Childhood

Presumed Innocence: (Hetero)Sexual, Heterosexist and Homophobic Harassment among Primary School Girls and Boys

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When sexual harassment and schooling have been the focus of research, the site of investigation has been the secondary school and subsequently the experiences of adolescents. Locating the primary school as a key arena for the production and regulation of sexual discourses, practices and identities, this article examines the neglected area of preadolescents' experiences of different forms of sexual harassment. Drawing on data from an ethnographic study of children's gender and sexual identities during their final year of primary school, the author reports on the physical and verbal forms of heterosexual, homophobic and heterosexist harassment of both girls and boys and suggests that such practices are the means by which many children define, create and consolidate hegemonic masculinities and femininities, heterosexual identities and heterosexual hierarchies. The implications regarding the more damaging practices of children's sexual cultures and relationships for policy and practice are discussed briefly in the concluding section.

Introduction

The past 15 years have witnessed a growing awareness and an increase of research into bullying in primary and secondary schools (Aaora and Thompson, 1987; Elton, 1989; La Fontaine, 1991; Olweus, 1978, 1993; Roland and Munthe, 1989; Smith and Sharpe, 1994; Smith et al., 1999; Tattum and Lane, 1989; Tatum, 1993). Much of this work has been designed and conducted within a psychological paradigm which often neglects and excludes how bullying behaviour is embedded in relations of power and control (Smith and Sharpe, 1994) and is part of a continuum which can directly

affect all pupils (Askew, 1989). Despite the more recent conceptualizations of bullying as an abuse of interpersonal power (Duncan, 1999), one of the most significant absences in the UK bullying literature is its failure to engage with the contributions from researchers concerned with gender, race and sexuality as Mac an Ghaill suggests:

> A popular discourse has been constructed that serves to depoliticise the sexual and racial violence taking place at the microcultural level of playground and classroom. (Mac and Ghaill, 1994: 128)

Indeed, sexual violence and harassment are often absent in definitions of bullying. The recent collection of cross-national research into the 'nature of school bullying' (Smith et al., 1999), for example, makes no reference to gender-based or sexualized bullying. Studies which examine the relationship between bullying, violence and gender come from a wider focus on gender relations and secondary schooling (Askew, 1989; Askew and Ross, 1988) and have explored schools as sites for sexual harassment, predominantly experienced by young women and perpetrated by young men (Davies, 1984; Halson, 1989; Herbert, 1992; Jones, 1985; Mahony, 1985) – although some studies have extended the concept of interpersonal forms of sexual violence and oppression to include both boys and girls as 'victims' and 'perpetrators' (Lees, 1986, 1993; Wolpe, 1988).

More recent research, which has examined the school as a key site for the production of masculinities, femininities and sexualities, has explored and exposed the relationship between gender-based and sexualized forms of violence and harassment, particularly its role in the production of hegemonic heterosexual masculinities in school (Blackmore, 1995; Duncan, 1999; Epstein, 2000; Kehily and Nayak, 1997; Kenway and Fitzclarence, 1997; Mac an Ghaill, 1994, 1999). However, when sexual harassment and schooling has been the focus of research,[1] the site of investigation has been the secondary school and subsequently the experience of adolescents. Despite isolated incidents within the media (Jones and Rose, 1997; Simpson, 1997) and references within broader projects on the gendered worlds of primary school children (Best, 1983; Clark, 1990; Connolly, 1998; Davies, 1993; Francis, 1998; Skelton, 2001; Thorne, 1993), there are very few detailed accounts that centre the experience of preadolescents (although see Stein, 1996) – possibly due to the fact that very few ethnographic studies locate the primary school as a key arena for the production of sexual identities (Renold, 2000). This article goes some way to redressing the balance and draws upon a study which foregrounds the primary school as a key arena for the production and regulation of sexual discourses, practices and identities to explore the often neglected accounts of children's experiences of different types of sexual harassment, which has been conceptualized as 'heterosexual', 'homophobic' and 'heterosexist' harassment.

The study: researching children's construction of gender and sexuality

The data and analysis presented in this article derive from doctoral research in the form of a year-long ethnography exploring the construction of children's gender and sexual identities in their final year (Year 6, age 10/11 years old) of primary school (Renold, 1999). The fieldwork was conducted during the academic year 1995/6 in two primary schools (Tipton Primary and Hirstwood) situated in a small semi-rural town in the east of England.[2] As discussed elsewhere (Renold, 2000, 2002), I did not set out to study children's sexual cultures. However, as in many qualitative studies, the reflexivity and indeed flexibility of the ethnographic process led to a shift in focus. From examining gender relations, I found myself increasingly witnessing a complex interactive daily network of heterosexual performances by both boys and girls as they negotiated their gendered selves and thus the interconnectedness of sexuality and gender. I explored how dominant notions of heterosexuality underscore much of children's identity work and peer relationships as they 'live out' the categories 'girl' and 'boy' and how each are subject to the pressures of 'compulsory heterosexuality' (Rich, 1983), where to be a 'normal' boy and girl involves the projection of a coherent and abiding heterosexual self. To this end I have been examining the acting out of Butler's (1990) 'heterosexual matrix' in which the 'real' expression of masculinity and femininity is embedded with a presupposed heterosexuality. In particular, I explore how heterosexism, homophobia and heterosexual harassment are experienced and carried out by both boys and girls, as they negotiate and maintain gender and sexual hierarchies and hegemonies, both within and between the genders and within and outside of heterosexual relationships/practices.

