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Do media portrayals of drinking and sexual/romantic relationships shape
teenagers' constructions of gendered identities?

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Abstract

This study explores the possible influence of the media on teenagers' constructions of gendered identities, with a specific focus on drinking alcohol and engaging in sexual/romantic relationships. Understanding the factors underlying alcohol consumption and sexual activity in this age group is an important public health priority. Teenagers in 'western' countries are drinking more alcohol than ever before and these drinking habits may be associated with risky behaviour, such as unprotected sex, and with morbidity and mortality. In comparison to other west European nations, the UK demonstrates a poor history of sexual health in teenagers, with the highest levels of teenage pregnancy and the second-highest level of abortions in women under the age of 20. Approximately half of all sexually transmitted infections diagnosed in the UK in 2009 were seen in the under-25s. Research also suggests that the mass media influence teenagers' behaviours, including drinking alcohol and sexual practices.

The question about the influence of the media is complex. There are two opposing theoretical positions which purport to explain the influence of the media: the 'media as powerful' versus the 'media audience as powerful'. This study adopts a theoretical approach which accommodates both of these: the 'influence of presumed media influence' theory (Milkie, 1999). A contentious issue is how the media is understood by teenagers to influence their alcohol consumption and their sexual/romantic relationships. This thesis has sought to address these issues by answering the following research questions:

1:     Is the media integrated into the lives of teenage boys and girls?

2: How do teenagers' understandings of gender-appropriate alcohol-use relate to media portrayals of alcohol use?

3: How do teenagers' understandings of gender-appropriate engagement in sexual/romantic relationships relate to media portrayals of sexual/romantic relationships?

4: Is Milkie's (1999) 'influence of presumed media influence' theory a useful way to understand the media's position in teenagers' lives, and specifically their understandings of gender-appropriate alcohol use, and of romantic and sexual relationships?

5: How are teenagers' understandings of gender-appropriate behaviours with regards to drinking alcohol and sexual/romantic relationships used in the construction of their gendered identities?

Fieldwork was conducted with teenagers aged 13-16 years, specifically in Edinburgh and in Ayrshire. The main sample comprised 25 semi-structured group discussions with 11 follow-up individual interviews, during which participants were asked to reflect on, and interpret, images from popular British television programmes that portrayed instances of alcohol use and sexual/romantic relationships. This method was intended both to prompt discussion on the process of media influence and to allow the participants to reflect on similar situations in their own lives.

The research found that the mass media does shape teenagers' perceptions and expectations of drinking alcohol and engaging in sexual/romantic relationships; and in doing so shapes their gendered identities. Importantly, the research confirmed Milkie's 'influence of presumed media influence' theory that resolved the apparently incompatible 'powerful media' versus 'powerful audience' approaches to media influence. This suggests that media influence might be all the stronger for not being readily recognised or acknowledged as being influential.

Media were more influential for teenagers' understandings of gender-appropriate engagement in sexual/romantic relationships than they were for teenagers' understandings of gender-appropriate drinking. The reason that media portrayals of drinking were considered to be only a minor influence among other stronger influences such as peers and family may be that these activities are more public. Sexual behaviour is less public therefore teenagers rely more on media to shape their images of what is considered to be appropriate behaviour.

Sexual behaviour and drinking alcohol were intertwined. Many participants talked of how sexual negotiation and activities were often accompanied by drinking. Being drunk, or, importantly, pretending to be drunk, may be understood as a process that is useful for teenagers when trying out perceived gender-appropriate identities as they engage in their relationships. As with alcohol, romantic and sexual relationships are acted out in a particular way which is informed by discourses which specify gender-appropriate behaviour, attitudes and roles (and with the help of alcohol itself, which acts as a social 'lubricant') and in doing so is a component of the project of identity construction.

The implication of this research is that existing concern about the influence of the media should be concentrated on the media portrayals of behaviours that are less public, such as sexual/romantic relationships, rather than media portrayals of behaviours that are more public, such as drinking alcohol.

Mum and Dad, Nana and Ma: this is for you.

Keep reminding yourself of the way things are connected, of
their relatedness.
All things are implicated in one another and in sympathy with
each other.
This event is the consequence of some other one.
Things push and pull on each other, and breathe together, and
are one.

Marcus Aurelius

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Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own independent work, except where otherwise stated. It has not been written or composed by another person and all sources have been appropriately acknowledged by giving explicit references. A detailed list of these references is appended.

I further declare that this work has not been previously submitted or accepted in substantially the same form for any degree and is not concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

Chapter One - Introduction

This thesis is a study of teenagers'[1] lives. The study has a twofold purpose: first, it focuses upon teenagers' understanding of the gender-appropriate consumption of alcohol; and second, it investigates understandings of how to conduct sexual/romantic relationships. There is a strong focus throughout the thesis on the influence of the mass media, in particular, television, film and internet. The question about the influence of the media is complex. There are two polar-opposite theoretical positions which purport to explain the influence of the media: the 'media as powerful' versus the 'media audience as powerful'. The study here adopts a position which accommodates both of these positions. It is referred to as the 'influence of presumed media influence' theory (Milkie, 1999). A contentious issue is how the media is understood by teenagers to influence the two behaviours named above: that is, their alcohol consumption and their sexual/romantic relationships.

In addition, the study addresses two further issues: first, how these behaviours of drinking alcohol and engaging in sexual/romantic relationships themselves might be understood in relation to one another; and second, how teenagers' understandings of these behaviours serve to inform the construction of their gendered identities. These matters are extremely important in enabling our understanding of the lives of Scottish teenagers. How they regard what is appropriate in terms of sexual/romantic relationships and of drinking alcohol inform our understanding of the wider issues in their lives. Indeed, an exploration of sexual/romantic relationships or of alcohol consumption can provide a nexus that connects and illuminates a great many of these issues. They range from peer

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[1] Aged 13- 16 years

relations, family, perceptions of maturity and social reputation, as well as broader issues around culturally- and socially-accepted gender-appropriate behaviours.

Furthermore, teenagers in 'western' countries are drinking more alcohol than ever before (Lyons and Willott, 2008). These drinking habits may be associated with risky behaviour, such as unprotected sex (Alcohol Concern, 2004), and for longer term health problems such as morbidity and mortality (Wilsnack et al., 2000). In comparison to other west European nations, the UK demonstrates a poor history of sexual health in teenagers, with the highest levels of teenage pregnancy (UNICEF, 2001; ISD, 2007) and the second highest level of abortions in women under the age of 20 (ISD, 2007). Approximately half of all sexually transmitted infections diagnosed in the UK in 2007 were seen in the under-25s (HPA, 2008). It is apparent, therefore, that understanding the factors underlying alcohol consumption and sexual activity in this age group is an important public health priority.

The *initial* aim for the study was to investigate the influence of the media on teenagers' sexual behaviour and smoking. As a result of considered reflection after a period of fieldwork which made apparent the salient issues in teenagers' lives, the study shifted to focus upon the everyday gender-appropriate perceptions which teenagers held of alcohol use, and of romantic and sexual relations; and whether or not these perceptions integrated the portrayals of these behaviours in the media. The central aim of the research became:

'Do media portrayals of drinking and sexual/romantic relationships shape teenagers' constructions of gendered identities?'

A number of more specific research questions logically followed. These are:

1:        Is the media integrated into the lives of teenage boys and girls?

2:        How do teenagers' understandings of gender-appropriate alcohol-use relate to media portrayals of alcohol use?

3:        How do teenagers' understandings of gender-appropriate engagement in sexual/romantic relationships relate to media portrayals of sexual/romantic relationships?

4:        Is Milkie's (1999) 'influence of presumed media influence' theory a useful way to understand the media's position in teenagers' lives, and specifically their understandings of gender-appropriate alcohol use, and of romantic and sexual relationships?

5:        How are teenagers' understandings of gender-appropriate behaviours with regards to drinking alcohol and sexual/romantic relationships used in the construction of their gendered identities?

In order to address this aim and attempt to answer these research questions, qualitative fieldwork was conducted with teenagers aged 13-16 years in Scotland, specifically in Edinburgh and in Ayrshire on the west coast of Scotland. I conducted group discussions, with follow-up individual interviews. During these semi-structured group discussions and individual interviews, participants were asked to reflect on and interpret images from popular British television programmes that portrayed relevant topics of alcohol use and sexual/romantic relationships. This method was intended both

to prompt discussion on the process of media influence and to allow the participants to reflect on similar situations in their own lives.

The thesis is organized as follows. Chapter Two reviews how the behaviours of alcohol use and sexual/romantic relationships may be constitutive in the construction of gendered identity. It also reviews the theories and empirical studies that have contributed to knowledge on the topics of alcohol use, on sexual and romantic relationships, and on the process of media influence and its particular relationship to these behaviours. Chapter Three gives an account of the research process itself. It details the methodological decisions that were made relating to the research design and to the collection and analysis of data.

Chapter Four, the first of three findings chapters, aims to set the context for the subsequent chapters. It describes the participants' accounts of their media use and shows how media fit in to their lives. Consequently, the main thesis questions regarding gendered identities, drinking alcohol, sexual/romantic relationships and the media should be better understood in the chapters which follow. Experiences, perceptions, and expectations of drinking alcohol are the focus of Chapter Five. Participants' reports of real-life experiences of drinking, and their interpretations of media portrayals of drinking are presented. Throughout the chapter, the nuanced differentiations between genders in terms of drinking experiences - and their perceptions and expectations of drinking - are highlighted. Comment is made on the participants' perceptions of the influence of the media on their understandings of gender-appropriate alcohol consumption. Chapter Six is concerned with the participants'

experiences, perceptions and expectations of sexual/romantic relationships. Reports from participants about their own experiences of sexual/romantic relationships are presented. Their accounts of their expectations of sexual/romantic relationships, including the perceived origin of these expectations, are also noted. Their interpretations of media portrayals of sexual/romantic relationships are analysed. The chapter also considers how engaging in sexual/romantic relationships may constitute elements of the construction of gendered identities. The last chapter, Chapter Seven, draws together and interprets the research findings, and it reflects on the strengths and limitations of the methods and design adopted.

Hitherto, academic research has focused on various combinations of some of the issues at hand, such as the media's influence on teenagers' sexual relationships, or on how drinking alcohol may construct gendered identities. However, to my knowledge, no research has explored the interrelationship among *all* the areas considered in this thesis: teenagers' understandings of gender-appropriate alcohol use and engagement in sexual/romantic relationships, and the potential influence of the media on the formation of these understandings. It is hoped that in contributing evidence to the study of this fascinating constellation of issues that a greater awareness and understanding of the associated complexities may be gained.

Chapter Two - Literature Review

1.   Introduction

2.1   Doing gender: understanding gendered identities

2.2   Doing gender: understanding how health-related
        behaviours relate to gendered identities

3.1   Empirical research on alcohol-related health issues

3.2   Drinking alcohol as a performance of gendered
        identities: social discourses

4.1   Empirical research on sexual health issues

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5.1   Young people's use of media

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              audience have equal power?

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1. Introduction

The following review is intended to highlight the relevant findings, debates, and gaps that led to the formulation of the research questions addressed in this thesis. A number of academic disciplines will be considered in order to identify links between relevant areas of research. This research began as a study of the importance of media in teenagers' lives. It has since shifted its focus somewhat to become a more general study of gendered identities, whilst still taking into account the relevance of the media in teenagers' lives. The review will start with a consideration of what a gendered identity is. In doing so, a description of the meaning of gender will be provided. Also provided will be an outline of symbolic interactionism and social constructionism, presented in relation to the concept of gender. Combined, this literature will explain what is meant by a gendered identity. This is important as gendered identity construction is the over-arching concept which informs this study.

Next, I will consider how two social practices - drinking alcohol and engaging in sexual/romantic relationships - contribute towards the construction of gendered identities. It is important to note that these teenagers did not choose to establish their gender identity through health behaviours; rather these behaviours were selected to be the focus of the research because they have implications for health. I will argue that health-related behaviours are among the social interactions that are constitutive of performing a gendered identity, bearing in mind that the teenagers did not actively choose to establish their gender identities through health-related behaviours because they relate to health *per se*. As well as exploring how these two health-related behaviours may

construct gendered identities, a brief review will also be given of the empirical research which highlights the potential health risks of these behaviours. A crucial aspect of understanding drinking alcohol and sexual/romantic relationships is discourse. Teenagers may both construct (and may be constructed by) these discourses. The relevant literature on discourse and drinking alcohol and sexual/romantic relationships will be detailed here.

The review also considers mass media. Firstly, it looks at how the media is used among teenagers. Secondly, it looks at media content in terms of alcohol use and sexual behaviour. Thirdly, the process of media influence is explored. This takes into account three possible processes: media as powerful, in that it can influence its audience; audience as powerful, in that it is not influenced by media; and a possible reconciliation of the previous two stances. Lastly, the collective use of media is addressed as a potentially necessary way in which a certain media influence theory may be applied in a useful way for this research.

2. Doing gender

2.1 Understanding gendered identities

In the context of this thesis, the concept of identity is about understanding who we are. Identities in this respect are borne from the relationship between the individual and numerous external factors, such as friends, family or the media. They are a relationship between self and the 'other' (Leader, 1996). Identity is an especially fraught issue for teenagers as they are beginning to, or know that they will soon, negotiate their identities with a different audience as they become interested in engaging in sexual/romantic relationships. A key theory that explores the concept of identities is symbolic interactionism.

This theory is imperative to the conceptualization of this thesis, both in terms of methodology and theory. It is an overarching idea that will be returned to on various occasions throughout the thesis. Although this theory was conceived over 100 years ago, it is still extremely relevant. The symbolic interactionist premise is that meaning is created in interaction with others. The theory was developed by theorists such as Cooley (1902), James (1915), Thomas (1931) and Mead (1934). The term symbolic interactionism was coined by Blumer in 1937. As a theoretical framework it emphasises the micro-social interactions among individuals. Blumer set out three main tenets: meaning, language and thought:

o   Humans act towards people and things based on the meanings they have given those people or things.
o   Language is the means by which we negotiate meaning through symbols.
o   Thought, based on language, is a mental conversation that requires role-taking or imagining different points of view.

Meaning is created in interaction with others. Cooley's 'looking-glass self' suggests that people must consider themselves through the eyes of others, and in doing so they can understand and attain their own social identity (McIntyre, 2007).

Symbolic interactionists interpret the self as being made up from a range of identities, portrayed in different situations. Rather than accepting an essentialist construction of the unified self as created and maintained over the life-course, symbolic interactionist perspectives acknowledge that an individual's (range of) identities will change as their roles and responsibilities change, sometimes over a long period of time, and sometimes many times within a day. Whilst identities can shift quickly, and many different identities can be presented

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within one day, or one hour, certain identities are solidified or objectified through social interaction. What was initially subjective becomes objective; it is reified. Therefore, if a certain role-associated identity (for example, daughter in a particular context, relationship and situation) is portrayed (by the self) and is perceived by someone else, then it is strengthened in the actor and in the perceiver; identities are strengthened through interactions within communities (Goffman, 1959).

Here there will be a focus on how gender constitutes identity. Oakley outlines the difference between gender and sex:

> 'Sex' is a word that refers to the biological differences between male and female: the visible difference in genitalia, the related difference in procreative function. 'Gender' however is a matter of culture: it refers to the social classification into 'masculine' and 'feminine' (Oakley, 1985: 16).

It should be noted that some (for example Laqueur, 1992) argue that sex itself is also a social construct. Others have argued that gender is a social construct constituted by and through the repetition of social, embodied and discursive practices (Butler, 1990b, Butler, 1990a, Butler, 1993, Grosz, 1995, Grosz and Ebrary, 1990, Paechter, 2006). Gender does not describe two static categories – male and female - but rather is a 'set of socially constructed relationships which are produced and reproduced through people's actions' (Gerson and Peiss, 1985); it is constructed by dynamic, dialectic relationships (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). West and Zimmerman's (1987) *Doing Gender* described gender as performative. This is a seminal theory and one which is integral to the understandings of gender in relation to this

thesis. The theory ignited much academic debate[2]. West and Zimmerman claimed that gender is something one does, and does recurrently, in interaction with others. Gender, they suggested, does not reside in a person but rather in social transactions. From this perspective gender is viewed as a social structure that involves cultural and subjective meanings that constantly shift and vary depending on time and place (Kimmel, 1992). These ideas share common roots in two main theories: symbolic interactionism, which was noted above, and social constructionism, to which I will now turn.

Social constructionism is related to symbolic interactionism in that it is to do with shared yet shifting meanings and connectedness among individuals. Like symbolic interactionism, social constructionism is a very well established theory and one which is still extremely relevant to this thesis. Social constructionism states that phenomena which may be considered as natural facts, or universal truths, are social constructs. One such construct is gender. Popularised by Berger and Luckmann (1967), social constructionism holds that perceptions of reality are created and renewed through interaction and social consensus (and, if not by consensus, then by the exertion of power). In an extension to Husserl's phenomenology, Berger and Luckmann focused on the social significance attributed to phenomena. They suggested that all that exists, and all that is, can only be comprehended in an interaction with the subject (self), which is then shared with others, intersubjectively. The universe as we understand it is constructed through our subjective interpretations of it, including perceptions of 'reality' and perceptions of ourselves (Burr, 1995). The term social

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[2] *Gender and Society* journal issue (volume 23, February, 2009) featured a 'Symposium on West and Zimmerman's 'Doing Gender'' with contributions from Celia Kitzinger, Nancy Jurik and Cynthia Siemsen and Dorothy Smith, Barbara Risman & James Messerschmidt

constructionism does not perhaps imbue the idea with the weight which Leader (1996) argues it deserves. Leader states that a social construct:

> [...] implies precisely that there is some natural, non-socially constructed reality behind it, something more real. It is clear, however, that what is socially constructed is real, like an atom bomb or a hole in the ozone layer. To deny this is to underestimate the power of social and symbolic forces, which is mere fancy (Leader, 1996: xi).

Having now outlined the roots of 'gender as performance' – that is symbolic interactionism and social constructionism - I will now briefly consider how academic understandings of the concept of gender have changed over time. Annandale and Hunt (2000 :28) offer an explanatory structure with which to do so. They provide three categories: *traditional*; *transitional* and *emerging new*. Within the *traditional* category, 'gender' is said to mean the difference between women and men. A distinction between sex and gender is developed and in terms of research there is a focus on women's exclusion from some and inclusion in other social roles and circumstances. Within the *transitional* category they state that there is a growing recognition of cross-cutting patterns of gender inequality, as well as similarities between men and women. Differences *within* women and *within* men are said to be becoming increasingly emphasized. Women and men are no longer viewed as being homogenous categories. The *emerging new* category draws explicit attention to the gender category as an essential category and it also questions the hard division between sex and gender. This new gender category is explained as the interaction of gender with other factors. That is, to appreciate social complexity while also holding on to gender as difference. However, a tension remains in that the closer we move towards embracing complexity, inevitably the

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closer we simultaneously move towards undermining the primacy of gender as difference (that is masculine/feminine as a binary division of power) (Annandale and Hunt, 2000:25). Perhaps, as Annandale and Clark suggest, we should move away from gender as being solely predicated upon the male/female binary and consider instead the more 'complex and fluid social relations of gender'(2000: 25).

Taking these complex and fluid social relations of gender as a point of departure, consideration is now given to Paechter. Paechter (2003) reminds us that gendered behaviour is directly associated with identity. What we do constitutes, at least in part, who we are, and therefore our identity:

> Our experience of our identity is deeply bound up with our experience of our being in the world. Identity is thus understood through the practices with which we engage, and these clearly include the practices involved in our construction and enactment of particular masculinities and femininities (Paechter, 2003: 73).

Paechter conceives of gender as a continually negotiated and tenuous identity achieved through repeated (and shared) practices – or *communities of practice*. Paechter adopted Wenger's idea of communities of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991, Wenger, 1998). Paechter states that masculinities and femininities can be many and various, whereby people learn what it is to be male and female within particular localised communities. A community of practice, broadly, is a group engaging in a shared practice. Wenger describes communities of practice as those in which:

> […] collective learning results in practices that reflect both the pursuit of our enterprises and the attendant social relations. These practices are thus the property of a kind of community created over time by the sustained pursuit of a shared enterprise (Wenger, 1998: 45).

However, one can be part of more than one community of practice. This Paechter refers to as multi-memberships:

> I am a woman of a particular kind (heterosexual,
> feminist) but I am also other things (a parent, an
> academic, a post-Holocaust Jew) to which my femininity
> is pertinent but (sometimes, at least) less central.
> Furthermore, as is the case for all women, I am involved
> in and enact a variety of femininities (some of which
> have significant stereotypically masculine
> characteristics), often simultaneously. My sense of who I
> am in all this is fluid and built up of my membership in
> these various communities of practice of femininity and
> of other things (Paechter, 2003: 78).

Gender is just one aspect of an often fluid and contextual identity potential. But what of gender stereotypes? Stereotypes, by their very nature, appear to be static. This apparent contradiction will now be explored further.

Gender stereotypes are characteristics that are generally believed to be typical either of women or of men (Geis, 1993). The dominant gender stereotypes have been referred to as hegemonic masculinity and hegemonic femininity. To provide more depth on this issue I will now outline Connell and Messerschmidt's (2005) article on hegemonic masculinities. This article is extremely relevant to this thesis. The concept of 'hegemonic masculinities' was first proposed in 1982 (Kessler et al., 1982). The Gramscian term 'hegemony' was current at the time and was used as a way in which to understand the stabilization of class relations. With regard to gender and masculinities in the mid-1980s, however, the term was understood as the pattern of practice (that is, *doing* things, not just a set of role expectations or a static identity) that allowed the dominance of men over women to continue (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). Hegemonic masculinity was

> ...not assumed to be normal; only a minority of men
> might enact it. But it was certainly normative. It
> embodied the currently most honoured way of being a
> man, it required all other men to position themselves in
> relation to it, and it ideologically legitimated the global

subordination of women to men (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005 :831).

The concept of hegemonic masculinities is, however, much contested. It has attracted criticism from several directions: sociological, psychological, poststructuralist and materialist (Demetriou, 2001, Wetherell and Edley, 1999). After considering these criticisms closely, Connell and Messerschmidt retained the following elements of the concept. They assert that the fundamental features of the concept remain the hierarchy of masculinities (certain masculinities are more socially central, or more associated with authority and social power than others) and the possibility of plural masculinities. Hegemonic masculinity need not be the most common pattern in the everyday lives of boys and men – there are other ways of doing masculinities – but rather, hegemony works in part through the production of exemplars of masculinity (sports stars, for example), symbols that have authority despite the fact that most men and boys do not fully live up to them (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005: 830). This chimes with the earlier-presented idea of gender as a community of practice (or, since most men do not practice it, perhaps *communities of shared ideals of possible practice* is more precise) and also with Sloan's idea of localised gender. Sloan states that:

> What counts as hegemonic is in part made relevant by men in every day contexts and in part influenced by wider cultural norms. In other words, the core ideals circulating within a local community will be reproduced, reworked or even resisted as men go about their everyday lives, and the local ideal will contain contrary elements which can be picked up and deployed flexibly during social interaction (Sloan et al., 2009: 2).

This, I suggest, must also be relevant to the producing and reproducing of femininities. To return to Connell and Messerschmidt, they assert that research has confirmed the idea of the historical construction and reconstruction of

hegemonic masculinities. That is to say, hegemonic masculinities change over time (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005: 833). This means that older forms of hegemonic masculinities might be displaced by new ones. Elements of hegemonic masculinity are commonly set up in binary opposition to their alternatives, so that anything other than the hegemonic form is immediately non-masculine (McQueen, 2002).

Connell and Messerschmidt provide useful ways in which to understand hegemonic masculinities. But what of hegemonic *feminities*? According to Connell (1987) there are no femininities that are hegemonic: 'all forms of femininity in this society are constructed in the context of the overall subordination of women to men. For this reason, there is no femininity that holds among women the position held by hegemonic masculinity among men' (Connell, 1987: 187). Instead, Connell refers to *emphasized femininity*. She states:

> One form [of femininity] is defined around compliance with this subordination and is oriented to accommodating the interests and desires of men. I will call this 'emphasized femininity'. Others are defined centrally by strategies of resistance or forms of non-compliance. Others again are defined by complex strategic combinations of compliance, resistance and co-operation (Connell, 1987: 184-185)

Here, Connell suggests that there are multiple femininities, but the focus is more on the relationships among masculinities and therefore Connell does not elaborate further. Schippers (2007), building on the original conceptual framework offered by Connell's masculinity research, states that an adequate conceptualization of hegemonic femininity and multiple femininities has not yet been developed. She argues that femininity includes physical vulnerability, an inability to use violence effectively, and compliance. These are

complementary and inferior qualities that are relational to masculinities. She defines hegemonic masculinity as including physical strength, the ability to use interpersonal violence in the face of conflict, and authority. Schippers offers a conceptualisation of femininity as follows: 'hegemonic femininity consists of the characteristics defined as womanly that establish and legitimate a hierarchical and complementary relationship to hegemonic masculinity and that, by doing so, guarantee the dominant position of men and the subordination of women' (Schippers, 2007: 10). Schippers here is stating that gender hegemony is produced through the relationship between femininity and masculinity. From here it is suggested that the empirical exploration of masculinity and femininity, and their role in gender hegemony, must focus on relationality.

In sum, gender is socially constructed, and it is socially performed: its roots are in social constructionism. Gender is dynamic and reproducible. It is constructed through social transactions. Gender is relational, and gender should also be recognised as only one component of what constitutes an identity. My approach to gendered identity is through the meaning and incorporated values which attach to a person's practices and provide the powers through which he or she can position him- or herself in relation to others.

2.2 Understanding how drinking alcohol and sexual/romantic relationships relate to gendered identities

I will now explore the conceptualisation of health-related behaviours as a means of 'doing gender'. Health-related behaviours are social acts and can be seen as a form of practice which constructs the person in the same way that other social and cultural activities do (Saltonstall, 1993: 12). Courtenay (2000) states that 'health related beliefs and

behaviours, like other social practices that men and women engage in, are a means for demonstrating femininities and masculinities' (Courtenay, 2000: 1385). This seminal theory proposes that health-related behaviours are used in daily interactions in the social structuring of gender and power. Courtenay states that many sociocultural factors are associated with, and influence, health-related behaviours. Gender is one of the most important of these factors. Indeed, Courtenay contends that 'women engage in far more health-promoting behaviours than men and have more healthy lifestyles. Being a woman may in fact be the strongest predictor of preventive and health promoting behaviour' (Courtenay, 2000:1386). I shall consider two such health-related behaviours: first, drinking alcohol; and second, engaging in sexual and romantic relationships. I would like to note here that there is a difference between whether 'health-related behaviours' are important for gender identity *because* they are related to health, or whether some behaviours that are important for gender *happen* to affect health. I suggest that for this thesis the latter is most accurate.

3. Alcohol

3.1 Empirical research on alcohol-related health risks

Alcohol consumption will be dealt with here in terms of its potential risk to health. Young adults in 'western' countries are drinking more alcohol than ever before (Lyons and Willott, 2008). These drinking habits may be associated with risky behaviour, such as unprotected sex (Alcohol Concern, 2004), and for longer term health problems such as morbidity and mortality (Wilsnack et al., 2000). Drinking behaviour is influenced by a range of demographic, social and attitudinal variables. Peer, religious, cultural and socioeconomic factors interact to influence teenagers' alcohol consumption (de Visser

and Smith, 2007). I will now consider alcohol and young men's health, and alcohol and young women's health, respectively.

In the UK there is widespread concern about the health and social consequences of alcohol consumption among young men (Rehm et al., 2003, PMSU, 2004). Men are more likely to exceed current alcohol guidelines than women (ONS, 2006) and alcohol-related deaths were significantly higher for men in 2006, with men accounting for two-thirds of all alcohol-related deaths (ONS, 2006). High alcohol consumption is normative for men in many societies while other interwoven masculine attributes such as risk-taking, invulnerablity and competitiveness may also prompt or support alcohol use among men (de Visser and Smith, 2007).

Lyons and Willott (2008) states that in recent years there has been a marked increase in alcohol consumption amongst young women in 'western' countries. Traditionally much lighter drinkers, they are now rapidly catching up with their male peers (Alcohol Concern, 2000, Motluk, 2004). Women, especially those aged between 18–29 years, now drink more alcohol in any one sitting than ever before (Habgood et al., 2001). These changes have led to a moral panic about women's drinking (Holmila and Raitasalo, 2005) despite cross-cultural research showing that men continue to drink more often and more heavily than women (Rahav et al., 2006). It should be noted that these moral panics are often fuelled by the media for whom a moral panic is an extremely useful way in which to sell media products. Drinking patterns are said to be less differentiated by gender during adolescence. However, once into adulthood 'young women tend to consume less alcohol, drink less frequently, and get drunk less than young men' (Ahlstrom and Osterberg, 2004: 625).

Recent research from the Healthy Respect Evaluation (Elliot et al., 2010) provides statistics about 15 year-olds from Scottish secondary schools. This survey of 14 schools included the two from which my sample was recruited: Rosefield High and Yatesly Academy and these data are therefore highly relevant. Here I will draw out some of the key points for this literature review. Interestingly the survey showed that nearly 40 percent of boys thought that a few of their friends got drunk most days; 20 percent thought that most of their friends got drunk most days. Actually, only 18 percent of boys reported that they get drunk once a week. This demonstrates that participants had an exaggerated perception of their friends' use of alcohol. As with the boys, the girls also had an exaggerated perception of their friends' use of alcohol: 37 percent of girls thought that a few of their friends got drunk most days; 20 percent thought that most of their friends got drunk most days. In fact 20 percent of girls reported getting drunk once a week.

Seaman and Ikegwuonu's (2010) UK study sought to understand how young adults are responding to the current culture around alcohol. They noted that it is important not to over-generalise young adulthood as a universally similar life stage between subgroups of the population, but rather that there should be an awareness that experiences of the transition to adulthood are differentiated between subgroups by employment, housing and educational opportunities. As a result, understanding how young adults respond to the contemporary alcohol environment should involve understanding the differences in responses between subgroups of adults, as well as the similarities.

This was a qualitative study that included in-depth interviews with 35 young adults and follow-up focus groups with key peers

with whom they drank (80 individuals in total). Social network maps and drink diaries were also produced by the participants. The aim of the study was to discover how young adults make decisions around when, where, with whom and how much and how often they consume alcohol. Ideas of 'normal' alcohol consumption were explored, and a consideration of the differences between different groups of young adults on different pathways to full adult status was also given.

Excessive alcohol consumption was seen as integral to the experience of young adulthood. It was found that having a number of drinking standards to observe and practice that were made accessible through various social networks offered an alternative perspective on the styles of drinking promoted in young adulthood. This gave young adults a way of imagining different relationships to alcohol that could be put into practice (Seaman and Ikegwuonu, 2010: 7). The influence of parents was also important in establishing ideas of contextual appropriateness for different styles of drinking practice (Seaman and Ikegwuonu, 2010: 18). Seaman and Ikegwuonu conclude that alcohol has found a monopoly position in facilitating social group belonging and forging and maintaining friendship groups in young adulthood. This is attributed to three factors: the special nature of young adulthood within the life-course; the absence of group bonding opportunities in other areas of life; and the success of alcohol markets in filling the void (Seaman and Ikegwuonu's, 2010: 7).

Szmigin et al. (2008) also explored excessive alcohol consumption in young adulthood. They conducted a qualitative study with people aged 18-25 in three areas of Britain: a major city in the West Midlands, a seaside town in the South-West of England and a small market town also in the South-West. Their

findings present the varied forms and meanings that socialising and drinking took in these young people's social lives. In particular the results illustrate the ways in which drinking is constituted and managed as a potential source of pleasure. Excessive drinking was reported to be seen by both young men and women as a routine occurrence and as a result they did not perceive themselves as 'binge' or 'serious' drinkers (Szmigin et al., 2008). Szmigin et al. argue that there is an element of control in excessive drinking among young people which is rarely taken into account and that this 'calculated hedonism' is a type of 'planned letting go which balances out the constrained behaviour they are subject to in the formal structure of everyday life' (Szmigin et al., 2008:361). They stress that it is important to go beyond the simplistic and problematic notion of binge drinking and try to understand how young people are 'doing consumption' (Warde, 1994: 894) within the context of a 'culture of intoxication' (Measham & Brain, 2005).

I will now consider three studies that focus on the importance of specific localized context with regards to young people's drinking in the UK. Pavis et al. (1997) reported on the alcohol consumption patterns of 15 year-olds living on the east coast of Scotland. The social context of the participants' drinking behaviours and the meanings which they attached to their actions were examined. Participants were found to consume alcohol in multiple social contexts including on street corners, in local parks, pubs and clubs, and in friends' and their own homes. Participants discussed four main reasons for drinking alcohol: peer influence/pressure; social facilitation; mood alteration; and to cope with personal difficulties and/or to relieve stress. Pavis et al. argue that as alcohol is widely used and accepted within adult society, learning how to use it

appropriately is an important task of adolescence. For the majority of teenagers this is a relatively unproblematic process, although it sometimes involves mistakes and episodes of drunkenness; for others, alcohol appears to have become a 'drug of solace' (Pavis et al., 1997: 311). It was found that the single most important reason for drinking was the belief that it aided social interaction. Pavis et al. state that for health promotion to be effective it must take account of both *where* and *why* young people drink, and support those who are experiencing or are likely to have difficulties.

There was an interesting gender division in Pavis et al.'s findings with regards to the participants' reasons for drinking. The young women, but not the young men, said that alcohol gave them more confidence. Seaman and Ikegwuonu's (2010) study (as outlined earlier in this section) also noted interesting findings with relation to gendered drinking. They stated that the most striking recent change has been the difference in consumption trends between young men and women. They continue by suggesting that cultural responses to the combined opportunities of young adulthood, and increases in gender equality, have been implicated when accounting for the continued increase in female consumption (Bloomfield, et al., 2005). Affluence and living alone (with related decreases in family responsibilities), changes in cultural norms around the acceptability of female drunkenness, and the places where women drink (more likely to be at home than for men) are also relevant issues. Others point to a growth in female risk-taking, more traditionally associated with young men (Sweeting and West, 2003).

To return to Pavis et al.'s study, their findings also demonstrated that many participants drank alcohol on a

regular basis; however, they did so in different social settings and for various reasons. Participants drank at home with the family, in the street (including in parks, outside local shops and at beach parties), in each other's houses, and at pubs, clubs and discos. Galloway et al.'s (2007) qualitative study also examined in some depth the specific locations of young people's drinking, and specifically the street drinking behaviour of young adults. 24 focus groups were conducted with naturally-occurring groups of 16 and 25 year-old street drinkers recruited in outdoor locations. Participants included both male and female drinkers from a range of subcultures ('neds', 'alternatives' and 'mainstream') in order to provide a more appropriately gendered perspective as well as more insight into the differences which might exist in the behaviours and views of groups of young adults from different cultural backgrounds. Their aim was to provide further knowledge on patterns of outdoor drinking culture among drinkers in this age group.

Being detected by the police, and the threat of violence, were major concerns for the participants, whilst drinking outdoors. However these concerns were afforded varying degrees of importance according to the age, gender and cultural background of group members. For example, 'ned' drinkers described feeling excessively targeted by police officers; 'alternative' and 'mainstream' drinkers were more concerned with the threat of violent victimisation by 'neds'. Females were perceived to be at a lower risk of violence than their male peers when drinking outdoors, but were perceived to be at a greater risk of sexual harassment (Galloway et al.'s, 2007: 1).

Many participants drank outdoors because they had little other choice. This was because they were excluded from indoor settings because of their age, their friends, their past behaviour, or because they could not afford to drink in the indoor establishments all night. Drinking outdoors was also reported to have positive aspects, such as being less physically and socially restricting. The different groups chose different outdoor drinking locations. For 'neds,' the priority was to avoid the police and so they opted to move around whilst drinking and preferred well-hidden, isolated locations. Locations chosen by 'alternative' and 'mainstream' individuals were intended to minimise the risk of victimisation. Often participants reported to have travelled from their local communities where they felt outnumbered and persecuted to other areas where there were other like-minded youths and where they felt there was 'safety in numbers' (Galloway et al., 2007: 2).

As a result of their findings Galloway et al. suggest the provision of more age-appropriate leisure activities and locations. However, they also state that the participants considered such places as safer, more comfortable venues in which they could continue drinking. Others felt that reducing the age limit for drinking in pubs and clubs would allow drinkers earlier access to these locations and limit risk by removing them from danger.

The third study is a recent UK-based research project - *Teenage Drinking Cultures* - (Percy et al., 2011) explores both alcohol use within small groups of teenage friends, and how underage drinking is influenced by the wider friendship group. The research found that, when drinking, teenagers want to get drunk, have fun with their friends and then sober up before going home. They rarely set out to drink so much that they are

sick, lose control or pass out. In fact, the authors state, there is considerable stigma associated with getting too drunk. Moreover, there is not one teenage drinking culture: what teenagers drink, how much they drink, where they drink and how drunk they intend to get, differs between friendship groups. Teenagers use a range of strategies to try and manage their drinking (such as buying a specific amount of alcohol at the beginning of the night, eating or drinking water) with varying degrees of success. This research indicates that many teenagers are drinking much earlier than the legal age of 18 – some to harmful levels. This is in accordance with the *Healthy Respect* data as noted in the previous paragraph. The research report *Teenage Drinking Cultures* concludes by suggesting that interventions should be developed to teach young drinkers better strategies to regulate their own drinking, and in doing so these could potentially reduce alcohol-related harm.

From the studies presented by Pavis et al. (1997), Galloway et al. (2007) and Percy et al. (2011) it can be concluded that an adequate understanding of young people's drinking behaviours requires that their behaviours are carefully located and embedded within specific social contexts and their wider lives. I will now outline how the consumption of alcohol may be constitutive of a performance of gendered identities.

3.2 Drinking alcohol as a performance of gendered identities

How does drinking alcohol associate with gender identities? Gender identities with respect to health have been changing, with women engaging more in traditionally masculinised practices such as smoking, binge-drinking and aggressive behaviour (Lyons and Willott, 2008; Day, 2003). DeVisser and Smith (2007) link the mere act of consuming alcohol to the construction of traditional masculine identities. For women,

drinking alcohol, although traditionally a masculine practice, has become a means of pursuing a contemporary femininity (Day et al., 2003; Lyons and Willott, 2008).

In terms of exploring how drinking alcohol can contribute to feminine identity, it is useful to consider the role of discourses. Foucault (1998) suggests that discourses are particular ways of talking about things and that they shape the way we perceive the world and ourselves. This theory is seminal in the conception of social discourses, and it underpins many other theories and research that focus on discourses. Willig states that discourses make available particular subject positions (certain ways-of-seeing the world and certain ways-of-being in the world) that when taken up, have particular implications for subjectivity and experience (Willig, 2001: 107). Indeed Butler asserts that 'there is no self... who maintains integrity prior to its entrance into this conflicted cultural field. There is only the taking up of tools where they lie, where the 'very taking up' is enabled by the tool lying there' (1990: 145).

Lyons and Willott's (2008) study will be considered now in relation to discourses and how drinking alcohol contributes to the construction of feminine identity. Eight friendship group discussions were conducted, with a total of 32 participants (16 females; mean age 24.6 years) in New Zealand. The potential limitation of the locality of the study should be noted here. Being based in New Zealand makes these research findings potentially less generalisable and therefore less useful with regards to this research at hand which is based in Scotland. The study aimed to explore contemporary constructions of femininity, and how young women are (re-) defining their gender identities in relation to men and the traditional

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masculine ethos of consuming alcohol in public. Lyons and Willott noted four discourses that emerged from her research in relation to drinking alcohol and constructions of femininity. The first is the *equality* discourse. Here, male and female participants often drew on notions of gender 'equality' to explain increases in women's drinking. Simply doing 'equal stuff' to men, and being considered as 'equals' enabled them to justify their drinking. The second is the *double standard* discourse. Lyons and Willott noted that there are specific exceptions to the positive and encouraging descriptions of women's drinking. Notably, older women, attractive women and women who are out in public very drunk (and combinations of these groups) are condemned for their drinking. The third discourse described is the *control and responsibility* discourse. Participants here described their expectations of control, suggesting that 'maybe we're meant to keep control all the time'. The final discourse is the *vulnerability* discourse. Participants in all of the groups drew on a discourse of women being in danger and being vulnerable when they are drunk. The vulnerability discourse functioned to rationalise the double standard between perceptions of drunk men and women. The worry that both men and women have about drunk 'girls' was noted in all of the discussions, and situated in opposition to the lack of worry people have about 'guys' being drunk (Lyons & Willott, 2008: 13).

So, in Lyons and Willott's study participants drew on traditional femininity discourses to describe women's drinking in public (being in control and responsible, double standards, vulnerability). Lyons and Willott assert that these discourses all invoke the binary oppositions of male-female dichotomies, reinforcing opposing and hierarchical meanings and values (Lyons cites Jay 1981), for example: being in control and

responsible versus out of control and irresponsible; able to be legitimately drunk in public versus unable to be legitimately drunk in public; being independent versus dependent; being strong and invulnerable versus being weak and vulnerable (Lyons & Willott, 2008: 15).

Moving away from discourses specifically, Lyons and Willott suggests that increases in women's drinking may be seen as reflecting changes in women's social positions. Women are increasingly entering public domains which have traditionally been dominated by men (for example in employment) and have greater opportunities to engage in traditionally 'male' leisure activities such as frequent public drinking (Day et al. 2004; Wilsnack et al. 2000). However, Lyons and Willott states that little research has investigated the contexts of women's drinking, their drinking patterns, or the meanings women attach to their drinking (Day et al. 2004). This is a gap in the literature that this research aims to fill. Consideration is now given to how masculinities may be constructed through drinking alcohol.

De Visser and Smith (2007) explored issues of masculinity in relation to drinking alcohol. Group discussions and individual interviews were employed to capture data. The group discussions were designed to identify the range of ideologies of masculinity and drinking available in the interviewees' social contexts; the individual interviews were designed to explore how individuals saw themselves in relation to the available ideologies, and how this was related to their drinking behaviour. For both modes of data collection, a sample diverse in both class and ethnicity consisted of men aged 18-21 living in England.

The study revealed that many men believe that drinking and being able to hold their drink are important components of masculinity. The study also demonstrated that there was some evidence that men traded drinking competence with competence in other behaviours in constructing their masculinities. For example, if alcohol consumption is seen to be a masculine behaviour, then men who are insecure in their masculine identities may use alcohol consumption to demonstrate masculine competence. The interesting consequence of this is that men may be able to use competence in other masculine behaviours to excuse non-engagement in health-compromising 'masculine' behaviours such as alcohol consumption (de Visser and Smith, 2007: 598). De Visser and Smith call this 'trading masculine competencies'. For example, they found that for men, being a top footballer could compensate for not drinking alcohol.

Peralta, 2007, explored alcohol use in relation to the construction of masculinity. The purpose of his research was to explore the process of local hegemonic masculinity construction (as opposed to regional or national constructions) via alcohol use among a diverse sample of college students. He interviewed 78 male and female, heterosexual and homosexual students at a university in the US. His results suggest that the meaning of public drinking is to express a form of masculinity: in students' gendered descriptions of their own and peers' drinking behavior, alcohol use among men was found to symbolize the embodiment of hegemonic masculinity. Masculinities were constructed through the telling of stories about drinking, the body's ability to tolerate alcohol, and the relevance of drinking too little or not at all, which symbolized weakness, homosexuality, or femininity. Others too have suggested that alcohol use or abstaining from alcohol has been

used for gender construction purposes (Campbell 2000; Montemurro and McClure 2005).

Peralta found that three main themes emerged from the data. The first was that drinking was often understood to be a form of 'macho' or masculine behavior. Both men and women believed that drinking, especially heavy drinking, is indicative of masculinity accomplishment for those who drink. He found that evidence of heavy drinking via stories and trophies (that is, physical evidence of alcohol use) were used as markers of masculinity. Second, Peralta noted that male students 'do' a specific type of masculinity by reproducing hierarchical images of what a 'real man' is thought capable of doing. Here, alcohol use was assumed to fuel strength, aggression and confidence thereby creating contexts where risky behaviors are more likely (Peralta, 2007: 747). The third theme to emerge was 'liquid courage' which was defined by Peralta's participants as the courage that emerges because of alcohol use. For example, six men reported feeling 'invincible' when drinking. Peralta concluded by stating that alcohol is a readily available and socially legitimized tool that is gendered in terms of how and when it is used. Its use (particularly its heavy use) was observed to be associated with demonstrations of power, whereas abstention or light use was associated with 'weakness' or otherness (Peralta, 2007: 752). As with Lyons and Willot's (2008) study we should be aware of the potential limitation of the locality of the study. Peralta's study was based in the U.S. and therefore these research findings are potentially less generalisable and therefore less useful with regards to this research at hand which is based in Scotland.

In the UK, Mullen et al. (2007) also consider the relationship between young men, masculinity and alcohol. Instead of the

one standard hegemonic masculinity, they argue for the emergence of numerous forms and expressions of masculinity, as was also described earlier in this chapter by Connell and Messerschmidt (2005). Mullen et al.'s study explored the lives of 16- to 24-year-old men in Greater Glasgow. Qualitative methods were employed which included 10 focus groups and 12 in depth 'life trajectory' interviews.

Participants' perceptions' of female drinking was reported in relation to masculine identities. Female drinking was not only viewed as an expression of independence by young men; it was also seen as another opportunity by which girls and women attempt to temporarily leave behind their own insecurities and try and boost their confidence with their friends and with the opposite sex. One participant said of girls drinking: 'Girls get drunk for a reason. Guys just get drunk. Their boyfriend's left them or something. That's when they get drunk. Or they want something. If they get drunk they can make a move on a guy. Then the next morning they've got an excuse. They can say, 'Oh, I'm sorry, I was drunk' (YM12) (Mullen et al., 2007: 160).

Overall, the participants believed the reasons that young men and women drink are similar. However, there was near unanimous consensus among the participants that while young men may become more physical (emphasizing their physical presence by becoming louder, larking about, becoming aggressive, clumsy), young women become more emotional (crying, sharing secrets) (Mullen et al., 2007: 160). Both young men and women valued intoxication and there appeared to be changing attitudes towards women's drinking by young men. Mullen et al. state that masculinity is being redefined in relation to female's drinking behaviours. As a result of the findings, Mullen et al. suggest that current experience of

masculinity and drinking in Greater Glasgow is less masculinized and more conditional than before. It resembles less hegemonic masculinity and demonstrates more flexibility of role possibilities, with more pluralistic masculinities becoming evident (Mullen, 2007: 162).

I will now look at the health-related behaviour of engaging in sexual and romantic relationships as a possible way in which gendered identities may be formed.

4. Sexual and romantic relationships

4.1 Empirical research on sexual health issues

In comparison to other west European nations, the UK demonstrates a poor history of sexual health in young people, with the highest levels of teenage pregnancy (UNICEF, 2001, ISD, 2007) and the second highest level of abortions in women under the age of 20 (ISD, 2007). In addition to this, approximately half of all sexually transmitted infections (STIs) diagnosed in the UK in 2007 were seen in the under 25s (HPA, 2008), with 65 percent of genital chlamydia diagnoses being observed in this group. As a result of these figures, it can be seen that understanding the factors underlying sexual activity in this age group is an important public health priority.

The National Sexual Health Strategy Scotland (NSHS, 2010) which was launched in 2005 is the first national sexual health and relationships strategy and is set to continue until 2011. Some of the long-term outcomes hoped for include: reduced levels of regret; reduced levels of unintended pregnancy, particularly in those under 16 (but also a reduction in the number of repeat abortions in all ages); and reduced levels of sexually transmitted infections.

Recent data from the Healthy Respect Evaluation (Elliot et al., 2010) provides statistics on the sexual behaviours of 15 year-old teenagers in Scottish schools. 41 percent of the girls reported that they had had penetrative sex. As for the girl participants' perceptions of others' sexual activity: 74 percent reported that 'about half and under' of their friends had had sex and 26 percent thought that 'over half' of their friends had. 37 percent of boys in the study reported that they had had penetrative sex. 78 percent of boys thought that 'about half and under' of their friends had had sex; and that 23 percent thought that 'over half' of their friends had.

These statistics run counter to other research. Kimmel (2008: 209) studied US male undergraduates in an attempt to discern what percentage of their peers they believed had sex on any given weekend. The average answer was 80 percent. In fact, 80 percent is the proportion of US male undergraduates who have ever had sexual intercourse. The number who have sex on any given weekend, according to Kimmel, falls in the 5 - 10 per cent range. This gap between perception and reality is problematic because of the role which popular discourses play in setting the parameters of what is normal — and even what is possible (Plummer 1995: 168).

It is also important to draw out from the Healthy Respect data the percentage of 15 year old participants who reported themselves to have been drunk when they first had sex: 29 percent of girls and 33 percent of boys. This highlights the important connection between drinking alcohol and engaging in sexual and romantic behaviours. Indeed, the National Sexual Health Strategy Scotland aims to increase public awareness of sexual health issues and alcohol use. Further links are being made to the Alcohol Strategy, including an exploration into the scope of interventions on alcohol use being delivered in some sexual health services. Having touched on some of the relevant

empirical research on sexual behaviours, consideration will now be given to how these behaviours may be constitutive of gender as performance.

4.2 Sexual and romantic relationships as a performance of gendered identities: social discourses

The very nature of sexual/romantic relationships is gendered, so in understanding these relationships we are also arriving at an understanding of how such behaviours constitute gendered identities. Butler (1990b) states that heterosexual desire, as a defining feature for both women and men, is what binds the masculine and feminine in a binary, hierarchical relationship. In contemporary 'western' societies, heterosexual desire is defined as an erotic attachment to difference, and as such, it does the hegemonic work of fusing masculinity and femininity together as complementary opposites. Thus, it is assumed that men have a natural attraction to women and women have a natural attraction to men.

Here I will outline the social nature of sexual/romantic relationships. Weeks summarises sexuality as being 'both public and secret; both intimately personal and regulated by law; both biological and cultural; both socially constructed, organized and institiutionalised, and the product of fantasy, individual agency and resistance' (Weeks, 1986: 15). According to symbolic interactionism, romantic and sexual behaviour, like all human behaviour, is symbolic. Men and women (or boys and girls) use symbols and exist in a world of meaning created by those symbols. Sexual behaviour is associated with a variety of activities, each with different meanings. These may include having children, attaining physical pleasure, having fun, creating intimacy, achieving spirituality and exerting power (Laumann, 1994). The symbolic meanings associated with sexuality affect how we relate to others and how others think

of and relate to us. As Kimmel and Fracher state, 'that we are sexual is determined by a biological imperative toward reproduction, but how we are sexual – where, when, how often and with whom, and why, has to do with cultural learning, with meanings transmitted in a cultural setting' (1992: 472). That is, *how* we are sexual is a social construct. Another key idea comes from Simon (1996: 142), who asserts that 'the most important permanent truth about sexuality is that there may be no important truths about sexuality that are permanent'. This once again highlights the fact that all sexual behaviours are a social construction and therefore have the potential to be ever-changing.

How do teenage sexual and romantic relationships manifest themselves? Teenagers are not a homogenous group; there are variations among them. Wight and Henderson (in Burtney and Duffy 2004: 15) state that 'at a given age the extent of young people's heterosexual experiences and the meanings that they have, vary considerably'. What might be the reason for these variations of experiences? Burtney and Duffy (2004: 169) state that one of the biggest challenges young people face is how to decipher the mixed messages that are available to them. They suggest that one of the reasons for high teenage pregnancy rates in the UK is the confusion around sex: on the one hand sex is all around, but on the other there is not enough open discussion.

