the significance of gender because of the dominant discourses that make gender irrelevant. The privileging of children as non-gendered, cloaks the construction of gender power relations thus enabling unequal power relations to continue. If the object in early schooling is on the child as gender-neutral, then teachers cannot see the child as gendered and constructing gendering with others, nor can they challenge the continual construction of boys as dominant and girls as shy. These commonsense positions are deeply intertwined with the understandings of how to be a teacher of young children.

### **Just Kids: Still young**

The discourses I have identified thus far mesh through an intricate network as they link, form and regulate identity in the early years of schooling. In the previous section I pointed out that the shared teaching discourses are interdependent, forming regimes of truth in early schooling. The “just kids: still young” discourse functions as part of a strategic tactic which connects discourses with each other, attracting and propagating each other (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982). The dominant discourses depend on each other, interlocking and forming a network of meanings around gender and early schooling. The network cannot be consolidated without the production and circulation of these discourses.

The “just kids” discourse was not immediately clear as I sat as ethnographer in the very early days of this research. In early February 1999, Westridge Primary School had set up a meeting with all teachers in order for me to explain my research. At the time, I thought of the meeting as a normal part of the research process: gaining access to school sites. A key concern raised by teachers was the nature of the research itself. “Why children? They’re just kids”. I kept wondering whether I had in fact made a mistake. I was just

beginning to insert myself into the field of gender and early childhood education and learning about masculinities. I did not regard myself as adequately informed so I thought they could be right; maybe the theories I was reading and trying to put to work were somehow different to the realities. I did not give much reflection to the concern raised at the time, but I slowly came to realise how significant the “just kids” discourse was in extending the invisibility and the marginalisation of children. The “just kids” discourse I had heard at Westridge Primary and at other school sites helped shape what I had discovered and how I had put my ideas together. In this section I do not offer many examples to make a point, but rather I attempt to show how the discourse is intertwined with the assumption that children in the early years of schooling are too young, too immature to be implicated in gender considerations. I kept wondering why in my conversations with teachers I was constantly told that I could get richer data from the “higher standards”.

Mrs. L            These are **just kids**. (my emphasis)

Mrs. J            Here in the class they are ‘**still young**’. Usually it is the older ones who discriminate. I see all the children the same and they see themselves as the same. I don’t give preferences to a girl or boy. (emphasis added).

Mrs. B            Gender is more relevant in the higher standards.

Mrs. A            In grade one the children are too young.

In the theory of development, children are often constructed as adults in the making (Thorne 1993). In this section, I show that recourse to ages and stages of development (re)produce unequal power relations. The dominant teaching discourse positions childhood as a sequence of developmental stages. In other words being too young, illustrates the incomplete gendered version of adults (Danby 1998). The idea that children are too young to know about gender implies that children in the higher standards do know. Mrs. B’s argument about the “higher standards” makes pedagogical sense and is associated with a gender development approach (Thorne 1993). A gender development approach is based on an incremental and linear unfolding and developing of identity

within social contexts. Power is one-sided and is assumed to be possessed by adults. Mrs. J points out that older people discriminate, implying that children don't because they can't, as they are "too young". Age is thus a significant marker and the young are biologically destined to get older. The young child is considered as unprotesting and without agency. The child is regarded as an incomplete version of the adult without the ability to make sense of the world. This conceptualization about young children is deeply problematic. It mis-recognises the position of children. They are assumed to lack knowledge; acquiring an identity that is observed and absorbed. The assumption is that they have a basic goodness. Absent in the 'just kids' discourse are the gender dynamics of children and the play of power in children's cultures. This is explored in Chapter 7. It is also assumed that children are passive recipients of gender messages. The emphasis that teaching discourses place on age and stages of development means that gender concerns appear frivolous because they are not seen to correlate with "just kids". This discourse is a means through which an attempt is made to "anchor children's lives, confirm teachers' power and generate multiple sites of power for adults" (Canella 1997: 44). Making children "young" works to sustain unequal power relations between teacher and taught and in the configuration of gender relations.

### **Parents are the models**

The perception of children as non-gendered, and therefore as unprotesting young minds without the ability to make choices about how to be, is a dominant teaching discourse. The dominant teaching discourses are different but they overlap as mutually supportive and interconnected grids. The "parents are the models" discourse interconnects with other discourses (re)producing the conservatism of teaching discourses and the logic that children are passive. Just how dominant and conservative this discourse is can be illustrated in the narrowness in understanding power relations. I illustrate the pervasiveness of this discourse by referring to Mrs. B and then to Mrs. F's articulation on the issue:

Mrs. B.            So the problem with gender is that there are different home values brought to school. If there is a certain idea at home, you can sow seeds in the classroom, but you can't change. Besides, if certain people think that way about gender, it is not our right to change it.

In beginning to develop the approaches that I have taken in this research, I have read and re-read the data several times. Making sense of the data steered me towards an analysis that refused to accept what was said even if it came from Mrs. B who had twenty-nine years of teaching experience. The data pushed me to an analysis that was able to ask questions beyond what was immediately available.

Mrs. B's, perspective raises important issues in the research on gender in the early years of schooling. This is inextricably linked to the conceptualisation of power as finite. Mrs. B articulates a position through which power is constructed in a linear direction. Power is constructed as one-sided and oppressive. Power is possessed by adults. This understanding of power is limiting in beginning the work towards gender equality. If education is the vehicle for building a new nation in South Africa, then its capacity to drive gender equality is restricted by a discourse that paralyses action. Mrs. B constructed power negatively. She did not have the power to interfere. Power is seen as the imposition of one's values on another. This meant that she believed that she could not change the conditions in her classroom. She could not control the conditions in her classroom because power resided somewhere else: with parents as more influential adults. The idea that there is a simple relationship in how children become gendered is based on socialisation and power as oppressive. Exercising power may be at odds with her idea that it is not right to interfere with what children learn at home, so that schooling as an arena of social change is made less promising. This is not convincing because teachers are very powerful agents in school and the children often idolize and adore them. The dominant teaching discourse, however, is a strategic tactic to produce the logic of passivity in children.

Mrs. F expressed "how children learn to be gendered":

Mrs. F            You know how important the parents are in bringing up their children. The children will naturally carry what their parents have expected. I think we need to be equal, but you automatically fall back on what your parents have taught you. What I follow is what my mother taught me and so that's how I carry on...

Mrs. F, like Mrs. B's commonsense approach, constructs the home and the parents as one of the central foundations of child and gender development. The family is a key to understanding how gender is mediated and negotiated but gendering occurs in many sites, and the school is one of them. This is a powerful discourse and children are assumed to get their gender right in terms of socialization. Sex-role stereotyping tends to reinforce biological understandings of being female and being male. In Mrs. F's terms "parents are the models" – children are born as boys or girls and are socialised by their parents to be that way. It assumes that parents model and reinforce in the child those behaviours that are considered to be sex-role appropriate (Yelland and Grieshaber 1998; MacNaughton 2000). Sex role theory is based on an ordered and consistent relation between the social institutions and some causal mechanism. What adults want and do affects what children become. Thus power is constructed as one-sided and oppressive.

In another interview, Mrs. F. illustrates the point further:

**"Parents are the models"**. Boys will imitate their fathers and girls imitate their mothers. It's already set there. Boys are good with their hands. Girls are sharper with reading and they are more obedient (emphasis added).

Boys become boys in the ways that they do because of a simple cause and effect relationship. Here it is assumed that sexist gender differences are created and maintained through a process of "osmosis" (Davies 1988). In this process, it is assumed that

children, as unthinking beings automatically absorb how to become. Hence, boys and girls for Mrs. F become gendered through imitation and modeling. For Mrs. F, boys and girls become traditionally gendered because they have absorbed the sexist gender messages from their parents.

The logic of this conservative discourse is the passivity of children. The child is produced in this discourse as not legitimately agentic.

### **Presumed Innocent**

Thus far, I have tried to identify teaching discourses which foreground the conservatism through which gender identities in early schooling are regulated. The teaching discourses I have identified underscore the conceptualisation of young children as fixed, with gender being a frivolous concern confirming unequal power relations between teachers and taught. Hinging on the identified discourses is the presumption of childhood innocence associated with unequal power relations. Presuming innocence means immunity from sexual (and gendered) knowledge (Silin 1995; 1997; Epstein and Johnson 1998; Tobin 1997; Yelland 1998; Epstein 1999; Lett and Sears 1999; MacNaughton 2000; Theilheimer and Cahill 2001; Grieshaber and Canella 2001), and imbues the adult teacher with knowledge and power and the need for children to be protected from (sexual) corruption. Protection and childhood innocence is assumed to be guaranteed by a basic belief in the two-parent, heterosexual family. Deviating from the two-parent norm undermines the basic beliefs and is assumed to corrupt the innocent child. The family is central to the social construction of sexuality: a place where sexuality can be controlled and rendered safe and holy (Epstein and Johnson 1998). The family is regarded as stable and regulated, nurturing and producing a moral environment for children. This is a dominant model of the family. In South Africa there are increasing numbers of orphans, children living with grandparents, or with single parents, largely as a result of the AIDS pandemic. Even in this context, the dominant circle of the two-parent heterosexual family remains. Children who are outside this circle are othered, deviant and corrupting, breaking the family-innocence couplet.

In all the schools under study, presuming innocence and distancing sexuality from young children is a common theme. Teachers tend to avoid sexuality in general and this increases its value on the black market of forbidden discourses (Lett and Sears 1999). Early schooling, though, is not a sexually-free political arena. Teacher-made discourses wish this upon children. Children's discourses contest this construction. In Chapter 7 I explore how sexuality forms part of the everyday experiences of children. This is evident in, for example, the game called kissing catches. In Westridge Primary School, for instance, it was found to be "not appropriate" and children were not allowed to play the game, and when they spoke about it, they warned me not to say anything about it to their teachers. They knew that sexuality was taboo talk. The presumptive innocence of the young child is captured in this extract from an interview with Mrs. H:

- Mrs H            When these children go to **high school** they are falling in love  
(emphasis added).
- Mrs. H.            Science needs mind and dedication and girls dedicate their minds  
to affairs. I'm not saying that girls shouldn't be interested in boys.  
Girls are abnormal if they're not. It is natural for girls to fall in  
love with boys at a **certain stage**....

Taken together, the above conversation with Mrs. H and making kissing catches "inappropriate" suggests that associating sexuality and young children is malignant, corrupting, "problematic and even potentially dangerous" (Tobin 1997:1). Mrs. H works within a projective mechanism that high school is the place for falling in (assumed heterosexual) love, affirming innocence for young children, and confirming power for herself. The pervasiveness of such images of boys and girls to come in the future rather than a concern with the present is associated with a more tangible sexuality that comes with age. Butler's performance theory is useful in explicating this issue. Butler (1990: 33) understands gender as "the repeated stylisation of the body, a set of repeated acts...that congeal over time to produce the appearance of a substance, of a natural sort of being". The association of sexuality and young children could threaten or disrupt the

illusion that makes gender and childhood innocence a powerful discourse, or as Butler observes, a “natural sort of being”. Presuming childhood innocence produces and regulates the world of children. I show in Chapter 7 that this is unsuccessful as sexuality features strongly in children’s discourses. Presuming innocence translates powerfully into, and invokes the need for childhood protection. This protection is also clear in the reconstitution of the two-parent family plot, as I outlined in the introduction to this section. The Barney song sung in Mrs. F’s classroom demonstrates the dominance of the happy family:

I love you, you love me, we’re a happy family. With a great big hug and a kiss  
from me to you, won’t you say you love me too?

The Barney song is a discursive marker of the happy family myth. In particular, the privileging of the two-parent family serves to validate for teachers the childhood innocence and protection that the two-parent family is deemed to provide. Let’s consider two specific examples of how this operates. This must not be read as reflective of all the teachers in the schools under study. Rather I want to show the link between innocence and the two-parent family plot:

Mrs. G            These kids live a hard life. Thobeka’s mother died of paraffin burns. She was fighting with another woman about her boyfriend. The other one threw parafin on her and she died in hospital. Now the granny does not know who Thobeka’s father is and she came to me to fill in these forms for a child grant. That’s why the government must promote abortions. The kids have to live with grannies and some of them live in the hostel. The hostel is a bad thing in this area. Its like Sodom and Gomorrah. There are little girls staying with men in that hostel.

Mrs. G promotes the conventional family order as the “locus of safety” (Silin 1997: 222). That there are absent fathers, that there are children in the care of grandmothers, that

there is no family order have resulted in the loss of childhood innocence, in pregnancies, sinful living and corruption. The point is that a moral panic is created about children without fathers and about children in “deficit” families. Children are constructed as victims and unagentic. The implications are clear. The presumptions about childhood innocence, passivity, and vulnerability helps to perpetuate the myth of two parent family as the two parent family contributes to innocence and passivity (Silin 1997; 1995) diverting attention to the more serious forms of abuse against children (Epstein and Johnson 1998). In South Africa the abuses are serious and I do not wish to downplay this. In fact, the Sunday Tribune, 25 November 2001 reports on the rape of a nine-month old baby in the Northern Cape. The sexual violation of children in schools must be a critical concern in education. In 2000, the recorded sexual crimes against children was more than 25 000. The Sunday Tribune, 17 March 2002 reports that the most significant number of rapes of children occurred in the six-to nine-year age group. Jewkes et al (2002) report that schools in South Africa are not safe places for girls who are victims of sexual abuse committed not only by boys but male teachers. The logic of innocence stigmatizes children who are sexually violated and diverts attention from preventative measures in early schooling. Why should early schooling be concerned with rape and, sexual molestation if children are innocent? The conservatism of presuming innocence works to misrecognise the sexual violations in schooling.

Presuming innocence contributes to the construction of children as defenceless victims, requiring immunity from sexual and gender knowledge, and confirms power for teachers over innocent children. Yoking children with sexual knowledge operates as a theft of innocence. This may explain why kissing catches, is considered “not appropriate”. Moreover, the construction of the two-parent family is inextricably bound to the preservation of innocence and diverts attention from its breakdown. Presuming innocence produces and reproduces the two-parent plot but also opens up the space for what is absent (Epstein and Johnson 1998). For teachers the absent father, the absent family order results in corrupting innocence. To what extent are children suffering from the norms of the happy myth? In South Africa, the dominant model of the family misrecognises the increasing number of orphans, single-parent families and children who

live with their grandparents as AIDS increases mortality. . . What does it mean for the work towards gender equality? The pure and fragile child, as I have shown, means that the child is always ignorant and empty of knowledge. This conception denies their sexuality, their agency and their protestations (Silin 1997; Tobin 1997; Epstein and Johnson 1998) and works to divert attention from the serious sexual abuses that children in South Africa endure. Chapter 7 shows that early schooling contexts are not barren, as teachers wish them, but are actively producing gendered (and sexual) cultures. Early schooling thus produces sexuality by forbidding it. Closeting children by presuming innocence is a “state which some *adults* mistakenly *wish* upon children and which confirms their power” (Epstein and Johnson 1998: 97 (emphasis in original)) while denying children’s lived experiences. These lived experiences for many young black children who live in single rooms mean that they witness sexual activity and they know of and witness incidents of rape. Presuming innocence works to deny the lived experience of many children in this country and diverts attention from the everyday issues that face them.

The discourse of presuming innocence consolidates the idea of teachers as mothers, women as caring and nurturing, and as moral heroines of innocent and ignorant children. It also helps to understand why the early years of schooling are seen as a woman’s domain and explains the broader implications of men’s absence in this field.

### **Teachers are mothers**

This part of the thesis will show that teachers at a very general level come to share and position themselves as teacher-mothers, which is expressive of the “innocence/protection couplet” (Epstein and Johnson 1998: 97). The dominant discourses form a network of interlocking strategies. In the formation of a web of teaching discourses in early schooling, there are points of connection in multiple, complex and diverse ways. For example, the “teachers are mothers” and “parents are the models” discourses overlap and contradict each other. It is the contradictions which actually work to regulate gender in early schooling.

The main concern in this section is to draw attention to the ways in which the surrogate mother position is embedded in discourses that regulate gender identity in the early years of schooling. The argument in this part of the section is organised around two interrelated themes: teaching as caring, and discipline. As with the previous sections, the identification of this discourse should be read as my attempt to invoke a common grammar, at the very general level, in the regulation of gender identity across the four early school contexts. It should therefore not be read as a representative or comprehensive account of the experiences of teachers in grades one and two at the multi-sited school in this study. In fact, I have shown in Chapter 4 how Mrs. H uses corporal punishment, which suggests the variations to this theme.

The teacher-mother position is a familiar discourse for teachers in the primary school and especially in the early years of schooling (Mac an Ghail 1994; Connell 1985; Pollard 1985; Epstein and Johnson 1998; Lesko 2000; King 2000; Tobin 1997; Rhedding Jones 2001). Mac an Ghail (1994:37), for example, suggest that teaching has been viewed as a soft job involved with caring and nurturing constructed as “women’s work”. Junior primary schooling contexts can be considered as extended daycare centres with women teachers considered as “mother substitutes” (Rhedding-Jones 2001: 1) and in the majority. My study confirms this.

Linking teachers as mothers and binding them together in a care and protection relation is highlighted in the following two quotes:

Mrs. F            Our duty is to be mothers. I pamper all the kids...give them love and attention. I believe in positive reinforcement. If you give positive comments...the children react in a positive way. The parents and teachers are responsible for moulding the kids and we can make them into what they would become...

Me                How do you see your role as a teacher?

Mrs. G            We are like mothers to them... mother's role is to love her children  
and I try to love these kids(...)

The teachers position their roles as care-givers, nurturers who love and give attention to the emerging, innocent and developing child who is also in need of protection. Child development pedagogy is influential in the construction of the mother surrogate and forms the basis through which teachers understand their roles as caregivers and nurturers of young children (Grieshaber and Canella 2001). The understanding of gendering and young children is influenced by psychologically-based development theories of how to be a teacher of young children. Caring, loving, protecting and encouraging the development of the child is constructed as paramount. This is what has been recognised as developmentally appropriate practice –DAP (Tobin 1997; MacNaughton 2000; Canella and Grieshaber 2001) as a sense-making machine through which children are constructed. DAP suggests that pedagogical practice should acknowledge the developmental levels of each child and is a dominant force in making sense of how children learn through the stages and ages of development. Mrs. F says, “we can make them into what they become”. Mrs. F invests in development ages of the child and confirms power for herself in shaping and moulding a cohesive and coherent eventual self, an adult. This development-driven approach leads her to value her teacher-mother role, which accordingly will have a long- term positive effect on the coherence of the child's identity. Giving love and attention to innocent young children is isomorphic with development and with her as woman. This perpetuates the logic which makes children incapable of grasping complex sexual and gendered issues. Walkerdine's (1993:209) study shows, for example, how a four-year-old told his infant teacher “show your knickers”. The point I raise here is that the teacher-mother discourse is developmentalist and circumscribes the teacher's role to one of caring without recognition of power relations. In particular, the effect of this is to regulate the gendered identities of young children, thereby reproducing unequal relations. This is illustrated in the following quote:

Mrs. B            I think men and women are different but differences mean respect.  
Me                And the kids, how do they think about the differences?

- Mrs. B I think that it's in their personalities. When we have little plays in the class, the boys always choose to be soldiers, policeman and firemen.
- Me And the girls?
- Mrs. B Most often they choose to be teachers. More girls choose teachers because they see female teachers like their mummies.
- Me Do you think a male teacher could teach at this level?
- Mrs. B This is a difficult question. I don't know of any of them teaching the little ones. Parents might at this stage feel some reservations about male teachers. I think this is across all the cultures.
- Me Why?
- Mrs. B I think that we give the kids lots of love and I'm afraid that men can't really do that...

Seeing "teachers as mummies" confirms for Mrs. B her mother surrogate position and her power. Mrs. B says that "most often they[girls] choose to be teachers...because they see female teachers like their mummies". Moreover, this position serves to regulate gender identity and is intrinsic to its regulation. Is this why teaching is appealing to women and girls? In KwaZulu-Natal, the teacher count in 2000 shows that women constitute 71,9 percent of the teaching force according to the Persal database of the Department of Education. The same database shows women teachers in KwaZulu-Natal constituted 65 percent of the workforce in 1997. These numbers matter to the extent that they suggest the distinctly gendered teaching environment. My concern here is not to present whole pictures on this issue, but rather to provoke related research and to invoke discussion on how discourses construct and reconstruct gender identity and the gender positionings of particular people which may also explain the predominance of women teachers.

Mrs. B projects future teaching careers for the girls in her classroom. Thus, female teachers' "capacities for nurturance are amplified" (Walkerdine 1989: 74; Noddings 1992). The teacher-mother discourse illustrates the multiple ways through which gender

and young children are connected and shape each other and how it works to regulate the identity of girls and women but also of men and boys.

If woman can nurture and care for young children and caring is only a “woman’s way of knowing” (King 1997: 242) what about the actively absent men? Mrs. B expresses reservations about men teaching young children. A moral panic is re (created) around absent men. Mrs. B suggests that parents across the cultures have negative perceptions of men teaching young children. Men, she argues, cannot give love. How is love gendered? What type of love do men give? Why do men ignore teaching young children? Whose agenda is served when Mrs. B suggests that girls and teaching are associated? Do women get their gender right by teaching and do men get their gender right by avoiding teaching young children? What kind of myth has been set up about men and young children and love? These questions invoke the need for more research but my research does suggest the interconnections. For example, men (and fathers) are in positions of authority and discipline children. This comes to represent the opposite of the teacher-mother position. This is illustrated in the following extract:

Mrs. F            No matter what kind of children they are they need their fathers...whether they are boys or girls. Just having a father there makes a difference. The kids have that respect with their fathers. The mother can talk and talk but when the father stands up, they respect. I think it’s the same with *me*...

Mrs. F constructs discipline as male, not motherly and not associated with women. Men and fathers, Mrs. F. assumes, are better able to provide discipline “no matter what kind of children they are” and men are invested with authority. An important point must be raised here. The data presented is used to suggest the meanings that are attached to the teacher-mother position through which men are constructed differently. As such it is not representative of the range of meanings that can be made from the teachers in this study and should not be read as representative. Mrs. B assumes that men have an easier time controlling children on the assumption that males (as fathers) are more comfortable with

wielding authority- a biological and patriarchal privilege. Power and control is reinscribed as male power and nurturing becomes exclusively a female domain. By positioning herself within the teacher-mother discourse, Mrs. F fails to see the connection in shaping and regulating identity. She cannot exercise power because she wants to make room for the emerging child, she wants to pamper children because her theory of how children develop suggests the need for pampering and loving. There are inconsistent positions here: she cannot discipline because children must be loved but men can punish and discipline children. Is this why women are over represented as teachers in the early years of schooling because they are made to be vulnerable to nurturing and caring?

In this section of the thesis, I have suggested that the teacher-mother discourse is normalised and has implications for the regulation of gender identity (and men's positionings become broader). At the very general level the teacher-mother surrogate position engenders the "innocence/protection couplet" between adult-child and men and women with unequal power. This section suggests the need for related research on the over representation of women in teaching, in particular in the early years of schooling. "Whose agenda is served by what the teaching/caring is?" (Rhedding-Jones 2001:12) I have shown how care and nurturing has become axiomatic of women teaching young children (King 1997: 244). In other words having more women (and no men) in the early years of schooling is not necessarily useful in the work towards gender equality. Putting more men in the early years of schooling should also be a research consideration as is now the case in Scandinavian countries (Rhedding-Jones 2001).

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has identified six teaching discourses as hegemonic, conservative and constraining. These discourses are: making difference biological,; children are children, gender doesn't matter; parents are the models; just kids: still young; presumed innocent; teaching are mothers. I tried to show how teaching discourses privilege particular ways of knowing, thinking and living gender; the power relations that are produced and reproduced and the implications of this for unequal gender power relations which become

significant in the production and regulation of gendered identities. The teaching discourses make children innocent; construct them as unsexed, unprotesting, passive and without agency. It is not surprising that my initial request to do this study at schools was met with “why children-just kids”. The teaching discourses serve to perpetuate the minor status of the early years in the bigger picture of schooling and leads to a systematic inattention to the dynamic lives of all those who inhabit it. I also partly understand why I was told to research the “higher standards” and why gender research in the early years of schooling in South Africa has been neglected. We are expected to think about young children without any persistence and seriousness because of the assumed vulnerability of children who are made to be defenseless and powerless.

The next chapter of this thesis turns to the specific teaching discourses through which gender identity is constructed. It explores how race and class positions are taken up in the gendering process.

## **Chapter Six**

### **Specific Teaching Discourses**

#### **Introduction**

Gender is intrinsic to the formation and regulation of identity in the early years of schooling. Chapter 5 examined the shared teaching discourses significant to the production and regulation of gender identity across four schooling sites. This served to highlight the overall discourses in/through which gender is constructed in early schooling. However, focus only on the shared patterns of discourse across school sites misses the important fact that experiences of early schooling in South Africa are also different, contradictory and complex. A complex set of interrelationships exists between race, class and gender in specific socio-economic contexts. Such specificities are important to consider. While the shared teaching discourses are manifest within and across the school sites, there are also variations. The purpose of this chapter is to identify these as specific teaching discourses which are crucial to the gendering process.

Inequalities of apartheid education have impacted on making gender. It is impossible to understand the making of gender in the early years of schooling without giving weight to class and race politics that are constitutive to gender identities. We need to look at the different social situations in which people find themselves to understand more comprehensively how gender is understood. The schools in this study are reflective of such. The argument in this thesis is that teachers and learners produce gender identities actively but always within “concrete social circumstances” (Connell 1995: 86). The outcomes are not easily controlled. We need to understand the context of gender relations and the specific processes that produce them to better understand the related issues. This will help to identify unequal productions of gender, in order to make political progress with them, to delimit them and to make political interventions.

This chapter examines how cultural dynamics including race and class shape specific teaching discourses. Teaching discourses influence what happens outside the school and feed on broader national discourses of gender and gender equality. The coalescence of

outside dynamics and those within is taken into consideration in each school site. Specific teaching discourses fit unevenly with shared teaching discourses identified in Chapter 5. It is not clear how they undermine or even reinforce dominant teaching discourses. The important fact is that specificity in each school makes certain subject positions available and not others. The specific constructed contextualization of power and meanings impacts on the performances of gender in different sites.

This chapter focuses on teachers and specific teaching discourses through which gender becomes manifest, to seek how teachers make sense of gender in specific sites of race and class. However, this does not imply that teaching discourses must be privileged as in this and Chapter 5 teachers and children actively constitute and are constituted by specific cultural dynamics. Chapters 7 and 8 concern the ways children make meaning but here I identify those teaching discourses which constrain and regulate gender identities in local circumstances. This not only allows a way to look at diverse challenges when working towards gender equality but also a means to identify opportunities for change in each school. Specific teaching discourses contradict and constrain the work towards gender equality. Gender patterns are woven and weave through many areas and do not change with dramatic speed. However within specificities of teaching discourses possibilities exist to help move gender equality along. After discussion of each school, I identify possible patterns which allow potential for better gender relations.

The schools in this study reflect four historically-specific schooling sites, in the historically-specific present in KwaZulu-Natal and are connected through the ways that teaching discourses draw upon familiar and common sense ways of understanding gender and early schooling. Race, class and social specifics of teaching discourses influence the range of subject positions inhabited. The specific teaching discourses embody multiple dimensions. In other words social locations create conditions for relations of power. In identifying specific teaching discourses I show differential access to power, practice of power and effects of power. The argument here is that in order to begin the work towards gender equality, a school must identify specific teaching discourses operating within its own site and recognize the dominant constructed gender patterns.

As in Chapter 5, no claims are made here concerning the generalisability or representative nature of the discourses identified. Rather my contention is that to identify specific discourses will prove useful to understand gender power relations, and their challenges, and to enable political progress.

### **Westridge Primary School**

Chapter 4 described Westridge Primary School and provided snapshots of descriptions I considered to be closest to illuminating my research questions. Westridge is predominantly middle class and largely white. Through political changes in South Africa economically mobile black and coloured but mostly Indian families have moved into the area reflecting their class position and predominance in Durban. Chapter 3 noted that the school reflects changing racial dynamics though remains largely white.

As ethnographic researcher, I tried to acquaint myself with the culture of Westridge Primary School. This experience continuously invoked my nine years of experience as a schoolteacher at an Indian school. I was easily able to identify with Mrs. A, B, C and D as adult women though I was acutely aware of being Indian in an unfamiliar context. Little is known of possibilities of identity constitution that have followed the official end of apartheid. Within the social context of Westridge Primary School, the “gender does not matter discourse” took on a racially neutral perspective. As researcher, I was aware of race as I sat in a predominantly white and female staff room. An Indian female teacher was appointed in a temporary capacity during the course of the study. She was also the first non-white teacher to be appointed to the school. In Westridge Primary School I was not sure whether I was perceived as an Indian woman and researcher from a historically disadvantaged institution or as superior university lecturer engaged in the very difficult work of research for which none of them were trained. Most times, I avoided the staff room as I worked through my own imaginations – a kind of self-expulsion from the liberal construction of that played out in “everybody is the same”. At Westridge School a dominant theme was race (and gender) did not matter. Holding onto the ideal of treating

all children the same means either seeing them as the same or as distinctive individuals (Thorne 1993). Thorne warns that both these stances lessen the importance of gender (1993: 51), of sexuality (Epstein 1999) and of race (Connolly 1995).

The clearest evidence that race, gender (and any other kinds of inequalities) did not matter on the surface is evident in this quote:

Mrs. C            You know I'm not into all that democratic stuff. I'm really not geared that way. It's the non- white teachers who're into those things. It's no real concern for us because **we treat all the kids the same** (emphasis added).

Mrs. C suggests that democratic issues, gender and race in particular, bear no relevance to a white person like herself because it is a problem that black teachers must live and deal with. Thus, race and gender equality, for example, are constructed as a concern for black teachers and not an issue that involves or implicates "us", the white teachers. In this way, white teaching practices become unmarked and the unequal power relations are concealed. Frankenberg (2000:451) calls this a "seeming normativity" and invisibility. The assumption of whiteness as an assumed norm making the salience of racialised identity irrelevant is not new. The international literature bears witness to this (Epstein and Johnson 1998; Back and Solomos 2000; Frankenberg 2000; Sleeter 1993). For example, Sleeter (1993: 161) argues that white teachers insist they are "color-blind" and they see children as children. This is evident from the data in my study.

In South Africa where race has been a main signifier of inequality, the assumed normativity does create problems especially for myself as researcher as I faced my own racial imaginations in all research sites. My avoidance of the staffroom at Westridge Primary School was intricately linked to my discursive and material construction of whites in South Africa. Reflections on my actions and interactions with predominantly white female staff at the school, highlight how the separation and hierarchies created by apartheid impacted on the way I came to understand myself and others. For example in

my interaction with Robert, I had come to see him through the apartheid-structured lens. However, my construction was much more complicated and was not only mediated by race but also through what I call an academic masculinity. There are definite relations between that kind of masculinity and my own femininity. White academic masculinity, for me invokes an authoritative, intellectual rigor seasoned with confidence and poised articulation. It is a kind of masculinity which demands infallibility and has an abrasive edge. This often ran riot with my vulnerability as PhD student. It left me at times feeling intimidated, self-censored, limiting my voice, questioning my capacity, feeling excluded (as subaltern) and yet simultaneously enticing me to challenge my constructions of myself and others in dangerous ways. This confirms for me that racial constructions (and racialised imaginations) are always caught in a web of discourse which forbids simplistic reading.

In the following sub-sections I identify specific teaching discourses which privilege a white rigger buggie masculinity. Secondly “Looking Indian and seeing Muslim” provides the specific example of Indian Muslim masculinity and finally I focus on the prospects for change at Westridge School.

### *White Rigger Buggies*

In South Africa, rugby has played an important part in the white social identity. It is a highly structured social institution and a symbol of “white male success, exuberance, athleticism, solidity” (Morrell 1996: 89). It was presented as a game of titans and playing rugby assured social acceptance. Rugby has become a means through which white boys and men assert their class and masculine values. The affirmation of male physical power underscored this masculinity.

This section of discussion focuses on how teaching discourses position white rigger buggie boys at Westridge Primary School which affirm the kinds of masculine values which Morrell has cited. Chapter 5 identified a hegemonic pattern of conduct for boys (rough, adventurous, confident, strong) based on essentialist and fixed patterns of

meaning which play out as a “boys will be boys” discourse. This section analyses both how teaching discourses invest in particular patterns of boys conduct, and how unequal power relations are manifest. Of central concern is the contribution of this investment to the production of masculinities and thus the regulation of gender identity. As in earlier sections, I make no claims of representivity, rather I want to draw attention to teaching discourses which position boys’ patterns of conduct or masculinities in hierarchical ways which engender unequal power relations, celebrate particular forms of conduct and regulate culturally specific identities.

A salient feature at Westridge Primary School was general interest in sport particularly among white boys. Mrs. C was a former physical education teacher. Mrs. B was in charge of soccer organised soccer matches in the school and against other schools in the area. Cricket and rugby featured in classroom talk. In Mrs. A’s class I kept wondering why Shaun, a white boy, was called Polly. Soon I was told that Polly is the shortened name for Shaun Pollock, who is now captain of the South African team, but at the time of the study was a fast bowler in the South African cricket squad. I noticed the boys proudly showing off their expensive V100 or V600 bats as they spoke with eagerness about cricket. This resonates with the consumerist middle-class, sometimes rich and generally white culture of the school and of the area. Identification of the boys with the V100 or the V600 cricket bats devolves from their particular race-class context. The school has a cricket pitch and cricket coaching is offered. I have sketched a context to the issues I wish to raise to suggest that sport here has race, class and gender links.