Methods and methodology: researching from the 'children's standpoint'

The study locates itself within the 'new' sociology of children and childhood in which children are no longer perceived as passive bystanders within processes of socialization, but active constructors and mediators of their social worlds and realities and worthy of study in their own right (Alderson, 1995; Butler and Shaw, 1996; James and Prout, 1998; Mayall, 1994; Qvortrup et al., 1994). Indeed, one of the central features of the research was its commitment to foregrounding children's own experiences and allowing them to wield some control over the focus of the research. Alanen (1994) has described this approach as research conducted from the 'children's standpoint', that is giving voice and respecting children as knowledgeable and active subjects and using the research process as a platform which can enable children to communicate experiences of importance to them.

I decided to use exploratory unstructured group interviews as one of the main ethnographic methods because it maximized children's ability to create spaces (physical and discursive) from which they could freely discuss what they felt to be important and significant to them. My 'role' during these interviews was one of facilitator. I refrained from asking direct questions and as far as possible allowed children themselves to set the agenda and topic for discussion. Moreover, by repeatedly interviewing children over the year (six times in total), organizing interviews by friendship groups and limiting the sample to two Year 6 classes (59 children), it was possible to develop a safe, comfortable and supportive relationship and environment with which they could discuss, disclose and share their experiences[3] (see Renold, 2002). As a result, many children allowed me access to their more private thoughts, experiences and relationships, and previously unreported accounts of children's sexual cultures, including the more painful and oppressive experiences, began to surface.

Defining and conceptualizing sexual harassment

Sexual harassment is an ambivalent term and its legal, sociopolitical and 'everyday' usage varies both within and across countries and cultures. For example, unlike the US, under UK law there is no specific legislation against *sexual* harassment or homophobic discrimination.[4] Complainants instead rely on the various provisions set out in the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 or the more recent Protection from Harassment Act 1997, originally set up to prevent stalking. European law, however, has sought to define and legislate against sexual harassment (in the workplace at least) under the European Commission's 1991 Recommendation on the Protection of the Dignity of Women and Men at Work. Here, harassment is defined as the 'unwanted conduct of a sexual nature' (including 'physical, verbal and non-verbal conduct') which is 'unwelcome, unreasonable and offensive to the recipient'. It is this definition that I have used to categorize sexualized forms of children's bullying and harassment because it is an inclusive interpretation that defines harassment in terms of the subjective experiences of the recipients of harassment.

Indeed, defining harassment in terms of the harm and pain of the recipient (rather than relying *solely* on what particular types of behaviour might constitute harassment) is important insofar as it prioritizes children's own and often multiple interpretations of events. For example, 'bra-pulling' has several conflicting meanings. It could be experienced by girls positively (such as a welcome sign of a boy's romantic interest) or negatively (such as a humiliating recognition of a girl's sexual maturation). Consequently, if it was experienced as fun and amusing and thus 'welcome' it *would not* be categorized as harassment. If, however, 'bra-pulling' was experienced as 'unwanted' and 'unwelcome' and made the girl involved feel uncomfortable it *would* be categorized as harassment.[5] While such a definition may be

problematic given the multiple and sometimes conflicting interpretations of social interactions and accounts, it was the only working definition I felt that could capture the complexities and ambiguities of sexual harassment and one which could differentiate between children's 'welcome' or 'unwelcome' (boys' and girls') sexualized behaviour.[6] The term is further unpacked in the form of 'heterosexual', 'homophobic' and 'heterosexist' harassment to make visible the interconnectedness of sexuality and gender and thus to illuminate the heteronormative cultures within which children make sense of their gendered selves.