A consideration of discourses is a fruitful way of analysing sexual and romantic relationships. Grey (1993) states that our failure to find simple, comfortable ways of talking about sex perpetuates lopsided attitudes with adverse effects upon personal and national health and happiness. Grey also claims that each of the traditional rhetorics which we use to debate

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sexual matters – religious, moral, legal, medical, psychological, sociological, political - is inadequate, stultifying and distorting. He suggests a need to cultivate new attitudes to sex. Schauer concurs, stating that 'citizens of a culture feel bound to address a topic like sex via the established vocabularies and discourses set out by pornography, sex-education classes, medical and psychological discourses. Sexuality, thus, cannot be conceived outside of discourse' (Schauer, 2005: 46). Jackson adds to this:

> The advance of capitalism has created a gulf between the public sphere of production and exchange and the private sphere of the family and personal relationships. Within the latter sexuality has become so extremely privatized and exclusively personal that it constitutes a world apart from the rest of our lives even in their most intimate aspects. It is a subject set aside to be learnt at a particular time and in unique ways. Whether this separateness leads to a guilty, negative orientation to the sexual or to ideals of specialness and spontaneity, it results in problems of communication. Even within the privacy of the sexual dyad, sex itself is rarely discussed. Sexual activity is usually initiated by and proceeds through innuendo and gesture rather than open talk. Hence sexual interaction is characterized by a degree of confusion and doubt about the intentions and interpretations of the other which is not typical of more routine forms of interaction (Jackson, 1993: 71).

Foucault discusses the history of sexuality and the ways in which society constructs sexualities. He suggested that people internalise these concepts of sexuality, leading them to see sexuality as the 'truth about themselves' at the core of their identity (Foucault, 1998). Simon (1996) takes a different approach to the idea of the centrality of sex to identity. Simon states that 'sex is the ultimate dependent variable that requires more explanation than it provides ... all discourses about sexuality are ultimately discourses about something else' (Simon, 1996: xvii). Thus we may say that discourses about sexuality are often in fact discourses which attempt to

portray a certain identity and achieve a certain status of belonging. Jackson (1993) also claims that sexuality cannot be understood in isolation. It cannot be understood as if it is separated from such things as the relationships between the sexes, the cultural ideals of 'love', or the institution of marriage. 'Sexual behaviour', Jackson says, 'is social behaviour, it isn't just the consummation of some biological drive… biological factors do not determine the forms which sexuality takes, but merely set the parameters within which other influences operate' (Jackson, 1993: 63).

Hollway (1993) asks how the cultural creates the sexual. In doing so she is exploring the way in which men and women can position themselves as sexual subjects and objects within the discourses available to them. She argues that 'we have no way of conceptualising sex outside language and culture' (Hollway, 1993: 11). Moreover, Hollway asserts that at a specific moment, several coexisting and potentially contradictory discourses concerning sexuality make available different positions and different powers for men and women.

Stemming from sexual discourses is the idea of 'sexual scripts' (Gagnon and Simon, 1973). The central notion of sexual script theory is the idea that sexuality is learned from culturally-available messages that define what 'counts' as sex, or which teach individuals how to recognise sexual situations, and what to do in sexual encounters. According to the theory, these scripts are adapted by individuals to particular interpersonal contexts, and are also modified and internalized as 'intrapsychic scripts' (Frith and Kitzinger, 2001: 210). Wight develops these ideas, stating that 'to become a competent actor in socio sexual dramas and to develop a sexual commitment, individuals need to be able to interpret her or his own emotions in sexual terms, to recognize potentially

sexual situations and to be able to make decisions on how to act in them' (Wight, 1996: 70).

A fundamental tenet of Gagnon and Simon's (1973, 1987) theory is that males and females inhabit different social locations and learn different scripts. Jackson also asserts that:

> Girls learn to enact sexual scripts within the milieu of their peer groups, an environment which may be characterized as homosocial and heterosexual. So although their sexual interest is focused on the opposite sex, it is primarily to their same sex peers that adolescents will look for validation of their sexual attitudes and accomplishments. In such a situation, girls and boys develop markedly different sexual expectations and hence continue their psychosexual development along the divergent paths that have already been mapped out (Jackson, 1993: 71)

This introduces the idea of homosocial worlds; this is a very important idea with respect to this thesis. Homosociality refers to social bonds between persons of the same sex and more broadly, to same-sex-focused social relations. Kimmel (1994) states that men's lives, for example, are said to be highly organized by relations *between men*; men seek the approval of other men, both identifying with and competing against them. They attempt to improve their position in masculine social hierarchies, using 'markers of manhood' such as occupational achievement, wealth, power and status, physical prowess and sexual achievement (Kimmel, 1994:129). An example of research in this area is Flood's 2008 study. Here Flood analyses the sexual and social relations of young *Australian* heterosexual men aged 18 - 26, and offers an examination of the homosocial organization of their heterosexual relations. Flood found that homosociality organizes mens' sociosexual relationships in four main ways. First, for some of these young men, male-male friendships take priority over male–female

relations. Second, platonic friendships with women are considered to be dangerously feminizing. Third, sexual activity is seen as a key path to masculine status whereby other men are the audience; always imagined and sometimes real. An example of this is a quote from one of the participants who said '… Lucinda finishes cleaning up after lunch, she sits down and just starts suckin' me off. And I'm sittin' there with my beer. And I'm watchin' the footy. And I've got a girl suckin' me off. And I just go "hoooo, if the *boys* could see me now"' (Flood, 2008: 350). The fourth way in which homosociality organizes mens' sociosexual relationships is whereby men's sexual storytelling is shaped by homosocial masculine cultures. An example to highlight this comes from a participant, Tim, who says 'we all talk about sex, all the time. And I'll tell 'em everything. You know I had her, on a table…Just talk about it all the time' (Flood, 2008: 353).

Focusing now on the impact of homosocial relationships at a younger age and in the UK, Wight and Henderson suggest that the profound gender differences in sexual understanding are largely attributable to the way most young people grow up in sexually segregated social worlds, or homosocial worlds, especially in the period prior to early sexual relationships. Indeed, in the UK most young people see friends as one of their most important sources of information on sex (Wight and Henderson in Burtney and Duffy, 2004: 19). So, since social activities in the early teens are usually highly segregated by gender, the meanings given to sex and sexual relations come from same-sex peers (Wight, 1994). This can lead to some discordance between boys' and girls' understandings. Hollway (1993) states that one such discordance could be that boys' desires are seen as uncontrollable urges which girls are paradoxically expected both to satisfy and to restrain. For

girls, however, sex may be problematic: it involves serious risks and too much overt interest in sex, particularly if not within established relations, continues to be seen as not properly feminine (Hollway, 1993). I will now outline some possible discourses of romantic and sexual relationships.

Hollway (in Henriques et al., 1984) presents three discourses: the *male sexual drive* discourse; the *have/hold* discourse; and the *permissive* discourse. The *male sexual drive* discourse describes sex as a biological drive, often expressed as a common sense assumption and as hegemonic in the production of meanings concerning sexuality. Hollway offers a descriptive quotation provided by her male friend: 'I want to fuck. I need to fuck. I've always longed after fucking' (Hollway, 1984: 86). The *have/hold* discourse is more associated with Christian ideals such as monogamy, partnership and family life than with sexuality. It is here we see the dichotomization of women into wife and mistress, or virgin and whore. Hollway states that despite this dichotomization women are often expected to be both. Whereas for men sex is expected and is seen to be natural and out-of-control, for women, underneath the superficial emphasis on asexuality within this *have/hold* discourse, is the belief that sexuality is rabid and dangerous and must be controlled; controlled by men, that is (Hollway,1984: 87). Lastly, the *permissive* discourse focuses on sex for its own sake, having gained legitimacy through the libertarian ethics of the 1960s. It focuses on mutual sexual satisfaction. Hollway states: 'the principle of monogamy is explicitly challenged...in assuming that sexuality is entirely natural and therefore should not be repressed, the permissive discourse is the offspring of the male sexual drive discourse...it takes the individual as the locus of sexuality, rather than looking at it in terms of a relationship' (Hollway,1984: 87).

Hollway reminds us of the important difference, however, between the permissive and the male sexual drive discourse: the permissive discourse applies the same assumptions to women as to men. In addition to these three discourses, Wight offers, with reference to his qualitative study on working class Glasgow boys, the *uninterested* discourse and the *predatory* discourse. The *uninterested* discourse is an extreme expression of homosociality, as previously discussed, whereby the boys professed to be simply uninterested in heterosexual relations (Wight, 1996: 52). The *predatory* discourse involves the stereotype of masculine sexuality in which men gain esteem from peers by having as many sexual partners as possible. In this discourse, physical sexual pleasure is of less importance that the opinions of one's male peers (Wight, 1996: 154). This sentiment was also highlighted by Hollway: 'a boy's interest is to do with gender not sex' (Hollway, 1984: 240). It is important to consider the social context and historical situation of Hollway's discourses. These discourses were conceived of in 1984, and, as with Connell et al.'s claim that hegemonic masculinities are historically relative and may therefore change over time, so too are Hollway's discourses likely to develop and change.

For Wight, the interesting dilemma with romantic and sexual relationship discourses is that it is difficult to clarify whether the discourse within which someone is located prompted certain actions or whether, having acted in a particular way, the person adopted a particular discourse through which to interpret those actions (Wight, 1996: 148). This idea is reminiscent of Simon and Gagnon's more general assertion that 'rather than the past determining the present it is possible that the present reshapes the past, as we reconstruct our autobiographies in an effort to bring them greater congruence

with our present identities, roles and available vocabularies'
(Gagnon and Simon, 1973: 69).

Forrest (2010) discusses, amongst other things, the importance
of discourses in relation to both their local and broader social
contexts. His paper details a qualitative study with a small
group of young heterosexual men and reports their experiences
of what they termed 'serious' relationships. It is suggested
that their experiences of serious relationships may be seen as
contexts through which they engaged in processes of exploring
and, in some ways, remaking their masculine identities. An
idea that is of particular interest here is how sexual/romantic
relationships, can act as a 'nexus' between the big cultural
ideas about gender, emotions and relationships – such as
discourses, social structures, and use of cultural images and
practices – and the local cultural world that Forrest's
participants inhabit – with issues such as 'maturity, status and
school structure', 'modern, middle-class femininities' and 'the
family' being of importance. I suggest that this idea of the
nexus between 'big' and 'little' culture illuminates and
connects together all of the different issues at play from this
present research: identity construction; gender;
sexual/romantic relationships; drinking alcohol; and the
influence of the media.

We saw in Hollway's *have/hold* discourse that there was a
dichotomization of women into wife and mistress, or virgin and
whore. This brings our attention to the idea of sexual
reputation. There has been much research that reveals the
persistence of concern about 'reputation' (Holland et al. 1990;
1992) and female sexual reputation has been widely
documented as an important concern for young men and
women (Herbert 1991; Holland et al 1992; Lees 1993; Wight,

1993; Wood, 1984). Holland et al. (1998) state that sexual reputations can regulate behaviour, knowledge and expectations since they are constituted through very powerful normative conceptions of what it is to be masculine and feminine. While young women appear under pressure to safeguard their reputation, young men are under pressure to demonstrate theirs. Men are also under pressure to produce themselves in relation to a dominant conception of acceptability and to maintain their own sexual reputations (Holland et al, 1998: 239).

Holland et al. (1998) state that in terms of sexual reputation there are clear expressions of a double standard for men and women and also a much more hidden area of power in which the masculine dominates the feminine. One example of these double standards is 'if you sleep around you're a slag, if a bloke sleeps around he's lucky'. Holland et al., in their book *The Male in the Head* (1998), note that young women were under pressure to construct their sexuality in response to what they call 'the male in the head'. The book is the product of over ten years of research, and presents combined findings from the Women, Risk and Aids Project (WRAP) period and the smaller scale Men, Risk and Aids Project (MRAP). The projects were based on interviews with young people between the ages of 16 and 21 conducted in the UK in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The authors had originally expected to find that the young people's heterosexuality was regulated by 'two separate worlds of masculinity and femininity, brought into collision in sexual encounters' (Holland et al., 1998: 10). However, this was found not to be the case, and their subsequent rethinking of the nature of heterosexuality led them to formulate the concept of the 'male-in-the-head'. Far from being an unequal clash between masculinity and femininity, heterosexuality

emerged from the young people's accounts as organized around a single centre. 'Heterosexuality' they state 'is not, as it appears to be, masculinity-and-femininity in opposition: it is masculinity' (Holland et al., 1998: 11). Both young men and young women alike are regulated by the 'male-in-the-head'; a hegemonic ideal of heterosexual masculinity which submits them to the surveillance of a 'male gaze'. The differences between the young men's and the young women's sexuality were ultimately traceable not to different ideals of masculinity and femininity respectively, but rather to the different ways in which the two sexes were subjected to a single masculine eye. To be feminine is to construct oneself in relation to the heterosexual male. It is the general pressure to conform to hegemonic masculinity that is exerted by the surveillance power of the male in the head. It highlights the surveillance power of male-dominated heterosexuality. It is important to highlight that Holland et al.'s theory is now over ten years old and therefore it would be interesting to retest this theory.

One of these male-in-the-head powers is the use of the reputation discourse. Kitzinger's (1995) qualitative study can offer this discussion of sexual reputation greater detail. Her article provides her analysis of interviews conducted with 19-20 year olds in Scotland. She found that sexual reputation was a major concern for most of the young women in the study. Indeed, girls appeared to be just as active as boys in commenting on sexual reputation. Her article explores young women's understandings of terms such as slag, tart and slut and identifies three overlapping but distinct ways in which slag is defined. First, slag as 'other', as in other woman. Second, slag as everywoman, as in this could happen to any women. This highlighted the difficulty of 'getting the balance' between looking 'voluptuously sexy' and 'just like a slag'. It also made

apparent the necessary monitoring which was presented as a routine and unexceptional part of every woman's life. Third, slag as 'she who allows herself to be used', and therefore she who deserves no sympathy.

Kitzinger asserts that it is power, rather than sexual activity *per se*, that is central to the understanding of a slag and a woman may be 'promiscuous' and yet not be perceived as a slag because she is 'in control'; this accounts for the popularity of the popstar Madonna. Madonna is not perceived to be a slag because she conveys the message 'I am sexually attractive but I am powerful'. Kitzinger claims that the tenaciousness of terms such as 'slag' speaks, in part, of the continuing absence of a discourse of female desire. Women must not speak about, or act openly in the pursuit of, their own sexual pleasure (Holland et al 1992). But the tenaciousness of such terms also reflects a much more important absence: the absence of a discourse about power. Kitzinger concludes that when women talk about 'slag' and 'reputation' they could be talking about power and powerlessness (Kitzinger, 1995: 194). Indeed, in the same vein, Holland et al. (1998) state a very interesting idea that a powerful woman cannot exist or be perceived as both feminine and powerful. If she were to be powerful, she would be considered to be an unnatural woman. Some women can become powerful by accessing male power: for example, exercising power like a man or being a masculine woman. But, it is thought that a powerful woman unmans a man by depriving him of his position of binary opposition. Powerful women are socially contradictory because power is not feminine (Holland et al., 1994: 256).

Having now described the concept of sexual reputation, homosociality, sexual discourses and provided some potential discourses, I will now consider a potential origin for these discourses: the media. More than this, the media is a pervasive world which offers not only discourses but visual representations of people drinking alcohol and engaging in romantic and sexual relationships.

5. The media

5.1 Young people's use of media

The use of the mass media plays an integral part in the lives of young people. Watching television and films accounts for the greatest proportion of school aged children's media consumption (Ofcom, 2008). In the UK, young people aged between 12 and 16 years watch an average of 14.7 hours of television and 4.8 hours of DVD entertainment during the school week (Ofcom, 2006), with similar figures being found for weekend television viewing in 2008 (Ofcom, 2008; Currie et al., 2008). Livingstone states that young people[3] today are the first generation to live in an environment in which electronic media technologies are an ingrained and integral part of everyday life. Livingstone (2009) asserts that people used to spend much of their time sitting on the sofa with others, watching prescheduled hours of mass broadcast television, then talking about it the next day. Today, however, they increasingly supplement such moments by sitting, generally alone, in front of the computer so as to multitask: music downloading, online chat, social networking, information searching and participation in multi-user games (Livingstone, 2009: 2). It is important to note that media technology is changing at an extremely rapid rate. Since Livingstone's 2009 work, *Iphones* and *Iphone* applications have become

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[3] By 'young people' Livingstone means age 5-17

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commonplace and allow for multimedia consumption to take place through a single medium.

Recent statistics from the Healthy Respect Evaluation (Elliot et al., 2010) provide some data on the media use of 15 year-olds in Scotland. I will detail the top ten films and top ten TV programmes for each sex. The boys' top ten films were as follows: *Green Street*; *Braveheart*; *Scarface*; *Football Factory*; *American Pie*; *Lord of the Rings*; *I Am Legend*; *Superbad*; *Scary Movie* and *300*. The top ten films as reported by girls were: *Mean Girls*; *Dirty Dancing*; *Step Up*; *Titanic*; *Twilight*; *The Notebook*; *PS: I Love You*; *Pirates of The Caribbean*; *American Pie* and *Green Street*. We can see that from these lists of favourite films that there is very little overlap between those watched by boys and girls. It can be said therefore that there is a strong gender difference in the reported favourite films. The boys' top ten TV programmes were: *Family Guy*; *The Simpsons*; *Top Gear*; *Skins*; *Scrubs*; *Shameless*; *Match of The Day*; *Friends*; *Eastenders* and *Lost*. Those for the girls were: *Hollyoaks*; *Eastenders*; *Skins*; *Friends*; *Shameless*; *Scrubs*; *Coronation Street*; *Desperate Housewives*; *Waterloo Road* and *One Tree Hill*. For the TV programmes there was more consistency, with both sexes reporting to like to watch *Skins*, *Shameless*, *Friends*, *Scrubs* and *Hollyoaks.*

With regard to their media use practice, a third of boys reported watching TV with same-sex friends on a weekly basis, with a similar proportion reporting doing so with mixed-sex friends. Fewer – 23 percent - reported watching TV with their parents on a weekly basis. About a third of boys said that they went to the cinema every week. The prevalence of girls' use of media was slightly higher. 48 percent of girls watched TV with same-sex friends weekly. Slightly fewer - about 35 percent - said that they watched TV on a weekly basis with mixed-sex

friends, and about 22 percent claimed to watch TV with their parents on a weekly basis. The majority - over 75 percent - of boys reported to have looked at pornography (in any media form – not just television). This is in stark contrast to girls' reported use of pornography – about 12 percent. These data from the Healthy Respect Evaluation are particularly salient for this research project as it was from two schools that were part of the Healthy Respect Evaluation that participants for this research were gleaned.

Consideration will now be given to media content, starting with the media portrayals of alcohol use.

5.2 Media content: alcohol use

In Adalbjarnardottir's (2002) Icelandic study, she states that in the second half of the twentieth century an increasing number of teenagers started using alcohol, at an increasingly early age; she suggests that a possible process that influences teenagers to drink may be the media. Robinson (1998), and Brown and Witherspoon (2002), both quantitative studies conducted in the US, state that when people are seen drinking on television they are drinking alcohol most of the time. Pendleton et al. (1991) found that every six and a half minutes a reference to alcohol was made in their sample of 50 programmes on British television. Furnham et al. (1997) concluded that 86 percent of episodes of all six the British soap operas that they studied contained visual or verbal references to alcoholic beverages. Moreover, these programmes almost never referred to the hazards of alcohol consumption. In 1998, Everett et al. examined alcohol use in top-grossing American movies, concluding that 96 percent of the films had positive references to alcohol consumption. Furthermore only 37 percent of the movies showed any kind of discouraging depiction of alcohol

consumption. More recently, Sargent et al.'s (2006) US study revealed evidence of an association between exposure to movie alcohol use and early-onset teen drinking. These studies suggest that alcohol content in the media is pervasive. However, it is also important to note that these are all quantitative studies that sought to demonstrate a causal link between media exposure and consuming alcohol. Whilst these statistics are very useful in gaining an understanding of the landscape of the literature surrounding the media's influence on alcohol consumption, this present research is focusing on teenagers' perceptions and understandings of media portrayals as opposed to searching for a causal link. The context of the studies should also be noted; only one British study is from 1997, whilst the other studies are from Iceland and the US.

With regards to how media portrays drinking alcohol in relation to gender, my literature searches found limited research on the topic. Day (2004) suggested that the media often portray drinking alcohol as potentially dangerous for women (Day et al. 2004). A study by Lyons, Dalton and Hoy (2006) examined the ways in which drinking, and particularly different types of drinking, are portrayed in media targeted to young adults. They analysed six UK monthly magazines (three targeted at young men, three at young women) across a three month period (18 magazines). Three main discourses were identified: the drug alcohol; masculinity and machismo; and drinking as normality. These discourses constructed women's and men's drinks and drinking behaviours in sharp contrast. Drinking was aligned with traditional masculine images. New kinds of drinks were aligned with traditional feminine images—and derided in men's magazines. Essentially their findings highlight how gender, constructed in relation to the other, is an important aspect of representations of drinking patterns in young adults.

It would be extremely valuable to broaden this research to consider other forms of media.

5.3 Media content: sex

Cope-Farrar and Kunkel (2002 :55) demonstrate that popular media has a tendency to portray young people as sexually active, or as in romantic relationships, or as seeking to be in relationships. Wight and Henderson (2004) suggest that the emphasis that the media places upon portraying adolescent relationships in this manner can lead to young people gaining an exaggerated impression of others' sexual experience. Quantitative content analysis of television programmes broadcast between 5.30pm and midnight on the UK terrestrial channels (BBC1, BBC2, ITV, Channel 4 and Five) demonstrated that 21 percent of programmes contained sexual scenes, implied sexual activity or sexual provocation, with an average of 1.4 scenes shown per hour (Cumberbatch et al., 2003). Although these figures are relatively low in comparison to US television programming where 70 percent of programmes contained sexual acts and the average number of sexual scenes per hour was 5.0 (Kunkel et al., 2005), the UK figures do not take into account programming shown on 'free view' and satellite television and may underestimate the actual sexual content broadcast on UK television. Evidence in support of this can be seen in the fact that soap operas and films, which are more prolific on 'free view' and satellite channels, contained 3.1 and 3.2 sexual scenes per hour respectively (Cumberbatch et al, 2003).

I will now consider the content of media portrayals of sex and what kinds of discourses they reproduce. In a broad sense, Arthurs (2004) observes in a critical fashion that television now addresses a range of issues relating to sex and sexuality. First,

she mentions sexual morality in the public and private spheres. These issues are around adultery, child sexual abuse, homosexual rights, sexual harassment and prostitution. Second, she discusses changing patterns of family life, for example the rise in number of single parent families, working mothers and homosexual parenting. Third, Arthurs talks of the limits of sexual representation in a deregulated media market: that is, people's right to privacy and the effects of pornographic images.

In terms of what *discourses* media produces in terms of sexual/romantic relationships, Markle's (2008) study of the American television series *Sex and the City* produced some interesting findings. *Sex and the City* delivers a detailed view of the sexual discourses of its four fictional heroines. The series initially contests hegemonic masculine and feminine ideas about the nature of the relationships men and women seek. The leading women attempt to transgress gendered sexual roles in their quest to experience 'sex like a man', which they characterize as without emotional feeling, for physical pleasure only, and with no commitment.

Markle used content analysis to examine the sexual scripts embedded in the series. Sexual encounters were coded using Mahay et al.'s (2005) characterization of interpersonal sexual discourses as traditional (partners were married), relational (partners were in love, but not married), and recreational (partners were not in love). The analysis revealed that the sexual encounters of the four main characters, Carrie, Miranda, Charlotte and Samantha, were more likely to be recreational than relational. The women were able to initiate sexual encounters and decline them with no negative repercussions. Markle concludes by stating:

In the final analysis, the women of *Sex and the City* abandon their desires to enjoy ''sex like a man'' in favor of committed relationships—''happily ever after'' endings for all. In this series, the supposedly liberated women ''appropriate the language of radical feminist politics only to retell old patriarchal fairy tales of women longing to be swept away''. The more things change the more they remain the same (Markle, 2008: 12).

Of course this research is based on a television series that focuses on a very limited demographic of white, wealthy, American, thirty-something women and therefore is not representative of all media portrayals of sexual/romantic relationships. However, it is interesting to consider the content analysis of a programme that purports to contest hegemonic masculine and feminine ideas about the nature of the sexual/romantic relationships, and consider the kinds of discourses that it actually reproduces.

5.4 Exploration of the process of media influence

Attention will now be given to the concept of media influence, and specifically to exploring the possible processes of media influence. It is important to note the difference between media-effects research in the UK and in the US. Buckingham (2007) states that public concerns about media effects in the UK are arguably less intense, or at least less intensely expressed, than in the US, and that moral pressure groups have generally been less influential here. Most of the research on media effects has been carried out in the US, and most British reviews of research rely on US research, as though it were universally applicable (Buckingham, 2007: 10). Buckingham also notes that there is a distinction between researchers in the 'psychological effects' tradition, and those in the fields of media and cultural studies which are broadly sociological in orientation. To some extent, this translates to a distinction

between US researchers (or those influenced by US-based approaches) and UK researchers. Essentially, Buckingham asserts that researchers in the psychological effects tradition are seeking evidence of a direct causal relationship between exposure to media and particular consequences in terms of audiences' behaviour or attitudes. Buckingham warns that a fundamental distinction is that researchers in media and cultural studies are generally not looking to find 'effects' at the level of the individual. Clearly, they still believe that media is in some way significant, but more emphasis is placed on media influence as being a 'complex, diverse and unpredictable process' (Buckingham, 2007: 25).

The concept of media influence will now be considered further under three themes: first, media as powerful; second, audiences as powerful; and third, ideas that may reconcile the first two. Presented here are some of the most salient theories on media influence. It should be noted that these theories are not referring exclusively to young people.

5.4.1 Media as powerful

The evidence that media contribute to young people's behavior is substantial. Half a century of research shows that the media can have an impact on virtually every concern parents and pediatricians have about young people. These include: early sexual activity (Strasburger et al., 2009, Brown, & Strasburger: 2007); drug use (Borzekowski & Strasburger, 2008 & Sargent et al., 2005); aggressive behavior (Strasburger et al., 2009); obesity (Gantz et al.W, 2007 & Jordan et al., 2008); and eating disorders (Krowchuk et al., 1998, Hogan et al., 2008 & Strasburger et al., 2009). It should be noted that all the above studies are quantitative. Outlined below are three examples of media-effects research which conclude that

media is powerful: the first is quite general; the second focuses on alcohol use; and the third focuses on sexual activity. First I present a UK-based qualitative research study on media effects by Philo and colleagues at the Glasgow Media Group. This research has shown that media is a key source of information for many people and that media accounts are often used to structure understandings of the world. They state that information which media offer to audiences can develop and stabilise ways of understanding or can undermine existing commitments or beliefs (Philo et al., 1999: 182). New information from the media can either reinforce or weaken existing ways of understanding, and the information can influence what audiences believe and what is thought to be legitimate or desirable. A key theme in their research has been to examine the processes through which messages were either accepted and believed, or were rejected by the audiences. Although audiences have a certain amount of agency through drawing on their experiences and cognitive faculties, Philo et al. essentially argue that the media is influential and does affect its audience.

In 1993 Philo and his colleagues conducted media content analysis and found that two-thirds of items of media content dealing with mental health issues forged a link between mental illness and violence. Using some of this research material, the impact on the beliefs of an audience sample was explored in Scotland. Two-fifths of the general sample of 70 people believed that mental illness was associated with violence and cited the media as their source. While some participants with personal knowledge of mental illness rejected the dominant media message, one of the most striking findings was that in several cases this pattern was reversed whereby people appeared to believe media messages in preference to the

'evidence of their own eyes' (Philo et al., 1994: 275). The findings here suggest that the media can play a significant role in influencing public opinion. Philo et al.'s qualitative study is extremely useful for this current research as it explores the audience's reception of media portrayals in an interpretive and nuanced manner.

Anderson et al. (2009) provide an example of powerful media in their UK-based research which focuses on the mass media's effect on young people's alcohol consumption. They state that research has linked exposure to portrayals of alcohol use in the mass media with the development of positive drinking expectancies by children and adolescents. This is quantitative research that deals with the impact of alcohol promotion and marketing. Young people 'with more positive affective responses to alcohol advertising hold more favourable drinking expectancies, perceive greater social approval for drinking, believe drinking is more common among peers and adults, and intend to drink more as adults' (Martin et al., 2002: 230). Martin's Canadian review found consistent evidence to link alcohol advertising with the uptake of drinking among non-drinking young people, and increased consumption among their drinking peers. They state, however, that these studies do not establish whether alcohol advertising actually influences young people's drinking behaviour. Answering this question requires either experimental studies (which they suggest are not possible for ethical reasons) or qualitative research such as this current research.

I will now outline some 'powerful media' effects research that focuses on sexual activity. Several studies in the US have demonstrated associations between television exposure and the initiation of sexual intercourse in adolescents. Collins et

al. (2004) found that the viewing of sexual content on television was associated with an acceleration in the initiation of sexual intercourse. Brown et al. (2006) demonstrated that 12-14 year-olds who have 'media diets' that are high in sexual content are more likely than those with 'media diets' that are low in sexual content to have engaged in sexual activity two years later. This was after adjustment for a number of known predictors of sexual activity in adolescence. Brown et al.'s (2002) work with the Kaiser Family Foundation *Sexual Teens, Sexual Media* looks at different areas within which the media engages specifically with teens and sexuality, finding that the media have arguably become the leading sex educator of young people. Their work has a preoccupation with sex as a potentially harmful health phenomenon. There are now five longitudinal studies linking exposure to 'sexy' media to earlier onset of sexual intercourse, two of which were conducted by Brown and her colleagues (Brown, 2006; Brown, 2009; Ashby, 2006; Bersamin, 2008 and Collins, 2004).

Kunkel et al. (2001: 8) state explicitly that 'abstinence or waiting for sex is the most effective strategy for reducing one's risk for negative outcomes from sex'. This is in line with US government policy that promotes abstinence before marriage[4]. According to Brown et al., it is in contrast to the media which 'frequently portray sexual behaviour as riveting, central in everyday life, and emotionally and physically risk free' (Brown et al 2002: xi).

It is important to highlight that the above research that describes the media as being influential in terms of sexual behaviour are quantitative studies, all of which are based in the US. However, both the US and UK have seen vigorous

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[4] 86% of the public school districts in the US that have a policy to teach sex education require that abstinence be promoted (Landry, D.J. et. al., 1999, 31(6):280-286). However, the Obama administration is dropping the emphasis on abstinence-only sex education (Reuters 2009)

debate concerning the perceived proliferation of images of teenage sex and sexuality in the mass media. Much of this concern has centred on the belief that the media encourage young people to think that heterosexual intercourse before age sixteen is the norm and that young people may copy what they see (Millwood-Hargrave A, 1996).

5.4.2 Audience as powerful

As previously mentioned, this literature is largely qualitative and UK-based. The 'active audience' concept pertains directly to ideas of audience reception theory. In his (1973) paper, *Encoding and Decoding the TV Message*, Hall emphasized audience reception (that is the way in which audiences receive media messages), suggesting that media texts are open to interpretation by the individual viewer who can bring their own experience and critical faculties to media texts. In addition, Hodgetts and Chamberlain (2003), assert that 'readers' of media texts rarely take up the stories offered to them directly. Rather, they state, people engage and interact with media content, drawing on it selectively for particular purposes, accepting, rejecting, resisting and modifying representations to suit their own particular purposes. Gerbner et al. (2002) state that while understandings are circulated widely through the media, caution is required in reaching conclusions about how the media exert effects on people.

Livingstone (2008: 3) summarises three main points about audience reception studies. The first is that unpredictable and differing meanings may be derived by different members of a media audience. The second is that the meanings derived by audiences from the media are diverse and context-specific. The third is the importance of the mediation process of the

audiences, thereby making the direct cause and effect influence of the media almost impossible.

Buckingham (1999) is also concerned with how young people *use* the media, including the meanings and pleasures they may derive from them. Most research on young people and media, he argues, is largely framed by anxieties. Importantly, he states we must be careful to distinguish between correlation and causality. That people who are violent may watch a lot of violent TV does not necessarily prove that TV causes violence. Buckingham also suggests that young people are largely defined as passive victims of powerful and exclusively negative 'effects'.

Lyons, Dalton and Hoy (2006) provide an example of 'powerful audience' media research that focuses on alcohol (this research was outlined in section 5.2 of this chapter). This research examines the ways in which drinking in the UK is portrayed in media targeted at young adults. Magazines that are frequently read by young men and women were analysed. Findings were described in terms of the potential discourses that such media provided young men and women about gendered alcohol consumption; for example a 'strong and secure version of masculinity' was made available. The authors discussed the findings in such a way as to suggest that the young adults were active in their use of media in terms of how they used, resisted or ignored these media discourses, thereby providing an example of 'powerful audience' research. They also state that there is an absence of qualitative research exploring the ways in which alcohol and drinking is portrayed in other forms of media aimed at young adults.

Bragg and Buckingham (2004) published one of the few qualitative UK-based research projects focusing on media and young peoples' sexual relationships: *Young People, Sex and the Media: the facts of life?* This is an example of 'powerful audience' research and it is an extremely useful publication to consider for this present research. Bragg and Buckingham explore in a subtle and nuanced way the importance of media to young people, with a focus on sex and relationships. They found that young people were frequently encountering material that some would deem unsuitable. In some instances, children struggled to understand what they saw; while in others they were quite offended or even disgusted. Nevertheless, the children in this study strongly defended their right to have access to such material; and the study provided good evidence that they used even unsuitable media positively, both as a source of information and in the process of actively developing their own values and beliefs (Buckingham, 2007: 19). This study suggests that sexual content on the TV might influence young people's beliefs and behaviour, but it is extremely difficult to collect the evidence required to establish this. Bragg and Buckingham suggest that much closer attention should be paid to how young people interpret and respond to particular televised portrayals and how they use TV as a resource in forming their own sexual identities. This would mean that future research would move away from effects and influences towards an emphasis on the interpretations and uses of TV. Bragg and Buckingham also state that further empirical qualitative research is required in order to investigate theoretical concerns such as sexuality and subjectivity and the changing nature of gender.

Thus far, the chapter has considered the media-as-powerful argument and the audience-as-powerful argument. Overall it

would appear that the methodology used in the audience-as-powerful research is most akin to the methodology that is used in this research; that is, qualitative, interpretive research. It now remains to review a third possible process of media influence: one in which the media and the media audiences have relatively equal power.

5.4.3 Presumed media influence: do the media and the audience have equal power?

The media can be seen as an extension of an individual's world; of what the individual can know. Media images may provide ideas of what may be normative or ideal, or indeed ideas of what one thinks others believe is normative or ideal. This is significant. We care about what other people think and often compare ourselves to others. This is reminiscent of the ideas integral to symbolic interactionism whereby meaning is created in interaction with others and where people must consider themselves through the eyes of others in order to understand and attain their own social identity (McIntyre, 2006). I will now outline some theories that use this idea of social comparison as a point of departure, arriving at a place whereby it may be possible for the 'powerful media' and the 'powerful audience' positions to be reconciled.

In the field of mass communication the concept of presumed media influence on others is not new. The 'bandwagon effect', for example, is a long-standing propaganda strategy which operates by convincing people that other important people are adopting a certain position and that they should therefore also follow (Lee, 1939). In 1983 Davison published *The Third-person Effect in Communication.* The 'third-person' effect states that people tend to perceive a greater influence of the mass media on others than on themselves. Based on an extensive line of

research on this 'third-person' effect, Gunther and Storey (2003) developed a comprehensive model of indirect media effects. This model, termed *the influence of presumed influence*, is based on the idea that people will perceive some influence of media on others and will change their own attitudes or behaviours accordingly.

A key, if not *the* key paper in terms of this thesis, that is based on the same premise as the *influence of presumed influence* theory is Milkie's (1999) 'Social comparisons, reflected appraisals, and mass media'. It is important to note that Milkie does not refer to the process in her research as *the influence of presumed influence* – this was coined by Gunther and Storey four years later in 2003, as mentioned above. However, the process that Milkie identifies is essentially the same. For clarification, throughout the rest of the thesis I will be referring to 'Milkie's (1999) presumed media influence', as I think this is a more straightforward and understandable way of describing the process than Milkie's phraseology 'social comparisons and reflected appraisals'.

Data for Milkie's US-based mixed-methods research came from in-depth interviews with a subsample of 60 girls, who were part of a larger survey of 210 female and 227 male Grade 9 and Grade 10 students (age 13 – 16 years). Only data from the female students are reported on in the paper. Of the 60 girls interviewed, 49 were white and 11 were from ethnic minorities (ten African-American and one Asian-American). The study was an attempt at understanding how girls may be affected by prominent images of females that are pervasive in media (in this case, girls' magazines). The girls in the study generally understood that the media images were unrealistic. They said that the media images created an uneasy gap between image

and reality and said they disliked them for this reason (Milkie, 1999: 199). Milkie found that there was a clear race-distinction. White girls, despite their criticism, still reported feeling negatively affected by the images. This was because they believed that others they knew thought that the images were important, especially to boys in their peer group. The girls thought that the boys evaluated them on the basis of these images. So, despite the girls stating that the images were unrealistic, the social comparison with peers overrode the initial critical response (Milkie, 1999: 201). Minority girls, however, did not identify with 'white' media images, nor did they believe that their significant others were affected by them. For this reason, they did not feel negatively affected by the images. In sum, the mainstream female images, although mostly viewed as unrealistic and therefore criticised, became an oppressive negative referent for white girls who could not escape them easily, but not for black girls, who felt distant from them (Milkie, 1999: 199).

On the basis of this research Milkie suggests that a unique quality of media is its public pervasiveness and people's knowledge that its content is also seen by many others. People believe that others are more strongly affected by media portrayals than are they themselves. She states that a complex, indirect effect may also occur as people account for the effects of the pervasive imagery in media on others in their social networks and are themselves influenced by perceptions of the way others see the media-distorted world (Milkie 1999: 193). Milkie's article outlines a possible bridge between the contrasting positions of a powerful audience and a powerful media. It also explores the complexities of media audience interpretation. She states:

> Even though an individual may consciously feel no effect
> from the media (in this case pervasive beauty ideals

disseminated through mass media, particularly in regard to body image), because of social comparisons and reflected appraisals, individuals presume that the images effect significant and generalized others and, therefore, have an effect on the individual (Milkie 1999: 194).

So, the influence of the 'presumed media influence model' reconciles, to some extent, the tension between the 'powerful media' and the 'powerful audiences' positions. Its roots grow from Cooley's (1902) 'looking-glass self' which suggested that people must consider themselves through the eyes of others, and in doing so can understand and attain their own social identity. This idea is central to symbolic interactionism. We have returned to the bedrock of this thesis where identities are understood in terms of symbolic interactionism. I suggest that in order for Milkie's *influence of presumed media influence* theory to be useful and applicable, media audiences must partake in a collective or shared media use. By this it is not meant that people must use media together; they must, however, be at least aware of what they *think* significant others in their social group are watching. This is a crucial point. Whether or not they are accurate in what they think significant others are watching is irrelevant. It is the presumption that is important here. It is this presumption that allows for the circuitous media influence process to happen. This thesis research is, to my knowledge, the only research that has adopted and developed Milkie's *influence of presumed media influence* theory. It is applied to a significantly different sample than that of Milkie's – girls and boys, in Scotland – with a focus on sexual/romantic relationships and drinking alcohol rather than body image.

6. Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to identify and to review the issues and debates focused on the potential significance of the health-related behaviours of alcohol consumption and sexual and romantic relationship to teenagers' construction of gendered identities. Relevant theories relating to the potential influence of the media with regards to these health-related behaviours were considered.

The chapter started with an exploration of theories related to gendered identity, including literature on how 'doing gender' has its roots in symbolic interactionism and social constructionism. From here theories about how health-related behaviours were informed by and were informative of gendered identities were presented. The two health-related behaviours considered were alcohol consumption, and sexual and romantic behaviour. The theories presented considered in some detail how health-related behaviours were a means by which to demonstrate and construct femininities and masculinities. The review also addressed empirical research regarding alcohol consumption and sexual behaviour. The idea of discourses was introduced as a means by which to understand how people think about drinking alcohol and sexual and romantic behaviours. This included a discussion of homosociality and sexual reputations.

Media literature was considered next. Media were framed as a possible location from which gendered discourses may derive. Media were also presented as a pervasive presence which offer not only discourses but visual representations of people drinking alcohol and engaging in romantic and sexual relationships. Here empirical data on media use was described. Also reviewed was research on media content of alcohol use and sexual behaviour. Next, debates regarding the influence of

the media were outlined. This included a consideration of media as powerful, audience as powerful, and finally Milkie's *influence of presumed media influence* which was presented as a possible reconciliation of the two polemic positions.

Chapter Three - Methods

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1. Introduction

This chapter gives an account of my experience of conducting this research. It will detail the methodological decisions that were made relating to the research design and to the collection and analysis of data. First I mention the most salient issues on conducting research with young people. I then describe the reasons why qualitative research methods were considered to be the most appropriate way of exploring some of the diversity in teenagers' accounts of media use, of alcohol use, of engagement in sexual/romantic relationships and of media influence. Next I will briefly introduce the *Healthy Respect* project and its importance as background for this thesis. The lessons learnt from the pilot study are then detailed. I then describe all aspects relating to sample design, recruitment of participants and interview design, and the process of data analysis. Finally I outline the ethical considerations and reflect on my experiences of doing research. For reasons suggested by Wolcott, I have chosen to write in the first person, where appropriate, in this chapter and for the remainder of the thesis:

> Because the researcher's role is ordinarily an integral part of reporting qualitative work, I write my descriptive accounts in the first person. I think the practice of writing in the third person reflects a belief that impersonal language intensifies an author's stronghold on objective truth….Recognizing the critical nature of the observer role and the influence of his or her subjective assessments in qualitative work makes it all the more important to have readers aware of that role, that presence. Writing in the first person helps authors achieve those purposes. For reporting qualitative research, it should be the rule rather than the exception (Wolcott, 2002: 17).

2. Doing research with young people

Oakley (1994) states that engaging in research with children should be no different from engaging in research with adults:

> ...the consensus that emerges from studies exploring children's perspectives is that the major issues of the researcher-researched relationship are essentially the same with children as they are with adults:...the need to be aware of and respect the imbalanced power relations of the researcher vis-à-vis the researched, the importance of distinguishing 'private' from 'public' accounts and the need to handle controversial and or personal topics with sensitivity...the issues that are highlighted in thinking about the research in the area of children's studies are not a particular class of issues: they are questions to which all good researchers will attend (Oakley, 1994: 26).

Closely linked to the issues discussed by Oakley is that of researcher reflexivity. The relationship between the researcher and researched is a central dynamic (Fraser, 2004). No doubt my presence and my identity – mid-twenties, white, middle-class female – impacted on those being researched and on the research itself. However, as I was obviously immersed in the social interactions and have nothing to compare these with (that is, I cannot change my identity) I do not feel it is possible to offer a concrete answer to the issues of *how* exactly my presence impacted on the research. For Fraser, doing research with children and young people properly requires having a reflective and flexible approach (Fraser, 2004). I concur with Oakley (above) in that, although different methods may be more appropriate, I do not think that conducting research with young people is significantly different from conducting research with adults. Good research principles should be the same whether research is being conducted with toddlers, teenagers or any age of adult. As part of my training for this PhD research I gained 'First Class' for a Listening to Children postgraduate module at the University of Edinburgh Centre for

Research on Families and Relationships. This raised my awareness of conducting research with young people with a particular focus on: ethical considerations; conceptual understandings of childhood; data collection and data analysis; tackling sensitive topics; involving children as part of the research team and disseminating findings.

The fundamental difference between research with adults and with children relates to issues of power (although power inequalities may easily exist between adults of the same age, being based on class or race, for example). These power issues relate most significantly to ethics and consent. All manner of complications have the potential to arise in terms of consent, parental consent or gatekeepers. I was aware that the potential pressure by parents or teachers to take part, or indeed not to take part, in research could be problematic. Aside from consent, imbalanced power relations within the actual research process were bound to exist. Adults (generally) hold a more powerful place in our society than children. As interviews and other methods are just another social situation then it follows that the same power relationships are likely to exist there too. This power hierarchy should not necessarily be to the detriment of the research or the child. What is most important is that the researcher is constantly reflexive and aware of their position.

3. Reason for choosing qualitative methods

Qualitative research methods are argued to be good to use to investigate social phenomena and the meanings people attach to their own world (Mason, 2002, Snape and Spencer, 2003). Indeed, the two main theoretical underpinnings of my research - symbolic interactionism and social constructionism – are concerned with the dynamic and relativity of the meanings

that humans attach to their worlds, and in particular, how these meanings are subject to change through social interaction. These theories were outlined in the literature review.

This research is concerned with the social production of meaning. For this reason, and because they have the potential to yield rich insights into teenagers' beliefs, behaviours and experiences, I used qualitative methods. I thought that teenagers' interpretation of various behaviours in the media, with specific reference to alcohol use and romantic/sexual relationships, would most likely be revealed using a method that encouraged them to describe their thoughts, behaviours and experiences in their own words. I also thought that qualitative interviewing would be of particular benefit in exploring the complex and varied ways in which teenagers both understand and articulate the concept of media influence.

Qualitative methods had the advantage of allowing me to tailor interviews to the particular dynamics of the groups or the participants' experiences. As it is not always possible to anticipate accurately participants' experiences and opinions, such research also offered me the flexibility to explore unanticipated topics that emerged during the interview process. Within the interview context there was freedom for digression, and participants were made aware that they could ask questions at any point. The interview context also allowed the participants to provide clarification of interesting points, usually motivated by my prompts ('go on', 'can you explain more?', 'can you think of an example?'). This highlights how the initial stages of analysis are present even in conducting an interview through the interviewer identifying potentially interesting themes and perceptions and asking for elaboration.

My research employed group discussions and individual interviews (usually as a follow-up to the group discussions). Group discussions provide an opportunity to witness the expression of opinions and views on an issue and to observe how they are shaped and censored by the responses of others within the group. Views and opinions are not fixed; rather, they are formed and altered throughout the course of a discussion. Arguments are also an important facet of focus groups that promote the emergence of socially acceptable and prevalent views (McCool et al., 2001). Kitzinger states that 'focus groups are a form of group interview that capitalises on communication between research participants in order to generate data' (Kitzinger, 1995:311). The idea behind this method is that group processes can help people to explore and clarify their views in ways that would be less easily accessible in a one-to-one interview. The particular advantage of a group discussion, and the reason why it perhaps outweighs rights to total privacy, is that it allows the researcher to see how meanings and interpretations can emerge out of social interaction. I would argue that in my own research the use of group discussions allowed a closer understanding of how media are received and interpreted in reality, and how gendered identities are performed. Another important strength of group discussions is that the researcher gets a better sense of how people present themselves to their peers or friends than in an individual interview.

Whenever possible, my intention was to speak with groups of friends. The use of pre-existing groups has been strongly endorsed in appropriate circumstances to enable the researcher to 'tap into fragments of interactions which approximate to 'naturally occurring' data' (Kitzinger, 1994).

However, I was mindful that the group discussion is an artificially-convened discussion, requiring the majority of participants to discuss subjects they may not ordinarily engage with.

The individual interviews that I conducted provided the opportunity to gather kinds of data that would not be possible from group discussions. In this more private setting, I asked about more personal and sensitive aspects of the participants' lives and experiences – such as their experiences of romantic/sexual relationships. I expected that the teenagers might discuss their opinions on some of the topics that were covered in the focus group discussions differently when alone with me as opposed to how they might discuss them in a group.

The complexity of these qualitative methods becomes apparent when establishing the 'status' and 'validity' of the versions of reality that people present (West, 1990); specifically, in relation to their accounts (Goffman, 1969, Radley and Billig, 1996, Scott and Lyman, 1968, West, 1979). Indeed, 'what people say and how they say it, varies according to who they are talking to and the circumstances in which they find themselves' (Cornwell, 1984. p12). Snape and Spencer (2003) state that interpretivism is the underpinning philosophy for qualitative research. Broadly, it is governed by the idea that it is not possible to conduct value free research because the researcher and the social world influence each other to affect the data generated (Snape and Spencer, 2003). Thus, interpretivist epistemology encourages researchers to explore and understand the social world not only through the participants' views, but also how they 'themselves' impact on the findings. As such, 'explanations' can only be registered at the level of meaning and understanding rather than as

evidence for causal links (Mason, 2002; Snape and Spencer, 2003).

4. Healthy Respect

Before going further, I will briefly introduce the *Healthy Respect* project and its importance for this PhD study. My study was informed by research findings from *Healthy Respect,* and made use of some *Healthy Respect* data. The work that colleagues had done previously also facilitated access to gatekeepers in the two *Healthy Respect* schools where I conducted my own fieldwork.

Healthy Respect was a National Demonstration Project designed to promote young people's sexual health in Lothian, Scotland, by supporting professionals working with young people, providing sexual health information, and running media campaigns. In particular, it supported the delivery of high-standard sex education in schools within Personal and Social Education lessons. The evaluation of Phase 2 of *Healthy Respect* was conducted by researchers in the MRC Social and Public Health Sciences Unit, Napier University, Dundee University and the Scottish Centre for Social Research. Part of the project involved a school-based survey with S4 pupils in 14 schools across the central belt of Scotland. S4 pupils are in their fourth year of secondary schooling, the final year of statutory education in Scotland, starting the year aged 14-15 and ending it aged 15-16 years old. Self-complete questionnaires asked about their home, lifestyle (including media use), attitudes to sex and experience of relationships (if any). *Healthy Respect One* began in 2001 and ended in 2004, and *Healthy Respect* Two began in 2005 and ended in March 2008. The final report (Elliot et al. 2010) contains the findings from the evaluation of *Healthy Respect Two*.

The two schools from which I recruited the majority of the participants for this PhD research – 'Rosefield High' in Edinburgh, Scotland and 'Yatesly Academy[5]' in Ayrshire, Scotland – had taken part in the *Healthy Respect* project and this facilitated recruitment of participants to this project. My rationale for choosing Rosefield High in particular from the *Healthy Respect* schools was that it both had a wide socioeconomic catchment area and it was close to my home in Edinburgh and was therefore convenient in terms of fieldwork. I chose Yatesly Academy because I wanted to recruit from more that one school and I was keen for that school to be located in the west of Scotland. As well as being part of *Healthy Respect*, I also had a personal contact at the school which, again, was good in terms of ease of access. The main way in which I drew upon *Healthy Respect* data was in making a choice about which television programmes I would ask teenagers to talk about in some detail during my own data collection.

5. Fieldwork process

Figure 1 outlines the chronology of the significant dates and stages of my fieldwork.

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[5] The school names, and indeed all names in the thesis, are pseudonyms

Figure 1: A chronology of the fieldwork

2007>		2008>													2009>					
Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jly	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun
[1]																			
										[2]									
											[3]								
												[4]							
													[5]						
															[6]				
															[7]				

Explanatory Notes:

[1]: **Pilot fieldwork:**
Personal contacts: five girls' group discussions through personal contacts aged 13-17; one paired girls' interview aged 15 and 16; one paired boys' interview aged 16 and 17; and one girl individual interview aged 15.

Rosefield High: one girls' focus groups (aged 13-14); one boys' focus groups (aged 13-14); Yatesly Academy: one boys' focus group (aged 14-15).

Discussion topics for this pilot fieldwork focused broadly on media use, media influence, opinions on celebrity life, romantic/sexual relationships; body image; smoking; drinking and illicit drug use.

[2]: **Topic Guide**, September 2008: the topic guide for the main fieldwork was composed.

[3] **Main fieldwork with group discussions** at Rosefield High: six boys' group discussions; three girls' group discussions; and four mixed-sex group discussions.

[4] **Advisory Group:** (This meeting in November informed the re-focusing of the aim of the research.)

[5] **Development of the research aim, research questions and the new topic guide** with the incorporation of Milkie's (1999) theory of 'presumed media influence'.

[6] **Individual interviews:**
Rosefield High: one boy, age 14; two girls, aged 15; and one paired girls' interview, aged 15.
Personal contacts: one girl aged 15; one girl, aged 14
Yatesly Academy: five individual boys' interviews, aged 14.