In fact Connell (1995:54) describes sport as a leading “definer of masculinity” and by constructing sporty boys teaching discourses invest in this pattern of conduct. I name this form of masculinity ruggie-buggers. It is captured in the following quote:

Me	Why are the boys in your class that way?
Mrs. C.	They have so much of energy. The girls are so lethargic. You know I was the PE teacher in the other school I taught at and I tell

you I couldn't take that kind of slow go. It's the girls. The **boys are sporty** and competitive and they make this class such a pleasure to teach. There is so much of competition maybe because I encourage competition. You should have been here the other day. You should have seen the boys. We had this competition...me and the Diamonds. We had one minute to finish 10 questions. I won. You should have seen how they squealed and fought and refused to accept that I won. But I actually like that kind of spirit they show (emphasis added).

In this vignette Mrs. C talks of White boys in the top math group called Diamond Group. Boys are constructed as energetic, sporty and competitive, they squeal and they fight. Squealing as a young boy-like thing is positively associated with the fighting spirit and is linked to particular forms of sporty masculinity in eight-year old boys. Mrs. C, as a woman, celebrates the dominant pattern of conduct for boys. She teaches implicitly about who to be and what to value. She does maintenance work in the name of sporty boys, and reproduces it. Mrs. C re-invents sporty boys and reproduces a masculine ideal. Energy, competition, squealing and a fighting spirit are the patterns of conduct which are suggestive of a winning team so that people like Shaun Pollock are valued. Dominance of a sporting masculinity is lived out in but not restricted to this school alone. Mrs. C thus locks into a predominantly white, middle-class, South African sports-mad discourse. As an ex-physical education teacher, she encourages toughness and competitiveness and links sport with manliness. A particular kind of masculinity is being imbricated here not uncommon in the literature of gender and its relation to sport (Kidd 1990; Messner 1990; Whitson 1990; Connell 1995; Martino 1999; Mills 2001). Messner (1990), for example claims that through sport boys learn to value the aggressive competition and toughness central to formation of a particular kind of masculinity.

Mrs. C's construction of sporty boys affirms a normative masculinity which is differentiated from the lethargic "slow go" femininity. She extends the boy-girl typology. In this way she works in subtle ways to develop specific skills and capacities



the aggressive spirit not only of boys but also between boys and teachers. Hegemonic masculinity is secured through the discourses and practices associated with sporty boys. And what could have happened in a different context? Who will the boys choose to be? What type of boy will be constructed then? How will power be exercised? The positions made available in Westridge Primary School work to differentiate access to power, and thus power positions that can be inhabited. Within the culture of Westridge Primary School teaching discourses invest in a specific kind of conduct so that the rugger bugger boy is celebrated and encouraged. In this way the normative conceptions of rugger bugger white middle-class South African masculinity are upheld. Other kinds of masculinity become vulnerable especially when their patterns of conduct are identified as less than valuable. Thus other kinds of masculinities exist and there is no one-dimensional identity:

Me and Mrs. C on the Diamond Group

Me           What happens in the Diamond group?

Mrs. C       This is a fascinating lot. The Diamonds are a very competitive lot.

Me           And Stephen?

Mrs. C       He is a real star. Brilliant. He's the one I competed with and he just wouldn't accept my win. He said that I cheated. Really, he accused me of cheating! He is good but sometimes he does become opiated. He is **Bennie boekwurm** [one who is fond of books] type. He is more academically inclined and so uncoordinated. He hates sport. (emphasis added)

Me           And Clayton?

Mrs. C       Clayton is the **sporty type**. Always on the go. He must have his last say. But a real lovely boy. He does pottery though. His mother thinks that it's good to do. But I don't think it will last. He's just not that way inclined. I think the mum wants to get a balance with Clayton since his dad is involved in the club. (my emphasis)

- Me                   What about Rory?
- Mrs. C               Out of those four, he is the **smoothie**. He is always aware of the right things to do and say. He is good at art and music. But mind you in my class the boys won't easily advertise their interest in music. (emphasis added)
- Me                   Why?
- Mrs. C               Real **rugger- buggers**, that's why. They don't want anyone to think that they do 'girlish' things (emphasis added)
- Me                   So do you have other smoothies in your class?
- Mrs. C (laughing) Ya, some of them but generally nobody wants to be seen like that. I have a friend who married about a year ago and she's inherited a nine year old boy. She keeps complaining about him. He's so feminine and it's causing quite serious problems. Not that she needs that. The dad is such a good sportsman. He's done the Comrades and they're always at rugby training but that little boy is happy with his music, his drama and art. He just refuses to be a boy.
- Me                   What kind of problem is it causing?
- Mrs. C               For one she has to put up with him and that's driving her crazy. The father is always at him since he is such a **sissy**. (emphasis added)
- Me                   What do you think of sissies?
- Mrs. C.              Eh..I don't have a problem with gays but as long as they don't affect my sons[Mrs. C has 2 sons]...(emphasis added).

The sporty buggers or rugger buggers presented by Mrs. C do represent the kind of masculinity most respected at Westridge Primary School. The teaching discourses invest it as the ideal form, as I have illustrated. The previous vignette illustrates the diversity of masculinities: the bennie boekwurm, the sporty, the smoothie, and her friend's son the sissy, suggesting the patterns of masculinities are never fixed even within the same all-white, all-affluent context. They are, however, related to relationships of hierarchy and

exclusion: power relations. I shall consider the implications of this by considering the multiple masculinities through which a pecking order is established.

Stephen is a “Bennie boekworm” (academically inclined). He is physically uncoordinated and not sporty. With Stephen there appear to be contradictions in that he is part of the hegemonic group but simultaneously uncoordinated and not sporty. I want to illustrate two points here. Stephen did not fulfill Mrs. C requirements of an ideal rigger bugger. How could an unsporty boy who is also academically inclined be a rigger bugger? The hegemonic pattern of masculinity is not fixed and unchangeable. Stephen could not do sport but he could compete and he is a “Diamond boy”. His competitive spirit, his mathematical prowess, his “opiniated self” ensures his visibility as rigger bugger. He is able to contest and challenge the teacher’s authority- a spirit which Mrs. C encourages. Highly specific skills are needed for this stylised performance. His prowess in competing, challenging and mathematics serve as a representation of the mental strength of the male mind (Gilbert and Gilbert 1998:19; Chapman 2001). He is not excluded as lethargic and go slow as the girls are, even though he is not sporty. Thus, Stephen is able to develop an alternative to the dominant hegemonic pattern that has academic achievement or “intellectual muscularity” (Steinberg et al 1997; Epstein and Johnson 1998: 181). His competitive, opiniated practices allow Mrs. C to shift from valuing sport to endorsing his competitive and intellectual spirit which allows for the transgression of teacher-child relations. In the extract Mrs. C states that: “He’s the one I competed with and he just wouldn’t accept my win. He said that I cheated. Really, he accused me of cheating!” In other words Stephen’s agency is recognized and he is able to accuse the teacher of cheating. Mrs. C makes Stephen’s position easier as an alternative hegemonic masculinity which values the intellectual competitive spirit.

In the same way Clayton’s particular status as sporty rigger bugger is not eroded because he does pottery. Mrs. C has typed him as rigger bugger whose “interest in pottery won’t last”. While Clayton may not be able to enact a desirable masculinity through his involvement in pottery, he is able to do so because Mrs. C rationalises his involvement in terms of his mother’s intervention.

Rory's construction as smoothie is associated with music and art. There are definite social relations embedded in music and art that are traditionally feminine. Social relations of gender are symbolised in association with hierarchy amongst boys and exclusion and domination over women and girls. Thus, Mrs. C claims that boys like Rory do not "easily advertise their interest in music," suggesting that interest in it becomes a pressure zone which effeminises identity. It presents a moment of crisis disrupting the illusion of a hegemonic performance. Part of the hegemonic masculine performance in this regard would be the resistance to developing or advertising skills in art, music and pottery. Mrs. C points to the pressure that boys face in "advertising" less than celebrated patterns of conduct. Is this the reason why math and science but not the arts are considered part of the boys' domain? Actions and behaviours are coded in gendered terms. Mrs. C validates them. These codes are known to the boys because they "won't advertise" interest in them. They learn what behaviours are power investments and how certain positions constitute a move away from power. They have certain investments in being rigger buggers but they know of the risks involved in revelation and advertisement of interest in the arts. Connell (1995) refers to this as complicit masculinity. Rory is a smoothie. He cannot meet the normative pattern of conduct, yet there are clear benefits yielded by complicity in the overall subordination of girls and women and within the pecking order of masculinities. In this way femininity is traduced, desired masculinity is fabricated (Nayak and Kehily 1997) and disassociation occurs from art, music and pottery which represent a less than desirable masculinity. Thus, specific practices including participation in certain school subjects become an identifiable means through which boys can establish hegemonic patterns which confer a particular status (Martino 1999; Martino 2001).

The sissy draws attention to the role of homophobia to define dominant patterns of conduct through disassociation from femininity and homosexuality or in Connell's (1995) words a "subordinated masculinity". Mrs. C ties gays and sissies together and reveals her own anxieties and horror at the thought of gays affecting her sons' presumptive heterosexuality and thus enticing them away from the rigger bugger masculinity which

*Looking Indian, seeing Muslim*

Various assumptions exist about the existence of separate racial and ethnic groups in KwaZulu-Natal. Apartheid, has historically allowed the unproblematic use of racial categories suggesting racial and cultural similarity and thus a coherent identity. The Preface in this thesis referred to the complexity of Indian identity in KwaZulu-Natal and the variations in terms of religion, language, culture and histories. Many Indians arrived in this province to work in the sugar plantations in 1860 while many others arrived here as merchants. They included Muslims, Christians but predominantly Hindus. The Muslim merchants came chiefly from Surat, a province in India. Others in particular the indentured labourers, arrived from southern areas of India. Thus Muslim identity varies according to geographical location, culture, language and class. Surti is the language spoken by many business class Muslims whilst Urdu is spoken by others. Language and class are interwoven in the construction of Muslim identity. In Durban today many Muslims and Surti speakers constitute a business class and many inhabit the area apartheid set aside for Indians in Westridge.

Since the end of apartheid racial dynamics in schools are altering and Indians are dominant in the changing faces of schools in Westridge. A growing number of economically mobile Indian families have moved into the former white areas of Westridge. As ethnographer, I was aware of many Muslim parents and women in particular who came to school to pick up their children clad in traditional dress or “burkah.” The dress usually entails the wearing of a head-covering scarf and a long dress and pants. In contrast Hindu Indian woman sometimes wear “punjabis”- a long dress, pants and scarves. These further contrast with the dominant white middle class western dress codes. Muslim girls in the school do not add scarves or pants to their uniforms and adhere to the required dress code. School assemblies are Christian and suggest the hegemonic nature of white South African schooling. Parents do have the right to withdraw their children from assembly but few do so. In Westridge Primary School the broader discourses on religion and race have been re-worked and impact upon the nature of social relations in the school (Skelton, 2001). These discourses include assumptions of a coherent and fixed racial identity and are further intersected by gender.

she exalts. In other words, there are choices about who to be. Biology alone does not provide that answer. Elaborated here is that masculinity is not as fixed as dominant teaching discourses have suggested. Mrs. C says that the “sissy” has caused serious problems. For the sake of the future happiness of the family, he must be corrected. This suggests that those who don’t get their gender right are subject to problems and unhappiness and those who do are more content. Significantly, the construction of the father as a good sportsman, rugby player and an athlete in the Comrades Marathon provides the contradiction to the “parents are the models” discourse.

The sissy gets a lashing for refusing to be a boy and for refusing to get his gender right in terms of biology. If we follow Mrs. C’s rationalisation, her friend’s son is a failure who has caused trouble and needs help to be a boy. But if the dialogue between me and Mrs. C above is understood to be not “true” or natural or common sense but shot through with power relations, then the description of gender fails Mrs. C and not the friend’s son who fails gender (Boldt 1997; Weedon 1997). Mrs. C relies on a discourse which tries to homogenise boys. As the data suggests, these are unlivable positions.

In this section, I have demonstrated the complexity of gender power relations and have shown how teaching discourses invest in hegemonic patterns of white boy’s conduct which create the conditions for power. Within the same context, class and race differentiated masculinities exist perpetuating the pecking order of masculinities, the subordination of particular masculine patterns of conduct and the general subordination of women and girls. Masculinity is not monolithic and its variations also point to the uncertainty of what constitutes masculinity in a given time, place and person (Mac an Ghail 1994; Kenway 1996; Youdell and Gilborn 1996; Haywood and Mac an Ghail 2001). Different masculinities exist with differential access to power and effects of power (Haywood and Mac an Ghail 2001: 32). In the next sub-section, I consider the transience of race, class and religious interconnections in Westridge Primary School.

In the following example, in order to explore the regulation of gender identity, I sketch the construction of masculinity with reference to Mrs. D's notion of Samit:

- Me                    Samit says "girls don't exist".
- Mrs. D.              Oh yes. Samit is very anti-girl. He does sometimes come in with culture because he is Muslim. So, it is possible that the culture comes in clearly here and because there's definitely those differences in culture where the girls are valued lesser. I don't know whether that is the reason but that's possible.

Samit is a wealthy nine-year-old Indian boy. I draw from my data to introduce Samit.

I chat to Samit who in a previous visit had proudly showed me a framed photograph of his home which won the best architectural design in Durban the previous year (*I thought he was overbearing, delighted at his home and quite a show-off, pompous in fact.*)

Mrs. D constructs Samit as anti-girl and Muslim. Through my own material positioning, I knew that Samit was not Muslim but Hindu and more specifically Hindi speaking. Mrs. D attempted to explain Samit's alleged misogyny in terms of his culture and religion. Samit's comments that "girls don't exist" are described as specific to him as Muslim is specific to a particular culture. In the same way, Samit is distanced from her, as white English Christian teacher, other children and the hegemonic Christian culture of the school. The assembly, part of the Christian National Education plan of apartheid South Africa, is one of the key elements in maintaining the Christian ethic of the school. Its residues are seen in the Christian assembly still conducted at Westridge Primary School despite the Constitution supporting equality of all religions. Samit's culture and his religion are constructed as 'other' (Pettman 1992). His culture and hence his religion are valued differently, negatively and rejected. Thus "Muslim" boys in general are constructed with different value. Misogyny and anti-girl comments are then given to reside in Muslim boys and men. These negative patterns are rendered invisible to the

dominant white Christian culture. White Christian boys are then constructed as gender friendly. Misogynistic practices of other boys are normalized within the hegemonic Christian culture, but what Samit says is problematic. This discourse serves to render all Muslims misogynous. In other words, Mrs. D assumes that all Muslim share a common devaluation of gender. In this way, culture becomes static and unchanging homogenising Muslim boys' experiences. Misogyny becomes a problem residing elsewhere such as in Samit who is assumed to be a Muslim who is anti-girl.

At Westridge School teaching discourses exalt rugged masculinity which creates conditions for power. Multiple masculinities are found in the school but the modes of masculinity are shaped and informed by access to power (Skelton 2001) Mrs. D's construction of Samit does not simply display the meshing of gender, culture and religion, nor does it simply point to the damaging social relations in the classroom. Samit's pattern of masculinity is relative to the normative white English context of the school. Samit is rich and this provides access to power but relative affluence does not award automatic authority to rich presumably Muslim boys.

These are significant issues and are context-specific. Therefore teaching discourses inscribed in specific schools must be recognized so as to develop strategies relevant to their particular situation. The problem becomes even more complex as I know that Samit is not a Muslim. Mrs. D homogenises Indian people and assumes Samit's culture and religion based on his race. That Samit is not Muslim reveals the fragility of reductionist arguments based on culture and religion. It suggests also the othering of Muslims as folk devils with accompanying negative categorisation (Mac an Ghail 1994). In this example gender is not only intimately linked to race and religion, but also to wider demonisation of Muslims as regressive in terms of gender equality. Samit who is not even a Muslim is positioned as more sexist.

Specific teaching discourses work to create the conditions for relations of power. "Looking Indian and seeing Muslim" can be read as a cultural index through which



Here gender power relations are marginalized. However within the discourse which treats “everyone the same” there are possibilities created by the new pedagogical and political contexts and they do offer, albeit contradictorily, some scope for change:

Me Do you do anything different with boys and girls with the new way in which you teach?

Mrs. D To be quite honest, I don't do anything differently except with the things like assessment and I've changed my assessment. I have looked at OBE and changed my way. I've looked at the assessment and I've changed the way I assess. I've looked at my planning and I've changed the way I plan and I've looked at doing the groupwork and I do the groupwork and I've not really to be quite honest ever thought about gender, to be totally honest.

These changes relate to issues like assessment, planning and groupwork rather than to social issues of which she is unaware:

Me OBE is under review what do you think?

Mrs. D. I think that it would be very sad if it is abandoned because so much time and money has been spent on it. OBE is really a good thing but I never go overboard with anything. I take what is good and try to structure it in the way I do things. I think the 3 R's are important. Jenny Joshua[the Junior Primary Advisor] has realised that those skills are important and in our meetings , now it is emphasised.

Me And gender in all of this?

Mrs. D No, not yet maybe, in a couple of years time when they realise it they may start looking at it. But I have to say that these meetings about OBE have made me look at myself. After 22 years in the rut you can be very set in your ways. So it has made me re-think what I do.

Me                   And gender?  
Mrs. D.            There's no time for that with all the meetings we have to go to. So  
                          I don't really consider gender as important.

While gender is not given immediate status, Mrs. D points to the possibility for change in the future. In particular, "after 22 years in the rut you can be very set in your ways. So it has made me re-think what I do" points to the way policy has coalesced and impacted upon her which raises the potential for re-thinking gender. In particular she points to the necessity for school advisors to look at gender issues: "when they realize it they may start looking at it". While potential for improving gender relations seems minimal, indications are that alternative patterns of being could be encouraged in the future when gender narratives become firmly inscribed in early schooling discourses. This also points to the need for policy to become more sensitive to gender issues in early schooling.

The specific teaching discourses at Westridge Primary School work to affirm and regulate white rugged masculinity, while at the same time producing a range of other subject positions which work to make certain power positions inaccessible. Positions are shifting and contradictory. Most importantly, Chapters 7 and 8 illustrate that children do not passively inherit positions but are active makers of meaning and identity. In this section of the thesis I have argued that the specific context of Westridge Primary School provides conditions for relations of power.

### **Umhlatuzana Primary School**

In Umhlatuzana Primary School teachers referred openly to race rather than offering a neutralising perspective. Chapter 3 described the dominant Indian normative context of the school. Unlike Westridge Primary School where I avoided the staff room, at Umhlatuzana the familiar context of the former all Indian school invoked particular memories for me as teacher and me as schoolgirl. The plain white cotton school dresses and black jerseys, standard in most Indian schools in Durban, have not changed from 1973 when I started school. The familiar Indian accent, being called "mam", the sight of



construction of a racial other within an Indian normativity that produces unequal power relations.

*April: poor White chatterbox*

April was the first white child that I saw in a former Indian school. Her racial visibility implicated my own normative constructions. But, being white in a former Indian school also carries working class connotations. Mrs. F mentioned that April “crossed the railway lines with her brother who is in grade 6”. They live in Queensburgh, a former White and working class area. Mrs. F secured April’s visibility in the following way:

- Mrs. F            We have quite a few White kids; poor Whites. Financially, they can’t make it so they come here. The parents can’t be bothered. There’s no homework done.
- Me                And what does it feel like teaching White kids?
- Mrs. F            I think it’s a good thing for them to come here. Indian teachers work hard. And Indian teachers concentrate on academic work... We were surprised in the beginning but they’re just kids also. Everyone has problems and April’s neglected ...she’s a chatterbox that one...

Within the normative boundaries of the classroom, April’s behaviour is rationalised as “poor white”. However, there are contradictions to this deficit. April’s position as white girl worked invisibly as a claim to power (as historically privileged white in South Africa). Mrs. F says that, “We were surprised in the beginning” and indicates April’s whiteness as exotic. My own surprise at seeing a white girl in an Indian school is indicative of the inferior positions that black schools generally occupy in South Africa so that white is not a familiar sight in black schools. Thus having white children and teachers in black schools is not common.

Race and class are closely connected as Mrs. F shows that “everyone has problems” and lumps April with the working class. Race as a claim to power is negated by economic weakness: April is an exotic white girl in a predominantly Indian school but she is neglected and financially impoverished. Differential access to power occurs simultaneously. The making of gender identity is thus fluid and also characterized by oppositions and alliances. Mrs. F’s constructs April as a “chatterbox” which links race, gender and class issues. A chatterbox contradicts the dominant discourses which position girls as quiet – a power position. However, the power relations are fluid. Mrs. F claims that “Indian teachers work hard. And Indian teachers concentrate on academic work”. April may be a “chatterbox” but she also does not perform academically. Mrs. F positions Indian teachers and by implication Indians as hardworking. April’s identity is thus policed in terms of the normative context of Indianness. Mrs. F suggests that there is something inherently Indian regarding an academic culture and April’s departure from this is linked to race and class. Generally white women and girls are often seen in South Africa, as more privileged but also more liberated than other women but here the racialisation of April’s femininity, simultaneously and contradictorily positions her as other.

### *Black boys don't perform*

This section explores teaching discourses where black boys are positioned as academically poor achievers. The focus of this section is to highlight the racialising discourses that regulate the gender identity of black boys. Racialised discourses did not uniformly take place in all situations. At times when children performed poorly, teachers drew upon deficit theories that had become part of their teaching discourse including those about the black boys. Thus, at a very general level I draw on observations and interviews from Mrs. E’s classroom to demonstrate the interconnections between race class and gender in black boys. There were four black boys in her class. Generally the black children at Umhlatuzana Primary School came from the nearby working class black township of KwaMashu although some live with their mothers who work as domestic workers in Indian homes.

- Mrs. E            The African boys don't respond in class. They're not yet confident. Abongile lives here and the others come from KwaMashu... You know how it is there, poverty and so neglected. When you ask for something to be done, they don't do it. When I talk in class there's no confidence and its very hard to get it. So they're very withdrawn and shy and it takes a long time to improve confidence.... With such a big class I have no time to worry about individuals... The environment that they come from makes a big difference. If you put them in a different environment then you would get a different reaction.
- Me                What about language?
- Mrs. E            They're very embarrassed about their home language. Samke speaks well and is confident and she helps ...

At Umhlatuzana Primary the black boys' visibility was achieved through complex race, class, gender and language connections. By reference to poverty, lack of parental care and general neglect in KwaMashu, Mrs. E constructs a black masculinity based on deficit and therefore shy, lacking in confidence and withdrawn. The particular social context of black boys is a move away from power. Black boys who don't speak English are constructed as withdrawn. Clearly language and learning difficulties are immediate issues interwoven with economic disadvantage and poor academic performance to (re)produce stereotypes. Mrs. E claims that the black boys are embarrassed about their home language. This highlights the pressures that the Zulu speaking boys face as they struggle to align themselves to English speaking Indian norms. Once black boys have been aligned with poor language skills, poor achievement and withdrawal, a context allows reproduction and regulation of a racialised gender identity. Is this why black boys are over-represented in school sport and music as they access alternative patterns of conduct?

The black boys do not display overtly disruptive behaviour, as the international literature suggests (Connolly 1995; Gilbert and Gilbert 1998), to (re)produce the idea of their academic lack and general otherness which in turn engender inequalities. But, as the international literature shows also, black boys are seen as disruptive or potentially disruptive. Mrs. F referred to David, a black boy:

Mrs. F            David can be very good but sometimes he gets so wild that I have to remind him where he is...

David is contradictorily constructed as good and wild. However, the wildness is located within the context of “where he is”. Mrs. F’s comments of “where he is”, provides the essential context which serves to foreground wildness and which in turn points to race. David lives in the township of KwaMashu. Mrs. F’s reminder to David about where he is (Indian school) foregrounds where he is not, that is the context of township, among working class blacks more generally seen as a site of wildness and disruption. Thus black boys are constructed through complex processes of academic lack and actually and potentially disruptive behaviour. Thus black boys from marginalized backgrounds are actually and potentially disruptive but they must be understood in terms of a kind of masculinity which exerts some form of power within a world where their influence is limited. At the same time Mrs. F reinforces dominant images of working class black boys (and men) as more aggressive and violent than the Indian middle-class boys and men. Racialised constructions of black masculinities serve to homogenize disruptive behaviour of black boys. As such, disruptive behaviour becomes associated with class and race and violence common in South Africa and which maintain dominant gender, race and class relations.

### *Prospects for change*

In this sub-section on Umhlatuzana Primary School, I identify some of the discourses that may offer some scope for beginning the work towards gender equality. Amidst the

general discourses of race, class and gender inequalities, small blurred spaces offer some scope in the work towards gender equality as Mrs. F claims:

- Mrs. F                    OBE is not oriented to making girls and boys equal. The new way is catering for the development of the whole child without emphasis on gender.
- Me                         And what about you?
- Mrs. F                    OBE can help. It all depends on the teacher. We went for lectures, workshops and meetings but it depends on teachers and what is important to her. If she wants to improve gender issues then she can achieve that but it depends on whether this is the message the teacher wants to send. What we learn at the meetings and what we practice are different things. There are so many disruptions in schools. We have to raise funds. There is teacher redeployment. Everyday emphasis is not only on work. We have this mini Debs Ball for the kids. It does cause problems with work. They have to go out and practice. Then what about teacher promotions. I have been teaching for nineteen years and yet I am still where I am. The pupil role too is declining. The black pupils find it expensive to travel here and so they are going back to schools closer to their own homes. Also the parent body has high expectations but they don't understand the stresses. I've got the experience and the capability but all the problems make teachers work very difficult. People on the top don't know what they're doing.

Mrs. F refers to policy specific practices at Umhlatuzana Primary School which highlight the difficulties faced by teachers in their everyday worlds: the new curriculum, constant worry of teacher redeployment, promotion or funding for the school to survive. Mrs. E

refers to OBE- the new curriculum; as not being oriented to gender equality despite the new curriculum laying down social justice as a critical outcome in teaching. However she acknowledges that it is possible to help the cause of gender equality. The emerging context thus draws its strength from the new curriculum and policy context, albeit in a contradictory way.

Within the discourse which serves to constrain and regulate the teacher are better prospects: “If she wants to improve gender issues then she can achieve that but it depends on whether this is the message the teacher wants to send”. Mrs. F creates the possibility of doing gender differently. Herein lies the possibilities for better relations. Unequal gender relations can be addressed in the school if “this is the message the teacher wants to send”. She added that “if she[teacher] has a certain aim then it can be done”, “at the end of the year you get a lot of joy when you see what they have achieved”. She can exercise power. Alternative messages do exist. She knows this but she decides when and how she can choose. Power is exercised but all of this happens through recognition of broader national contexts and of how race and class are crucial when defining the daily struggles through which teachers work. For example, Mrs. F is keen for black children to come to Umhlatuzana Primary School but this is based on increasing numbers in the school and limiting the constant threat of redeployment of staff to potentially black rural areas. She worries that black children cannot come to the school because of transport costs which is why teachers like herself could be redeployed to black areas. Despite this, her position is extremely useful for beginning the work towards gender equality. If teachers want to send a particular message, the message of gender equality for example, then that position can be occupied. Thus common sense teaching discourses which articulate gender as an immovable and fixed position and the resultant (in) capacity to work for gender equality have been revealed to be regulatory fiction, fragile and contradictory but powerful nonetheless. Dominant and authoritative discourses which restrict the work towards gender equality are not immovable. Potential to threaten them exists. Positions favourable to gender equality are occupied in contradictory ways and hence can be occupied in the future. This is a favourable position from which to begin

the work towards gender equality. Though the message that Mrs. F gives may be imperfect, the prospects are still better for some change than none at all.

### **KwaDabeka Primary School**

Chapter 4 provided a lens through which I had experienced KwaDabeka Primary School. In this section I provide a different format from the preceding schools. While the focus here is on specific teacher-generated discourse I give this school a special status as it was one most punctuated by violence and the least friendly in gender terms. The general experience of living in KwaDabeka is punctuated by violence and poverty. Mrs. I explains:

Mrs. I            It's a hard life here. The government is trying to make it better with the feeding scheme but how much can it help? Some can afford a little. Then there are those who cannot afford anything. They say to me "tisha we have nothing to eat at home". Sometimes they have no food in the morning, no food at home after school. This one they eat at school is the only meal for most of them. The neighbours sometimes help and the grandparents. The parents are twenty years old, sometimes twenty three, very young. Siyanda's mother is nineteen. The mother is unemployed and I don't think he knows who his father is.... Fathers have died fighting. Velile's father died, the police killed him just recently. The father was in the taxi, the police was after that taxi and shot him...

The poverty and its links to violence is clearly articulated in the following quote:

Mrs. G            The smaller boys eat their lunches in the class because the big boys bully them and take their lunches. They all cannot afford lunches

here. They have bread without Rama and then you see these big boys they take it away...

Mrs. G recognizes the threat of being bullied and actual bullying. She recognizes also that a pecking order of masculinities exists which is age and size related but within the broader structures of inequality:

Mrs. G            You see there are young ones in this class. The parents did not send them to pre-school. The fees are too high. What they do is to send the child to grade one. When we ask for the birth certificate, they say that they have to go to the farm to collect the certificate. When they do produce the certificate, it's late in the year and it is too late to uproot the child. There are different ages in my class. Look that one S'bonelo, he is fourteen years old. He was in the farm and never went to school and so he is here for two years...

Specific social circumstances explain why there are differing ages in the classroom. Parents cannot afford pre-school fees, thus, children younger than the regulated age enter school to compensate for the lack of pre-schooling. Older children like S'bonelo have come from the "farm". In South Africa, the "farm" invokes a rural context which generally lacks material resources and has limited access to schools. S'bonelo is "fourteen years old... and never went to school". The unevenness in ages in the classroom is tied to economic impoverishment. Unequal gender relations are thus linked to the unequal power dynamics among boys. These unequal gender relations thus occur within specific structures of inequality "involving a massive dispossession of social resources" (Connell 1995: 83) and where violence is located. Violence and poverty are thus integral in the process of gender relations. The "big bully boys" hold and use the means of violence. Those who lack material advantages vis-à-vis other boys, thus perform masculinity in ways that are violent. Size and age also matter for those who bear its burdens. Small boys avoid the bigger boys who take their lunches. Within the broad context of poverty and violence in KwaDabeka children learn that violence is an

appropriate form of power. As researcher the threats real and imagined of violence had racial manifestations. It was hard to imagine coming into KwaDabeka without bodily fear, feeling unsafe, knowing (imagining) all the time that I was vulnerable, at stake in some of the common patterns of violence in South Africa (rape, assault and even hijacking). Race, gender and class are intricately related.

In KwaDabeka Primary School, blackness was assumed by teachers. The clearest example of racialisation is illustrated in Mrs. G's question: "Why do Indian teachers only apply for promotion posts to black schools?" Since the end of apartheid, new discourses of social justice meant that promotion posts are open to all races. Discourses of gender equality have also enabled the entry of women into positions of leadership such as the one which Mrs. Makan occupied. Women have to date dominated the educational profession in South Africa but not its leadership and management (Chisholm 2001). Mrs. Makan was the only Indian teacher in the school and also occupied a head of department position. Mrs. G's question works to make visible the complex ways through which racialised and gendered identities are constructed and reinforced. Identities are simultaneously racialised and gendered articulating the dispersed nature of social power. In this sense, once Indian woman teachers, more generally, have come to be constructed as the threat in the competition for senior positions in former black schools, the essential context is provided to reproduce racialised and gendered identity.

*Black Girls and Culture: We must not look into the eyes of a male*

At KwaDabeka Primary School gender power relations are culturally manifested.

Mrs. G            No there is no difference to gender because boys still dominate. Look at the boys they just go there and sit on the floor and write. Girls won't do that. Boys are not afraid of the teacher but girls will never do this...In our school there a very few male teachers. The male teachers lack power because the female teachers dominate but they try all the time to undermine the principal.

- Me                    Why?
- Mrs. G                Because she is a female. They do not want to take instructions from a female. At home the father is the head of the family, it's not the same in this school. In our culture we must respect them [males] but because we are educated we challenge them.
- Me                    What kind of culture is this?
- Mrs. G                **In our culture we must not look into the eyes of a male.** You must look down at the floor especially if you are an older man. In my grade the kids are influenced by all of this and so the girls don't speak to the boys (emphasis added).