Heterosexual harassment

'He called her a "fucking bitch" ': verbal sexual harassment

Heterosexual harassment from boys to girls commonly took the form of denigrating girls (and women) through sexually abusive and aggressive language. Verbal insults predominantly centred around a girl's sexual status included terms such as 'bitch', 'slag', 'tart' and 'slut'. Clark (1990: 40) also cites examples of girls aged 11 and 12 being called 'big tits' and 'period bag', all of which resonate strongly with the well-documented pervasiveness of heterosexual harassment experienced by girls and young women in the secondary school (Cowie and Lees, 1981; Duncan, 1999; Hey, 1997; Lees 1986, 1993; Mahony, 1985; Wolpe, 1988). While some of the misogyny was delivered and justified through humour (Kehily and Nayak, 1997), this was not always the case, as the following two extracts illustrate:

> Juliet starts singing a song when pupils have been told to 'be quiet'. Darren spins on his chair and leans forward in front of Juliet. He then mouths the word 'fuck' at her – I am not sure why. He looks annoyed at something.

> (*Discussing girlfriends*)
> *ER:* So what about you Darren?
> *Pete:* Well, he's been out with Mandy, I mean, not Mandy, I mean er er Victoria about three times in the past three months init?
> *Darren:* Mmm
> *ER:* What happened, why aren't you seeing her any more?
> *Pete:* Because she, because he called her a fucking bitch and/
> *Darren:* I . . . I just always get in a stress over things, like I was in a stress that time/and I don't know why

The first extract illustrates how some boys would use sexual swearwords to unsettle and overtly intimidate girls. The second extract seems to be part of a wider narrative about boys' need to reinstate their heterosexual dominance often undermined and denied through 'real' boyfriend and girlfriend relationships, in which many of the boys claimed they were 'used', manipulated and ruthlessly dumped by girls (Renold, 2000). For many boys of this age, who sporadically engaged in heterosexual practices of 'fancying' and 'going out', their experiences were nothing short of confusion, fear and frustration

– particularly when proximity to girls could be simultaneously contaminating *and* masculinity confirming. Indeed, misogynistic discourses via the sexual objectification and ridicule of girls was most commonly displayed by boys who failed to, or rarely located themselves within, heterosexual relationships or discourses.[7]

'They punch you in the boobs and pull your bra': physical sexual harassment

Incidents of physical sexual harassment are rarely reported in the primary school literature, although there have been cases sensationally reported in the media. Even though they were less frequently reported to me[8] than the various forms of verbal sexual abuse, some girls were experiencing what they considered as unwanted sexualized forms of harassment from their male classmates. Indeed, physical sexual violence seemed to be another means of reasserting and reproducing boys as powerful in social circumstances which often rendered them powerless or out of their control (Mac an Ghaill, 1994). Such practices were often engaged in by boys who were located lower down the hierarchies of heterosexuality and masculinity. What follows is an example of one of the most extreme cases of physical sexual violence/harassment reported by girls towards the end of the study. The boys' response to the incident described is discussed later:

> *ER:* Do boys pick on you like they do their friends?
> *Trudy:* They punch you in the boobs
> *Anabel:* Yeah they punch you in the boobs sometimes and pull your bra and that really kills/
> *Trudy:* Yeah, they go like that (*shows me*)
> *ER:* Who does that?
> *All:* Stu
> *Anabel:* And Ryan and that
> *ER:* So what do you do to that/
> *Anabel:* Nothing, we just walk away going like this (*hugging chest*), 'don't touch me'
> *ER:* Do you think that's some form of harassment?
> *All:* Yeah
> *Anabel:* Yeah, but
> *ER:* You don't tell anyone?
> *Anabel and Carla:* No
> *ER:* Why not?
> *Kate:* Because you . . . /they might think it's a big deal
> *Trudy:* Because w/e're used to it
> *Anabel:* No, we do think it's a big deal but if we told someone/like Miss Wilson, she'd just say 'oh don't be so silly'
> *Trudy:* The/y'd laugh
>
> . . .
>
> *Carla:* and I'd be too embarrassed
> *Anabel and Kate:* Yeah

Trudy: Yeah and we don't like causing an argument, we don't I don't like causing an argument.

. . .

ER: Don't you punch him back? [when he hits you]
Trudy: No, coz you can't really
Anabel: You don't
Carla: They hurt you
ER: Sometimes/
Trudy: Girls really don't fight boys

While echoing encounters of physical heterosexual harassment within the secondary school, Clark (1990) and Stein (1995) (conducting their research in Australian and American primary schools respectively) reveal that such experiences are not peculiar or restricted to adolescents and secondary schools. Clark (1990), for example, examining the gender divide in the primary school, describes similar reports of boys punching girls in the breasts. Stein (1995: 149), in a more focused discussion of school children's experiences of sexual violence, describes 'Friday flip-up days' where 'boys in the first through to third grades flipped up the dresses of their female classmates'. Moreover, just as Stein describes how such incidents were typically dismissed as mutual, voluntary and playful playground behaviour, the girls themselves, like so many reporters of sexual harassment, used discourses that served to invalidate and undermine their experiences as a form of harassment despite describing such incidents as unwelcome and unwanted (Kelly and Radford, 1996).