[7] **Group discussions** at Yatesly Academy: seven boys' group discussions, aged 13-15; five girls' group discussions, aged 13-15.

My PhD studies started in September 2007 and by November 2007 I had decided that I would like to conduct pilot fieldwork to explore broadly the influence of the media on teenagers' lives. An opportunity presented itself through a personal

contact in November 2007 to conduct a group discussion with a group of teenage girls, which enabled me to commence pilot fieldwork early.

In January 2008, I worked as a sessional researcher for the *Healthy Respect Evaluation*. During this time I made contact with the Head of Guidance at Rosefield High and explained my proposed PhD project and my aspirations to work at his school with his pupils. Through these contacts Rosefield High became the first school at which I conducted research – both pilot research and the main research. During 2008 I also conducted pilot research in a second school, Yatesly Academy, and my main fieldwork was there in 2009. I gained access to Yatesly Academy and to the pupils there through a personal contact. The pupils from both of these schools were from a range of socio-economic backgrounds. Both Rosefield High and Yatesly Academy had a free school-meal eligibility[6] of 17 per cent in 2008[7]. The national average of those entitled to free school-meals is 12.9 per cent[8]. I chose to recruit through schools because they provided an accessible way in which to access sufficiently large numbers of the desired age of participants. Rosefield High is a school situated in the east of Scotland, and Yatesly Academy is on the west coast of Scotland.

5.1 Pilot fieldwork

In November 2007, before I started any pilot research, the specific focus of my research was still undecided. I knew in general terms that I was going to focus my research on teenagers, the media, and health behaviours such as smoking,

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[6] Pupils who take free school meals live in a household where income is low. It is therefore a measure which is strongly related with poverty.

[7] Statistics from the Healthy Respect Evaluation

8 http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2009/06/22104701/22

alcohol use, drug use, or romantic and/or sexual relationships. I chose to focus on teenagers because I thought that it was an age at which the behaviours I was interested in may be tried out. At this stage I knew very little, beyond the existing literature and my own personal experience, about how contemporary teenagers used media, what they thought of various media, what sort of role media played in their lives and which aspects of it were salient for them. For this reason the main aims of my pilot research were to broadly explore these issues and to establish the best way in which to elucidate teenagers' views. I thought that group discussions and individual interviews would provide a useful arena for the teenagers to discuss these issues. Also, at this stage I was unsure how to broach the concept of media influence and was somewhat naïve as to the complexities and difficulties that attempting to ascertain the influence of the media would pose.

Prior to any experience in the field, I considered group discussions to be a useful method for piloting the issues of this large and complex area (various health behaviours, types of media and the concept of media influence). These pilot group discussions were intended to encourage participants to speak freely about their thoughts, behaviours and experiences relating to the media, health behaviours and their identities and general lifestyle. I conducted the group discussions with groups of three to seven participants. I also conducted pilot fieldwork with two pairs of participants, and one individual participant. This allowed me to compare these methods.

The content of the group discussions and individual interviews for some of the pilot fieldwork focused on the participants' use of media, with an emphasis on three British TV series: *Skins*,

Hollyoaks and *Shameless.* I chose to focus on these three programmes largely because the *Healthy Respect Evaluation* survey found they were the most popular programmes with 15-16 year olds, but also because they featured all of the health behaviours that I was interested in at that early stage: romantic/sexual relationships; smoking; drinking and illicit drug use. These programmes were being screened on terrestrial or digital/satellite television channels at the time of the pilot fieldwork. *Skins* revolves around the lives of a group of 16-19 year-old friends who live in Bristol. *Hollyoaks* is set in a fictional Chester suburb and is centred around the local college. The characters are generally in their late teens or early twenties. *Shameless* follows the lives of a dysfunctional family who live on a working class estate near Manchester. The pilot group discussions (and the group discussions for the main fieldwork) included the use of images from *Skins*, *Hollyoaks* and *Shameless* to prompt discussion on how the issues of romantic/sexual relationships, body image, smoking, drinking and illicit drug-taking were interpreted by the participants, and how they related to their own perceptions and behaviours. Although my focus in terms of media was on these particular TV programmes, if other types of media – were mentioned during the discussion, then this posed no problem. I allowed for the term 'media' to be open to interpretation by the participants.

Two of the pilot groups – one boys' group and one girls' group - took place at Rosefield High. One boys' group discussion was conducted at Yatesly Academy. I also conducted further pilot fieldwork outwith the school setting: six girls' group discussions; one paired girls interview; one paired boys interview and one girl individual interview. Participants for this part of the pilot fieldwork were accessed through personal

contacts and these group discussions and interviews took place in coffee shops and participants' homes. Generally these participants were from middle-class backgrounds. It is important to note that the presumption of socio-economic class status to participants throughout the thesis is based only on my observations regarding aspects such as clothing, bodily deportment and accents and so may not be accurate.

5.1.1 Lessons learnt from the pilot fieldwork

Fortunately, all the pilot interviews and group discussions were generally positive experiences. I learnt much about teenagers' use and perceptions of many facets of the media. One thing I struggled with was getting the participants to discuss or admit to the media having any influence on them. The exception to this was in relation to body image, which both the boys and girls identified as being a direct, personal influence. That is, they freely admitted that the media influenced their perceptions of body image, always in a negative way. The 'third-person effect' (as discussed in the literature review) was apparent throughout, whereby each group presumed that another group would more likely be affected by the media. For example, the boys' group thought that girls would be more influenced by the media, and *vice versa*, and often both thought that a younger age group would be more influenced. Encouraging the participants to reflect and articulate on the way others are influenced by media became a main issue for this research.

Another interesting element that arose in two of the girls' groups was the issue of girls being aware of boys watching pornography. Neither of the boys' groups discussed their use of porn, but within two of the girls' groups it was clear that participants were convinced that most boys they knew were

watching porn all the time. Indeed, one group said that the boys would regularly try and show it to girls on their mobile phones. Because of this, the girls presumed that the boys had expectations about what girls should look like, and how they should behave sexually, even though the boys never expressed these expectations. It was observations such as this, as well as data collected from the first stage of main fieldwork at Rosefield High, that led me to adopt Milkie's 1999 'influence of presumed media influence' theory for the individual interviews and the later fieldwork at Yatesly Academy. This pornography observation also resulted in the decision to explicity ask participants about their perceptions of others' use of pornography in the first part of the main fieldwork (those group discussions conducted at Rosefield High). This question was approached by me saying 'some girls have reported that some boys they know watch pornography; do you think that is the case for the boys you know?'. I thought this would give participants a licence to discuss this topic. Appendix 1 provides the version of the topic guide that was used for the main fieldwork. After reflection on these data from Rosefield High, and after the research evolved further, I took a decision not to include 'use of pornography' as a specific question, but rather be receptive to the topic should the participants approach the subject of their own accord.

Methodologically the piloting demonstrated the difficulty of getting real friendship groups to participate in group discussions within a school setting. My experience of conducting the pilot groups at Rosefield High indicated to me that, due to the gatekeeping roles of teachers, the 'friendship groups' I was presented with were not necessarily friends at all, but rather the pupils whom the teachers regarded as 'the best' they had: presumably the most articulate and best

behaved. This was something I endeavoured to deal with in the main body of the fieldwork with variable success. Another methodological issue highlighted by my pilot fieldwork concerned the ideal size for a group discussion for this study. I found that the maximum number in a group should be six; four or five participants was ideal. Any larger than this and I found that either over-talking was a problem or else a couple of participants dominated the discussion. Four to five per group meant that the dynamic was much easier to manage and I was able to ensure that the participants had the opportunity to contribute equally (should they choose to do so). I found that conducting fieldwork outside school enabled greater control of time: that is, groups within school were inevitably constricted by the school timetable. However, despite this advantage of conducting fieldwork outwith school time, I found that ease of recruitment through schools far outweighed this disadvantage of time. Furthermore, in both Rosefield High and Yatesly Academy, I had the opportunity to individually interview participants with no time constraints; at Rosefield High the individual interviews took place outwith the school premises and the school day, and at Yatesly Academy I was granted as much time as was needed to individually interview the participants.

Another lesson that I learnt from conducting pilot research was the importance of keeping fieldnotes. I kept fieldnotes for every group discussion and interview that I conducted. This was invaluable in terms of allowing considered reflection on the group discussion or interview. I reflected on the conversation, on the participants themselves, on the location, on the interaction (including body language) between the participants (when it was a group discussion), and between me

and the participants, on how I was feeling and on the general atmosphere of the interaction.

5.2. Main fieldwork

The main fieldwork could only be conducted during school term-time, and so could not commence until August 2008. The methods I adopted to conduct the main fieldwork were a mixture of group discussions and individual interviews. Participants were recruited from two schools – Rosefield High and Yatesly Academy. Two of the participants for the individual girls' interviews were recruited from personal contacts.

5.2.1 Sample for main fieldwork

My goal in designing the qualitative sample was to ensure that a range of perspectives were included even though I was only recruiting a relatively small number of people. By this stage, I had decided that the age-range I was interested in was 13-16 year olds: that is, pupils from roughly S3-S4 in the Scottish secondary school system. From hereon I will refer to this age category as 'teenagers'. There were three reasons for choosing this age range. First, I thought this age range would be better suited to discuss the potentially sensitive topics regarding 'risky' health behaviours than younger people. I anticipated that they would either have had some experiences of these behaviours, or if not, that such behaviours would be very much part of their consciousness. I also thought that because some of them were likely to not have had experiences of these behaviours, it may be interesting to explore whether or not the media were thought to be more influential for these less experienced participants. Crucial to note here is my awareness of the potential importance of participants' experiences in terms of engaging in sexual/romantic relationships and

drinking alcohol and how this may have impacted on their perceptions of media influence on their understandings of these behaviours. Unfortunately the data I collected did not provide a consistent representation of their experiences and therefore I cannot confidently state whether or not their experiences did impact on their perceptions of media influence.

Second, this age is a transition point between 'collective' media exposure and much more fragmented individualised use of media (Livingstone, 2002; Livingstone et al., 1999). I therefore thought that this would be an interesting age at which to explore this potentially fragmented individualised use of media. Third, if I had chosen to include pupils in the next year up, I would risk losing the full socio-economic range, as many pupils, and particularly those with lower educational attainment, leave school at the end of S4. I wanted the group discussions to be mainly single-sex because as I thought that I would be more able to collect richer data on sexual and romantic relationships by interviewing separate sex groups; however, I did interview four mixed-sex groups at Rosefield High as part of the media influence sample design as explained in the following paragraph.

A major factor governing my sample design was the media influence concept. How could this elusive 'influence' be explored? I thought that a possible strategy might be to split the sample into groups who took Media Studies as a subject at school, and those who did not. By doing this I thought that a comparison could be made in participants' accounts of media influence (with the assumption that those taking Media Studies would have a more sophisticated interpretation of the media). I adopted this approach for some groups at Rosefield High (but

not at Yatesly Academy). This will be discussed in greater detail shortly.

Where possible, friendship groups took precedence over single-sex groups as I wanted the participants to be as open and relaxed as possible with each other. I managed to include pupils from a range of socio-economic backgrounds by conducting fieldwork at two schools which had pupils from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds.

An important note here to bear in mind when reading the following chapters is how the sample actually materialized. I conducted group discussions with more boys than girls at Yatesly Academy, and all of the individual boy interviews, except one (Frank), were from the Yatesly Academy groups. The participants at Yatesly Academy appeared to be generally more working-class, while Frank appeared to be very much middle-class. Unlike the individual girls from Rosefield High who independently arranged a follow-up interview with me, the individual boys' interviews from Yatesly Academy were held during class time at school and were arranged by the teacher (had it been up to the boys to arrange the interviews with me independently, I doubt most of the boys I did speak to would have been willing). All of the boys' group discussions that focused on the more specific questions regarding sexual/romantic relationships were from Yatesly Academy and were mostly working-class. All of the individual girl interviews, bar one (Lucy), were middle-class. All of the girls' group discussions that focused on the specific question regarding sexual/romantic relationships were from Yatesly Academy and were more working-class.

5.2.2 Sample recruitment

Recruiting participants through schools was firstly done by negotiating with teaching staff. I had already gained consent to work in these schools during the period of my pilot fieldwork. I requested that pupils were given leave from their normal classes - either PSE (Personal and Social Education) or Media Studies lessons - in order to take part in group discussions in a separate room. Having obtained permission from teachers, I introduced the research to the groups, provided the information sheet (see Appendix 2) and answered any questions. Teachers were not present during the focus groups, as their presence may have inhibited conversation and could be problematic in terms of confidentiality.

Where interviews took place outwith school time, recruitment was via direct contact with the participants – by email, telephone or texting. Interviews took place either at a university campus in a private room (I thought this was a convenient, safe and appropriate place for these interviews to be held as it was located near to the school premises) or in the participants' home with no-one else present in the room. Participants who were interviewed outwith school time were also given a £10 gift voucher for high street shopping, as a token of gratitude for their time.

5.2.3 Table of sample composition

The main fieldwork sample comprised **25 group discussions** and **11 individual interviews**. In total, this included **126 participants**. Table 1 demonstrates the composition of the group discussions and individual interviews:

Table 1. Composition of the research sample

Participant Recruitment Source	Group of 4-6 participants						Paired group			Individuals			
	S3: 13-15 years			S4: 14-16 years			S4			S3		S4	
	Boys	Girls	Mix	Boys	Girls	Mix	Boys	Girls	Mix	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
Rosefield High	3		(2)	3	3	(2)		1		1	1		1
Yatesley Academy	6	5		1						5			
Personal contact													2

Note: Media class participants are shown in brackets ( )
Note: The actual number of participants for each group discussion is between four and six

Figures 2 and 3 provide the abbreviations for the participants that will be used throughout the thesis. The code is: sex; school; age group. For example, in Figure 1, B.Ro.4b means Boys.Rosefield.S4. The letters a, b, c and so on refer to the number of groups in that category. Those who took part in individual interviews are identified by (II) after their name.

<u>Figure 2. Participant code-abbreviations for Rosefield High</u>

Please note that the follow-up interviews were with participants from the school group discussions in the corresponding left-hand column of the figure below. The individual interviews were with participants who were recruited outwith the school.

Rosefield High:	Follow-up interviews	Individual Interviews
Mxd. Ro. 3a (mixed sex group S.3)		
Mxd. Ro. 3b (mixed sex group S.3)		
Mxd. Ro. 4a (mixed sex group S.4)	B.Na (group of five male friends)	Frank (II): follow-up Individual Interview Heidi (II): follow-up Individual Interview
Mxd. Ro. 4b (mixed sex group S.4)		
B.Ro.4a (Boys group S.4)		
B.Ro.4b (Boys group S.4)		
B.Ro.4c (Boys group S.4)		
G.Ro.4a (Girls group S.4)	Milly and Molly (paired interview)	
G.Ro.4b (Girls group S.4)		Eva (II): follow-up Individual Interview
G.Ro.4c (Girls group S.4)		
		Rhona (II) S4 Personal contact – not affiliated to either school
		Lucy (II) S4 –Personal contact – not affiliated to either school

Figure 3. Participant code-abbreviations for Yatesly Academy

Yatesly Academy	Follow-up Individual interviews
B.Ya.3a (Boys group S.3)	
B.Ya.3b (Boys group S.3)	Carl (II) – Individual Interview
B.Ya.3c (Boys group S.3)	Dave (II) – Individual Interview Norman (II) Individual Interview
B.Ya.4a (Boys group S.4)	
B.Ya.3d (Boys group S.3)	Johnny (II) – Individual Interview
B.Ya.3e (Boys group S.3)	Kai (II) - Individual Interview
B.Ya.3f (Boys group S.3)	
G.Ya.3a (Girls group S.3)	
G.Ya.3b (Girls group S.3)	
G.Ya.3c (Girls group S.3)	
G.Ya.3d (Girls group S.3)	
G.Ya.3e (Girls group S.3)	

5.3 Data collection process

The process of data collection was similar for both group discussions and individual interviews. I had a topic guide from which I asked participants a variety of questions. The topic guide for the Rosefield High group discussions is slightly different from the topic guide for the individual interviews and all participants from Yatesly Academy. This is because, after reflecting upon the data gleaned from the group discussions at Rosefield High, I decided to modify the questions slightly. The topics covered in the group discussions at Rosefield High (see Appendix 1) were: general media use; opinions of celebrities; media influence; discussions about what makes a good party; interpretations of media images and reflections on media

effects research. These topics were selected as I felt they covered a broad range of the issues that I was interested in learning about at this stage in the research.

The topic guide for the individual interviews and the group discussions at Yatesly Academy included: general media use; what participants think they know of others drinking alcohol; general portrayals of alcohol in the media; alcohol in the media and its relation to sexual behaviour; interpretations of alcohol images and media influence; descriptions of sexual/romantic relationships; own and others' expectations of sexual/romantic relationships; and interpretations of media images of sexual/romantic relationships. In the individual interviews I asked some extra questions about the participants' own experiences of sexual/romantic relationships. The topic guides for group discussions at Yatesly Academy and, for all individual interviews, are shown in Appendices 3 and 4 respectively.

At the end of the interviews and group discussion, time permitting, I asked participants to reflect on selected images from the TV programmes *Skins*, *Hollyoaks* and *Shameless*. A selection[9] of these images is shown in chapters five and six. The images in chapter five were intended to prompt discussion about (gender-appropriate) alcohol use and the images in chapter six were intended to prompt discussion about (gender-appropriate) sexual/romantic behaviour. These images are referred to when discussing the interpretations of the images in the later chapters. The reason for introducing the images at the end of the interviews and group discussions is that I did not want to influence the earlier discussion with the introduction of media. The order of the data collection for the individual

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[9] This selection comprises the images that prompted the most discussion

interviews and group discussions has in turn affected the order in which the findings chapters five and six have been reported; that is, the data regarding media influence are reported towards the end of the chapters.

5.3.1 Fieldwork at Rosefield High

I mentioned previously that access to Rosefield High was achieved through the *Healthy Respect* project. I negotiated access initially with the Head Guidance teacher Mr. Jackson who was the main contact for the *Healthy Respect* project and with whom I had liaised previously when conducting the two pilot groups. I also liaised with Mr. McIntyre, Head of Media Studies. The reason for this was due to the sample design involving a Media Studies class and a non-Media Studies class. The way in which the groups materialised was more to do with the two teachers' decisions than mine, despite my attempts to shape the composition.

I interviewed participants from the media classes in four groups, all of them mixed-sex. I had initially asked to speak to S4 pupils, but when I spoke with Mr McIntyre he warned me that his S4 pupils were 'annoying'. For this reason he suggested I spoke with his S3 group instead, whom he described as a 'nicer lot'. I said that it would be great to speak with them, but I would also like to speak to the S4s, even if they were 'annoying': he agreed to this. The result was two S3 and two S4 'friendship groups'. Mr McIntyre introduced me at the beginning of the class and then said, 'so, who's friends here then?', before picking out pupils to take part in the groups before anyone had replied. By default, I felt this meant that participants in the second group that I spoke to were less likely to be friends.

The interview location for the groups from the media classes was not ideal. The space which I was allocated to conduct these group discussions was essentially a large photocopier cupboard which connected Mr McIntrye's classroom with the adjacent classroom. The walls were covered in shelves and books. There was a small window through which came little light, affording the cupboard a gloomy tone. I was conducting group discussions with up to six participants in this space. It was impossible to arrange a circular formation given the size of the cupboard. This made for an awkward configuration and one which was not conducive to a good interview dynamic.

The PSE groups were chosen by Mr. Jackson. They were all single-sex groups. The participants were brought to me in the room I had been allocated, a large classroom which was far more satisfactory for conducting a group discussion than the small media studies cupboard. I found that the single-sex groups generally generated more data, especially about sexual/romantic relationships. Participants appeared reluctant to talk about this subject in front of peers from the opposite sex. For this reason all future group discussions were conducted as single-sex groups.

5.3.2 Re-focusing of research questions prior to conducting individual interviews and group discussions at the second school, Yatesly Academy

Because the group discussions at Rosefield finished in mid-December 2008, no further fieldwork could take place for a few weeks due to the Christmas holidays. By this point I felt that I had reached a stage where I was predicting participants' responses. This situation is referred to by Bryman (2004) as 'theoretical saturation'. It was time for me to reflect on the fieldwork conducted so far. After the Christmas holidays I took the opportunity to do this. This was a necessary endeavour in

order for me to critically re-examine my focus; at this point I adopted a more specific focus and some new research questions necessitated amendments to my topic guide. I felt that the research needed to become more focussed in order to reach, under the time constraints of a PhD thesis, a greater depth of understanding of a more specific area of the teenagers' lives. My re-focused research aim and questions are presented below:

Aim: Do media portrayals of drinking and sexual/romantic relationships shape teenagers' constructions of gendered identities?

Question 1: Is the media integrated into the lives of teenage boys and girls?

Question 2: How do teenagers' understandings of gender-appropriate alcohol-use relate to media portrayals of alcohol use?

Question 3: How do teenagers' understandings of gender-appropriate engagement in sexual/romantic relationships relate to media portrayals of sexual/romantic relationships?

Question 4: Is Milkie's (1999) 'influence of presumed media influence' theory a useful way to understand the media's position in teenagers' lives, and specifically their understandings of gender-appropriate alcohol use, and of romantic and sexual relationships?

My refined research focus was much informed by the pilot groups and the group discussions at Rosefield High. Another major factor in this final re-focusing was the outcome of an Advisory Group that was held in November 2008. The Advisory Group was with my supervisors Danny Wight (Programme leader for sexual health and families at the MRC) and Kate Hunt (Programme leader for gender and health at the MRC), and also Helen Sweeting (Senior investigator scientist in gender, youth and health at the MRC), Patrick West (Head of

youth and health programme at the MRC), Marion Henderson (Senior investigator scientist for sexual health and families at the MRC) and Jenny Kitzinger (Director of Research, specialising in questions of media influence with a focus on health issues, Cardiff University). Following on from this discussion, I decided that the project should:

- retain a focus on sexual/romantic relationships from a gendered perspective;
- retain a focus on drinking alcohol from a gendered perspective;
- retain the use of images as a tool to reflect on the participants' lives as this proved a useful method with which to glean data;
- drop any focus on smoking or drug use as these were less salient for the participants;
- leave behind the media literacy comparison tactic – that is, no longer interview some participants from media studies classes and some from non media studies classes as there appeared to be little difference in the data gleaned from the media class focus groups as compared to the non-media class focus groups;
- focus on 'integration' rather than 'influence' of media in participants' lives. This was because it was suggested by Jenny Kitzinger – an expert in media effects studies – that it would be wise to avoid entering into a media 'effects' debate. It should be noted here that, in hindsight, this PhD project has retained a focus on media influence, albeit in a highly nuanced way, and that the word 'integration' is in fact an alternative to the word 'influence'.

Another crucial change that was made to the focus of the research at this stage was the introduction of another theoretical perspective which influenced the design of the data collection. This theoretical perspective is outlined in Milkie's (1999) paper entitled *Social comparisons, reflected appraisals, and mass media*. This paper is detailed in the literature review chapter. I decided that it would be a useful theory for this research as a result of reflection on both the literature and my pilot fieldwork. Specifically during the pilot fieldwork data participants would often state that they were

not influenced by the media, but that others they knew were. The combination of this information, and the ideas from Milkie's paper which states that people may be influenced by the media but via their friends and peers, suggested that the topic guide for the interviews and group discussions should focus on participants' expectations and presumptions of whether *others they know* are influenced by the media (see Appendices 3 and 4). Important to note here is that I applied Milkie's theory in a slightly different way to how she applied it in her research. Whereas Milkie's research focused only on girls, I focused the theory on the opposite sex. Therefore, for example, when interviewing girls I was interested in finding out what they thought of the expectations that boys they knew had of sexual/romantic relationships, and whether these expectations may be influenced by the media, and *vice versa* with the opposite sex. This process of questioning provides the rationale for the logic of the reporting of data in the findings Chapters Five and Six.

5.3.3 *Individual interviews with participants from Rosefield High and two personal contacts*

After interviewing the groups at Rosefield High (four media studies groups and six PSE groups) I was keen to speak individually with some of the participants again in order to discuss in greater depth the issues that had been initially raised in the group discussions. At the end of each group discussion, I stated that I was interested in discussing these issues further, and if anyone was interested in participating in an individual interview then I would like them to leave their contact details with me. A majority of participants left their email address and/or mobile phone number. I decided that the location of these individual interviews would either be at the participant's home or at a university campus that was close to

the school (a ten-minute walk). The reason for choosing this location was because I did not have to negotiate access to school after school hours and because I hoped that a non-school context might facilitate different kinds of accounts.

The individuals who did come forward for interview were all girls bar one boy, Frank. My perception was that all of these individuals were from middle-class families. In addition to the individuals from Rosefield High, I also interviewed separately two girls who were recruited through personal contacts. They were both 15 years old and from Edinburgh. The interviews were conducted in their homes. The reason why I interviewed these two girls was that at this stage in the fieldwork process I had fewer girl participants to interview individually than I would have liked as a result of the recruitment at Rosefield High. Therefore I took the opportunity to conduct these two individual interviews.

5.3.4 Fieldwork at Yatesly Academy

Access to Yatesly Academy was gained through a personal contact with a teacher there. He kindly offered to put me in touch with Mr. Miner, a guidance teacher at the school. I told Mr. Miner about the study and assured him that the study had received the appropriate ethical permission. From here Mr. Miner was granted authorization from the head teacher. The groups at Yatesly Academy were then arranged from February 2009 until the end of June 2009. All of the interviews in Yatesly Academy were conducted in the allocated 'meditation room'. This was a small, comfortable room with purple cushioned seats which could be arranged as needed. I wanted to interview groups of friends as far as possible. My experience from the pilot fieldwork and the main fieldwork at Rosefield High indicated that richer data were gathered when the

participants were friends. The group discussions at Yatesly Academy – five girls' groups (S3) and seven boys' groups (six S3, one S4) - were positive experiences. I interviewed participants with a wide range of personalities and levels of confidence. Again, I feel the composition of the friendship groups played a part in the richness of data gleaned at Yatesly Academy. All of the groups I interviewed at Yatesly Academy were single-sex, and appeared to be friendship groups to some extent, though my perceptions of the level of 'real' friendships varied. As with Rosefield High, I was not in control of the group selection. Further reflections on these group discussions will be addressed later in this chapter.

From the group discussions conducted at Yatesly Academy I selected boys with whom to conduct individual interviews (I had already interviewed enough individual girls from the participants at Rosefield High and the two personal contacts with my focus on the newly developed research questions). At Yatesly Academy the individual interviews, in contrast to the follow-up individual interviews with pupils from Rosefield High, were conducted at the school and during school time. My rationale for selection was to pick a mix of those who had been forthcoming with opinions during the group discussions, and those who had been less so. I wanted to give those who perhaps felt uncomfortable discussing issues with peers the opportunity to do so in a more private setting. This was different from the process at Rosefield High. At Rosefield High, because the follow-up individual interviews were required to take place out of school hours and premises, I was limited to conducting the individual interviews with anyone who would agree to a meeting. Generally, the participants who took part in individual interviews at Yatesly Academy appeared to be more economically deprived than those from Rosefield High.

I will now move on to describe how I dealt with and analysed the data that were gleaned from these group discussions and interviews.

6. Dealing with data and further analysis

I transferred group discussion and interview recordings to a computer and listened to them in order to determine quality and coherence. They were then sent to a transcription company who returned the interviews as typed Microsoft Word documents. The file name was anonymised prior to sending to the transcription company. I checked the transcripts against the original recordings and made any necessary alterations. The transcripts were anonymised by changing the names of the schools, the participants and the teachers. Every name used in the thesis is a pseudonym. At this stage I also made summary notes on the content of each interview.

The next stage of analysis was to think about important themes and how to code the data. I re-read the transcripts and noted initial themes as broad codes in order to begin to categorise the content of the interview and to develop an overall impression of the structure of the interviews. This stage of analysis was conducted using NVivo 7. The use of NVivo afforded me a number of benefits: for example the ability to store large quantities of data, transportable access, unlimited corrections, fast search and retrieve functions (Ritchie and Lewis 2003). It also made each stage of the analytic process easily identifiable and traceable for any future validation or auditing purposes. The codes were saved in NVivo as 'tree nodes'. 'Tree nodes' are nodes which are connected to each other. Examples of these nodes were 'presumed media influence', 'norms of sexual relationships' or 'obvious

gender presentation'. As these were saved as 'tree nodes' it was possible to see how each node linked with the other nodes or with any given piece of text.

The next stage of the analysis was to summarise the meanings of the tree nodes. This was done by simply accessing the particular node and manually summarizing the emergent ideas. I identified connections between themes and looked at the 'overarching themes'. These overarching themes were: gender; general media; TV programmes (that is, specific data referring to *Skins*, *Hollyoaks* and *Shameless*); sexual/romantic relationships; emotions; identity/presentations of self; and alcohol. The themes were identified by reflecting on the data, which followed a general order as derived from the topic guide. However, by no means did I restrict myself to this order. The overarching themes would go on to inform the structure of the presentation of my findings. This process involved detecting patterns of associations within the data to gain insight of the different levels of phenomena that were occurring.

Although the analysis is presented here as being a linear process, it must be emphasised that this was often not the case. Rather, as Spencer et al. comment, 'as categories are refined, dimensions clarified, and explanations are developed there is a constant need to revisit the original or synthesised data to search for new clues, to check assumptions or to identify underlying factors' (Spencer et al., 2003. 213). I often re-visited relevant data in order to check any tentative hypotheses. The outcome of this often-convoluted analysis process was the 'writing up' of the data. I did this in tandem with the analysis. For example, for each of the three findings chapters I analysed the data, then wrote a first draft of the

chapter. The coding structure allowed me to chart the rough structure of the chapters before writing was underway. Figure 3 demonstrates the rigorous and methodical process of analysis that I undertook. I applied the same process to data used for Chapter Five.

Figure 4: Structure of data analysis

Romantic and sexual relationships		
Romantic and sexual relationships as lived experiences:	Reported by girls	Reported by boys
Expectations of romantic and sexual relationships:	Reported by girls	Reported by boys
Interpretations of media-portrayals of romantic and sexual relationships:	Reported by girls	Reported by boys
Presumptions about the opposite sex's expectations about relationships:	What did girls think that boys thought about relationships?	What did boys think that girls thought about relationships?
Presumed expectations about the influence of the media:	The opinions reported by the boys	The opinions reported by the girls

A final and important comment about the process of analysis concerns my ultimate theoretical framing of the data. It was only after writing drafts of all three findings chapters that I decided that the overall frame of the research should be the construction of gendered identities. The outcome of the findings chapters highlighted that media were only one influence among others, such as peers and family. I therefore decided to develop an approach that would allow for all the possible influences to be understood. This approach was to

consider participants' understandings of what was gender-appropriate in terms of drinking alcohol and engaging in sexual/romantic relationships. These understandings could then be explored as a way in which participants may construct their gendered identities. Media influence remained the focus, but it was considered as just one influence among other possible influences. Therefore the final research question was:

Question 5:   How are teenagers' understandings of gender-appropriate behaviours with regards to drinking alcohol and sexual/romantic relationships used in the construction of their gendered identities?

7. Ethical issues

Inherent in any methodological design is a consideration of the ethical implications of the research process. This study was no exception. The study was subject to review and approval by the Ethics Board of the Faculty of Law, Business and Social Sciences at the University of Glasgow. Please see Appendix 5 for the approved ethics form.

After negotiating access to participants, I introduced the research and provided an information sheet to the participants (Appendix 2). I then invited the participants to take part, fully explaining the consent form. All participants were required to give active consent (Appendix 6). Here permission was sought to audiotape the interviews and focus groups. I also made it clear that I was willing to answer any questions posed by the participants. Well in advance of the fieldwork a letter was issued to the parents of the participants (Appendix 7), explaining the research and seeking their passive consent. Participants were informed that they could withdraw at any point should they so choose.

I reassured participants that their responses would be confidential and anonymous; all names would be changed and participants were asked to choose a pseudonym. All paper transcripts were kept securely in a locked cabinet and all electronic files of transcripts were secured in a password-protected file. After the completion of the study, all physical data were stored in a secure storage facility. Confidentiality was achieved by conducting the research in private where possible (without teachers or parents present), requiring group-discussion participants to respect the confidentiality of fellow participants, and anonymising all references to individuals when disseminating findings. Although confidentiality was fully discussed at the start of each group discussion in order to strongly discourage disclosures that might subsequently be regretted, it is never possible to guarantee total confidentiality in such circumstances, since this depends on the behaviour of each participant. An example of such a situation is highlighted below in an excerpt from my fieldnotes:

In the focus groups I avoided asking personal questions, as although I can guarantee confidentiality, I cannot guarantee that this will be the case for the other participants. This apprehension materialized in one of the girls' PSE groups. The group consisted of five girls – two of them were friends and the rest knew each other in class but not out of school. During the discussion when the question 'does the media influence you or anyone you know?' was asked, two of the five girls started talking about a girl they knew, separately, about drug-taking and sexually 'promiscuous' behaviour. Both girls (not friends) were reluctant to say the girl's name when I was recording. However, when I had finished recording and we were packing up they all started to talk about her by name and tell each other what they had heard about her. Of course this kind of gossiping goes on in schools anyway, but I felt that this particular instance of gossiping was directly instigated by my question and that, now that I was leaving, there was little I could do to withhold this gossip.

The content of the group discussions and individual interviews covered sensitive topics such as risky behaviours. These included sexual behaviour, smoking, drinking and illegal drug use. I was interested in how presentations of these behaviours in the media are interpreted by the participants, and how this relates to the participants' own behaviours. During the group discussions I strongly discouraged any potentially sensitive disclosure not already shared with the group participants, for example on personal sexual history, but rather sought to learn about more general use and interpretations of the media, or their perceptions and expectations of others' behaviour.

Although the group discussions and interviews focussed on the media and some potentially sensitive issues, the media content being reflected upon and interpreted was largely in response to what the participants said they had already chosen to watch and discuss, or on material that participants in the *Healthy Respect* evaluation (Elliot et al., 2010) had indicated are the most popular programmes with my target audience.

It was possible that engaging in discussion surrounding sensitive areas such as sexual behaviour and risky health behaviour would cause emotional distress. However, the majority of participants had received sex education as part of their school curriculum and were already part of the *Healthy Respect* survey which asks in-depth questions about young people's sexual behaviour. At most, participants may have felt embarrassed, but everyone was assured that they did not have to answer any questions that they did not feel comfortable answering. I was sensitive to embarrassment and to anyone becoming distressed, having trained in conducting research with children and young people. This rarely happened. On the

couple of occasions that it did, I moved off the topic altogether and made a point of talking to the participant after the interview. I ensured that I always had time after the interviews in case it was necessary to talk to a distressed participant. This was somewhere private and without distraction; and, if it seemed appropriate, I suggested professionals who might be able to help the respondent.

I followed the relevant *Child Protection Guidelines* for the institution through which I recruited participants. In schools these were the guidelines of the local education authority. These required that if, during the interviews or focus groups, a participant under the age of 16 discloses that s/he may be at serious harm from others, I had to pass on this information to the appropriate authority. This was made clear to participants at the start of the group discussion or interview. During one of the focus groups at Yatesly Academy a participant disclosed to me information of an incident which I felt did put him at risk. After discussion with my supervisors it was thought that I should pursue the issue. I attempted to speak with the participant during my future visits to the school. However, this was not possible due to a range of factors. Eventually I spoke with Mr Miner, the contact guidance teacher, and explained the situation. From here he took the issue forward and informed me that he would discuss the situation with the participant's guidance teacher and would let me know if any information was needed from me and what the outcome was. I did not hear any news from him subsequently.

If a less serious matter arose but, nevertheless if I felt that the participant might benefit from support, I did, in private, refer participants to the most appropriate services. I made it clear that, as long as the issue fell outwith the *Child Protection*

Guidelines, referral to other services would be entirely voluntary. Additionally, I ensured that participants were aware of how to access confidential advice, for example through the *Childline* leaflets I gave them. This situation arose only once. During a focus group at Yatesly Academy, a participant disclosed information in such a way that I felt he was distressed about a past family issue. At the end of the interview I asked if he could stay back. I asked him if he was ok and if he would like to talk over the issue with anyone. I reminded him that he can always talk with his guidance teacher, and I left him (as with all participants) a copy of the *Childline* number. He assured me that he was 'over it now' but took the number and said 'thanks anyway'.

8. Reflections

Researcher reflexivity is a vital part of qualitative research. Finlay and Gough (2003) recognize that the decisions made by the researcher at all points of the research will influence the findings. This is true from the choice of literature, through methodological decisions, to the writing-up process itself (for example what information to include or leave out). Denzin and Lincoln also assert that:

> what we 'look for' is un/fortunately what we shall find…It is perhaps difficult for an analytically trained mind to admit that recording, gathering, sorting, deciphering, analyzing and synthesizing, dissecting and articulating are already imposing our structure (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003).

An important issue with reflexivity, highlighted by Mauthner and Doucet (2003), is that it is often reported at the fieldwork stage, but neglected in accounts of the analytic process. It should be noted that the findings are interpreted by the researcher at all times, such that a repeat study by another researcher might result in different conclusions. This

reiterates the point that the product of qualitative research is a contribution to knowledge, but one that does not claim to be a universal 'truth'. One of the values of qualitative research is that knowledge of social phenomena is developed as research is repeated with new authors enriching data through their own interpretation.

During every part of the research process I was reminded of my past relationships, my parents' relationship and friends' relationships. It has made me consider my present relationship: that is, how I 'do' this relationship and what I and my boyfriend might expect from it. These personal considerations have undoubtedly influenced the direction of the research and the path that the interviews took in some way. Another interesting aspect of the research/non-research interface has been the reaction of those around me on learning of the topic of my research. For example, when I told my boyfriend that an aspect of my research was going to be based on sexual/romantic relationships he said 'so you'll be thinking about our relationship now?', as if this might have been the first time the thought had occurred to me. Friends were sure that I was always analysing their relationships. I now find that I am considered to be a source of relationship advice.

During my fieldwork I kept a field diary, noting down the experiences encountered at each interview, along with feelings at the time that may have affected the way the interview was conducted. Below is an example of my reflections as a researcher from my fieldnotes:

> *Doing this research with teenagers, I can't help but reflect on my own teenage years, nor can I help but reflect on my current relationship, and those of my friends. What do boys and girls / men and women want from each other? All these issues about guessing what*

the opposite sex wants and acting accordingly – it most definitely continues past teenage years… I was chatting to my friend on MSN last night and she was talking about a guy who had been into her and he was saying how amazing she is and how he loves everything about her. She slept with him and since then he hasn't seemed nearly so interested. She can't understand it. She said having sex was like a Danny Zucco, from the film Grease, *whatever that means. It made me think about how even at our age (or even more so at our age?) we don't know the rules and it's just a big guessing game.*

Another thing I noticed upon reflection (especially after listening to the recordings) was how laughter emerged as an extremely important tool. It was a frequent occurrence in my interviews. It featured in every interview and could mean many things. I used it to:

o keep the discussion light-hearted and open;
o put the participants at ease

Both the participants and I used it:

o to disguise nervousness / discomfort;
o to express nervousness / discomfort;
o as a 'get-out clause' after a particularly serious / controversial comment. In other words, if this comment is not well accepted then you know I was 'only joking';
o express shock;
o diffuse a potentially awkward situation. For example if somebody swore or said something controversial;
o to laugh *with* (bond);
o to laugh *at* (deride)

In the ideal group discussion the participants are all taking part and the role of the researcher is to ask key questions that will steer the discussion in the desired direction and allow for equal participation. In reality this sometimes, unfortunately, was not the case. Instead, on occasions questions would be answered with grunts or one-word answers, and there would be little interaction among the participants.

When listening to the interviews I can tell which ones were conducted latterly depending on the length of pause I allow before asking the next question. The pause in conversation is a strange phenomenon to become accustomed to. In everyday social interactions with people you do not know, it is social etiquette not to leave long silences in conversation. It is interpreted as being awkward and uncomfortable, and people go to great lengths to avoid them. However, in group discussions and interviews, pauses and silences are necessary. It took me a while to become confident enough to allow for these pauses. Participants need time to think about the questions and how they will answer them. It is easy to forget that it is unlikely that they will have ever before thought about these issues in quite this way, or even have engaged with these issues at all. This became especially apparent to me when I attended a focus group training day in December 2008. This date was half way through my fieldwork at Rosefield High. As part of an exercise I was a participant in a focus group. What struck me was how quickly the interview moved on from topic to topic, allowing for very little thinking time. By the time it took me to construct my answer (and one which I was happy to share with the group) the conversation had moved on. Often the discussion topic changed so rapidly that by the time the person who had started on a certain topic had finished, the topic had shifted altogether and my comment was left feeling irrelevant. Having that experience as a participant in a focus group sensitized me to the participants in my research, and prevented me from moving on too quickly and from being too hasty in filling the silences.

8.1 Interview style (positioning of self as researcher)

My main concern with regards to my style of interviewing was deciding how to situate myself in terms of 'friend versus

teacher'. I was very aware (especially in the main fieldwork where interviews took place in a school setting) of being perceived as a teacher or at least a teacher-like person. After all, I was always introduced to the participants by their teacher and the participants were often told to 'be good' as they were left with me. Although I wanted the respect and good behaviour that I expected a teacher would warrant, I assumed that they would be unlikely to be open and honest with a teacher about some of the topics at hand. I wanted to be their friend insofar as that would encourage a relaxed and friendly atmosphere, a flowing discussion and willingness to engage comfortably with each other. This was aided, perhaps, by the fact that I am a Scottish woman in my twenties and therefore hopefully someone they could communicate with easily. At the same time, because I was older than the participants I was able to retain an element of the naïve outsider position which allowed me to probe further. I reiterated that that there was no right or wrong answers and that they could be as honest as possible. I was always acutely aware of body language. I adopted what I imagined was a relaxed demeanour, again hoping this would facilitate a relaxed and open atmosphere for discussion.

8.2 Gender reflections

I was sensitive to the fact that group interactions were likely to differ between the sexes. Below I will note my reflections on research with boys as compared with girls.

8.2.1 Boys

Courtenay (2000) suggests that men have difficulty discussing their emotions. This was sometimes true in my experience whereby the boys would look like they wanted the ground to open up and swallow them – especially when discussing

relationships and emotions. This was more likely to happen in a group discussion than in an individual interview. It is possible that this situation would have been less awkward for the participants had I been a male interviewer. With the boys' focus groups my main concerns were that they would:

> 1. Misbehave and get out of control. I felt I would be ill-equipped in knowing how to deal with them;

> 2. Make me feel uncomfortable by making sexual references/advances. I was aware of this mainly due to the fact that this was the main concern of most people to whom I explained my research;

> 3. Respond with just a grunt or a shrug of the shoulders to my questions.

As it turned out, only the third concern materialised occasionally. Below an excerpt from my fieldnotes, from a boys' group at Yatesly Academy, highlights an example of this:

> *When I asked them how they'd describe a relationship, none of them said a single thing, just kept looking round at each other and smirking, then verbally passing the buck. The most dominant boy said to the English boy – 'you say, you've no said much yet'. The English boy took a long pause then turned to the little mute boy and said sarcastically 'you go, you're the expert here'. Laughter briefly broke the tense atmosphere. I didn't know whether to join in laughing like I wanted to, so happy I felt that at this small relief, or not to, as by doing so I be colluding with that comment and agreeing to the inference that he knew nothing about girls and relationships.*

The closest boys got to bad behaviour was being rude to each other, swearing and talking about sex. They thought they were being bad because, I assume, this would be deemed bad behaviour in their normal school environment (though the sex-talk was of interest for my research). Perhaps a reason for their generally very good behaviour was that they enjoyed having their opinions listened to and taken seriously, and they

would rather have been taking part in the interview than be in their normal class. None of the boys made sexual comments/advances directed at me; only on a couple of occasions boys hung back at the end of the interview saying 'thanks so much' with a big grin and a lingering look.

I did not tailor my questions depending on the sex of the participants. I was often surprised by the level of emotional openness, maturity and sophistication from the boys, especially their reflections regarding what it is to be in a relationship, saying for example 'boys don't do emotions', or 'it's difficult for boys'. Indeed, this discomfort regarding openly communicating emotions and feelings was a key issue between girls and boys in terms of their reasons for drinking alcohol and using MSN to negotiate relationships, as will be shown in the chapters which follow.

8.2.2 Girls

There is little mention in the literature of the discomfort that the researcher role can sometimes create for the interviewer. For some reason I was most uncomfortable initially with groups of girls; I found myself anxious to know that they liked me. A couple of times I felt that a participant did not like me and I found this uncomfortable. I felt there was a power imbalance: rather than the researcher having the power, I felt as though the participants in this case did. Oakley (1981) has highlighted an imbalance of power in the interview context, suggesting that it is unethical to 'mine' the participant for information whilst the researcher provides none. In this case I felt that even though it was the participants who were providing the information, this instilled them with the power. They knew how much I wanted to know this information - their thoughts and experiences - and they could see how I was trying to

persuade them to tell me, and deployed different questions, smiles, encouraging (I hoped!) eye-contact and body language. On these couple of occasions I was met with firmly- crossed arms, glaring or bored expressions, and either silent or grunting answers to my questions. Rationally I knew it was silly to feel personally offended by this. I had no idea what was going on in their lives, what had happened that morning or how they were feeling. Although every participant had consented to take part, in these instances they had been selected by their teacher and taken to a room separate from their class. There is every chance that they did not especially want to take part in the interview, yet preferred to do so rather than stay in their normal class. Another possibility could be that they did not feel confident enough to actually say 'no, I don't want to take part, I'd rather go back to my class.'

Many of the groups I spoke with, especially at Rosefield High, were not groups of friends. Therefore the social structures and hierarchies of the groups no doubt played a large part in how vocal and confident each participant was. One focus group that highlighted well these preformed social hierarchical problems was a girls' group at Yatesley Academy. Here is a fieldnote excerpt:

> *Well that wasn't a great interview. They were much less chatty and really less dynamic than the last group. It was pretty much dominated by one 'cool' girl. Two of the others were very quiet despite much encouragement by me. The dynamic was quite stilted and this really impacted on the flow of the discussion. This dominating girl came into the room late. She said she hung around with older boys because girls and people her age were 'boring'. This of course immediately put down everyone else in the group (who were all girls her age), and clearly showed her derogatory opinion of them. She was the only one who really spoke, and every time I asked the others to offer their opinion they just said 'I agree with her' or 'just*

> *what she said'. She was far more experienced than the others in terms of drinking, hanging about with older people, sex and relationships. I felt under pressure and scrutiny as a person from this girl – her I'm-bored-who-are-you-and-why-would-I-want-to-speak-to-you? expression never left her face.'*

After group discussions like these, I learnt of the potential difficulties of discussing focussed research questions. Nevertheless, these experiences also made me aware of the more subtle or non-spoken communication that can be extremely informative in its own right.

Despite the occasional difficulties, mostly the groups of girls got on well and I thoroughly enjoyed the interviews and felt that the data I gathered were interesting and rich. The majority of girls spoke openly and easily about relationships, and about emotions in particular. (For more reflections from fieldnotes on challenging interviews, please see Appendix 8.)

9. Summary

This chapter has described the methodological design of the current study. Various theories have contributed to the development of the current thesis and these have influenced the choice of methods and mode of analysis. In integrating overlapping ideas from symbolic interactionism, social constructionism, interpretivism and the influence of presumed media influence, a methodology was devised that aimed to investigate the possible influence of the media on teenagers' understandings of gender-appropriate behaviour with regards to alcohol use and engagement in sexual and romantic relationships (although as we have seen this research aim changed in various ways during the course of the research).

This chapter started with a brief consideration of conducting research with young people. A reflection on the reasons for choosing qualitative methods and for detailing the related theoretical underpinnings for this research was also provided. I then described the various stages and details of my fieldwork and analysis process. The chapter drew to a close with a discussion of ethical issues and reflections on the research process. The following three findings chapters will describe the outcome of this methodological process. Before continuing to the findings chapter below is a reminder of my research questions:

Question 1:   Is the media integrated into the lives of teenage boys and girls?

Question 2:   How do teenagers' understandings of gender-appropriate alcohol-use relate to media portrayals of alcohol use?

Question 3:   How do teenagers' understandings of gender-appropriate engagement in sexual/romantic relationships relate to media portrayals of sexual/romantic relationships?

Question 4:   Is Milkie's (1999) 'influence of presumed media influence' theory a useful way to understand the media's position in teenagers' lives, and specifically their understandings of gender-appropriate alcohol use, and of romantic and sexual relationships?

Question 5:   How are teenagers' understandings of gender-appropriate behaviours with regards to drinking alcohol and sexual/romantic relationships used in the construction of their gendered identities?

Chapter Four
Descriptions of teenagers' use of media

1. Introduction

2. Descriptions of teenagers' use of media: characteristics and content
    2.1   A discussion of the concept of interactivity
    2.2   'Traditional' audio-visual media: television and cinema
    2.3   Audio-visual 'web-based' media: internet pornography
    2.4   Communications-based 'web-based' media: social networking and Instant Messenger (MSN)

3. An overview of teenagers' use of media: the process of media use
    3.1   Description of how media use is embedded in participants' lives
    3.2   Description of where participants used media
    3.3   Description of with whom participants used media
    3.4   Description of participants' motivations for using media
    3.5   Talking about media use with others

4. Conclusion

1. Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to set the context for the later findings chapters. In this chapter, I describe the participants'[10] accounts of their media use and show how media fit into their lives. Consequently the main thesis questions regarding gendered identities, drinking alcohol, sexual/romantic relationships and the media will be better understood in the chapters which follow.

The media are constantly changing. With each technological advance, the form, use and reception of media shift and evolve. No longer do people just watch films at the cinema or on DVDs, or watch programmes on the television and use their PCs for email. The types and content of media are now permeable, and digitally integrated. The participants in this study might watch yesterday's television online whilst simultaneously being logged onto MSN, before choosing to watch a film on their iPod in bed. Media use is becoming de-situated and mobile. With access to the internet now on many mobile phones and iPods, and with films, TV programmes and the galaxy of information available on the internet, teenagers' experience of media consumption is complex both to understand and to categorise and difficult to regulate.

For the purpose of this thesis, the definition of 'media' can largely be understood as TV, film and internet. However, the definition of 'media' was left open to interpretation by the participants; all types of media, for example magazines, were taken into account if they were discussed by participants.

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[10] For description of sample of participants please refer to methods chapter

The chapter is organised as follows. The first section of the chapter provides detail of three substantive types of media and their content that the participants reported using: TV and film; internet pornography, *YouTube* and computer games; and social networking sites and MSN. The second section of the chapter presents the participants' descriptions of the process of their use of media. This includes: the type of media used; the amount of media used; how and why they talked about their media use; where they used media; with whom and what their motivations for media use were. This is important because it outlines the social side of their media use.

2. Descriptions of teenagers' use of media: characteristics and content

The media *technology* reported to have been used by the participants included television, DVD players, the cinema, PCs, laptops, mobile phones, iPods and game consoles. No reference will be made to hard copies of printed media such as newspapers, magazines and books as these did not feature significantly in discussions. The *content* that was used from these media technologies will be dealt with in greater depth shortly, but before doing so, I will briefly discuss the logic of the categorization process for this section. Media technologies, content and uses are extremely permeable and complex; so too are the potential ways in which they might be organized and categorized. In order to do this, it is important to discuss the concept of interactivity.

2.1 Discussion of the concept of interactivity

What is interactivity? Interactivity can, at its most general level, be seen as any form of interface between the user and the medium. Even language in face- to-face communication belongs to the category of interactivity. With media, as with any invention or technology, the original use can be, and often

is, interpreted and used in alternative and unintended ways. Relatively conventionally 'uninteractive' media such as a film or TV can be consumed in the most 'interactive' of ways thereby pushing the boundaries of its intended interactivity. That is to say, individuals may be watching a programme in a group, paying close attention to what is going on, discussing it with others, relating it to their lives and behaviours; in future, either privately or together, they may recount and refer to the programme. Continuing to share and discuss the ideas with others could create a chain of interactivity. Similarly, someone may have a *Facebook* account, which is intended as an interactive interface, but rarely use it, thus rendering it relatively non-interactive.