Mrs. G constructs identity that is ethnically specific and highly patriarchal. Mrs. G's reference to "in our culture we must not look into the eyes of a male" is a statement of identity and is ethnically charged. Within the particular context of KwaDabeka the specific discourses on "culture" and particular practices are appropriated and re-worked to impact on the nature of social relations in the classroom. A central issue here is how boys, girls and teachers engage with specific cultural forms which contribute to the asymmetrical relations of power. Mrs. G points to connections between cultural definitions, male power and girls' disadvantage. Mrs. G constructs the culture as unchanging and static. Here it is assumed that boys or girls do not have the power to change their positions in society because of cultural discourses and practices. Thus, Mrs. G understands power dynamics in favour of boys and men. She notes the invasion of space, "boys just go there and sit on the floor and write". As teacher she lives through the battle of the sexes as the few male teachers in the school try to undermine the female principal. Mrs. G accounts for this through culture, "in our culture we must respect them". However, Mrs. G invests in her ability to resist cultural definitions that are placed on her as adult woman but her resistance is enabled because she is "educated". She is able to challenge the men in her school. In this way she claims and confirms power for herself with the ability to challenge and contest. The cultural patterns which work against girls are not static but dynamic and open to change. However, the girls (as children) who "don't speak to the boys" are rendered as passive, unprotesting victims of

culture and thus powerless. The interconnectedness of power with cultural constructions of maleness is important in the construction of hegemonic masculinities. Mrs. G points to the particular practices which inscribe unequal power relations “in our culture we must not look into the eyes of a male ... In my grade the kids are influenced by all of this”. Thus particular positions are inhabited based on the cultural practice which marginalizes others and is damaging to girls. Boys are able to occupy positions which reinforce maleness and contribute to unequal power relations. Mrs. G is also aware of boys’ ability to blur the boundaries between teacher, and taught. The cultural practices which silence girls’ voices also objectify the teacher as woman. The cultural privilege and her objectification is manifest in her claim that boys are not afraid of the teacher and her recognition that boys invade the spaces in the classroom which serve to (re)produce gender identity. Adult teacher-boy and girl relations are thus differentially valued and inscribed with cultural (and racial) definition. Specific cultural practices create the conditions for power and access to power is differential and impacts severely on the positions that are made available to girls and objectify women. Mrs. I points to this objectification:

Me Do you think that you can make things better for boys and girls?

Mrs. It’s impossible. Like here in the school, we want the bigger girls to cut their hair. When they come to the males’ class and he says you must tie your hair they just listen but they never care about us females because they respect the males. We always quarrel about those kids.

Mrs. I shows how girls position themselves within the cultural discourses which blur the teacher-girl-child boundaries. In other words, the cultural discourses order a domain of hegemonic male reality whereby the effect is to limit the possibilities of girls and women teachers through their ability to authorize only certain people to speak (Skelton, 2001). In the context of KwaDabeka Primary School, authority is male dominated, based on the authority of particular cultural discourses and practices.

In the next section, I identify how teaching discourses are invested in particular patterns of boy's conduct, how unequal power relations are manifest and how these investments contribute to the production of masculinities and the regulation of gender identity. As in earlier sections, I make no claims of representativity, but instead I draw attention to teaching discourses which are culturally specific which position boys' patterns of conduct in ways that engender unequal power relations. An example of the range of masculinities lived through KwaDabeka School is *tsotsi* masculinity- a toxic version of masculinity. Another example is *yimvu* masculinity- a more peaceable and less toxic pattern of conduct. *Yimvu* are holy boys or in Zulu "ngcwele ngcwele" and overall they are constructed as "olungile umfana" (good boys). In Zulu *yimvu* means sheep and it is used metaphorically to describe passive, quiet, harmless boys.

### *Tsotsi Boys*

Schools are sites where a multiplicity of masculinities are constructed. The modes of masculinities are shaped, informed and dependent upon access to power. At KwaDabeka Primary School, *tsotsi* masculinity is hegemonic and is intricately interwoven with aggression and violence.

In this school, the normalisation of violence was highly challenging for me as researcher. I constantly noted the fights for things which ranged from pencils, pens, lunches and school bags. Bullying and violence are widespread and enacted in the context of material disadvantage. The scale of inequalities at KwaDabeka Primary School is captured here:

Mrs. G            They don't get any love from home. The mothers are not there and they don't know who their fathers are. I bring extra sandwiches and give them because this month there is a problem with the feeding scheme. If I ask them for 50c for polish there are many who don't have that.

It is within this context that gender based violence is naturalized and tsotsi masculinity is dominant. In this section I show how performance in school is related to issues of masculinity and in particular how tsotsi masculinity is constructed.

Me                    How do you see the boys in your class?

Mrs. I                They are the same. These are just kids. The boys dominate the class. It's the same. The girls are the shy ones to discuss anything. As you know in matric, it's the boys who are always getting an exemption. More boys get an exemption compared to girls. Even in maths it's the boys.

Me                    And the girls?

Mrs. I                The girls are better in English and they grasp Zulu. Sometimes in my class the boys copy work from the girls. When I was young it was always the girls that got to the top ten, but when they go to the tertiary level then its the boys who get more than the girls. Here in the primary school the boys' IQ is lower than the girls'. But there are some brilliant ones. I have noticed these brilliant ones. They need more work. If the teacher neglects the boy and gives him the same work as the average boy then he becomes someone that is not good in the community.

Through recourse to common sense and dominant discourses, Mrs. I (re)produces gender inequalities and traditional power positions for boys. For example, gender becomes a critical factor in predicting performance (Gilbert and Gilbert 1998:10). From the theory of intelligence Mrs. I points out that boys' IQ's are lower in the primary schools. Girls are better in English and Zulu, but she predicts that boys go to university. Girl's success in Zulu and English does not mean future advantage for them. Mrs. I is alert to the differential treatment of boys and girls. She understands the unequal power relations in

her classroom where boys dominate. She points to maths and university as being a boy's domain. There is a link between boys' domination, math and university. But Mrs. I chooses to explain this through recourse to IQ although there are contradictions:

Me           What do you mean about these boys?

Mrs. I       These ones, these brilliant ones you need to help them more and give them more, and then they will be fine.

Me           So certain boys need help to be better in the community?

Mrs. I       Yes you see if you neglect them then they will be just like these others and they become like these **tsotsis**.... (emphasis added)

Me           Which boys are like tsotsis?

Mrs. I       These ones who are not interested in their work. You see here there are many many tsotsis. They are the ones who are stealing. They don't work. They drink ijuba and utshwala and fight. All they do is play soccer and fight. The women must go out and work. They wait for the money and drink.

While Mrs. I seeks recourse to common sense psychology and IQ measurements to differentiate between boys' and girls' performance, she suggests that there are "brilliant ones". These boys "need more work". They are yimvu boys. In other words, this position resonates with the contention developed in the international literature that boys are the educationally disadvantaged gender (Kenway and Willis 1997; Yates 1997; Gilbert and Gilbert 1998; MacNaughton 2000; Martino and Meyenn 2001). For Mrs. I the logical step to help those boys who have a lower IQ, is to give them more attention in the primary school. However, an association is made with performance and the existence of a range of masculinities. Mrs. I recognises the pressures that the hegemonic tsotsi

patterns bear upon the non-hegemonic patterns. Thus, the debate about boys' achievement is constructed along with recognition of the diversity of masculinities and the differential patterns of power that exist. She understands that masculinity is not monolithic. Rather a diversity of masculinities exists within the same context and yimvu are constructed as more peaceable than tsotsis. Many of the rituals which induct boys into patterns of violence are recognised. The hegemonic pattern involves a lack of interest in schoolwork, stealing, drinking utshwala, fighting and playing soccer. Mrs. I identifies the specificities of masculinity and the extent to which boys draw from the context to understand who they are, what they can be. This takes into account the pressures they face from hegemonic tsotsi patterns. Mrs. I is alert to the specific class and cultural location of the school which draws on particular social practices which prescribe a desirable way of being a boy (man) and how a boy could be a man in the future. Thus, tsotsi masculinity is not predictable but transient. Tsotsi masculinity cannot be taken for granted because boys do not simply become tsotsis. Boys learn it. They also learn to be yimvu boys. The problem of boys' achievement cannot be explained by IQ or personality alone. The dominant patterns of boys' conduct at KwaDabeka matters. Whilst there is recognition of the diversity of masculinities and unequal gender power relations, Mrs. I regulates identity according to a dominant discourse that homogenises boys.

This section has demonstrated the contradictory positioning of boys within the dominant discourse that tries to fix them but at the same time positions them as diverse. A pecking order of masculinities has been identified in/through which power relations are manifest. Chapter 8 draws attention to the complexity of power relations and specifically how power is invested in particular patterns of conduct.

### *Prospects for change*

There are many structural and socio-cultural inequalities at KwaDabeka Primary School which make the creation of gender friendly relations difficult. In addition the use of corporal punishment as I described in Chapter 3 serves to reproduce a culture of violence

which dehumanizes children's experiences. However, emerging from these conditions are disrupting moments which cannot be discounted in opening up a small space for gender-fair relations to develop. One such example is the practice of cleaning the classrooms. All three teachers in this study claimed that sexist cleaning practices were unfair and that they had changed classroom practices. Mthethwa-Sommers (1999: 45) describes schools in black townships as "Sexism -girls still cleaning schools". Mthethwa-Sommers argues that teachers are not being encouraged to change gender specific practices in the township school. The teachers in this study have changed cleaning practices as this quote from Mrs. I illustrates:

- Me                    How do you see gender in your class?
- Mrs I                In my class they are all the same whether they are boys or girls.
- Me                    What do you mean?
- Mrs I                See everyone has to sweep the floors in my classroom. First the boys refused. They said that the girls have to do this sweeping. Deevia, when I was in school, everyday we had to clean and sweep in school and then we went home and again we had to clean and sweep. I told the boys in my classroom we have to share the responsibility. So what happens now is that everybody sweeps.
- Me                    Does that make them change towards the girls?
- Mrs. I                I can't say. It's the boys who discriminate and they bring these ideas from home. These values that they bring from home is difficult to break down but we do not live in old times where only the boys herd the cattle. Now boys and girls must share the responsibility. But what can we do when the parents are not even there to help them. This is a very poor area. Most of the young are unemployed and uneducated. They live in single rooms and the grandparents support these kids. They have no money, and no lunch. Look a few years ago Sibonelo's mother was in this school and now I'm teaching her son. She must be about 22 years old. This is what happens here in the townships.

Practices never occur in a vacuum (Connell 1995: 65). In the township schools change in cleaning practices was a specific response to the lack of resources which meant that schools could not afford to hire cleaners. Teachers as schoolgirls had experienced this situation. Mrs. I understands the powerful discourse, which was reproduced: “when I was in school, everyday we had to clean and sweep in school, and then we went home and again we had to clean and sweep”. The absence of cleaners made it incumbent upon girls to ensure the school was in a habitable condition. Mrs. I recognized from her personal experiences how girls have been positioned. She was alert to gender discrimination and intervened. The intervention was premised upon the discourse of democracy and equality and based on being alert to gendered power-effects and hierarchical-organisation of cleaning which constrained girls (and herself). She imposed a gender-fair approach and was thus able to control conditions in the classroom as far as cleaning was concerned. The exercise of power by teachers enabled a more sensitive approach to gender and challenged the persistence of the “domestication of girls in township schools” (Mthethwa-Sommers 1999:46). Teachers can and do exercise power to enhance the quality of human life and indicate prospects for change. However, simply challenging the gendered power effects of cleaning cannot overturn the effects of gender power. This is also recognised in the international literature (Jordan 1995). Jordan refers to the problems of gender inequalities in primary schools in Australia where non-sexist policies were implemented in order to transcend the male-female dichotomies in primary schools. These policies were based on transcending the male-female dichotomies in schools. She notes that children were no longer asked to form gender specific lines and teachers had to try to avoid gender definitions to classroom jobs like tidying. Despite these changes, Jordan (1995: 72) suggests that the school made “little headway in modifying the salience of gender in children’s interactions”. Jordan points out that discourses children bring with them to school are highly gendered and schools cannot simply iron out these constructions. Mrs. I too, is alert to the social and structural inequalities which limits the success of intervention. Changing practices never proceed in a vacuum (Connell 1995).

In conversion from one situation to another material and cultural realities set the limits of what is possible and impossible in schools. The teachers tried to create a social environment based on gender equity but limitations are clear. Gender identity is complex and schooling is only one site where identity is negotiated and constructed. Children bring their learned experiences about gender into institutional settings. In the context of material realities in KwaDabeka, children position themselves around the familiar gender discourses. In other words exercising power by creating a gender-fair cleaning environment is limited because of the many influences that shape gender realities in children's lives. The family is a significant site in the production and reproduction of gender identity which is further influenced by the harsh conditions of poverty, economic dislocation and general material inequalities. These conditions as they operate in the black working-class urban townships fuel unequal gender relations (Morrell 2001).

Despite these obstacles, prospects for generating better gender relations are increased by challenging stereotypical ways through which gender is regulated in township schools. This offers a rejuvenating space to work towards gender equality by drawing strength from the political context in which women and girls now have a stake.

### **Umbumbulu Primary School**

The everyday life of boys and girls at Umbumbulu Primary School is defined and differentiated through gender. In this regard, teaching discourses work to produce and reproduce specific inscriptions of gender. In this section three quotes are used to set the context through which gender is constructed:

Mrs L            It's hard. The girls see what their mothers do. They are all very poor. Their grannies support them. You see they have no shoes. If the mothers are at home, they plough at home. They work in the sugar cane plantation. Some of them grow madumbies [yams] but you see these madumbies take six months to grow so they sell them only once a year. These girls they must help at home.

The broader structures of inequality in Umbumbulu Primary School are recognised by teachers. They foreground the context of poverty linked to apartheid where rural areas became a chief source of labour for the mining industry and drew large numbers of black men to wage labour in the cities.

Mrs. J.            These kids are very very poor. They wait for their fathers. If I want money from them for school, you can't say tomorrow you must bring five rands. No. You have to give them a date. Their fathers work in the town and they stay there and they only come home in the weekends.

Mrs J (adds)    If you want something they say "father is only coming in the weekend". I wait a week for that five rands. They will have to report to the father. The mothers are mostly housewives and most of these young ones stay with their grandparents. The mother stays in the township. If the girl is pregnant, then she comes here and dumps the baby and goes back to the township. This is what happens here. The grandparents have no money. They have to wait for pension day. Also you see in my class some of them, I say five of them lost their fathers in faction fights.

Social context is integral to gender relations. Production of gender discourses occurs in/through a material reality which limits the articulation of positions. Children learn they must report to the dominant gender for five rands. Here in rural areas children learn how gender is intimately connected to cultural and economic realities. Men in rural areas generally occupy a position of power with respect to women, children and younger men (Morrell 2001; Hemson 2001).

*Here in the rural areas they don't say that men and women are equal.*

The rural context is significant in the negotiation and maintenance of unequal gender relations. At Umbumbulu Primary School gender power relations are (re)produced through dominant cultural definitions of femininity (fearfulness of men) and masculinity (male cultural entitlement). Girls (and women) are inducted into many rituals of “Zulu culture”. According to Mrs. K these cultural practices, for example, mean that girls cannot make eye contact with a male. They cannot hold their heads up when they talk to older men and have to gaze downwards. Moreover they “could not talk anyhow” to an (adult) male, they cannot laugh but have to speak in hushed tones and they have to conform to cultural definitions of femininity which means that they cannot act “cheeky”. These practices represent a “generic expression of deference” (White 2000: 38) which are linked to race, gender and age. Thus, casting the eyes down, for example, works to deploy specific gender, age and racial markers of power and are part of the broad cultural practices called *ukuhlonipha* which are the “customs of avoidance and deference that reflected gender and generational divisions” (Carton 2001). The cultural definitions of gender are most salient in this quote:

- Mrs. K            It’s the home environment which influences them because I come in the class with one thing and they come with another influence from home.
- Me                What kind of influence is that?
- Mrs. K            It’s where the father is the main speaker of the house and they must all respect the man. **Here I think here in the rural areas they don’t say that men and women are equal.** Ya, the father has his own place in the home. (emphasis added)

The father as patriarch is considered to have unchanging and uncontested power. Cultural influences are significant when understanding gender relations within the school site. Cultural influences are constructed as fixed and work to maintain unequal gender-power relations. “They must all respect the man” points to cultural entitlement and respect accorded to men according to the cultural definitions or *ukuhlonipha*. By reducing the experiences of children to culture, Mrs. K provides a fixed idea of

masculinity and femininity in her classroom. At the same time children are constructed as unprotesting and passive, and girls as victims of male entitlement. However, *ukuhlonipha* is dynamic and contradictory. Cultural practices are not necessarily dominant and harmful to girls and women. *Ukuhlonipha*, for example grants woman a status in the homestead and cannot be equated simply with the subordination of women. Spaces within cultural definitions are gender friendly. These are explored in the sub-section highlighting the prospects for change in Umbumbulu Primary School. While, Mrs. K constructs *ukuhlonipha* in this extract as monolithic and unchanging with a fixed pattern inscribing male entitlement and oppression, the section on the prospects for change will show that cultural definitions do hold, albeit contradictorily, the prospects for change. Mrs. K acknowledges the cultural scripts through which children come to understand their gender: “I come in the class with one thing and they come with another influence from home” but she reduces gender to cultural determination. Significantly, the space exists for potentially progressive gender relations in the classroom.

*Move away, we are men here*

In this sub-section I focus on specific teaching discourses through which boys’ patterns of conduct are articulated. The continuum of unequal gender relations is evident in the following quote:

- |        |   |
|--------|---|
| Me     | Do you think you can make changes in the classroom?   |
| Mrs. L | It’s not easy. There are other boys who want to work with girls but there are those who just do not want to work with girls. If a girl wants to join them they say, “no women here,” but then I say that we are all the same here. Others say “move away, we are men here”. You see their mothers and grannies do all the work and they respect the men and that’s why they do this thing in the class. |

Mrs. L recognises the difficulty of gender equality and points to the relations of hierarchy and exclusion. The hegemonic pattern of boys' conduct is authoritative, aggressive, based on male entitlement to and expectation of respect and deference from girls. Being physically brave is part of this repertoire. Hemson (2001: 58) states that in the "Zulu rural context, becoming a stick fighter was an important rite of passage into manhood". Herding formed part of this repertoire through which young boys gained a sense of masculine identity. After school children performed gender differentiated activities including fetching water from the river, washing dishes, sweeping rooms, cutting grass, cleaning the grounds, and herding cattle. The herders were exclusively male. With herding went the practice of stick fighting. Boys' "play", as Hemson correctly points out, reflected their preparations to become men. Thus, they prepared so as to get their masculinity right and demonstrate physical prowess. Boys who preferred not to herd were mocked and teased and this worked to define both acceptable and unacceptable patterns of conduct. Other less celebrated patterns exist as demonstrated by those boys who **do** want to "work with girls". Cultural definitions of masculinity set the limits to what is possible in schools. Mrs. L says, "mothers and grannies do all the work and they respect the men and that's why they do this thing in the class." Boys' experiences are homogenised and seen to be static and related exclusively to what they see at home. A simple causal relationship is constructed between social practice and behaviour. Mrs. L understands that boys are inducted into many cultural rituals at home. She reduces all behaviour to culture so that the boys are constructed as uncritical, non-reflexive and as empty vessels into which adult culture is poured. Despite the recognition of hierarchies, unequal gender power relations are (re)produced through cultural reductionism. Such a perception fails to take into account the fine grained and complex ways through which masculinities are constructed. That some boys do want to work with girls suggests alternative forms of masculinity were operating around and within the dominant forms. Mrs. L recognises this but chooses to position the power asymmetries within her dominant understanding which is of cultural determination.

### *Prospects for Change*

Specific teaching discourses at Umbumbulu Primary School work to normalize the constructions of gender and take place around and within a framework of cultural definitions. Cultural discourses from which the teachers drew and within which they were located powerfully (re)produced familiar perceptions about gender. However, it is important to recognize that Zulu cultural (and gendered) practices are dynamic and have different strands and interpretations within them (Morrell 2001; Carton 2001; Hemson 2001). More and less peaceful and thus more and less democratic versions do exist. Ubuntu, for example is a particular cultural practice that is based on positive relations and a more inclusive notion of mutual respect. Ubuntu has been defined as:

The art of being human that affirms commonality and unity while it validates diversity amongs human beings and recognizes the oneness through the interconnectedness umntu ngumntu ngabantu. I am we; because I am in you, you are in me... live together work together and pool resources to solve common problems (Goduka 1999: 39).

Or captured here in the following way:

You have to learn to respect the public, whether they are male or female, and you have to learn how to deal with the public wherever you are, and respect other race groups as well (Hemson 2001: 66).

Within overall structures of gender relations, the spirit of ubuntu may point to the small spaces in the search for gender equality. Culture is thus not a static concept subordinating women. Fresh possibilities exist for gender equality:

Mrs. K            What I have been doing now is culture and ubuntu and we are talking of the importance of the people who are living around us

and the people who are important in our lives and those who have helped us a lot. Then we were talking about doctors and then they argued that the doctor is a man and then I said that there are females who are doctors and then they didn't want to believe me because they haven't seen a female doctor and then I had to go and look for a picture of a female doctor and then they agreed that there are doctors who are female. And then I also gave them the example of the teacher. I said that there are male teachers and female teachers. So people are really the same. They all do the same work. But last year we had a male principal and this year we have Mrs. Makhaye. At first the whole school had this idea that this is a woman. Things started to go wrong (emphasis added)

Me How?

Mrs K Bad behaviour and those things and so we had to tell them so that they will understand that even if the principal is a female you have got to respect her. The job is the same as the principal before her, the male one, so now things are OK.

Me And the children in your class what do they think now?

Mrs K In fact they are all like that but it's my influence that helps. If we go outside to play games and we form a circle. At first the boys did not want to hold the hand of a girl because it was a girl. They would say "I can't touch her" and then I had to explain all over again that it's fine to touch a girl. They used to say that. Now I tell them that we are just like brothers and sisters. I tell them we are the same but I think that it's in some of them. There are those who doesn't want to change.

Me Who are those?

Mrs. K Those boys. They get the influence from their homes.

Me So is the influence stronger from the home?

Mrs. K            I can't say. I have a powerful role as teacher despite what they learn at home. Maybe they change when they are in their homes. I don't know but here in my class they do what I tell them.

The normalization of gender identities takes place around and within a framework of discourses which teachers draw upon and are located within. However also, within this framework are available discourses which hold hope for beginning work towards gender equality. Mrs. K acknowledges her power and authority as teacher. Power can be exercised for the benefit of gender equality and provides hope for developing a gender-sensitive classroom context. Thus contradictory discourses with differential access to power proliferate. Mrs. K provides a discourse of gender equality within the framework of cultural determination. Some cultural patterns are more peaceable, more humane, and thus more gender friendly. Ubuntu, further captures this cultural condition where a person is only a person because of others- a spirit of humanity not based on obligation but a community spirit and mutual respect. This coalesces with the broader national context to revive the spirit of ubuntu in South Africa. Of course, pressures of *ukuhlonipha* limit ubuntu. Nevertheless alternate messages do exist. Mrs. K uses the concept of ubuntu to explain that women can be doctors. Her comments must be read against the realities of children at Umbumbulu who are not likely to go to the city because of the transport costs involved.

Reference to the new female principal draws its strength and weakness from culture: "so we had to tell them so that they will understand that even if the principal is a female you have got to respect her." There are constant pressures and differing meanings. Some meanings are more positive in the work towards gender equality. Significantly, teacher intervention is critical in the creation of a more humane approach in schools. Power must be exercised in the interests of gender equality. Intervention is also bolstered by the political context which affirms women in management and leadership positions in education in which black people, in general have a stake. These conditions create the possibility for Mrs. K to explore gender identity in different ways and to make meaning differently.

Mrs. K believed preventing unequal gender relations in her classroom was crucial and tried to extend the children's available discourses and so reduce sexist behaviour. In all instances, intervention was necessary. Thus, gender equality cannot happen through default but action. For Mrs. K intervention meant:

- providing alternate versions of gender through the photograph of the woman doctor thus making visible the normative constructions of gender
- re-organising circle formation and resisting misogyny
- providing detailed alternative understandings of teachers' work
- challenging sexist comments
- engaging with children about sexism
- using the curriculum as a means through which to integrate gender equality

Her sensitivity towards gender meant that she attempted to create a more gender fair environment. However, the creation of a gender sensitive environment cannot simply be assumed. How many stories, for example, can a picture of a woman doctor tell?

Intervention is progressive but to what extent will the provision of non-stereotypical activities reduce or even remove gender stereotypes? Mrs. L says she tries to intervene and “they listen to me but when I am not looking they say those things”. The boys are reluctant to give up on what has benefited them and boys have particular investments in *ukuhlonipha*. Ordering children to act in non-sexist ways cannot guarantee equality. Mrs. K, for example, suggests that some boys don't want to change. At the same time, however, the good should not be discounted through imperfect and blurred initiatives since these are better than no intervention at all.

The picture of the doctor, the intervention in circle formation, and provision of alternative narratives about women are better alternatives than no intervention at all. It is more viable and more important than the dominant view because it recognises that no initiative is free from the dominant discourses which position women and girls unfavourably. The current political context in South Africa gives significance to gender equality matters and

this permeates school sites. Legislation is important. Laws do matter, but also norms and ideas of human conduct need to be scrutinised through children's experiences.

## **Conclusion**

Chapters 5 and 6 focused on complex and multiply-interlocking ways in the making of gender provided by teaching discourses. In this chapter, I have looked at specific teaching discourses within their practical bases. These sites which also articulate the bizarre constructions of apartheid are Westridge, Umhlatuzana, KwaDabeka and Umbumbulu Primary Schools. The chapter has explored normalizing and contradictory practices that regulate gender identities and ways in which they are deployed in historically specific sites. The making of gender implicates other patterns of inequalities. It is impossible to understand the makings of gender without giving weight to contextual issues such as race and class.

Teaching discourses position boys and girls within specific schooling sites and make and regulate gender identity in the early years of schooling. These discourses inform, and are informed by, differentiated masculinities and femininities and the power relations that are contained within them. Teaching discourses are informed by class, race, sexuality, religion, language and culture, all of which contribute to and help shape gendered experiences in schools. This chapter has highlighted the significance of the local in the construction of gender identities. In each school broader cultural discourses have been appropriated and in turn impact upon the nature of social relations in the school. The main argument presented in this chapter is that in order to begin the work towards gender equality it is necessary to identify the specific teaching discourses operating within a site and to recognize the dominant patterns in/through which gender is constructed. This chapter has shown how dominant definitions of gender are affirmed in the four schools in/through race and class contexts but the chapter has also indicated the contradictory nature of teaching discourses. Within local discourses which try to fix gender are also spaces which acknowledge gender as dynamic, changing and open to change. Significantly, teaching discourses do recognize children's agentic capacity but

recognitions occur within dominant teaching discourses which work to construct the child as a non-reflexive, non-agentic and powerless victim unable to make sense of his or her social world.

Specific teaching discourses are located within a whole range of complex and interlocking practices which systematically work to re(produce) gender identity. At the same time, however, this chapter has drawn attention to the prospects for gender equality in each school. Schools are complicit in the construction and regulation of gender identities but they are also sites where questions are asked and fresh thinking can be stimulated rendering gender identities capable of and open to change. Teaching discourses thus provide contextual ingredients for understanding the nature and form of children's social worlds. Specificities in and within each school, point to variation in the construction of gender identities which also vary the potential for change. The voices in KwaDabeka Primary School, for example are suppressed by the culture of violence and the context in which violence is the appropriate means to achieve an end. The specificities are thus important to understand.

Equally, exploration is needed of how children make sense of their social worlds, in order to understand how the broader teaching discourses are manifest and shape children's gendered worlds. How do children make sense of gender, how do they negotiate, contest and challenge gender constructions? Gender power relations circumscribe the routines of everyday school life. Issues of masculinity and femininity arise through gender power relations. Teachers have power but not always. Understanding is needed of how children make sense of gender and what the resources are in the making of gender. The next two chapters turn to this.

## **Chapter 7**

### **Momentary Children's Discourses**

#### **Introduction**

Power relations between and within teaching discourses produce and regulate gender identity in early schooling, thus limiting the understanding of gender in children's lives. In this chapter and Chapter 8 I examine children's subjective worlds. I show that children's gendered (and sexual) cultures are powerful in the making and the elaboration of schooling relations. I refer to children's subjective worlds as momentary discourses in/through which knowledge, power and identity are associated. Children's subjective worlds are intricately related to power and systems of knowledge and they cannot stand outside these systems of power and knowledge. The forms of power/knowledge position particular kinds of subjects and they put pressure on us to adopt particular identities (Epstein and Johnson 1998: 15). Momentary discourses are thus utilised to explain the rapidly shifting, elusive and episodic moments of power through which children construct their gendered selves in the interstices between freedom and structure. They are potent, ephemeral and episodic spaces that exist in classrooms in the shifting balance between production and reproduction of gender identity, but when evoked they also carry a sense of performance (Thorne, 1993). Drawing on episodic moments across schooling sites, this chapter explores how children's gender (and sexual) identities, respond and contribute to dominant definitions of gender.

Foregrounding children's cultures as a key arena for the production and reproduction of gender identity and gender relations, this chapter goes beyond the simplistic portrayals of young children as unprotesting, innocent victims. Children are not blank sheets on which gender patterns are stamped. The making of gender is a very active process. This is not an uncommon position, as the international literature on the early years of schooling shows. It has been argued that children actively construct and shape gender (and sexual) relations (Davies 1989; Thorne 1993; Jordan 1995; Connolly 1995; Skelton 1996; 1997; Francis 1997; 1998; Tobin 1997; MacNaughton 1999; 2000; Epstein 1997; Epstein and

Johnson 1998; Epstein 1999; Epstein and Sears 1999; Renold 2000; Grieshaber and Cannella 2001). This chapter shows too, that in the making of everyday gender identity, children actively contest, challenge and contribute to the dominant definitions of gender (and sexuality) in early schooling and through which particular identities are constructed.

This chapter explores the salience of gender (and sexuality) through the accounts by, and observations of, boys and boys, boys and girls and girls and girls. The primary concern is to explore the micro mediations, contestations and negotiations as masculinities and femininities are enacted in/through which gender identities are constituted. I also try to show how boys and girls negotiate their gendered selves in terms of the heterosexual matrix (Butler 1990). Butler's notion of gender as performance is useful because the commonsense understandings attached to gender are illusions which create immutable truths about gender that are then performed on a regular basis (Butler 1990; Nayak and Kehily 1997; Yelland 1998; Renold 2000).

The first part of this chapter explores hegemonic masculinity. I integrate the construction of femininities into this. I use hegemonic masculinity as a useful tool to articulate how boys struggle to accomplish particular patterns of conduct. I integrate the construction of femininities in this to avoid the danger of shifting all attention to boys and "re-excluding" girls (White 2000: 36). Chapter 8 considers KwaDabeka Primary School as a specific example of how social conflict shifts to violence, and why understanding masculinity is key. Hegemonic masculinity is a mode of masculinity which at any one point is 'culturally exalted' (Connell 1995). This concept allows for the unbalanced nature of gendered power relations in children's lives to be explored and recognises that the dominant exalted position has to be constantly won (Skelton 1997). The ideal hegemonic pattern is authoritative, aggressive, heterosexual, brave, adventurous, assertive, strong, competitive and possesses public knowledge (Connell 1987; 1995; Gilbert and Gilbert 1998; Salisbury and Jackson 1996; Skelton 1997; Kenway and Fitzclarence 1997). The hegemonic pattern is celebrated as an ideal for boys. There is no one hegemonic pattern although all patterns draw upon, exaggerate, modify and distort the hegemonic patterns of conduct (Skelton 1997). Thus, not all boys embody the hegemonic pattern but the

hierarchy is an important means through which particular kinds of identities are established. Conflict among boys and with girls often involves homophobic and misogynist taunts establishing patterns of hierarchy and exclusion for both boys and girls.

The second part of this chapter explores the salience of sexuality in children's lives. Like Thorne (1993), I frequently observed heterosexual teasing across all school sites.

"Kissing, sex and marriage" was the phrase I scribbled on my field notes as I witnessed the complex network of heterosexual performances by both boys and girls contesting and negotiating their gendered selves. The main argument in this section is that schools are significant places where children learn sexuality, whether teachers intend this or not (Redman, 1994: 142). Sexuality is actively constructed in early schooling (Tobin 1997; Yelland 1998; Epstein and Johnson 1998). Within the public domain of schooling, potent ephemeral spaces exist through which children (re)produce their sexual identities. For boys and girls these moments of slippage and excess provide the opportunity to produce their own pleasures and negotiate their own (presupposed heterosexual) identity. These moments of power provide a more reflexive account of femininities and masculinities. This section considers boys and heterosexuality, girls and heterosexuality and heterosexual games which are a pervasive form of pleasure and power across the schooling sites.

In what follows I explore the gendered experiences of young children, and how they are negotiated and maintained in the battles for power.

### **Constructing Hegemonic Masculinity**

#### **Making stories**

Making stories is one way in which boys exhibit a particular form of masculinity and establish patterns of hierarchies. Here is a picture of me sitting with Michael and a group of boys at Westridge Primary School telling a story of the spitfire, an aeroplane.

Michael        My grandfather flew in a spitfire and he had two chances to shoot somebody and he lost two of them. The one of them was shot down and the other was grandpa... was after him (sic) and he kept on turning after him. The other one he was after and he went back up in the hills and he couldn't shoot, went into the clouds and over and they were going up through this one big straight cloud like this and he went into the clouds and they couldn't see each other...

Michael's story is one of many that I heard while sitting in classrooms. The story through which Michael engages me and the other boys in the group is a means through which boys fashion their masculinities. The story about the spitfire, the shooting and manoeuvring through the hills and clouds was spoken with actions and expressions and through which power was exercised as I and the other boys listened to him. Michael thus claims a particular kind of masculinity by association with an ancestor. Michael claims a space for himself which produces power relations. In this sense the story is utilised to substantiate a dominant masculinity which is in tune with spitfires and shooting and through which masculinities are regulated. However, I also discovered that once Michael's story was almost complete the attention was diverted to other stories. Boys telling stories is thus a means through which to gain power and take on particular masculine identities.

### **You're useless! Even a girl can beat you!**

In this section, I show how masculinities are constructed. Many boys in this study resorted to defining and asserting their masculinity through practices of misogyny in order to create the illusion of an essential identity. I observed David and Robert with spin tops as they competed with each other:

David (laughing) **You're useless.** You can't even spin a top. **Even a girl can beat you.** (emphasis added).