Indeed, none of the girls reported these incidents to the teaching staff at either Tipton or Hirstwood. When I asked them why ('don't you tell anyone?'), their rationales reflect and echo wider cultural issues around girls' and women's socialized passivity and subordination regarding their personal/private sexual lives particularly in relation to challenging sexual violence with either their perpetrators or teaching/ancillary staff. They explain how 'telling' is not an option because of fears of confrontation and conflict ('causing an argument'), ridicule ('they'd just laugh'), raising/discussing personal and sensitive topics ('embarrassment') and not being taken seriously by their class teacher ('she'd say oh don't be silly'). Each girl's experiences not only remained untold, but, unable to retaliate, given the pervasive discourse that 'girls don't fight boys', they also went unchallenged, thus reproducing the boys' behaviour as 'normal' and 'natural' (Blackmore, 1995). Indeed, as the following extract and analysis illustrates, the ambiguity of this form of harassment coupled with the discourse that 'boys don't hit girls' possibly led one of the boys involved to deny his actions when confronted by myself and his male peers in a later interview:

ER: So Stu, you don't hit the girls at all?
Stu: No
ER: So are they just making/it all up?

Sam: I do
ER: I know you do
Sam: Coz they're always going like this (*demonstrates hair ruffling*)
ER: So you hit them back?
Sam: Yeah
ER: They were telling me that sometimes you thump them in the chest [I obtained the girls' consent to confront the boys]
Sam: Yeah yeah he does (*laughing*)
Stu: No
James: He's, he's a women beater he is
Sam: Man slaughter[9]
Jake: He's like someone out of *Cracker*[10]
James: Stu can't beat up boys so he beats up girls
Stu: Oh yeah, I could beat you up (*Sam laughs*)
James: Come on then
ER: So is it true?
Stu: No
Sam: He's gone /all red
Stu: It isn't true
Sam: It is

Stu, the boy in question, was part of the dominant peer group, but was continually teased by the other boys for his sporting skill and often came out the loser in one-on-one fights and fighting games. One interpretation of why he 'punched girls in the chest' could be his struggle to access successfully the 'tough' and 'sporting' discourses that produced boys as 'boys'. However, the socially unacceptable behaviour, revealed by Ryan's reaction, in which he is positioned as a 'women beater' thus potentially threatening his masculinity (as 'real men' don't hit women), and ultimately his (hetero)sexuality (given the common conflation of questionable masculinities and 'homosexuality'), does not fully explain Stuart's actions. An alternative interpretation could be that the overwhelming need to disassociate himself from and subordinate the 'feminine', which ultimately led to a physical domination, transgressed the social acceptability of his behaviour. Even if that is taking a rather deterministic view of psychoanalytic theories,[11] Stu's behaviour towards Anabel and Carla does however highlight the contradiction and struggle in trying to perform a coherent hegemonic masculine identity, and all that that entails, particularly when girls are physically bigger and sometimes stronger than boys at this age. Stu was, by comparison, a small boy. This analysis confirms Collinson and Hearn's (1996) thesis, among others, that sexual harassment is not just about sexuality but about violence and power (Hanmer and Maynard, 1987; Kenway and Fitzclarence, 1997; Morgan, 1987). Despite the humour through which Stu's friends interpreted and commented upon his actions, his behaviour towards Anabel and her friends must be taken seriously. These practices, despite being unchallenged by their production as 'just fun', 'produce and privilege' boys in their 'complicity', which Connell claims is the way boys and men benefit from the 'patriarchal dividend' (Connell, 1995: 79).

Challenging the male sexual gaze: predatory girls and violent relationships

Despite the regulation and surveillance of girls' (hetero)sexual practices, many girls found their positions as 'girlfriends' and their new-found sexual knowledges as particularly powerful (Renold, 2000). Thus, while much of the heterosexual harassment, both verbal and physical, was experienced by girls at the hands and mouths of boys, there were cases of dominant girls sexually intimidating subordinate boys ('predatory girls') and boyfriend–girlfriend relationships in which girls as 'girlfriends' were physically violent to their prospective boyfriends. In the following extract, Tina and Sally seem to delight in sexually teasing/harassing and verbally abusing an unpopular, subordinate boy, Charles, insofar as their heterosexual advances are unwanted, unwelcome and mocking in their tone:

> *Tina:* Do you remember that time when we kept going round to Charles Hatherton . . . the fat one . . .
> *Tina:* He's got ginger hair
> *Sally:* He's so horrible
> *ER:* Why, because of the way he looks?
> *Sally:* No, he's just so annoying
> *Tina:* Yeah he goes right, if you go erm . . . he just walks around like this (*she displays his walk, very camp*)
> *Sally:* And he's really a drag and stuff, he's just such a (*lowers voice*) knobby[12] person (*the others laugh*)
> *Tina and Carrie:* Yeah
>
> . . .
>
> *Sally:* They're scared of us . . . and you go 'Oh Charlie, Oh Charlie' (*singing style*)
> *ER:* Are you teasing him?
> *Sally and Tina:* Yeah
> *Sally:* And he goes 'OH NO' and I go, 'Tina your lover is here to see you' and he runs off and then she goes, 'oh you're really ugly'
>
> . . .
>
> *Sally:* He's so sad
> *ER:* Don't you think this might upset him?
> *Tina and Sally:* No no