Any medium is potentially participatory and is, to a greater or lesser extent, an interactive experience. With the internet especially, there is considerable potential for interaction: it offers a universal equality of things, and it is up to the users to imbue these things with value. The World Wide Web model assumes that every object has the same importance as any other and that everything is, or can be, connected to everything else. All the world can meet on a screen. Media are interactive in the sense that they are a shared vision. They provide representations of human life. These representations are from elsewhere, another time and space, but because users know that other people see it too, it is literally a shared vision. Even when viewers are not together in space and time, their minds can still be interacting and sharing. From a different physical space and time a different reality can be brought to the individual in their own space and time through whichever type of media they choose.

Quiring's (2009) article 'What do users do with 'interactivity'?' explores which media services and technical devices 'ordinary' users believe to be interactive, and why. Quiring summarises the concept of interactivity from three different perspectives. First, interactivity is an attribute of *technological systems*: that is, the technological system's responsiveness or ability to react to user input (Downes and McMillan, 2000). Interactive systems also offer the option of selecting and modifying content (Heeter, 2000, Heeter, 1989, Jensen, 1998) and allow users to communicate directly, independently of time and place. Second, interactivity can be understood in terms of *communication processes.* That is, interactivity takes place when participants *exchange* communication with each other, when they enter into *dialogue or discourse* (Bretz and Schmidbauer, 1983, Rafaeli and Sudweeks, 1997)*.* Thirdly, interactivity can be understood as *an attribute of user perception.* In other words, it can be conceived as a result of the user's perceptions and sensations in terms of navigation, playfulness and feelings of connectedness (Quiring, 2009: 902). Quiring concluded that people mainly associate and utilise the concept of interactivity as a social dimension. The social dimension comprises all associations that either initiate an action towards other humans in the sense of social influence or emphasize social relationships and connectedness with other people. The social dimensions could include advising, commenting, exchanging, participating and contacting. A conclusion which can be drawn from Quiring's paper - and from the research at hand here - is that individuals have different ideas about media interactivity. In this sense media are only as interactive as the individual thinks they are and chooses to act on this.

There are various ways in which media may be categorised. However due to their intertwining and permeable nature these categories are arbitrary. They could be defined in terms of content, or in terms of the technological interface. They could be understood as a point along a continuum from passive to interactive. The continuum could be from private use of media to public or shared use. All of these forms of categorisation are useful ways in which we can think about the use of media. In this thesis, the following three categories of media use will be addressed:

o   'Traditional' audio-visual media: television and cinema

o   Audio-visual 'web-based' media: internet pornography

o   Communications-based 'web-based' media: social networking and Instant Messenger (MSN)

2.2 'Traditional' audio-visual media: television and cinema

I will start by considering TV programmes. The focus here is on the content of the programmes. Where or how they are viewed – the television set, the laptop, or the mobile phone via the internet - will not be explored here. What follows is a selection of the wide variety of TV programmes that the participants said they watched. It is important to note the relevance of the broadcasting schedule at the time of fieldwork in terms of what media content was watched. Soaps were among the favourite programmes that participants said they watched. The soaps can be divided into two sections – UK soaps and US/Australian soaps. Favourite UK soaps included: *Skins; Hollyoaks; Shameless* (these three programmes will be dealt with in greater detail in the next chapter); *Emmerdale, Eastenders, The Bill* and *Waterloo Road.* Favourite US/Australian soaps included: *Friends; My Name Is Earl; 90210; Scrubs; Home and Away* and *Neighbours.* US cartoons *The Simpsons* and *South Park* were also popular, particularly among

the boys. Popular US dramas included: *Lost; Heroes* and *CSI.* Music channels were often favourite 'filler' viewing, and were seen as good to watch when there was nothing else on. Sport channels – mainly football – were very popular among boys. Even when boys claimed not to watch television, it would emerge that they did indeed watch sport. Reality TV shows such as *The X-factor* and *I'm a Celebrity Get Me Out Of Here* were cited as programmes watched, yet were also the topic of some derision and embarrassment.

Participants often discussed a variety of types of TV programmes. The excerpt below illustrates that the boys identify with quite different programmes among themselves. This perhaps is a reflection of different aspects of their identities, their interests and their lives. *Lost* is a fantasy/adventure programme whereas *90210* focuses on social relationship dramas:

> **And what's your favourite TV programme?[11]**
>
> Craig: *Lost*. I like *Lost*, that's really good.
>
> **What do you like about it, anything in particular?**
>
> Mark: I like how it's just- it's just like good. Apart- like when I first watched it from season one it was just like-
>
> Thomas: My ma likes *Lost*.
>
> Mark: I didn't know, I didn't get it, it was just like they crashed on an island then, through the other season the island's like, they had this like, initiative of people they used to like come and research the island and that. They had all these stations buried undergound and stuff.
>
> **Oh, okay.**
>
> Mark: Yeah, it's good.

---

[11] Bold type signals my voice

Craig: I watch *90210* as well

Is that quite recently that has started?

Craig: Yeah.

So what do you like about it?

Craig: It's funny.

And is that kind of- your similar age group or is it a bit older?

Craig: A bit older than us.

Bit older. And it's American obviously. And what happens in it, what's the kind of thing that's going on at the moment?

Craig: A lot of fighting at the moment. Boyfriend, girlfriend, stuff like that. And people falling out and family squabbles. Quite good.

(B.Ya.3b)

This next excerpt illustrates the diversity and quantity of TV programmes that the teenage girls watched. This demonstrates that TV plays a significant role in their lives in that they are so readily able to relay a list of programmes that they watch:

Do you watch a lot of TV and films?

Sarah: I don't get a chance.

Susan: I do watch telly but not a lot.

Mhm, and if you did, what would you watch if you had a chance?

Susan: I don't know, there's hardly anything on. Usually *Friends*. Don't know what else.

Jill: *Hollyoaks*.

Kate: *Skins*.

Jill: *Scrubs, Shameless, 90210*

Kate: *The Simpsons*.

So quite a lot, then?

Sarah: I watch *Eastenders* sometimes.

What would be your favourite?

Jill: *Hollyoaks*.

Kate: *Skins*

Jill: I watch sometimes *CSI*. I watch *CSI*.

(G.Ya.3b)

Kai (*B.Ya.3e*) provides another example of the prominence some participants gave to media in their lives: 'I'm a big fan of *Scrubs*… I've got every single one of them on my computer… I'm not kidding you – I watched the newest one last night'.

Moving on from television programmes, consideration will now be given to participants' use of films. The participants watched a variety of films, either at the cinema, on TV or on a PC. In terms of genre, the main films that participants mentioned were: horrors, such as *The Saw* and *The Mirror*; action films like *X-men* and *James Bond* films; over-15, such as films *Candy*, *Saving Private Ryan*, *Defiance*; comedy films, such as *Eagle vs Shark*, *Bolt*, *Hotel for Dogs* and *Scary Movie*; Disney

films, such as *The Little Mermaid* and *The Lion King*; and romantic films like *High School Musical* (*High School Musical* was very popular with the girls), *The Notebook*, *Titanic*, *Brokeback Mountain*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *Sex and the City*. These romantic films will feature in later chapters wherein romantic/sexual relationships in relation to media will be explored. The majority of the horror, action and comedy films were watched by boys and the majority of the Disney and romantic films were watched by the girls.

Below is an example of how film viewing is interwoven into participants' lives.

So when you hang out together outside of school, what do you get up to?

Tom: Football.

Football.

Bruce: Just go down town and stuff and like hang out. Like, just play with the X-box and that together.

Okay.

Tom: Just go to the cinema sometimes.

You do what sorry?

Tom: Cinemas.

Okay, cool. I take it there's a cinema quite nearby.

(Several voices.) Kalburn. (6 miles away)

Okay. Seen anything good recently?

Tom: No good.

(Laughs.)

Calum: All rubbish at the moment.

What's the latest one you've been to see?

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Bruce: I went to see *Bolt*.

Oh yeah, how was that?

Bruce: Alright. Cartoon one. I got to go with my little brother.

(B.Ya.3a)

Some participants displayed great variety and diversity of taste in their choice of film. The following excerpt is from a girls' focus group. Although this was supposedly a good friendship group, within the group was a further division between two groups of best friends. This division is exemplified in their favourite genres of film, one preferring Disney films and the other horror films. This suggests that choice of media, in this case film, can be used as an identity definer.

What other DVDs do you like to watch?

Karly: I like *Big Daddy*, that's my favourite, and I like... I like kiddy DVD's like *Cinderella* and *Anastasia* and stuff like that.

What do you like about them?

Louise: I remember I bought *Anastasia* for me and you to watch.

Karly: I don't know, I just like *Cinderella* because it's a huge thing, I like *High School Musical* too and I like *Angus, Thongs and Perfect Snogging*.

So what do you like about those ones?

Karly: Just because they're like... funny and I don't know, I just really, I don't know why I like *Cinderella*. I just like it.

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[Laughter]

What about you two? Do you like _Cinderella_?

Louise: I like a lot of the Disney films.

What's that?

Louise: I like a lot of the Disney films.

You do like them?

Louise: Yeah.

Annie: _Lion King._

Lion King.

Annie: _Little Mermaid's_ my favourite.

Is it?

Louise: _Lion King's_ the first ever movie I seen.

Yeah. OK. What about you two? Do you like any other DVD's, any kind of films?

Hannah: Horror.

Horror ones?

[Laughter]

Hannah: It's a blue cover like that, it's like ??

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Karly: I don't like them, I get scared.

Annie: I think they're a bit stupid, to be honest. There's all like stabbing and everything.

(G.Ya.3d)

Films were viewed through a variety of media. The following excerpt highlights this. In this instance a film is accessed for free on *YouTube*. Because there is a limit to how long each video clip can last for on *YouTube*, the film has been divided into nine parts. The two films being discussed, *Green Street 2* and *Cash*, are films based on football. In fact many of the boys groups favourite films were football-related. This is no surprise considering that for many of these boys their lives were focused around football. They played football at school, after school and at the weekends. They were best friends with the people they played football with. They watched football on TV. Some had posters of football players on their walls; and during discussions of celebrity lifestyle, these footballers, some of whom are very much integrated in to the celebrity milieu, were cited as having the perfect lifestyle: money; fame; status and any woman they wanted.

Ok, have you seen any good films, lately?

George: Aye, I watched *Green Street 2* last night.

Iain: Is it good, aye?

George: Aye.

Johnny: It's based in jail, but.

Is that *Green Street 2*, is that a football thing?

Johnny: Aye, it's out on *YouTube* in nine parts.

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Oh is it?

Johnny: Aye.

Is it out in the cinema, yet?

Johnny: No, they're no bringing it out over here – it's only in America.

George: I've got it on DVD.

So what's the story with that one, then?

George: It's like the guy at the end, he gets put in prison. It's just about him getting out, really. It's quite good, but.

So is it just about his life in prison?

George: Aye, it's quite violent. It's good.

What's the first Green Street about?

George: Football violence.

Iain: Train stations and all that.

Train stations?

Iain: Aye at the train stations – they meet each other, and then football and they end up fighting. Singing football songs and all that.

Do you like it, then?

Iain: Aye.

Johnny: I like hundreds of films like that – like *Rise of the Foot Soldier* and *Cash*.

George: It's a true story – it's about this guy that was adopted.

Iain: It's a guy who's adopted, and he supports West Ham and all that and...

George: Coz it's like racist back in 1970 and all that. ...Gollywogs and all that, so he just ends up going into violence and starts battering folk.

Iain: It's a true story, but.

Johnny: Gollywog's a black person, innit?

Iain: Aye and then he comes up through the ranks of West Ham, and then he becomes one of the biggest gangsters and that.

(B.Ya.3d)

From the above extract we can see how selection of film reflects real-life choices; in this instance football features prominently in their real lives and therefore it is the topic of the films they choose to watch. Quite the opposite from the traditionally masculine lifestyle and film choices above, the excerpt below shows one of the boys asserting his difference from the other boys by stating that he enjoyed what is considered to be a quintessentially female film. It is useful to remember here de Visser's (2007) theory whereby different aspects of masculinities may be 'traded'. It may be that Eric is especially confident in another aspect of his masculinity and therefore feels he is in a secure enough place socially to playfully go beyond the boundaries of the hegemonic masculinity.

Eric: I watched a film on Sunday, with my mum.

What was that?

Eric: *Dirty Dancing.*

Oh yeah?

Eric: I really like that film now.

You do?

Eric: Uh huh.

It's brilliant, isn't it?

Mike: I did – I used to watch telly all the time.

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Bob: Eric, I'm a bit worried about you.

(B.Ya.3c)

Even despite Bob saying to Eric 'I'm a bit worried about you', I think that Eric's comment was accepted and Bob was speaking in jest. Eric was a confident member of the group and seemed able to be playful with masculine expectations.

In this section consideration has been given to how TV and film feature in participants' lives. Descriptions of TV programmes and films that were popular with participants were provided. Other elements of TV and film use such as variety and quantity, the prominence in their lives and how choices of TV programmes and films may be representative of participants' identities and gendered identities were discussed. To follow will be an exploration of how computer-born media were used in participants' lives.

2.3 Audio-visual 'web-based' media: internet pornography

Although under this category of 'web-based' media there was some mention made of *YouTube* and computer games, I do not feel they were salient enough to the participants to warrant a discussion here.

Some participants said that they accessed pornography on websites on the internet. These websites could also be accessed through the internet on mobile phones. Mobile phones in particular were said to be used to share pornographic images and films with friends, either by bluetoothing, texting or just showing each other, as is illustrated in the following extract from a girls' group discussion:

Caroline: Then they (boys) stand in little groups, like huddled over their phone and looking through-

Daisy: Yeah.

Caroline: -and they know like all these sites that you can go on and stuff, and you get people on this site…And you go on it and then-…and you're just like-

(Laughter)

Caroline: (Mumbling) … all them look through them as well.

So they have it on their phones as well?

Caroline: Yeah, they've like downloaded the videos and stuff.

And do they ever show it to you or-?

Caroline: Yeah.

Daisy: Yeah.

(G.Ro.4c)

One girl recounted how readily available pornography is and how she would unexpectedly come across it. She said that people she knew would post porn website links[12] on her *Bebo*[13] page and whilst she was chatting to friends on MSN. Here Jordan describes to me what *Redtube* is.

What exactly is *Redtube*?

Jordan: It was like if you click on it, you just get like hundreds of videos right in your face [laughing] it's disgusting! People send you links on MSN like you get like… I got one through from a boy the other day I clicked on it… I was like oh my God [laughter]…. And spam on *Bebo* it sends you links to *Redtube*.

---

[12] In particular the website *Redtube* which is the equivalent of *YouTube*, but with exclusively pornographic video content that users upload
[13] A social networking site

(Mxd. Ro.3b)

I did not feel it was appropriate to probe into the *reasons* for using or not using pornography as these discussions took place in focus groups[14]. Participants' accounts of the use of pornography will now be described in further detail, looking at boys' use of pornography as described by both girls and boys, and then at girls' use of pornography as described by both boys and girls.

Some girls said that it was likely that 'stereotypical' boys use pornography. A small number of others said perhaps it is older boys who use pornography because they find it more fascinating; more said that it may be more immature boys who use it. Below is an example of a girls' group discussion of boys' use of pornography:

> Miquette: I think more like five percent of the boys watch porn daily.
>
> **Only five percent?**
>
> Miquette: Twenty-five percent.
>
> **Yeah, where did you read that, or... ?**
>
> Miquette: I watched it on a TV programme
>
> **Okay, and do you think that's just about right?**
>
> Miquette: I don't know, I think it's likely to be more.
>
> **And what about they guys you know? Would you say...?**
>
> Miquette: Yeah.
>
> Catherine: Yes, absolutely. [laughter]

---

[14] This issue is discussed further in Chapter Three

What do you think? I mean, a few groups of girls I've spoken to and they're like, oh, all the guys I know watch porn and stuff, but...

Catherine: I wouldn't say all of them. No, like the more like immature ones.

Miquette: Yeah.

Immature ones, okay.

Joanne: Perhaps the older ones, because they find it like more fascinating.

(G.Ro.4c)

Many boys said a lot of boys their age used pornography; others sarcastically denied it saying 'it's disgusting!' and 'the wrong' thing to do. Some participants offered their reasons for using pornography. Richie (*B.Ro.4b*) said: 'I went round to borrow a game and then this lassie showed me it [gay porn] and I was almost sick and then I left'. In the following case the participants admitted that they did use pornography, but with the caveat of not using it all the time:

That's quite interesting because a lot of groups of girls that I've spoken to have told me that the boys they know watch a lot of porn in their room?

Jonathan: Oh aye? Do you know what I mean? Do you not? Don't even lie!

Dougie: I swear ah dinny

Jonathan: I used tae but, I'm past it now like

Cameron: Now it's just stuff for the boys eh?

Do you think that's what the younger boys do then?

Jonathan: I'm no younger, like.

Cameron: When you're immature.

Jonathan: It's like some people do but then I've just got to a stage where it's just some, some of it's weird and

like the stuff the boys have been talking about, what these boys have been talking about whit they're daen and that.

(B.Ro.4a)

Some boys said they had heard stories of girls watching pornography, but that they could not be sure whether this was true. One boy said that a girl showed him porn when he went to her house. Another group of boys talked initially of how they thought girls 'love' porn, before saying that in fact they are likely to show resistance to watching it:

And what do you think girls think about porn?

Richie: They love it!

Aaron: I think they secretly do, but they just don't like-

Really, do you think they watch it as well?

Richie: To be honest with you, I don't know.

Robin: Nah!

Aaron: Ken for a laugh and you're in your house and you're flipping through channels and all that, and they're like 'eugh get off that' That's what they're mostly like.

(B.Ro.4b)

There was little discussion by girl participants of girls' use of pornography. One unusual discussion that did touch on this topic involved accounts of girls watching cartoon porn, gay and lesbian porn. In the following example the girls are discussing how it in fact is often them, not boys, who start sex and porn related discussions:

And are the girls… are the girls getting involved in these conversations as well or?

Barbara: It's more them!

Oh, really?

Danielle: It's usually the girls who start it!

What, talking about sex in general or talking about porn?

Danielle: Both.

(Mxd. Ro.4a)

It is important to note that under the genre pornography the participants distinguished between many different categories. These included some boys expressing disgust at gay porn, or others describing certain types as 'sick'. Another participant described a spectrum of seriousness related to pornography. Jonathan (*B.Ro.4a*) stated that *Page 3* (presumably referring to Page 3 models from the *Sun* newspaper) is 'no big deal' whereas child pornography is 'a big deal', as well as being illegal. Below is an excerpt from a boys' group discussion in which they discuss different categories of pornography.

Cameron: You've got different kinds.

Jonathan: … aye, there's like loads of different categories.

Right.

Jonathan: And there's like, but like some of them it's like the men all dominate the women and you know, the women dominate it's weird, it's horrible.

Cameron: It's kinda sick

Dougie: They've got loads of dodgy stuff now, it used to be simple but now it's like, hey, ?? stuff and that.

Jonathan: I was watching it a few weeks ago right, I can't remember what's his… Russell Brand? About animals and that… that was….

Ferg: He was... aye and then this American lassie was like... she had a husband and she had an affair with animals, like she had a farm and she had an affair with the horse.

Cameron: Is that the one where the ??

Jonathan: No, no, no it's a different one. She had an affair with the horse like, a horse and cats and all that stuff.

Ferg: Aye it's weird, it's like there's like... I didn't go on to that but there's like a whole load of different categories and there's animals and that and...

Cameron: Grannies

Jonathan: ... heard some of the stories like of women who've been daen it with horses... it's shite!

Dougie: Aye, lass that done it with the horse died, they said.

What?

Dougie: The lass that done it with the horse died.

Really?

Jonathan: Did the horse ?? [laughter] It's sick, it's horrible!

Dougie: It is.

So that's taking it too far for you?

Dougie: Aye that's, see, that's like out of limits.

(B.Ro.4a)

Having described the participants' varied reports of their use of pornography, I will move on to discuss social networking and MSN.

2.4 Communications-based 'web-based' media: social networking and Instant Messenger (MSN)

I will now move on to briefly consider communication-based 'web-based' media content: social networking sites and Instant Messenger (MSN). These are of a different ilk to the other types of media discussed in that there is a different kind of content to be 'consumed' by the audience. It is a means of communication that uses the same technology used by content-based media. That is to say, this type of communication is mediated by the internet and therefore by a PC, laptop or possibly mobile phone. This type of media can be considered to have less significance for this thesis than the other types of media content that have been mentioned above. Social networking sites and MSN are not necessarily providing the teenagers with any added expectations of gender-appropriate drinking or engagement in sexual/romantic relationships because they do not have content with images and discourses that are from a dimension other than their 'real world'. That is, although of course they are free to discuss the topics of alcohol use and romantic/sexual relationships on these forms of media, and indeed may glean expectations from using them, they are not a source of potential expectations over and above their everyday lives, which is the topic in question for this thesis. Rather, social networking sites and MSN are a means by which to communicate with people. Despite this, when I asked participants about their media use in the group discussions and interviews, they often discussed social networking sites and MSN: they were a significant presence in the participants' lives. For this reason it is necessary to briefly describe their reports of their use of this type of media.

Participants' use of social networking was endemic. The three sites mentioned during this research were *MySpace*, *Facebook* and *Bebo*. It was *Bebo*, however, that was used the most by the participants. At the time of interviewing, posting links to *YouTube* videos and other internet sites (as is popular practice on *Facebook*) was never discussed. *Bebo*, as with *MySpace* and *Facebook*, requires the user to set up a profile page. On this profile page, the user chooses a profile picture (which can be changed as often as they like), is asked to leave information about themselves such as hobbies, favourite films and music or other information the user feels is relevant. Users can affiliate themselves in particular with other users by identifying their top ten friends and stating that they are in a relationship with [....]. This is displayed as 'the other half of me is [...] '. Towards the bottom of the page is a section for other users to leave comments. Alongside the comment the person's profile photo is displayed, and they can choose to leave their 'love', which is displayed as a little loveheart icon alongside their comment. Links to music videos from *YouTube* can be posted, as well as links to any other website. Quizzes sometimes feature, often about identity, such as 'what fragrance are you?' Each user can choose a 'skin' which is a background to their profile page, which can be different colours, have patterns, phrases or be associated with a favourite celebrity. However, one of the main attractions of *Bebo*, as illustrated below, is the opportunity to upload photographs and to look at other users' photographs. Bebo's real appeal - indeed that of any of the social networking sites - is the chance to 'snoop around' other users' pages. As long as you are 'friends' with the other user, you can read comments left on their page and look through their photos at leisure. Although it is possible to send private messages on *Bebo*, often messages, or 'comments', are posted publicly. This is a clear presentation

of self. In a sense it is a popularity contest: how many friends do you have; how many people leave you comments; how many of those people who leave comments 'share their love'?

Bebo provided a medium through which users could communicate with friends, peers, family and strangers. One participant told of how someone at school whom she did not know 'added' her as a friend on *Bebo*. From here their friendship developed, initially on *Bebo*, but later progressing to a real-life friendship. In another case, a participant used *Bebo* as a way of communicating with his separated parents in order to negotiate being collected from either parents' home.

> **Ok. So how often do you use *Bebo* then, do you use it quite a lot?**
>
> Bryn: I usually just go on check once a night, coz that's like, my mum and da's split up and that's where she talks to me, like when he's coming to get me and that.
>
> (*B.Ya.4a*)

A different case illustrates how *Bebo* played a significant role in the stagnation of Eva's (II) romantic relationship. The relationship with a boy (which was mainly played out through MSN and texting) had petered out. Eva still had positive feelings for him. Despite receiving a public comment on her *Bebo* profile from him, she felt unable to respond in case the sender was not him but his friends playing a prank. This example highlights the question of why teenagers want to communicate with their friends or boyfriends or girlfriends in the gaze of their other friends. From this example it seems safer to communicate one-to-one privately. Perhaps the lure of publicly constructing and presenting identities is stronger than the desire for privacy.

So there was no kind of point when either one of you said, that you didn't want it to carry on?

Eva: No.

It just kind of, drifted away.

Eva: Yeah.

And did you ever talk about the fact that it was kind of coming to an end or did it just, really just fizzle out?

Eva: No, but like a couple of months later he did text me and left me a comment on *Bebo* and stuff saying, long time no speak, but I couldn't text back or write back cause I don't know, I thought it might have been a friend, like one of his friends, winding me up or something.

Aw!

Eva: So he probably thought I was just ignoring him but I was too scared cause it was weird cause we hadn't talked in so long. I thought why is he just wanting to talk now?

Eva (II)

In summary, social networking sites, and *Bebo* in particular, provided participants with a space to model their identities and negotiate status with their 'friends'.

Real-time communication was most likely to occur using Windows Live Messenger, colloquially known as MSN. This service allows users to communicate with each other in real-time, with the option of using a webcam and file-sharing. MSN was overwhelmingly discussed in reference to communication with the opposite sex. I will start with the girls' accounts. I introduced the topic of MSN with the following prompt:

With MSN, some of the groups I've spoken to said that you might not speak to a boy (or girl, when interviewing boys) at school, but then in the evening, you'd spend hours chatting on MSN. Is that the case for you?

As we saw in the previous section, MSN played a vital role in Eva's (II) relationship; the greater part of her relationship was played out through text messaging and MSN. MSN also played a part in negotiating relationships with other participants. Milly and Molly provide an example where MSN was used quite specifically as a method with which to alleviate embarrassment:

So do you think teenagers find it easier to discuss relationships over MSN rather than face-to-face?

Milly: Rather than face-to-face.

Molly: Yeah, definitely.

Milly: Cause they're- more kind of like self-confident.

Molly: Less embarrassing.

Milly: Yeah.

Molly: And it's kind of easier.

Milly: It's harder to talk to people face-to-face about relationships and stuff. Like if you like someone it would be really hard for you to like confess that to the person's face.

Oh right okay.

Milly: Cause to be honest, you'd feel pretty humiliated if they rejected you.

Molly: So whereas on MSN you'll be like perfectly fine afterwards.

So how would you go about saying it on MSN that you liked someone or that you wanted to-?

Milly: I don't know, I've never done it before.

Molly: I'd get her to do it.

Milly: You already did that.

You'd use a friend.

Milly: Yeah.

Molly: No, I've never done it. I've had like guys tell me on MSN and stuff, but they always put like little blushed faces and stuff.

MSN was reported to make people more confident, enabling girls to act differently because they thought that boys did not want to be seen by their friends talking to certain girls. Girls in *G.Ya.3a* confirm this by saying that boys and girls do not talk in school but do talk on MSN; on MSN it is not embarrassing because 'you don't have to look at them'. Conversely, embarrassment is reported by some as a reason not to use MSN. Rhona (II) said that she preferred to say 'deep' things face-to-face. That way she can be sure that the other person was not laughing at her and that no-one else was in the room. Others discussed how using MSN can bring people – that is boys and girls – closer (*G.Ya.3d*), as there is 'more honesty' (Jill – *G.Ya.3b*) and that 'you get to know the real them' on MSN (Lucy – II). Participants in *G.Ya.3b* said that after talking and getting to know each other on MSN people then progress to talking in real life. Girls in *G.Ya.3d* specifically said that 'I don't think we'd go up to somebody and say "oh, I want to go out with you." You'd probably say it on MSN'.

I also asked the boys to reflect upon the use of MSN in terms of negotiating a relationship. Johnny (II) used MSN as a tool for negotiating, when a relationship was becoming more serious. Johnny did not state why this was used, but if it was in any way similar to the other participants' reasons, it was to do with alleviating potentially embarrassing face-to-face situations. Participants in *B.Ro.4c* told of how when they were conversing on MSN, girls are like different people. On MSN they

talk 'healthy' (a lot), but when they meet at school all they say is 'alriiight' (said in a lackluster voice). The reason, they said, is because they think the girls are embarrassed. Participants in *B.Ya.3a* also cited embarrassment as a reason for MSN use, but this time it is they, the boys, who are embarrassed:

> Tom: It's like, if you talked on MSN, but you don't talk in school, maybe like you want to talk in school but like, like, you might just, you might be afraid or you might just get like the mickey taken out you or whatever, by like their friends or that.
>
> Bruce: It's like-
>
> Tom: Maybe the other person wants to talk to you at school as well.
>
> Calum: Like if you're yourself and you want to go up and talk to that certain person, but then they're all sitting like around with friends, you kind of feel awkward, cause they're like-
>
> Bruce: They only talk-
>
> Calum: -the only boy there. And then they're all talking about a certain thing and then you just come in and say something else and if you're just by yourself and the other person's by themselves it's much easier.
>
> Tom: Aye, it's not as hard to talk to them because you know they're not going to make a fool of you or anything cause you know what they're like. But when they're out with their friends, and just trying to act all, like oh I don't like you or anything.

The excerpt above illuminates the reason why participants may get embarrassed and why using an online tool such as MSN can provide a welcome sanctuary in which they can communicate without fear of these disruptions. Frank (*B.Na.4a*) was the only participant who offered a reason why he did not use MSN to talk to girls. He found it strange: 'If [you] don't speak to them in real life then they are just like a virtual friend'.

I have described participants' accounts of the main characteristics and content of their media use. Consideration will now be given to an overview of the process of how participants' used media. This will cover more overarching social aspects of their media use and will demonstrate further how they incorporated media into their lives.

3. An overview of teenagers' use of media: the process of media use

3.1. Description of how media use fitted into participants' lives

Participants were not asked in quantitative terms about the amount of their media use. However, it was clear from the focus group and interview data that the teenagers who participated in the research used media a great deal: they were almost ubiquitous in their lives. There was not a single participant who did not use at least one type of media on a daily basis. For many, media use was very much part of their daily routine. For example, they would wake up and put on the radio. Whilst eating breakfast in the kitchen the TV would be on, often being listened to rather than watched. This raises the issue of the audience's attention. Just because a form of media is on, it does not necessarily mean that the viewer/user is engaging with it or that they may be engaging with it partially. At school the participants had access to the internet, and although this was intended for research for school work, participants informed me that they knew ways in which to access their favourite websites, such as *Bebo* and *YouTube*. By changing a setting on the computer, the restrictions installed by the school authorities were by-passed. Throughout the course of the day, internet, games and pornographic films and images could also be accessed on mobile phones. After school, the teenagers' TV 'routine' might involve watching soaps (sometimes quite religiously) or sport, often whilst

simultaneously being logged on to *MSN* or *Bebo*. They might watch a DVD, or catch up with their favourite programmes online.

Even those participants who claimed not to be interested in media (often boys) would later reveal that they had spent time playing computer games, or watching sport on TV. Indeed they often had an in-depth knowledge of the characters and storylines in *Hollyoaks, Skins* and *Shameless.* This was revealed when I used images from those three programmes as prompts. They would tell me that they did not watch these programmes but that other members of their family or their friends did. This revealed that they did not always interpret my questions as I intended. Much of the time when participants said they *watched* something they meant that they had *chosen* to watch it. When they watched something that they had not actively chosen they sometimes did not register it sufficiently to report having watched it to me. Below is an example where Chris, on two separate occasions, states that he does not watch television. Later, however, when asked more explicitly, he stated that he does watch TV:

> **Anybody else? If you are watching TV or that in the evening what do you watch?**
>
> Chris: I don't watch TV.
> ...
> **Does anyone else watch *Skins* here? You are the only one. So, what do the rest of you watch on TV?**
>
> Chris: I don't watch TV
> ...
> **What about any films, has any one seen any good films lately? [pause] Nope?**
>
> Chris: *Saving Private Ryan*, I watched that the other night.
> ...

Ok. And do you ever find yourself watching any programmes or films that you don't choose to watch?

Chris: Hmm mm. My ma's down the stairs and I'm sitting down with her she'll be watching something I don't want to.

Yeah. And what kind of thing would it be?

 Chris: *Coronation Street.*

(*B.Ya.3f*)

An explanation for this could relate to identity and presentation of self. If people's choice of media reflects their identity – programmes can be 'cool' or 'sad' or 'geeky' or 'trashy' – then revealing what they watched could be seen as a statement about their identity. In this instance, although not stated, I suggest that *Coronation Street* is not thought of by teenage boys as a particularly 'cool' programme. If so, the reasons for Chris's denial of watching it may be two-fold: first, it was not his choice to watch it; and, second, the programme itself may not reflect the type of self-image he wished to portray to his peers, or to me as the researcher. Indeed in terms of identifying with programmes, Frank (*B.Na.4a*) felt ashamed of watching the reality TV programme *I'm A Celebrity Get Me Out Of Here,* stating that '*s*omebody told me to watch it and then, you know, I just couldn't stop'. He later explicitly stated that he prides himself on *not* watching another reality TV programme *The X Factor*, perhaps in an effort to redeem himself. Since in group discussions participants were revealing their media use to their friends/peers as much as to me, the researcher, it is of little wonder that there were various inconsistencies in their reports, suggesting the management of their self-identities. In contrast I found no inconsistencies in participants' reports of their media use in individual interviews.

3.2 Description of where participants used media

Participants used media in a range of places. The most common locations were within the home: the bedroom, living room, kitchen or study. Media were used at school (computers), the cinema and friends' houses. However, due to developments in technology whereby mobile phones and iPods are designed with applications that allow the user to access the internet, watch films and play games, the location of media use, though not irrelevant, is perhaps becoming less important. Media are becoming de-situated and mobile. However, de-situated or not, the social context within which media were used was of importance.

3.3 Description of with whom participants used media

Implicit in discussions of where media were used is an important issue: with whom were the teenagers using media? Under what conditions and in which social environment were media being used? These questions are important in understanding how media were integrated into the lives of the participants. The notion of with whom they used media is tied in with the wider category of their *motivations* for media use. This will be dealt with in the following section. Some participants used media with family and/or friends. Others would use media alone – sometimes through choice, sometimes due to circumstance. For example, they might be alone in the house, or their family/friends might be busy or using other media that the participant had no interest in. Using media with other people can be understood in two ways. On the one hand, the participant had chosen to be with other people, be they friends or family. They often enjoyed laughing at and chatting about media together. This was their choice. On the other hand, using media with others was not always their choice: rather sometimes it just happened that other people were in

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the same space. For example, if they were watching TV in the living room their parents might also be there. This leads us on to a discussion about the motivation for the participants' media use.

3.4 Description of participants' motivations for media use

The influence of other people was seen to shape participants' motivation but it was not the motivation itself. Rather, expressing solidarity with peers, or sharing experiences with them, might be the motivation. A response that illustrates this well was in reply to the question 'What do you watch?' Bryn (*B.Ya.4a*) answered, 'What everyone else is watching'. A desire to be 'in the loop' and to know what was going on in a programme that their friends frequently watched was important for the participants. To not know what the latest news or storyline in a popular series was would exclude people from conversation and therefore from interaction with their peers. Another reason related to other people was a participant sharing a bedroom with a sibling and therefore having to watch what he or she watched. Social events also provided motivations for media use, for example the sleepover where one of the main activities was watching DVDs, or going to the cinema.

Another motivation reported was using media as an emotional release. In the example below Lucy (II) found expressing her emotions in everyday situations difficult. However, she found that watching old, sad films alone provided her with an emotional release where she could cry secretly, uninterrupted:

> **Have you seen any good films lately, any kind of films that you like in particular?**
>
> Lucy: I usually like old films, actually. Yeah, my dad's got me into that.

How old are we talking?

Lucy: Well, like... not like 'black and white' old. Like emotional films, like *Walk the Line* and stuff. Can't remember the other one but I basically cried like all the way through it...

Really?

Lucy... I just had to get paracetamol, my dad was asking what am I doing? I was just crying, it was that upsetting.

So, what was it about that made you cry so much?

Lucy: It's just so much bad things happen to these people, this one woman breaks up four bro... eh three brothers basically.....It's so upsetting.

That does sound quite upsetting. And do you watch films with your dad there?

Lucy: No, I'll just watch them by myself. I like films that make me cry, I don't know why.

Yeah, and are they usually about relationships, that make you cry?

Lucy: Relationships, pain, losing someone.

Yeah, so why do you think you like that?

Lucy: Don't know, I just don't... I don't think I show my emotional side very much, I won't cry at all. Like I've got one friend I've had for three years and she's saw me cry twice.

Oh right, okay.

Lucy: And that's been really bad circumstances. I just don't cry.

So, this is a kind of chance for you to let out your emotions?

Lucy: Yeah, I think it is a long time to cry. Like, won't cry if my mates are around. I don't know why. I don't like showing weakness, I think.

(Lucy II)

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The addictive quality of TV programmes was described as another motivating reason for using media. Here Carly (*G.Ya.3c*) describes her viewing of the TV soap *Hollyoaks* as being beyond her control: 'I think it's addictive, once you've watched it you just have to keep watching it'. Whether or not the motivation or root of this addiction was the role it played in the participant's social life and peer relationships, rather than that the programme was addictive *per se*, is unclear. A further motivation mentioned in reaction to other people, was the notion that media use (in this case playing computer games on the Xbox) provided an opportunity to block out the outside world and get away from family.

> **So what do you like about playing the XBox?**
>
> Eric: It's dead peaceful.
>
> Dave: I know, I just block out everything else.
>
> Eric: You get peace from your family, aye. Just listen to music in my room and everything.
>
> Dave: I know – I stick my headphones in and nobody can talk to me.
>
> (*B.Ya.3c*)

Other motivations for using media not directly related to other people were factors such as appealing content, for example a funny storyline or attractive characters.

3.5 Talking about media use with others

Talking about media use featured as a significant aspect of the participants' media consumption. Participants reported that they talked with their peers (that is, outwith the interview or group discussion) about which programmes they watched or

which films they had seen, about the latest updates on social networking sites, about the sports results seen on TV, or about conversations which they recently had on MSN. In the following excerpt a group of girls describe that their reason for watching *Skins* is because of others at school discussing it:

> **So what do you like about the programmes that you watch? What is it that you get out of watching them?**
>
> Alison: You get a lot of drama out of them and that.
>
> Kat: Like, with *Skins*, I just like it cos it's like kind of a teenager programme. It's like, people can, like, they have more fun watching it and it's kind of, it's a strange programme but it's like fun to watch so…and everybody talks about it at school so you kind of like think "oh, I'll watch that" and then you get, like, hooked on to that, so…
>
> **What kind of thing would you say about it?**
>
> Kat: Like, "oh, I can't believe he done this" and "I can't believe he done that" and "oh, he's so nice looking."
>
> [Laughter]
>
> (*G.Ya.3a*)

This media-talk was a common point of conversation. At times it was also used as a common language among certain groups of friends where they quoted characters. It appeared that jokes developed from these quotes. They were the basis of a sort of private language. The extract below exemplifies how this boys' group discussion was peppered throughout with references to media that the group thought were funny:

> **And so do you talk about programmes and films and stuff when you come into school?**

Richie: Aye, all the time, eh?

What do you discuss? Just like what's happened in them or-?

Richie: Aye, and how funny it was and that.

Robin: The jokes.

Aaron: Mirrors is- mirrors.

Richie: Like when you watch Lee Evans, you're always doing- like copy everything he says cause he's that funny. (Laughter.) But then when you try and tell somebody it, you're just no funny, cause you're creasing yourself when you're telling it- you're trying to tell it but you're laughing.

Aaron: I'm the funny one in my class.

Are you?

Richie: Cause you're a bell end.

So like this morning for example, have you already discussed anything that was on TV last night?

Robin: *Family Guy.*

Family Guy. **What did you say?**

Robin: We were just like quoting it.

(*B.Ro.4b*)

Participants talked about what the opposite sex watched. Often the boys talked about how many television soaps the girls whom they knew watched; the girls talked of boys watching pornography. Some participants overheard others talking about media, and this enabled them to know what was being watched and/or what type of media the other was interested in. I was informed of how participants talked about media whilst it was being used. For example, DVDs watched at a sleepover with a group of friends would be discussed whilst

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being watched; laughed or scoffed at; or related to their own lives or experiences, in terms of how similar or different it was. Others told of how they would only watch TV or films alone because they were so irritated by interruptions. Finally, talk of media could be used as a point of connection and as a topic of conversation with the opposite sex. In otherwise separate lives, with different friends and hobbies and therefore with little in common (apart from school) which could be discussed, the media – namely film, TV programmes and celebrity news – all offered common ground from which a connection with the opposite sex could grow. Below is an excerpt from a boys' group in which they discuss how media offers salvation in terms of a common topic to discuss with girls:

> Calum: All I hear girls talking about nowadays, well since it started, is *90210* and how it's happening and what's happening and that. Cause like it's on tonight and everyone'll come back in tomorrow and go, oh did you see Darren, how did that happen?

> Bruce: That's what happened with *Big Brother* and that.

> Calum: Aye exactly.

> Darren: It makes conversation, things like that so… Something to talk about, instead of saying the same thing all the time.

> Calum: It's like you're afraid of them. Well you're no afraid but it's like, you're not confident enough, as Justin said earlier on, and then you start talking about that and you start talking about it every week. And they might get fed up of that after a while…Then you have to think of something to talk about, and you're like, oh no.

> **(Laughs.)**

> Darren: It's hard cause like, if you're into football you can't really-

> Calum: Talk-

Darren: -no a lot of girls like football so, like can't really talk about football or anything.

So you think TV programmes and that is something that you can all talk about in common?

(Several voices.) Yeah.

(*B.Ya.3a*)

4. Conclusion

This chapter has described how participants' media use was both ever-present and enduring. The chapter started with a general discussion of the concept of interactivity. Detailed descriptions were then given of the different kinds, and content, of media that participants use. I organized media content as follows: 'traditional' audio-visual media: television and cinema; audio-visual 'web-based' media: internet pornography; and communications-based 'web-based' media: social networking and Instant Messenger (MSN). It was apparent that media use in participants' lives was diverse, complex and diffuse. It is important to note here the reports of collective media use, which means more than merely using media together. They must, first, have been at least aware of who in their social group were using a given medium; and, second (to some extent), they must have been familiar with the content of this medium. These two considerations are significant for participants' presumptions of the expectations of the opposite sex. They are at the crux of this thesis. In order for it to be claimed that media are influential, then participants must in some way be aware of what media others - and in particular the opposite sex - are using. For example, a boy can only think a girl is influenced to act in a certain way by certain media content *if he is aware of, or thinks he is aware of, that content*. Importantly, he can *presume* the girl watches certain

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content and *presume* it affects her, irrespective of what she does watch. In turn he may then act accordingly. This was an important emerging theme of the chapter: for example, the boys often reported to know how many television soaps the girls whom they knew watched; the girls talked of boys watching pornography. Some participants overheard others talking about media, and this enabled them to know what was being watched and/or what type of media the other was interested in. In sum, this chapter has set the context within which the rest of the thesis can be placed: we have now seen how the teenagers actually used media, and how central they were to the conduct of their social lives. This allows us to see how media are used in the construction of gendered identities.

Chapter Five
Teenagers' construction of gendered identities: experiences, perceptions and expectations of drinking alcohol

1. Introduction

2. Participants' experiences of drinking alcohol

   2.1 Girls' experiences of drinking alcohol

   2.2 Boys' experiences of drinking alcohol

   2.3 Participants' perceptions of people drinking alcohol

3. Drinking alcohol and social relationships

   3.1 Drinking alcohol and parents

   3.2 Peers, respect and drinking alcohol

   3.3 Drinking alcohol and its effect on social groups

   3.4 Drinking alcohol and sexual behaviour

4. Drinking alcohol and identity presentation

   4.1 Drinking alcohol and perceptions of maturity

   4.2 Drinking alcohol and acting 'out of character'

      4.2.1 Drinking alcohol and acting 'out of character': moods and emotions

   4.3 Drinking alcohol and gender presentations

   4.4 Discourses on gender-appropriate alcohol use

5. Media portrayals of people drinking alcohol

   5.1 Perceptions of media portrayals of females drinking alcohol

   5.2 Perceptions of media portrayals of males drinking alcohol

   5.3 Interpretations of images of alcohol use

6. Perceptions of the influence of media portrayals of alcohol use

7. Conclusion

1. Introduction

> It's 1 o'clock and already today I've done two groups. I was surprised by the sophistication and seriousness of the girls' opinions and personalities. And I was reminded of how difficult teenage life can be: parents; school; friends; your body. All the new expectations and unsure roles and rituals. And the discrepancy between what you want and what everyone else wants. Complicated. Drinking is a major issue for them and something which permeates all of their lives in one way or another, even if it's that they don't drink – this in itself is a big issue in their lives. (Monday 2nd March 2009)

This excerpt from my fieldnotes captures the position which alcohol holds in the lives of the participants. The vast difference in experiences that the participants had was striking. Whereas some described an average weekend simply as 'drunk', others had never drunk alcohol and knew of no-one who did. Some seemed to be in no hurry to 'grow up'. 'Growing up' was an allusion to having sex and drinking alcohol. Even if they were not yet drinking, it was only a matter of time until they were 'older' and therefore of an age to be drinking. For many boy participants, drinking alcohol was a sign of maturity that alluded to sexual activity. Although fewer than half of the participants discussed personal drinking experiences, it was thought by both girls and boys that it was the girls they knew who drank the most alcohol. One explanation for this perception could be the media headlines that suggest that it is females' drinking that is problematic in this country. This skewed concern about females' drinking as opposed to males' drinking behaviour suggests that perhaps there is a media-fed understanding that female behaviour and females bodies are public property. This is true if we consider that drinking is a behaviour that often results in visible change to the drinkers' behaviour and therefore the action of their bodies. Why is it that news stories – to be read and judged by

the public - are rarely about men's drinking behaviours but often discuss women's drinking behaviours? Coward (1984) notes that men have kept their bodies from being the subjects of analysis and that men's bodies are taken for granted, exempted from scrutiny, whereas women's are extensively defined and overexposed. He states that social meanings are imposed on women's bodies, not men's; men have left themselves out of the picture because 'a body defined is a body controlled'. This, however, I suggest may have changed somewhat since the time Coward was writing in 1984; men's bodies are perhaps becoming more publicly scrutinised. Gill (2006) takes the idea of women's bodies and control further:

> The body is presented simultaneously as women's source of power and as unruly and requiring constant monitoring, surveillance, discipline and remodeling (and consumer spending) in order to conform to ever narrower judgments of female attractiveness. Indeed, surveillance of women's bodies (but not men's) constitutes perhaps the largest type of media content across all genres and media forms (Gill, 2006: 6).

Magazines and tabloids scrutinise every aspect of a too-fat, too-thin, too-wrinkly or a too-sweaty female body. There exists a tenet of control. Bodies are too controlled - too much botox, too anorexic, too bulimic, subject to too much dieting or exercise. Alternatively they are out of control: women have 'let themselves go' and so are fat; they have left the house without makeup; they are exposing themselves whilst getting out of a low-seated car; they are in rehab; they are going crazy, having lost their man; or, of course, they are out of control when they are drunk.

Overwhelmingly the themes that emerged from both real-life experiences of participants' drinking and media portrayals of drinking were sexual behaviour and aggression – be that verbal or physical. Throughout the chapter, the different nuances

between genders in terms of drinking experiences, perceptions and expectations will be drawn out.

Participants' responses throughout held an assumption that to drink means to get drunk. Although there were personal accounts in which participants assured me that they did not drink to excess, the majority of tales of drinking, whether from real life or from the media, assumed that to drink meant to get drunk. Before considering how teenagers' understandings of gender-appropriate alcohol-use relate to media portrayals of alcohol use, it is useful to look at the place which alcohol has in the lives of these participants. To do this I will describe participants' accounts of their experiences of drinking alcohol.

2. Participants' experiences of drinking alcohol

2.1 Girls' experiences of drinking alcohol

There are not a great deal of data from girl participants about their own drinking experiences. This, in part, is due to the questions I asked. My approach was to ask each sex about the opposite sex's drinking behaviour. Therefore, any information I have about their own sex's drinking (in this case girls') followed on from an initial question about the opposite sex[15] and was not explicitly asked for. The information I do have about girls' drinking experiences are generally third person accounts of other girls, or of boys talking about the girls they knew. Only one group of girls (*G.Ya.3d*) went into detail about their own drinking habits. They reported that they drank vodka, cider and *Blue Wicked* (an alcopop). These girls said they drank at a park 'where everyone else is going' (Karly). Eva (II), who did not drink herself, told me that her friends drink vodka and mix it with red cola. She also informed me that people do not drink because they like the taste. Presumably this means they drink to get drunk or some other

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[15] 'What can you tell me about the boys you know drinking alcohol?'

effect. According to the boys, the girls they knew drank vodka, MD 20/20 – (18% wine) - referred to here as 'mad dog', cider, *Blue Wicked* (alcopop) and *Lambrini*.

Lucy (II), referring to her own drinking practice, said she knows when 'enough is enough'. When I asked group *G.Ya.3c* what a typical weekend was like, Claire answered: 'drunk'. Eva (II) said she used to drink when she was in S1, but she 'took a break'. Now her friends 'get reekin' (very drunk). According to Milly and Molly there were labels for people at different stages of drunkenness, or for those who have different alcohol capacities. If you cannot drink much, 'they call you a lightweight', or if you have drunk too much, 'they call you a 'drunk' or 'alcoholic''. This was not gender-specific. They did not go into detail about their own drinking experience, but they did discuss their drinking 'process':

> Milly: Like some teenagers do, they just like, oh I'm going out drinking this weekend. It's like, why would you intentionally get drunk? It's sad.

> Molly: Yeah, I mean like, usually if you're like us, you don't plan on going drinking, its not like oh yeah, I'm going to get like drunk, between four and six so that I can be sober by seven so I can go home. Cause you don't plan these things. (laughs) If you're going to get drunk then you don't know about it usually, you just kind of go with the flow.

The majority of boys said that girls they knew did drink alcohol. This ranged from 'some do, some don't' (Kai- II, *B.Ya.3e*, *B.Ya.3b*), 'once or twice a year' (Norman II), most, or all of them (Dave - II, *B.Ya.4a*). Johnny (II) said that some girls he knew refrain from eating all day so they get drunk more easily. Carl (II) said they go out and drink all night long. Ally (*B.Ya.3f*) stated that girls he knew started trying drinking in second year and are 'doing it' in third or fourth year. Others (*B.Ya.3c* & *B.Ya.3f*) reported that the girls accessed alcohol

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from older siblings or 'junkies' who loiter outside newsagents. They said that girls drank in the park, in underpasses, under bridges, on benches, on the streets, in 'pipes' (presumably large concrete drainage pipes left by builders), at parties and on the beach. Or, as Olly (*B.Ya.4a*) put it, 'just places that they think folk won't go and that, dodgy places'.

2.2 Boys' experiences of drinking alcohol

The boys' accounts of drinking ranged from never drinking to drinking as a frequent activity. These accounts came from both group discussions and individual interviews. For example, all participants in *B.Ya.3b* said they did not drink. The exchange below explains the participants' (*B.Na.4a*) decision to not drink:

> **What about drinking? I mean, is it pretty normal? Is everyone drinking or not really?**
>
> Robert: Not really at our age.
>
> Frank: Some people at our age…It's their life choice.
>
> Andrew: But not a lot of people.
>
> Frank: I'd rather do it in time. I'd rather be a child whilst I am one, rather than just be an adult and regret it.

The boys in this group were middle-class and this was very much part of their identity-presentation. In a follow-up individual interview, Frank confirmed that he did not drink. However, he did discuss the drinking habits of a boy he knew. This boy and his friends drank vodka and alcopops. They drank to get drunk. Stories were recounted to Frank of his friends' drunken antics that involved music being played too loud, waking up the neighbours and the police being called. This was a far cry from Frank's experiences. The most that Frank had

ever had to drink was a glass of champagne at New Year with his family. Recently his mother had offered him a beer with his meal but Frank did not 'see the point'. Only one other group (*B.Ro.4b*) talked about drinking in any depth. The drinking experiences of these participants varied considerably:

> **So is that like a typical weekend, just like going to the park, and parties?**
>
> Cameron: Aye.
>
> Jonathon: Sort of, but it's been like no as good the last couple of weeks.
>
> Cameron: The last week it's been cold eh.
>
> Jonathon: We dinnae do like, we dinnae always like drink
>
> Cameron: You can talk.
>
> Jonathan: No, we're not like hard-core drinkers, we're like… we play football and that as well, just normal teenagers basically. Basically typical teenagers.
>
> **Okay, and what about you two, what do you get up to at the weekend?**
>
> Ferg: I don't drink.
>
> **Right, okay. And why do you not drink?**
>
> Ferg: Because of my religion.
>
> **Okay. And how about you?**
>
> James: Diabetes.