David tries to validate his own masculinity through the subordination of femininities. Thorne (1993) calls this boundary work. David tries to construct his identity in opposition to girls. David tries to express to Robert the horror that “even a girl can beat you”. This performance functions through misogyny and is an attempt to reinstate the boy’s dominance over girls (women) which is now brought under attack by Robert’s inability to perform to that expectation. The horror for David and Robert is that if you can’t spin a top you become like a girl. Thus to be a normal boy one has to enact prowess in top spinning, otherwise face the risk of being the target of misogynistic teasing, and of being constructed as effeminate and thus subordinate. This suggests the complex means and the pressures under which boys forge their identities. To be bad at games can be read as a “cultural index, implying a suspect lack of manly vigour and ... of effeminacy” (Haywood and Mac an Ghail 2001). David’s put-down of Robert is accompanied by laughter. Laughter is used as a strategy that produces power and hierarchies.

Boys are subject to the pressures of hegemonic patterns of conduct in different ways and they struggle in the constitution of their gendered identity. Here is one example. When I sat in a group in Mrs. L’s classroom, Nhlanhla said: “Girls don’t help. I don’t want them to help me. They irritate me”. Nhlanhla thus positions himself as anti-girl and is thus used to show his availability for hegemonic masculinity.

The following data indicates the dynamics through which boys struggle to accomplish the ideal hegemonic pattern of conduct:

I sit with a group of boys and girls and listen to their conversation about breakfast. I ask them what they thought about their breakfast. The discussion is around who makes breakfast. Many say that it’s their maids who do so. This is an affluent area and most households have live-in maids. I chat to Samit who in a previous visit had proudly showed me a picture frame of his home which won the best architectural design in Durban that previous year (*I thought he was overbearing. Delighted at his home and quite a show-off, pompous in fact*)

Me           Who makes your breakfast?  
 Samit       My mom.  
 Me           Does your dad make breakfast too?  
 Samit       No.  
 Me           Do you think he should?  
 Samit       No.  
 Me           Would you do it if you were a dad?  
 Samit       No...but sometimes my dad does make a sissy egg.  
 Me           Why do you call it a sissy egg?  
 Samit       ..cos the yolk's broken...

In the extract above I have used an ordinary classroom experience to show how Samit enacts a particular version of himself to get his gender right across the racial boundaries. Samit is a rich Indian boy but boys' unity is achieved across racial categories. This is a very ordinary experience in schools. Gender is made salient surreptitiously through ordinary unexceptional experience which promotes particular hegemonic versions of masculinity and across the racial boundaries. In the struggle to achieve a particular form of masculinity, the alternative (sissy) has to be put down in relation to the ideal-heterosexual.

At Westridge Primary School, as I sat with a group of white children, the following conversation unfolded:

Luke        I don't like girls.  
 Me         Why?  
 Bryce      They're too fancy.  
 Me         What is fancy about girls?  
 Storm     I know they wear fancy things and they go to stores and buy lots of things and carry handbags.  
 Me         Are boys fancy?

Megan Yes they are. Bryce wore a mask to my party with all this gold stuff. That was fancy too (*mocking*). Bryce gets mad at girls if they do something wrong. When I bit his koki [fibre tipped pen] he ...

*Bryce blocks his ears*

Storm (*interrupts*) Shut up Megan!

Megan ...he tried to kiss me.

The social and material context of Westridge Primary provides the repertoire within and through which gender identity is constituted. This contextual specificity allows Storm to make the connection with shopping, fancy clothes, handbags and gender identity. Gendered identity is thus produced as Storm actively constructs gender in relation to his material and social condition. Thus, the repertoire of social discourses associates subjectivities with specific commodities (Hughes and MacNaughton 2001). Shopping, fancy clothes and handbags is the association that Storm makes with girls (re)producing gendered cultural identities.

What is important here is the role the girls play in constructing masculinity.

Megan disrupts the coherence of meaning as Bryce is exposed and his identity is brought under threat: going to a girl's party with a mask and with "gold stuff" and the attempted kiss. Thus the girls reinforce hegemonic masculinity and Bryce's masculinity is brought under question as he is humiliated about the gold stuff and the kiss. As eight-year old boys, proximity to girls, even within the discourse of heterosexuality, is a fragile and ambiguous experience. To kiss a girl was seen as heterosexually acceptable but not at age eight. Megan says: "When I bit his koki [fibre tipped pen] he ...he tried to kiss me". Megan laughs as she successfully humiliates Bryce, as Storm tries to come to his defence.

Megan enjoys the pleasure of breaking the canon and revealing Bryce to be effeminate- the ideal masculine norm has been revealed to be a fiction. Moreover, she has publicly humiliated him by revealing his attempt to kiss her. But Megan's power is quickly made

tenuous with the knowledge that power games are also risky. Megan does not see it that way. She takes pleasure in revealing that Bryce tried to kiss her: an innocent, natural and pleasure-provoking action. In this way girls' bodies become sites of potential danger, but are naturalised as part of the heterosexual discourse (Epstein 1999; Renold 2000).

In another observation in Mrs. B's classroom, some groups are busy colouring a worksheet. Colouring is a major activity in the early years of schooling where the colours pink and blue have a universal gloss. For the majority of boys in this study, the polluting effects of the colour pink were clearly articulated, and not to distance oneself from pink meant being subject to ridicule and insult. The ridicule, the laughter and the teasing works as a powerful device for exalting the dominant form of masculinity and for whipping others into shape (Nayak and Kehily 2001).

Ricky laughs and teases Ze

Ricky                      Ze's favourite colour is pink. I don't like pink...It's a girl's colour and Ze likes pink".

The following vignette extends the universality of pinks and blues as they were played out in Mrs. F's classroom:

Brenton                      I like red. Pink is for girls ...  
Avashen (giggles)        That's a girl's colour, not a boy's colour.  
Brenton (quietly)        Yellow is for shit in the pillow.  
Mrs. F                        Boys, why don't you like pink?  
Avashen                      It's a girl's colour.  
Mrs. F                        Who told you so?  
Avashen                      Jason said so.  
Avashen (continuing)    Mam, also if you have pink, they tease you, all the girls  
Mrs. F                        What if the boys wear pink?  
Brenton                      Yucky. People will tease them that they are wearing girls' colours. Pink is for stink.

Colour is a descriptor of gender and is tied to patterns of hegemonic masculinity and homophobia: pink is for girls and pink stinks (Grieshaber 1998; White 1998). Pink is conflated with femininity (and homosexuality) thus boys assert their masculinity through practices of disassociation from pink. The boys claim that misogynistic teasing is the reason for boys not wearing pink. People, especially girls, tease boys who wear pink. Boys can and do wear pink but with risks. Pink is perceived to be a proper way to be feminine. Thus, the discourse around the colour pink is an attempt to assert the assumptions about the inferior position of girls. In particular, it works to produce and regulate boys' patterns of conduct and suggests the pressures through which boys make sense of their identity.

The above extract also demonstrates the ability of the boys to blur adult-child relations. Here, these eight-year old boys are conducting this interchange as I sat in their group. While their conversation with Mrs. F is a public one, they are able to blur adult-child relations. The pink for stink discourse positions Brenton as male and Mrs. F and me as female. The moment is ambivalent. Brenton refuses to be cast as powerless and resorts to misogynist mockery, "pink is for stink", and challenges adult female authority, positioning both Mrs. F and me as objects. The momentary position allows the space for disruption of established relations. Recreating pink with stink and yellow for shit is also a means through which the boys find fascination with things that adults consider rude. While the boys assert their own type of masculinity, their discussion around colour can also be read as an assertion of their own "paradoxical pleasures" (Kenway et al 1997:22) derived from rude things and which work to blur adult-teacher control.

The following observation in Westridge Primary illustrates the public display of hegemonic masculinity:

Reading. Mrs. D instructs the children to come to the mat area. They take their places on the mat in gender differentiated ways. Grant trips Nicola. Nicola reacts:



### **Ruggerbuggers: Boys Rule Girls Drool**

I have named ruggerbugger in Chapter 6 as a dominant form of masculinity through which other forms of masculinity and femininity are devalued. In the next vignette I talk to the ruggerbuggers that are also constructed as being good in math. Jody is the only girl in the group who was made invisible in Mrs. C's comments on the Diamond Group (See page 163). During my observations, I was struck by Jody's silence in the group:

Me            Do you work with Jody?  
Jordan        No  
Me            Why  
Jordan        'Cos boys rule and girls drool.  
Me            What do you think Rory?  
Rory          Girls serve boys.  
Steven        We're the best group and I am the best in maths.  
Me            Jody do you like these boys in this group?  
Jody          No.  
Me            Why?  
Jody          'Cos.  
Me            Why?  
Jody          I prefer to be with the Circles. My friend Stacy is in that group.  
Me            What do the boys do?  
Jody          They shout all the time.

In this vignette, hegemonic ruggerbugger masculinity is secured through positioning Jody and girls in general as inferior. Steven, who Mrs. C constructed as not sporty (see Chapter 5), asserts his mathematical prowess and, through this assertion, he proclaims his affinity with ruggerbuggers. Steven claims the he is "the best in maths". The construction of hegemonic masculinity is not just a competition with girls but also with other boys. Jody belongs to the best mathematics group in class but it is not enough for her. Her sex is made to be a more distinctive marker and so she is positioned within the

“boys rule, girls drool” discourse. Steven though, is able to re-position himself as ruggiebugger despite his ‘lack’ in sport, by asserting and glorifying his mathematical skill. The effects for Jody are clear. She wants to belong to a group where she has a “friend”: “boys rule, girls drool” is made salient. Observing the Diamond Group suggested to me that Jody was marginal. The boys dominated. It was a highly competitive and energetic group with screaming and shouting. The boys competed against each other and against Jody, making salient the gendered nature of group work. Group work is risky business. For the boys it meant a struggle to accomplish winning status and usurp Steven’s glorified position. For Jody it meant being quiet. However girls are not normally quiet in the primary school (Francis, 1998). The submissive stage tends to come in the secondary school where the acquisition of a boyfriend is the major marker of emphasized femininity. It can be argued that Jody was a clear victim of sexism, and that hegemonic masculine forces position her as a girl and a “drooler”. Jody preferred to be in a weaker mathematics group: the Circles because she knew her options could be greater. Her desire to remain quiet came from her knowledge that talking to the boys involved definite limits to what she could do as a girl. Playing the dice was an activity in the group to enhance counting skills. Here is a picture of the group and me playing dice:

They start the game and Preston gives Jody the dice.

Me                    So why does Jody get the dice first?

Rory                I don’t know why. Preston gave her the dice first.

Me                    So why did you give Jody the dice first, Preston?

Preston            Cos she’s a girl. She’ll go first.

Clayton            O no, she’s last. She’s a girl. O yes, men rule.

Jody’s sense of the real dice game came from her being positioned as the weaker sex within the “men rule” discourse. Jody is good at mathematics. She can be “in” the good mathematics group but the boys imposed the limits on how much or how far she was able to be part of the real group. In this instance it could be argued that single sex schools are safer and better environments for girls’ academic performance. Like woman entering

non-traditional areas of work, Jody had limits imposed on her. The extent to which she could move was pre-determined by her biology. Playing the dice is risky business. However, if the situation were to be reversed with there being one girl and many boys, or equal boys and girls, would that change the nature of gender power relations? For Jody the odds were almost clear. Her silence though was not a powerless position. Her silence was based on her knowledge of how she was being positioned and her knowledge that “boys shout”. Her “quietness” was a powerful position. It could have been easy to view Jody as “poor Jody”. The poor Jody position means that the boys are making it extremely difficult for Jody to be a significant part of the group. Their sexism is intolerable which means that Jody never has a fair chance. If boys are constructed as the problem, then the work for gender equality is quite simple, as I tried to show in the Boleu Secondary case- an intervention which chastises bad boy behaviour. But understanding the extracts above as a struggle for hegemonic masculinity makes the problem not the boys but the discourse which tries regulating how boys and girls should be. A drive-by intervention targeting boys is no solution. Jody was quiet in the Diamond Group but she longed for the circle group which was “friendlier” and a safe place to talk. Her desire to be absent from the Diamonds and her preference for the Circle Group is based on her knowledge that the Diamond group was a place where others named you, excluded you and ignored you. Jody had very good reasons for being quiet in the group. “Silence is one self-protective strategy to manage the risks of evaluation” (Nairn 1997: 113). Her quietness was not the answer to the problem even though it was a powerful position. Jody was judged and made insignificant even though she was quiet. She is not naturally silent and the boys are not naturally shouters. Her silence is a vote of no confidence in the form masculinity which excluded her.

Jody’s silence may be seen as her attempt to manage hegemonic masculinity which the boys were trying to fashion for themselves. The struggle to get their gender right is evident at the start of the game when Jody is unassumingly given the dice first. Preston suggests that Jody can go first because she is a “girl”- like a man opening a door for a woman. Preston has learnt that it is a proper thing to do:- to let girls in first but the boys are still struggling to find the adult meaning that is attached to its practice. There is

confusion about this. They presume that girls are the weaker sex but they don't know altogether how and why they have to give Jody the dice first. They are learning "adult" ways of being. Confusion and contradiction are imminent: Preston says "cos she's a girl. She'll go first"; Clayton says "O no she's last. She's a girl O yes. Men rule". Hegemonic masculinity is not fixed but is upheld tenuously through contradiction and struggle to find coherence. There is a discrepancy between the norm of masculinity among the group of boys with its misogynistic attitude, and Preston's gentle, personal relationship with Jody, which could also be seen as a source of affection. Preston's gentle, yet sexist approach is seen to be a move away from power and thus Clayton's more aggressive and explicit alternative is understood as one with power. Thus letting girls go first is proscribed because they are not able yet to see that it is still a powerful position for them. Being masculine means a difficult process of finding the right way of being male.

Group work is rich with information about how gender relations are understood. The Diamond Group provides the instance through which meaning is made and negotiated about masculinity and femininity. Doing group work is risky business. For Jody it meant being simultaneously positioned with and without power. For the boys it meant another instance through which their masculinity was maintained and policed but also through which alternatives were castigated. In South Africa the new OBE curriculum is based on co-operative learning and working together in groups. In fact, group work has become a pedagogical tool for the facilitation of democratic teaching and learning in South Africa. But its pedagogical value cannot be guaranteed. Group work hurts and not just Jody. The boys have constantly to be aware of what they say and do in order to get their gender right. The circle from whom friends can be chosen is made clear for Jody and the boys. The production of friendships, or its lack, is markedly gendered. The possibilities of who to be friends with is reduced when there are clear risks involved, and there are lifelong losses not just for girls but for boys who have to confront the implications of who they are supposed to have as friends.

## Cubs and Brownies

I have shown that the production of masculinities is inextricably tied to dominant notions of what it means to be a boy. In particular I have shown how gender matters and how children dynamically generate identity. The following extract focuses on Scott and Shaun in Westridge Primary School. Mrs. D had constructed Shaun as the boy with “a lot of knowledge”:

- Scott            I love animals. I'm going to be an animal scientist to fight the disease that gorillas spread. Do you know what that is? SPCA does that ring a bell?
- Me                Yes. Who are the animal scientists?
- Scott            We know scientists.
- Me                What are they?
- Scott            There are two types of scientists. One works for the SPCA. The other one is trying to find the cure for the disease that gorillas spread. These are the ones who work for the government and they try to prevent the disease that affect animals and they affect people also. About 300 people have died. They want to find something in gorillas that keeps them alive. Me and Shaun have just invented something that keeps the mosquitoes away.
- Shaun            It keeps all the dogs' fleas away.
- Me                What is it?
- Scott            Mixing mint and parsley.
- Shaun            The parsley keeps the fleas and ticks away and the mint gives the flavour.
- Shaun            My brother had tick bite fever.
- Me                How many do you have?
- Shaun            I have a brother that's 13 and one who is 26. He's a doctor. I know quite a lot from Cubs.

Me I should have been a Cub myself.

Shaun No, that one's Brownies.

Me Could I have belonged to Cubs?

Shaun No, well not exactly, because girls wear different uniforms to Cubs and Cubs wear different things. Girls get easier badges and the boys have to feed their dogs for a month and also feed their dogs to get their pet badge and their animal badge and they have to know about 8 or 6 types of animals....

Scott The oldest dog who lived was about 20 years old.

Me Do brownies know about that?

Scott Well, I think they may know some of that but not all.

Me Maybe they should have only one group. What do you think?

Shaun I don't know; maybe because they don't get along so well. Maybe because boys, um, boys might be content with them. Maybe they don't want to share the same tent with each other.

Me Would you like to have girls in your group

Shaun I don't know. I'll have to think about that question. There's all sorts of things that you have to think about.

Me Like what?

Shaun I don't know. They're stuck in my head.

Scott I think boys are Cubs. I'm trying to earn my home craftbadge and I have polished silver and brass...

Both Shaun and Scott construct and define a particular form of masculinity through which scientific knowledge is integral. Here it needs to be borne in mind that this conversation on science and knowledge is as much for my benefit as it is for Scott's and Shaun's. Knowledge about the disease that gorillas spread is generally 'adult' knowledge. Shaun's ability to discuss this competently and confidently asserted his status over Scott and me, as adult researcher. The tone and the confidence with which he asked me the question, "SPCA, does that ring a bell?" positioned me as ignorant of the SPCA. In my field notes I wrote "'cheek". I knew the boundaries had been blurred as I

sat feeling “cheated” of my power as adult as he questioned me. Once he breached the adult-child relations, I sought to construct his white masculinity as abrasive. His tone, his question, his confidence provided a performance through which he could challenge me as adult. What emerges from their knowledge of animals, science and diseases is objectification of me as woman (researcher) and the ability to transgress adult-child relations. This also serves to remind me as female of my place in society (as less than scientific) but also of the potential for the boys to be animal scientists. Interviews such as these became very popular with children who saw it as a means of re-telling and (re)producing adult ways of knowing, and provided the space to challenge and to impress me as adult researcher.

“I know quite a lot from Cubs”, is integral to establishing their boyhoods with knowledge, prestige and power. In this way the boys were learning the patterns of their boyhoods by blurring and bumping adult-child relations. Who they were and who they would be was based on their boyish solidarity. Both Scott and Shaun were members of Cubs in Westridge. They exhibit their power through their solidarity as Cubs and as a particular type of boy. Their power was based on inventions (mint and parsley), knowledge of tick bite fever, the government, animal scientists and disease, men in training as rational and scientific. Who they are, though, is not simply the result of belonging to Cubs but the value that is attached to boys with knowledge. Mrs. D had positioned Shaun as having a lot of knowledge. Cubs have knowledge but Brownies are accorded a lower status. As the boys in this vignette produce themselves with knowledge and power, girls are constructed in stereotypical ways. The boys imagine themselves with knowledge and future scientists but the girls are accorded a lesser status. The boys make things happen for themselves but they suggest that the girls can’t. Power is meant to reside with them as boys with scientific knowledge: “girls get easier badges”. Shaun does acknowledge that girls do have knowledge but “not all”. Science and biology becomes confused with gender. The presumed truth about knowledgeable boys is based on what they have learnt about science and are learning to be associated with science. Thus the boys participate in reiterating the power relations through which men and women are (re)produced. The limits of girls (and women) are specified: “Well, I think

they may know some of that, but not all". This is similar to women entering the scientific world where limited expectations have been imposed on how much they know and should know as women. If they know too much then the cub-brownie dichotomy will be made less than real and fragile. Shaun and Scott try to maintain the categories because there are "all sorts of things which you have to think about" including, I suggest, giving up on power and thereby risking marginalisation.

In this section I have tried to show how boys closely guard and maintain their sense of masculinity through projecting their knowledge of science and scientific things. Getting their science right means being seen as knowledgeable boys and this allows them to interpret themselves with power through which the limits on girls and girls' knowledge are imposed. The boys try to exalt a position for themselves which regulates their thoughts and actions and those of girls. Within and between the cub/brownie dichotomy, are spaces which are actively occupied as power moments and which are more gender friendly. The next section turns to this issue which I name gender-bender. This refers to a form of masculinity which exists and is tolerated within the regulatory framework of gender identity.

### **Gender Bender**

The production of masculinities is intimately connected to dominant notions of what it means to be a boy. The making of masculinities involves a constant battle, a constant policing of the boundaries (Steinberg et al 1997) in which the dominant notion has to be won and re-won through patterns of hierarchies and exclusion. Thus far in this thesis I have pointed to some of the patterns of exclusion. However, within and between the battle are moments which are created, allowed and even tolerated which explicitly abandon the "dual spheres" (Salisbury and Jackson 1996: ix) or ping pong relations. Boys do differ. Some boys decline to participate in hegemonic masculinity (Kenway and Willis 1998) and display alternate versions of masculinity (Connell 1995). This section explores the moments in which some boys refuse to participate in hegemonic

masculinity. The act of refusing, however, always occurs within the broader patterns of dominance. I call these moments of refusal gender benders.

I focus on Keolan a seven-year old Indian boy whom Mrs. E describes as follows:

Mrs. E            Keolan is just a one-in-a-million case but I don't know how long it will last. He plays with the girls. His best friend is Tamara and he's not afraid to say that. His mum is a teacher. She's the only one working...

During my visits to Mrs. E's classroom I inevitably found myself scanning the room for Keolan. Unlike Thorne (1993), who was less emotionally attached to boys, I found greater attachment to boys. Perhaps being a mother of two sons influenced my identification with them and I kept wondering about their worlds and about the childhood "me" who wanted to be a "he". Keolan did not remind me of my sons. His voice, his posture, his language, his actions and the tone of his voice were compelling, desirable and seductive. At times I did feel like putting him on my lap but was checked by the potential disruption this would cause to social relations.

Keolan's group was working on the theme "About Me" (See Appendix E) and this is the data I produced from my conversation with them.

The children are busy colouring the picture which shows a girl skipping and a boy holding a ball:

Me                    What does this picture tell us?  
Devlin              Girls skip and boys play with balls.  
Me                    Do you have a skipping rope?  
Devlin (laughing) No.  
Me                    Why?  
Sewraj              Because only girls have skipping ropes.

Me	Do you have a ball?
Sapna	And only boys have balls.
Me	Okay so do boys have balls and girls have skipping ropes?
Keolan	Mam, I skip. I have a ball and a skipping rope. My sister she lets me use her skipping rope. It doesn't matter if you're a boy or a girl.
Devlin	I won't use a skipping rope.
Me	Why?
Devlin	It's dumb. It's for girls.

The playing of sport is a highly gendered activity (Connell 1995). Playing ball and avoiding skipping emphasises physical strength and skill and would appear to represent hegemonic masculinity. Devlin, for example, suggests that skipping is for girls because “it’s dumb” not requiring the skill and the rigour that he associates with ball playing (Whitson 1990; Thorne 1993; Connell 1995; Edley and Wetherell 1996; Mac and Ghail 1996). Devlin tries to align himself with hegemonic patterns of boys conduct. This means avoiding skipping. Skipping and its association with less skill and girls is a move away from power, thus regarded as subordinate. The sense of the masculine ideal tells him that it is normal for him to be interested in balls and not skipping. Interest in sport thus works as a normalising practice in which misogynistic strategies are used to give ascendancy to boys and balls. Devlin’s masculinity operates through the processes of sporting differentiation in which skipping is readily recognisable as a marker of deviance from the hegemonic masculine norm. This is peculiar to the construction of masculinities in early schooling. Boxing for example (a male dominated sport) has skipping as a major element in the training regime.

Keolan declares his interest in skipping and balls and violates the hegemonic norms in early schooling. The tenuous nature of gender relations is exposed and subverts the conventional social relations. However, his challenge occurs in relation to dominant positionings. Keolan is able to challenge and work against the position which privileges and (re)produces gender identity. There are consequences, as “dumb” and “girls” are

aligned. There are costs for gender benders. For Keolan it means being regarded as not quite normal. These are not quite apparent in the conversation above. I did observe Keolan share his lunch with Tamara, but when it came to playing “girls games” like clapping and singing, Keolan was not invited to do so and he quickly reconstituted his boys-only friendship network. His experience was transient. As already noted, Keolan likes girls (his best friend is Tamara) and he is interested in skipping. These activities are not valued by the boys or the school. Nevertheless, he was able to offer a challenge to hegemonic patterns of conduct. In the day-to-day maintenance work of hegemonic masculinity there are small spaces which open but are closed so quickly. The momentary openness challenges familiar gender definitions which can and do occur. This incident may represent an insignificant and negligible contest but it does represent a better prospect in the development of gender relations.

On another occasion the discussion in the class turns to the issue of difference:

- Mrs. E            We were talking about all of us being different. Everyone in the class is different because...
- Sanusha            ...the way we act.
- Mrs. E            ...the way we look.
- Rita                ...our hair.
- Mrs. E            Let's look at our hair. We have different shades. We have black hair and silver hair.
- The class roars with laughter as the mention of silverhair.*
- Mrs. E            Your granny has silver hair does she? How else are we different?
- Sewraj            Boys have short hair and girls have long hair.
- Keolan            I saw Michael Jackson and he has long hair so it doesn't have to be a boy...

In this example, Keolan disrupts the discourse through which difference is made biological. It occurred unexpectedly, and in an instant it was over. These are momentary

power positions and work to disrupt in a small way the legitimation of hegemonic masculinity.

What I have represented thus far is the diversity of experience, how hegemonic patterns of conduct are (re)produced and challenged. Keolan provides the example through which the contradiction emerges in the structures of gender relations. Thus hegemonic masculinity is not monolithic but complex and has to be constantly fought over. This section illustrates the battles for power and how boys struggle to make sense of their gendered worlds. The next example illustrates how cry/baby masculinity, a subordinate form of masculinity for seven year old boys, is contested:

The class is busy with the theme Happy and Sad

- Me Do you cry when you're sad?
- Sewraj No.
- Me Why?
- Sewraj 'cos I'm not a baby.
- Me And you Devlin?
- Devlin I don't cry because I'm strong. Only girls cry *we we we*.  
*(laughing)* I don't like to cry because other people will tease you, "cry baby."
- Keolan (interrupting) No mam girls cry and boys cry. Mam when my grandmother died my father cried. Girls cry and boys cry. You don't have to be a baby to cry.
- Devlin When you go to a funeral, who carries the coffin. The men! They are strong that's why they carry the coffin.
- Keolan But they cry and carry the coffin. My father carried my grandmother's coffin and he cried and so did my uncle.
- Devlin Women are not so strong that's why they don't carry the coffin.

Keolan	My sister is strong. She goes to the gym.
Devlin	I don't like to cry because other people will tease you, cry baby, cry baby.

As boys growing up they try to forge their gendered identity by challenging and (re)producing “adult male” ways of being. Cry/baby masculinity is the occasion when boys might risk having their masculinity brought into question. Devlin states that, “other people will tease you”. Clearly, expressive emotional practices such as crying are key in the patterns of exclusion in the formation of hegemonic masculine identities. Displaying overt forms of emotion is identified as incongruent with hegemonic masculinity- a move away from power. Devlin refuses to be seen as contravening the normative construction: “boys don't cry”. Hegemonic masculinities are thus policed through practices which boys learn to attribute to effeminacy. Boys who display behaviour associated with girls or femininity can lead them to becoming targets of harassment “cry baby, cry baby”. Devlin thus tries to forge his identity which is subject to the pressures of hegemonic masculinity and through discourses and practices of misogyny. “Boys don't cry” is applied as a measure of hegemonic masculinity.

Keolan provides the disruption but it occurs with contradiction: “My father carried my grandmother's coffin and he cried and so did my uncle”. Hegemonic masculinity is not monolithic. Keolan contests the pattern of conduct which inscribes particular practices for boys and girls. The myth that “boys (and men) don't cry”, demands justification pointing to the complexity and the contradictions in gender relations. In this way the meaning of what it means to be boy and girl is opened up. However, Keolan's reference to expressive emotions draws attention to the occasion on which it is appropriate for men to behave in this way. While he challenges the myth, his example suggests that an overt display of affection amongst men (his father and his uncle) would be acceptable only in extreme emotional situations and circumstances. If the situation involved the death of a family member, emotional display by men is perceived to be legitimate. Thus, under extenuating circumstances, Keolan suggests that crying is appropriate, however, the

everyday pattern of conduct for boys limits expression of feelings since to do so is to risk enacting cry/baby masculinity, a subordinate feminine form.

In this section, I have explored gender bender as the moment in which familiar gender positions are disrupted but they occur within dominant definitions of masculinity. Keolan's transgressive moment is small but it does exist. It appears in unexpected places. Mrs. E suggests that he is "one in a million" and that "it won't last", but his diversity escapes the rigid gender definitions and it is a rejuvenating moment in the work for gender equality despite its brevity. By opening up masculinity, Keolan offers the hope that boys and girls can skip and cry, challenging the devaluation of counter-hegemonic masculinity. Thus there are spaces within early schooling which have the potential to threaten hegemonic forms of masculinity. There are opportunities available to teachers to allow children to do their own thinking in this area with the potential to disrupt the devaluation of subordinated forms of masculinity.

Boys are not boys, as the dominant teaching discourses suggest. They become. Boys differ, and they struggle to align to dominant hegemonic patterns of conduct. They are not blank sheets, they are not biologically determined, but they are active in the making of their gender identity. Gendering is an integral process through which lives are managed in early schooling sites. The next section explores further how hegemonic patterns of conduct are challenged.

### **Tiger without teeth**

Getting masculinity right means claiming power and in the process subordinating cry-baby masculinity and girls in general. But there is no simple boy-girl, powerful-powerless binary, as the gender bender example suggests. The binary is not incontestable as the data demonstrates:

Megan Do you know why girls are different from boys...because they are gross. They play with spiders and mud, and girls don't. Girls play with Barbies.

Bryce I hate Barbies.

Megan My thirteen-year old brother plays with my Barbie.

*The boys laugh*

Bryce Barbie, stupid Barbie.

Me So what's different about girls?

Sunil Girls are stupid. They can't play soccer, cart wheels or rugby or do a head stand in the pool.

Megan I can

Bryce Well, they can't run as fast as boys can. Warren is the fastest boy in the class.

The children in this vignette struggle to make sense of their identity resorting to contestation and contradictory gender differentiations. Contestation occurs through pleasurable moments of squirming, giggling, laughing and chatting. They do chat to each other. But the pleasurable moments of chatting are always infused with freedom, desire and power. In the vignette, there are moments of conflicting agendas and desires:-each one in pursuit of getting gender right in terms of traditional masculinity and femininity. But these are also infused with transgressive moments:

Me Do you play with girls, Warren?

Warren Nope.

Amy Yes he does. We chase them all the time.

Me Do you play with Amy?

Warren (smiling)Yes, I play with Amy but she's not my friend...

In this scene, power and opportunities for resisting the categories are made available. There are great pressures to conform to gender stereotypes. Warren does play with girls. The canon is compromised. His validation, though, occurs through constraint: he plays with Amy, but he won't (can't) make her his friend. Cross-gender friendships do exist, but they can't be named, or at least they can only be named in particular contexts and ways. Gender binaries or "gender separation is far from total" (Thorne 1993: 47). The need to refer to other boys limits Warren's ability to name and claim friendship with a girl. This suggests the pressure at age eight which he and others have come to bear in trying to get their gender right. Boys are made subject to the pressures of hegemonic masculinity where to be a normal boy involves the projection of a coherence which renders proximity to girls an ambiguous experience. Even birthday parties are gendered:

Bryce	...girls are just clumsy.
Me	What's clumsy about them?
Bryce	They just knock everything over.
Warren	I won't invite girls to my party.
Megan	I had a party and I invited 2 boys.
Me	Warren, were there only boys at your party?
Warren	No.
Megan	He plays with us and he catches us all the time.
Me	So why didn't you invite them to your party so you could play catches?
Warren	Cos..cos they're slow.
Megan	No we're not.
Amy	No we aren't...

Clearly, the boys seem to have higher investments than girls in getting their gender right. For Megan there do not appear to be high costs involved in inviting boys to her party. The boys, though, are subject increasingly to the pressures of getting their gender right, and struggle to maintain the illusion of it. The issue is the different content of what is right and its rules. The boys try to assert their masculinity through discourses and

practices of misogyny. The girls though challenge and contest them. These ordinary chats are significant and of great value in opening up the space for power and pleasurable moments in the classroom.

I examine the following extract to illustrate tenuous power positions as they occurred at Westridge School.

Me            Why don't you want to work together?  
Tyron        Sometimes boys and girls understand things differently.  
Me            Like what?  
Tyron        Like painting and computers.  
Me            How do you mean? Can't girls paint?  
Tyron        Yes, my mom paints. She paints flowers.  
Me            So what else?  
Tyron        At computer time they're so slow.  
Leila        No, I'm not. I beat Zo.  
Tyron        Ya, but you are sometimes...  
Me            But can they paint and play with computers?  
Tyron        Yes I think so.

In this incident, Tyron's power is invested in displacing girls to a subordinate position with regard to painting and computers. But race and class are intertwined in the construction of identity. Computers and painting constitute the social repertoire within and through which gender identity is constructed. Computers, for example, equate with specific class commodities and are racialised. Tyron's race, gender and class explains why he makes the connection with specific commodities and why he privileges them. These are commodities that are more readily available to him as a middle-class consumer. Through these connections he reproduces the stereotypical image of girls and women as less than able, thus making his way of doing art and computers more attractive. There are contradictions. His investment in art is compromised through reference to his mother's ability to paint flowers. Leila too breaks the canon and claims a position of power. She

is faster than Zo. Tyron's investment in computers is compromised but it happens within a discourse which positions girls and women as less than capable with computers. He agrees that she is capable with computers but only sometimes. He thus specifies the limits to what she can achieve. Computers position boys within a social practice hegemonically regarded as a man's domain and it is regarded as a desirable way of being a male. Tyron tries to position himself within this esteemed domain. Elkjaer (1992) suggest that boys are seen as hosts in information technology and feel a need to maintain their dominant position regarding their masculinity: "It is threatening to their gender identity if they are not allowed to" (Jones and Smart 1995: 159). Leila says that she "beat Zo". Zo's position is threatened. Leila's power temporarily shifts the domain which he tries to hold for himself. Zo's lack and Leila's power represent the challenge to forms of masculinity which try to position women as other, and less able, but they are always contestable as the following vignette illustrates:

*I am sitting with Lauren, Kayla, Megan, Marian, Shaun and Tim.*

Me            Are you working on your own or with the girls Tim?