This was not an isolated incident. There were many occasions when girls of a high heterosexual ranking would engage in these types of scenarios, using their sexual prowess to subordinate and heterosexualize other, less desirable and often effeminate boys. Lees (1993), Duncan (1999) and Dubberly (1993) also found how girls were far from passive and would sometimes mock and sexually tease and derogate other boys. Duncan (1999), for example, cites the popular practices of 'de-bagging', where a group of girls would pull a boy's trousers and underpants down. Dubberly (1988) graphically describes a gang of girls 'raping' a boy with special needs as an example of female sexual power. Indeed, the preceding extract does go some way to

challenge old stereotypes of girls as passive sexual beings and possibly challenges the male gaze, albeit temporarily, in terms of the girls' ability to disrupt the gendered power relations of dominant masculinity/boys and subordinate femininity/girls. However, while Sally and Tina's behaviour may have challenged the male gaze on the surface by engaging in what is usually associated with boys and men, their actions (bullying 'effeminate' boys) simultaneously shamed and thus policed alternative/different masculinities and thus reinforced wider cultural and social gendered power dynamics.

In addition to the predatory behaviour, there were also two cases of girls being physically violent towards their boyfriends. One girl, Jo, engaged in predatory behaviour, by almost stalking her boyfriend, William, chasing him round the classroom, following him at playtime and pestering him for kisses. Her relationship with him was turbulent and violent sometimes, as the following extract describes:

> *ER:* So Jo how are things how are things with you and er William?
> *Jo:* All right
> *Amanda:* She whacked him the other day and he had a red mark like a hand shape/
> *Jo:* That's because during the summer holidays he comes round my house and he does this thing with a pipe cleaner . . . he takes these little bits off and goes like that (*hand across face*) and I got these cuts straight down here
> *Jane:* eeer/
> *ER:* He did that/to your face
> *Hayley:* You always hit him, all, all the time
> *Jo:* Yeah
> *ER:* So you slapped him?
> *Jo:* Yeah I slapped him/
> *ER:* Coz he made a mark on your face?
> *Jo:* Yeah, coz
> *Hayley:* He had a hand mark on his back/(*almost defending William*)
> *Amanda:* She slaps him all the time/
> *Jo:* He hits me (*defensive tone*)
> *ER:* So if he hits you, you hit him back/or do you hit him and he hits you back?
> *Jo:* Yeah, . . . no he hits me and I hit him/back
> *Amanda:* If he thumps you though you don't think you'd want normally to keep hitting him do you?
> *Jo:* (*Laughs*) and nods
> *ER:* You like that do you?
> *Jo:* He doesn't but I do/
> *ER:* You like hitting him?
> *Jo:* Yeah/

Another girl, Kelly, in the parallel research site (Tipton Primary), used to hit and stamp on her boyfriend's toes. She even sent him an anonymous letter saying 'watch it I'll get you' and threatened to scratch and kick him when their relationship had terminated. Both these cases in a similar way to the 'predatory girls', illustrate how some girls were transgressing conventional

heterosexual expressions and performances. Indeed, Jo's heterosexual relationship with William contrasts with Davies's (1993: 136) construction of girls' heterosexual engagements as predominantly fragile and vulnerable. However, dominant heterosexual codes governing how children conducted their relationships with each other prevailed, and are explored in the final section of this article.

Homophobia: 'they say I'm gay, they say I'm like a girl'

I have briefly discussed earlier how, in the pursuit of hegemonic masculinity, heterosexual identifications were defined through misogynistic discourses and practices which I have conceptualized as heterosexual harassment. As many secondary school ethnographies have illustrated (Duncan, 1999; Mac an Ghaill, 1994; Nayak and Kehily, 1997) boys also formed their masculinities and heterosexualities via homophobic practices – which in this study involved labelling other boys as 'gay'. As the following extract reveals, this could entail everyday interactions within friendship groups and often formed part of everyday classroom interactions:

> As Colin walks into the classroom, he clips Aaron around the head. Aaron responds with 'get off baby' to which Colin, horrified, shouts, 'urgh, you gay'. Aaron laughs this off and tells me about the latest fight between two girls in the playground.