The rest of the boy participants either did not drink or did not disclose their drinking experiences. Participants in *B.Ya.3f* said in their spare time they like to play football and go out drinking with their friends. On a normal weekend Johnny (*B.Ya.3d*) would 'just go oot and drink (laugh); maist folk drink, not everyone every weekend.' Whilst trying to ascertain

from the boys in *B.Ya.3e* what they knew of girls' drinking habits, I was informed instead of their own personal experiences. The participants in this group were good friends. They often shared jokes and threw mischievous comments back and forth, always accompanied by big grins and laughter.

> **Ok. Well let's move on to talk about alcohol.**
>
> Kai: Aaaah. [satisfied sigh]
>
> **Can you tell me about the girls that you know drinking alcohol?**
>
> Adam: Mmmm maybe.
>
> Ross: No.
>
> Adam: Some do, some don't.
>
> **What do you know about the ones that do?**
>
> Martin: They'll drink *Lambrini*.
>
> *Lambrini*?
>
> Adam: Yeah, I drink that. Not bottle, like, when I'm sitting with my mum and dad…
>
> Kai: I just drink if I… I'm not a big, crazy, heavy drinker but I like a good drink – although it was not good when I was at a wedding and it was an open bar. It was an open bar, I couldn't help myself.
>
> Martin: Kai got drunk on *Ribena*. (Laughing.)
>
> Adam: Ross gets high on sherbert. (Laughing.)

We can see from the last two comments that perhaps drinking alcohol and drug-taking ('Ross gets high on sherbert' could be interpreted as alluding to snorting cocaine) are dealt with playfully as ways of testing boundaries and working out communal perceptions of these activities. I conducted a follow-up individual interview with Kai from this group. Kai was a vivacious boy and quite hard work to interview alone, his

train of thought often flitting from topic to topic. When I mentioned to Kai that we would be discussing alcohol again he said 'aaaaaaah' like a satisfied, relieved sigh (identical to the response he gave in the group discussion as seen above), implying that he enjoyed drinking and that he associated drinking with relaxing.

There were a few girl participants who discussed their opinions of boys' drinking. Heidi (II), who was inexperienced in terms of drinking, had heard of only one rumour of a boy drinking and getting taken home by police. This she believed to be untrue. She said, in her hesitant way, that she did not know of anyone else but 'I imagine, you know, alcohol drinking does occur'. Participants in *G.Ya.3c* had varying knowledge of boys' drinking. Lauren said that boys she knew got drunk, whereas Carly said that none of her friends who were boys drank. Lucy (II) said that all of the boys she knew drank, apart from 'good boys' who are supervised by their parents. I will discuss the situation regarding these boys and their parents in more detail shortly. With great conviction, Alison (*G.Ya.3a*) said that all the boys in her year and the year above drank alcohol.

The places that the boys were reported to drink alcohol were the park, at parties and 'along the road' (*B.Ro.4b*, Kai). The most common place to drink for the participants at Yatesly Academy was at a park called Hawgreen[16] (Johnny, *B.Ya.3d*, *B.Ya.3f*). Johnny told me that at the weekend he and his friends 'just go oot like Hawgreen or something, just doon there – just go oot and drink (laughs)… there's older folk come down, tae – they all come doon…'. Only two girls mentioned the whereabouts of boys' drinking. Lucy (II) said it would be in a house, park or in the woods.

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[16] Pseudonym

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We have seen that the participants were varied in their drinking experiences. However, those who did not drink alcohol often offered precise reasons, as though these were well-rehearsed and had been previously used in defence of their decision. Often stated as a reason why boys do not drink was their allegiance to playing sport, mostly football. Whether or not this was ostensibly because their free time was spent playing football - and therefore no other pastimes were sought - or whether it was due to health reasons, was unclear. Some girls also mentioned this issue (Rhona - II, *G.Ya.3d*) Here, group *G.Ya.3d* discuss this topic:

> Karly: Cos a lot of boys play football and that and don't want… and they've got games on the Saturday.

> **Yeah. So you think that's, like, a main reason why boys don't drink in your year?**

> Karly: Aye.

> Louise: Isn't really, cos there's some folk that do drink all the time but…

> Karly: Aye, I know, but they don't play sports or anything.

I will now move on to consider participants' general perceptions of drinking alcohol.

2.3 Participants' general perceptions of drinking alcohol

Boys' opinions of girls drinking were particularly interesting. Some responded nonchalantly stated they had no opinion or did not care about girls drinking. Kai (*B.Ya.3e*) thought girls were 'fun' when they drink. However, the main accounts of

boys' opinions about girls drinking were either negative or of parental-like concern (which tallies with the tenet of control as mentioned in the introduction to this chapter). Frank (II) thought the girls he knew were too young to be drinking. Later he informed me that although he used to find girls' drinking irresponsible, now he does not mind as much. Norman (II) stated that girls should not drink as much as they do, but with the caveat that he 'doesn't really care'. Bruce (*B.Ya.3a*) worried: 'Or like one of them maybe gets raped and they don't even know, like cause they're drunk'. They were also concerned that they might jeopardise their future job prospects if they drank too much. Johnny (II) said he preferred girls when they are sober because they are 'annoying' when they are drunk. This sentiment was echoed by others who said the girls who do not drink are the smart ones (implying that the ones who do drink are not smart), that drunk girls are 'wasters', 'stupid' and that boys 'laugh at them' when they are drunk.

I now consider girls' perceptions of boys' opinions of girls drinking alcohol. No girl thought that the boys had positive perceptions of girls drinking alcohol. Although Lucy (II) thought that boys did not mind girls drinking and that they 'just don't want them getting hurt', she later said that she thought that 'boys think girls getting really drunk is stupid'. Others thought boys' perceptions were that girls 'get in a state' (Eva-II) and that they do not like it when girls drink because they find it 'annoying' (*G.Ya.3d*). Did these presumed negative perceptions match the boys' accounts of girls' drinking?

On only three occasions did girl participants offer their opinion of boys' drinking. Lucy (II) said that she did not like boys who drank because she hated violence. Lynsey (*G.Ya.3a*) said that she thought that boys think it is cool to get drunk and have sex. Her opinion came from the boys she saw in *Skins.* Others

(*G.Ya.3b*) thought that boys' drinking was 'annoying' and 'stupid'. So, it could be said the boys' perceptions of girls' opinions matched the negative aspects such as being annoying and aggressive but did not match the less negative aspects such as trying to be funny and impress girls.

The boys' perceptions of girls' opinions were varied. Some boys (*B.Ya.3b*, Kai-II) said they did not know what girls thought of boys drinking because they did not discuss drinking with them; they would rather discuss 'something fun' (Kai-II). However, nearly all of the other boys had something to say about girls' opinions of boys' drinking. This shows how important girls' opinions were to these boy participants. The perceptions they had of girls' opinions were: that girls would find boys' drinking annoying (Johnny, *B.Ya.3d*); that girls thought boys become aggressive when drinking (Carl – II, *B.Ya.3a*, Norman – II, Dave –II, *B.Ya.4a, B.Ya.3e,*) and that girls thought boys drank to impress girls and make them appear funny (Frank- II, GB1, Norman-II). George (*B.Ya.3d*) added a caveat that some girls probably would not notice boys drinking because of how drunk the girls themselves were. Carl (II) said that whereas girls argue with words, boys fight physically. Participants from *B.Ya.3a* integrated some other ideas:

> **And what do you think of the way girls think of the way that boys get drunk?**
>
> Calum: Usually think they're acting smart I think. Just to impress girls most of the time, I think.
>
> Bruce: When boys drink they get more aggressive and like-
>
> Calum: They get into fights a lot more than girls. Girls just kind of tend to argue but boys tend to take it to the next level, and just start-

> Darren: But not saying it's like, you're not drinking they just take you as like you're boring. And so, they make you feel you need to drink to like, be cool and that but-

It seems that Darren stated that girls thought boys are boring if they do not drink, hence encouraging them to drink.

3. Drinking alcohol and social relationships

Having provided some understanding of participants' drinking habits, the analysis turns now to participants' accounts of their experiences of drinking and relationships. Alcohol featured prominently in the lives of most participants regardless of whether or not they actually drank alcohol. For this reason it is not surprising that alcohol affected different social relationships, be they with parents, friends or potential/actual romantic/sexual partners.

3.1 Drinking alcohol and parents

For some, their parents' opinions affected their choices regarding drinking:

> Sarah: Cos you kind of like, you do, you worry about yourself and like, my mum was, like, really worrying once, because she saw like where I live there's like a probably about 20 of them under the bridge and my mum was just like, really worrying about me, and you kind of feel, like, really guilty because like, you're going out and then you don't know what's gonna happen so, like, it's really worrying.

The above example was one of only two provided by girl participants about their parents and drinking. These absences are explained by the fact that I never specifically asked about their perceptions of their parents' opinions. There was, however, much more data related to boys' drinking and their parents (despite not specifically asking them either). In one respect, Frank (II) discussed what he thinks is a good age to drink, and he talks about how one's decision to drink should depend on what age one's parents believe is suitable. Despite

this he had never talked to his parents about this matter. In contrast, some participants told of how they associate their parents with drinking.

Calum's revelations provide a remarkable example. To understand the following excerpts better, here is some context about the group discussion. *B.Ya.1* was the first group I interviewed at Yatesly Academy so I was a little nervous. I waited in the 'meditation room' - the room to which I was allocated. The seats were bright purple, the carpet dirty blue. The air conditioning made a constant fuzzy noise. A window over-looked the internal courtyard which served as the dining hall. The window did not open. When the four boys arrived it was apparent there were two pairs of friends: two boys who were goth-like, and two who were more 'neddy' and who had very broad west-coast accents. Calum belonged to the latter pair. He was a small boy with brown hair gelled forward. He wore school trousers and a tracksuit top with green stripes down the sleeves. In his left ear he wore a stud. He was engaging and talkative. His expression would slip from sure and arrogant to scared and fragile. Despite the division within the group, the boys were respectful, listening to and often agreeing with each other's opinions. Calum (*B.Ya.3a*) told a disquieting story when asked what he knew of people drinking:

> Calum: Only time I seen someone really really really...
> my mum and my dad. My dad jumped in a river.
>
> **Really?**
>
> Calum: We were up in Glasgow. And then, he got into a
> fight later on that night and got stabbed in the
> knee...[pause]
>
> **What did you think of that then?**
>
> Calum: I just thought he was, just going mad. Although I
> didn't stop it, cause I was walking about the town

myself, cause they were just away drinking. I didn't know what to do…So I had to go to my uncle's… Had enough of them. But they've lowered down recently.

What, sorry?

Calum: They're not drinking as much recently… Cause I told them what they did and everything, they just kind of took responsibility now. Cause I got- me and my wee sister, she's only nine, and she was there. And I had to look after her, and then Glasgow's not the best place.

Later in the discussion, Calum went to on to tell of another recent incident involving his mother. This followed on from a discussion about how people get drunk in the programmes *Skins* and *Shameless*:

Tom: It looks like fun but I wouldn't do it.

Darren: Looks like fun but then-

Calum: It isn't.

Darren: Like it shows you like them in the morning and they're like, they can't get up out their bed and they're feeling ill-

Calum: My mum drunk heavy one night last week, and she just stayed in bed the whole day. She came in the house, kicked her shoes off, put her jacket down and then just crawled up the stairs, literally crawled. I was like that, oh God mum, my dad's like that (makes a noise) started laughing.[17]

In another group discussion (*B.Ya.3c*), during an exchange about where their opinions about drinking came from, Dave mentioned that his father used to be an alcoholic. The flow of the conversation swept over this comment:

Where do you think your opinions about this (drinking) come from?

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[17] Please see methods chapter for details about how I dealt with Calum's accounts

Eric: You see folk out on the street, doing it.

Mike: Experience and that.

Dave: Aye, with yourself.

Mike: Aye.

Bob: Day-to-day life.

Dave: My dad used to be an alchy.

Eric: Folk get violent.

Dave: I ken.

I thought it best not to address this during the group discussion. Afterwards I quietly asked Dave to stay behind. I asked about his father drinking and if he had ever spoken to anyone about it. Looking down he said 'nah, its ok, I'm over it now'. 'Are you sure that you wouldn't like to speak to anyone?' He shrugged. 'Nah'. I told him that he was welcome to get in touch with me, tell his guidance teacher or phone the *Childline* number should he change his mind. I gave him what I hoped was a kind, reassuring smile. 'Thanks' he said quietly, and left.

In contrast to these darker tales of drinking associated with parents, Lucy (II) talked in some detail about 'good boys' she knew whose every move was supervised by their parents:

> **Can you tell me about any boys that you know, like in your year group, drinking alcohol?**
>
> Lucy: Basically, everyone. There's maybe about ten really good - probably fifteen actually - really good boys that don't drink but they were like supervised by their parents. They don't have the chance to really get into that sort of trouble...they get checked up on like every hour.
>
> **How does that make them feel, like being supervised like that?**

Lucy: It's horrible. It must well, they're all fed up with them got to say that, I mean, they do try and hide... they hide things from their parents and everything, but even then. Their parents look through their phones, what kind of internets, see what they've been on.

And does that have an effect on the relationship they have with their parents then?

Lucy: Yeah, they're always in their room or they're trying to be out all the time and if they're not allowed out, they'll stay in their room. They just don't want to be around them.

The last few examples have demonstrated opposite extremes of parental influence on participants' perceptions and behaviours in terms of drinking. But what role did participants say their peers played in this?

3.2 Peers, respect and drinking alcohol

There was some discussion amongst the girls about peer reputation and respect in relation to drinking. Rhona (II), who was the only person in her group of friends who did not drink, said that her friends respected that decision. Others (*G.Ya.3a*) agreed that you 'don't get slagged' for not drinking. Annie (*G.Ya.3d*) said 'I don't like getting into that state, when people talk about you...I like to know what I've done. I hate not knowing what you've done.' Peers gossiping about drunken behaviour was obviously an issue for Annie.

An exchange between the participants in *B.Ro.4b* highlights the influence of peers for the boy participants. The context of the discussion was as follows. Initially only two boys were selected by the teacher for this group discussion. They began by telling me how well they knew each other: not very: they had been in the same class since primary school but did not socialize and were no longer in any other classes together,

apart from their PSE class because 'he's brainy an' ahm no'[18].
At this point the door opened and the teacher said she had
'found a few more'. Jonathon, Cameron and Dougie settled
down, chatting. They obviously knew each other. They told me
that they socialised together at the park where they drank at
the weekends. Here Jonathon and Cameron describe their
drinking experiences:

> Jonathon: See, like I absolutely started drinking because
> everyone else was like. Like at first, I hated it, I
> thought it was wrong. I just, I didnae see the point of it
> and then I tried it once, and then like...
>
> Cameron: It's fun.
>
> Jonathon: ...we were having a good night but like people
> tell me I'm an alcoholic and that like.
>
> Cameron: For a laugh. You do that as a joke, though.
> You do that as a joke.

Later they said that some people they know 'actually go oot
absolutely oot their face but like we don't get out of hand with
it'. So in this sense, although it seems socially acceptable for
them to drink, there is a clear limit as to what is acceptable.
Cameron was sure to mention his considerate and sensible
side: 'if we got out we make sure everyone gets home alright,
like'.

The foregoing excerpts described the role of the peer group in
instigating drinking and alluded to reputation in terms of what
was acceptable. I turn now to the notion of respect. Frank (II)
shared his ideas on this issue. Upon meeting Frank for a follow-
up individual interview he seemed quite nervous, fidgeting a
lot, touching the back of his neck, his hair and his arms. Once
we got chatting he soon relaxed. Frank said that the girls he

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[18] This means 'he's clever and I'm not'

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used to be friends with now drink with older boys in the park. There was a fall-out that was related, it seems, to the boys (in Frank's group) wanting to 'take things further', sexually, than the girls did. When this falling-out happened, the girls rejected Frank's group and instead 'immediately respected all these boys that were drinking'. He thought that if the girls are drinking with only other girls then it is 'not as bad, just for fun'. He did not say what happened when the girls were drinking with the boys. Later in the interview Frank told me that neither he nor any of his friends drank. However, drinking was, among his friends, an often-discussed, and even planned, activity, though one which had not yet materialised. I inferred from the tone of this part of the interview that a real incentive for Frank and his friends to start drinking would be to become, perhaps, part of the group of boys who were 'respected' for drinking, thereby enabling them, once again, to socialise with the said group of girls. The issue of respect was very important to Frank and it was something he referred to often throughout his interview. Still on this matter of respect, Johnny (II) said that if people chose not to drink 'naebody would say anything' and their reputation would not be damaged. Participants in *G.Ya.3a* concurred that boys 'wouldn't get slagged' for not drinking. This notion of respect was not as salient for the girl participants. These boys' concern with respect is related to performing their masculinity to their peers, and this performance being accepted.

3.3 Drinking alcohol and its effect on social groups

This section opens with some examples from girl participants. Here I will provide two examples specifically related to alcohol and its effect on participants' social groups. The first is from Eva's (II) interview. This interview took place in Eva's home - a white, semi-detached house. She answered the door wearing

tracksuit bottoms and a sweater. She was tall, with dark hair and a quiet demeanour. It felt a little strange just turning up at this girl's house on a dark November evening. We went through to the living room where her parents were sitting on the sofa. I smiled and introduced myself. I was about to explain the research but before I had a chance they got up and said 'Well, we'll get out of your way'. The living room was small and cosy with a fireplace upon which sat a photo frame in the shape of the word 'family'. *The Guardian* newspaper lay on the floor by the armchair. Eva sat on the sofa across from me, feet on the floor, hands in her lap. Barely before I had asked the first question, Eva began to tell me of the recent disintegration of her group of girl friends. In retrospect I felt her decision to meet me for an individual follow-up interview was for a cathartic session in which she could discuss both this new problem and her recent break-up with a secret boyfriend about whom even her closest friends knew nothing.

How much time do you spend with your parents?

Eva: Recently quite a lot. Cause my friends sort of do stuff that I can't be bothered doing half the time. I go to the cinema with my mum most of the time.

So what kind of things are your friends doing that you don't want to do?

Eva: Going out to the park drinking and stuff like that.

Oh I see, right OK. And that's just something that you're not really interested in?

Eva: No

OK, I understand. Is your friendship affected by that?

Eva: Sort of, it's split me away from two friends but my other friend, she doesn't like to do it either. So like on a Saturday night I'll go stay with her. But it's kind of caused a divide between a couple of us.

What do they say about the fact that you're not going?

Eva: Cause we just kind of said something, oh no I don't want to do that - it's too cold. And even if it was warm I wouldn't want to do it anyway, and they're like, I don't see the big deal, what's wrong with it? Quite a lot.

So is this a recent thing then that they've been going out?

Eva: Yeah cause at first it was kind of all of us. But then I just kind of realised I was growing up and like, I found it quite immature. So then we stopped, which caused this kind of tension.

The second example describes the accounts of four participants (*G.Ya.3c*) who used to socialise together, but no longer do: drinking alcohol is partly responsible for this. The teacher who organised this group asked me 'Who do you want this morning? How about a group of Goths?'. When they appeared they were smiling and not like the sombre, mute teenagers I had imagined. There was, they told me - and as was also clear from the clothes they wore - a divide within the group. Danielle and Carly were best friends. They did not drink and they cared about what their parents said about alcohol. The other two, Holly and Lauren, spent a lot of time together with a big group of people at the weekends, drinking alcohol. Holly was sexually experienced, wore a black hoody and her hair was short and dark. Her friend Lauren had a sincere expression on her face. She also wore a dark, baggy jumper. It was apparent that Holly and Lauren spent their free time drinking and socialising in mixed-sex groups, while Danielle and

Carly, despite the fact all four were good friends, spent time at home, not drinking. Alcohol here is used as a social signifier.

There were only two specific examples of drinking being reported to affect boys' social groups. I have referred earlier to Frank's (II) fall-out with a group of girls, and so perhaps, in his mind, drinking alcohol was a significant factor in the subsequent forming of social groups with these girls and another group of boys. Of course, it could have been the case that it was not the drinking *per se* that attracted the girls to the older boys, but rather the fact that they were indeed older boys, and drinking alcohol perhaps indicated that they would be behaving in different ways, that is, in sexual ways. For Johnny (II), drinking alcohol allowed him to be 'more pally wi' folk, talk to different folk, likes. Talk to folk you wouldnae when you're no drinking'. In the places he drank were large numbers of people loosely organized into smaller groups among which people could wander. There were no data from girls regarding how boys' social groups may be affected by alcohol.

Drinking, therefore, can have an effect on social groups and social interaction. It could be argued that it is not the drinking of alcohol *per se* that is the definer, but rather what the drinking symbolises – that is, growing up or being immature, exploring new experiences and trying new identities. Social organisation and shifting loyalties can be complex and complicated to negotiate. Who belongs where and why are fraught issues. Drinking alcohol, I suggest, is a social signifier as to who can belong. It can represent a certain attitude or affiliation with a particular group. Deciding to drink for the first time, as Frank's example demonstrated, can be an activity which warrants much discussion and planning. This in itself highlights the significance of drinking among these

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teenagers. Now I will turn to a social behaviour which can be even more complicated - that of sexual/romantic behaviour - and explore how drinking alcohol fits in with these negotiations.

3.4 Drinking alcohol and sexual behaviour

I will deal firstly with girls' and boys' reports of girls' alcohol use and sexual behaviour and secondly with boys' and girls' reports about the boys. Many of the girl participants discussed the connection between their own or other girls' drinking and sexual behaviour. Eva (II) talked of the drinking and sexual behaviour of other girls that she knew. They would get drunk and 'go with boys'. They would have sex in the park when they were drinking; Eva was sure that this would not happen if the girls were sober. Due perhaps to the fact that the number of girls who were drinking in the park outnumbered the boys, Eva told me how girls often fought over the boys: 'I think that's why some people drink, so they get the confidence so they can have sex cause it's sort of a competition of who can lose it first[19]'. Talking in more general terms, Sarah (*G.Ya.3b*) said:

> I mean, like, people in our year that have probably already slept with somebody think it's not that big a deal, but like, see when you're like, you're not drunk, you can say like, no to it and that if you don't want to do it, but see like when you are drunk, you don't really have control of your body and you just say 'yes' to everything.

Lucy's (II) statement matched Sarah's. Lucy believed that drinking alcohol is likely to bring people 'together' (sexually), and that unless a couple are in a relationship, people would only have sex if they were drinking.

Many of the boys also discussed the connection between girls drinking and sexual behaviour. They reported that girls flirt, cuddle up to boys and have sex when they are drunk. Dave (II)

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[19] Presumably lose their virginity

supposed this would not happen if they were sober. Here Craig (*B.Ya.3b*) voiced his concerns about girls, alcohol and boys:

> Craig: ….when they are with older boys things will happen. And when they wake up in the morning… (pause)
>
> **Ok so when you say you think things will happen are you talking about sex?**
>
> Craig: Aye
>
> **And so do you think that girls are more likely to do that if they've been drinking?**
>
> Craig: Aye, because they don't know what they are doing and boys are more likely to take advantage of them.

Quite different to Craig's concerns for the girls, Bryn (*B.Ya.4a*) offered a harsher comment about his perceptions of girls drinking: 'they're wee sluts when they drink'. Group *B.Ya.3d* also enlightened me on their opinions on girls drinking. According to the teacher who organised them, this group could be badly behaved. They were not. I think they liked that I was interested in what they had to say and enjoyed the fact they could say whatever they wanted. They wore tracksuits, or school trousers and tracksuit tops. Iain had an arrogant expression on his chubby face. Johnny was slouched so far down on his chair I was sure he would slide off it. George was fidgety and kept standing up to look out the window, wrapping a rubber band around his finger and getting it stuck. They were an animated group and their interactions were a performance of traditional masculinity. In the quote below we can see that they provided interesting detail of girls' behaviour when drunk and present some critical opinions:

> **What happens when the girls are drunk?**
>
> George: Phone you at like two o'clock in the morning.
>
> Johnny: Aye, when they get in, they just phone you
>
> …

So, do they speak differently if they're drunk than when they're sober?

George: Aye

Iain: Aye

Johnny: Usually

What kind of stuff do they chat about?

George: Aye, talk about anything, sex and aw that

Johnny: Aye, they keep telling you that they love you and all this

Iain: It does your head in

Johnny: That's how I don't answer anymore

At first this exchange appears to suggest that the boys have little interest in having sex, and that this is legitimate within their group. However, I think they are suggesting that having sex is so easy for them, and that girls are so readily available, that they can afford to be blasé. Also within the context of this group discussion, their attitude towards girls often seemed to be negative and derogatory. Perhaps, then, what this exchange shows is that they can have sex when they want, particularly if the girls have been drinking, and therefore why bother becoming involved with the emotional or non-physical aspects of relationships? Put plainly, an exploration into girls' sexual/romantic encounters with boys shows that alcohol plays a prominent role. Both sexes state that girls would not be acting sexually if they were not drunk. Girls were also said to fight over boys, to be taken advantage of by boys and to say yes to sex because they had no control over their bodies because they were drinking. These are important claims. They imply that without alcohol, girls' relationships with boys would be very different.

Let us look now at how boys' drinking is related to sexual behaviour. In terms of drinking and sexual behaviour, the majority of responses were speculative. However, nearly all of the boys did discuss this topic, whether talking in group discussions or individual interviews. An exchange from *B.Ya.3a* offered a perspective on how drinking can be related to sexual behaviour:

> Darren: When you're, like when you're drunk you're like more relaxed and let go and-
>
> Calum: Don't care what you're doing.
>
> Darren: -go with the flow I think. You just-
>
> Calum: It's like other people go and have sex and then they're all like that, on you go it's like fun. And then you just go like that, all right.
>
> **So you don't really think about it as much then.**
>
> Calum: Aye, exactly, cause like when you're drunk you kind of lose some brain cells and you can't think as well. But when you're like not drunk you actually know what you're doing and where you're going and what's going to happen.

This excerpt suggests the power of peer-group persuasion. Kai (II) suggested that, in real life, drinking alcohol is likely to lead to one-night stands. One group (*B.Ya.4a*) offered opinions of a more cautionary ilk. These boys seemed like a genuine friendship group. Often they were quite serious and noble in their sentiment, though that may have been to impress me. I was struck by how young, naïve and at ease they were with just being their age. They were in no hurry to grow up quickly or to try more adult behaviours such as drinking, drugs and sex:

> **And what about sex as well- do you think maybe people who drink more have sex at a younger age?**

Robert: Probably.

Andrew: Yeah, one night stands and things like that.

Andrew: Maybe just coz they're drunk.

Frank: Yeh. You know, they like don't think when they're drunk – they just think, just act, you know, don't think about consequences.

Robert: They sort of look and think, yeah, you've probably done that, you know what I mean?

Yeah – what kind of people would that be?

Robert: Well, just sort of – I don't know. Well, without sounding snobby, just sort of folk from rougher areas. That's what sort of goes about – coz folk from better areas wouldn't do that, you know? They'd be more…[trails off]

Frank and Robert may be distancing themselves from behaviours such as drinking and sex as in their opinion these are associated with working-class people and this is at odds with their self-identities. Craig (*B.Ya.3b*) said that if older boys (presumably referring to older boys in his school) drink with girls then 'things will happen'. Drunken boys, he reported, take sexual advantage of drunken girls. Boys (that is, other boys) always want to have sex when they are drunk. Carl's (II) concern was that if he got drunk he might have sex with someone that he did not want to have sex with and that the next morning he might get a fright. In this same vein, Mike (*B.Ya.3c*), after a discussion about sex and drinking in *Skins*, told a tale of his uncle in Spain:

> Mike: See when I was in Spain, right? My uncle lives over there, and there's this really ugly lassie, right, she's about forty – and my uncle, she really fancied my uncle. My uncle was like that, "I would never date her, she's a man", right? See after about seven pints, he was up dancing with her and got her number and all that. He

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didn't remember anything about it the next morning, though.

The above examples are speculation about older people, family or media portrayals of alcohol leading to sexual behaviour. They tell of sexual behaviour due to drunken misjudgment and the role of peer pressure and social class. Some are presented in cautionary terms, others in a more jovial manner.

What of boys who described their *own* experiences involving alcohol and sexual behaviour? Only four participants disclosed such experiences – two within individual interviews (with much more detail offered) and two within group discussion. Dave (II) revealed his experiences in this excerpt:

> **What kind of things could you not do when you're sober that you could do when you've been drinking?**
>
> Dave: Go up to lassies and like talk to them, like, ask them oot or something – just like flirt with them.
>
> **And you just wouldn't have the confidence to do that if you were sober?**
>
> Dave: Yeah, instead of getting your pals there to dae it.
>
> **Yeah, you don't need your pals, then. Ok. And what do you think of girls drinking?**
>
> Dave: It's, it's alright, but if they like get wrecked or something, then I don't know. Lassies get up to mair when they're drunk than boys.
>
> **What do they do?**
>
> Dave: Like sleep with hundreds of folk and stuff.
>
> **Really?**
>
> Dave: Aye. So do boys.
>
> **Is it just when they're drinking?**

Dave: Aye, I think so, coz I'm normally dead shy.

So they wouldn't be sleeping with people if they were sober?

Dave: Aye.

Note here Dave's shift in grammar from third to first person. From talking about how it is 'them' who have sex when they are drunk, he then says 'coz I'm normally dead shy'. This implies that he too gets drunk and has sex. When asked if he could think of any examples from the media about alcohol and sex, Dave divulged details about how his mother and step-father met. Dave's biological father had been cheating on his mother. One night his mother was at a party, drunk, and she met Adam (Dave's step-father). He came home with her that night and so the relationship began. Needless to say, the biological father was not happy. Dave's mother's drunken night out that resulted in the presence of his step-father living at home was not easy initially for Dave:

And how do you get on with your mum and your step-dad?

Dave: My step-dad, I get on well with him. I used tae no – he used to say, "Get oot my hoose," and all that, first couple of weeks.

How long has he been living with you for?

Dave: I think it's about, I was seven, so eight years.

Oh right, that's quite a long time. What's he like?

Dave: He's just, I don't know – he likes carrying on[20] with us, but if we dae something bad, he's like a dad – just basically.

The fact that he was well aware of the role alcohol played in the forming of his mother's current relationship is telling.

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[20] 'Carrying on' means 'having a laugh' or having a good time

Dave's family life, played a significant role in his perceptions and behaviours with regard to alcohol and sexual/romantic relationships. Similar to Dave, Johnny (II) discussed how drinking enables him to communicate more comfortably with girls. Following on from talking about sex in the media he reported that he has sex when he is drinking: it would not happen were it not for alcohol.

There were only three responses from girl participants directly related to boys' drinking and sexual behaviour. Rhona (II) offered the most detailed response:

> **What do they (boys) get up to when they're drunk?**
>
> Rhona: I'm not really sure that- well boys kind of take advantage of the girls if they're a bit drunk and stuff like that. Like, people you wouldn't normally get together with, tend to, just because their judgments are clouded and stuff like that. But I don't think the guys necessarily mean to take advantage of them, it's just they think they're up for it so, let's go for it…
>
> **Mhmm. And would it ever work the other way around, like could the girl ever take advantage of a guy that wouldn't normally go with her?**
>
> Rhona: From what I've seen it's usually the guy, but I suppose the girls have before. I've never really seen it but, probably happens.
>
> **And do the girls regret that in the morning, if they felt like-**
>
> Rhona: Yeah, usually. Usually just think they shouldn't have been so drunk that would never have happened.

It is interesting that although Rhona says in theory it could be a girl taking advantage of a boy, this is not something that she had experienced. Also notable is how the girls feel as though it was their fault ('think they shouldn't have been so drunk that would never have happened'). Did the alcohol transform them into a different drunken being who was happy to be 'taken

advantage of' the night before? Why would they be so averse to be seen to be participating in sexual behaviour if they were sober? A discussion among participants in *G.Ya.3a* also alluded to the notion being 'taken advantage' of:

What do they (boys) drink and what happens when they drink and stuff?

Kat: They just carry on like they usually do except get rough and loud.

Alison: Aye.

So what do you mean when you say they get rough?

Kat: They kinda start fighting

Lynsey: Have sex a lot.

They have sex a lot? With people their age?

Alison: Yeah. Younger, most o' them, 15 year olds to 13 year olds. Just go a walk and then… come back. That's them done. [Laughter]

And you think the fact that they're drinking has anything to do with that?

Alison: Yeah. Most of them cannae remember it.

Really?

Alison: Mhm.

You think that would happen if they weren't drinking?

Alison: No. Might want it to happen, but.

Kat: It just takes one person to get drunk and then the other person can take advantage of them.

Yeah, so you think that happens quite a lot?

Kat: Probably, aye.

Why do you think people get that drunk that they let themselves get taken advantage of? You just don't think they think it through?

Alison: Get a reputation.

Lynsey: Aye, and they think it's cos... because of what age they are and they think that it's cool.

According to this example boys think having sex at their age is 'cool'. What is also of interest is that here violence is mentioned in the same instance as sexual behaviour. It is not specified whether or not this violence spills over into the sexual behaviour. Regardless, the language used is controlling and dominant: 'it just takes one person to get drunk and then the other person can take advantage of them.' And the act of sex itself seems almost utilitarian in order, perhaps, to uphold their 'cool' reputation: 'just go a walk and then... come back. That's them done'. It is not clear from this excerpt whether it is only the boys' reputation that is shaped by having sex at that age. The use of 'they' could refer to 'those' people who are having sex - presumably boys and girls. However, in the context of this interview I suggest that the participants are referring to boys. This contrasts with accounts from other girl participants who say that if girls have sex it is detrimental to their reputation. Again, we can see from this excerpt that

were it not for alcohol, sexual encounters would not be likely to take place. Here is the final example on this topic:

Would it (alcohol) put you off boys, or would it make you attracted to them or would it…

Susan: Depends

Kate: Doesn't make a difference

What about you?

Sarah: Don't know, it just, like, every week they're like that, when they're drinking they're pure like that, say all stuff to you, it's like that, will you winch me, and its like no, you're my best pal and everything like that, but it's like… they say to you stuff like that, "will you shag me?" and that, it's like that, "no", but they only do it when they're drunk. You're like that, you try to walk away but you cannae.

…

Jill: It's no that they don't know what they're doing. They know they're doing it, they're just… cannae really stop theirselves or something like that.

(*G.Ya.3b*)

The boys are reported here as being aggravating and insistent. Sex (when drinking alcohol) is again presented as something that the girls resist and that the boys 'need' to do: 'they know they're doing it, they're just… cannae really stop theirselves or something like that'. The participants' reports would suggest that girls do not want to have sex and that boys do.

This section has explored the relevance of drinking alcohol to sexual behaviour. Both sexes stated that sexual behaviour is very much associated with drinking alcohol and being drunk, and often such sexual behaviour would not occur were it not

for alcohol. Alcohol was reported to inhibit people's sense of consequence, thereby resulting in sexual behaviour with otherwise undesired partners. A key theme from both boys and girls was that boys were likely to take sexual advantage of girls when both are drunk.

4. Drinking alcohol and identity presentation

In this section, under the conceptual umbrella of *'identity presentation'*, I will explore accounts of participants' drinking as associated with: maturity, acting differently, emotions and gender. This is not to say that the rest of the data presented is not important in terms of presentations of their identity; 'identity presentation' here is being utilised as an organizational term.

4.1 Drinking alcohol and perceptions of maturity

As drinking alcohol is associated with being of a certain 'older' age, discussions of alcohol can offer some interesting insights into how mature or immature someone feels or presents themselves to be. For the girls, talk of maturity, however, was only mentioned by those who did not drink: it was those who did drink who were deemed immature. In this respect drinking alcohol is an identity symbol, or a symbolic association with groups of friends or with parents. Could it be that for those who did not drink, the topic was contentious, and a way to alleviate worries was to deflect potential comments regarding their immaturity onto the very people (that is people who did drink) who might be responsible for causing stress (that is, by mocking those who do not drink and/or excluding them for not drinking)? Eva (II) thought that drinking was immature. This opinion fitted well with her story of her recent falling-out with friends who had started drinking in the park. Perhaps this was a way of defending herself by criticising her friends' choice of

behaviour, and therefore protecting and justifying her own choices (of staying in and not drinking). Frank (II) offered a fascinating analysis of the different types of people who are likely to be drinking alcohol at his age. It is related to his socio-economic stereotypes:

> **And where do most people try drinking for the first time? Is it with older folk?**
>
> Frank: Yeah, I think they just hang around with a different group and then you know, well it depends where they come from, you know, like what area and they're usually more like… I don't want to give somebody a stereotype because I know a lot of people from that area (deprived) who are very nice, but you know, yeah, they sometimes get drunk with their parents if you know what I mean… well, not drunk but you know, their parents allow them to have more than say somebody, you know, my parents.
>
> ….
>
> **Do you and your friends talk about drinking?**
>
> Frank: Yeah, quite a lot. How, you know, some of them think they're cool. They think, oh yeah, we should do it, yeah, and then it always ends up that they never do.
>
> **Why don't they?**
>
> Frank: Well, it's because like, well not enough people in the group think, oh yeah, it's a great idea and basically, they're doing it to be… act cool, but they know that they you know, they can't really do it.
>
> **So are they kind of waiting for there to be more of a consensus in the group before they…?**
>
> Frank: Yeah, I think so but I think they probably still you know, wimp out a bit. I'm not saying that you're cool if you do drink, but… you know.

What is notable here is what an important role alcohol plays in Frank's life. On the one hand he sees drinking alcohol at his age as indicative of being a member of a social class to which

he feels he does not belong. For this reason he is deterred from drinking. However it seems he is experiencing a tension between this and seeing alcohol as 'cool'. And for someone who has shown himself to be very concerned about his 'rep' (reputation – he refers to his reputation on numerous occasions throughout the interview) being 'cool' is very important. Whichever way he turns, alcohol is confusing him in terms of how he presents his identity.

4.2 Drinking alcohol and acting 'out of character'

Many participants told stories of acting 'out of character' when drunk. I will report first on girls' accounts. Some (*G.Ya.3b*) offered some interesting comments about acting out of character when drunk. There was a nice dynamic in this group. The girls were best friends. There was a lot of bangle-rattling and hair-twiddling. They talked and finished each others' sentences. They all wore makeup and had their hair styled poker-straight. Big gold hoops dangled from their ears. When I told them what we would be discussing they gave each other knowing glances and started giggling.

> Kate: I think some people just, like, pretend to be drunk so that they can get away with everything and...

> Jill: They're drunk a wee bit and then they just start acting it.

> Kate: Yeah

So why are they pretending to be drunk?

> Jill: To show off

> Susan: To show off and look cool and that.

Acting in a way that they couldn't act when they're sober?

Susan: Mhmm

And what would that be? What would they be doing?

Susan: Like shouting and walking about funny and...

Jill: Pure, like, hanging on to the boys and that and like...

Kate: Just being, like, too confident

Sarah: Like, thinking too high of yourself and that and... just like...you kinda like, yeah, you practically, like, shout everything

Jill: Basically like you walk about yourself, like...

Susan: You pretend that you can say anything you want, that you can get away with it, like...people think you're drunk, OK, it's no big deal or that, what you say.

I suggest this *pretending to be drunk* is a license to act differently, to be someone else, to say what you cannot say in 'normal' daily exchanges. It is an important element of drinking alcohol. It allows participants to experiment with different identities. It also allows for some inconsistency in self-presentations and gives participants a chance to gauge how others react.

Boys also reported a change in girls' behaviour when drinking. Apart from acting differently in terms of their flirtatious and sexual behaviour with boys (as mentioned in the previous section), the reported change in behaviour included insulting people on MSN (Norman-II), being cheeky and having arguments (*B.Ya.4a*), getting defensive, being stupid and

having accidents (*B.Ya.3a*). Some said what happens when girls are drunk depends on their personality (*B.Ya.3e*, Kai). George and Johnny (*B.Ya.3d*) reported that girls fall over, 'whitey' (collapse), 'say sorry all the time' and 'start greetin' (crying). The excerpt below shows a range of behaviours:

> **What happens when the girls drink? What do they get up to?**
>
> Thomas: They just kind of walk about
>
> Gavin: Strut about
>
> Thomas: Float about all the time
>
> Mark: Some of them are pure, they get violent or something and start hitting you
>
> Thomas: And cry a lot
>
> Craig: Aye, some will cry about nothing. This lassie I know she got drunk, man, and she was like that 'nobody likes me, nobody likes me'. And I was like 'shut up'. Sittin' and greetin' (crying) and that. And if nobody likes you, go away.
>
> (*B.Ya.3b*)

Craig's somewhat callous approach to the girls' concerns was in keeping with the tone of that group discussion where girls were often referred to in a derogatory tone. This could be their honest opinion of the girls they knew, or it could be an attempt to preserve a particular gendered identity within the focus group. Perhaps within their social group it was not acceptable to admire or like girls in ways that were not sexual.

Some participants described girls as 'happy' or 'funny' when they are drinking (Norman, George, Johnny). Others said that girls regret what they do, or cannot remember their actions (*B.Ya.3f*, *B.Ya.4a*), which, according to Kai, can be dangerous: 'Up at my bit, but, cause of all the lassies when they drink – see cause they've got a river right behind my

house, they always try and jump in the river and try and kill themselves (laughing)'. Whether the girls' suicidal intention was real is debatable, but this tone of alarm or concern for girls' wayward drinking behaviours was commonplace in the boys' accounts.

Reports of boys acting differently when drunk was a quality of boys' drinking alcohol that was quite striking, and one about which almost all of the boy participants had something to say. A shift in confidence and perceptions of normal social behaviours are explored here. I will start with a quote from Kai (II) who sets the tone for this section:

> Kai: When you drink you just, you become a different person depending on how much you drink…Sometimes you don't change that much, you just become a bit more relaxed and don't become so nervous, you know, like you could be too nervous to talk to someone, you just go talk to them to have fun…You could be too nervous to do something but you just go and do it. Then there's drinking too much and then doing crazy things that you would never ever do, that you wouldn't normally do even if you had the confidence to.

Some of the things people did as a result of what Kai describes as 'becoming a different person' were engaging in sexual behaviour (due to more confidence) (*B.Ya.4a, B.Ro.4b,* Dave-II), physical fighting (also due to more confidence) (Dave - II, Johnny - II), becoming 'happy' (Eric – *B.Ya.3c*), and being inconsiderate of others' perceptions (Norman - II, *B.Ya.3d*). In terms of this alcohol-induced confidence and sexual behaviour, Jonathan and Dougie (*B.Ro.4b*) stated that when they are drunk they can talk to anyone and get it on with girls. In the context of the interview it was clear that to 'get it on with girls' meant some kind of sexual behaviour. Dave (II) said that drinking alcohol boosts his confidence. This made him feel good. He could do different things like talk to and flirt with

girls without needing his friends to help him. He said that some boys fight when they are drunk. Other changes that were reported to occur when boys drink were[21] that some people get angry, others go 'weird' and some 'don't care what others think' (Norman (II). George's (*B.Ya.3d*) opinion chimes with this point[22]. He said that people act badly when they drink because 'they won't think about it, just do it'.

Did the girls report changes in the boys' behaviour when boys drink alcohol? Louise (*G.Ya.3d*) said that they 'talk a load of rubbish' and that they are 'different' when they are drunk. Annie stated that the reasons that they drink are because they are shy and they want more confidence. This is the only girls' reference to confidence as the driving factor to the changes in boys' behaviour. Lauren (*G.Ya.3c*) reported that the boys she knew 'like to get naked and run around'. Although Lucy (II) said that the boys she socialized with were mainly 'happy to dance', she added that five percent of them become violent. However, as self-proclaimed leader of the group, she was quick to get them under control: 'the violent ones I would tell them to go home'. Indeed, physical fighting appears to be the main difference in behaviour noticed by the girl participants (Rhona – II, Kat – G.Ya.3a, Carly – *G.Ya.3c*). Kat said that when boys are drunk they get rough, loud and start fighting. Carly (*G.Ya.3c*) concurred saying that some boys she knows get aggressive. When probed as to where this opinion came from, she said both from her mother and from direct observation of drunken boys when she has been in their company and she has been sober.

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[21] Following on from a discussion about a *Hollyoaks* image
[22] Following on from a discussion about a *Shameless* image

4.2.1 Drinking alcohol and acting 'out of character': moods and emotions

This reported change of behaviour is preceded or caused by the change of mood or emotion caused by drinking. Heidi (II) said alcohol would 'amplify your mood'. This was matched by Lucy's (II) account that alcohol would 'times your emotion by about a hundred. Quite honest, like if you were happy and you drink, it'll make you more happy but if you're sad, like even just a little bit, and then you drink you'll be crying your eyes out by the end of the night' and that it will 'egg on what you are feeling and give you a false confidence'. It seems that girls 'need booze for confidence' (Annie – *G.Ya.3d*, Eva- II). Perhaps the reason that girls behave differently when they are drunk is because alcohol makes them feel different. They experience different, and/or different levels of, emotions when they drink which cause them to act in an out-of-the-ordinary way. Kai (II) stated that there are 'different types' of drunken person: that is, depending on what type of person you are, or what mood you are in, this will determine what type of drunken person you will become. Norman (II) said that when girls drink 'they show more feeling, they kinda show themselves'. Girls drink to boost their confidence (Dave-II) and to feel happy (*B.Ya.3a*, *B.Ya.4a*) (whereas boys, according to Bruce and Calum, (*B.Ya.3a*) are happy anyway). Perhaps the participants drank because it gave them a license to behave differently (especially with the opposite sex) regardless of whether they were drunk or not. This would tie in with the previously mentioned phenomenon of girls *pretending* to be drunk. Why would they pretend to be drunk, if not to take advantage of the free rein to behave in an out-of-the-ordinary way?

Boy participants only discussed emotions in individual interviews. This may have been because they were

'performing' only in front of me rather than in front of me and their peers; discussion of personal emotions may not have been an accepted part of their peer repertoire as it does not align with hegemonic masculinity. Another reason could be that, in the individual interviews, we had more time and therefore more opportunity to discuss their drinking experiences in depth. Dave (II), Johnny (II) and Norman (II) all mentioned confidence with reference to their own drinking behaviour in that gaining confidence through alcohol was a positive thing and was a reason for drinking. Finally, Frank (II) offered an insightful and sensitive remark about drinking (not his own) and emotions:

> Frank: [...] people have a lot more courage when they're drunk, so they say, you know, things that they wouldn't normally [...] I remember somebody told me a little like thing about that. I can't remember what it was, just like your drunken body speaks a sober heart, or something like that.

4.3 Drinking alcohol and self-conscious gender presentations

This exploration of identity-presentation will now focus on gender. It is important to note that even when participants are presenting gender differences focussing on the opposite sex – for example, boys talking about the way girls drink – in doing so they are allocentrically defining their identity. They are saying 'I am this because I am not that'.

Who was reported to drink more: girls or boys? Mainly girls reported that it was equal, although a few stated that boys do not drink as much as girls. Lucy (II) said girls can handle drink, whereas Eva (II) reported: 'I don't think boys get as drunk, and they can kind of handle it a bit more. Whereas girls cry and scream … boys aren't really like that'. In terms of gender and frequency of alcohol consumption, according to boys, girls either drank the same, or more than boys. Was this because

'boys have more sense'? (*B.Ya.3a*). Kai (II) said that 'according to science girls can't drink as much as boys'. Reasons as to why girls drink more than boys were that 'girls faff more' (*B.Ya.3a*) and that they drink because they do not have any other hobbies or sports to occupy themselves. There may be a third-person effect at play with accounts of drinking: it is never 'me' or 'my social group' that drinks the most. Rather it is always someone else or some other group.

Heidi's (II) interview produced some fascinating insights into her perceptions of boys' opinions and gender-stereotyping. She thought that boys may think that girls are 'timid' when drinking and may choose 'more feminine drinks like gin and tonic'. As to how girls and boys may act when drunk she said that girls may 'become tipsy, giggle and may faint' whereas boys may 'just continue to drink and become more manly'. She could not explain to me what she meant by 'more manly'. To understand this exchange better here is some detail about Heidi. She was a sweet girl with dark curly hair, small eyes and a rosebud-shaped mouth. Overall the difference in experiences between her and some of the other participants was striking: no boys, no relationships, no drinking. She had only heard of one person in her school who drank and she did not know any boys at all. The fact that she had had little experience, she said, with drinking or relationships meant that she relied heavily on the media for her ideas on these topics. She was articulate and used language that was unusual for a fifteen-year-old; yet she was also bashful and unsure. Often she said her life was 'unextraordinary'. Regardless of her 'unextraordinary' life, she was sensitive towards issues on gender and drinking.

Carl (II) also shared some interesting opinions regarding gendered drinking. He thought that it would 'be funny' if a boy

were drinking wine or a cocktail because it is 'not normal'.

Norman (II) also discussed gendered drinking:

> **What would they think if girls were drinking beer or…?**
>
> Norman: Kinda tomboy. My cousin drinks beer at like a football game but she doesn't ever drink stuff like that (cocktails).
>
> **Yeah, and what would happen if boys were drinking, like, cocktails and stuff?**
>
> Norman: I'd say they were gay, probably (laughing)
>
> **Would you actually think they were gay or is that just gay as a sort of word to describe them?**
>
> Norman: Well, I'd say…kinda camp. I wouldn't say, like, permanently 'you're gay'. I'd just say, 'you're acting as if you're gay'.
>
> **And do you think they'd get the piss taken out of them from their mates if they were drinking something like that?**
>
> Norman: Probably most of them.

Later when asked if girls who drink a 'masculine' drink like beer would be mocked by their friends, he said:

> Norman: Well, I don't really know. Obviously I'm not a girl
>
> **But you can imagine.**
>
> Norman: I think they'd have their views on it at the start, but then just get used to it. But for a boy you can't really do that. Like, everything needs to be like this.
>
> **What do you mean?**

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> Norman: Like, all the boys need to do this thing and all the girls need to do this thing but girls don't really care if a girl starts doing, like, football or a male sport...but boys'll be like, more influenced if a boy's doing a girl's sport.

Here we can see how constrained Norman thinks boys are in terms of gender rules. Rules for girls are more lenient and it appears that girls would not care if the 'rules' were broken, whereas boys are less merciful. Also interesting to note is how a discussion about alcoholic drinks soon leads into a broader discussion regarding gender rules – here he also talks of sport. I suggest this highlights the social significance alcohol holds as being symbolic of other gendered identities including, as seen previously in the excerpt (I'd say they were gay, probably'), sexual identities.

Above I have explored participants' drinking and identity-presentation in terms of maturity, acting differently and the related shift in emotions and gender. The examples given are only some of the most 'obvious' presentations; every comment and opinion offered in an interview or group discussion, together with physical appearance, accent, body language and social interaction, is, to an extent, a presentation, creation or affirmation of identity. I will now turn to consider the use of discourses on alcohol in the construction of gendered identities.

4.4 Discourses on gender-appropriate alcohol use

One way of considering how alcohol constitutes gendered identities is through discourses. Lyons and Willott's (2008) study offered an interesting analysis of discourses related to how drinking alcohol contributes to the construction of feminine identity. Lyons and Willott noted four discourses (as

outlined in Chapter Two). I will now note how these discourses were utilised by my participants.