Tim           Not with the girls.

Shaun        No girls.

Me            Why?

Tim           Cos...

Me            Megan why don't you work with the boys?

Megan       I don't work with boys.

Me            Why?

Megan       Boys talk too much.

Tim           She's a kitten.

Megan (laughs) And you're **a tiger without teeth** (emphasis added).

Tim           You're a kitten. You're a kitten...

The everyday experiences of young children suggest pushing the boundaries and transgressing the norms of classroom life. Constant bickering is part of the routine of

everyday school life, as the above extract demonstrates. This challenges the idea of gender boundaries and the teacher's desire for "good" classroom management. Teachers are constantly saying "be good, be quiet, no noise, no talking" and in doing so they suppress the power contests. They also suppress cross-gender chats and bickering which are the spaces through which hegemonic discourse is simultaneously enabled and constrained.

Tim and Megan try to position themselves within the boy/girl dichotomy as separate and apart; however they do work together in their constant and humorous battles with each other. For both Tim and Megan this provides the opportunity to produce their own pleasures. Tim tries to position Megan as a kitten, attaching explicit passive value to it. Megan's "tiger without teeth" response suggests that Tim's projection of himself as not kitten but tiger is without substance. The tigers do not possess power but power is fluid, rendering tiger and kitten position for both boys and girls. In this humorous way power is made contingent, tentative and unpredictable. Tim is not with power as Megan is not without it. Both have power and exercise it. Their bickering is not without pleasure as both laugh and tease each other. It is through these daily subversive activities that power is being constantly positioned and re-positioned. It is through their interaction that tigers (which represent the dominant masculinity in the classroom) are sometimes rendered toothless. The following vignette illustrates this further:

Bryce	We [Warren and Asante] share answers but not with Amy.
Me	Why?
Bryce	Amy is greedy. She doesn't like us. She shouts at us and she bosses us around.
Dylan	Me too, I don't like Amy. She bosses me around.
Amy	Liar, liar you're greedy. You took my Astros and you finished most of it.

Amy claims power: "She bosses us around". It appears that Amy has been able to shift power in her favour. She is the tiger. I observed that Amy relished bickering with the

boys in the group as powerful moments, but it occurred not without difficulties for her. The boys collectively formed a strategic force against her. They did not want to share answers with her. But Amy was in the top group for maths and reading. The international literature shows that girls are constructed as more successful than boys at primary school levels (Francis 1998: 166; Yates 1997). Amy was caught between two contradictory desires. She wanted to be the boss, but she wanted to be with the group. Her desire to be the boss came from what she could accomplish as boss. Dylan had taken too much of her astros. Significantly, the astros suggest the cross gender sharing. I wonder if Amy would have been less angry if Dylan had not eaten most of them. Amy had shouted and screamed at him. As boss she could do that and it invested her with power. Crossing the boundaries meant that Amy faced the dilemma of being limited by the strategic solidarity that the boys had put up. She was able to be boss but the extent to which she was boss was clear. The boys prevented her from sharing answers with them. The limits of Amy the boss, happens through a power battle:- bickering, calling each other names like greedy, liar. Name-calling is a powerful means through which power battles occur; name calling is an injury. In this vignette, I have tried to show that Amy was constructed as a tiger but lacked the teeth (the sex?) to maintain it. Amy had constantly to bicker as a means of negotiating power relations. To be a boss was a desirable position, but there were clear dangers in being the boss.

### **(Hetero)sexuality and Children**

This section explores the salience of sexuality in the lives of young children and deconstructs earlier discourses which try to fit children into barren worlds without the ability to make sense of their gender (and sexuality). Recent international research shows how sexuality matters for young children in the early years of schooling (Epstein 1997; 1999; King 1997; Tobin 1997; Yelland 1998; Renold 2000; Grieshaber and Cannella 2001). In this part of the thesis, I highlight the early years of schooling as a key cultural arena for the production and reproduction of sexuality and sexual identities, by addressing what is absent from teacher portrayals of young children in the early years of schooling. The main argument here is that children are active makers of sex/gender

identities. Children actively produce and reproduce their sexual identities whether teachers intend this or not (Redman 1994). Specifically, I examine the enactments of sexual identities through the “heterosexual matrix” (Butler, 1990), and through which masculinity and femininity are embedded. This section explores how dominant notions of (hetero)sexuality underscore children’s identity work.

From the first days in the field, I became increasingly aware of the ways in which boys and girls invested in heterosexual masculinity and femininity. This involved investing in heterosexual teasing, girlfriends, kissing, love letters and daily rituals which included playing heterosexual games. “Heterosexual idioms might seem to unite the genders but when used in teasing contexts, these idioms create risks that drive girls and boys apart” (Thorne 1993: 53; Thorne and Luria 1993). This study confirms this and is evident in the following extract:

- Claudia. I don’t like boys. They whinge. They nag. That’s why I never told my mum to have a brother...that’s why I have a sister.
- Brandon What happens if I come to stay with you?
- Claudia Then I will tell you to find another woman.
- Lizette (interrupting) Do you know what my sister said? She has a date (laughing).
- Claudia Don’t embarrass us!
- Lizette Yes...with a boy and his name is Morne. Don’t laugh Claudia, its true.

*A little later.*

- Claudia. Nicholas loves girls because he always copies them
- Nicholas. You love boys.
- Claudia. You love girls.
- Nicholas. Sometimes I hate girls. They get me into trouble.

- Claudia. And I won't forgive you for calling me a cow... Sometimes I like boys and sometimes I hate them. Nicholas loves me but I'm not marrying him.
- Me. Why not?
- Claudia. Because he's a pain. He comes and does this to me... *(Claudia imitates the sounds of kissing)*... It makes me vomit ... it makes me disgusted. It's so embarrassing... *(giggling.)*

These snatches of heterosexual dynamics were played out at Westridge Primary School between two white children. My data captures episodic and momentary spaces which materialize (as quickly as they vanish) in unexpected places and at unexpected times and through which gender (and sexual) identities are produced and regulated. All of this was captured as I sat listening to this conversation. In my presence, the introduction of “taboo” subjects involving kissing and dating provided a successful strategy for children to challenge both the dominant discourses on childhood manifest within teaching discourses, and my authority as an adult (Walkerdine 1981). The above exchange serves to deconstruct earlier notions of childhood innocence and suggests that talk about marriage, dating, kissing are fun and pleasurable moments which bring the genders together but also throw them apart. Heterosexual teasing, for example, took the shape of “you like” and “you love” followed by laughter and giggles. Claudia invests in a heterosexual future and it connects to power and masculinity. Power is manifest in sex-based harassment (being called a cow, the kiss) but it is made invisible through the naturalization of heterosexuality. Claudia finds pleasure in heterosexuality, but at the same time ‘it makes her vomit’.

Heterosexuality is an integral part of hegemonic masculinity, but for young boys aged generally between seven and nine it is a tenuous experience. As young boys they have to distance themselves from girls but at the same time invest in heterosexuality, which renders proximity to girls an ambiguous experience. Heterosexual teasing is a means through which young boys become vulnerable to attack. I consider these issues in the

section below. First I examine boys and heterosexuality. Next I consider girls and heterosexuality as they experience, negotiate and maintain sexual (and gendered) identities.

### **Boys and Heterosexuality**

#### *Girls and Girlfriends: Misogyny and Heterosexuality*

In this section I explore how boys appropriate discourses which resist dominant discourses on childhood but at the same time learn to (re)produce adult male ways of being. The construction of masculine identities, draws upon a range of complex heterosexual discourses, such as the identification and distinction of “girlfriends” and “girls as friends” (Connolly 1995). This is different from boys in more senior phases of school where it is more assumptive and acceptable (but also ambiguous) to be boyfriends, make overt sexual advances and ask girls out (Renold 2000).

Me	Who is your friend Shaun?
Shaun	Vikal is
Vikal (smiling and teasing)	Jess, Jess, Jess
Shaun	She's not my friend.
Vikal	What's the other girl's name? Jessica and...
Scott	Mary Anne, Sarah ...
(laughter in the group)	
Shaun (denies this loudly)	No
Scott (laughing)	Yes they are.
Me	Vikal, do you have girl friends?
Vikal	No (dragging tone).
Me	Why?
Vikal	Because <b>girls don't exist.</b>

John I'm a friend of a girl but an older girl. I know one day I was playing with Scott and I showed a girl my hat. I don't know why. Her name's Monique.

Scott Why are you talking about me like that?

Shaun Ja, why?

Jessica (interrupting) Boys don't exist. Boys don't exist.

Vikal No, girls don't exist.

Me Why do you say that?

Vikal 'Cos girls don't exist.

Me Don't you like girls, Vikal?

Vikal No.

Me Why not?

Vikal I don't know.

Me Do other boys play with girls?

*The boys giggle*

Vikal Polly likes Jess. Polly likes Jess.

Me So girls do exist?

Vikal Okay, ya sometimes

This vignette at Westridge Primary School occurred amidst giggling, laughing, teasing, and joke-telling. Being a friend of a girl was not seen as “normal” and a threat to the formation of masculine identities. Vikal, the only Indian boy amongst white boys, teases, mocks and laughs at Shaun about his presumed heterosexual interest in Mary Ann, Sarah and Jessica. This is a source of humour for the boys. These are also expressions of envy based on the heterosexual understanding that males are affirmed by having girl-friends. Humour and teasing have been identified as an instance of a stylized form of heterosexual masculinity (Kehily and Nayak 1997). In fact, Nayak and Kehily (1996; 2001), claim that sexuality is an uncertain realm which gives rise to joke telling and hyperbolic performance. It is the chief means through which girls are brought into the boys' worlds as “girlfriends”. Throughout this study, teasing and mocking about girlfriends is a key to boys' production of heterosexual masculine identities.

Shaun is publicly mocked and faces temporary humiliation. The boy/ girl boundary is blurred but it happens amidst humiliation, teasing and the objectification of girls as 'girlfriends'. Girls are brought into humorous discussion as girlfriends ("Polly likes Jess") and provides a crucial means through which masculinities are forged. Vikal ridicules Shaun for his interest in Jess: "Polly likes Jess". Vikal's ridicule and teasing is an attempt to police the boundaries of acceptable forms of masculinity. Vikal suggests that girls exist, "ya sometimes", as they are objectified in heterosexual performances. Outside their role of girlfriends, girls as friends "don't exist". To have a girl as a friend could bring the ideal masculinity crumbling down (Connolly 1995: 183). The boys in this vignette do boundary work by vehemently denying association/friendship with girls.

However, John declares his association with girls, but he says this is an "older girl". He justifies this because he assumes that he would be less at risk. He can't be interested in her because she is older. This serves to shield him from mockery. The older girl can be his friend but presumably not in the heterosexual way. The contradiction emerges as he claims that he showed a girl his hat while playing with Scott. Scott reacts against this and Shaun supports him against John. In this way resistance through togetherness is accomplished. The collectivity of masculine constructions is not an individual choice but a collective project. Collectivity or being in this together is a key feature of how children relate to each other and provides the space within which to "validate and amplify masculine reputations" (Mac an Ghaill 1994: 53). Collective action is thus a means through which Scott and Shaun heavily guard and defend their reputations. To have a girl as a friend is not deemed to be part of hegemonic masculinity. Shaun and Scott's defence, or border work, is an attempt quickly to resuscitate their lost pride. Thus for boys in grades one and two, girls could be objectified heterosexually through teasing, mocking and humour, thus forging masculine identities. Heteronormative desire is thus mimicked through the objectification of girlfriends. At the same time, though, overt heterosexual practices, such as being a boyfriend, is not considered normal for young boys. This renders proximity to girls (even within the discourse of heterosexuality) an ambiguous experience which is different in later years of primary school, where it is

assumptive to ask girls out (Renold 2000). Heterosexual desirability is thus the means through which girls are included, but overall they are belittled by boys who seek recourse to misogynistic mockery. In this case the boys' contradictions lie in their ambivalent attitude towards their proximity to girls which at any given time could give rise to teasing associated with misogyny and/or an expression of boys' heterosexual masculinity (Renold 2000).

The following extract further illustrates the confusions with regard to girl friends:

Me           Who are your friends Shaun?  
Shaun       O well there are quite a few.  
Michael     My friend at break is right over here  
Scott       So is mine (pointing at Scott)  
Michael     Yes, we are friends. We share knowledge of dangerous creatures...

As I have described earlier, the boys create a sense of togetherness which Mac an Ghaill (1994:56) describes as "sticking together". Here sticking together is accomplished through "knowledge of dangerous creatures" and it creates solidarity.

Me           And girls?  
Michael     mmmm. ...Naa. A few, ya, but they're not girl friends exactly.  
Shaun       Just a friend. You can't get married at this age.  
Me           So you would only have a girlfriend if you're wanting to get married?  
Michael     Yes, ya.  
Shaun       You only start getting a girlfriend when you're 17 or 20.  
Michael     No. My dad had a girlfriend when he was only 15. That was my mom. He married her. Her friend had an older sister who was beautiful, and my mom told my dad, and then the girl, who had a zillion boyfriends, she was the beautiful one, was going to go out

with my dad, and she asked her sister if my mom could go out with my dad instead. Okay, eventually my mom and my dad got married.

Me I can't understand why you can't have girls that are friends as well.

Michael I used to. I used to have 5.

Me And now?

Michael ne ne ne

Me Why?

Michael Not anymore. I'm still too young...

Heterosexual desire is mobilised around developmental discourses of maturity to account for changes in the ways that boys learn to relate to girls, which the boys in the above exchange argue occurs at ages 15-17. A certain age appears to function as a threshold for developing a wider range of behaviours and an acceptance of particular forms of heterosexual masculinity. The boys position themselves currently as non-sexual and exalt the "children are children discourse" as non-gendered and non-sexed people: "too young" or "you can't get married at this age" or you get a girlfriend when you're "17 or 20". In this way the boys mobilise the developmental discourse of maturity to account for what boys can do when they are 17 or 20 years old. This position as non-sexual seems to make misogyny acceptable. Girls are thus objectified as girlfriends (as I have illustrated earlier). Yet cross-gender friendships are possible, as Michael indicates, but they are increasingly subject to the pressures of hegemonic masculinity which involves the projection of an abiding boy whose proximity to girls is a tenuous experience. These are ambivalent moments. The boys constructed themselves as non-sexual but their masculinity is constructed around misogyny and heterosexuality. Thus the struggle to achieve hegemonic masculinity is always a contradictory experience.

Michael provides this illustration by placing himself and others in advance of their ages. By referring to his parents' teen romance, Michael positions himself and others (both boys and girls) as preliminaries in the compulsory heterosexual matrix. This happens through the love 'n marriage discourse: the romantic heterosexual plot. Michael knows

how to make the narrative work: love-and-then-marriage. But the romantic plot also needs villains and, in this case, the “bitch”, who Michael does not name but constructs: “the girl who had a zillion boyfriends. She was the beautiful one, was going to go out with my dad...” She is not the one who is lumped with his father. The binary order of good (his mother) and bad (the bitch) provides Michael with a discourse which disapproves of the girl with a zillion boyfriends. Michael’s production of his heterosexuality is located between the discourses of the romantic, happy mother-father couplet, and so produces a patriarchal discourse of love ‘n marriage. Moreover, good girls do not have a “zillion boyfriends”. The sexual objectification of women, the degradation of the bitch, is a means through which Michael asserts his heterosexual dominance as he and the others claim sexual innocence. In this way, girl as friend is further inhibited by the imputations of a sexual basis to a friendship (Thorne 1993; Jordan 1995).

Not all the boys engaged in the “too young to know” discourse. This emerges in the following extract:

Simphiwe      Girls smell. They give us diseases. Their armpits smell. Girls tease boys. The boys don’t sleep with the girls because the girls stink.

At KwaDabeka Primary School, I sat chatting to a group of boys in Mrs. L’s classroom. Simphiwe, a poor working class black boy, and his friends were conducting this conversation in the presence of an adult female, as I asked them about girls. In this sense Simphiwe’s claim about girls is a public performance which is for my benefit as much as it is for the benefit of the boys in the group. Simphiwe’s ability to talk about sexuality challenged dominant discourses on childhood, and in doing so he blurred relations with me as adult female. In my presence, the introduction of taboo or adult subjects provided a successful strategy for challenging presumptive innocence. It is with this in mind that the transcript above and those that follow need to be understood. Not all boys spoke in overtly abusive ways.

Simphiwe is eight years old. He learns how to be adult male in advance of his age as he performs adult ways of being, showing unequal gender power relations. In this process girls are objectified in advance of their ages as passive sexual objects of male desire. At the same time the sex talk worked to validate masculinity publicly to his male friends (Mac an Ghail 1994: 92). Misogyny and the sexual objectification of girls thus work to subordinate women in general, confirming a hegemonic heterosexual masculinity for boys by making them act like men and enabling them to try out adult patterns of conduct, which is crucial for the (re)production of sex/gender relations. Misogyny and sexual objectification of women thus works to reinforce boys' heterosexual dominance.

At Umhlatuzana Primary School I sat with a group of boys and girls and Ricky said: "Tristan says the he's got a bakkie key and he takes his girlfriend for a ride". This works as a public validation of heterosexual masculinity for the boys and for girls, which serves to reinforce dominant heterosexual masculinity while sexually objectifying girlfriends. Taking a "bakkie key" for an eight year old boy is a way of asserting a dominant masculinity and is evidence of risk taking. Ricky confirms Tristan's risk-taking and is approved. By confirming the "bakkie key" which Tristan presumably has, Ricky is able to establish Tristan's credentials within the social organization of masculinity and one which he approves (Salisbury and Jackson 1996; Connell 1995). Mills (2001: 55) claims that the extent to which a boy can demonstrate his willingness to engage in risky business is significant in placing him within a hierarchy.

This context surrounded the following conversation with Ricky and Zo:

Me	Ricky, Zo tells me that you have many girlfriends.
Ricky	No, except for one.
Me	Who?
Ricky	Angel, and Zo is going to marry her.
Me	And who are you going to marry?
Ricky	Angel.

Me            So both of you want to marry Angel?  
Ricky        Ya.  
Me            And what did you say to her?  
Ricky        The same thing that Zo said.  
Me            And what was that?  
Ricky        I love you.  
Me            Do you really love her?  
Ricky        Ya and Zo.  
Me            So who will she choose?  
Ricky        I don't know, but I sent her a letter.  
Me            A love letter?  
Ricky        Ya.  
Me            What did you say?  
Ricky        I love you.

As an eight-year-old boy Ricky is learning how masculinity and heterosexuality are linked. In the above extract Ricky acknowledges his heterosexual interest in Angel but it happens through validation: "The same thing that Zo said". Ricky is able to assert his heterosexuality by positioning himself with Zo, and this serves as a confirmation of boys' heterosexual masculinity. The unison counts. The validation, however, occurs through confusion. Ricky and Zo did not tease each other about Angel. In fact, the love letter serves to instantiate the heterosexual practice. It is easy to see how Angel became the passive object of their love: the object for a boy. However, there is much more that is going on here. Ricky and Zo are in "friendly" competition for Angel. Heterosexuality was not simply about the object of love but the competition between the boys. Angel's position is rendered simultaneously powerful and powerless: objectified but silently powerful. She decides who. She holds the power. Ricky positioned himself with power and asserted his heterosexual masculinity, but he was rendered less powerful because he was confronted with the knowledge that Angel makes the choice. If Angel so desired it could be Zo but it could also be neither.

The data in this section shows how boys appropriate and re-work masculine identities in/through heterosexual discourses. Moreover, the data vividly illustrates the ability of children as young as six to produce and reproduce gendered (sexual) identities as active agents. The boys spoke about girls and sexuality as the data suggests. The predominance of meaning given to sexuality and to girls was influenced by my presence as adult female researcher. In the making of masculine identities, the boys were aware of me as female researcher. They were able momentarily to subvert adult-child relations through which their masculine status was maintained. However the data captured is not simply representative of their identities. The boys across the schooling sites did not engage in such discussions on a continuous basis. Their conversations also ranged from computer games, fighting, rugby, cricket, soccer, herding, toys, Batman and Robin, racing cars, guns, police cars. Here is an example of such conversations I had with Raven in Umhlatuzana School:

Raven            My best toy is my police car. It's red and blue and it's got four coloured lights. It takes two big batteries.

The construction of masculinities thus occurs through a range of mechanisms through which boys' claim to hegemonic masculinity has constantly to be won through asserting "fast life," including knowledge of police cars.

The next section explores how girls challenge, contest and maintain sex/gender identities.

### **Girls and Heterosexuality**

When I first arrived and took my place in Mrs. D's classroom, Samantha came to me and said, "I like your nail polish". I was struck by this simple statement because my nails were not polished, yet Samantha thought they were.

From the very early days of my research, I was increasingly aware of the ways in which girls invested in the production of heterosexuality. Samantha, a white girl, recognised

some of the feminine and heterosexual links between herself and me. Another reading of Samantha was that she was looking at women through the eyes of an eight-year-old girl: wearing nail polish and making herself attractive for heterosexual relationships: a future for herself perhaps? I became the validation of the desirable heterosexual “nail varnished” image. I could not avoid from the very start of my study, the heterosexual matrix through which children were fashioning their gendered selves (as I myself was performing heterosexuality). The girls in this study took pleasure in the projection of their desirability. At Westridge Primary School I heard the following comment from Angelique: “I’m going to wear my Barbie outfit. It is purple with stars”. On another occasion Stacy told me that she was going to her uncle’s wedding in Nelspruit: “I’m wearing a beautiful white dress for my uncle’s wedding”. While femininities were produced and regulated within the normative heterosexual standards of desirability, many girls achieved a sense of agency and power as they spoke about clothing. The significant referents were their mothers and boys. It could be argued that girls learn adult female ways of being in looking heterosexually desirable. This deconstructs earlier teaching discourses of childhood innocence. At Westridge Primary School, Angelique had brought glitter and as I sat with Angelique and Mary Ann they ‘secretly’ opened it and tried it out on their palms. By break time and through gossip most of the girls in the classroom had come to know about the glitter and Angelique had a sense of power as she showed it to the girls. Bringing objects to school was strictly prohibited at Westridge Primary School unless it was for “Show and Tell” activities. The glitter projected heterosexual desirability. I noticed how all the girls cooed over Angelique, trying to get a feel of the body glitter, and her power to choose who could try it. The real sense of agency and power were achieved in contradicting discourses of childhood innocence, breaking the “rules” by bringing prohibited objects to school. Moreover, the disruption of adult-child relations was clear, as I sat observing the glitter with full knowledge that these objects were prohibited in school.

The girls (and boys) in this study are not generally sexually active or aware, as older children in the primary school often are, but their sexuality is suffused within the ordinary everydayness of school life (Epstein 1999), which is pleasurable but also caught

up and naturalised in the processes of heterosexuality. Here is an illustration of the ordinary constructions of everyday sexuality:

Keith            Girls are just chatterboxes.  
Angel            I don't have girlfriends or boyfriends.  
Keith            How can you have a girlfriend? Girls can't kiss girls.  
Angel            I won't kiss a girl, silly.

In this vignette, dominant notions of heterosexuality involve the projection of an abiding heterosexual self which is related to homophobia. As the boys and girls live out the gendered categories of boys and girls, sexuality underscores the conversation. Keith's power within the wider discourses of patriarchy is made visible as he marginalises girls as "chatterboxes". But his power is fragile. The ambivalence is created the moment heterosexuality appears to be undermined. Keith resorts to policing Angelique to validate his heterosexuality through her. In the pursuit of his own masculinity, heterosexual identification was crucial which is why he resorts to "girls can't kiss girls"- a fear and contempt of homosexuality. Girls kissing girls (lesbianism) threatens patriarchy. His heterosexual desirability can only be validated through heterosexualised others such as Angel. Even at this age the pressure for heteronormativity is present which also prevents boy/girl friendships (Renold 2000). Renold claims that girls whose femininity rests on "heterosexual desirability and the securing of boyfriends" suffer from "age-old sexual inequalities" and "feelings of anxiety and despair" (323). "I won't kiss a girl, silly" is Angel's production of femininity through the heterosexual regulation. In this way Angelique learns to be a "girl" through the naturalised process of heterosexuality. Her response that you have to kiss a boy invests her with a proper heterosexual femininity. Are these not the manifestations of age-old sexual inequalities? The girls, as young children, are not as yet subject to the despair and the anxiety that accompanies the heterosexual gaze of being dumped and used, as Renold (ibid) notes. But school sites are active in the (re)production of these heterosexual identities. Angel's sense of power is achieved as she is not repulsed by kissing (but homophobic kissing). Competent heterosexual performances are necessary to be seen as getting gender right. It could be

argued that by implication heterosexual kissing is less taboo, even for eight-year-olds. This contradicts earlier discourses of childhood innocence.

Gender and sexuality are foregrounded in classroom talk, as the next vignette illustrates. Here is data from a conversation between Mariella and myself:

Mariella	Miss Bhana do you know what a ting-a-ling is?
Me	No
Mariella (whispering)	It's that down there. It's a willy
Me	Oh!
Mariella	Do you have a boyfriend?...Do you do the French kiss with him?...
Me	mmm....No

Children know and live gender through the intersection and intimacy with sexuality whether teachers intend this or not. My response to Mariella suggests my own complicity in the discourse of childhood innocence, as I sat there not knowing what to say, as power relations were subverted. Mariella's femininity is invested with heterosexual desire. This involved heterosexual ideals: having a boyfriend, doing the French kiss and her knowledge of the penis. Of course, Mariella knows that sexual activity is supposedly adult and I become the representation of something in advance of her age. Like Samantha, there are links between me and her and femininity. These are (hetero) pleasurable moments for Mariella. But they are also power moments through which she is able to exceed the frameworks of innocence and her relations with me as adult. She had the freedom in the classroom to position herself (and me) as appropriate to heterosexual desires. All of this operates within a discourse of childhood innocence. I did mention to Mrs. B that Mariella had asked me about the kiss. This is how she responded:

Mrs B	Well, I'm not surprised. You know the type of family that Mariella comes from...she's from Argentina...
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Mariella has come under attack for having dangerous sexual knowledge and dismissed. Mrs. B tries to make sense of this through the construction of Latin-Americans (Argentineans) as sexually aberrant. This cultural reductionist approach may be traced to the mythical Spaniard Don Juan. Mariella becomes the threat to childhood innocence. The problem is Mariella's emanating from her national cultural being. The girl with sexual knowledge transgresses the discourse of childhood innocence. Mrs. B's need to erase sexuality (the erotic) is clear but her drive is unsuccessful. The fiction of the discourse has been revealed. Sexuality is actively constructed: an ordinary everyday experience is brought under siege by degrading sexual knowledge (which appears to be the domain of Don Juan machismo). In other words, allegiance to childhood innocence belies the fear of sexual knowledge. For Mrs. B the suggestion of dangerous sexual knowledge smashes the 'sanctity' of innocence. Mariella's knowledge is frowned upon and reduced to something degrading as she exceeds the boundaries of innocence and as she invests power for herself. The core concern here is that excessive sexual knowledge is dangerous because it suggests erosion of innocence. However it also suggests the passion for ignorance in the education of children (Silin 1997; Tobin 1997; Epstein 1999). "Ignorance in children is equated with innocence, then precocious sexual knowledge suggests defilement and culpability" (Tobin 1997: 138). The children are aware of this as the following extract illustrates:

Me            Do you really write the love letters?  
Catherine    I do, but don't tell Mrs. D.  
Me            I promise I won't. What did you write?  
Catherine    (giggling) I love Michael. I hate Shaun. He swears.

Catherine took pleasure in talking about the love letter and projecting her heterosexual desirability but her agency occurs with the knowledge that love-talk is taboo. Her power and agency were produced through the love letter and love talk. It can be argued that Catherine being "in love" contradicted the "innocent kids" discourse. However, Catherine's power is contradictory. While she was able to contradict the official

discourse, her femininity is produced precisely through the love letter, which came to represent the hard copy of the heterosexual male gaze. I illustrate these issues further:

Warren        Amy writes love letters. She says she loves me. I love girls  
Me             What does love mean?  
Warren        Marriage and caring  
Amy (laughing)It means kissing... (whispering), sex.  
Warren        Shh Amy! That's the f-word.  
Me             What is?  
Warren (quietly)Not so loud. Shhh.. Don't tell Mrs. A... it's "fuck"  
Me             What does that mean?  
Warren        Kissing and stuff...

What I want to emphasise here is not only the heterosexual construction of femininity but also the point that talk about marriage, caring, kissing and fucking are not rare and unexceptional moments in the lives of children, but part of the mundane complexity through which they live their everyday lives. But they whisper and they are afraid of the teacher. They know that school is not a safe place to talk about sex, yet they do. Their power is enabled within a condition of constraint. Sexual knowledge and young children are together seen to be unthinkable, unsayable and inaudible (Tobin 1997). But they know it, as they are produced amongst other places in the family, at home and here at school. The early years of schooling is one site in the colliding (re)production of sexual identities. Sexuality becomes a private matter in the public domain of schooling (Epstein 1994) and rendered inaudible. The extract, though, suggests the salience of sexual knowledge in their lives.

Part of the heterosexual activity is the writing of love letters: Amy loves Warren. The love letter functions as the instantiation of the boyfriend-girlfriend subject position. The writing of the love letter suggests Amy's availability as heterosexually desirable and of the power she has in exceeding the boundaries of classroom discourse. At the same time the writing of the letter invests her with a proper heterosexual femininity.

Breaking the myth of innocence, the children show in this vignette the practice of heterosexuality. They “know” that talk about sex and love are forbidden but this does not prevent them from love talk. The children are learning that sexual knowledge is something to be hidden and “somehow taboo” (Epstein and Johnson 1998: 164) and through which their sexuality is forged, as they cloak their desires and pleasures in constraint.

For Warren, love, marriage and caring are seen to be embedded within each other. Amy, though, conflates love with heterosexual activity: kissing and sex. As agentic subjects, both Amy and Warren position themselves with power. However, “fuck” is on Warren’s side, not Amy’s. It is Warren who says that “sex is fuck”. Fucking rather than kissing implies the possible construction of masculinity based on hard aggressive objectification of women (Holland, et al 1993). Could it also be the reason why Catherine prefers Michael and not Shaun who swears?

Is this the cycle of men’s sexual domination over women? Amy’s power in producing herself for heterosexual desire enables at the same time the construction of power over her. Within the discourses which compete for meaning about love, both Amy and Warren produce and negotiate meaning through the heterosexual matrix. Warren, like Amy, is in a contradictory position: love is caring but love can also be fucking, which is the dominant and powerful but dangerous subject position associated with the wider discourses of patriarchy. Sex as fuck discourse is a defence against any form of vulnerability or effeminacy and a means to demonstrate acceptable masculinity.

### **Playing (Hetero) sexual Games**

#### *Kissing and Farting*

Children’s play is complexly gendered (Thorne 1993; Grugeon 1993; MacNaughton 1999; Epstein 1998; Tobin 1997; Connolly 1995). In Chapter 4, I provided examples of

rhymes that pervade the playgrounds of the schools I researched. These songs and rhymes are sung mostly by girls. They included “I’m a little Dutch girl”, “When Suzie was a baby”, “Girls are sexy”; “My mother, your mother”, “Apples on treetop”, “There’s a party around the corner”, “Hambha tenga Omo”, “Gym Gym bafana” and Ije” (see Appendix... for a full list of the rhymes). Thorne (1993), suggests that children learn to become gendered (and heterosexual) through play. As they play at kissing, love, marriage and babies, children show themselves and others what they think about boys (and men) and what girls (and women) can and should do. What did the girls think the word “sexy” meant at the end of the rhyme: girls are sexy? Why did the girls clap this rhyme and the boys stand aside watching, sometimes mocking or playing ball?

Gender (and heterosexuality) was performed through rhymes and clapping:

Emma and Dave [names are always changed]

Sitting on a tree

K I S S I N G [alphabets are recited]

First comes love then comes marriage.

Then comes the baby in the golden carriage.

That’s not all That’s not all.

Then comes the baby drinking alcohol [can be changed to playing basketball].