Homophobic performances, such as name-calling, teasing and labelling were also directed at those boys who failed or chose not to access hegemonic masculine discourses and practices. Two boys were regularly called 'gay' by their classroom peers because they did not engage in the three routes that were perceived to secure hegemonic heterosexual masculinities – football, fighting and girlfriends. True to Butler's (1990) framework, displaying an 'abnormal' or questionable 'masculine' identity also threw into doubt boys' heterosexuality, thereby creating potential for their behaviours to be homo-sexualized.[13] Indeed discourses of homophobia were expressed vehemently by boys who did not engage in overt heterosexual boyfriend–girlfriend relationships and more frequently than by boys who did have girlfriends and who were going out. Differentiating oneself and subordinating homosexualities by shouting out and positioning other boys as 'gay' were all ways in which these boys asserted and attempted to make coherent their heterosexual identities and were a means of policing the boundaries of hegemonic heterosexual masculinities (Nayak and Kehily, 1997). Thus, homophobic performances and misogyny seemed to offer a way of producing 'heterosexual coherence', which in turn signified a coherent 'masculine' identity. More common, however, was the heterosexist bullying of children, boys and girls alike, who transgressed dominant masculinities and femininities, and dominant heterosexualities.

Heterosexism

Heterosexism has been defined by some as the superiority of heterosexuality over other forms of sexuality such as gay, lesbian and bisexualities (van de Ven, 1996). Given that there are multiple forms of heterosexuality (note for example, Mac an Ghaill's (1999) 'fashionable' and 'explicit' heterosexuals and Haywood's (1996) 'subordinated', 'hyper' and 'dominant' heterosexuals), heterosexism is maybe more about those performances which keep the heterosexual presentation within acceptable boundaries which are often located within a paradigm of dominant masculinity and submissive femininity (Hinson, 1996; Renew, 1996). It is thus about maintaining dominant forms of heterosexuality. Heterosexism, as a pedagogy of heterosexuality, is also 'used against those children and young people who do their gender in ways that conflict with dominant hegemonic practices . . . [that is] those who do masculinity and femininity in non-traditional ways' (Hinson, 1996: 235).

(Hetero)sexual outsiders: gender misfits and gender hierarchies

Bullying behaviours towards those girls and boys who did not invest in dominant and hegemonic forms of masculinity and femininity were particularly common and affected over a third of all children interviewed. Much of this bullying took the form of exclusion, verbal abuse, ridicule and ritual humiliation, which Adler and Adler (1998) have conceptualized as 'out-group subjugation', 'stigmatization' and 'expulsion' and was a way of policing and maintaining dominant gender and sexual identities. Epstein (1993: 18) for example, notes how it is by drawing boundaries that subjects establish and secure identities, where the processes of Othering 'create the terms of cultural hegemony' and are 'the means through which we establish our identities'.

In Tipton Primary and Hirstwood there were two groups of boys who either through choice or failure did not take up and construct their identities through hegemonic masculine discourses. They were boys who were studious, pro-school, played fantasy games instead of football, who preferred romantic ballads ('Whitney Housten') over heavy rock ('Nirvana') and did not adopt the popular modes of dress, which, at the time of research, included baggy trousers and oversized T-shirts. Each of these boys was positioned as Other within a hegemonic masculine matrix which equated all of these activities and practices with girls, things feminine and non-masculine ways of being. Girls were positioned as Other if they did not or failed to cultivate their femininity within dominant heterosexual/feminine discourses. This often took the form of endlessly evaluating other girls and positioning and repositioning them within the regime of the male gaze by calling them 'fat', 'loud', 'unfashionable', 'tarty' – particularly those girls who were not interested in boys romantically. The capacity of girls to position girls as Other via an erasure of alternative/different femininities as legitimate 'sub-

jects of girlhood' resonates closely with Hey's (1997: 84) ethnography of girls' friendships and peer relationships.

While much of the gendered bullying and harassment was conducted within same-sex peer groups, with girls positioning other girls and boys positioning other boys as 'outsiders' and 'others', there was also a case of girls bullying 'failed males' (Thorne, 1993):

> The class has just finished tidying out their drawers and they are slotting them back into place, one by one. Stuart goes to put his back and then Sophie. Sophie however leaves a gap. Mrs. Fryer does not notice at first until Georgina goes to put hers back and then she is asked to fill the gap. Georgina moves Sophie's into the gap and places her tray below Sophie's. Sophie lets out a squeal and says 'I'm not having mine next to his' and promptly moves it below Georgina's. Mrs. Fryer then tells Sophie not to be so silly and to fill the gap. Sophie refuses and eventually Damion fills the gap. He is thanked.
>
> . . .
>
> *Jo:* Stuart
> *Hayley:* He's horrible/
> *Jane:* I used/to have some really close male friends like in my old school though
> *Amanda:* Everyone hates Stuart, when they touch him they go urrrgh lurgy[14]
> *ER:* To who?
> *Jane:* Stuart
> *ER:* Do they?
> *Jane:* Yeah they say he's got the lurgy and stuff/
> *Amanda:* Yeah say you're Stuart, you touch him and go errrrrrrr (*they laugh*)sort of thing/
> *Jane:* And it goes round the whole class
> *Amanda:* If you cross your fingers/
> *Jo:* Then you can't get it/unless??????/
> *Jane:* It's a bit childish really because you can't really get a lurgy from touching someone really can you, even if you just don't like them