The first discourse is the equality discourse. There was no use of this discourse by the participants in this present study. My interpretation of this lack of evidence is that participants felt drinking to be inevitable for both sexes and therefore would not be raised as an issue of equality. This suggests that they were unaware of traditional gender norms that might restrict girls from drinking, or considered them irrelevant to their lives. The second discourse noted by Lyons and Willott is the double standard discourse. There were many examples of the double standard discourse in my data. Much of this data regarded different consequences of drinking and/or being drunk for girls than for boys. One instance of the double standard discourse was from Bryn (B.Ya.4) who had at the start of the interview said that girls are fun when they are drunk, yet who later states 'they're wee sluts when they drink'. The third discourse described by Lyons and Willott is the control and responsibility discourse. There were many instances of this discourse in my data. Frank (II) thought the girls he knew were too young to be drinking. Later he stated that he found girls drinking to be irresponsible. Boys also voiced their concern that girls might jeopardise their future job prospects if they drank too much alcohol. My research also had examples of girls adhering to this discourse. Lucy, as self-proclaimed leader of her social group, said she was always quick to keep the drunk boys under control. The final discourse noted by Lyons and Willott is the vulnerability discourse. This was a very popular discourse amongst my participants. Bruce warned of girls being likely to get raped when they are drunk. This tone of concern for girls' wayward drinking behaviour was commonplace in the boys' accounts. Girls also offered examples of this discourse:

> Milly: Sometimes, yeah, like if they're really drunk in like *Skins* or *Shameless* or something.
>
> Molly: Girls usually get used though. Whereas guys don't.
>
> Milly: In TV shows they portray girls as being really, really vulnerable when they're drunk.

What of alcohol contributing to the construction of masculine identity? De Visser and Smith (2007) revealed that many men believe that drinking and being able to hold their drink are important components of masculinity. In terms of my boy participants their discourses around alcohol focused on issues of maturity, sexual behaviour, aggression and popularity.

Now consideration will be given to participants' interpretations of media portrayals of alcohol.

5. Media portrayals of people drinking alcohol

5.1 Perceptions of media portrayals of females drinking alcohol

Girls felt that media portrayals of girls' drinking were often associated with parties, sex and fighting. Programmes like *Skins* showed 'drunken mistakes'. Alcohol in media portrayals, it was thought, clouds judgements and can lead to regretful actions such as taking other drugs, having sex (including unprotected sex), catching diseases and unwanted pregnancies (Rhona-II). Celebrities were also mentioned as being a deterrent. The lifestyles of American actor Lindsay Lohan and British singers Lily Allen and Amy Winehouse, were deemed excessive and these celebrities were considered to have drink problems. Heidi (II) said the number of girls drinking excessively in the media is increasing. In line with this concern, Rhona (II) thought it would be beneficial if the media could feature alcohol consumption in moderation and show

people making 'good choices'. Rhona was an interesting participant. She was the only one in her group who did not drink; instead she adopted the role of carer or 'guardian angel', often warning drunken friends against acting in certain ways lest they regret their actions in the morning. She was their sober conscience. In light of this, we can see why Rhona was keen for media portrayals of alcohol consumption to promote 'good choices', like the ones, presumably, she helps her friends make.

Another perception girls had about how girls were depicted in the media was that when they were drinking they were engaged in sexual activities. There was much prompted discussion on this topic. One example discussed the characters Sarah and Zoe in *Hollyoaks*. Zoe was going out with Sarah's father. After a drunken night, friends Zoe and Sarah end up having sex. Another example involved Pandora and Cook in *Skins.* Pandora and Cook were at a pyjama party together. After drinking vodka and (inadvertently on Pandora's part) eating MDMA[23] chocolate brownies, sexually-inexperienced Pandora and sexually-very-experienced Cook stay up until the morning when a game of twister ended in sex. Most likely these examples were given as the interviews corresponded in time with the storylines on television.

Lucy (II) and Rhona (II) discussed media portrayals of girls drinking and sex in a precautionary way. Lucy was strong, kind and very principled. She was clearly influenced by her father Steve. Her father grew up in a deprived area and as a teenager was involved in heavy drinking and violence. He was adamant that his old lifestyle would not to be repeated by his children. Here is Lucy's take on alcohol portrayals in the media:

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[23]The chemical component in the drug ecstasy

What normally happens in those programmes[24] when people are drinking?

Lucy: They either have sex, fight or it can just be a good night. In *Skins* it usually leads to a bad scenario every time.

What would be a bad scenario?

Lucy: Waking up next to a guy you don't even know, it could be, yeah, you wake up and you're in his house, you don't know where you are, or you could wake up in an alleyway and you don't know what's happened to you, you can't remember, or if you just can't remember the night, the last night full-stop. I mean, heaven knows what could've happened.

From Lucy's comments we can see that the discussion of drinking in the media prompted thoughts and concerns of what might happen to girls in real life if they are drinking. Milly and Molly also told me about girls drinking and sexual behaviour in the media:

So, different things happen to boys and girls when they get drunk? Is that the same as what you see on TV and in films?

Milly: Sometimes, yeah, like if they're really drunk in like *Skins* or *Shameless* or something.

Molly: Girls usually get used though

Milly: Yeah

Molly: Whereas guys don't.

Girls get used?

Molly: Yeah, as in like...

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[24] *Skins, Hollyoaks* and *Shameless*

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Milly: In TV shows they portray girls as being really, really vulnerable when they're drunk.

Molly: Like slutty kind of thing. Like, if you get drunk, a guy'll usually pull a girl and then the next day be like…

Milly: Ignore her

Molly: Yeh. And it could be one who was really good friends and stuff. And then she could end up having feelings for him, because she thought that…like,

Milly: Actually meant something

Molly: Yeah, and then she'll get hurt

Milly and Molly were the only two participants I interviewed in a pair. They were best friends; very comfortable with each other, sharing jokes, warmly mocking each other and recounting stories together. Milly seemed quite confident and chatty. Molly was shy. She had a very long fringe and wore a hat that covered her eyes completely. At one stage Milly got upset when we were discussing boys and relationships; her eyes shone with tears. At another point Molly told of a difficult time concerning a boy she liked. If we return now to the quote above we can see how the discussion develops from a focus on TV programmes to a more general focus on relationships. Taking into account their real-life experiences, we can see in the above quote why their interpretations of media portrayals of girls drinking quickly turns to focus on the more negative consequences of the situation.

To summarise girls' perceptions of how girls' drinking is portrayed in the media, it is usually linked to parties, sexual adventures and fighting. If we explore further how these

media portrayals matter for the girl participants, then it seems that it is the precautionary tales that are salient: alcohol can equate to losing control and acting in regrettable ways. Often these regrettable actions involve the opposite sex, be it getting pregnant, catching diseases, waking up next to a boy and being unable to recall what happened, or having sex and developing painful unrequited feelings.

What of boys' perceptions of media portrayals of girls drinking? The boys discussed a range of ideas on how the media portrayed girls' drinking. Frank's (II) impression of girls' drinking from the media was that they were throwing up, coming home late and even being raped. He said that the programme *Skins* often portrayed girls having good fun 'but I think in the end they do something that they regret'. Dave (II) thought that the portrayals of girls' drinking in the media, for example in *Shameless*, were like 'lassies oot on the street, staggering, or getting pregnant.' Kai (*B.Ya.3e*) said of a *Shameless* character: 'when she gets drunk she starts doing the strip show', and in *Hollyoaks* 'girls get drunk and pole dance'. He also talked of a favourite film *Knocked Up*. The premise of the film is that a couple get drunk, have sex, and she gets pregnant, or 'knocked up'. Mike and Rodrigo (*B.Ya.3c*) also discussed girls' drinking as portrayed in *Shameless*: Debbie had just turned 16 and she and Carl get 'wasted' on a bottle of vodka. Rodrigo illustrated this point with another storyline, this time from *Hollyoaks*, whereby a love triangle among Nancy, Chris and Ravi is played out, but only when they are drunk. Therefore, the boys' perceptions of girls' drinking as it is displayed in the media involve negative outcomes such as staggering around and throwing up. And, echoing the girls' responses, they also involve sexual behaviour both in a more

playful sense (doing a strip show) and in a precautionary sense (they might be raped).

5.2 Perceptions of media portrayals of males drinking alcohol

A range of media were discussed as portraying boys' drinking alcohol. These included *Still Game* (*B.Ya.4a*), *Emmerdale* (*B.Ya.3a*, *B.Ya.3e*) and the *Simpsons* (*B.Ya.3e*) and films such as *American Pie* (*B.Ya.3c*) and *Green Street* (Dave- II, *B.Ya.3c*, *B.Ya.3f*). Behaviours generally associated with these portrayals were parties (Dave -II), football matches (Dave-II), fighting (Dave-II, Norman-II, *B.Ya.3f*) and sexual behaviour (Kai – II, Norman – II, *B.Ya.3c*, *B.Ya.4a*, *B.Ya.3e*). Two participants referred to *Hollyoaks*, stating that characters get drunk, make wrong decisions and fall out with people (Carl-II). The most common programmes cited when asked about boys being portrayed drinking alcohol in the media were *Skins* and *Shameless* (nearly all participants). This is why Kai liked *Shameless*:

> Kai: Yeah, *Shameless*. Yeah, *Shameless*. I love like the start, I love the start of *Shameless*, the man just goes, "*Shameless* contains nudity, drug taking, sexual- scenes of a sexual nature, and alcohol. Available in HD" - (laughs.) I love that. They're brilliant.

Activities related to boys drinking in *Skins* and *Shameless* were having parties and speaking to lots of people, sexual behaviour, fighting, getting drunk and going home with strangers, ending up in unfamiliar places, and being unable to get out of bed in the morning. Tom (*B.Ya.3a*) said it looked like fun. Bryn (*B.Ya.4a*) said that in *Shameless* they have sex every week, which sometimes the girls regret; Greg (*B.Ya.4a*) said that in *Skins* Cook has sex every week. Ally and Sandy (*B.Ya.3f*) said *Skins* often involved fighting and violence when boys are drinking because they do not know what they are

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doing. Perhaps, Kai (II) speculated, by having characters drink alcohol it made 'it easier for people to do crazy stuff'. There were very little data about girls' perceptions of general media portrayals of boys' drinking. One example was from Milly and Molly who said that Russell Brand and Pete Doherty, whom they saw as the two prominent male drinkers in the media, project a bad image because they are addicted to alcohol.

5.3 Interpretations of images of alcohol use

Let us look now at three images from *Hollyoaks* and *Skins* to augment our understanding of participants' perceptions of media portrayals of drinking. In order to prompt further discussion about the topic of media and drinking alcohol, I presented the participants with these images[25]. The participants had varied knowledge of the programmes, but all were at least familiar with them. These images, although not presented as 'images of drinking', were shown at the end of an interview section about media and drinking. The girls' interpretations of the images were far less detailed than the boys'. A reason for this may be due to girls' discussions being generally more relaxed than boys'. The boys' groups were often quiet and not very forthcoming, or else there were one or two obvious 'leaders' in the group. Offering the boys' groups images to discuss was often met with an air of relief. No longer was the focus on them, but on the image and the characters. It meant they had something concrete to discuss, which they liked.

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[25] Providing we had time, which unfortunately was not always the case

Image 1 Alcohol: *Hollyoaks*

The first image (**Image 1 Alcohol**: *Hollyoaks*) from *Hollyoaks* portrays only girls drinking. Here Sarah (left), Nancy (middle) and Hannah (right) are in the Student's Union bar drinking. The girls' interpretations of this image included arguments, falling out with each other, getting angry and bitching about each other and other people. Prompted by this image, Rhona (II) said that when discussions are fuelled by alcohol, people are more likely to speak their mind. In this same vein, Heidi (II) suggested that alcohol alters people's judgements and can exacerbate situations negatively.

The boys' interpretations of this image corresponded with what they told me they knew about drinking in real life. For example if they associated drinking with fighting and violence, then the image was interpreted through this same lens. When asked what they thought might happen later on in the programme, Chris thought 'a lot of shouting and fighting and stuff', with which Sandy concurred 'Keep drinking there'd be a fight' (*B.Ya.3f*). Carl (II) described how the girls are on a night out and the girls on the left and right have fallen out with the girl in the middle because 'I think she was aggressive when she

was drunk, and she said like nasty things to them two. And they're trying to make it look as if they don't ken her. They're looking away.' This description followed on from a discussion of how girls probably do not like boys drinking because they get aggressive. Dave and Mike shared this idea, stating that drinking has 'made them different' (which chimes with the girls' interpretations), and that they will end up fighting. Norman (II) imagined that the events of the night could be different because they were drinking: 'like you can see something going on but you won't go up and say cause it'll start something, but if you're like that (drunk), you'll just go up and say…it gives them more confidence.'

Some participants (*B.Ro.4c*, *B.Ya.3b*) thought these girls were drinking because they were depressed, and perhaps had fallen out with their boyfriends, resulting in an argument or fight; Harvie (*B.Ya.4a*) suggested that one of the girls had probably fallen out with her boyfriend, and they were 'getting steaming to try get over it'. Here Calum gave the other participants in his group an accurate description of the story in this image: 'the one in the middle slept with the one on the left and so they're sitting arguing why they did it and how it happened…cos they were both out their nuts, they crashed a car and went into a hotel'. Group *B.Ya.3d* had a different idea about what was happening. When this group were asked to respond to the image, and whether the discussion the girls in the image were having had anything to do with the alcohol they replied:

> Adam: No, maybe

> Ross: Coz maybe if they were drunk they would like talk about things they wouldn't talk about when they weren't drunk.

Martin: But they don't look as if they've drunk that much

In sum, the above image elicited a range of interpretations. The girl participants' suggested things like arguments, anger and bitching as a result of their drinking. They boys' interpretations matched this, adding potential reasons for the arguments and drinking were due to boyfriend-related depression which they are 'trying to get over' by drinking.

Image 2 Alcohol: *Skins*

The next image from *Skins* (**Image 2 Alcohol:** *Skins*) shows the character Cook in the bedroom of his friend Pandora's house. Pandora was having a girly pyjama party and Cook gate-crashed by climbing in the window in the hope of getting together with a girl. He is holding a bottle of vodka. Someone has just entered the room. All participants had either seen this episode of *Skins* or were familiar with the programme and the character Cook. Interpretations of this image mainly focused on getting caught drinking (possibly a real issue for some

participants), and the likelihood that he is going to have sex that evening. Kai thought that he had just been caught 'having pleasure time', presumably meaning masturbating. Norman's (II) response to this image caused him to consider what the consequences would be for him were he to be in Cook's position.

> Norman: He's just been found by his mother drinking. He's dead worried.
>
> **What she's gonna say to him?**
>
> Norman: "Get out my house!"
>
> **Is that what your mum would say to you if she found you with a bottle of vodka?**
>
> Norman: Probably, yeah. She'd ground me or something.
>
> **Yeah. Is that, like, the worst punishment that you can get, get grounded?**
>
> Norman: Depends, like... like, you can say grounded but it means just go in and watch TV or play a game or go out and play with friends. If you get caught with that you'd probably get battered as well.

With this as a potential punishment for being caught drinking it is understandable that he is in no rush to start. Ally and Sandy (*B.Ya.3f*) thought that although alcohol would not have an effect on Cook's sexual behaviour (it was thought he would be having sex all the time regardless of whether or not he was drinking alcohol), alcohol would make him more aggressive. Dave (II) also gives his opinion on Cook's personality. Cook was Dave's favourite character:

> Dave: ... He's at a party and he's got a bottle of vodka in his haun (hand), aye, so he's been drinking.
>
> **And does the fact that he's been drinking vodka affect what's happening to him that night, do you think?**

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> Dave: Aye, because I've, I've got this on DVD – he's em, he'd been in the cupboard with a lassie and they've come through to next door. So…(pause)
>
> **What do you think of him as a character?**
>
> Dave: He's mad. He's funny.
>
> **Yeah – who's your favourite guy character?**
>
> Dave: Cook, him.
>
> **Yeah? What do you like about him?**
>
> Dave: Just all the things he gets up to. His seventeenth birthday and all that, he gets drugged up and everything. He just has a good time.

So Dave, who in my view seemed to be nothing like Cook, liked Cook because he takes lots of drugs and has a good time.

How did the girls' interpret this image? Heidi (II), who had seen this episode, offered a detailed description:

> Heidi: Oh yeah, I've seen this episode. He's arrived at Pandora's party which is, you know, limited to girls only and, yeah, I suppose he wants to infiltrate and, you know, provide them with some alcohol…
>
> **Yeah – so what do you think about him?**
>
> Heidi: Oh (laughs) he's rather promiscuous, really. I suppose, well, he's alright – he's one of those kind of, you know, he's tough but sensitive guys, which, you know…
>
> **Do you prefer him to Freddie?**
>
> Heidi: Yeah, I do actually. Yeah, Freddie's just pathetic (Laughing.)

Even the most innocent of participants Heidi preferred Cook (the 'crazy' character) rather than Freddie (the gorgeous, sensitive one) who I would have predicted to be her favourite character. Earlier in her interview she said she did not like

Freddie because everyone else liked him. This was not the first time that Heidi explicitly stated that she did not like some aspect of media for the sole reason that it was very popular with everyone else. This once again illustrates how choice of media can be seen as a presentation of identity. The other girl participants' interpretations of this image all suggested that because Cook is drunk he is looking for girls. The consensus interpretation of this image was that of Cook being drunk, aggressive and looking for girls and sex. Participants also responded to this image by identifying him as their favourite character.

Image 3 Alcohol: *Skins*

The second image from *Skins* (**Image 3 Alcohol: *Skins***) portrays both girls and boys drinking. Here, whilst on a school trip to Europe, Michelle is seen drinking with men in a bar. There was a limited response to this image from the girls. Rhona (II) and Carly (*G.Ya.3c*) said they were likely to have sex because they were drinking. Heidi (II) thought the vodka they are drinking would relax them, perhaps to 'provide a distraction and amplify the mood'. The boys offered much more detailed

interpretations. Some said it was likely that the people in the image would get really drunk (Ally -*B.Ya.3f*) and 'end up lying there paralytic' (Carl – II, *B.Ya.3b*). In fact Frank (II) thought that because it appeared to be a celebration, perhaps a stag night, it might actually be questionable if they were *not* drinking. Norman (II) suggested that because they were from the army it was OK to drink as they do not have many opportunities to do so. He also said that drinking is 'good until [it] goes bad...some people get angry, others weird, some don't care what others think'. Richie said they would probably fight later, and Sandy concluded that someone would be arrested. The rest of the responses to this image all referred to drinking and sexual behaviour:

> **What's going on here then?**
>
> Calum: They're all having a big booze party, and she's looking at the guy, thinking he's suave.
>
> **What do you think's going to happen later on?**
>
> Bruce: They're going to have sex.
>
> Calum: Probably, aye.
>
> **Has that got anything to do with the fact they're drinking vodka?**
>
> Bruce: Aye, probably.
>
> Calum: Yeh, probably.
>
> Darren: Sometimes, like, if the guy's no had anything to drink he can like take advantage, of the girl...
>
> Calum: Aye

Darren: ...cos they don't know what the girl's- don't know...

Tom: Either that or they're going sailing (laughter)

Darren: They can do whatever they want.
(*B.Ya.3a*)

Dave (II) thought 'she's steaming and she's flirting with everybody. I think she's getting them to buy her drinks and everything.' Later on he said they would 'probably sleep together or like, I don't know – have a quickie in the toilet.' Johnny thought she was flirting too, that she was 'steamin' and that they were likely to have sex later because she was drunk. Jack thought 'they're all going to get mad wi' it and she's going to dae him' (she's going to have sex with him). Ally (*B.Ya.7*) agreed and also stated that had they been sober, she would not have had sex. The participants in *B.Ya.3e* said it was likely that Michelle would go to the man's house for 'a roastie toastie' (sex) because they were drunk. For this image, then, the majority of response were from the boy participants. Most interpretations were about sexual behaviour, with a few related to occasions such as a stag night or army night out and being violent and getting arrested.

6. Perceptions of the influence of media portrayals of alcohol use

I will look now at some examples of whether participants themselves perceived media to be influential in terms of drinking; first for girls and then for boys.

When asked if the media influences girls' drinking, a range of responses were offered. Some stated that television (in particular programmes like *Skins* and *Hollyoaks*) might make drinking look good (for other people), thus implying that

people could be influenced. This influence was, as usual, linked to girls outwith their social group, illustrating the third-person effect whereby it is thought that it is not you, but other people, who are influenced by media. As with earlier examples of precautionary media, some (*G.Ya.3b*) thought that the portrayal of girls drinking in *Skins* and *Shameless* showed them 'what not to do'. Interestingly, Lucy (II) thought that boys get expectations from films that show girls who are drunk and vulnerable, and so can be 'moulded', presumably in a desirable and sexual way. Later in the interview, perhaps having had time to think further about the concept of media influence, Lucy wondered:

> Lucy: It might, I mean, some of them may well make drinking look good.

> **Yeah, which ones do you think make drinking look good?**

> Lucy: Maybe on *Hollyoaks*, *Skins* as well. It makes it look like a laugh because I don't think they realise the circumstances it does actually happen. I think they think 'oh that sounds like a good night', but they don't think this actually happened to people. They just think, oh laughter and you know, drink makes you have a good time, makes you feel good, and I think that's why they do it, I think it does influence you.

Bruce (*B.Ya.3a*) thought that the girls they knew were influenced by celebrities: 'I just think that girls, see like Paris Hilton or Britney Spears or whatever, they just think, oh let's be like them, she'll just smoke and drink and take drugs and stuff'. Bob and Eric (*B.Ya.3c*) talked of how they thought girls got their opinion about drinking alcohol from TV, and in particular from documentaries. Later in the discussion Bob returned to this concept, unprompted, and said 'see when you think about it, all the soaps you've got and all that, that could influence them...'. Other boys (*B.Ro.4c*, *B.Ya.3a*) concluded

that the media *could* influence drinking but that it was more likely to be their peer group than television that was influential. This echoed some girls' accounts where it was thought that girls drinking alcohol was a combination of media and peer pressure.

When asked if the media influences boys' drinking a range of responses were offered. Eric (B.Ya.3c) said that he thought TV programmes could influence other people and 'us' as well. It was suggested that media could have a deterrent affect: for example, when drinking was portrayed with violence (Carl – II). Norman (II) said that a lot of alcohol in films 'shows kids how not to do it. It shows them acting cool then spewing'. Others said that it was not the media that influenced their or others' behaviour but rather peer pressure (Frank – II, Kai – II, B.Ro.4c), or that it would happen regardless: 'I just dae it anyway' (Johnny – II, B.Ya.3d). Frank (II) stated that, depending on how much people can relate to media content, it can determine how influential it may be. Jonathan (B.Ro.4c) said that, insofar as alcohol is concerned, friends are more influential than the media 'because you ken them better, you ken them, their daily life, what they do'.

There was very little response from girls. One response was from participants in *G.Ya.3a* who said that some of their opinions of boys' drinking may be shaped by *Skins.* It confirmed what they already knew; that is, that boys express their sexual frustrations more openly when they are drunk.

When talking about whether others were influenced by media portrayals the participants were vague, stating things like 'it could kinda influence folk to dae it' and 'I think it's like films that makes them do it' (*B.Ya.3a*, *B.Ya.3c*, *B.Ya.3d*). One group of boys (*B.Ya.3e*) suggested that if girls have not seen boys

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drinking in real life they may get their opinions from the media. When the girl participants were talking about presumed influence they referred only to boys (although it was only two participants who referred to this). Lucy (II) said that boys might want to copy the things they see in the media.

Given the focus of the thesis, there were fewer data than expected on this topic of perceptions of the influence of media portrayals of alcohol use. I think the simple reason for this is that the participants did not engage with this issue because it often was responded to with a straightforward 'no they were not influenced'. Despite probing into reasons as to why, that avenue of discussion was short as participants would stand by the original statement of 'no it isn't the media', 'it's more peers' or 'it just happens', as though it were an inevitable part of their life.

7. Conclusion

This chapter has revealed that the participants reported varied experiences of drinking alcohol. Alcohol featured prominently in the lives of most participants, regardless of whether or not they actually drank it. It is not surprising, therefore, that alcohol affected different social relationships, whether with parents, friends or potential/actual romantic/sexual partners.

Participants' general understandings of *media* portrayals of *girls* drinking involved parties, sex and fighting. To some extent, the reported *real-life* experiences of girls' drinking correspond with those reported in the media. Although there was less fighting and fewer parties reported in real life, if we understand fighting to be aggression and parties to be socializing in a broader sense, then media interpretations and reported real-life accounts do correspond to an extent. With

regards to depictions of sex and alcohol in the media – and if
again it is understood in its broader sense of romantic/sexual
relations with the opposite sex - then these media-portrayals
also accord with participants' accounts of their experiences.
Participants' general understanding of media-portrayals of
boys being drunk involved promiscuous sex and physical
aggression. Again it can be suggested tentatively that the real-
life experiences of some of the (more working-class) boys'
drinking correspond to the media-portrayals. Accounts of
drunken sexual encounters and physical aggression were
reported to be common outcomes of boys' drinking. Parents'
behaviour played a significant role in some boys' drinking
perceptions. This was not something interpreted as being
portrayed by the media.

A caveat is in order. My impression was that those boys who
appeared to be more middle-class, and who were the same age
as the more materially-deprived boys, did not share the
latter's experiences of drinking and its associated behaviours
of promiscuous sex and physical aggression. Although this is
suggestive of a class distinction, the empirical data is not
conclusive. Not every participant talked about their own
experiences of alcohol. Furthermore, it may be speculated
that the boys who were interviewed individually were more
working-class. They were more likely to discuss their own
experiences during the individual interviews rather than during
group discussions. The data may have been different had more
of the participants whom I interviewed individually been
middle-class. Also relevant is that the data here are not only
about participants' own experiences, but also about others'
and about the expectations of others' experiences. This adds
another dimension of uncertainty when attempting to
ascertain any class distinctions because it is not known who

the other people being discussed are. No class distinctions or patterns were discernible from the data produced by the girl participants. There is something tantalising in the data here but unfortunately, for these reasons, it is something I am unable to tease out.

This chapter also presented accounts of the pivotal role that alcohol plays in the negotiations of sexual behaviour, both in real life and in the media. Being drunk, or at least pretending to be drunk, may be understood as a process that is useful for participants when trying out perceived gender-appropriate identities as they engage in their relationships[26]. This provides the necessary context from which to approach the next chapter on sexual and romantic relationships.

In parts, it has been shown how participants' discussions of drinking alcohol often slip between accounts of media-portrayals and accounts of real life. This suggests that, for the participants, their real lives and the media-portrayals are closely connected, and that their perceptions of gender-appropriate drinking do associate with portrayals of drinking alcohol in the media. Their interpretations of media-portrayals of alcohol are arrived at partly through the lens of their personal experiences. Thereby, if sex and aggression, for example, are commonplace in (reports of) participants' lives it is arguably not surprising that these experiences were used to interpret the media-portrayals. This is the 'powerful audience' position. The other position is the 'powerful media' position: that is, that these behaviours are taking place in the participants' lives as a result of media influence. Based on both the participants' reports of drinking alcohol and on the media's influence, their alcohol-related behaviours and their

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[26] This will be explored further in the Chapter Seven.

expectations appear to be influenced less by the media and more by their friends and peers in 'real life'.

This chapter sought to answer three questions. The first is: 'How do teenagers' understandings of gender-appropriate alcohol-use relate to media portrayals of alcohol use?' Media portrayals were not reported to relate to teenagers' understandings of gender-appropriate alcohol-use. Although real-life and media portrayals correspond with regard to alcohol, a causal relationship cannot be shown.

The second question that this chapter sought to answer is: 'Is Milkie's "influence of presumed media influence" theory a useful way to understand the media's position in teenagers' lives, and specifically their understandings of gender-appropriate alcohol use?'. It has been argued here that neither presumed media influence nor straightforward media influence was strong for the teenagers' understandings of gender-appropriate alcohol. Despite this finding, I still feel that Milkie's theory was a useful way to understand the media's position in teenagers' lives, and specifically their understandings of gender-appropriate alcohol use. Participants did not report that they learned gender-appropriate behaviour with regards to drinking alcohol from the media. They did not report that the media influenced their understandings of drinking alcohol. Nor did participants presume that the opposite sex was influenced by the media in their understandings of gender-appropriate drinking. However, it was through utilising Milkie's theory as a heuristic device that I was able to arrive at these conclusions.

The third question that this chapter sought to answer is: 'How are teenagers' understandings of gender-appropriate behaviours with regards to drinking alcohol used in the construction of gendered identities?. Drinking alcohol, and

expectations thereof, was important in the construction of gendered identities. Learning what was gender-appropriate with regards to drinking contributed to establishing gendered identities. However, the sources from which participants learned this were more likely to be peers and family than from media portrayals.

Chapter Six
Teenagers' construction of gendered identities: experiences, perceptions and expectations of sexual/romantic relationships

1. Introduction

2. Participants' experiences of sexual/romantic relationships

   2.1 Girls' accounts of their experiences of sexual and romantic relationships
   2.2 Boys' accounts of their experiences of sexual and romantic relationships
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3. Participants' expectations of sexual/romantic relationships

   3.1 Participants' accounts of their expectations of sexual/romantic relationships
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4. Media portrayals of sexual/romantic relationships

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5. Accounts of media influence with regards to sexual/romantic relationships

   5.1 Girls' accounts of media influence with regards to sexual/romantic relationships
   5.2 Boys' accounts of media influence with regards to sexual/romantic relationships
   5.3 Girls' accounts of presumed media influence: what influence did girls think the media had on boys in terms of sexual/romantic relationships?
   5.4 Boys' accounts of presumed media influence with regards to sexual/romantic relationships: what

influence did boys think the media had on girls in terms of sexual/romantic relationships?

6.   Thematic integration of accounts of sexual/romantic relationships in real-life and media portrayals

  6.1   The importance of emotions in sexual/romantic relationships
  6.2   Gender difference and power/agency

7.   Discourses on gender-appropriate engagement in sexual/romantic relationships

8.   Conclusion

1. Introduction

Concern about sexual and romantic relationships was central to the participants' accounts of their lives. There was a discrepancy between those participants who reported significant experiences of relationships and those who reported none. The participants' accounts were rich, with some fascinating emergent themes. Their expectations about sexual/romantic relationships were derived from various sources, including peers, family and the media. Often it seemed that the discussion of romantic/sexual relationships was in fact more a discussion about identity construction and about acceptance by peers.

The chapter divides into five stages. First, reports from participants about their own experiences of sexual/romantic relationships are presented. This is not only to provide some context for the later sections of the chapter, but also as a way in which to later understand the participants' interpretations and understandings of expectations and media portrayals of sexual/romantic relationships. As will become apparent, media portrayals are often interpreted through the lens of real-life experience. The second sections explore participants' accounts of expectations of sexual/romantic relationships, including the perceived origin of these expectations that include family, friends, peers and the media. This section also includes participants' views of what the opposite sex anticipate in relationships. Third, participants' interpretations of media portrayals of sexual/romantic relationships are considered. The fourth section provides accounts of participants' perceptions of the influence which the media has on their sexual/romantic relationships. Participants' experiences, expectations and perceptions of media portrayals are drawn

together to highlight two overarching emergent themes: first, the importance of emotions in sexual/romantic relationships; and second, gender difference and power/agency. This will explain further how engaging in sexual/romantic relationships may constitute elements of the construction of gendered identities. Finally, consideration is given to discourses of gender-appropriate engagement in sexual/romantic relationships.

2. Participants' experiences of sexual and romantic relationships

2.1 Girls' accounts of experiences of sexual and romantic relationships

I begin by documenting some of the girl participants' accounts of their experiences of sexual/romantic relationships. Lucy, Rhona, Eva and Milly and Molly provided the most detailed accounts[27]. The first thing Lucy (II) said when I asked her if she had experience of a relationship was:

> I have had one relationship. At first, well this is the way he put it, at first he was just using me and he had wanted to get something out of…, but then he got to know me and I managed to wrap him round my finger. I think he thought I was… like every girlfriend I think he's ever had has been a pushover, he can tell them what to do and they'll do it. I'm completely different.

Throughout her interview, Lucy let me know how confident and in control she was of her life. I asked what initially attracted her to this boyfriend:

> His good personality. I mean, he was tall but I don't think all the girls liked the look of him, where his personality just made him look so nice to me and he just looked like such an amazing guy. He didn't look like he'd ever hurt anyone, but then again, that's a charm he's got.

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[27] Only for this section do I focus solely on Lucy, Rhona, Eva and Milly and Molly's accounts of their experiences - the rest of the chapter will consider all participants' accounts

She says almost in a cautionary manner 'but then again that's a charm he's got' as though, perhaps, all is not as good as it first appears. She seemed to realise that relationships may not always be rosy. The main issue of contention for this relationship was sex; at first her boyfriend only wanted the relationship to be sexual and this was problematic for Lucy. The relationship lasted for four months and one week. Lucy did not reveal the reason for the break-up.

Rhona (II) had had two 'pretty serious' relationships. She chose to talk about the one that had the most effect on her. They met on a school trip to Iceland. 'And he was just really nice, like he was sweet and kind, caring and that sort of thing. And we got on well together so it seemed like it could work.' They spent a lot of time together, often holding hands. In terms of sexual negotiations she said: 'well we've always spoken about anything we've decided to do. It's not really been like one-sided, it's more been both of us.' At the time of the interview they had recently split up because he had smoked cannabis; Rhona did not approve.

I have the impression that Eva's (II) recent relationship was the reason she had agreed to meet for a follow-up interview. She wanted to talk. Even Eva's own friends were kept in the dark about the relationship: 'they knew that he liked me but they thought that I didn't like him at all'. This is how her relationship started:

> I was quite surprised that I was picked out from the crowd. And then, it kind of was gradual like at first we just talked to each other, just friends. But he was like, oh I think you're really nice and stuff like that. And then ... we texted each other every night and then he started to text me telling me that from the moment he saw me he just wanted to get to know me...and then he started like telling me that he loved me and stuff which was a bit heavy for me. I was quite taken aback.

Obviously Eva was completely flattered to have been 'picked out from the crowd'. He made her feel special. He said 'I love you' after three months. However this was only by text-message. He could not say it to her face. She too would text 'I love you' but could not say it to his face because she would start laughing with embarrassment. It seemed, therefore, that texting played a significant role in the manifestation of emotions in this relationship. In terms of the sexual aspect of their relationship she said:

> Well I was quite scared 'cause he was two years older than me so I thought he would be expecting something out of it. But I wasn't ready, and he asked- like he said 'are you ready?' And I said 'no', but he was okay with that, which I really appreciated.

Apart from one day, their whole relationship was negotiated over MSN or by text-message. So in fact if she had said yes to sex the dynamics of their relationship would have had to change significantly – they would have had to spend time together in person. Eva finished the relationship because they did not know each other well enough. When I asked if she would have changed anything if she were to do it all again, she said 'I think I would have just like forgotten my fears and went out with him', which presumably means go out with him publicly. Eva seemed to harbour regret about the relationship, which she often referred to when discussing relationships, including her interpretations of media portrayals.

Milly and Molly told of a situation in which Milly fancied her older brother's best friend. The day before our interview Molly had informed the boy that Milly liked him. It remained unrequited:

> Molly: But he put it nicely. He said the age difference and the fact that her brother was his best friend was the

main problem as well. And like that's a rule as well, it's almost like, friends before boyfriends and stuff.

Milly: I don't like boys any more.

Molly: You will when you're older Milly, you will when you're older.

In more general terms I asked of their experiences of physical relationships. Molly said: 'because like I haven't gone that far and don't plan on doing that, until like I've found the right person who I actually trust and want to do it with. Rather than just waste it'.

The above accounts of romantic/sexual relationships are gleaned from the individual or paired interviews. Only vague reference was made to personal experiences of relationships in the group discussions. For example, girls in *G.Ya.3b*, when asked about relationships, said that boys 'talk behind your back' in a negative way; they care about sex and not personality. Carly (*G.Ya.3c*) mentioned that she liked someone because they had a lot in common. This illustrates that probably only a minority of participants had much sexual experience. Due to the sensitive nature of the topic I did not ask about participants sexual/romantic experiences in group discussions.

A range of relationship-related issues have been covered in the preceding paragraphs: Lucy's concern with control and sex; Rhona's principles regarding drug use; Eva's fear of others' opinions; Milly and Molly's rejection and fear of 'wasting sex' and a more general concern from the other girls about sex. There are no boys' accounts about girls' experiences of sexual/romantic relationships. I did not specifically ask, and nor did they proffer the information.

2.2 Boys' accounts of their experiences of sexual and romantic experiences

The boy participants reported few experiences of romantic/sexual relationships. Kai (II) told of a recent relationship. He liked her because:

> She was just, she wasn't like everyone else, she wasn't-she didn't fake anything. She was more herself and well if she didn't think it was funny she wouldn't go (puts on silly laugh) kind of thing. She'd just like, not laugh really... And, more realistic, she doesn't always- she's like me really, she doesn't always have to go out, she doesn't always have to drink, she doesn't always have to do this and that. Sometimes she just stays in, plays like Sims on her computer, or- And she's quite messy. She's like me...

We can see here how Kai thought she was 'like me really'. In this sense it seems that his choice of partner was helping to affirm his own identity. The relationship ended because she fancied another girl.

Norman (II) reported that he had been in a few relationships. His most recent relationship had lasted two months. However during these two months he did not even talk to the girl. He had heard that she liked him; he said he liked her. That was as far as it went. After two months of not talking he ended it because it was 'a waste of time'. Dave (II) had not had a relationship, or at least 'not a proper one; just experiences'. I asked Johnny (II) the same: have you had any relationships? 'Naw', he said, 'no lately. Normally go oot and winch somebody'. In other words Dave and Johnny had not had 'serious' relationships but rather sexual encounters.

Frank (II) discussed in some detail his views on relationships. Relationships for him, it seemed, were a tool with which boys could show off to each other and gain kudos and increase their

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reputation. He said that he had not been in any 'known' relationships. The relationships he had heard of at school normally lasted for a day or two. 'You do it to get popular'. Often, he said, a relationship would last for as long as it takes for enough other people to know about it, and then 'you just dump them'. This, Frank assured me, was not something that he had done:

> Well, I've never really just gone and you know pulled somebody just to get my rep up. I just don't believe in that, you know. I think... because I wouldn't like to say that I'm extremely popular but you know, I feel I've got enough friends and stuff like that, I don't feel like I need to show off.

If we follow the logic of Frank's quote above, it seems that the less popular you are generally, the more necessary it is to 'pull' somebody to improve 'your rep'. Below participants in *B.Ya.6* discuss what they know of relationships. Like Frank, they talked of short-term relationships:

> Adam: The weird thing is, you feel dead happy when someone asks you, but at school, it's either they ask you out – the first day you don't really do anything, the second day you kind of start hanging about, the second day...
>
> Kai: There's a bit of shyness.
>
> Adam: The next week, it's like you go down the town and all that, and then the second week, you just kinda can't stand each other. That's the average one. The second week you get, it's either you actually do like each other, so you're still with each other or you can't stand each other, you just get annoyed at everything the other person says.

We can see from this example and from the others presented above, that romantic and sexual relationships for these boys are at an embryonic stage. The boys' accounts appeared to be far more concerned with their social reputation than with the

actual relationship. There are no accounts from the girls about boys' experiences of sexual/romantic relationships.

2.3 Definitions of sexual/romantic relationships

Let us look now at participants' definitions of sexual/romantic relationships. Here I am reporting on all of the participants' responses. Participants often found it difficult to define their idea of a relationship. Heidi (II – in S4) had no experience of relationships, had no friends who were boys, and knew nothing of their lives:

> I suppose with relationships, you would think of, you know, monogamy and a kind of mutual like of one another. But that's becoming increasingly more incorrect, now. Oh, I don't know – that's difficult. I suppose just, maybe now, you know, there's two people who maybe have, like, kind of, I don't know – maybe, I suppose, well yeah, generally like, possibly – no, coz there are more than two people involved at times, so there's no average, really.

We can see how much Heidi struggled with this question. I felt that she was almost resigned to the situation (no contact with boys whatsoever) in which she found herself. She was not especially happy about it, but it seemed to her too difficult to change. She said how important a role other people played in terms of establishing romantic/sexual relationships: that is, how rumours pass around thereby instigating relationships. Our interview came to rather an abrupt end. Her father arrived home from work and came into the kitchen, barely responding with a grunt when I said hello. Heidi giggled nervously. He started putting the grocery shopping away; and so the interview finished.

Defining relationships was not a comfortable task for some boys either:

So, could you define for me what you think a relationship is?

[long pause]

Craig: Go on, you've not said much

Any one thing?

Thomas: A laugh.

Gavin: Between a boy and lassie or something, or whatever.

Yeah.

Gavin: Between two people … Or maybe it's three sometimes! (laugh)

You never know. Like if you were to explain to someone what that kind of relationship would be, what would you say?

[silence]   (mumble)

Would there be one thing that you would like your relationship to be like?

[silence]

(*B.Ya.3b*)

These participants attempted to defuse the difficult question by employing humour: 'maybe it's three sometimes.'

Emotions were often used to define a relationship:

How would you define a relationship?

Tom: Boy and girl in real life together.

Bruce: Caring.

Calum: Share thoughts and tell them what they feel like, stuff like that.

Bruce: Compassion.

(Laughter)

Tom: Emotions aye.

Bruce: ...emotions.

Tom: Emotions.

(*B.Ya.3a*)

The boys in *B.Ya.3a* were an interesting group. It was clear that there were two pairs of friends. Throughout I was struck by the seriousness of their answers, and their respect for each others' opinions. For others (*B.Na.4a*), trust, love, respect and a mutual appreciation were what defined a relationship. Andrew stated 'with a relationship you've got to keep working at it, doing special things'. I suspect this is a dialogue he had overheard from his parents. Trusting each other to be honest and faithful was also stated as an important factor in a relationship (Dave, Johnny, Mike – *B.Ya.3c*, Ally- *B.Ya.3f*). Eric (*B.Ya.3c*) mused over the fact that although it is necessary to have a mix of personality and looks, 'actually ugly girls are nicer than good-looking lassies - you can trust them more'. Milly also felt that trust was important, stating that 'if you can't trust them there's no point'. Other emotions noted in relation to sexual/romantic relationships were 'happy' (Kat *G.Ya.3a*, Carly *G.Ya.3c*); 'compassion' (*G.Ya.3a*); 'respect' (*G.Ya.3c*) and 'love' (*G.Ya.1a*).

People outwith the sexual/romantic relationship were important factors in some participants' definitions. Kat (*G.Ya.3a*) thought it necessary that in a relationship 'they don't mind if you're talking to someone else'. When I asked girls in *G.Ya.3d* which words they would use to describe a relationship, Annie replied: 'I'd hate it if, like, a boy was going out with you and he always kind of left you for his friends. I

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mean, you're not expecting him to just, like, ditch friends for you, but you don't want him to kind of like leave you for them.' Annie seems to have a somewhat jaded impression of relationships.

Frank (II) understood relationships in terms of popularity. He was candid about how his impressions of relationships had recently changed from assuming they were about people falling in love, to them being now about looks and reputation. Participants in *B.Ya.4a* also discuss the importance of friends and popularity in terms of relationships:

> **What about the way they look?**
>
> Bryn: Aye, that's, aye, important.
>
> **How important is that compared with friendship and stuff?**
>
> Bryn: 50/50.
>
> Harvie: Aye.
>
> Greg: It used to be dead important when you were younger and that but... you grow up a bit. Sometimes it's more about what you think, it's like if your pals don't say something to you about somebody or something like that.
>
> Bryn: Aye, you get embarrassed and all that. If somebody slags you for doing something.
>
> **So your kind of reputation with your mates, was that quite important in terms of who you're likely to go out with?**

> Greg: Wouldnae bother to me to take a slagging. If you like the lassie then... you'll take the slagging for her.

> **So what kind of girl would you get slagged for going out with?**

> Bryn: Somebody that's fat.

> Greg: Aye, or if they've got, like, big ears or something [laughs] or a big heid (head).

> Harvie: Who they've done it with in the past.

For these participants (although Greg denies it), it seems as though impressing their friends may be a reason for having a relationship. They state that not only could a girl's physical appearance cause embarrassment, but so too could her sexual reputation. Finally, participants in *B.Ya.3d* stated that their definition of a relationship was 'love and trust'- possibly given as the 'correct' answer to me. This was followed by 'boogya boogya' (Iain) and 'sex' (George); this could be more of an 'honest' answer, or perhaps the 'correct' answer in front of their male peers.

Overall, when discussing definitions of relationships, boys talked in an often uncomfortable way. The definitions provided by both sexes were broadly to do with emotions, friends and reputation.

2.4 Accounts of stages of sexual/romantic relationships

The majority of participants, both boys and girls, said that relationships comprised three stages: 'single'; 'seeing' and 'going with'. The 'single' and 'going with' stage did not warrant much discussion. The 'seeing' stage, however, was ambiguous. Generally, 'seeing' someone was not considered as serious or

as committed as 'going with' someone (Hannah & Karly - *G.Ya.3d*). Carly (*G.Ya.3c*) said that she preferred 'seeing' people rather than 'going with' them. However, other girls reported the 'seeing' stage negatively; they did not see the point of it because it just involved 'winching' (refers to any form of sexual contact from snogging to vaginal sex) and was not committed. They worried that 'seeing' meant that it is easy for boys to cheat on them (Alison-*G.Ya.3a*). Other girls said that people only want to be at the 'seeing' stage so they can gauge if someone is 'good at stuff' (I presume this means sexual 'stuff') (Jill- *G.Ya.3b*). Milly and Molly chimed with the other girl participants' descriptions of 'seeing', in that you can see other people, whereas if you are 'going with', then it is 'official':

> Milly: Yeah, like if you do something with someone else when you're going out then-
>
> Molly: It's branded as-
>
> Milly: It's cheating.
>
> Molly: Cheating yeah.
>
> Milly: But if you see some- like a person, and you can see another person and stuff, and do stuff with them.

The issue of exclusivity seems to be the defining factor when understanding the stages of a relationship. Lucy was not happy to share her boyfriend:

> No, I don't believe in seeing people because then they can see a different person at the same time. Basically, you can see as many people as you want and it's not classed as cheating, but when you're going out, they do anything with a girl, it's cheating, so if anybody asked me to see them, I'll say "no".

Heidi (II) described the seeing stage of the relationship as a way in which you can start to establish your relationship and make it public:

> Heidi: Well, I suppose, like, from not going out with them to seeing someone would be kind of, like, I don't know, maybe establishing your relationship with someone and maybe it becomes known to other people.
>
> **How would you go about establishing that in the first place, then?**
>
> Heidi: Other friends become involved, or just other people – and then through rumours and yeah, so it, maybe that might become known to the people that are involved.

For Heidi (II) it seems that the relationship itself is almost insignificant in comparison to the importance of friends or 'other people' (presumably these 'other people' are her peer group) and the person's wider social reputation. This is a thread that runs throughout the whole of this chapter, for both the boys and girls.

Johnny (II) offered some detail on how the stages of relationships shifted:

> **So what's the point in this whole seeing someone bit? Would you be with that person more, but you can still do what you want with anyone else?**
>
> Johnny: Sometimes, but it's like when you're, I don't really know the difference... Maist of the time, now, it's just if you're going with one another – but if you're just seeing them, then you're just winching them and that at the weekends kind of thing. If you're going with them, then you'll see them on week nights, if you're seeing them then you'll just see them at the weekends and everything.

Above, Johnny discussed the amorphous process of the stages of a relationship. We can conclude from this that the main

difference between the 'seeing' and 'going with' stage is the amount of time spent together.

A different example of the stages of a relationship comes from a girls' group discussion:

> Denise: Guys are pretty much like 'oh we can just go sleep with a girl and then drop her and be like, 'hey!' Like, my guy mates…they have this thing, like PTE being penetrate then evacuate. PTB means penetrate then bail. PTS means penetrate then stay. But the two okay ones are PTE or PTS, but the really bad one is PTB because you never talk to the girl ever again.
>
> **Really?**
>
> Denise: I know like quite a lot of people, like some, are PTBs and stuff. And PTS means that you go out with them. And then PTE is just you just visit, you just- it's just like, nothing, casual.
>
> **What do the girls think about that then?**
>
> Denise: I don't think the girls get a say in it.
> (*G.Ro.4c*)

The notable point here is how much of this is on the boy's terms. It is he who decides what happens: 'I don't think the girls get a say in it'.

In sum, the participants' accounts of the different stages of relationships dealt mainly with ideas about physical possession, exclusivity and fear of peers' opinions and their reputation, and in the case above from *G.Ro.4c*, feeling out of control.

3. Participants' expectations of sexual/romantic relationships

3.1 Participants' accounts of their expectations of sexual/romantic relationships

What were the participants' expectations of romantic/sexual relationships? Accounts of expectations of future relationships

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were often rich in detail. Although in the interviews I had asked about their expectations, often I found that their answers instead defined their hopes.

The length of time the relationship was expected to last was a popular response. For the girls, the answers ranged from 'I don't know', to '20 years' (Holly- *G.Ya.3c*). Participants in *G.Ya.3b* said they were at an age when they want a relationship to last as long as possible. Milly and Molly said that they could not predict the length of the relationship because they did not 'truly know what goes on in a boy's head'. The others' responses were also unsure due to their uncertainty of what the boy wanted. In that sense, their expectations depended on the presumed expectations of the boys.

The boys' ideas of how long they expected their next relationship would last ranged from three days (Frank-II), to a few weeks (*B.Ya.3a*), to 'can't say forever, but a very long time' (Norman-II), to an open-ended 'just depends, if it was somebody you like and care about then could last a while' (Sandy- *B.Ya.3f*). Participants in *B.Ya.3a* gave some detail about their expectations of their future relationships:

> Tom: Yeah, it gets more serious as it goes along.
>
> Calum: Don't need to. It can stay the same.
>
> Tom: If it stays the same story it just gets boring.
>
> Calum: But when you're younger you're not exactly going to have sex straight away are you.-
>
> Bruce: Depends how people want to take it. It's like, it's up to them if they want to like take it slow or-
>
> Calum: Take it fast.
>
> Bruce: -rush into things.

Calum: Aye exactly.

Tom: And like, you need to know them really well. As in like supporting them and things like that.

Calum: Something happens, you need to comfort them.

Bruce: If you're older if you're like planning a baby it's like, a big step so you need to be ready for it and have a house and that to deal with it.

Calum: Aye exactly.

Bruce: And then you need to get babysitters, and if you're going out need to hire people, stuff like that.

This excerpt covers a range of concerns. It starts with a fear of the relationship turning stale, to uncertainty about sex and then to ambiguity about the level of intimacy that is expected and the role that they may need to play in order to comfort and support their partner. Bruce takes it as far as planning for a baby, which seems very mature, but we then see that his real concern lies in whether or not he would be able to secure a babysitter if he were to go out.

For girls only, trust was stated as an expectation or ideal (Karly-*G.Ya.3d*, Milly&Molly). Lucy (II) was specific in stating that it would take her a year to trust a boy: she did not like being alone and thought that you should have 'another part of you you can trust'. Rhona's (II) ideal relationship was about an emotional rather than a physical bond.

Once again the issue of what other people thought was raised, this time in relation to what the girl participants expected from their next relationship. Eva feared that in her next relationship the boy would be nasty to her in front of his friends. I asked Milly and Molly what they expected from their next relationship:

Milly: Well you wouldn't ignore them. If you were going out with someone you'd expect them to talk to you and stuff and like -

Molly: Yeah you wouldn't expect them to be like ashamed of you -

Milly: Yeah be like 'oh my God' -

Molly: - you would expect them to want to show that they're your girlfriend, boyfriend type thing.

When I asked the boy participants how they might act in a relationship, a significant part of their answers referred to sex. I asked participants from *B.Ro.4a* what they thought a good way to behave in a relationship was:

Dylan: Treat the girl fair.

Treat the girl fair.

Dylan: Aye.

Okay. What does that mean exactly?

Dylan: Get into their pants basically. (Laughter)

Right.