Confronted with these discourses of gender and their related implications for femininity the girls can be seen to be reproducing love ‘n marriage discourse without consciously thinking of it as such. Here the girls can be seen as preparing for the heterosexual courtship and its associated activities which include marriage. They are also preparing for the kitchen sinks, babies and buckets to come (Rhedding-Jones 1994: 222). Yet, the cacophony of sounds and rhythmic clapping associated with the rhymes were not audible as heterosexual discourses in schools but as natural and just what girls do. Epstein (1999: 31), however, suggests that the rhymes “certainly produce part of a culture of heterosexuality in which girls grow up to be women who marry men, go on honeymoon, have babies and otherwise perform their gendered, heterosexual female parts.” In other

words, through the rhymes they are not simply clapping and singing, they are also exploring their positionings in gendered society. They do this by the narrative constructions of femininity. The rhymes that they sing can be seen as their own but also of other girls' past and present. They sing the rhymes with the support of the other girls. What amazed me was how the girls got the rhymes right so quickly as they entered grade one and became part of the schoolgirl culture. That they sing with the support of friends means that one girl gives another the point of access to a gendered discourse. Thus, the rhymes were heterosexually desirable through the validation of other girls. They enjoy it; they do it for their own enjoyment and for other girls. The girls took delight and pleasure in the fantasies that were projected through these rhymes. In this way, the insertion into the rhyming culture becomes a part of girl's early childhood experience through which particular forms of femininity were fashioned. However, they were able to position themselves with power over boys who stood watching and being mocking. The very public spaces of the school fields provided the space through which moments of power could be experienced, thus disrupting adult-child relations, disrupting innocence and subverting unequal gender power relations. While the rhymes became a means of reproducing particular feminine positions they were also validating and making tangible a range of alternative feminine positions. I illustrate this with another example from Umbumbulu Primary and at KwaDabeka Primary:

*Ofuna ukungigaxa*

*Makeze kithi*

*Hayi umfana*

*Sifuna intombazana*

*Ngoba umfana*

*Ushipa izidwedwe*

Translation

The one who wants to hug me must come to us.

Not a boy.

We want a girl,  
Because the boys are farting, filthy rags.

This rhyme can be seen as breaking free from the rigid stereotypes of love and marriage and thus testing out other ways of femininity. Hugging is not associated with heterosexual activity and is different from the norm. The girls make things happen for themselves to their advantage by associating boys with things that adults consider uncouth: farting dirty rags. This example is of laughing resistance to traditional forms of femininity; and the girls do laugh and shout as they perform this rhyme. The rhymes are powerful moments through which femininity is redefined and re-evaluated against the patriarchal investment in heterosexuality. Here normative meanings are defied and schoolgirls can triumph within the rude spaces that they make available for themselves. Newkirk (quoted in Tobin, 1997) writes that children's predisposition for poop jokes and farts can open up newer transgressive spaces in schools. The girls in this "farting rhyme" are no different. They open up spaces through which heterosexual patriarchy is challenged and play within the normative boundaries through which children are constructed as innocent and rule abiding. Within the normative boundaries of gender (and heterosexuality) they are not simply reproducing the school-girl culture which makes available a discourse preparing them for marriage, babies and husbands, but they have the potential to recast themselves as powerful. This potentiality is discussed further in the following section as some girls invest in "rudeness".

### *Show me the panties*

In this section, I show how "show me the panties" works to provide girls with a space to contest boys' domination.

I have suggested that the rhymes are contradictory discourses which serve to reproduce schoolgirl's heterosexual culture, but I have also suggested that within constraint the girls position themselves with power, which goes against the patriarchal discourses of the school. This make it impossible for schooling to ignore sexuality yet it is silenced

through the discourse of childhood innocence. Through rhymes, girls are able to transgress the normative boundaries under the convenient cover of childhood innocence. Through rude suggestions the girls are able to position their femininities in different ways.

The girls engaged in rhythmic performances in pairs or groups. Other girls and, sometimes, boys watched. They developed a sense of being together through which their collectivity was asserted. This was especially the case as they tried to create a space for themselves away from (the mocking and sometimes violent) boys. Fuelled by their desire to amuse themselves, and others and create a space for themselves they raised their panties to the boys. In response the boys would either move away or make misogynistic comments. I illustrate this through different cameos from KwaDabeka Primary School:

- (1) Khanyasile                      The girls don't swear at the boys because they are scared of them. We say, "he's mad in the head" and we show them our panties. (giggling).
- Me    And what do the boys do?
- Khanyasile                                They laugh and tease us.
- (2) Me                                        Do the girls show you their panties?
- Siyabonga                                Yes. They think that the boys love girls. They say "hey, do you love me?" and they mock us.
- Mncedo                                      The girls say, "He's mad in the head". They say voetsek. The girls say "come here and they raise their dresses". [He shows me what he means].
- (3) Me                                        Do you play with the girls, Sibonelo?
- Sibonelo                                    No.
- Me    Who do you play with?
- Sibonelo                                    Mbatha.
- Me    Why don't you play with the girls?

“Show me the panties” is a position which girls inhabit to make things happen for themselves. The above cameos suggest the constant struggles between boys and girls to make things happen to their own advantage. “Show me the pantie” is clearly a powerful moment of female conspiracy against (swearing) boys. Khanyasile suggests the unequal power relations. Girls are scared at school but they are not powerless. Their moment of power rests in “show me the panties,” which tries to create a safer place through which their desires can be lived out. The moment of power is enabled through constraint. Within constraint there exists a freer position which pushes the boundaries and transgresses the norms of patriarchy and childhood innocence of everyday school life. As they show the boys their panties, the girls laugh hilariously as if in a surge of camaraderie, a spirit of oneness joined by laughter. The boys react by saying, “voetsek,” and some move away while others just continually say, “voetsek, voetsek”. “Show me the panties” provided the girls with an opportunity to display their own power. The fact that this took place within a discourse through which girls are made to be scared of boys is a paradox. “Hey, do you love me?” is a power moment made to mock and humiliate boys, while paradoxically it happens within the power relations of heterosexuality. The girls are able to use the heterosexual discourse to their advantage while at the same time being positioned in it. “Show me the panties” questions the relative passivity and innocence of schoolgirl discourses (Walkerdine 1996).

“Show me the panties” is an ambivalent moment which is shocking both in terms of its explicit sexual reference and the power it asserts over the troublesome boys. The girls who are cast as powerless, scared of boys in general, scared of boys who swear in particular, are able to recast themselves as powerful in the public space of the school as they privately recast boys as powerless objects whom they humiliate through their performance. There are definite limits to this transgression. In South Africa sexual violence against schoolgirls is a daily experience. Girls are raped, sexually abused, sexually harassed and assaulted at school by male classmates and teachers (Human

Rights Watch, 2001; GETT, 1997). Legislative measures are important but not sufficient to eradicate sexual violence. It is important that teachers for example recognise sexual violence and take adequate measures to prevent sexual violation. The convenient cover of childhood innocence makes the recognition of sexual violence difficult. Yet schooling is associated with sexuality in rich ways (Epstein and Johnson, 1998).

In foregrounding heterosexual games I have argued that the early years of schooling is a key cultural arena for the production and reproduction of sexuality and sexual identities. Children are active makers of sex/gender identities through which unequal gender power relations are contested, challenged and maintained as groups of girls stick together.

Not all games are based on sticking together. There were different types of chasing and catching games in which gender is performed which carry explicit sexual meaning. One such game is based on entry into the classroom. Both boys and girls stand at the door. A girl that is selected has to kiss a boy if she wants to enter the classroom. If the girl refuses then the boys run after her. Another game was called *I propose*. In this game a girl starts the play by touching another girl's pinky (small finger) (Girl 2). Girl 1 says: "I propose that you hug and kiss Bongani (name of a boy). If the girl says "no" then Girl 1 hits Girl 2. Torture was not simply a boy's domain but girls too resorted to painful activities which constructed their femininities with hardness. If Girl 1 says "maybe" then she has to hug the boy. If she says "yes" then Girl 1 hugs and kisses the boy that has been proposed. Another game involved taking a girl's shoe and running. The girl runs after the boy and she has to kiss him in order to get her shoe back. This game in particular also involved running and catching which become transmuted into arenas of sexualised chasing. I consider kiss- kiss chase as the complex experience of sexualised chasing,

### **Kiss-Kiss Chase**

Kiss-kiss chase was not something I saw during playground activity, but it was talked about in the classroom:

- (1) Me Which pre-school did you go to?  
 Mariella Westridge Pre-primary.  
 Me And you, Keith?  
 Keith Westridge Pre-primary  
 Me So you two should be friends?  
 Mariella No.  
 Keith Yuck.  
 Me Why?  
 Mariella Yes, but just in class I talk to him, but I don't have any boy who is my friend. No.. my friends are girls.  
 Angelique No, Miss Bhana, Mariella does play with boys. We play kiss-kiss catches. Mariella runs after them.  
 Me Do you Mariella?  
 Mariella er ..Ja sometimes.  
 Me What's this kiss-kiss catches?  
 Angelique It's a kiss-kiss catching game. Mariella kissed Alex (laughing).  
 Mariella Angelique you're rotten.  
 Me So what is this game?  
 Mariella It's when girls are on, and boys are on.  
 Me Do you enjoy it?  
 Mariella Yes I do...
- (2) Me Do any of you play kissing catches?  
 Nguleko Yes we do.  
 Sarah But, Mrs. B doesn't know 'cos she said that it's not allowed.  
 Nguleko All the boys say, "can I play? Can I play?" and I say, " yes" because it's a fun game.  
 Me So what's this game?  
 Angelique The girls run and catch the boys and they catch the boy for me if I'm the queen and then we swap. The boys catch us.

Nicholas      O and then we kiss them on the lips.

Angelique     But Leo is the roughest. He is like a rugby player...

In both vignettes as they are played out at Westridge Primary School, kiss-kiss chase are described as pleasurable moments in children's lives. A major contradiction surrounding the production of children is the ambivalence regarding sexual knowledge and the "just kids" discourse. But kiss-kiss chase and other games are part of the school discourse, although at Westridge Primary it is not allowed. The rule did not prevent children from talking about it or playing the game. This actively challenged the authority of the teacher. As in the other (hetero) sexual games, gender difference in kiss-kiss chase was marked as a heterosexual binary. Kiss-kiss chase produced heterosexual desirability and was part of the complex network of heterosexual activities: Mariella kissed Alex, and Nicholas claims that boys kiss the girls on the lips, though sometimes the girls told me that the boys kissed their hands. For both boys and girls, kissing and kissing on the lips was an ordinary experience, but it happened within a discourse which tried to bring it under siege; "...cos she[Mrs B] said it was not allowed..."-perhaps another strategy not to deal with sexuality and children.

For the girls kiss-kiss chase provided the opportunity to perform heterosexuality. Within this matrix one girl was to be queen while the other girls were worker bees who had to do the hard work and catch the prey (boy) whom the queen had chosen. This highlights a power moment. Engaging in kiss-kiss catches did empower girls but it did so within the boundaries through which girls' heterosexuality was regulated. For example, kissing a boy meant facing the danger of being identified as less than innocent. This is clearly evident as Angelique lets the secret out and mocks Mariella for kissing Alex. Thus, the girls operated in contradictory discourses: constructing heterosexual femininities while guarding against overt heterosexuality. This web of double standards illustrates the contradictory discourses through which sexual identity is forged. The girls took pleasure in playing kiss-kiss chase which positioned them at one moment as desirable and at another as less than innocent in the regulation of their identities.

Kiss-kiss chase is invested with power relations. Angelique is wary of Zo who she constructs as a rugby player: wild and rough. I illustrate this with another cameo:

- Megan            Yes, except for the big boys. They [boys] are bullies. My big brother bullies me all the time. Girls aren't bullies.
- Bryce            Yes, except that they have long hair.
- Me                Do you play with girls, Bryce?
- Bryce            We play kissing catches.
- Me                What's that?
- Bryce (embarrassed) No, just catches.
- Megan            Don't lie Bryce. He always wants to play kissing catches. He always runs and doesn't give us a chance to eat our lunches...

Sexualised running occurs with knowledge of the “more general relation of gendered power” (Epstein, 1999: 33). While learning that kiss-kiss catches is an enjoyable and pleasurable moment entwined with power positions, the girls are also learning that its enjoyment happens within unequal relations of power.

This section has highlighted heterosexual games as a key feature in the production and regulation of sexual identities. Whether teachers intend it or not sexuality, pervades the early years of schooling and is a way through which children give meaning to their lives.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has drawn attention to the complex ways through which gender (and sexual) identities are forged in early schooling contexts. It shows that children are agentic and powerful, and in doing so they challenge earlier teaching discourses that construct them in a contrary light. Rather than attempting to offer a representative account of all children in the four schools under study, the chapter has drawn attention to experiences that articulate the varying degrees to which identities are constructed and regulated. It has highlighted how masculinity and femininity are embedded in the negotiation of (heterosexual) identities and how children's gender (and sexual) identities respond and contribute to dominant definitions of gender.

More importantly, this chapter has drawn attention to children's cultures as a key arena for the production and reproduction of gender identity and gender relations. In this it helps to develop and broaden our understanding of children as protesting and not blank sheets on which gender patterns are stamped. The making of gender identities is an active process which deconstructs teaching discourses which construct children as passive and innocent. The first part of the chapter explored hegemonic masculinity and femininity, and how children struggle as they learn adult ways of being. Conflict among boys and with girls often involves misogynist taunts which establish patterns of hierarchy and exclusion for both boys and girls. The second part of this chapter explored the salience of sexuality in children's lives. Early schooling is a powerful site in the (re)production of their sexual identities. Whether this is intended or not, it does materialise and provides pleasurable moments in the production and regulation of identities.

The next chapter focuses on how social conflicts between and amongst children turn to violence. The focus is on KwaDabeka Primary School.

## **Chapter 8**

### ***Ngizokushaya- Survival of the Fittest***

Chapter 3 outlined the context of poverty and violence at KwaDabeka Primary School. Chapter 6 elaborated this context and identified *tsotsi* and *yimvu* masculinities as a way of thinking about gender relations at the school. This chapter will explore these forms of masculinities. KwaDabeka Primary School highlights, the specific context of violent relations which is central to the way in which children's cultural dynamics are (re)produced. The chapter explores how masculinities and femininities are mediated and contested in violent relations. First I provide a brief context.

#### **Brief Context**

KwaDabeka School was highly challenging for me as a woman as I felt at risk in the familiar patterns of gender violence that mark black township life including high levels of rape and violence (Morrell 1998; 2001; Mama 2000). Apartheid played a major role in the racial construction of township life. In the post 1994 period, township life for most residents continues to be marked by poverty and associated vulnerability to unemployment and crime, which also fuels unequal gender relations. In these turbulent conditions a black masculinity emerged in black, urban, working-class areas during apartheid. Morrell (1998: 630) describes black masculinity as a "masculinity in which men lost jobs...their dignity and expressed their feelings of emasculation in violent ways" to sustain dominance over men and women. Within the structures of race and class inequalities, violent black masculinity was thus an adaptive response to the conditions of distress and economic dislocation. Such a "massive dispossession of social resources is hard to imagine without violence" (Connell 1995: 83) and in contemporary South Africa, with many legacies from apartheid, this is enacted in the form of high levels of violence among black men in townships. Historically the apartheid state had harnessed and deployed destructive masculinities for its own ends in the suppression of liberation struggles. Regular invasions of township areas was a common and violent

experience in the 1980's. These were launched on the principle that townships were unstable and potentially threatening to the apartheid state and needed to be kept under the panopticon but through regular and excessive show of force. The apartheid show of force also worked to normalise male on male violence as part of "official" masculinity. There is thus a link between apartheid, patterns of economic inequalities and gender violence. In contemporary South Africa there is a fierce competition for scarce resources. The unavailability of work generates violent gender relations in men in particular. It is within these conditions that children at KwaDabeka School experience their gendered lives. It is inside these families who generally live in mjondolo (informal shelters often made of mud and water) that many of the children learn about human relationships and about violence. Thulani, for example, in Mrs I's classroom did not know where his father was. He said: "I don't know, I think he's dead". Thulani lives in a mjondolo. Old tin sheeting has been patched and repatched, old windows have been attached to give a semblance of a home and sometimes a splash of paint or Coca Cola billboards attached for identification in the overcrowded, unpatterned and dense configuration of living. The mjondolo are adjacent to the school fence and, when the wind blew I got the stale smell of urine. It is here that the children see violence against women and where children are inducted into the rituals of violence. Violent resolutions of conflict are important in shaping children's patterns of conduct.

The worlds collide as schooling intersects with lived realities. Violence is incorporated into the children's repertoire of conduct. Many children admitted to witnessing gender violence at home and even police brutality. One of the children recited an incident where the police used "knobkierries" after they had caught a suspect near her 'home'

Children learn that violence makes right. I insert my experiences of an incident I witnessed in Mrs. H's classroom. In my field notes I scribbled the "broken broomstick" as a signpost:

Someone knocks and enters the classroom. A mother. Mrs H calls Sandile. He is shouted at and the mother shouts at him also. The pipe is brought to the mother.

It's difficult to understand what she says to Sandile. But slowly he moves towards the desks. The other kids rush eagerly as if they are preparing for an event, and set two desks together. Sandile rests on his stomach across two desks. The kids watch with brightened eyes as if they know what's about to happen. She strikes him with that pipe. I count. Ten times. He sobs. He cries. I discover that Sandile broke the classroom broom and Mrs. H demanded a new one. The mother cannot afford to buy a broom and the mother had comes talk to Mrs. H about that.

I insert this data as incidents like these at Kwadabeka School were highly charged, violent and difficult for me as researcher, but the clear connection between schooling, parents and violence is established and also how punishment is a significant means to resolve conflicts. These are the patterns of learning for boys and girls in KwaDabeka School. Mrs. H uses corporal punishment. Sandile's mother punishes her child for breaking the broom. Many of the children live with grandmothers, aunts or their mothers and, as primary caregivers, they are chiefly responsible for inducing punishment. The children learn that violence is a purposive behaviour that achieves an end. They are learning to understand that action provokes a "rational", violent response which works to (re)produce violence in general and sustains and gives credence to tsotsi masculinity.

Gender violence materialised in ways that were emotionally difficult to challenge. This involved a complex interactive network of violence between boys and boys, boys and girls and girls and girls. Mrs. G points to this context:

- Mrs. G            In this school it is the **survival of the fittest**. The stronger you are, the harder you fight. If you are weak you lose. (emphasis added)
- Me                Who wins?
- Mrs. G            It depends on the grade. Usually the boys in the senior phase, it's them that win.

Mrs. G points to the clear connection between boys and violence asserting violence. For example, as I roamed around the school during play break, I noticed how two grade seven

pupils, Sifiso (male) and Thoko (female) had engaged in a violent battle. The following field notes describe the event:

Thoko had bought a 50c packet of chips and vetkoek. Sifiso demanded the vetkoek. Bullying. Thoko refused. Sifiso pushed her, his voice raised. She refused. He slapped her. She hit him back and ran from him. He went after her and grabbed and hit her again before he ran off with the vetkoek.

Structural conditions of poverty (re)produce distress and aggression where the key to material advantage is to “push, slap and hit” the opposition. Violence is an easier means to obtain vetkoek rather than the 50c, which is a scarce resource. The abject conditions under which the children live in KwaDabeka encourage a particular pattern of behaviour where to get material advantage is to smash the opposition. The pattern of conduct that Sifiso learns and enacts is that vetkoeks will come to him and will continue to come to him through the enactment of an aggressive and violent masculinity. These are not uncommon incidents at the school, and are continually (re)produced, making available “rewards” through violence. Violence is not easy to deal with. There are strong emotions involved and, for me as researcher, a sense of urgency. The context described above suggests how easily Sifiso was able to blur adult-child relations, as he was aware of my presence and as I called after him, he ran away.

A key element in the enactment of violent masculinity is bodily strength. Bodies are used as tools and weapons to symbolise the capacity for violence (Connell, 1995; Gilbert and Gilbert; Salisbury and Jackson, 1996). Bodily strength is an important part of the tsotsi masculinity: “The stronger you are the harder you fight. If you are weak you lose” which has effects for girls and for boys who ‘lack’ bodily strength. What struck me in KwaDabeka was how social and personal conflicts so quickly turned violent. In the everyday world at KwaDabeka, children’s conflicts ranged from the demand for a slice of bread to the fight for an old pencil. Violence was not only the means to maintain control over others but the mere threat of violence was sometimes sufficient to ensure

compliance. The key issue here is how social conflict shifts to physical violence. Tsotsi masculinity is key to this shift. It is toxic and a distorted version of hegemonic masculinity which “blends... into potent combinations” (Kenway and Fitzclarence 1997: 119). Tsotsi masculinity is inscribed with a pattern of conduct where benefits can be attained by smashing the opponent, and is an admired masculine conduct resonating with the black masculinity in townships, making violence an effective means to get socially valued rewards (Xaba, 2001; Field, 2001). And benefits will continually come to tsotsi boys through the enactment of an aggressive masculinity unless there is change in the cultural and structural conditions that make violent masculinity so adaptive.

The first part of this chapter focuses on tsotsi boys. Not all boys at KwaDabeka School embody this toxic model. Alternative masculinities do exist, as identified in Chapter 6. *Yimvu* or holy, innocent boys do not readily resort to violence. They are more peaceable. Hemson (2001) identifies this masculinity as *amaKholwa* who are the converts to Christianity and a kind of masculinity which emphasises “piety, education and familial respectability”. Mrs. I described the alternative form of masculinity as “holy” or in Zulu *ngewele*. It is a less potent and less toxic form of masculinity or, in the children’s words, *yimvu* which means sheep. The existence of *yimvu* boys suggests that not all boys practise violent and subordinating strategies at all times and in all circumstances (Mac an Ghail 1994; Salisbury and Jackson 1996; Skelton 1997). However the hierarchies around tsotsi masculinity are an important source of conflict and violence. This is the concern of the second part of this chapter. The last part of this chapter involves the construction of a hard girl femininity which articulates the complex nature of gender relations among and between girls.

Masculinities and femininities at KwaDabeka School provide the example of how social identity is constituted in structures of dominance against a backdrop of major structural inequalities. Boys and girls learn at different sites, times and places how violence is a strategy for exerting control over others and establishing and maintaining relations of domination and subordination. At KwaDabeka School, the mimicry of physical violence thus provides the means through which social identities are produced.

### **Tsotsi Boys: Fighting to Survive**

Tsotsi boys' masculine identities were (re) produced as they actively struggled to accomplish a celebratory hegemonic form. They were many instances that I identified as masculine tsotsi competence, including outbursts of who could run the fastest, or who had the longest pencil or who played soccer the best. There also existed a range of masculine forms that were violent. It was violent tsotsi masculinity which provided the immediate lens through which their identities were forged as young boys. The following incident was observed in Mrs. G's classroom:

Sandile and Nkanyiso fight with Thulani. They try to convince the younger boy to release his pencil. The child fights back and Sandile says “ngizokushaya”

Incidents like these are part of the everyday world at KwaDabeka. In this incident described, Sandile and Nkanyiso are older than Thulani. Chapter 6 outlined how age is never completely uniform in any grade. Sandile threatens with *ngizokushaya* (hit) the child after school. The word *ngizokushaya* followed me in most of my observations with children. Incidents like, these where violence was enacted, had harmful and hurtful effects for Sandile and for me as researcher. Violence and bullying can be seen as a means through which the boys try to position themselves according to the tsotsi masculinity against other 'smaller' boys, establishing a pecking order of social relations and through which bodily enactments are used to establish a violent form of masculinity. Sandile and Nkanyiso were loud, and constantly repeated the word “ngizokushaya” at every level of conflict. Tsotsi masculinity is thus asserted through bullying, violence and the threat of violence.

The pecking order of masculinities was also evident during line-up. Before entering the classroom, both boys and girls had to remove their shoes. The teachers told me that this practice kept the classroom clean. At KwaDabeka School the children are responsible for

cleaning the classroom, which includes sweeping, dusting and polishing the floor. Many times during my visit at the school there were children on their knees polishing the floors. I observed how tsotsi boys would push in the lines and trip others in their way as they sat on the floor removing their shoes. When this happened it was usually followed by a huge outburst of laughter. I observed Andile as he postured his body in threatening ways and knocked Thembinkosi with his shoulders. Andile is eleven years old and in grade one. Thembinkosi was not sure how old he was, but he looked smaller than six. This violence provided the instance through which tsotsi boys enacted their abusive masculinity. It was also a means through which tsotsi boys were learning how to maintain status and build a reputation. The smaller boys in Mrs. H's classroom were generally quieter and stayed away from Andile and the group of tsotsis. Membership to the tsotsi group was premised on the importance of aggressive forms of behaviour for gaining and maintaining a particular status within the tsotsi group and through which a sense of masculine identity was sustained. The dominant tsotsi discourse within the context of massive unequal social relations at KwaDabeka put pressure on boys to adopt violent and aggressive identities.

Tsotsis would generally use "sukha wena" (get out) or "voetsek" and these were enough to threaten other boys. Fighting for things provided the avenue through which a masculine identity was developing. Fighting for food was key in the development of tsotsi masculinity and it shifted speedily into violence. Very few children bring lunch or snacks to school. If they do, it is usually brown peanut butter bread wrapped in newspaper and sometimes, as Mrs. G pointed out "bread without Rama"[margarine]. Having a sweet is a luxury, but I noticed that even a small chocolate éclair sweet had to be shared with tsotsi boys who demanded it. Violence is about power and tsotsi boys use their bodies, their loud voices and their age and their size to dominate others forcibly. They learn that violence is a way of getting what they want. In conditions of poverty, violence and the threat of violence are the most effective means to get a material reward, even a small sweet. The boys learn this: that violence is a way to get what they want, as well as respect and deference from others. This works to produce and reproduce the dominant black masculinity in townships which makes violence an effective means to get

rewards. However it is important to note that tsotsi masculine identities are not static. They are spatially situated and evolve (Skelton 2001). Kenway and Fitzclarence (1997) point out that conditions of poverty and racial inequalities are fertile grounds for inciting violence amongst boys. Tsotsi masculinity thus arises as boys interact with the contradictions of the particular situation and the broader social structures. Tsotsi masculinity at KwaDabeka Primary School is 'culturally exalted' (Connell, 1995). It struggles to claim the highest status and the greatest influence. It is never fixed but constantly in flux and needs to be achieved by dominating alternative patterns of conduct. In KwaDabeka, violent behaviour provides almost the only way of gaining a reputation and material rewards. For tsotsi boys who fight for bread, vetkoek, sweets, gwinya or pap and gravy, they have "more to gain" through violence and "little to lose" (Kenway and Fitzclarence, 1997: 122). Bullying practices and the potential and actual violence (re)produce tsotsi masculinity and maintain the systems of men's domination over women. The identities that the boys were constructing were being forged not only in opposition to other boys some of whom were much younger and in the same class but against girls as well. Verbal and physical harassment against girls is rife at KwaDabeka School.

In one incident Nompila (girl) ate chips. She gives some to Vuyo. He demands more. She says no:

Nompila        I was eating my cake and I gave him a piece and then he said that he is gonna catch me and I told him that I will hit him back.

In the classroom Lelea is crying:

Kholiwe        He[Sipho] says I'm smelling and I said no. I pushed him and he hit me.

These incidents show how conflict shifts to violence. Girls too are implicated in violence. The girls learn that challenging the tsotsi boys has violent effects and learn that

violence is the appropriate means to challenge opposition. Tsotsi boys value power “over” others and have a sense of entitlement to respect and deference particularly from girls. Moreover in the making of tsotsi masculinity, the boys come to believe that violence is the only way of resolving conflict.

In my conversations with the tsotsi boys they told me that “girls are naughty, they talk too much” and so they hit them. From the earliest days in the field at KwaDabeka, the repetitive notion that girls talk too much was overwhelming in most responses from boys. I realised from the earliest days that tsotsi boys were learning how to make meaning of cultural views of male power and supremacy. These cultural practices, which I described in Chapter 6, meant that girls were expected to speak in hushed tones and not “anyhow” to an (adult) man. Tsotsi boys were learning adult ways of being male, and talking too much was in opposition to the general expression of deference, which was part of Zulu cultural practices. That the girls talk too much is thus an expression of an ‘unacceptable degree of freedom’. If girls fail to give deference to tsotsi boys, then it is seen as bad conduct which ought to be punished. Moreover, talking too much is seen as a challenge to their dignity to which the appropriate response is violently to restore order and keep girls in hushed voices and subservient.

The following data is used to illustrate this. Mncedo and Spesishle are two boys in Mrs. G’s classroom, who I had come to construct as tsotsi:

Me	Do you like girls?
Spesishle	Ya (laughing)
Me	Why?
Spesishle	I like to play with them
Me	Do you play with them?
Spesishle	I hit them too.
Me	Why do you hit them?
Spesishle	They’re naughty

Mncedo        The boys hit the girls and the girls call the tisha and the girls they talk too much (emphasis added)

Me              But you still play with them, why?

Spesihle        I like to play with the girls. The other boys are too big and some of them leave us and go and play soccer

Mncedo        Sometimes the other boys are absent

Me              Why did the other boys leave you?

Spesihle        They don't want to play soccer with us. They have their own friends. I don't like to play soccer with them also. They're rough, they push and I fall down and I get hurt

Mncedo        Ya, the big boys they push us around.

Me              So what do you think of girls?

Mncedo        They're nicer.

Mncedo has been constructed as the “boss of hitting” and some girls are afraid of Spesihle:

Me              Do you like boys?

Eli              No

Me              Why?

Eli              I am scared of them

Me              Why?

Eli              They are rough

Me              What do they do?

Eli              They hit. I am scared of him[pointing to Spesihle]. I am scared that he is going to hit me. I'm scared of hitting.

Mncedo and Speshile have invested in the production of a dominant and violent form of masculinity. They are not afraid to boast about their dominance. Thus they highlight the extent to which tsotsi boys bolstered their masculinity through violence, bullying and aggression. On the basis of these practices these boys perceived themselves to acquire a

high status of masculinity which fitted into the “survival of the fittest” discourse. Despite the misogynist taunts, violence and bullying practices against the girls, Speshile says that he likes to play with the girls. Mncedo adds that they are nicer. The smaller nicer girls are preferred as they are more vulnerable, easier targets through which the boys can perform tsotsi masculinity. The bodily capacity of the smaller and more vulnerable girls thus provides meaning to identity. In particular, tsotsi masculinity is not fixed. Tsotsi boys in the early years of schooling dominate but are dominated as well, pointing to the constant state of flux of tsotsi masculinity. Power is relative and they live in fear of the bigger boys especially on the soccer field and the bigger girls who sit on them like chairs. Tsotsi masculinity is not monolithic. In one situation, tsotsi boys experienced potent masculinity and in others, the boys are thwarted by other relationships. Thus tsotsi masculinity is generated in particular situations and in changing structures of relationships (Connell 1995). Tsotsi masculinity thus is fragile and fluid in the context of dynamic power relations in the school.

There are many ways to be masculine: as a hitter but also being pushed around by others. Both Mncedo and Speshile would like to play soccer. There is no soccer field in the school, just a makeshift goalpost behind the school as boys squeeze in for a game. Mncedo and Speshile are alert and vulnerable to age relations as they operate gender power. They specify their aggressive behaviour by subordinating femininities and assert their tsotsi masculinity: a hegemonic form. Simultaneously they know of a pecking order of power relations between males and males on the “soccer field” which renders their power fragile. Moreover, this experience suggests the transient nature of their masculinities. Tsotsi masculinity is not fixed, but at a given time and place particular patterns are exalted. Mncedo and Speshile are not ‘bad’ in all time and places. Power is relative to context. They are learning how to be in relation to older tsotsi boys and at the same time (re)producing patterns of tsotsi masculinity. The boys’ masculinity is on the constant offensive and defensive (Kenway, 1995). This is one way that the boys are learning the confusions and ambiguities of adult ways of being male (Skelton, 1997).

There are different ways of being a boy. One way is to demonstrate aggressive and violent power over girls (over Eli and Nompilo for example) and other boys. At other times, places and contexts, their sense of prestige associated with violent power is itself brought into question and their power is momentarily suspended, as I have tried to show with their construction of the bigger boys. Power is relative and in other, more “safe” contexts they work to secure power through violent objectification of others and particularly of girls who are constructed as “nicer” because of the assumed unequal sex-based power relations. Their sense of power is not only brought into question with older boys, but also with older bigger sized girls:

- Me            Are you afraid of any of the girls?
- Mncedo      Yes, I am afraid of the big girls.
- Me            Which one?
- Mncedo      I am scared of the girls in standard 5, standard 3 and standard 4. I am not afraid of the standard 1 and 2 girls
- Me            Why aren't you afraid of the standard 1 and 2 girls?
- Mncedo      They're small and short. I am afraid of the tall girls. They sit on me. They make me like a chair and they sit on me
- Me            And the boys?
- Mncedo      Ya, I don't play soccer with them.

Some of the “children” in grade seven were seventeen and sometimes a few were nineteen years old, and as some of the grade ones were five and not six, as the law had stipulated in 1999. Threats of violence and violent practices were key to the formation of hegemonic masculinity. Mncedo and Spesihle invested, albeit tenuously, in the production and projection of their tsotsi boy masculinity. The size and age of a person was integral to the production of a “proper” boy. The effects of gender power were clear for Mncedo when it came to larger and older girls, as his size and age were clear markers for the production and maintenance of masculinity, as it was for the production of other forms of masculinity and femininity. Clearly, his ability to act and resist older and bigger girls and boys was based on his perception of risk which was his knowledge of different

relations of power through which he organised differently according to the discourses at play. He was able to take power but only according to the risks involved for him. But the struggle for masculinity always occurs on the presumption of superiority over girls, as the following data illustrates.

- Me            Why don't you like girls, Andile?  
Andile        Girls are rude. They are funny. The girls try to impress the teacher and I hit them.  
Me            Do they get hurt?  
Andile        Yes and I hit them again  
Me            But why?  
Andile        They must not be rude

Andile said "they must not be rude" with a sense of indignation. This resonates with the point made earlier that the cultural construction of male entitlement and the idea that women and girls must speak in hushed tones is pervasive in the abuse of girls. Andile argues that he hits the girls because they are "rude, funny and impress the teacher". Violence is a pattern of behaviour which he feels he is obliged to carry out "yes and I hit them again". This point makes it necessary to understand violence and rape against women in South Africa, for example, not simply as a sexual script or flirtatious behaviour through which some men justify rape, which is particular in Western patterns of violence against women. Here violence against women must be contextualized within the broad cultural definitions which define women's hushed roles and specifies male power and supremacy. Being rude and talking too much, and the overall degree of freedom that talking too much and being rude represent, must be understood as a challenge to male entitlement and to the power males feel that they are entitled to.