Such discourses of disease and pollution have predominantly been cited in primary schools as something which boys do to girls (Best, 1983; Davies, 1984; Thorne, 1993 – although see Douglas, 1966). However, there were many examples such as refusing to stand next to Stuart when lining up for assembly, to sit in his chair if chairs were moved around or be in close proximity to him, or making a cross with their fingers against contamination. Other boys who were described as 'dorks', 'geeks' or like Stuart as 'gay' were also verbally abused and mistreated in a similar fashion. Some girls would push them, kick them, tease them and laugh at them. It seemed one of the ways in which girls could access more powerful ways of being (when in other contexts they would be at the receiving end of boys' jibes, jokes and insults). It was also a way, as Duncan (1999) has suggested in his ethnography of sexual bullying in secondary schools, of children consolidating and normalizing dominant modes of femininity and masculinity.

Heterosexual failures

Transgressing gender norms or choosing not to invest in dominant modes of masculinity and femininity often produced 'heterosexual failures' insofar as 'aggressive' or 'weird' femininities and subordinate effeminate masculinities positioned them as heterosexually undesirable by popular boys and girls. Even if they became 'girlfriends' or 'boyfriends' and engaged in practices of 'going out' and 'dumping' it was usually within their own isolated 'subordinate' groups, at the bottom of the heterosexual hierarchies, which subsequently reinforced their positioning as 'heterosexual failures'. To this end, they were used by 'popular' boys and girls, at the top of the heterosexual hierarchies, as objects of sexual ridicule. For example, 'messengers' who acted as go-betweens and matchmakers could cruelly position unpopular and sexually undesirable girls as potential girlfriends of popular boys, as a way of mocking and belittling boys' heterosexual masculinity and maintaining the girls' status as 'heterosexual failure'.[15] Duncan (1999) describes similar incidents by both girls and boys as a means of maintaining heterosexual hierarchies. Davies (1993) also cites how only high-status boys and girls were considered attractive and Connolly (1998) describes how girls would not play kiss chase with South Asian boys because of their perceived effeminacy, and, I would suggest, given the conflation of gender with sexuality, their perceived non-heterosexuality.

Disinterested heterosexuals

Similar forms of sexualized bullying included girls[16] who were not interested in producing their femininities through heterosexual practices and discourses. In this study they were a group of white, middle-class girls who differentiated themselves from dominant feminine performances evidenced by their lack of interest in street fashion and the popular pursuit of boys as potential boyfriends (see Renold, 2001). Indeed, all four girls reported a strong disinterest in fashion, in terms of modes of dress and physical appearance and a disinterest in and rejection of the dominant heterosexual narratives, i.e. desiring or having a boyfriend. The combination of these factors produced the girls as 'different', as 'Other' and they became an easy target and object of ridicule and exclusionary techniques. As each of the previous subsections have illustrated, such behaviour was one of the predominant means by which heterosexism was employed by both boys and girls as a means of policing dominant modes of masculinity, femininity and heterosexuality.

Conclusions

In her article on sexuality and education, Kelly (1992) states that sexuality is not only denied in primary schools, but actively excluded. Exploring the relationship between schooling and sexualities, Epstein and Johnson (1998)

suggest that such silences come about and are produced through discourses of childhood innocence, which as a kind of desirable ignorance not only produces confusing messages for children who overtly engage with or enjoy their sexuality, but in the case of this presentation, endangers those who experience sexuality as threatening or as harassment. I have attempted elsewhere to break the silence regarding young children's sexual cultures and 'presumed innocence' by exploring the primary school as a key site for the production of sexual identities and how hegemonic masculinities and femininities involve the 'heterosexual presumption' (Renold, 2000). I have also explored how children are active in the formation of their gender and sexual identities and how sexuality and specifically heterosexuality is part and parcel of their gender identity constructions. This article has expanded some of this analysis and focused upon the neglected and underreported area of young children's experiences of different forms of sexual harassment – not as isolated and unconnected incidents, but as part of children's everyday interactive social worlds, peer networks and relationships (Blackmore, 1995). In sum, I have explored how homophobia, heterosexism and heterosexual harassment provide ways of resecuring gender dichotomies, creating and maintaining dominant masculinities and passive subordinate femininities, and policing heterosexual hierarchies.