Dylan: No, have respect for the bitch. (Laughter)

This could be what he really thinks, or it could be, as I suspect is the case, that it is a performance either to shock me or to impress his friends. Thinking about a partner in a relationship, Frank (II) said:

I think in girls … somebody might say that if they're a bit of a slag or something like that you know, then they would be all clingy. You know, they'd probably do something a bit more sort of sexual or something like that. A lot of girls have, you know, a lot more self-respect and they have to be absolutely going out with

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> the person for a long time before they'll actually do anything, but that's often when the relationships only last three days because you know, with the boys… just want action, you know what I mean, … as soon as they can…because they're not a good personality, it's not like they want to hang around with them.

Frank is saying here that some girls only have sex in what they think is a committed relationship.

The concept of physical exclusivity was much discussed in relation to expectations. Some male participants (*B.Ya.3a*, *B.Ya.3c* & *B.Ya.4a*) expected that their next relationships would be exclusive; the reason being that 'going with someone else seems to annoy them [girls]'. Johnny (II) and Carl (II) both said that they would want to have an exclusive relationship and if the girl was to cheat on them they would have to 'get rid of her' (Carl). George (*B.Ya.3d*) lamented that 'girls cheat on you, especially when they are wrecked'[28].

In sum, the main issues participants discussed with regard to what they expected from their next relationship were: the length of time the relationship would last; issues related to trust (girls only); boys expecting sex; physical exclusivity and concern for other peoples' opinions.

3.2 Perceived origins of expectations of sexual/romantic relationships

Some responses to the question 'where did your expectations come from?' were rather elusive. Suzanne (*G.Ro.4a*) said 'you just kinda know', Iain (*B.Ya.3d*) said 'just the stuff I think is right' and Dougie (*B.Ro.4b*) claimed 'I don't look to anyone else how to do a relationship – it's just the way you feel in your heart'. Lots of participants said that their expectations came from a range of sources. For example, Norman (II) said 'my

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[28] Intoxicated with either drink or drugs

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head, just the way people act - friends, cousins, family' and participants in *B.Ya.1*: 'just inside, instinct, mum and dad, your history with someone'. Others were more specific as to the origin of their expectations. Often when participants would cite a range of perceived influences, friends would be among them. For example, some (Milly & Molly, Heidi-II, *G.Ya.3a*, *G.Ya.3d*) said they learned about relationships from the media, friends, experience and older siblings. Girls in *G.Ro.4a*, when asked if they get their expectations about relationships from the media, said it was more from their peers or friends than the media. Lucy's (II) expectation of relationships was influenced by her friends' experiences in relationships. She said that her friends would do anything sexual with boys because they expect that other girls do it too. In fact, Lucy thought that boys called her friends 'slags' and had no respect for them because they had acted sexually. This demonstrates a cycle of influence. The girls Lucy knew acted in a certain way with boys because they thought that is how other girls were acting. In turn, Lucy saw the outcome of this behaviour and subsequently her ideas about boys changed. Her friends acted as a warning.

Friends or peers were an important source of information and influence for boys as well. In one sense, friends provided a role in offering recommendations about whom it is appropriate to be interested in, as we saw earlier from Frank. Carl (II) gave an example of how he helped his friend's girlfriend to understand her relationship:

> **And do you ever talk to girls about relationships or the way things are working, anything like that?**
>
> Carl: Just Tom's girlfriend.
>
> **And what does she say?**

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Carl: Know how, when he's playing football, he'd walk up with her maybe jump onto the pitch and sometimes she'd feel left oot cause he's went to play fitba and left her sitting there with her pals. And then I talk to her and convince her that Tom has to play football cause it's a passion he's got.

Frank (II) said that his expectation about having sex was more to do with peer pressure than the media. Johnny's (II) expectations came from 'people I ken'. Dave (II) gave an example of why he thought a relationship would not last:

Dave: Their friends' opinion – like slagging them off for who they're gaun wi'.

Does that happen a lot, then?

Dave: It happened to my friend Kieran.

And what was wrong with the person that he was with?

Dave: She didnae tell anybody aboot them. So it was just nae point.

Oh right, ok – so why did she not tell anybody, then?

Dave: She's embarrassed.

Dave actually said that because the girl did not tell anyone, did not make the relationship public, there was 'just nae point'. This is a powerful statement regarding the significance of friends in these relationships. The idea of peer reputation is also mentioned by Adam (*B.Ya.3e*), albeit in a slightly different way: 'I think, right now, everyone says, if you don't have a boyfriend or a girlfriend, you're not popular or something – so they just go with the first person they kinda meet, but you need to kind of wait and find the right person for you'.

Family also featured as a perceived source of influence on the participants' relationship expectations and negotiations (*G.Ya.3d*). Alison (*G.Ya.3a*) said that her ideas about what boys want from girls derive from her big brother and her father, who were 'over-protective'. Francesca (*G.Ya.3a*) said that her expectations about relationships came from her older brother. Lucy (II) said her ideas about relationships come from her Dad: 'he's always trying to keep me safe by making sure I don't get hurt, telling me what guys are really thinking'.

Boy participants also cited family as being influential, although this was often among other influences such as friends and media (Norman, *B.Ya.3a*, *B.Ya.3f*). Carl (II) was quite clearly influenced by his cousin's life choices:

> My big cousin, he's 29 the now, and see how through me growing up, he was always like, know how if my mum and dad were out, he'd always baby sit me. And he got married last year, and they had a baby this year, and it's just that they're living such a good life, when they've got the wee family.

So participants reported that their expectations of relationships came from some kind of inherent knowledge ('you just know'), their friends, peers and family. Media were another source of perceived influence: this will be addressed later in the chapter. Meanwhile, I shall consider the boys' accounts of girls' expectations: that is, what boys thought that girls would want from a relationship with a boy. And similarly, I shall consider the girls' accounts of boys' expectations: that is, what girls thought that boys would want from a relationship with a girl. I refer to these as 'presumed expectations'.

3.3 Presumptions about the opposite sex's expectations of sexual/romantic relationships

One of the most discussed issues with regards to presumed expectations of sexual/romantic relationships was the length of time the relationship might last for. This was discussed by both girl and boy participants. The vast majority of boy participants said that they expected that the girls wanted a relationship to last for a long time; longer than the boys wanted it to last. Some said that depending on how much the girl likes you, probably a few months (*B.Ya.3f*, *B.Ya.3e*). Others said that they wanted it to last a long time (Frank), or forever (Dave, Blair- *B.Ya.4a*), though Johnny (II) could not understand why. Norman also said that a girl always wants a relationship to last forever, though 'they kinda know it won't, unless it's like really, really strong'. Others add to this dimension of uncertainty, saying that girls want the relationship to last forever, that is: unless they want to end it (Jason- *B.Ya.3c*, Mark - *B.Ya.3b*); or 'if the lassie hears that the boy wants to end it she'll try and do it first' (Mark- *B.Ya.3b*). Participants' in *B.Ya.3d* dialogue on this topic is interesting:

> **And how long do you think they [girls] want it to last for?**
>
> Iain: Months and years and centuries.
>
> George: Forever. (Laughing) Centuries.
>
> **So for a long time, then?**
>
> Johnny: They see you coming, but – and then they start texting you, like, "how many weans (babies) do you want to have?" And all that.

Girls' presumed expectations of what boys expected also featured how long the relationship might last for. Presumptions included that boys wanted it to last for a few weeks (Heidi-II), that they do not want a long term relationship – all they want to do is brag to their friends (Alison & Kat -*G.Ya.3a*), and that again they do not want it to last a long time because they will probably be bored after a short while (Kate & Susan -*G.Ya.3b*). Milly and Molly commented further on this issue:

> **And do you have an idea about how long they think it's going to last?**
>
> Milly: No.
>
> Molly: I mean sometimes they're only after the physical part of it and then they dump you.
>
> Milly: Yeah, and then some people are like, oh it's going to last forever.
>
> Molly: And you're like God!
>
> Milly: Yeah, and that's scary! (all laugh.) People like that scare me.
>
> Molly: It's like yes, we're going to get married and have babies and stuff. And it's like, I'm only fifteen.

This suggestion of a relationship lasting forever warranted a somewhat horrified response, perhaps contradicting the statements by the other participants who suggested that boys never want a relationship to last for a long time.

When asked what they think boys look for in a potential girlfriend, physical looks and attractiveness were often cited, though some said that boys are interested in personality too (Annie-*G.Ya.3d*). Heidi provides some more detail:

> Heidi: I suppose, like, maybe initially, or superficially it would be kind of, I suppose, nice hair – just like a nice appearance, really. Hair (Laughing).

> **Yeah – and what expectations do you think they might have about the relationship?**

> Heidi: Like, I suppose you would have a sort of small degree of company with one another, but maybe not, I don't know, maybe they'd have more time with their friends, possibly – they'd expect that.

Another popular perception of presumed expectations discussed by both girl and boy participants was the idea of exclusivity in relationships. The boys thought that the girls would not want them to 'see' other girls if they were in a relationship (Johnny - II), not to 'like' anyone else (Norman -II) or, as Sandy (*B.Ya.3f*) said, 'don't cheat'. If this were to happen, participants in *B.Ya.4a* presumed that the girls would get jealous, which could lead to arguments, fights and fallouts. However, this expectation of desired exclusivity was not restricted to preventing the boys seeing or spending time with other *girls*. Johnny said that girls (that is, girls in potential future sexual/romantic relationships) would not want him to see anyone else, including his *male* friends, because the girls would want him to spend all his time with them: 'A lot of lassies don't want you hanging about with your pals and all that… not got to hae a social life – it's just to be yous two'. Girls also commented on the presumed expectations of relationships with regard to exclusivity. Alison & Francesca (*G.Ya.3a*) felt that there are double standards in relationships: boys are annoyed if girls flirt, yet this is something that boys readily do when in a relationship.

Quite a few girl participants spoke about boys expecting sex from them. When asked about her future relationship, Rhona (II) said 'I don't think I'd take it very well with someone

forcing you into doing something. Like I've had that before and I wasn't happy, and I ended it'. In the context of the discussion, I understand this 'something' to mean sex, or some kind of sexual behaviour. Her uncomfortable past experiences here are informing her expectations. Holly and Carly (*G.Ya.3c*) also referred to sex in terms of expectations. They discussed how they would like their future partners to behave 'more mature and not like a two- year old', though Danielle (*G.Ya.3c*) added that she would not like them to be '*too* mature', implying that she would not want her next boyfriend to be interested in having sex.

I turn now to the presumed expectations which only boy participants had. Frank (II) and Dave (II) both presumed that girls would be impressed more by a boy's good reputation or popularity than looks. Frank suggested that girls will like the boy to be there for them when scared, adhering to the traditional gender role of man as protector. When I asked Carl (II) how a girlfriend would like him to behave, he answered democratically 'same way they'd treat me – you get back what you give'. He went on to state that her expectations would be identical to his own expectations of a relationship: 'spending time together, going places, doing stuff'. In this same egalitarian vein, Dave (II) said that a girl would want you to treat them 'with respect; no like dirt'. Dave understood respect to mean: 'like if you fell oot, like try and solve it instead of ignoring them for days'. Gavin (*B.Ya.3b*) begins this dialogue with the same sentiment as Dave, though this soon becomes unconvincing:

> **And if you were going out with someone can you think of the way that the girl for example would like you to behave?**
>
> Gavin: Nice to her.

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Nice to her. And how would you do that?

Gavin: Just be nice to her.

How else would she like you to behave?

Gavin: I don't care anything about that.

Hm?

Gavin: Don't care about how they are.

Another presumed expectation the boys had was that they thought girls wanted them to 'be yourself'. Presumably this means not trying to act in a certain way just to impress girls.

The rest of this section focuses on issues which only girl participants suggested as presumed expectations. The vast majority of girl participants commented that sexual behaviour would be expected of them by the boys. Lauren (*G.Ya.3c*), in answer to my question of what boys want from a relationship, said 'short, sweet, shaggable. All guys are the same'. Alison (*G.Ya.3a*) concurred: 'A boy wants sex'. Milly and Molly adhere to a sex/emotion dichotomy. For them romance equates to emotions, and sex and physical behaviour are seen as emotionless. Boys will be after sexual activity and are more interested in sex than girls are, unless, that is, they are 'romantic or emotional kind of people'; *ergo* they would not be interested in sex. Heidi (II) had a different idea in terms of presumed expectations and sex. She thought that her partner would want a sexual relationship but would expect her to display sexual restraint and not allow such behaviour. In this sense Heidi's comments chime with Milly and Molly's above in this discourse of boys being sexually interested. Perhaps Heidi felt that boys would assume the girl to be a certain 'type' of girl should she show interest in sex or that boys would not like to imagine that she had had other sexual experiences?

To summarise, both boy and girl participants reported their presumed expectations to be about the length of time the relationship might last and issues of exclusivity. Boys presumed that girls' expectations included ideas of reputation, popularity, respect, 'being yourself' and not 'hassling' girls. Girl presumed that boys' expectations were largely about their presumption that boys expect sexual behaviour and related issues of emotions.

3.4 Origins of boys' and girls' presumed expectations of sexual/romantic relationships

Where did the boys presume the girls' expectations came from? A few boys said the girls got their expectations solely from the media. Bruce and Calum (*B.Ya.3a*) said that because girls get their expectations from TV – in particular 'love movies' and 'happily ever after' movies - this is what they come to expect from a relationship. Frank (II) concurred, saying that the expectation which girls derive from TV is that relationships are going to be 'perfect'. This will be further explored later in the chapter. The rest of the boys said that girls were influenced by a range of sources, including media, older people, big sisters, friends' relationships, personal experiences and 'everything and other people around them' (Dave - II).

A large proportion of the girl participants suggested that the boys' expectations came from their friends, albeit often this is stated as part of a collection of other influences such as media and family (Heidi, *G.Ya.3a, G.Ya.3b, G.Ya.3d*). Only one girl (Lauren *G.Ya.3c*) stated a solely family influence for boys' presumed expectations, namely their fathers. Media were also stated as an origin of presumed influence. This is dealt with in section five of the chapter. The next section explores accounts

of general media portrayals of relationships, interpretations of images and perceptions of media influence.

4. Media portrayals of sexual/romantic relationships

4.1 General accounts of media portrayals of sexual/romantic relationships

Data for this section were gleaned from the responses to the following questions:

- o Can you think of any ways in which people behave in relationships in the media that are similar to the way *you* think people should behave in a relationship?

- o Can you think of any ways in which people behave in relationships in the media that *you* think people should *not* behave in a relationship?

- o Is your idea of an ideal relationship similar to any relationship you can think of in the media?

The portrayals will progress from good portrayals of relationships to bad, with sex and unfaithfulness in between. There were sparse accounts of media portrayals of what the girl participants felt were good relationships. Katie Price *aka* Jordan (glamour model/business woman) and her then husband, Australian pop singer Peter Andre, were considered to have a 'really strong' relationship (*G.Ro.4a*). One positive fictional relationship mentioned was that of Calvin and Carmel, a married couple in *Hollyoaks* (*G.Ya.3d*). There were only two specific references to good relationships in the media made by the boy participants. Dylan (*B.Ro.4a*) said that David and Victoria Beckham's relationship was an example of a 'good way to behave'. On this note, boys in *B.Na.4a* referred to actors Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie, saying that they 'treat each other with respect'.

Other girl participants did discuss 'good' relationships that were portrayed in the media. However these were mawkish and seen in a less 'realistic' light. Often these kinds of relationships came from the American media and were referred to as 'romcoms' or 'loveydovey' relationships. Heidi (II) said of *Sex and the City*: 'I suppose, the main characters had issues with their marriages or their partner or something like that – but everything was remedied towards the end... I think we just all found it really quite ridiculous'. Some girl participants talked of the American film *High School Musical* (Mixed1, *G.Ro.4b*). This was presented as a film that girls liked more than boys (Lisa – *Mxd.Ro.3a*). Lisa went on: 'well, basically they meet at this place, sing together, and it starts there and then they do, like musicals together... I think they're a bit too, like, romantic'. Later in the same interview I asked how the media portrays the perfect romantic relationship: 'Young. No complications. Love at first sight.' (Lisa-*Mxd.Ro.3a*). Sarah (*G.Ya.3b*) also discussed American romance films: 'TV is all lovey dovey – then you try to make it happen but the opposite sex doesn't always think the same as you'. It seems that because of what she has seen in these 'lovey dovey' films she is disappointed in real life. Eva (II) considered these 'romcoms' seriously and aspired to them, more so than the other participants. Here she describes couples' behaviour in the American soap *90210*:

> Eva: In *90210* it's like, they wait a year or something to have sex, whereas like people my age just do it within a week or something. And they're a lot more like romantic on *90210*, and couples aren't really like that in my relationships.
>
> **So when you say they're romantic, what kind of stuff would they be doing?**

Eva: Like they take them out for dinner and stuff, and just like say that they love them to their face and stuff like that.

And that doesn't happen in real life?

Eva: No.

If we refer to Eva's account of her relationship (which was restricted to text message and MSN conversations), we can see how disappointed she must have been, if her expectations had been derived from programmes like *90210*. Whether or not she turns to these media relationships because of her past relationship, or whether she already had these ideas in mind before her relationship, remains unclear.

Sex was another topic described by both sexes as being portrayed by the media. Girl participants in *G.Ro.4c* discussed comedian Russell Brand's sex life. Debbie described him as a 'sex addict who should get help - might have HIV.' Annie (*G.Ya.3d*) said that the impression of relationships that *Skins* portrays is that there are no proper relationships, just sex. Other participants (*Mxd.Ro.4a*) commented on how men and women interact sexually in rap music videos:

Daisy: All you see is skimpy women dancing around and they're like flaunting themselves.

Caroline: That's what they think of them [the boys about the girls] - they can just go with any of them.

Boys in *B.Ro.4b* discussed a sex education programme that they had recently seen on TV which showed both the 'positive and negative sides of sex'. Jonathan went to on to tell of how his teacher Miss Bailie said that 'sex is one of the most beautiful things in the world, though it does have diseases'. This is the only time reference was made to a teacher. Boys in *B.Ro.4a*

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also discussed sex lives and relationships in the media. These participants were not a 'friendship group'. To my right was one of the quieter boys, with long dark straight(ened) hair. He was good friends with the boy to his right; another quiet boy with blondish hair, bad skin and a chubby face. To his right was a boy wearing a turban. He was mild-mannered and quiet. He contributed occasionally, usually with a smile on his face. Next to him was the joker of the group, Dylan. He was also sitting directly opposite me, which I think he found a little uncomfortable, as he kept looking at me out of the corner of his eye and fidgeting. He had a mischievous smile and dyed blonde hair, brushed forward. The last boy, to his right, wore a light-blue and white patterned woolly hat, with big ear covers that were folded up to reveal a diamante stud in each ear. He was the chattiest. Just as we began, Dylan said 'this is like a police interview'; not the atmosphere I was hoping to create. Here is an excerpt of them discussing footballer Cristiano Ronaldo's love/sex life:

> Dylan: Aye he's just a cheap wee slut. Basically. He goes-
>
> Kal: He finishes with somebody, goes to Spain and then hires hookers.
>
> Dylan: He goes with a prostitute and the prostitute's worth two grand a night. That's what he pays.
>
> **And does he have a girlfriend?**
>
> Kal: That's who she is.
>
> Dylan: Aye, Gemma Atkins, or it was. And then, now it's
>
> Kal: Now it's a prostitute.

Others (*B.Ro.4c*) discussed rap singer *50 Cent's* relationships with women. Nick described him as a 'pimp, like Stevo out of *Jackass* - he goes (has sex) then leaves'. I asked Nick what he

thought of this treatment. He replied 'I think that's good treatment'.

Media portrayals of relationships were also discussed with regards to pornography. Quite a few girl participants discussed the use of pornography; the vast majority reported that it was only boys who watched it. Heidi (II) told me that boys in her year download porn to their mobile phones. Jordan (*Mxd.Ro.4a*) told of how people posted links on her *Bebo* page which directed her to the porn website *Redtube*. Others (*Mxd.Ro.3a*) discussed socialite Paris Hilton's porn film. Interestingly, because this was one of the few mixed sex interviews I conducted, Frank piped up to say 'I know people say it's the ideal but they're (pornstars) just plastic - just barbie dolls'. To this Heidi responded 'Yeah, they're separate from reality - maybe that makes them easier to watch'.

Below, a boys' group discussion states that girls do watch pornography, and that they know of a girl who has taken a pornographic video of herself which she had posted on the website *Redtube*:

Jake: Some people- some lassies actually watch porn.

Is that right?

Jake: Aye.

Dillon: Yep.

What kind of porn?

Jake: Gay porn. Lesbian porn and all.

Oh right, okay.

Jake: Lesbian porn.

Euan: Girls laugh at it.

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Jake: Nah, I've seen a lassie that's masturbated over it.

Dillon: So did I.

And is that with their boyfriend, do their boyfriends encourage them or is that just?

Jake: Just themselves.

Just themselves. Right, okay.

Jake: I know somebody that's made a porno.

Really? How old are they?

Jake: Same age as us. (Coughs.)

And why do you think that they did that?

Jake: Popularity.

And did they show it around to people?

Jake: It's on *RedTube*.

***RedTube*, what's *RedTube*?**

Jake: Porno clips.

(Smothered laughter.)

(B.Ro.4c)

From the account above we learn of the boys' perceptions that this girl will gain popularity by making and uploading her own pornographic video.

A substantial number of girl participants perceived media-portrayed relationships to involve cheating. Heidi (II) said that *Skins* does not 'promote monogamy'. Others discussed topical 'celebrity' relationships and their infidelity (*G.Ya.3d*, Milly&Molly):

> Milly: I think Cheryl Cole and Ashley Cole, their relationship is completely stupid. I think Jordan and Peter-
>
> Molly: They're in a really, really strong relationship.
>
> Milly: Not always.
>
> Molly: Not recently-
>
> Milly: Yeah not recently-
>
> Molly: Cause she won't stop having plastic surgery.
>
> Milly: And because she's getting suspicious that he's cheating on her and stuff.
>
> Molly: Is she?
>
> Milly: Yeah.
>
> Molly: See, famous people who-
>
> Milly: (Overtalking) David Beckham and Victoria, David cheated on her with like the nanny or something so he's got to be pretty desperate to like, not like his wife as much to like find the next woman in the house that's old enough.

The relationships in *Hollyoaks* were also said to be unfaithful. The main story discussed was the married couple Calvin and Carmel. Rihanne (*G.Ro.4b*) said that Calvin was cheating on Carmel with his step-mother before they got married and that Carmel nearly cheated on him. They said that cheating is very much the norm in *Hollyoaks*, and so too in real life. 'Apparently', said Rihanne, '50 percent of married men cheat'. When I asked if this was the same for women, Rihanne said 'I don't think so'. Despite this presumed prevalence of infidelity, Cat maintained that cheating is 'wrong'. However she felt this view is not shared by the boys she knows: 'Boys say it's alright if another boy cheats on a girl. All the girls are like, I hate them'. Others (*G.Ro.4c*, *Mxd.Ro.4a*) also discussed Calvin and Carmel's relationship. This, once again, led to a more general

discussion on infidelity. Mia (*G.Ro.4c*) imagined that if people were influenced by a programme such as *Hollyoaks* they would undoubtedly have 'trust issues'. These unfaithful relationships were not confined to *Hollyoaks*; 'there's a lot of cheating in every soap - always divorce. No couple stays together'. From here they (*G.Ro.4c*) discussed the possible impact cheating has had on their lives:

> Mia: It's just happened so many times that you're just like, if there's fuss there's no like- at our age there's no point in like a relationship.
>
> Isobel: Very few teenage relationships last. I mean the- you might but-
>
> Imogen: I know there is a few, like I know people that have-
>
> Mia: … You're too young to handle a relationship, plus we're just going to ruin our lives if we go on a year- on a year relationship and then split up, it's like a waste of like a year of your life on a guy (Laughing.)
>
> Isobel: Such a nice way of putting it!

Compared with the girls' abundant accounts of unfaithful relationships in the media, cheating was only mentioned by one group of boys. Frank (*B.Na.4a*) said that the reason that you hear only of infidelity and bad relationships in the media is because it is 'more exciting to read about people cheating'. Steven said that if a relationship (presumably a 'celebrity' relationship) was really good then it is unlikely that it would be media-worthy. Later he said that 'seeing so many affairs in soaps can make you think it's normal'.

Rhona (II) said that she only heard about bad relationships in the media. She called these 'disaster' relationships: for example, singer Britney Spears and her various relationships, and singer Pete Doherty and model Kate Moss. When Milly and

Molly discussed these 'bad' media relationship they bleakly stated that such media portrayals of relationships 'get rid of your hope'. In terms of 'real-life celebrity' couples, boys in *B.Ya.3b* spoke of pop stars Rihanna and Chris Brown's violent relationship: 'he battered her' (Mark). Interestingly, participants in *B.Ya.3a* talked of a couple in American soap *90210* as 'always fighting' (Calum); this contrasts with the girls' accounts about this programme wherein the relationships were seen to be the epitome of romance. When I asked the boys in *B.Ya.3c* what their impression of relationships from the media was they said: 'nothing goes smoothly. You can argue sometimes and you can be alright sometimes. Nothing ever works out. Nothing's easy' (Eric).

Boys' and girls' perceptions of media portrayals of relationships covered similar issues: some good, much about sex, pornography and infidelity. Only boys mentioned violence and only girls talked about the 'unrealistic' romantic films.

4.2 Participants' interpretations of images of sexual/romantic relationships

I will now look at the participants' interpretations of images from the TV programmes *Skins* and *Hollyoaks*. These images were chosen from a number of images which were interpreted by the participants because they gleaned the greatest responses from them. For each image I will offer both the girls' and boys' responses.

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Image 1: *Skins*

Image 1: *Skins* depicts Effy handing Freddie a note at college. On the note is a list of dangerous tasks, which, if completed, will allow him to have sex with her. When I asked Milly and Molly to interpret this image they said:

> Molly: Well he likes her, and she's a big ho, and she's given him a list of stuff that he has to do by the end of the day, or she can't have sex with him.
>
> Milly: She's a slut.

Earlier in the interview Milly and Molly had been quite enraged at gender inequalities in terms of sex, yet above they are acquiescing in this very inequality. Furthermore, also earlier in their interview Molly said that normally a boy would instigate sex. If, however, it was the girl that instigated then she is a 'nymphomaniac'. This use of language pathologises girls who are interested in sex.

Issues raised in Lucy (II) and Eva's (II) interpretations of this image fit tightly with their earlier accounts of their real-life

experiences of relationships. Lucy stated that 'Effy is in control here telling him what to do and he'll get whatever he wants from her.' It will be recalled that Lucy set great store by being in control of her boyfriend. When I asked Eva what she thought this relationship is like she said:

> Eva: It looks like they kind of like each other but won't admit it. Cause they're quite- they're like both looking at each other in the eye but they're still really distant from each other.
>
> **Okay. And do you think anything'll happen in the future with them?**
>
> Eva: If they stop being stubborn.

Again, the main issues that Eva raised when discussing her relationship correlate here: not admitting to liking each other, and the relationship not reaching its full potential because of stubbornness.

The boys offered a range of responses to this image. George (*B.Ya.3d*) said that Effy is giving Freddie a letter of 'things he needs to do'. If he does them then 'he gets his hole' (can have sex). Iain said that Freddie 'wants out with her, she likes him, and she ends up shagging… it's just a sexual relationship'. Dave (II), who owned the box set of *Skins,* said that if girls were to watch this they might think that boys do anything to sleep with girls. Frank (II) was sure that this was love at first sight because Effy had dropped something and Freddie was picking it up for her. Kai (II), on the other hand thought that Freddie was passing a note to Effy.

Image 2: *Skins*

Image 2: *Skins* shows Effy and Cook embracing pre-sex in a cupboard in college. When I asked Heidi if this kind of image influenced what a boy might think of a girl she replied:

> Heidi: Well, I suppose there's always that kind of divide between, like, what's kind of acceptable with regard to physical relationship but then there's, like, oh right, she's a slut. I mean, you wouldn't want to associate with her because…(pause)

> **And do you think Effy is a slut?**

> Heidi: …I don't know – if you're not aware of her kind of situation at home, or something like that, but yeah, I suppose she could be considered a slut, really.

After initially considering that Effy may appear to be a slut, and that she may be best avoided, Heidi switches to a more considerate and understanding tone; thinking about possible underlying reasons for her behaviour. Others also refer to Effy as a slut (Lucy, Milly&Molly). Lucy said that 'she looks like a slag basically…they don't even know each other'. Lucy also suggested that boys who watch this may then expect girls to

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'just drop everything and do whatever the boy wants'. Eva (II) said that this image showed Effy and Cook having a one-night stand: 'They both look really drunk and just really going for it'. She said that they may or may not regret it; they may, in fact want to do it again. Girls in *G.Ya.3a* also thought that they are both drunk and that they look as though they are having fun. They go on to say 'for boys it's alright but lassies no looking for one night stand.' The reason is 'emotions. Cos the girl might really like him but he doesn't like her, just using her' (Kat-*G.Ya.3a*). Upon considering this image, Rhona (II) observed that a 'one-night stand' never happened to anyone that she knows. She adds, however, that there are more boys in her school would 'kind of agree with it, than the girls. The girls kind of think oh I wouldn't do that…like it's more so like if a guy does it, it's kind of high five, well done, you got with her. But if it's the girl doing it then it's, oh she's a slut, whatever, like more rumours and stuff start up'.

In terms of the boys' interpretations, Kai (II) thought that Cook was a 'lucky boy' and that this would make for 'fantastic gossip'. George (*B.Ya.3d*) simply said 'he's a wee pimp'. Boys in *B.Ya.3f* thought that Effy and Cook have an 'on-off' relationship that is just about sex. When asked to consider what influence this image might have on girls they said that 'some girls will think it's fine and they might do it all the time.' However, this was unlikely among the girls they knew who instead 'want a relationship'. Frank observed: 'I think when a girl when she feels loved enough, then she'll probably have, you know, sex; something like that, but then the boys sort of needs to have sex to feel loved. I think there's a saying that goes like that, but I'm not really sure'.

Image 3: *Hollyoaks*

Image 3 from *Hollyoaks* shows Zoe and Mike arguing. Alison and Lynsey (*G.Ya.3a1*) said that there has been some dispute over their relationship and the sexual relationship between Zoe and Mike's daughter. Alison reflected on the issues of blame: 'The girls think it's always the boys and I think the boys think it's always the girls'. Lucy (II) was more certain that Zoe was the perpetrator of hurt in this scenario. She concluded that this image shows that 'a man can be hurt in love too'.

There was an interesting response to this image from the boy participants. Some were quite philosophical in commenting on how a relationship may or may not work out. Frank (II) said it shows that men are not perfect and that you will not always get a perfect relationship: you need to work on them. Norman (II) commented that 'although everyone thinks they're right, girls will see that even if they're hurt the partner might be hurt as well'. What of the reason for their perceived argument? Johnny (II) said that Mike had been hitting Zoe. The rest of the responses were with regard to the perceived

infidelity. Carl (II) said in general terms that if people are in love and their partner cheats, 'it breaks their world'. The majority of the boys assumed that it was Zoe that had been unfaithful: 'He doesn't want her to go, she's cheated, lassies can be just as cruel, so they can' (Dave-II). Others (*B.Ya.3d*) said that she was going to get raped by Mike because she had been sleeping with someone else. Participants in *B.Ya.3f* led this interpretation of the image into a discussion on cheating. They debated what the best course of action would be, should you discover your partner had been cheating. They concluded that the criteria for the decision whether or not to leave them were twofold: first, whether or not you were love; and second, whether or not you were drunk when you cheated. If you were in love and if they were drunk then it means that it is more likely you will stay.

Image 4: *Skins*

In **Image 4:** *Skins* Michelle is seen lying on a bed, mascara smeared on her face. Despite this image only showing a close-up of Michelle on a bed, some varied and extreme

interpretations were offered. Mostly they involved the fact she has had a one-night stand (Eva-II), she was either drunk (Rhona-II) or hungover (Alison-*G.Ya.3a*), and was crying (*G.Ro.4a*) because she either had fallen out with her boyfriend (Cat – *G.Ro.4b*, Lucy, *Mxd.Ro.3b*), had sex with someone she cannot remember (Alison – *G.Ya.3a*), or was raped (Rhona, *G.Ro.4a*, Lorna - *Mxd.Ro.3b*.) Lucy said:

> Lucy: It looks like she's just had sex. She looks absolutely horrible, her make-up is dripping down her face. I think maybe she was drinking the night before and she just doesn't know what she got up to and she's feeling a bit embarrassed.
>
> **Do you think this would influence what a boy thinks of a girl?**
>
> Lucy: Yeah, I think they'd be thinking, a girl gets drunk, they can just basically do whatever they want to them, and there's no consequences about it.

The boys' interpretations of this image included drunken one-night stands - 'had rough night, woke up turned aroond 'n' seen who she's next tae' - and drunken arguments with her boyfriend (Johnny - II) that resulted in her having been dumped (Frank- *B.Na.4a*). Norman (II) suggested that she had found out that her boyfriend had an affair. Boys in *B.Ya.3d* discuss what is going on:

> Iain: I think she's just been let down.
>
> Johnny: Just state and a half, told to bolt.
>
> George: I think somebody's taken her home, pumped her and went home, to be honest with you. Pumped her and dumped her. I think she's just been used and abused – coz look, she looks happy. Happy chappy.
>
> Iain: She's been greetin' (crying). Look at the mascara on her face.

Participants' interpretations of these four images produced some powerful and interesting data on the topics of sex, violence, alcohol, emotions, friends and infidelity.

5. Accounts of media influence with regards to sexual/romantic relationships

5.1 Girls' accounts of media influence with regards to sexual/romantic relationships

I will now consider participants' accounts of how the media influences their own sex. Although the focus of the thesis is on how media influences the opposite sex, it is still of interest to consider how the perceived process of media influence with regards to the same sex. Subsequently I will consider each sex's presumptions about whether the 'opposite' sex may be influenced by media. I will start with the girls' accounts. Some participants were sure that they were not influenced by the media (Rhona, Milly&Molly): 'At the end of the day you're going to do what you're going to do. You decide not anyone else' (Milly). Others (*G.Ya.3c*) said that despite their own immunity to media influence, they accept that other girls could be influenced. This is an example of 'presumed influence'. Annie (*G.Ya.3d*) stated that girls are not affected by media, though boys are: 'It's different for girls cos they know what they want, loads of boys don't'. In a similar tone, Cat (*Mxd.Ro.4a*) said:

> And it's like just if you're strong you won't want to copy other people, but if you're not really, you don't really know what you want, then you might be influenced… you'd maybe want to be like somebody else, trying to be somebody else.

Others also said that girls they knew were generally influenced by the media (*G.Ro.4a*, Lucy). In fact some girls admitted to personally being influenced by the media, specifically about

boys and their relationship expectations. Heidi (II) stated generally that her expectations were 'probably from TV', as did girls in *G.Ya.3a*. They cited TV programmes *90210* and *Skins* as their influences, adding that they would probably be even more influenced if the programmes were a better reflection of 'reality'. Lynsey (*G.Ya.3a*) said that from *Skins* she had learned that all boys are sexually frustrated. Participants in *G.Ya.3b* describe their media-induced disappointment:

> **What other ideas do you get from TV about relationships?**
>
> Susan: When they break up and that, you just feel, like... I don't know, actually.
>
> Sarah: Like, they [TV] always say the boy will come running after you and that won't actually happen and you've got, somehow you've got this into your head that it's gonna happen, but like, you have to just accept that it's not. It's really hard to do that.

The quote above clearly illustrates how media portrayals of relationships have led to a conscious disappointment. Let us consider how Eva spoke of the role which the media played in her understanding of relationships:

> **Where do you think you got these expectations (about relationships) from?**
>
> Eva: From romantic movies probably (laughs)
>
> **Really? So what is it, tell me a little bit more about that...**
>
> Eva: Right, in a movie like *The Notebook* and stuff like, they just do like anything to be with each other and stuff.

And is that something that you'd want to do, is that your kind of ideal relationship?

Eva: Yeah.

Okay. And any other films at all?

Eva: *Titanic.*

Okay. So tell me a little bit more about *Titanic*. How do you remember it?

Eva: They kind of don't let anyone get in the way between them, and like I wish that's like what I done. (Laughs) So like I've learnt from my mistake that not to do that again.

And what's the story in *The Notebook*?

Eva: They meet each other and - well when they're younger and fall in love and then she moves away, but like every five years or so they keep coming back together. But then she's engaged to someone else, but he sees that she loves the guy from when she was younger so, he lets them be together and they fall in love and get married. And then when they're older you see them dying together. (Laughs)

Oh, that's a romantic story. And - the way you talked about those two films, would you change the way that you'd behave in a future relationship, because of the ideas you've got from those films?

Eva: Yeah.

And what would you do differently?

Eva: I wouldn't be ashamed of a relationship. And, be more upfront maybe.

It is clear from this quote how seriously Eva has taken into account the romantic message of the film.

5.2 Boys' accounts of media influence with regards to sexual/romantic relationships

I will now look at the boys' accounts of media influence and perceived media influence. A few male participants made a

gender distinction about media influence: that is, that boys are not influenced but girls are (Kai, Harvie-*B.Ya.4a*). Norman distinguished between boys learning a sensible lesson from the media, in contrast to the girls: 'I think boys see it [media], and someone's like that, you're really stupid to say I won't do that, but girls will see someone acting, like they'll say, I'll act like that'. A couple of participants stated that other boys might be influenced by media. Only Kai (II) said he personally was influenced. In his case it was about relationship expectations when he said that he looked to Ross and Rachel in *Friends* as role models. Frank (II) said that it is possible that boys are 'egged on by media about looks and being popular'. He was comparing this to girls who were more likely to be influenced 'about emotions, being in a relationship and being in love'. Participants in *B.Ro.4b* confirmed the girl participants' statements when they said that 'lots of boys watch porn, men too'. They envisaged that these men could learn about sex from watching porn.

5.3 Girls' accounts of presumed media influence: what influence did girls think the media had on boys in terms of sexual/romantic relationships?

Three main topics emerged from this analysis: first, boys' popularity; second, gender/power inequality; and third, pornography. Some girls (*G.Ya.3a*) said that boys would think 'if I do stuff like that I'll get as popular as he is'. Here they were referring to *Skins* character Cook. When I asked them where boys get these ideas from, Alison pragmatically said that different boys choose different things; some will be influenced by Cook, some by JJ, others by Freddie (all *Skins* characters). Media-perceived gender/ power inequality was commonly discussed. Presumed expectations about girls being sexually used were discussed. I asked Eva (II) where she thought boys' expectations about relationships came from:

> Eva: Probably *American Pie* or something. So not really a good thing.
>
> **So what kind of ideas do you think they'd get, from *American Pie*?**
>
> Eva: That they can just kind of treat girls however they want, and like again use girls as a one-night-stand sort of thing.

Lucy (II) presented her idea that boys' media-derived expectations mean that they think they can 'pull as many girls as possible'. Lucy thought this was 'horrible'. Later in her interview she said astutely that although boys may learn about sex from TV, it is a 'different story when you do it – it has emotions'. Participants in *G.Ya.3d* responded to my question of whether boys' expectations are from the media. Louise said 'there are no proper relationships in *Skins*', to which Annie added 'they just want sex with everyone, that's what some boys are like. That's all they really want you for'. Lucy thought that boys got the 'wrong impression' of girls from the media because media show that girls are 'easy' (sexually). Holly (*G.Ya.3c*) also thought boys got the wrong impression from programmes like *Skins.* She did not specify what this impression was.

Of those participants who discussed the issue, most of them said that boys derived their expectations about relationships from pornography. Participants from *G.Ro.4a* and *G.Ro.4b* discussed how they think pornography has influenced boys' expectations. Some said they think this is more likely if the boy has not been in a relationship before. Others said that boys expect girls to 'always do what they want, that we should be easy'. This opinion, they suggested, is from pornography. The girls assured me that they felt no pressure to act like a

pornstar for boys. Debbie (*G.Ro.4b*) said that 50 percent of men watch porn daily. When I asked how that made them feel they said 'doesn't really bother me - they always look so perfect, or the illusion of perfect. But I know boys who look for personality'. For Debbie, then, personal experience counteracts the presumed influence of media.

Heidi (II) told of how boys in her year at school download pornography to their mobile phones. Girls, on the other hand, did not watch porn, she said. She made a clear distinction between their expectations and what they deserve: in that porn may change what boys feel they deserve and what they want, but that because it is so clearly fantasy and separated from real life, the boys would be 'aware that it's not really possible'. Rhona (II) seemed more certain that the pornography that boys watch influences their expectations of girls: 'They kind of like more expect it from you, like you should be doing what these people are doing on these videos or photos or whatever they're looking at'.

5.4 Boys' accounts of presumed media influence with regards to sexual/romantic relationships: what influence did boys think the media had on girls in terms of sexual/romantic relationships?

A large number of boys said that girls were influenced by the media. Mark (*B.Ya.3b*) said, non-specifically, 'they'd maybe change what they think from media…. girls do get ideas from TV, but I don't know what – you have to ask them'. To this Gavin responded: 'Aye, lassies are complicated'. The excerpt below notes some possible origins of the presumed influences:

> **Do you think that girls get any of their expectations about relationships from the media?**
>
> Kai: Yeah. Coz there's like chick flicks.

Martin: Paris Hilton. *Titanic*.

Kai: Aye, *Titanic* - actually

Martin: Aw, I like that film.

Kai: Aye, shut up*. The Notebook, Love Actually*…

Adam: *Dirty Dancing*.

Martin: I like that film, too.

Kai: Aye I bet you do.

And so what kind of relationship is portrayed in these films?

Kai: Lovey dovey, run away, kiss each other…

Adam: Float about on bits of driftwood. Watch your boyfriend floating down to the bottom of the sea

(*B.Ya.3e*)

Interesting to note here is Martin saying that he too likes *Titanic*, which is being presented here very much as a 'girly' film. Martin was a confident member of the group and it was for this reason, I suspect, that he felt secure enough to be able to play with gender expectations. Although the boys presumed expectations only denote 'loveydovey, run away, kiss each other', they are clearly aware of the 'chickflicks' they thought girls were watching. Other boy participants also stated that girls got their expectations about relationships from the media:

Eric: If they see a nice lassie on the TV, and then see a nice boy, they're going to try and act the way they act to go out with them.

Dave: And you watch programmes where their pals give them advice, and then the lassies who watch it will take that advice and try and use it.
(*B.Ya.3c*)

Some (Johnny, *B.Ya.3d*) said that girls watch more TV than boys, adding that 'they probably just think that's the way you should dae it' (Johnny). The boys in *B.Ya.3d* go into more detail:

Do you think girls ever get expectations about relationships from TV and films?

Iain: Nope.

George: Aye, some lassies do from like *Skins* and that – coz they watch it every week and that's all they talk about.

Johnny: Aye, they pure watch hundreds of they kind of things, don't they? We might watch like *Shameless* and…

George: They watch like *Friends*, *Hollyoaks*.

Johnny: They pure watch everything, don't they?

George: Everything – aye, they just watch everything that's on the telly.

Kai: Coz they're fat and lazy (laughing).

Later they suggested that the expectations girls got from the media would be that relationships are all about sex (George). Participants in *B.Ya.4a* also thought that girls would learn from programmes such as *Skins* and *Shameless:* that is, 'how to dae things, how to have sex if she's never had sex' (Bryn). The rest of the boys' account of girls' expectations revolved around perfect relationships, which for some boys were understood as being unrealistic expectations. Boys in *B.Ya.3a* said girls expectations were from 'love movies', 'happily-ever-after', *90210*, Disney and mushy movies. Frank's account was similar. He said girls' media-derived expectations were that 'love conquers all' and how perfect relationships are about 'true love, feeling protected and safe and happy'. Norman (II)

suggested that girls will think that 'boys should act funny, smart, serious'. Kai (II) thought that girls get 'too influenced by things and have high expectations and you end up being disappointed'. Participants in *B.Ya.3c* also talked about this issue:

Do you think girls ever get their expectations from TV and films?

Jason: I think they can, aye. They think too much of their boyfriend.

They think too much of their boyfriend?

Mike: They're expecting them to be...

Jason: Expect too much of them.

Mike: Aye, but they expect them to do everything that they want them to, but if it doesn't, you know, it's usually him that suffers, you know? You don't go and talk to her one time, you know? You're out with your pals...

Dave: Aye, you dinghy (ignore) one phone call and that's you. They go mental at you.

Mike: Aye, you don't reply to a text or something coz you've got no credit and it turns into a domestic or something – end up bouncing their phone off you.

(Laughing)

Where does that expectation come from?

Mike: Probably so many of these chick flicks that they watch.

ALL Aye.

Mike: I had to sit through one of them – so boring.

Dave: *Sex and the City* and all that rubbish?

Mike: Aye.

Dave: *Mama Mia* and all that.

So what kind of impressions about relationships do these chick flicks give off to girls, then?

Mike: All like kind of lovey stuff – you know, flowers at Valentine's Day and aw that, no just a funny card about like G-strings or something.

(Laughing.)

So do you think girls and boys have a different idea about what a relationship should be?

ALL Aye.

What's the difference?

Bob: Girls expect more than boys do.

Mike: They want more out it.

Eric: They watch a programme, and then they see what's happening – and then they think, well my boyfriend's no doing that, so what's the point in going with him, know what I mean?

This exchange highlights in detail boys' presumptions about girls' expectations of romantic relationships.

6. Thematic integration of accounts of sexual/romantic relationships in real-life and media portrayals

6.1 The importance of emotions in sexual/romantic relationships

Throughout the interviews and group discussions, participants often noted a gender difference regarding the role of emotions in sexual/romantic relationships. Much of this data confirms previous findings going back at least as far as work by Holland et al. (1990) which considers gendered motivations and expectations and differential expressions of emotions; boys are very reluctant to discuss emotions while girls are forthcoming, and boys are more interested in sex while girls are not. For this reason I will not fully present this data here but provide

instead three short excerpts that are representative of the rest of my data.

Norman (II) said that he does not talk to anyone about his emotions. I asked why. 'Maybe they don't want you to. Girls talk more but they don't want boys to talk'. Frank said: 'boys say to girls that they love them to you know, like tie them in if you know what I mean, so they can get more out of them'. Representing the girl participants, here is an excerpt from Milly and Molly:

> Milly: Girls are probably mainly after trust, cause you want to be able to trust someone in a relationship.
>
> Molly: They're more emotional in relationships than guys.
>
> Milly: A lot more.
>
> Molly: And get more involved. And stuff.

6.2 Gender difference and power/agency

Overwhelmingly, girls' accounts of relationships bestow the boys with the agency. Girls, it was said, cared much more about boys and relationships than boys did about girls and relationships. This was one of the main power distortions described. Lucy (II) said that girls are 'much more obsessive and possessive' than boys. When girls she knew start a relationship, 'all you hear is his name, his life story'. Others said that boys 'aren't bothered' about relationships (*G.Ya.3a*, *G.Ya.3b*, *G.Ya.3d*). As we saw earlier, when talking about love, Frank (II) described how boys only say that they love girls 'so they can get more out of them'. Often the boys, matching the girls' comments, told of how the girls cared more about relationships than they did. 'Boys are casual, girls take it pure

seriously' (Mark-*B.Ya.3b*). Similarly, others (*B.Ya.3f*) said that 'a girl wants to be with a boy all the time, but the boy might want to spend time with his friends more'. Sandy suggested that the reason that boys were less serious about relationships was that they are less mature at this age. Johnny (II) said simply that girls are more into relationships than boys because boys 'get bored'. He did not know why. Participants in *B.Ya.3d* spoke of girls in relationships in a disparaging tone:

> **How do you think she'd want you to act in a relationship?**
>
> Iain: She wants you to be her scivvy.
>
> George: Aye, she wants you to do everything for her.
>
> Iain: Be her bitch.
>
> George: Aye.
>
> Iain: I don't tell you what to do, and she'll tell me what to do.
>
> George: They don't want you doing anything, like.
>
> Johnny: Aye, I know – they just want you to be with them all the time, don't they?

Although in one sense the power lies with the boys in their strong resistance to what the girls want from a relationship, perhaps what they think the girls expect of them – 'she wants you to do everything for her', and 'she'll tell me what to do' - suggests that the power is more equal. Or, the power will fluctuate between boys and girls in the relationships. Frank (II) described what could be a possible gender power transition. He said that when they get older, boys will mature and be more serious about relationships. He added that girls will also have to mature in a way that enables them to realise that a relationship is 'not always going to be perfect'.

There are very few examples from the participants of boys appearing to have less power than girls in sexual/romantic relationships. Dave (II), when asked if boys and girls have similar ideas about what they want from a relationship, said that boys 'just want folk (the person they're in a relationship with) tae tell everybody that they're going with them and don't be embarrassed ae them'. Earlier in the interview Dave had mentioned a situation such as this. Also, one interpretation of a *Hollyoaks* image (Image 3 in this chapter) described how men can be hurt as well and that if they knew they were being cheated on it would 'break their world'. This surely is a sign of vulnerability. For the above discussion it is important to bear in mind that most of the boys had not been in serious relationships. It could be argued here that boys are in a particularly powerful position over girls because they have little emotional investment in the relationships because their prime motivation is esteem with male peers (Wight, 1996), while girls have strong emotions. This, as is recognised by some boys (for example Frank), may change over time.

The other main issue related to power in relationships was with regards to sex. Lucy (II) said that girls 'give' boys sex and by doing so hope that the boys will stay with them. Lucy warned, however, that 'they (girls) don't understand you should take time, you should get to know them first'. In this respect it may be suggested that girls are using sex as a means to get what they want from the boy; sex is being used as a power tactic. Milly said that 'if a boy goes with loads of girls he gets praised but if it is vice versa she's called a whore, which is really insulting'. In this same tone as Milly's comment above, consider an intriguing example from *Mxd.Ro.4a* group about gender power issues.

Daisy: [...] There's a thingy up on the wall at school that says the 'Rules of the School' or something, and it says, if a girl sleeps around she's a slut, if a guy sleeps around, he's a legend.

Yeah, and do you think that's what people think?

Daisy: Yeah, that's what the media think

What do you think about that?

Caroline: It's not like fair
...

And do you think they (boys) watch anything different on TV or films or anything, to give them different ideas about how to treat women or how to treat men or...?

Caroline: Gangster films as well...it usually starts like speaking like a gangster on MSN

Really?

Caroline: Somebody called me a ho the other day. They said 'it means girl so I'm going to start calling you it'. I was like, 'no'.

Daisy: It's American for 'whore'.

Caroline: No, it's American for a girl.

Daisy: No, it's American for whore.

Caroline: No, it's American for girl. It means 'girl' if you're a gangster basically

Jordan: It can mean that.

Caroline: It basically means you can treat a girl like crap

This quote provides an insight into the development of language: one in which a derogatory term for a woman is becoming acceptable. Derogatory language was also used to describe Effy when the participants were interpreting media images (Images 1 and 2 in this chapter), as was shown earlier

in the chapter. Effy was described by girl participants as a 'slut'. The boys who were also depicted in the same images with Effy, on the other hand, were described as being 'lucky'. We also saw a more physical form of gendered power inequality with one image prompting discussion about how the man might hit or rape Zoe (Image 3 in this chapter) because she was caught cheating. In Image 4 (this chapter) some boy participants said that Michelle might be crying because she might have been raped.

In sum, this section has outlined what I present as two of the overarching emergent themes with regard to this chapter: the importance of emotions in sexual/romantic relationships; and gender difference and power/agency in sexual/romantic relationships.

7. Discourses on gender-appropriate engagement in sexual/romantic relationships

Discourses about sexuality are often in fact discourses which attempt to portray a certain identity. Discourses involve more than language; they also organize meaning and action (Gilfoyle et al., 1993: 182). Hollway (1996) presented three discourses (as discussed in Chapter Two). These are: the *male sexual drive* discourse; the *have/hold* discourse; and the *permissive discourse* (Holloway, 1996: 85). Wight (1994) suggested an additional *uninterested* and *predatory* discourse. The data in this study confirm the most use of the have/hold discourse and the predatory discourse, some use of the male sexual drive discourse, very little use of the permissive discourse and no use of the uninterested discourse. Below I will note a few examples of the use of these discourses from the data.