Andile hits girls because he values power, and expects girls to be respectful to him. Is this the reason why gender-based violence in South Africa is topping the world chart, as women and girls are seen with significant agency (with the laws to support it) and which therefore pose a threat to an uncertain status quo as in tsotsi masculinity? It is generally

women in South Africa who bear the main burden of men's violence including rape and severe domestic violence.

*"I'll find you my man. I'll kill you my man"*

In this sub-section, I continue to focus on tsotsi masculinity. "I'll find you my man. I'll kill you my man" works to reinscribe tsotsi masculinity:

Me	What do the boys do?
Thulisile	They push us and they swear
Me	What do they say?
Thulisile	Like <b>"I'll find you my man. I'll kill you my man"</b> Lucs says "bitch". He says it to the girls. When the girls are singing some of the boys say "fuck it, voetsek" and then they say: "I'll find you my man, I'll kill you my man".

Within the broad context of violence, it is not surprising to find that tsotsi boys have developed a derogatory vocabulary in relation to girls.

Me	Why do you hit the girls Sesishle?
Seshishle	They're naughty
Me	What's naughty
Seshishle	They talk too much
Rita (disagreeing)	When we are playing ije the boys don't like it and they always trouble us. The boys like to play soccer. I'm asking a question, "if you like to play soccer why do you play with us?"
Seshishle	I don't like soccer
Me	Do you hit the girls Seshishle?
Seshishle	I hit them

Rita Yes he hits girls

Me Why?

Seshishle They're naughty and they talk too much and if I ask them for lunch, the girls say "no chips, no juice". If I want juice or chips the girls don't give us. The girls don't like to give something. If another girl asks them, then they give the girl the chips.

Rita But Pindile gives you chips and lunch.

Seshishle I get angry; she gives the girls and not me.

Pindile One morning I had ice cream and I gave it to Seshishle and he didn't hit me.

Rita (interrupting) Look tisha, this Mncedo is pushy. He doesn't want S'bongile to stand here and he is pushing her

*I reprimand him*

Me Tell me Seshishle, do you stop if the girls tell the teacher that you have hit them?

Seshishle The girls cry (laughing) and they tell the tisha

Me What does the teacher do?

Seshishle She hits me.

Me So do you stop hitting the girls?

Seshishle No, I will still hit them

Me Why?

Seshishle They're naughty.

"I'll find you my man, I'll kill you my man" is part of the overall patriarchal oppression of women. Seshishle conforms to a particular pattern in tsotsi masculinity which also reacts against authority. An important point needs to be made here regarding the blurring of adult-child relations. Seshishle is able to blur relations with me as he says "no I will still hit them". This defiance is an example of the anti-authority pattern of tsotsi boys. In this sense the conversation above is a public one, and the emphasis on hitting girls is as much for my benefit as it is for his sense of masculine reputation. This conversation and

the others in this chapter must not be seen as a representative account of the children's conversations with me. They were, however, expressive of a struggle to position identity between themselves and between them and me. The learning of gender is a very active process in which adult patterns of conduct are being tried out.

Rita refers to the domination of space and the girls' private moments: "when we are playing ije the boys don't like it and they always trouble us". Ije is one of the play games through which girls find a freer and private space within the public site of the school but that space too is fragile with the constant threat of "boy trouble". Bullying for snacks was a common occurrence for these girls, as I have illustrated in the beginning of this section. The context of poverty thus encourages specific practices. Snacks are a scarce resource at KwaDabeka School where many children come because they "like to play, they learn and they eat". In all classrooms there was a sense of excitement as they described eating as a good reason for coming to school. So tsotsi boys may continue to accomplish a sense of their masculinity as they bid for scarce snacks enacting violence and aggression within the context of material disadvantage. Coercing others to give them snacks gives them a sense of power. They will continue to bid coercively because of the benefits that accrue to them. Using their bodily capacities the boys are able to (re)produce the unequal division of gender power, but it occurs as boys who lack material advantage feel the pressure to perform masculinity in violent ways. This resonates with Morrell's (1998; 2001) claim that apartheid forged the development of a violent black masculinity in urban working class contexts as black men lacked the material advantages vis-à-vis other men, usually white and felt the pressure to perform masculinity in violent ways which fuelled violent gender relations. The school is thus a fertile ground for the breeding and reproduction of violent masculinities where girls are under constant threat:

Seshishle

I get angry she gives the girls and not me.

Pindile

One morning I had ice cream and I gave it to Seshishle and he didn't hit me.

The struggle and pressure to assert tsotsi masculinity was also a pressure (and violent pressure) for girls. Pindile (and other girls) knows what “sharing” means. She has not given Seshishle the ice cream because she wants to, but because of the fear and threat of violence. The mere threat of violence is enough to ensure compliance. There are constant power battles over food. The power is made visible by the violence. As they resist the dilemma does not last long: acquiesce or face the dangers? Is this why South Africa rates amongst the highest rape cases in the world? Are schools complicit in making girls easy targets for verbal and physical violence? (Skelton 1997; Kenway and Fitzclarence 1997):

Me Do you like boys?  
Eli No.  
Me Why?  
Eli I am scared of them.  
Me Why?  
Eli They are rough.  
Me What do they do?  
Eli They hit. I am scared of him[pointing to Seshishle]. I am scared that he is going to hit me. I’m scared of hitting.  
Me Do you get hurt?  
Eli No.  
Me So why are you scared?  
Eli I just say sorry, but I squeeze him and I cry.

“Violent males...exaggerate, distort and glorify those [hegemonic masculine] behaviours”(Kenway and Fitzclarence, 1997: 121). It would seem here that I am painting a picture of girls as unagentic and the effects are clear, as the above quote demonstrates. Girls do resist:

Mncedo The girls say “He’s mad in the head”. They say “voetsek”. The girls say “come here” and they raise their dresses.

*He shows me what he mean.*

I have shown how “show me the panties” operates as a moment of power for girls who contest the invasion of their space. Similarly Mncedo points to girls’ agency as they try to humiliate boys by raising their dresses. However, their agency is closed when violence and the threat of violence constructs and limits everything that they do and can do. The boys were not simply the product of patriarchal discourse although patriarchy is always embedded in their relations. Their violence and aggression are part of the process of blending a potent and lethal mix of masculinity.

Sex and sexuality are key in tsotsi masculinity. Being a woman researcher in KwaDabeka School, roaming the grounds during break or walking around the senior grades of the school exposed my vulnerability. I felt the overt sexualized behaviour as bigger boys whistled, made kissing noises and sometimes made overt pelvic gestures as I walked past their classes or as I passed groups of older boys. During the break I chatted to a group of boys and girls. Chapter 3 provided part of the context of this conversation:

- Thabani        Why are you asking all these questions?
- Me                I want to know what boys and girls do in the primary schools
- Thabani        That’s easy. They play.
- Thulisile       They play and they hit.
- Thabani        Girls fight, boys and girls fight and girls fight with girls.
- Thulisile       It’s better in the other school because the Zulu people fight a lot
- Thabani        No, in any school they fight, not only in the Zulu school. Children fight all the time.
- Thulisile       Boys are criminals. They steal our pens and they swear “fuck, fuck, fuck”.
- Thabani        Girls smell. They give us diseases. Their armpits smell. Girls tease boys. The boys don’t sleep with the girls because the girls stink.

Thulisile        The boys kick. The boys want to do things with the girls but the girls don't want to do those things.

Misogyny easily shifts into violence: verbal harassment “fuck fuck fuck”, physical harassment “hit and kick” and sexual violence “the boys want to do things with the girls but the girls don't want to do those things”. The denigration and the polluting effects of femininity within the context of KwaDabeka School quickly turn to violence and part of the sexual dominance and exploitation of girls (and women). Thabani's reference to girls who smell and boys who don't want to sleep with the girls suggests contempt in the nature of dominance and exploitation. In addition to this the attitude towards girls as sexual objects is callous (Kenway and Fitzclarence, 1997; Skelton, 1996; 1997). Is Thabani preparing for sexual harassment activities as he learns adult male tsotsi patterns of behaviour? These are young boys and girls and sexual activities are considered adult (and taboo), but the explicit nature of the conversation was a public performance as Thabani produced and reproduced his masculine sense of identity. Significantly this conversation also blurred adult-child relations as explicit sexual knowledge is usually adult, which Thabani challenges. This conversation was held as a large group of boys and a few girls gathered around me and it served as a struggle for the boys to give meaning to adult knowledge. Thabani's ability to discuss sex, the callousness of his attitude towards girls and his misogynistic taunts provided a strategy to challenge both the dominant discourses on childhood and me as adult, and provided a space both to gain and maintain status amongst the group of boys and to produce and reproduce adult ways of knowing.

Thulisile understands the difference between schooling contexts. Her mother was a domestic worker for an Indian family in middle-class Wyebank, and grade one was spent at Wyebank School, as they lived in the domestic quarters in the employer's home. Thulisile told me that her mother had lost her job and she had been forced to return to KwaDabeka: “Its better in the other school because the Zulu people fight a lot”. This is significant because it raises the complicity of the school in endorsing and supporting violent tsotsi masculinity but is also raises the point about context and structural

inequalities which make some contexts more fertile and ripe for enactment of violent gender relations. Schools that fail to address violence, whether physical, sexual or verbal, make “girls easy targets for boys who are flexing ...their muscles” (Skelton 1997: 359). It is not easy for schools and practitioners to address these issues, especially when boys who flex their muscles are naturalized within a “boys will be boys” discourse. Mrs. G says:

Mrs G            They[Boys] are natural. It’s their way of life. They are aggressive. I’ll tell you about my brother’s son. He broke the handle of the deep freeze. He’s just a boy. He said he was sorry but it’s just their way.

The “boys will be boys” discourse serves to privilege an essentialist, causal relationship between boys, bullying, aggression and violence. Boys’ behaviour is homogenised as if they have a built-in predisposition for aggression and violence. This points to the complicity of the school in endorsing violence, but it also raises the possibility that teachers do have the potential to address these issues if they are raised at the broader policy level as significant stumbling-blocks in the work towards gender equality.

KwaDabeka School is a hotspot of violence and a fertile ground for the eruption of violent gender relations. Violence is embedded in its culture and power relationships (Kenway and Fitzclarence, 1997: 126) and difficult to change:

Me                    Tell me Seshishle, do you stop if the girls tell the teacher that you have hit them?

Seshishle            The girls cry (laughing) and they tell the tisha.

Me                    What does the teacher do?

Seshishle            She hits me.

Me                    So do you stop hitting the girls?

Seshishle            No I will still hit them.

Me                    Why?

Seshishle

They're naughty.

I use the above conversation again to emphasise the defiant pattern of tsotsi conduct. Seshishle points to the anti-authority performance of tsotsi masculinity. Acts of defying institutional authority by hitting the girls become recognisable as tsotsi masculinity. Tsotsi boys will not want to give up power easily as it is the chief and most celebrated means through which they maintain a sense of status and reputation. It is through the enactment of violence and aggression that scarce rewards like a sweet, bread with Rama, a pencil, a pen and even a vetkoek are produced. The question remains about the kind of incentive there is for them to be otherwise (Paechter, 1998) when they have nothing to lose and much to gain in the continual performance and display of tsotsi masculinity.

Not all boys at KwaDabeka School engaged in this potent and lethal definition of hegemonic tsotsi masculinity. When I asked Thabani if all boys were like him he said: "There are quiet boys but they're not nice. The names of the boys are going down". I consider these quiet boys or Yimvu in the next section. They too suffered from the ignominy of potential and actual violence.

### **Yimvu Boys**

Yimvu boys were not well placed in the toxic blend of tsotsi masculinity. Yimvu in Zulu means sheep: a quiet, softer version of masculinity. Khanyiso and Uvula were in Mrs. I's classroom and were constructed as yimvu boys. They tended to sit together in class, play together in the playground. They were also more likely to be attacked by other boys and tsotsi boys in particular and were uniformly excluded from playing soccer and other games like marbles. Their togetherness represented a strategy of survival. Part of the strategy meant that they would sit in the classroom during the break and have their pap and gravy or whatever else was served by the School Feeding Scheme. Many of the teachers including Mrs. G, I and, to a lesser extent, Mrs. H had their lunches in the classroom. Khanyiso and Uvula most often chose to sit in the classroom as I spoke to Mrs. I. Their response was one of avoiding the threat of attack and also the humiliation

of being excluded by developing their own protected spaces. The teachers in the school do not go on ground duty, thus making the classroom a much safer environment during break.

- Me            Do they[referring to tsotsis] hit you?  
Khanyiso (softly) Yes.  
Me            Are you scared of those boys?  
Khanyiso     Yes  
Me            What do they do?  
Khanyiso     They hit me, they push me. Sometimes they take my food away.  
Me            What do you bring for lunch?  
Khanyiso     Nothing.  
Me            What food do they take from you?  
Khanyiso     The food the aunties are cooking for us.  
Me            What do you do when they hit you?  
Khanyiso     I cry.  
Me            Do you fight back?  
Khanyiso     No. They hit my friend also.  
Me            Do they hit you, Uvula?  
Uvula        Yes they hit me, they slap me, but I don't cry. I don't like them.

While I have documented the effects of violent gender relations for girls, for boys described as *yimvu* there were similar effects. Khanyiso draws attention to the pecking order of masculinities that exists and shows how certain boys are targeted and bullied. There are definite relationships between the different masculinities, the most salient being one of hierarchy and exclusion. Khanyiso and Uvula do not fit the dominant *tsotsi* masculinity and are 'hit and pushed' which works to reinforce an oppositional structuring of gender relations. These unequal gender relations are fuelled by abject economic conditions. What kind of relations could exist within a different backdrop? How would gender relations be maintained and challenged? What is significant here though is not a simple reductive economic argument. *Tsotsi* masculinity cannot be reduced to

economics. In other words poverty does not determine masculinity. It does underpin the way in which it evolves spatially. The existence of yimvu masculinity means that not all poor, black, Zulu boys choose tsotsi culture.

Khanyiso confirms his position in the hierarchical structures of gender relations which he validates through his friend Uvula. In this way friendships are important for yimvu boys because they provide the pressure-free space through which they are able to express their experiences in school. But the pressure-free space is also contradictory as Uvula suggests that he “does not cry”. In other words, Uvula tries to reside within a discourse of hegemonic masculinity in which boys don’t cry, but simultaneously is positioned outside it. He tries to secure “masculinity” for himself by drawing on what he understands to be the related practices, such as “boys don’t cry”. The pressures of tsotsi masculinity are clear, and its celebrated status creates pressures for boys like Uvula as he tries to incorporate “boys don’t cry” into his repertoire and distancing then from “boys who cry” thus defining the boundaries of acceptable masculinity. The pressure and the struggle through which yimvu boys experience their identities and the perceived powerlessness (associated with “boys don’t cry”) produced contradictory yimvu masculine identities.

The struggle for masculinity is clear but also the struggle to be positioned within it. Yimvu boys are targets for abuse because they do not engage in disruptive behaviour and their visibility as yimvu casts doubt on tsotsi masculinity. Thus tsotsi masculinity is intolerant as it rejects other gender identities and is nihilistic. It constantly has to be won by dominating alternative patterns of conduct. The violence that is directed against yimvu boys is part of the process that reproduces violence in general and sustains aggressive and violent tsotsi masculinity and violence against girls and women. Yimvu masculinity is more peaceable than tsotsi and favourable to girls, as Samekeliswe suggests:

Me	What do you think of the quiet boys?
Samekeliswe	I like the quiet boys. Khanyiso and Qubelo. I like them because they are so quiet and so beautiful, but their work is

not good but they have good behaviour. If tisha says something he listens Khanyiso doesn't hit the children. The other boys hit him, the other boys hit him.

Me Why?

Samekeliswe If he doesn't give something then the other boys hit him. He doesn't tell tisha because after school the other boys will catch him. They walk with him and then they will hit him(...)

Me What do the other boys think of them

Samekeliswe They tell them that they love girls, like they say "Hey, do you love Nomvula" and they laugh. They don't want to play with them because they tease them.

Samekeliswe draws attention to the normative processes through which yimvu boys are policed: "if he doesn't give something then the other boys hit him". She also draws attention to the stylized version of yimvu masculinity, which is associated with "good behaviour" and respect for authority instead of the anti-authority stance of tsotsi boys. Yimvu boys who do not enact an aggressive violent masculinity are constructed as easy targets in getting "something", which is usually associated with material goods. In my early days in the field I had kept wondering why children attached their school bags across their backs the whole day through. Their few possessions are vital but easily removed through bullying and violent practices. The differences and hierarchies between tsotsi and yimvu boys provided the immediate source of violence and bullying.

Life can be very hard for yimvu boys who have to negotiate and strategise gender relations where the pressure to enact tsotsi masculinity is clear:

Nompilo ... but when Mrs. I is out of the classroom the boys[yimvu] they play top a two (a game) and marbles and they do karate

The pressure to align to the dominant position is clear even as they are subordinated. They are learning that there are rewards in the dominant position. Moreover, the pressures they face also point to the vulnerability of yimvu boys to perform masculinity in different ways:

Rita            Nodumiso gave Khotso chips but she does not give Kenneth.  
Me              Nondumiso, why did you give Khotso?  
Nondumiso    I'm scared of Khotso.  
Me              And of Kenneth, he's a boy?  
Nondumiso    No Kenneth is quiet. He is shy.

Kenneth is constructed as a quiet yimvu boy. There are clearly no material benefits for him because he does not get to eat chips as Khotso does. Through violent displays tsotsi boys are able to gain rewards: chips. There are no immediate rewards for displaying quietness and making masculinity in less toxic ways. Yimvu boys learn this as well.

Yimvu masculinity is most times gender-friendly but othered. This can be seen very clearly in the homophobic bullying: "they tell them that they love girls" and works to police the boundaries of acceptable masculinity. Yimvu is presented as less than normal, through misogynistic mockery and within the heterosexual matrix. Yimvu boys learn how to negotiate their masculinities within these normative boundaries. Yimvu boys' contradiction thus lies in their association with girls, which can at any given time give rise to teasing behaviours associated with the fear of the feminine, as an expression of tsotsi masculinity. Yimvu boys are generally tolerant and gender-friendly but the pressures to align with dominant tsotsi masculinity are always present. This means that even subordinated masculinities can perform hegemonic forms of masculinity. However, at the same time their less toxic masculinity means that gender arrangements are always multi-levelled, contradictory dynamic-changing and open to change, but for better or worse. In the making and remaking of masculine identity there is always complexity and fragility. Mrs. G captures this here:

Mrs. G            Some boys are very soft, not like this one but the soft boys get pushed around and they say “this one is fooling me” and that’s how they become murderers. And they don’t want to hurt but they become murderers because they don’t want to fight.

Mrs. G refers to the “vulnerable underbelly of all masculinities to the driving force” of rage and ambiguity and to masculine performances (Kenway and Fitzclarence, 1997: 119), which include the possibility of becoming murderers. There is a clear connection between boys (men) and violence. In South Africa, for example, men are the main agents of violence (and murder). How is murder related to the pressures which men and boys face in performing celebrated and dominant aggressive forms of masculinity, in conditions of economic dislocation? “And they don’t want to hurt but they become murderers because they don’t want to fight”. Violent masculine performances displace the hurt (emotion) at the same time as they “allow the performer to claim power and potency” (Kenway and Fitzclarence, 1997: 119). Here is an indication of the pressures that boys and men face to perform violent masculinity.

Yimvu masculinity is open to adjustment. However, it does point to the existence of gender-friendly patterns of conduct. This pattern is important in the work towards gender equality in South Africa. These subordinated masculinities threaten hegemonic masculinity and have the potential to disrupt the conventional assumptions about masculinities. Despite the lethal blend of tsotsi masculinity and the violence that it engenders, alternative patterns of conduct do exist. This opens up the possibilities for teachers to exalt alternative ways of being, which boys do inhabit and which others can also.

The last part of this chapter focuses on hard girl femininity.

## **Hard Girl Femininity**

This part of the thesis tries to give meaning to hard girl femininity as harsh and violent. It deconstructs the earlier teaching discourses which construct girls as quiet and passive. In this chapter I have sketched how violence is considered to be an appropriate weapon in the resolution of conflict as boys develop a sense of their masculine identities. From the early days of my research I was increasingly aware of how some girls use violence as a means to enact a hard femininity. However, hard girl femininity should not simply be read as a reaction and/or appropriation of tsotsi masculinity. Their social practices are also located within the wider social setting of KwaDabeka. The broader social issues through the influence of race, class, ethnicity and gender, and the connections between them, are important. These locations create the conditions for relations of power, thus informing the way in which some girls take on a harsh femininity.

There was a group of girls who displayed violent enactment of gender relations. This served to challenge the conventional teaching discourses which made girls invisible in the “boys will be boys” discourses and which emphasised a soft and gentle femininity. Hard girls provide an alternative reading to this dominant view.

Nompilo, was in grade two and ten years old. She was most often with a group of girls including Zama, and together these routinely played clapping and rhythmic games (as I explained in Chapter 7) which allowed a variety of gendered positionings to be made available, including moments of power through which they could mock and tease the boys. The tsotsi boys most often harassed the girls and tried to monopolise their spaces in the field and in the classroom, including Nompilo. But there were contradictions. As a tall girl with a commanding voice, Nompilo could carve out a sense of identity but she did so by borrowing from tsotsi boys. Her voice, her size and her bullying practices meant that she was able to share lunch with tsotsi boys and steal from other girls. I often observed how Nompilo would share her lunch with Andile and how he would tear a piece of his lunch and give it to her. Thus power relations between tsotsi boys and hard girls

were tenuous. However, their relations mobilized around the exalted and violent patterns of tsotsi masculinity. This meant that power could be exerted by tsotsi boys over hard girls as they instigated violent behaviour in girls.

Nompilo developed a strong position with her group of girl friends. From the early days of my research, I was highly aware of her stylized version of hard girl femininity:

- Nompilo      Zama, she hits the other girls if they don't share with her
- Me              What does Zama want?
- Nompilo      She wants their lunch or anything they have. Zama hit Amanda. Amanda told tisha and tisha hit Zama but Zama hit Amanda after school and then Amanda told sir and sir hit Zama then Zama hit Amanda in the break. So I hit Zama and then Zama cries.
- Me              Why did you hit Zama?
- Nompilo      Because Amanda is my friend and Zama hits her.
- Me              I thought it was only the boys who hit?
- Nompilo      No the girls learn from boys. If the boys say "can I go on that side" and the girls say "no" because the boys didn't say please, so the boys hit the girls and that's how the girls learn to hit. Tisha says that the girls who hit are grabbers because the girls are better than boys. The boys are skelms [criminals] so the girls mustn't hit like boys, but the girls hit.

The above cameo demonstrates the extent to which tsotsi boys instigate violent behaviour in girls. It also breaks the myth that "boys will be boys". Aggression is not about biology alone. Bullying and violence, as the quote above shows is about power battles and not only between boys and boys and boys and girls, but also between girls and girls, which works to produce differentiated femininities. All girls do not bully. Nompilo suggests how a pecking order is established within groups of girlfriends. Zama, who performs a hard and harsh femininity, hits Amanda, who performs a gentle femininity. Nompilo comes to Amanda's defence and carves out her sense of identity, as she

establishes a reputation as leader of the group through the enactment of violence. It was therefore not surprising to see other girls align themselves to hard girls by sharing lunch, since there were always benefits as hard girls did the dirty job of hitting, as Amanda's case demonstrates, (re)producing hard girl status.

Hard girl femininities are thus produced as girls interact with others in the context of extreme poverty. Zama hits other girls who do not share lunch with her or for "anything they have". What if the backdrop was different? Against the backdrop of harsh material inequalities and unemployment, the girls (re)produce the idea developed in this chapter that violence is a significant means to attain material rewards. Many of the children only eat one meal a day and sometimes the School Feeding Scheme is their only hot meal for the day. Zama has little to lose and much to gain by shifting conflict to violence: lunch and "anything they have" is better than nothing at all. At the same time the recourse to violence reinforces her position and status as a hard girl and thus a power position against more fragile and delicate femininities like Amanda's. But power battles are always tenuous, as Nompilo asserts her sense of hard girl identity as she defends her friend against Zama. Hard girls must not be read as simply reproducing tsotsi masculinity as Nompilo says "the girls learn from boys". Tsotsi boys legitimate violence against boys and more generally against girls, but hard girl femininity is not simply manufactured by learning from boys. There are other people at the school too who hit and Nompilo says: "Tisha hit Zama... Zama hit Amanda after school...sir hit Zama". All this happens against a backdrop of massive structural inequalities and where social conflict shifts speedily to violence. The school is thus the colliding site where the children with limited access to alternative patterns of conduct try out violence as adult ways of knowing in the fight for survival. It is therefore not surprising that girls too incorporate this conduct into their repertoire. Violent contexts produce violent femininities. Hard girl femininity, however, is fragile and cannot be discussed without their context in gender relations. Nompilo refers to this context of physical harassment: If the boys say 'Can I go on that side' and the girls say 'no' because the boys didn't say 'please' so the boys hit the girls. It is the girls more generally who bear the main burdens of "skelms" and male violence. While hard girls assert their power and status as they interact with other through violent

means they are rendered capable and not at the same time because of the recognition of the broader patterns of male violence:

- Me            Do they [boys] hit the girls then?
- Nompilo      Yes they do but I hit them. I beat them too.
- Me            Who do you hit?
- Nompilo      You see him? (pointing to Mncedo). He is a hitter. He is a boss of hitting
- Mncedo      She lies. She hits me.
- Me            Do you hit the girls also Nompilo?
- Nompilo      I'm not scared of girls because the girl is wearing a pantie like you. They have a private part like me. The boys...ai ai they got a underwear. I touch my panties not theirs....

The above quote demonstrates the ambiguities and contradictions through which Nompilo forges her identity as a violent expression of femininity. As a hard girl, the extent of her power is relative to the specific context. She refers to Mncedo, a tsotsi lad, as the “boss of hitting”, which establishes the patterns of hierarchy. This points to the asymmetrical relations of power and raises the point that girls bear the main burdens of boys’ violence. Nompilo does hit boys but she is alert to and conscious of her ability and simultaneous inability to forge her hard girl status, which is always relative to the specific context. Nompilo, for example, states that she is “not scared of girls because the girl is wearing a panty like you. They have a private part like me. The boys...ai ai they got a underwear”. Violence is clearly seen as a bodily affair and gendered. Biology becomes confused with gender. Bodies can be harmed and used as weapons. Boys present for Nompilo the threat of and the capacity for violence. The reference to “private part” and “underwear” also refers to boys’ potential for sexual violence and her vulnerability as a girl. Nompilo is thus alert to the general pattern of tsotsi boys’ ( and men’s) violence against women and to the diffused nature of power. Nompilo thus shows how young girls’ confrontations with tsotsi boys are severely circumscribed by the threat and actual violence both physical and sexual. Hard girl femininities are thus always in ebb and

flow, contesting, challenging and reproducing and forming patterns of hierarchy and exclusion:

- Nompilo        I'll hit the girls if they are hitting me. Pindile is naughty and so I hit her. She takes our names and tells her friends stories about me and my friends and so I hit her.
- Me                I don't understand. Tell me again.
- Nompilo        It's like this. Pindile and her friends were talking about us and we heard them. I asked her why she did that and then Pindile cries
- Me                Why does she cry?
- Nompilo        She is not my friend. She shouts at us and she doesn't share lunch with us.
- Me                Did you hit her?
- Nompilo        I only hit if she hits me.
- Me                Did you hit her?
- Nompilo        I'll hit her again.

Hard girl femininity is most salient as moments of power as girls interact with others. Nompilo asserts violent expressions of her femininity which is at the same time callous and insensitive and part of the repertoire of conduct. The sharing of lunch or of material goods was a key to forming and maintaining friendships. Failure to do so left them open to attack. The callousness was also enacted when names were "slurred" as in gossiping, and provided a space through which hard girls could enact, maintain and reproduce their hard girl status. Gossiping was seen as a challenge: "Pindile and her friends were talking about us and we heard them. I asked her why she did that and then Pindile cries". To quell the challenge, the appropriate response was to smash the opponent. Violently quelling the challenge provided the space through which hard girls could publicly perform and defend and maintain their power position-building reputation and status amongst the group of friends, and exclude others.

Femininities are thus constructed within and against each other in the constant battles for power. The hard girl femininities deconstruct conventional teaching discourses which target boys and make girls invisible in the construction of gender relations. Hard girl femininity provides an insight into femininities and how at KwaDabeka School violence is an expression of it. At the same time, asymmetrical power relations work to establish hierarchies and patterns of exclusion in conditions of poverty. Within these contexts girls learn that violence is a means to get rewards, and these are manifest in gender relations and in the construction of femininities. The mediation of femininities along patterns of violence and in township schools should also be a part of the debate around single sex schooling in South Africa (Morrell 2000; GETT 1997). Morrell, for example, argues that violence in schools is a major reason why single sex schools should be considered. In black co-ed schools working class girls are being denied the chance to excel because of sexual harassment and violence. My research confirms the high levels of violence against girls. However, as a strategy single-sex education does not of itself take account of the construction of violent femininities, girl on girl violence and harassment for lunch and “anything they have”, which all take place against the backdrop of major structural inequalities. Morrell, though, is right to point out that “more sophisticated research is required to find out who would benefit and how” with single sex schooling. Benefits cannot be seen as automatic. This section has pointed to the construction of hard girl femininity producing threats of violence and actual violence in conditions of economic deprivation. The question is whether single sex schooling can compensate for major structural inequalities in which violence is endemic. Schools, though, are still obliged to make schools safer. These issues must be added to the debate about single sex schooling and its specificities as they occur in South African schools.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter KwaDabeka Primary School provided the specific context in the making of gender as a violent expression of certain types of masculinities and femininities. Rather than offer a comprehensive and representative account of schooling experiences of children at KwaDabeka, this chapter has drawn attention to some of the violent

gender-arrangements which occur within the massive structures of inequalities. Racialised gender identities are characterised by poverty and violence.

Tsotsi masculinity as a hegemonic form provided a fertile context for the eruption of violent gender relations. Tsotsi boys align to dominant patterns of aggression and violence as a means to maintain a sense of status and through such enactments, gain material dividends. Not all boys at KwaDabeka School perform hegemonic tsotsi masculinity. Yimvu boys suffered from the ignominy of potential and actual violence as they are effeminised through misogynistic mockery. Yimvu boys struggle to perform their masculine sense of identity as they are othered in the policing of acceptable hegemonic masculinity. In the struggle to survive, the yimvu boys struggle to maintain and contest daily battles of bullying, mockery and actual violence. The last part of this chapter focused on the construction of hard girl femininity as they are mediated and contested against the backdrop of structural inequalities. Hard girl femininities deconstruct the earlier teaching discourses which make girls invisible in the patterns of violence. Hard girl femininities show how patterns of exclusion and hierarchies are established in the broad configuration of gender relations. This chapter has highlighted the importance of masculinities and femininities in the early years of schooling and its association with violence in the contexts of poverty, unemployment and economic dislocation. Ending violence and ending violent gender relations are thus also inseparable from ending economic inequalities. The fight for food, lunch, vetkoek, sweets, pens and pencils shifts speedily to violence and fuels violent gender relations. The children in this school have to see a new sense of economic possibility if alternate and peaceable gender relations are to develop. Anti-violence work has to be part of the broader strategy of reform in gender arrangements that will equalise resources and opportunities. These are long term goals which remain the commitment of the South African government. Inside the school as identities are negotiated, challenged and resisted, there are immediate possibilities for change. This is also the concern in the concluding chapter of this thesis.

## Chapter 9

### Conclusion

I end this thesis with two quotations, the first of which was set out in the preface:

Childhood, says the Children's Encyclopedia, is a time of innocent joy, to be spent in the meadows amid buttercups and bunny-rabbits or at the hearthside absorbed in a storybook (Coetzee 1997: 14)

There is no permanent and essential nature of childhood. The idea of childhood is defined differently in every culture, in every time period, in every political climate, in every economic era, in every social context. Our everyday assumption that the childhood that we 'know' is and always has been the definition of childhood turns out to be false (Hatch 1995: 118).

The former quotation represents a popular and common sense view of children. It attributes happiness and innocence as essential characteristics of children's lives. The ignorance and infirmities of common sense notions of childhood render children passive, unprotesting, blank sheets in need of restraint and protection. This thesis has attempted to show how my views are closer to the second quotation.

I began the thesis with a clipping from a local newspaper and the case of Boleu Secondary School. The article about gender inequalities at a secondary school in South Africa struck me as exceptionally helpful in clarifying the different types of positions that are possible regarding gender. I used the clipping to illustrate how gender power operates and why it is important to focus on issues of masculinities and femininities. The newspaper clipping also set the scene for asking questions about what "we don't know well enough to ask ....or even care about" (Wagner 1993: 16).

Understanding children and the construction of gender in the early years of schooling demands that we abandon familiar, essentialist and stereotypical approaches. And that

we should care! I have argued that to understand their world requires a close-focus examination in ways which trouble the taken-for-granted assumptions about children, childhood innocence and gender and sexuality. My examination of schooling lives, tells us more about gender power as a contradictory and transient experience. My approach in understanding gender power has meant moving beyond the commonsense constructions of boys and girls in early schooling.