While there is obviously a need for further research regarding the practices, experiences and coping strategies of sexual bullying in the primary school, the findings from this study suggest the need for sexuality to be included as an equal opportunities issue. However, such policies and practices need to be able to deal and resonate with the everyday realities of children's experiences and go beyond sex education practices and pedagogies which are embedded in the 'prevention and plumbing' of biological reproduction and engage with sexuality not just as physical acts but as processes of identity constructions and social relations. As Epstein (1999) concludes:

> We need to grasp the nettle of sex education and develop a broader sexuality education, in schools, where sexuality in its broadest sense is recognised, and where difference is valued and respected.

To this end, not only can the more damaging practices of misogyny, heterosexism and homophobia be legislated against, but all the hidden injuries embedded in the more fluid forms of dominance and subordination (Kenway et al., 1997) can be recognized and supported. While this will prove challenging, given the current media moral panics, confusion and political tensions regarding Section 28 of the Local Government Act (see note 1) and the discussion of children's sexuality more widely, only a curriculum and policy framework that reflects and is sensitive to children's own sexual cultures can support the more damaging and oppressive side to children's developing sexual and gender identities and peer relationships.

Key to transcripts

…	Pause
(…)	Material edited out
/	Moment when interruption begins
' '	Direct quotation in fieldnotes
???	Inaudible response

Notes

1.   As a result of some of this research and public campaigning, there has been a recent shift in education policy to recognize and tackle homophobic bullying in the recent UK government circular 10/99 on social inclusion (DfEE, 1999), which includes a specific reference to peer bullying as a result of sexual orientation (Section 4.44) and includes strategies to address sexual and racial harassment (Section 4.47). The government's anti-bullying pack for schools (DfEE, 2000) also offers detailed advice and guidance to prevent bullying because of perceived or actual sexual orientation. However, such a shift to combat sexualized bullying and harassment sits uneasily alongside Section 28 of the Local Government Act which prohibits local authorities from 'promoting homosexuality' as a 'pretended family relationship' despite two defeated repeals (see Redman [1994] and Epstein [2000] for a wider discussion).

2.   Tipton Primary's catchment area served white 'working'- and 'middle'-class families, while Hirstwood served predominantly white, 'middle'-class families.

3.   For a wider discussion of children's sexual cultures within the primary school setting see Renold (2000).

4.   In 2002, the UK will be required by a European directive to create legislation to combat discrimination because of sexual orientation. However, this legislation will apply to employment/workplace only.

5.   Most of the 'harassment/'bullying' disclosures presented in this article are unprompted self-disclosures. This is especially true of the more serious reports of physical sexual harassment.

6.   However, it is also necessary to stress that the term 'harassment', while serving a useful analytic function as a concept and language of description, was not a term widely used by the children in the study. Consequently, it is not possible to explore the meaning that 'harassment', as a category of behaviour, has for them.

7.   Some boys would also position their teacher as sexually subordinate (Walkerdine, 1981). For example a group of boys called their teacher a 'slag' and a 'bitch' (in an interview) when football was banned in the playground and when, on another occasion, they felt they were receiving unnecessary disciplinary treatment in the classroom.

8.   None of the girls reported incidents of sexual harassment to the teaching staff at either Tipton or Hirstwood.

9.   'Man slaughter' is legal jargon adopted by the boys to denote through hyperbole and humour the violent potential of Stu.

10.   *Cracker* is a title of a UK television crime drama series in which the central protagonist is a criminal psychologist.

11.   See Henriques et al. (1984) and Redman (1997) for a fuller discussion of a psychoanalytic approach to exploring how gender and sexual identities are constructed.

12.   'Knob' is slang for penis. The term 'knobby' was often used to describe a person who for many reasons was socially positioned as negatively different from others (e.g. having 'ginger hair', being 'fat', walking in a 'camp' way). I am unsure if the children in the study were aware of the term's sexual connotation.

13.   Interestingly, girls who transgressed dominant femininities were not homosexualized. Derogatory sexual terms such as 'dyke' and 'lesbo' had not entered the verbal repertoire of pupils from the two research schools. They were, however, masculinized and called 'boys' and were routinely labelled 'weird'.

14.   'Lurgy' was a slang term used by the children to indicate a social disease or virus that could be passed on to other children by physical touch or by even sitting in the same seat as the boy/girl who possessed the 'lurgy'.

15.   Alternatively, heterosexual hierarchies were maintained by coupling 'subordinate' boys and girls together. One episode involved teasing Stuart (discussed earlier) that his 'prefect match' would be Julia (constantly positioned as 'weird', and 'unfeminine'). The implication was that Julia as 'failed female' would be the perfect partner for Stuart as 'failed male'.

16.   It was just about possible for boys to postpone an active interest in pursuing girls for 'girlfriends', there being more than one route to performing and securing hegemonic masculinities (see Renold, 1999).

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