To develop this approach I have accepted and become more alert to the wider social location. Where are the teachers and children located? And who are they? These contexts create the conditions for gender power relations. The wider patterns of power and change are important. I have acknowledged social location in my study. It is important to understand it in the micro constitution of power. The social location creates the conditions in/through which gender power is maintained, negotiated and contested. Where the boys and girls are and who are the boys and girls are both important.

My approach was to examine early schooling sites which have been overlooked by South African researchers and, more significantly, have been made missing in the discourses around gender equality. I have argued that early schooling is integral in the making and remaking of gender identities and discourses. Early schooling is a primary site for the social construction of gender. In presenting this, I examined the formation of masculinities and femininities, how boys and girls position and become positioned as feminine and masculine. The analysis in this thesis suggests why it is so difficult to answer the question: "What does it mean for boys and girls to be equal?"

Foregrounding power relations at the micro level, I have shown: how gender power relations are made, the battle to position and align to dominant positions, the way they are struggled over and the impact they have on our identities and actions (Kenway and Willis 1997). The tensions and the struggles that exist within specific locales are important to understand and I have addressed the question of how teachers, boys and girls struggle and produce gender identity and gender relations. Nothing is static, power is made and remade in different contexts and different times and it can be made differently.

Departing from the dominant approach in South African research into education, I have not given into the obsession with policy and policy discourses. Policy does matter even though it is difficult to enforce. This study, however, shows that it is also a question of norms, the patterns of conduct, the social realities that are set out and performed in the gaze of all which makes lived experiences messy. I have argued that close-focused micro research is more convincing in examining the messiness. To understand the everyday ordinary gender experiences, we cannot remain at the level of gender policy. There are multiple competing ways of understandings and I have looked at “their practical bases” (Connell 1995: 5) to illustrate the micro mediation of power. In order to do so I stepped inside schools, listened and observed.

Understanding teachers, boys and girls and the context in which they functioned, forbids essentialist perspectives of gender. The alternate, diverse and broader ways in understanding the gendered worlds in early school contexts, requires a close focus micro ethnographic examination in ways which reveal the dynamic power relations and the contradictory experiences of people within it. Using this approach, it was possible to get beyond the everyday assumptions of the childhood we ‘know’.

The methodological focus in this thesis intended to show how gender power positions are lived in early schooling social contexts. My investigation of these processes was qualitative as I examined teachers, boys and girls to snatch a moment in the perpetual struggles for power. Internationally, recent social science research in the early years of schooling has made important changes to our understanding of masculinities and femininities, emphasizing patterns of hierarchies, exclusion and dynamic power that are manifest in schooling sites. These gains have resulted mainly from qualitative research methods. My study has not been different. This method of investigation has many benefits. Listening carefully to children and taking them seriously is a major one. I have also paid particular attention to the role of the researcher in the research process and I have troubled the linearity of research. In particular, I have focused on power relations between researcher and researched. It is in these specific contact zones that identities are

forged and meanings are constructed. These meanings are important and so data is always coloured. Meanings are partial, open and opening to change. Early schooling is a generative context in the making of gendered meanings and discourses.

In this study, I have focused on teaching discourses both common and specific, and focused on how these discourses construct gender in the early years of schooling. The term 'momentary children's discourses' was used to explain the rapidly shifting, elusive and episodic moments of power through which children constructed their identities. The term discourse brings together the ideas of knowledge, power and identity. Discourses constitute particular ways of being as normal and right. These discourses put pressure on us to adopt particular identities. For instance, the particular meanings given to social categories like boy and girl have an implicit sense of what is normal and right (MacNaughton, 1998). This sense of what is normal, is socially constituted and produced in discourse. I selected six common teaching discourses through which gender is articulated in early schooling. This is not because these discourses are right but because they have political strength deriving from their institutional location. They form dominant discourses but they are threatened by contradictory discourses about what is normal. The alternate meanings lack institutional bases and are therefore marginalized and positioned through discourse as wrong. The idea here is that discourse allows a variety of ways of positioning a person. It also permits consideration of the variables such as race, class and ethnicity on identity.

The study has drawn attention to the complex ways through which gender (and sexual) identities are forged in early schooling contexts. It shows that children are agentic and powerful, and in doing so they challenge earlier teaching discourses that construct them in a contrary light. The embeddedness of masculinity and femininity in the negotiation of (heterosexual) identities is a key feature of early schooling. In considering children's momentary discourses, I have actively challenged the assumptions that children are blank sheets without the ability to make sense and act upon their social (both gendered and sexual) world. Children's lived experiences suggest that biologicistic and essentialist accounts of gender are themselves constructions which can be questioned.

I have troubled childhood innocence and the teaching discourses which produce and regulate children's gendered (and sexual) worlds. Foregrounding the subjective (gendered and sexual) worlds of children, I have pushed the idea that children are actively able to appropriate, produce and reproduce discourses on gender in complex ways. While producing and challenging dominant definitions, children also appropriate common sense understandings of gender. I have used hegemonic masculinity as a useful tool to articulate how boys struggle to accomplish particular patterns of conduct, and how understanding masculinity is a key in the production of gender relations. Constructing hegemonic masculinity is a difficult process. Alternative forms of masculinities do exist but always within patterns of hierarchies and exclusion.

Identities are not simply (re)produced by their age but also by their race, gender, class and sexuality. These amalgamate to produce specific versions of children's identity. I argued that children actively contest, challenge and contribute to the dominant definitions of gender (and sexuality) in early schooling. Social conflict is an inevitable part of the children's world. They battle with each other, they bicker, they fight, they scream and shout at each other, they laugh and they tease, they play and they can and do play together, they seek pleasurable and fun-loving moments, and both boys and girls do exercise power, but within limits. They also hit, kick, slap, punch, hurt and make each other cry.

The shift from social conflict to violence, I argued, can be understood in/through hegemonic tsotsi masculinity at KwaDabeka Primary School. The school provides the specific context of violent relations through which children's cultural dynamics are (re)produced. I tried to capture the conflicts at KwaDabeka Primary School against the backdrop of social realities; of children living in poverty and how, in the fight to survive, violence is seen to be the only appropriate response. At KwaDabeka Primary School, the mimicry of physical violence thus provides the means through which social identities are produced. These are part of the realities within South Africa. The shift to violence occurs against the backdrop of major structural inequalities and the legacy of apartheid that fuels violent gender relations. It is part of the pathos of South African history that

race and class overlap so powerfully. This is historical and involves questions of violence and huge inequalities that created a divide in educational experiences for all in this country.

It follows from this study that early schooling is not a nurturant, gender (and sexual)- free political arena which reflects natural distinctions, but is one of the places where gender (and sexual) identities are produced. Violent gender relations must remain a concern in this country. In this, my study helps to develop and broaden our understanding of children as protesting and not blank sheets on which gender patterns are stamped. At the same time, the construction of masculinities and femininities highlight the importance of addressing these issues. In this sense attention has been drawn to the challenge in early schooling in teaching boys and girls. Particularly, I have drawn attention to the need to understand the dominant constructions of masculinity in the experiences of early schooling. Additionally, the construction of masculinity and femininity takes place within the context of wider structures which create the conditions for gender power relations. Tsotsi masculinity and hard girl femininity are potent and must be addressed at the policy level and at schools.

South Africa is trying to address the wider structural anomalies. The long-term goals are to reduce unemployment, poverty and general economic hardships. But change is not easy and does not occur with dramatic speed. There are shorter term possibilities. These include offering boys and girls a space in schooling which does not necessarily lock them into misogynist and violent subject positions. Teachers are key to unlocking some of these spaces, despite the restrictive teaching discourses which position boys and girls in familiar ways. I shall pick up on this later.

In Chapter 5, I argued that teaching discourses could be understood as a relentless commonsense assault on children's lived experiences through which gender identity is produced and regulated. I identified six teaching discourses: "making difference biological", "children are children: gender doesn't matter"; "parents are the models"; "just kids: still young"; "presumed innocent" and "teachers are mothers". I argued that

these common sense arguments construct early schooling as a gender (sexually) - free political arena. Cannella (1997: 44) comments on the common sense assumption of childhood which has:

...disempowered younger human beings by creating them as incompetent and dependent on adults for care, knowledge and even bodily control. The discourses of childhood have fostered regulation of a particular group of human beings by another group (described as adults) and generate multiple sites of power for those adults.

The discourses I identified serve to reproduce the idea that children cannot think which works to generate multiple sites of power for teachers-adults. The conventional teaching discourses of gender and children actually keep us from understanding the complexity of gender power relations which extend and naturalise the “boy will be boys and girls will be girls” discourse. Such notions, I argued, lead to the (re)production of gender identity.

Chapter 6 looked at the specific everyday teaching discourses in Westridge, Umhlatuzana, KwaDabeka and Umbumbulu Schools. I argued that it is impossible to understand the makings of gender without giving weight to contextual issues such as race and class. A central concern in this chapter was the specific conditions through which masculinities and femininities are positioned. A range of femininities and masculinities were identified within race and class specific contexts. The identification of a range of masculinities and femininities across the school sites suggests the fallibility of essentialist arguments and the shortcoming of gender generalization. The specific teaching discourses highlight the significance of context in the construction of gender identities.

Teachers can help begin the work towards gender equality and help to unlock the spaces for the exercise of power relations which are less toxic and friendlier towards gender equality. Chapter 6 identified some discourses which seem to hold some potential for beginning the work towards gender equality. These offer better prospects for change. Schools are complicit in the construction and regulation of gender identities, but they are

also sites where questions are asked and fresh thinking can be stimulated. Education has this potential. Teachers can and do work in the interests of gender equality despite the contradiction. Alternate gender-friendly discourses do circulate. Teachers can position these discourses and allow them to circulate as power positions. The important point here is that early schooling can stimulate fresh thinking about change and changing practices. These prospects are never perfect. I showed how at all times changing practices occur within the context of dominant discourses which (re)produce identity. Nevertheless, the imperfections are all we have and the blurring is a part of change for better or worse. Within the discourse which claims that gender does not matter, there are moments through which teachers can threaten dominant discourses. Such a pedagogical practice involves creating spaces for children to discuss gender issues in their classrooms. The research has shown that teachers are willing to participate in these kinds of discussions and, even in contradiction, are prepared to interrogate the limits of existing gender stereotypes.

However, at the same time, this study does point to the need to stimulate fresh discussion around gender: being self-reflexive and alert to gender.

### **Implications for Changing Practices**

How can we begin the work towards gender equality in the face of hard truths? This is a difficult and hydra-headed question.

Gender patterns are not lightly changed. This study has shown how gender patterns are woven through so many areas and form a web of discourses making change difficult. Families are also key institutions in the making of gender. Children come to school knowing that they are girls and boys (Jordan 1995), although they are continually learning the patterns of conduct that are required of them to be considered boys and girls. There has been no space in the thesis to explore this arena, although the data suggests its salience. It is inside families that much learning about gender relationships starts. It is also a place where many boys and girls see men's violence against women. Children at

KwaDabeka Primary School live these patterns at home, in their families and in the community. The messages that families convey and the way conflict is handled is important in shaping patterns of conduct. My study thus points to the need for further research into understanding the interconnection between early schooling, family and gender.

For this study the early years of schooling is one of the many other points where change can start. Here, I have argued repeatedly that the analysis of everyday gender power relations provides a more nuanced understanding of gender relations and gender identity. Particular knowledge about gender forms a network of discourses. They are contradictory and may constrain the work towards gender equality, but also include knowledge about how to gain power. There are conflicting subject positions and, as subjects choose from the available subject positions, they create newer and threatening positions. These threatening positions provide the hope in changing practices. In schools, as I have suggested, there is always the potential to offer some kind of thinking and reflection about gender-masculinities, femininities and violence.

Masculinity and femininity are not homogenous experiences and my research shows that there are differences between each category within and across race and class contexts. Girls and boys exercise power but always according to the specific conditions that operate. It is important to address the specificities of the gendered experience. This includes understanding why exercising power in some contexts is minimized through the sheer threat of violence and actual violence. However, even in these conditions it is important to understand that power is not possessed but it is fluid and runs through different relations. Hegemonic masculinity must be understood as a struggle to align to positions which are seen as ideal and must be constantly won. In the struggle to align to hegemonic masculinity, both boys and girls are hurt. Dominant discourses that implicitly subscribe to and endorse hegemonic versions of masculinity are thus complicit in the production of gender inequalities (Kenway and Fitzclarence 1997). KwaDabeka Primary School is complicit in endorsing and naturalizing violent and toxic tsotsi masculinity. In fact, if schools “operate in such a way as to marginalize and stigmatise certain groups of

students then they are complicit” (Kenway and Fitzclarence 1997: 125). KwaDabeka Primary School does all of this and was thus the least friendly school for gender equality. It is an active site in the production and reproduction of unequal and violent gender relations but they also occur against the backdrop of major structural inequalities. Gender identities vary from school to school. This study has identified different forms of hegemonic masculinity in schools. The social locations create the conditions for the relations of power. There are different masculinities with differential access to power (Haywood and Mac and Ghail 2001). Boys draw upon, negotiate and reject aspects of masculinity in the school as they construct their identities. Hegemonic masculinity is not fixed. For example, rigger bugger masculinity is an ascendant form of masculinity in Westridge Primary School. As Connell states, at any given time one form of masculinity rather than others is culturally exalted (1995). At KwaDabeka Primary School, the particular patterns used relied upon an intimidating, violent, aggressive type of hegemonic masculinity upheld in the wider community. At Westridge Primary School, the leading definer of masculinity was sport, which worked to reinforce the predominantly white middle-class South African sporting discourse. Here boys learned to value aggressive competition and toughness, and these patterns of conduct were reinforced by teaching discourses at the school. However, the school also offered scope in the work towards gender equality. It was highly organized and there was no corporal punishment and violence. Teachers were willing to begin the work towards gender equality. Similarly, at Umhlatuzana Primary School if teachers are aware of the factors that influence gender in their classrooms, then this information could broaden sources of information about gender and sexuality in schools. They are open to such changes. At Umbumbulu Primary School, the rural context and specific cultural definitions were key in the negotiation and maintenance of unequal gender relations. Yet if teachers are aware of gender in early schooling, this may begin broadening the sources of information about gender and sexuality.

Potentials do exist. My research has confirmed the position that the particular reading of poststructuralism could be a useful theoretical lens through which to examine gender in the early years of schooling. Its particular strength lies in the acknowledgement of the

complex ways in which meanings, power, identity and gender come together (Kenway and Willis 1998). It recognizes that gender is never fixed but dynamic and contested, changing and open to change. Children are not blank sheets on which gender patterns are stamped. Children, like teachers, make and remake meanings which challenge and maintain gender relations. I showed how meanings are contested, negotiated and appropriated. I also showed how particular discourses fix and narrow identity, which makes the work towards gender equality so difficult. It is in the making and remaking that alternate positions can emerge. This is all we have. Alternate positions do make themselves available but dominant positions also circulate. Alternate positions can in tiny ways threaten and transform dominant notions of gender.

Thus, if gender relations in South African education are going to be improved, which is the intention and thrust of policy at the moment, it has to be negotiated in the classroom. If it has to be negotiated in the classroom, teachers have to begin to be self-conscious gendered actors. They have to be made aware of their power and location within the school. Understanding the micropolitics of power will enable teachers to see how their classrooms are constant bids for gender power, how subjects struggle for position within the gendering discourses, which are constructed as the ideal, and how power always shifts, rendering one powerless at one moment and powerful at the next (Walkerdine 1990; Davies 1989). Using the shifting moments of power can make teachers see that gender cannot be essentialist, biological, developmental and psychological. In their own lives teachers live gender as fragile and fluid constructions, but they choose to privilege essentialist versions of the self. Gender is made missing from the early years of schooling because of the reliance on dominant discourses which lead to pedagogies that contribute to gender patriarchal relations. This can be a source of challenge and debate with teachers in developing alternate and more gender-fair practices for early schooling contexts.

Teachers can and do work against patriarchy in contradictory ways. But creating gender equality with young children is more difficult than simply re-organising classrooms. It is more complex than modelling and presenting non-stereotypical examples, as Mrs. K and

I have attempted with cleaning and presenting gender-friendly photographs (See Chapter 6). The attempts, though, to challenge gender boundaries are crucial to the development of alternate understandings of gender. Re-organising circle formation, challenging sexist comments in the classroom, re-organising cleaning, providing alternate versions of gender can interrupt the dominant gender definitions, but they can never be simple drive-through initiatives. There are no technical solutions to these problems. The teachers in this study recognise this. They need to understand why pleasure and fun must be rehabilitated in their classrooms, so that boys and girls are provided with the context through which they can constantly live as pleasurable human beings in constant battle with each other through which newer discourses are constantly being formed and reformed.

Sexuality needs to be included which can deal with the everyday realities of boys' and girls' early experiences. This could provide a way of addressing damaging practices of misogyny and the compulsory nature of heterosexuality and open the discussions and reflections on unequal power relations. These spaces need to be opened so that boys and girls can together coalesce and resist gendered messages. Through such an understanding, teachers can use their pedagogic powers to assess the extent to which particular practices are liberatory or subjugatory (Ellsworth 1995: MacNaughton 2000). This demands an explicit understanding of gender and its interlocking with race and class and other kinds of inequalities, and the place of masculinities and femininities in gender relations. It is essential, for example, that violent tsotsi masculinity and hard girl femininity be constructed in race and class terms. Chapter 7 acknowledges this. Making schooling safer, better and more just must be a priority in South Africa.

More research is required into broader structures of inequality and how they impact more specifically on schooling. In my study, teachers are key in creating newer gender-friendly discourses. It would be helpful for the goal of gender equality if teachers were exposed to a gender course which alerted them to the ways in which they were complicit in supporting gender inequalities and gender violence, despite their intentions and goal. Being alert to aggressive masculinity or toxic tsotsi masculinity would not, of itself,

destroy inequalities, but in the short term teachers, being alert to issues of violence and how children struggle in the construction of their identity, could broaden the options for boys and girls and make schools more tolerable for them. In other words, education cannot stop children from learning about violence. I have drawn attention to the wider forces of inequalities. What schools can and must do is to try to help violence from being immediately realized. Making schools a safer place is obligatory in South Africa yet remains a far ideal. Making schools safer is not simply about erecting barbed wires, fencing and lockable gates, as was the case at KwaDabeka School. It is inside the school itself, that violence erupts and that many are “scared at school”. Helping children to become more conscious and reflective about violence, and helping with providing alternate forms of resolving conflicts, demand that teachers have to be made aware about these issues. Gender equality must be made an important goal to work towards and should be part of a compulsory re-education plan for all teachers in early schooling.

The GETT (1997:109) has recommended, inter alia, that all teachers undergo in-service programmes that allow them to reflect on their classroom practices and gendered patterns in schooling:

It is also vital that teachers are prepared through in-service programmes that enable them to reflect on their own values and beliefs about gender, the ways this impacts on how they relate to male and female students, and the nature of gender relations made possible in their classrooms.

Specific programmes for teachers in early schooling must be developed so that equality and social justice can be debated and reflected upon. Sexuality, gender, violence femininities and masculinities must be part of any in-service programme. SACE -South African Council of Educators Act- (Department of Education 2000) provides fertile ground for the development of in- service programmes. The objectives of SACE (2000:2) are to:

provide for the registration of educators;

promote the professional development of educators; and  
set, maintain and protect ethical and professional standards .

Amongst its many purposes, SACE:

1. must determine minimum criteria and procedures for registration or provisional registration;
2. may prescribe the period of validity of the registration or provisional registration;
3. may develop resource materials to initiate and run, in consultation with an employer, training programmes, workshops, seminars and short courses that are designed to enhance the profession
4. with regard to the promotion and development of the education and training... must advise the Minister on matters relating to the education and training of educators, including but not limited to
  - a. the minimum requirements for entry to all the levels of the profession; the standards of programmes of pre-service and in-service
  - b. must promote in-service training of all educators; ...(Department of Education 2000: 4-8).

No teacher can be employed in South Africa without registration with SACE. SACE must therefore, as the law obliges it to do, offer compulsory short courses to teachers in early schooling around gender as part of the minimum requirements of registration and validity, failing which registration lapses.

There is an urgent need in South Africa to develop an education system which will work to free females and males and provide them with the spaces to be more fully human in an environment which is safe and challenging where they are encouraged to take some risks with their gender in order to move beyond the negative constraints that gender can impose (Gilbert and Gilbert 1998; Kenway 1996; MacNaughton 2000).

In this study, I have provided a critique of the dominant discourses around gender in the early years of schooling. The main argument is that early schooling is integral in the making and remaking of gender identities, which demands that we abandon the idea that children are blank sheets. By using close focus methods, talking and listening to both children and teachers and using poststructural tools, I have drawn attention to and critiqued commonsense arguments which make gender a frivolous concern in children's lives. In doing so, I have tried to fill the gap in the gender literature in South Africa which has left no close-up accounts of how teachers, boys and girls in the early years of schooling construct and (re)produce gender identities and gender relations.

Like Kenway (1996: 447), we in South Africa "want boys and men to change so that they can cause less trouble for girls and women and themselves, so that the sexes can live together alongside each other in a safe, secure, stable, respectful, harmonious way and in relationships of mutual life enhancing respect".

This is my hope.

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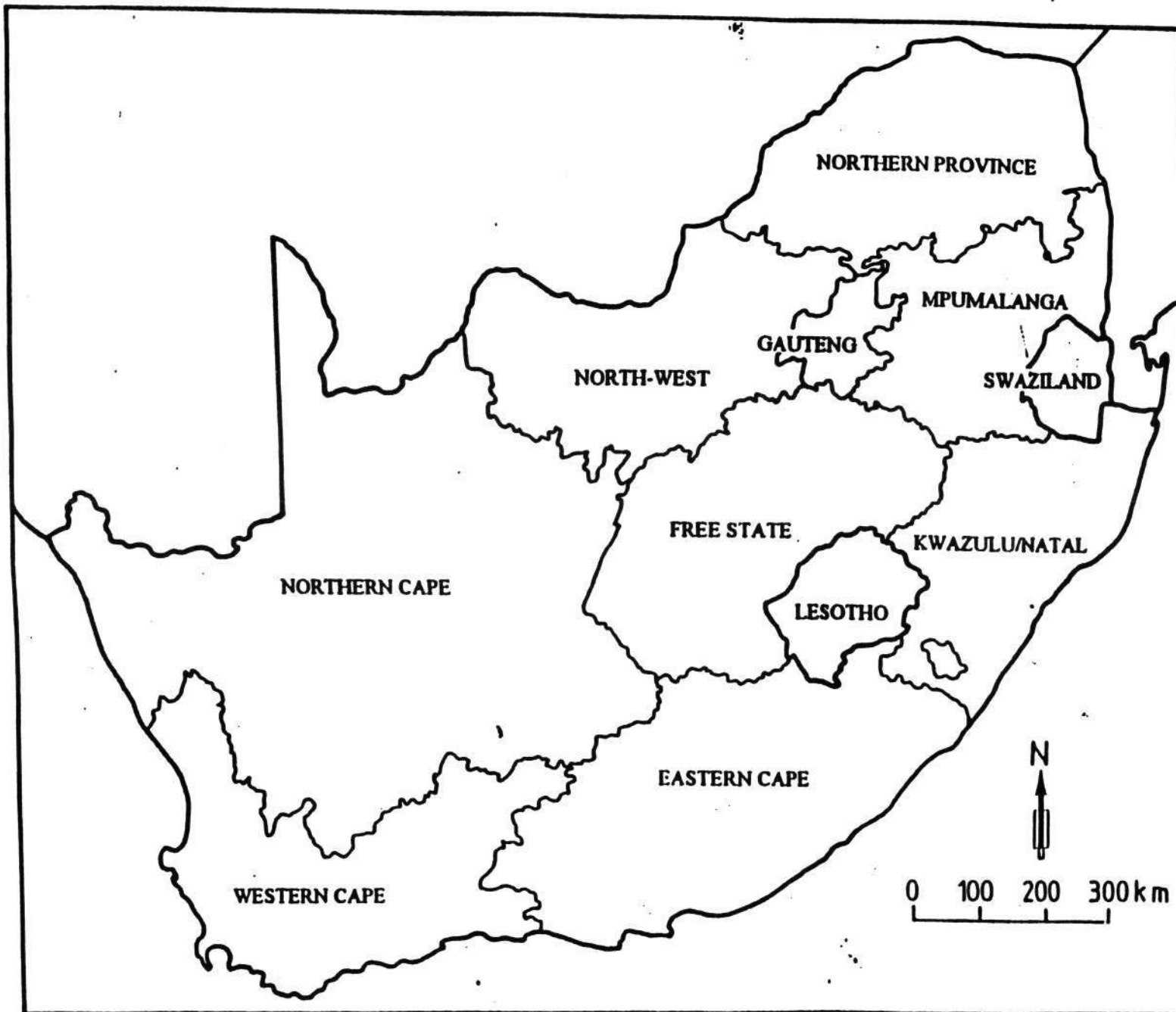
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**Appendix A**



This is an opening - I like this because it gets the reader's attention, but it not appropriate for a long - standing convention that you follow you need to build a bridge between you prefer this material. That bridge should take the context of p 67 & expand them into a consistent introductory note. THEN you can do the readable, eye-catching, immediate

Introduction

1999-10-21. Eastvale Primary. 8H10

I walk into Mrs. B's grade one classroom, knowing that the children, about six or seven, will be immediately distracted by my presence. So will Mrs. B. and the teacher aide, Mrs. B+. It's been eight months since I first started the research but I am still fascinated by the abundance, the colour, and the excess in the classroom that so vividly distinguishes one school from the other. As I greet Mrs. B, almost immediately the chorus of the children's greetings follows. I quickly maneuver myself in the first available scaled down seat. It's been like that since the start of the research, finding the first place that's available, observing and talking. All the desks and chairs are arranged in groups so it is always easy to sneak and chat and listen to the children always wary, though of Mrs. B.

*Claudia.* I don't like boys. They whinge. They nag. That's why I never told my mum to have a brother...that's why I have a sister.

*Brandon.* What happens if I come to stay with you?

*Claudia.* Then I will tell you to find another woman.

*Lizette (interrupting)* Do you know what my sister said? She has a date (laughing).

*Claudia.* Don't embarrass us!

*Lizette.* Yes...with a boy and his name is Morne. Don't laugh Claudia, its true.

*Mrs. B.* interrupts and the conversation closes

A little later.

*Claudia.* Nicholas loves girls because he always copies them

*Nicholas.* You love boys.

*Claudia.* You love girls.

*Nicholas.* Sometimes I hate girls. They get me into trouble.

Appendix C

start in reader's eyes? This is why you need a bridge & SA.

Place? context? the part of the

the readable, eye-catching, immediate

author talks about issues of sexualities in young children's play and classroom contexts without referring to Joe Tobin's work ... (Email Review of ms. #2000.059, 18 October 2000)

How does this shed light on the research process?

And so these papers reflect my own struggles to understand the data as indicative of practicing poststructuralism, although they also reflect my struggle with trying to reach those research materials with an expensive and sometimes inadequate inter-library loan system and with the price of books getting even more unaffordable with the rand-dollar rate (That stands at R7,59 as I write)

what? R7.74 today 29/11/00

Practically it involved trying to visit 12 teachers juggling in a full time academic load. As a researcher I blended in the different classrooms as best I could without being too intrusive or disrupting classroom events. I try to demonstrate some other methodological issues in each school in the next part of this chapter. One difficulty for me as a researcher generally was not being able to intervene when I sat and observed what I did. When I saw what I did in Mrs. H's classroom I most wanted to intervene. Sitting quietly and observing meant going against my inclination to chat and intervene. With gender on my mind, I wanted to be a kind of preacher. I wanted to disrupt when I heard words like "moffies", sissies, smoothies or misogynist comments. I wanted to disrupt the Mrs. C in Eastvale Primary who said: "democracy and stuff like that is only for the black schools. They're interested in all of that". But I could not. I wanted to tell many teachers including Mrs. J. : "What you do or what you say you do and what you think you do doesn't always tally". But I could not do that either. Yet I could not write myself out of what was happening. I did not want my presence to influence too much of what was happening. Yet I was always asked by children I had sat next to or as I sat observing the playgrounds why I was doing the research or why I was writing their names or why I was interested in them or why I kept asking questions or what I was writing

|| relevance you're not addressing ONE methodological issue yet!

you are to go to teacher, here, there, you can't just fly into a job + do your feelings

### Appendix D

Eastvale, Glenrose, Khayaleni and Mhalabatini the primary schools that I chose are all pseudonyms. My task as researcher in each school was to document openly what I saw and what I heard. My interactions though in each school with the children and the

descriptions

It's a 'convention' thing; sampling; descriptive of the research sites, problems of data collection, issues of ethics, etc - all these have to be tackled systematically.



girl



boy

---

## About me

My name is .....

I am a .....

I am ..... years old.

Girls are sexy  
Made out of pepsi  
Boys are rotten  
Made out of cotton

Girls go to college to make more knowledge  
Boys go to Jupiter  
To get more Stupider

My mother  
Your mother  
Walking down the street  
Eighteen Nineteen Marble Street  
Every time I go there  
This is what I hear  
itsy bitsy lollipop  
itsy bitsy boo  
itsy bitsy lollipop  
the boys love you

Double double  
Love love  
Double double  
Boys boys  
Double love  
double boys  
Double double love boys

OR

This this  
Double double that that  
Double Double this this  
Double double That that  
Double this double that double double this that

When Suzie was a baby  
A baby a baby  
When Suzie was a baby then she used to go like this

**Appendix F**

Wa wa wa wa  
When Suzie was a child , a child a child  
When Suzie was a child she used to go like this  
I want this I want that  
When Suzie was a school girl school girl school  
She used to say this  
study study study  
When Suzie was a teenager a teenager a teenager  
When Suzie was a teenager  
When Suzie had a boyfriend a boyfriend a boyfriend  
When Suzie had a boyfriend she used to say this  
I love you I love you I love you  
When Suzie got married married married  
When Suzie got married she used go like this  
I don't believe it I don't believe it I don't believe it  
When Suzie was a mother  
A mother a mother  
When Suzie was a mother  
She used to say this cook  
Cook Cook Cook Cook  
When Suzie had a baby a baby a baby  
When Suzy had a baby she used to say like this  
So cute so cute so cute  
When Suzie was a grandmother a grandmother a grandmother  
When Suzie was a grandmother  
She used to say this  
I'm sick I'm sick  
When Suzie was a skeleton, a skeleton a skeleton  
When Suzie was a skeleton she used to go like this  
Rattle rattle rattle  
When Suzie was a ghost, a ghost a ghost, a ghost  
When Suzie was a ghost  
She used to go like this  
Boo, boo, boo  
When Suzie was nothing nothing nothing  
When Suzie was nothing she used to go like this...

Eggs, bacon, chips and cheese  
Which one would you rather please  
Around the world or fuzzy cheese or a story all over the moon

Apples on the treetop make me sick  
They make me heart go 246  
Not because I'm dirty not because I'm clean  
Not because I kissed the boy behind the kitchen door  
So come girl lets have some fun  
Here comes Emily  
With her wiggly bum  
She can do the pom pom  
She can do the twist  
But I bet you \$5 she can't do this  
(roll over; roly polly)

There's a party around the corner  
Would you please please come  
Bring your own cup and saucer  
And your own cherry bun  
With a cherry in your bun and a fork and knife  
And how many peanuts would your boyfriend choose?  
And how many kisses will you kiss  
(Someone chooses a number and then you spell O U T spells out  
Three  
One two three

Emma and Dave  
Sitting on a tree  
K I S S I N G  
First comes love then comes marriage  
Then comes the baby in the golden carriage  
That's not all That's not all Then comes the baby drinking alcohol (playing  
basketball)

My boyfriend gave me peaches  
My boyfriend gave me pears  
My boyfriend gave me 50c  
And threw me down the stairs  
I gave him back his peaches

I gave him back his pears  
I gave him back his 50c  
I made him wash the dishes  
I made him scrub the floors.  
I made him kiss a pretty girl behind the kitchen door

Ije Ije Ije

1,2,3 hehelele

7 up to 10

ije ije ije

1,2,3, hehelele

7 up to 10

a, b, c, d, e, f, g, h, i, j, k, l, m, n, o, p,

(name of a boy starting with p)

Petros

Nomvula, do you love Petros?

Nomvula, will you marry him?

Yes

No

Yes

No

How many kisses will you give?

1, 2, 3, 4,

How many boyfriends have you got?

1, 2, 3, 4, 5,

How many babies have you got?

1, 2, 3,

plastic

gold

plastic

gold

van motorbike

van motorbike

I wrote a letter to my friend to my friend to my friend (repeat 5 times)

All the way we pull it

It wasn't you, it wasn't you

All but you

There's a party round the corner

Will you please please come

Bring your own cup and saucer

And your own cherry bun

And what is your boyfriend's name?

Brutus

Brutus will be there blowing kisses in the air

And O U T spells out

O bonnie bonnie bonnie bonnie macarina rina rina

Itse khayi khayi

Kuppa khayi khayi khayi

O simple simple for the apple apple apple

For the things you clap your hands

You pull

Hambha tenga Omo

Ini

Hambha tenga Skip

Ini

Hambha tenga njana

Jim Jim bafana

Jim Jim bafana

Jim Jim bafana

Make chinchane

Whena tata owamie

Mena tata owakho

Ofune ngxcaca

Makeze kiti

Haai umfana

Sifune umthombazane

Ngcoba umfame ushipa

Sdwedwe