In terms of the have/hold discourse some boy participants (B.Ya.3a, B.Ya.3c & B.Ya.4a) said that they expected that their next relationships would be exclusive; the reason being that not behaving exclusively annoys girls. Another example is from B.Ya.3d:

> **And how long do you think they (girls) want it to last for?**
>
> Iain: Months and years and centuries.
>
> George: Forever. (Laughing) Centuries.
>
> Johnny: They see you coming, but – and then they start texting you, like, "how many weans (babies) do you want to have?"

A final example of the have/hold discourse comes from Frank (II): 'A lot of girls have a lot more self-respect and they have to be absolutely going out with the person for a long time before they'll actually do anything (sexual)'. Interestingly, Milly and Molly offer an example that goes against the have/hold discourse for women:

> Milly: Yeah, and then some people (boys) are like, oh it's going to last forever.
>
> Molly: And you're like God!
>
> Milly: Yeah, and that's scary! (all laugh.) People like that scare me.
>
> Molly: It's like yes, we're going to get married and have babies and stuff. And it's like, I'm only fifteen.

There were many examples of the predatory discourse. This was in specific relation to the aspect of the predatory discourse that suggests that boys are more interested in the opinions of their peers than in sexual pleasure/relationships themselves. The majority of these examples came from the

boys' discussions of romantic/sexual relationships in which they seemed to be far more interested in how they were perceived by their male friends - and how it upheld their reputation with them - than they were with the girl with whom they had potential/actual relations. Many participants were reported to attribute a high value to others' – namely peers' - opinions of the relationship. Dave (II) said that because the girl with whom he was in a relationship did not tell anyone and therefore did not make the relationship public, there was 'just nae point' (to the relationship). Heidi (II), also adopted this discourse of concern for others' opinions. For Heidi (II) it seemed that the (imagined future) relationship itself is almost insignificant in comparison to the importance of others' opinions in her peer group. Although it corresponds with the predatory discourse in that she is concerned with others' opinions of her relationship, her example is different because she is a girl (and the discourse was originally associated with boys). One of the few examples of the male sexual drive discourse was from Alison (G.Ya.3a) who stated: 'A boy needs sex'. The few examples that mentioned the permissive discourse were reported to be when people were drunk.

8. Conclusion

The chapter began by outlining some participants' accounts of their own relationships. Thus it was that we saw Lucy's concern with control and sex; Rhona's mother's influence; Eva's fear of others' opinions and Milly and Molly's rejection and concern about 'wasting sex'. Boys' accounts of their embryonic relationships were reported; they appeared to be more concerned with their social reputation than with the actual romantic or sexual relationship. Also outlined were participants' definitions, and accounts, of different stages of sexual/romantic relationships. Their expectations - and the

expectations they presumed the opposite sex had - of sexual/romantic relationships were then considered. The next section of the chapter explored participants' interpretations of media portrayals of sexual/romantic relationships: both general accounts of media portrayals and interpretations of images from the TV programmes *Skins* and *Hollyoaks*. This was followed by participants' accounts of media-influence. The following section took into consideration the overarching themes that were related to their accounts of sexual/romantic relationships in real-life and in media portrayals. These were: the importance of emotions in sexual/romantic relationships; gender difference and power/agency. The final section noted some of the discourses that were utilised by the participants.

One of the major gender differences present in participants' accounts of relationships concerned emotions and sex. That is to say, girls are presented as being interested in emotions and boys presented as being are interested in sex. Boys reported being uncomfortable when expressing their emotions verbally. This may have been because they realized that it was not expected of them. Perhaps boys find it easier to express their emotions physically rather than verbally.

As was highlighted in the previous chapter on alcohol, we saw again in this chapter the correspondence in participants' reports between sexual relationships and alcohol use. This was not only present in participants' accounts of their real-life experiences of sexual/romantic relationships, but also in their interpretations of the media images. For example, in Image 4 (in this chapter), Michelle was said to not know whom she had had sex with because she was drunk. In response to Image 3 (in this chapter), some participants discussed how they felt

cheating would be more readily forgiven if they had been drunk at the time.

Another significant point to be drawn out is that engaging in a romantic/sexual relationship may be a construction of their gendered identity. The very nature of (either homosexual or heterosexual) sexual/romantic relationships is gendered, so in understanding these relationships we are also arriving at an understanding of how such behaviours constitute gendered identities. A consideration of the two overarching emergent themes - the importance of emotions in sexual/romantic relationships; and gender difference and power/agency - further explained how engaging in sexual/romantic relationships may constitute elements of the construction of gendered identities. Participants' repeated concern over friends' opinions', their peer popularity and their reputation is also allied to gender appropriate identities. Understandings and expectations of, as well as actual, sexual/romantic relationships can play a part in the creation of (gendered) identities.

The analysis of the opposite sex's expectations of sexual/romantic relationships, and the source of those expectations, has revealed the participants' wish to belong and to be accepted. They are attempting to understand what the rules and roles of relationships are. How do they 'do relationships'? There are many places in which clues can be found. These clues form expectations. Friends, peers and family are sources. So too is the media. We have seen in this chapter how teenagers interpret and respond to particular media portrayals of sex. The media are reported to play an important role in forming many of the participants' expectations of what a romantic and sexual relationship is, and

how one should behave. Not only that, but participants thought it played an important role in how the *opposite sex* perceived relationships. Many participants of both sexes stated that both they and the opposite sex were influenced by the media. The girls' *presumptions of what boys expect from* relationships included popularity, and power-inequality in matters sexual. Boys, they said, often had the 'wrong impression' of girls. On the other hand, boys' *presumptions* of what girls expect from relationships were romance, true love and the perfect relationship. This, they thought, could lead to girls being disappointed. They also thought that girls could learn about sex from the media.

The first question this chapter sought to answer is: 'How do teenagers' understandings of gender-appropriate engagement in sexual/romantic relationships relate to media portrayals of sexual/romantic relationships?' Media were reported to be influential on teenagers' expectations of sexual/romantic relationships (and more so than for alcohol). The influence of friends and media were intertwined. Media were also reported to be just one influence among others: including peers, actual/potential sexual/romantic partners, and, to a lesser extent, family.

The second question this chapter sought to answer is 'Is Milkie's "influence of presumed media influence" theory a useful way to understand the media's position in teenagers' lives, and specifically their understandings of gender-appropriate alcohol use, and of romantic and sexual relationships?' Milkie's theory structured both the data collection itself and subsequent analysis of data for this chapter. The media were reported to play an important role in forming many of the participants' expectations, and the

expectations they presumed others had, of what a romantic and sexual relationship should be, and how one should behave. Many participants of both sexes stated that they and the opposite sex were influenced by the media. To an extent, therefore, Milkie's 1999 *Influence of Presumed Media Influence* theory has been a useful conceptual apparatus with which to explore the role which media play in the lives of these teenagers with regard to their sexual/romantic relationships. Although it cannot be shown (from the data here) that participants' presumed expectations caused them to behave in certain ways, nevertheless it is apparent that these presumed expectations do exist. To this extent the media have an influence on participants' expectations of their sexual/romantic relationships.

The third question that this chapter sought to answer is: 'How are teenagers' understandings of gender-appropriate behaviours with regards to drinking alcohol and sexual/romantic relationships used in the construction of gendered identities?'. Engaging in sexual/romantic relationships, and expectations thereof, were important in the construction of gendered identities. Learning what was gender-appropriate with regards to relationships contributed to establishing gendered identities.

Chapter Seven - Discussion

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1. Introduction

2. Overview of the findings in relation to the research
   questions

3. Reflections on the research: limitations and strengths

4. Conclusion

1. Introduction

The main purpose of this final chapter is to draw together and to interpret the findings which were generated by the research and to reflect on the strengths and limitations of the methods and design adopted. The *initial* aim for the study had been to investigate the influence of the media on teenagers' sexual behaviour and smoking. The term 'influence' implied that a search for causality would be undertaken, to measure the effects of the media teenagers' sexual behaviour and smoking habits. It implied also that the study could somehow isolate the factor of 'media' from other factors which might also have causal effects: for example, social class, gender, family socialization, peers; and so on. Although at this stage the issues were discussed as though causality in terms of the media were explicit, the research was always intended to be qualitative. As a result of the pilot fieldwork, and after reflecting fully on the fieldwork conducted at Rosefield High (the first school to be studied), I decided to adopt an interpretivist epistemological stance. I focussed upon the everyday perceptions which teenage boys and girls held of alcohol use and of romantic and sexual relations, and whether or not their perceptions were shaped by media portrayals of these behaviours. The issue of smoking did not loom large in their discourse, and so it was put aside in favour of a focus on alcohol, a topic that appeared to occupy a central role in their lives. The central research question emerged to be:
'Do media portrayals of drinking and sexual/romantic relationships shape teenagers' constructions of gendered identities?'

A number of more specific research questions logically followed. These are:

1:     Is the media integrated into the lives of teenage boys
       and girls?

2:     How do teenagers' understandings of gender-appropriate
       alcohol-use relate to media portrayals of alcohol use?

3:     How do teenagers' understandings of gender-appropriate
       engagement in sexual/romantic relationships relate to
       media portrayals of sexual/romantic relationships?

4:     Is Milkie's (1999) 'influence of presumed media
       influence' theory a useful way to understand the
       media's position in teenagers' lives, and specifically
       their understandings of gender-appropriate alcohol use,
       and of romantic and sexual relationships?

5:     How are teenagers' understandings of gender-
       appropriate behaviours with regards to drinking alcohol
       and sexual/romantic relationships used in the
       construction of their gendered identities?

As it has been such an integral part of the research process, I would like to revisit here Milkie's (1999) *Influence of presumed media influence*. Milkie suggests that the media may be influential in a circuitous way, due to people's knowledge that media content is also seen by many others. Individuals believe that others are more strongly affected by media portrayals than they themselves are. Here an indirect effect may occur as people account for the effects of the pervasive media portrayals on others in their social networks, and are themselves influenced by perceptions of the way others see the media-distorted world. Milkie's theory structured both the data collection itself and subsequent analysis. It is necessary to bear this in mind when reading the answers to the research questions. Underlying the *presumed media influence* theory, and also crucial to the thesis as a whole, is symbolic interactionism. As a very brief reminder here, the tenet of symbolic interactionism (as is discussed in Chapter Two) is that individual identity is shaped through the interaction between

one's own self-concept and one's perception of how others see you.

2. Overview of the findings in relation to the research questions

Question 1: Is the media integrated into the lives of teenage boys and girls?

As shown in Chapter Two, recent literature on young people and the media suggest that the media play an integral part in the lives of young people, with television and films accounting for the greatest proportion of school-aged children's media consumption (Livingstone and Haddon, 2009). Livingstone also states that young people today are the first generation to live in an environment in which electronic media technologies are an ingrained and integral part of everyday life. The findings from this thesis are consistent with much of this literature.

The investigation revealed that teenagers' use of media was reported to be both pervasive and enduring. It was also apparent that media use in participants' lives was diverse, complex and diffuse. Important to note here is participants' reported awareness of what media their peers are exposed to, particularly opposite-sex peers. For example the boys often reported that they 'knew' how many television soaps the girls whom they knew watched; the girls talked of boys watching pornography. As well as discussing and watching media with friends, some participants overheard others talking about media, and this, they thought, enabled them to 'know' what was being watched, and/or what type of media the opposite sex was interested in. For teenagers, in order to presume media influence on others they must, first, at least *think they know* who in their social group were using a given medium; and second (to some extent), they must have been familiar with

the content of this medium. These two considerations are significant for participants' expectations of the opposite sex's expectations. At the crux of the thesis is this: a boy can think a girl is influenced to act in a certain way by certain media content by being aware of that content. In turn he may then act accordingly. However, although he can *presume* the girl watches certain content and *presume* that it affects her, the influence on *his* behaviour is *irrespective of what she actually does watch*.

MSN often played a vital role in negotiating sexual/romantic relationships. It was considered to provide a welcome sanctuary and was used as a method with which to alleviate the embarrassment of talking to the opposite sex, thereby allowing boys and girls to become 'closer'. MSN was reported to make people more confident, enabling participants to act differently because by talking on MSN they no longer felt the need to worry about the opinions of the friends of the boy or girl with whom they were talking. Conversely, embarrassment was reported by some as a reason not to use MSN as there was no way of knowing that the other person was not laughing at them or that no-one else was in the room. This finding also relates to the symbolic interactionist theory. If your individual identity is shaped through the interaction between your self-concept and your perception of how others see you, then restricting your self-presentation and receiving limited and controlled information from the person with whom you are interacting may have repercussions in terms of your understandings of self-identity. Here it is evident that participants felt that communicating on MSN afforded them more control over the presentation of their identity. In this sense MSN allowed for a disruption of the 'normal' symbolic interactionist process because only a chosen and restricted

element of the participants' identity was being presented and was able to be part of the interaction. However, participants were aware that those with whom they were conversing on MSN also had control of their own identity presentation.

This exploration of media use set the context within which the rest of the thesis was placed: we saw how the teenagers reported using media, and how central it was to the conduct of their social lives. In answer to this research question, the media were very much integrated into the lives of both male and female teenagers.

Question 2: How do teenagers' understandings of gender-appropriate alcohol use relate to media portrayals of alcohol use?

Much of the literature in this area suggested that there is an association between media images of drinking alcohol and the actual drinking of alcohol. Chapter Two identified both cross-sectional and longitudinal research (Adalbjarnardottir, 2002; Sargent et al., 2006; Anderson et al., 2009; Austin et al., 2000) showing clear associations between exposure to media images of drinking alcohol and actual drinking. It could be said that the findings presented in this thesis neither confirm nor refute this literature. It was found here that there is a relationship between media images of drinking and participants' understanding of drinking. However, the findings could give no definitive answer whether or not it is solely the media that are influencing these understandings.

The literature review found very little about how the media portrays drinking alcohol in relation to gender. Day (2004) suggested that media portrayals in which women are drinking alcohol are often represented as potentially dangerous for women. Importantly, Lyons, Dalton and Hoy (2006) stated that

there is an absence of qualitative research exploring the ways in which alcohol consumption is portrayed in the media aimed at young adults. To my knowledge there is no existing qualitative literature that explored whether or not, or how, media portrayals of drinking were integrated into the understandings and expectations of gender-appropriate behaviour of teenagers. This is a gap in the literature that my research has attempted to fill.

To an extent, fieldwork discussions of media portrayals of alcohol use were integrated into participants' understandings of gender-appropriate alcohol use. In order to assess this, it was necessary to explore participants' varied reported experiences of drinking. Alcohol featured prominently in the lives of most participants, even non-drinkers, since it was intertwined with issues of maturity, social groups and new experiences. It is not surprising, therefore, that alcohol affected different social relationships, be they relationships with family, friends or potential/actual romantic/sexual partners.

Participants' general understandings of discussed *media* portrayals of *girls'* drinking involved parties, sex and fighting. To some extent, the reported *real-life* experiences of girls' drinking correspond with those reported in the media. The main differences were that there was less fighting and fewer parties reported in their lives. Rather than fighting, there were reports only of aggression; it was not specified whether this was verbal and/or physical aggression. In terms of parties, there were more reports of general socializing rather than parties *per se* and this was said to take place outside, for example in parks, rather than in their homes. Despite the superficial differences, essentially some media interpretations and reported real-life accounts did correspond.

Participants' general understanding of media portrayals of *boys*
drinking involved promiscuous sex and physical aggression.
Again it can be suggested tentatively that the reported real-
life experiences of some of the (more working-class) boys'
drinking corresponded to these discussed media portrayals.
Accounts of drunken sexual encounters and physical aggression
were commonly reported outcomes of boys' drinking.
However, parents played a significant role in some boys'
perceptions of drinking. This was not something reported as
being portrayed by the media.

Throughout, participants' discussions of drinking alcohol often
slipped between accounts of media portrayals and accounts of
real life. This suggested that, for the participants, their real
lives and the discussed media portrayals were closely
connected, and that their perceptions of gender-appropriate
drinking did associate with portrayals of drinking alcohol in the
media. Their interpretations of media portrayals were arrived
at partly through the lens of their personal experiences.
Thereby, for example, if promiscuous sexual behaviour and
aggression were commonplace in participants' lives then it is
arguably not surprising that these experiences were used to
interpret the media portrayals. This is the 'powerful audience'
position. In answer to the research question, then, the
discussed media portrayals of alcohol use were integrated into
teenagers' understandings of gender-appropriate alcohol use,
to an extent. That is, the ways in which the participants
discussed and interpreted media portrayals of drinking often
accorded with the ways in which they reported their real life
experiences of drinking alcohol. What cannot be inferred from
these data is in which direction, if such a linear relationship
exists, the causality flows. As a result it is not possible to state

whether the 'powerful media' or 'powerful audience' position holds more weight.

Participants did not report that they learned gender-appropriate behaviour with regards to drinking alcohol from the media. They did not report that the media influenced their understandings of drinking alcohol. Nor did participants presume that the opposite sex was influenced by the media in their understandings of gender-appropriate drinking. This is different from what is concluded in the previous paragraph because it is referring to the *reported* media influence on themselves and on others, whereas the previous paragraph summarised the ways in which they simply *described* their real life experiences of drinking alcohol and their interpretations of discussed media portrayals of people drinking alcohol. In sum, both their alcohol-related behaviour and their presumptions of the opposite-sex's expectations appear to be influenced less by the media and more by their friends and peers.

Question 3: How do teenagers' understandings of gender-appropriate engagement in sexual/romantic relationships relate to media portrayals of these relationships?

The literature review highlighted how young people learn about sex in same-sex social worlds. Wight and Henderson (in Burtney and Duffy, 2004) suggest that the profound gender differences in sexual understanding are largely attributable to the way most young people grow up in sexually segregated social worlds, especially in the period prior to early sexual relationships. This leads to some discordance between boys' and girls' understandings. The findings here support the existence of this theory in that boys' and girls' understandings of sexual/romantic relationships were often discordant. The findings also suggested that media had the potential to add

another layer of discordance to each sex's understanding of gender-appropriate behaviour with regards to sexual/romantic behaviour.

The literature also shows research from both the 'powerful media' and the 'powerful audience' effects research that focused on sexual activity. Studies in the US have demonstrated associations between television exposure and the initiation of sexual intercourse in adolescents (Collins et al., 2004; Brown et al., 2006; Brown et al., 2002; Kunkel, 2001). In contrast, Bragg and Buckingham's (2004) UK-based research, which focused on media and young peoples' sexual relationships, is an example of 'powerful audience' research. Their study suggests that sexual content on the television is both used by the young people and at the same time might influence their beliefs and behaviour. However they say this evidence of media influence is limited both in terms of the evidence from their study and due to the fact that few qualitative studies have been undertaken in this field. They conclude by suggesting that much closer attention should be paid to how young people interpret and respond to particular televised portrayals and how they use television as a resource in forming their own sexual identities. This would mean moving away from 'effects' and 'influences' towards an emphasis on the interpretations and uses of television. They also call for further empirical qualitative research in order to investigate theoretical concerns such as sexuality and subjectivity, and the changing nature of gender. This thesis is a response to that call. Whereas Buckingham and Bragg cautiously suggested that the television might influence young people's beliefs and behaviour, this thesis suggests that it does indeed influence young peoples' beliefs and possibly behaviours with regard to sexual/romantic relationships, albeit in a circuitous way, and

in a manner suggested by the influence of 'presumed media influence' theory.

The analysis of participants' expectations of how the opposite sex thought about sexual/romantic relationships, and the source of those expectations, has revealed the participants' wish to belong and to be accepted. The teenagers were attempting to understand what the rules and roles of relationships are. How did they play the 'relationships part'? There are many places in which clues can be found; one of these places is the media.

Before moving on it is necessary to consider if and how the two behaviours of drinking alcohol and engaging in romantic/sexual relationships were said to be related. Findings for the Healthy Respect Evaluation (2010) noted that a high percentage of 15 year-old participants reported themselves to have been drunk when they first had sex: 29 percent of girls and 33 percent of boys. This highlights the important connection between drinking alcohol and engaging in sexual and romantic behaviours. Indeed, a goal of the National Sexual Health Strategy Scotland is to increase public awareness of the links between sexual health and alcohol use. The data from this thesis support this literature.

Many participants talked of how sexual negotiation and activities were often accompanied by drinking. This was not only present in participants' accounts of real-life experiences (not necessarily their own experiences but others they know) of sexual/romantic relationships, but also in their interpretations of the media images: alcohol played a pivotal role in the negotiations of sexual behaviour, both in real life and in the media. Being drunk, or at least pretending to be drunk, may be understood as a process that is useful for

teenagers when trying out perceived gender-appropriate identities as they engage in their relationships.

Question 4: Is Milkie's "influence of presumed media influence" theory a useful way to understand the media's position in teenagers' lives, and specifically their understandings of gender-appropriate alcohol use, and of romantic and sexual relationships?

The majority of media-effects research falls into two categories: 'powerful media' and 'powerful audience' (as discussed in Chapter Two). The present study has explored a theory that can potentially reconcile these two polar positions. Milkie's (1999) *Influence of presumed media influence* theory suggests that a unique quality of media is their public pervasiveness: that is, people's knowledge that that media content is also seen by many others. However, individuals believe that others are more strongly affected by media portrayals than they themselves are. She states that a complex, indirect effect may occur as people account for the effects of the pervasive imagery in media on others in their social networks, and are themselves influenced by perceptions of the way others see the media-distorted world (Milkie, 1999: 193). She states:

> Even though an individual may consciously feel no effect from the media (in this case pervasive beauty ideals disseminated through mass media, particularly in regard to body image), because of social comparisons and reflected appraisals, individuals *presume* that the images effect significant and generalized others and, therefore, have an effect on the individual (Milkie, 1999: 194).

Important to note here is that I applied Milkie's theory in a slightly different way to how she applied it in her research. Whereas Milkie's research focused only on girls, I focused the theory on the opposite sex. Therefore, for example, when interviewing girls I was interested in finding out what they

thought of the expectations that boys they knew had of sexual/romantic relationships, and whether these expectations may be influenced by the media, and *vice versa* with the opposite sex.

This study has used Milkie's concepts as heuristic devices. One way in which I sought to discern whether or not teenagers' notions of gender-appropriate behaviour were shaped by media portrayals was by exploring their presumptions of what the opposite sex expected of them, and from where this expectation was derived. This was carried out by adopting Milkie's conceptual apparatus based on the influence of presumed media influence. How teenagers interpreted and responded to particular media portrayals of sexual/romantic relationships was explored by discussing both participants' knowledge of these media portrayals and by their interpretations of the media images I presented to them during the individual interviews and group discussions. The media were reported to play an important role in forming many of the participants' expectations of what a romantic and sexual relationship should be, and how one should behave. Many participants of both sexes stated that they and the opposite sex were influenced by the media. The girls' presumptions of boys' expectations – that is, the expectations they think boys have of relationships - included popularity and power-inequality with regard to sexual behaviour. Boys, they said, often had the 'wrong impression' of girls. On the other hand, the boys' presumptions of girls' expectations – that is, the expectations they thought girls had of relationships - were romance, true love and the perfect relationship. This, they thought, could lead to girls being disappointed. They also thought that girls learned about sex from the media, in particular from romantic comedies and from pornography.

I found media to be less influential on teenagers' understandings and expectations of gender-appropriate alcohol use than on their understandings and expectations of gender-appropriate sexual/romantic relationships. The media were also reported to be only one possible influence among other influences, these being peers, actual/potential romantic/sexual partners and, to a lesser extent, the family.

The data here suggest that there is a complex interrelationship between media content and other dimensions of social relationships. This is specifically related to Milkie's theory in that it was seen that media were influential by virtue of other social relationships with significant other people. That is, someone may be influenced in a circuitous way because they think that a good friend or potential romantic partner is influenced.

In sum, Milkie's conceptual apparatus provided an important second-order interpretation of the commonsense accounts provided by the participants, especially in relation to their understandings and expectations of gender-appropriate romantic/sexual relationships. Although it cannot be shown (from the data here) that participants' presumed expectations caused them to behave in certain ways, nevertheless it is apparent that these presumed expectations do exist. To this extent the media have an influence on participants' expectations of their gender-appropriate engagement in sexual/romantic relationships.

It has been argued here that neither presumed media influence nor straightforward media influence was as strong for the teenagers' understandings of gender-appropriate alcohol use as it was for their understandings of gender-appropriate

sexual/romantic relationships. The media were reported to have different levels of influence with each behaviour. For this reason I took a conceptual step back in order to look at how other influences, such as those from peers and family, could be framed. A possible way of attempting to understand this finding was by asking the fifth and final research question.

Question 5:   How are teenagers' understandings of gender-appropriate behaviours with regards to drinking alcohol and sexual/romantic relationships used in the construction of gendered identities?

In broad terms, I adopted the theoretical perspective of symbolic interactionism, and within that perspective I located other approaches which had an affinity to it. The symbolic interactionist premise is that meaning is created in interaction with others in particular social settings, and the creation of this meaning has consequences for behaviour. The findings from this research support this theory, and they do so in two particular ways. First, because identity is seen to be created in interaction with others, symbolic interactionists suggest that people continually modify their self-identity depending on their social context, and that they take their newly-modified identity to the next social situation. I found that this was evident throughout the research data, and a way in which this can be demonstrated is by considering the concept of gender-appropriateness itself. It is only through being aware of where and with whom one is interacting – that is, the context of each specific interaction - that the notion of social appropriateness becomes apparent and relevant. Participants, in being aware of the specificities - especially the gendered specificities - of each social interaction were able to behave in what they felt to be a gender-appropriate manner. An example of this comes from Johnny. When discussing sexual/romantic relationships as part of a single-sex group

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discussion (B.Ya.3d), Johnny implied a lack of interest in communicating verbally and emotionally with girls; he said he would not answer the phone to girls because he thought they would be calling to tell him they loved him. However, in his individual interview no such lack of interest was discussed. In fact, he revealed to me a nervousness about communicating with the opposite sex and admitted that he drank alcohol in order to be able to communicate more comfortably with girls. This example highlights that Johnny portrays himself as being uninterested emotionally when in one type of social interaction (all-male group discussion), but as showing a vulnerability and desire to communicate verbally with girls when in another type of social interaction (individual interview with female researcher). He thereby demonstrates his ability to act in what he felt to be a gender-appropriate manner.

Within the general theoretical perspective of symbolic interactionism which I adopted, a number of theoretical strands have been considered as constitutive of it. In particular, Milkie's (1999) influence of presumed media influence theory is a nuanced adaptation of symbolic interactionism which was shown in this study to have particular explanatory power. Milkie's theory is based on the idea that the media are influential but that they are influential by virtue of one's expectations about how the media may have influenced other important people in one's social group. For this process to operate it was essential that participants were able to imagine what was going on in the minds of others; and in this case, in the minds of the opposite sex. Asking questions based on the premise of presumed media influence allowed me to explore participants' ideas and expectations of gender-appropriate behaviours. For this whole

process to work, participants had to care about what other people thought; this is integral to symbolic interactionism whereby meaning is created in interaction with others and where people must consider themselves through the eyes of others in order to understand and attain their own social identity (McIntyre, 2006). Indeed, this specific concept was employed as a data collection technique. Participants were shown media images and were asked to consider what members of the opposite sex would think of the image, and also whether or not they thought they might be influenced by the images. This was a fruitful methodological technique and resulted in much useful data.

In passing, I drew upon two further strands within symbolic interactionism which also had a bearing upon the construction of gendered identities. These strands are associated, first, with West and Zimmerman's (1987) Doing Gender; and second, with Courtenay's (2000) paper 'Constructions of masculinity and their influence on men's wellbeing'. West and Zimmerman regard gender as 'performative'. This does not mean that gender is read off from a prepared script, as in a theatrical performance; rather, it means that gender is an accomplishment, one achieved as an appropriate performance in social interactions. Gender is a social construction. In the study here, participants were able to report either about themselves or about others as they 'performed' (as West and Zimmerman would say) these gender-appropriate actions in different social settings. In the case of this thesis, the actions at issue were those to do with sexual/romantic relationships and drinking alcohol.

In passing, too, I explored the relevance of Courtenay's view that 'health related beliefs and behaviours, like other social

practices that men and women engage in, are a means for demonstrating femininities and masculinities' (Courtenay, 2000: 1385). This approach – again one constitutive of symbolic interactionism - proposes that health-related behaviours are used in daily interactions in the social structuring of gender and power. This matter of power tends to be under-theorised in symbolic interactionism, and I drew upon Courtenay's analysis in order to consider the matter of how gendered identities were negotiated (a process which always involves power). My research suggests that sexual negotiation and sexual activities were often accompanied by drinking alcohol. This emerged not only from participants' accounts of real-life experiences (not necessarily their own but that of others whom they knew) of sexual/romantic relationships, but also from their interpretations of the media images. Data also suggested that being drunk, or pretending to be drunk, may be understood as a process that is useful for teenagers when trying out perceived gender-appropriate identities as they engage in their relationships. How does this show how drinking can be used to establish or confirm gendered identity? A participants' idea of a particular gender-appropriate identity may have been informed by an exposure to a range of discourses which emanate from media, peers and the family. And in turn, certain alcohol-related behaviours may have been a response to perceived gender-appropriate discourses about sexual and romantic relationships. For example, a girl may have been influenced by a television programme to act in a sexual way with a boy. Nervous about acting in this way, she may use alcohol and its effects – for example increased confidence and the get-out-clause of being drunk – as a way in which to implement her new idea about how to act with the boy. As with drinking, romantic and sexual relationships are acted out in a particular way which is

informed by discourses which specify gender-appropriate behaviour, attitudes and roles (and with the help of alcohol itself, which acts as a social 'lubricant') and in doing so is a component of the project of identity construction.

Before finishing this section on research question five, I will move on to consider the different gendered discourses present in the data. One of the major gender differences present in participants' accounts of romantic/sexual relationships both in real life and in the media concerned emotions and sex. Girls employed the discourse that they were interested in emotions and boys employed the discourse that they were interested in sex. Boys reported being uncomfortable when expressing their emotions verbally. This may have been because they realized that it was not expected of them. Perhaps boys found it easier to express their emotions physically rather than verbally.

Thus it was reported in the *public discourse* that boys were not interested in emotions, which equated to being interested in little other than sex in a relationship, and that girls were interested in emotions, which equated to them having little interest in having sex. This type of data was often related to discussions of power. Put simply, participants suggested that girls had less power because they invested more emotionally in the relationship than the boys did. The boys, on the other hand, were said to 'only' be interested in the physical aspect of the relationship. There is a large body of literature which addresses these issues of emotions and gender. Here I will very briefly mention a couple of the most relevant to this discussion. Jackson and Scott argue that displays of emotions equate to neediness and a certain vulnerability. They state:

> Doing the feelings is equated with 'getting upset'. Conversely the person, usually a man, who gives support is thus obliged to position himself as someone who is strong enough not to have feelings… Expressing feelings

is seen as weak, feminine and in contradistinction to men's rationality. With the value, comes the power difference. Men can support women who are subject to the unfortunate bane of feeling and thus men are superior (Jackson and Scott, 1996: 99).

It is more often the case that girls display their emotions while boys keep them repressed: boys therefore *appear* to be in control. Tschann et al. offer some thoughts on the issue of power and control in sexual/romantic relationships:

> Among adolescents, an important basis for power is the desire for emotional intimacy, a major motivation for having a sexual relationship. If partners in a relationship are not equally emotionally involved, the partner who has less desire for emotional intimacy has greater personal resources, because the more involved partner is willing to do more to maintain the relationship (Tschann et al., 2002: 17).

This, they argue, is consistent with the 'principle of least interest' which states that the person who has the least interest in the relationship has the most control within it. Safilios-Rothschild (1976) called this a 'relative love and need' theory, and suggested that the less emotionally-involved partners in dating relationships tend to perceive themselves as having more power in their relationships.

It would appear from this literature that boys have more control. Additionally, it could be argued that the girls are at most risk from having sex: it is the girls who may get pregnant and who may damage their reputation. For these reasons, perhaps it is little wonder that the girls invest more in the emotional rather than the physical aspects of a relationship (although, as argued, this makes them vulnerable to emotional hurt). But are the boys really in control and risk-free? Are there risks related to the boys' repression of their emotions? Are they emotionally undeveloped or unstable, and if so, what repercussions might this have? Participants often discussed

boys' aggression with regard to drinking and sexual behaviour. I suggest that this could be their non-communicated emotions being manifested physically instead of verbally. Others have made similar suggestions. For example, vulnerability and sharing of feelings are seen to be related to girls and autonomy and regulation of emotions are related to boys (Polce-Lynch et al. 1998b; Bayrakdar Garside and Klimes-Dougan, 2002; Polce-Lynch et al., 1998a; Garside and Klimes-Dougan, 2002). Other studies that have looked at gender specific socialisation processes have found that girls and boys are socialised differently (Bartle-Haring, 1997; Bayrakdar Garside and Klimes-Dougan, 2002; Eisenberg et al., 1998; Jacobs and Eccles, 1992; Morrongiello and Dawber, 1999), as girls are taught to express their emotions more freely than are boys (Eisenberg et al., 1998; Bayrakdar Garside and Klimes-Dougan, 2002; Beiter et al., 1991; Morrongiello and Dawber, 1999).

Above I have discussed participants' use of the traditional hegemonic gender discourses which state that males are active, strong, sexual and disconnected from emotions whilst females are passive, emotional, weak, vulnerable and have less sexual desire. To achieve full masculine status boys must separate themselves from feminine identities, and vice versa (Allen, 2003: 226). I will now draw together some examples from throughout the thesis which display alternatives to the dominant discourses about gender. In considering these alternative discourses it may be possible to understand why and when this resistance occurs. I will begin by considering alternative discourses from the boys before discussing examples of the girls' alternative discourses.

Eric displayed a non-hegemonic masculinity when he disclosed in front of class mates that he had watched Dirty Dancing with

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his mother (see p. 143). Despite Bob saying to Eric 'I'm a bit worried about you', I think that Eric's comment was accepted and Bob was speaking in jest. Eric was a confident member of the group and therefore felt he was socially secure enough to playfully go beyond the boundaries of the hegemonic masculinity. In this respect he is manifesting something akin to de Visser's (2007) 'trading masculinities'. Because he was comfortable with other aspects of his identity, and was a popular and accepted member of his social group, he was able to challenge masculine expectations. More specifically, de Visser's theory would suggest that Eric would have to be confident with another aspect of his hegemonic masculine identity in order to be able to 'trade' like this. Unfortunately I do not have the data that would allow me say with any certainty what these other aspects might be. One suggestion may be that because of Eric's confidence (for whatever reason), by subverting the hegemonic masculine expectations he is scoring points in terms of 'shock factor' humour which itself may be considered to be more acceptable in terms of hegemonic masculinity.

The next two excerpts offer alternative discourses of masculinity through boys' explanations as to why they do not drink alcohol. The exchange on page 175 explains that the participants in B.Na.4a – a friendship group - do not want to drink because they equated drinking with being 'grown up'. In particular, Frank said 'I'd rather do it (drink) in time. I'd rather be a child whilst I am one, rather than just be an adult and regret it'. The boys in this group were middle-class and this was very much part of their identity-presentation. Follow-up interviews with Frank confirmed that he did not drink and the reason for this was because he equated under-age drinking and the possibility of related under-age sexual behaviour with

lower socio-economic classes. As with the first example above, we can see that Frank was able to subvert the hegemonic masculine discourse because he felt confident, and perhaps superior, in other aspects of his identity; that is, his 'higher' social class. Therefore he is able to 'trade' this drinking alcohol aspect of masculinity with the confidence he feels he has in terms of his social class.

In another group discussion (p. 176) Ferg and James state that they do not drink. Their reasons for not drinking – religion and diabetes respectively – do not adhere to a hegemonic masculine discourse. I had the impression from this conversation that these reasons were not revelations but common knowledge: they felt rehearsed. It was apparent to me from the group dynamic, including body language, participation in the group discussion, clothes and hair styles, that Ferg and James were by no means dominant members of this social group. In this respect, the notion of adhering to hegemonic masculinity equates to social status and social power, and conversely, not adhering to hegemonic masculinity equates to weak social status and social power.

The final example from the boys is with regard to a discussion about definitions of relationships (page 247). Here I asked Tom, Bruce and Calum in B.Ya.3a how they would define a sexual/romantic relationship? They responded by openly discussing emotions. In doing so these participants were not adhering to the dominant masculine discourse. One reason for this may be that these boys thought that I, as a female researcher, expected to hear these responses from them. Another reason could be that, other than sex, the discourse about emotions was the only other kind of discourse about relationships that the boys were familiar with. Therefore,

perhaps lacking any personal experience, it was the only discourse available to them. It is important to note that the laughter suggests that these boys are not quite comfortable with employing this discourse.

I will now move on to consider three examples of non-dominant gender discourses from the girls. These all focus on sexual/romantic relationships. First, Milly and Molly, on page 262, offer their opinion about how long they think a boy wants a relationship to last. Milly appeared to be horrified at the prospect of a relationship lasting forever. This contradicts the hegemonic feminine discourse of 'to have and to hold' for as long as possible. I suggest that in this instance, Milly and Molly are concerned with what they deem to be the negative aspects of growing up which they see as being the responsibility of marriage and children. So, they are subverting the hegemonic feminine discourse in favour of a discourse that reflects a young and 'carefree' identity which may be considered to be more acceptable. It should also be noted that Milly and Molly were best friends and this was a paired interview, therefore it may be that this comfortable context allowed them to display a non-dominant feminine discourse.

The second example is from a discussion between Barbara and Danielle from Mxd. Ro.4a (page 148/149) about girls watching cartoon, gay and lesbian pornography. Here the girls are discussing how, in fact, it is often they, not boys, who start discussions about sex and porn. Perhaps it is becoming more acceptable for girls to be openly interested in sex. It could be considered to be a boundary-testing statement, which, if pulled off, would be considered to be 'cool'. We can recall that Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) state that hegemonic discourses of gender are changeable and historically situated, so it is possible that this is an example of a tentative addition

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to a feminine discourse. It would certainly chime with the wider cultural ideas that women are seen to be valued for their sexual attractiveness and even their sexual 'deviance' as seen in pornography and 'adult' magazines.

The final example here is from Lucy (II) (page 163) where she describes how she watches sad films because they give her a chance to express her emotions by crying; something that she feels unable to do publicly. Lucy is discussing here her private and public identity presentation. Interestingly, it is in public that she is subverting the dominant feminine discourse by not wishing to display her emotions. Lucy considered herself to be a strong person and a dominant character, and is clearly aware that if she is to be considered as such in public then she must restrain the 'weak' feminine practice of displaying emotions. She has found a way to cope with this stifling of emotions by crying secretly with the aid of sad films.

From the examples above we can see that these alternative discourses were used by both boys and girls and that they were also drawn from individual interviews, paired interviews, single sex group discussions and mixed sex group discussion. Despite there being no difference between individual interview and group discussion situations that seemed to facilitate the use of these discourses, I suggest that the context of the discussions was nevertheless imperative to the employment of the alternative discourses. For example, Milly and Molly were two best friends being interviewed together, therefore the risk of them being negatively stigmatized, or their use of non-hegemonic discourses proving to be detrimental to their femininity, was reduced (Allen, 2003: 227). With respect to the boys' group who described relationships in terms of emotions, perhaps talking to a female researcher opened up a space where they felt able to use alternative discourses. This focus

on the impact of the specificities of context is also consistent with one of the underlying theories of this research - symbolic interactionism - which would suggest that how we act and speak is dependent upon each particular social interaction. However, an alternative interpretation of these non-hegemonic discourses is that they show that the portrayals of dichotomised hegemonic femininity and masculinity are greatly over-simplified and, in practice, it is in fact acceptable to express one's gender in fairly diverse ways.

The non-hegemonic discourses that have been presented above add to the notion that discourses are strongly implicated in the exercise of power (Willig, 2001: 107). As in the case of Frank not wanting to drink alcohol, some participants were able to trade masculinities (de Visser and Smith 2007). In this particular case Frank felt confident in being able to trade one score of not drinking with the fact that perhaps he felt he was from a more 'powerful' social class. What is considered to be powerful or acceptable in society, both generally and gender-specifically, however, is subject to change. Hekman (1995) suggests that at any historical moment discursive formations are multiple and heterogeneous so that 'even though every era there will be hegemonic discourses, other non-hegemonic discourses will also exist, forming a discursive mix from which subjectivity can be constructed' (Hekman, 1995: 203). Therefore it is quite possible, as I argued in relation to the girls who liked to talk about sex and pornography, that the dominant gender discourses may be changing. Overall I am unable to explain why some of the participants resisted the dominant gendered discourses and others did not. All I can suggest is that, for whatever reason, in that specific social interaction of the interview, the participants felt that utilising a non-dominant gendered discourse served them best in

describing their thoughts and presenting their gendered identities. With regards to interventions, this discussion can conclude that an alternative pedagogy would be useful. This might involve allowing teenagers the space to discuss the dominant gender discourses and consider the concept of a discourse or a stereotype itself. It may also involve offering teenagers access to an alternative set of gendered meanings and discourses.

To conclude this section of the chapter, I present a summary of the main findings from the data in order of sequence of importance given the existing literature and understandings of the lifestyles and identities of teenagers in Scotland:

1. Drinking alcohol and engaging in sexual/romantic relationships, and expectations thereof, were important in the construction of gendered identities. Learning what was gender-appropriate with regards to drinking and relationships contributed to establishing gendered identities. Sources from which participants learned this varied: from the media, peers, actual/potential sexual/romantic partners and, to a lesser extent, family.

2. Presumed media influence was evident, particularly with reference to teenagers' understandings and expectations of sexual/romantic relationships.

3. Media were reported to be influential on teenagers' expectations of relationships (and more so than for alcohol). The influence of peers and media were intertwined.

4. Media were reported to be just one influence among others: including peers, actual/potential sexual/romantic partners, and, to a lesser extent, family.

5. Some real-life and media portrayals correspond with regard to alcohol. However, a causal relationship cannot be shown.

6. Alcohol reportedly played a pivotal role in terms of sex and was useful for teenagers in trying out perceived

gender-appropriate behaviour; it gave them more confidence; and it offered them the excuse/caveat of being drunk, or *pretending* to be drunk, when they behaved in a way they later regretted.

7.   Sexual/romantic relationships were sometimes negotiated through MSN.

8.   Media use was reported to be pervasive and enduring in the lives of these teenagers.

9.   There was a major gender difference reported both in real life and in media portrayals regarding sexual/romantic relationships and emotions and sex: boys were reported to be interested in sex; girls were reported to be interested in emotions.

New insights that these research findings add to the existing literature are the findings 1, 2, 6, 7.

3. Reflections on the research: limitations and strengths

I turn now to a critical reflection on the research process, and I attempt to anticipate some of the criticisms which may be made of it.

Unfortunately the data I collected did not provide a consistent representation of the participants' experiences of drinking alcohol and engaging in sexual/romantic relationships and therefore I cannot confidently state whether or not their experiences did impact on their perceptions of media influence. In the same vein, much of the data I have on these teenagers' lives are generalized impressions that they wanted to give me. Rarely did the participants disclose detailed personal experiences of use of alcohol and/or sexual/romantic experiences. Much of the data is 'I think…' and 'probably…', and therefore it is likely that much of it is anecdotal and stereotypes.

Another possible weakness of this research is that I may not have gleaned valid accounts from participants about their experiences, perceptions or expectations. Could it be that they presented themselves in such a way as to appear more favourable in front of their friends, peers or me, the researcher? This is impossible to answer. There exists no such thing as an objective and 'accurate' account. In line with symbolic interactionist ideas, we act depending on our social context and with whom we are talking. For example, during a group discussion I asked participants from *B.Ro.4a* what they thought a good way to behave in a relationship was:

> Dylan: Treat the girl fair.
>
> **Treat the girl fair.**
>
> Dylan: Aye.
>
> **Okay. What does that mean exactly?**
>
> Dylan: Get into their pants basically. (Laughter)
>
> **Right.**
>
> Dylan: No, have respect for the bitch. (Laughter)

I suggest that Dylan's response was very much due to the social context of the discussion: the fact that he was in the company of both me as a female researcher and his male peers. There is friction in the discourses he uses. On the one hand I suggest he is subscribing to what he feels is an appropriate masculine discourse ('get into their pants basically') and on the other he is subscribing to a discourse that he feels is appropriate to use in front of me ('treat the girl fair'). His final comment 'have respect for the bitch' can be viewed as either an awkward amalgamation of the two positions, or else a clever synthesis in that he is leaving his audience unclear of which discourse he subscribed to.

Related to this discussion are my preconceived ideas about the issues at hand and how these may have impacted on how I conducted the research and interpreted the data. This may well have been the case, but this is an almost inevitable and unavoidable part of qualitative research. Group discussions and individual interviews are social interactions in their own right and, as 'objective' as one might try and be, things such as tone of voice and facial expressions can undoubtedly affect, for example, the direction of the discussion. A way in which I sought to address this issue was by analyzing what biases I brought to the research.

I was aware of the impact that the researcher could have on the data collected (Ali et al., 2004). Bryne (2004) states that some research topics may require like to interview like; for example women interviewing women on topics of domestic violence so as to ensure participants feel secure and un-judged when being interviewed, both for their own comfort but also so that their disclosure is not affected by the person interviewing them. I was aware of the fact that I was a woman conducting research and that this would almost certainly impact upon the kind of data provided by the participants. This could be considered to be a strength or a weakness. I would like to suggest, however, that it is neither, but rather a consequence of conducting qualitative research. The same would be said if I had been a man conducting this research. One can never be genderless so the issue, rather, is to remain sensitive to potential differences of being male or female. I also reflected on how my presence may have impacted on the data – both in the direction of fieldwork and interpretation of data - in other ways, such as social class, place of origin, experience of relationships and experience of drinking. These issues were discussed further in Chapter Three.

Another issue that is neither a particular strength nor weakness, but that could be construed as either, was the fact that the venue of the group discussions and interviews may have impacted on the data collected. A majority of the interviews and group discussions took place in the two schools. I could have been perceived to be like a teacher and therefore participants may have felt reluctant to be 'honest' with me, as they may have feared information being relayed to a teacher (despite the promise of anonymity) or for the simple fact that teacher-like figures may not warrant an open discussion. In retrospect, however, it must be noted that I was continually surprised at the level of openness encountered with the participants. Although I will never know what was not disclosed, the pupils' openness in group discussions and individual interviews suggested that they did not perceive me as a teacher and were not inhibited. This could be seen as a strength of my approach to fieldwork.

I deliberately did not go into depth in terms of addressing the issue of sexual orientation. When presenting the questions on sexual/romantic relationships I prefaced it with a comment about there being 'no wrong or right way' of 'doing' relationships, and that 'a relationship can be between a girl and a boy, boy and a boy, or a girl and a girl'. However, there seemed to be an assumption throughout from me and from the participants that the relationships being discussed were heterosexual. If I had had more time to devise the fieldwork and interview the participants then the issue of sexual orientation may have been given more prominence. This issue may have been addressed by interviewing participants individually to allow this kind of disclosure.

Another potential weakness of the study could be how the participants were managed. Much of the fieldwork was conducted in schools during class hours. Generally a teacher would go to a class, select pupils from that class, and bring them to me in order to conduct a group discussion or individual interview. It was only at this stage that consent was discussed and the option was given for them to return to their classes. Although it was made clear to them that they were in no way obligated to participate, if I were to conduct the study again I would prefer to talk to the participants first in an environment that had not been introduced to them as 'the group discussion' or 'the interview'. It may have been difficult or awkward for them to decline participation even if they had wanted to because their teacher had assumed the group discussion was taking place and also because they would have to speak up in front of their peers and return to class alone. Despite wishing to change this situation, and voicing this wish, the system in place due to time restraints disallowed the possibility of change.

One further potential weakness of the study concerns the sample and social class. The two schools from which I gleaned the sample have similar socio-economic deprivation profiles. Despite not having data on the socio-economic status of individual participants, I do have detailed observations of my impressions of the participants' socio-economic status. The participants for the group discussions were all selected by teachers and appeared to be a general mix of working- and middle-class participants in both schools. This was not the case with the individual interviews. In the first school, Rosefield High, I attempted to recruit participants for follow-up individual interviews at the end of the group discussions. The school was reluctant for me to use more of the pupils' class

time, so these individual interviews had to take place outwith school hours. I asked participants to give me their details if they were interested and I would contact them. The resulting follow-up individual interviews were all with middle-class girls, with the exception of one middle-class boy. Those interested and keen to undertake school-related extra-curricular activities were middle-class.

Having conducted those individual interviews with girls, by the time I was recruiting for individual interviews from the second school – Yatesly Academy – I wanted to talk with boys. However, teachers at Yatesly Academy requested that I conducted the individual interviews *during school time and on school premises.* I was required to give the contact teacher a list of names. The teacher then selected whichever boys were present and asked them to leave their class in order to come to the individual interview. For reasons I do not fully understand this process resulted in me interviewing mainly working-class boys.

The fact that I conducted individual interviews with participants from different social classes is important. It was during the individual interviews that the most detailed and in-depth data were gleaned. If I were to do this research again, I would be careful to put in to place a process that did not result in such a socio-economically distorted sample. As a result I am unable to make gender and class comparisons as rigorously as I would like; any conclusions must be tentative.

An additional potential limitation of the study was the lack of time and resources needed to analyse predominant discourses on television and in films relating to gendered alcohol drinking and engaging in sexual/romantic relationships. It would have

been extremely valuable to have been able to compare participants' real-life discourses with those on television. If I were to continue this line of research, I would endeavor to compare these discourses.

A strength of the thesis is that at a theoretical level this research is a rare attempt to bridge the two opposing schools of thought on media effects: 'powerful media' and 'powerful audience'. This 'bridge' was informed by the theory of *Influence of presumed media influence* (Milkie, 1999). This theoretical approach did suggest that media were influential, to an extent, in the teenagers' lives, albeit in a circuitous way, as has been described.

This study has contextualised media-use in the wider social lives of teenagers. In doing so it has highlighted both the salience of the media and the limitations of its influence on these teenagers' lives. This research has made a particular contribution to the study of teenagers' understandings of gender-appropriate behaviours and to the construction of gendered identities. In particular it has furthered understandings of the complex ways in which such an abstract phenomenon manifests itself in real lives.

Great effort was made to capture the most relevant data. The first and second stages of the pilot fieldwork, and the first stage of the main body of fieldwork at Rosefield High, were each reflected on before the next stage of the research was undertaken. As a result of these reflections, the topic guide and questions asked of participants evolved. This meant that the questions were always designed to elucidate the opinions of the teenagers on the evolving themes. I established a very good rapport with the majority of the teenagers with whom I

conducted research. This was achieved in part by the effort I made to achieve a relaxed atmosphere in the interviews and group discussions in order to encourage participants to disclose sometimes very personal aspects of their lives. The group discussions also provided strong data on how teenagers present themselves in front of their peers. For example, joking and teasing were often-adopted tactics among the boys, especially when discussing sensitive issues such as romantic/sexual relationships. This highlighted how such issues were dealt with among their same-age, same-sex peers. It shows how the boys were adhering to a traditional masculine discourse whereby it is unacceptable to discuss these issues surrounding relationships and emotions with any sincerity or openness.

I was religious in keeping a field diary. As soon after each interview as possible I wrote down everything that I could remember about the interview, from descriptions of participants and interview location, to their interactions with each other and with me, and my own feelings about the interviews. This was an imperative part of the process in terms of being reflexive[29] and therefore conducting good research.

In the course of writing this thesis some theoretical ideas have emerged that persistently appear whenever I consider the thesis from a broader theoretical perspective. I introduce these emergent theoretical considerations below. The thesis was informed by a theory within the interpretive paradigm known as symbolic interactionism. A central tenet of symbolic interactionism (as was discussed in Chapter Two) is that the external world 'out there' has no given ontological or real status. Individuals assign meaning to it. They define it. These definitions of the situation have consequences for action. In

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[29]   Examples of reflexivity are discussed in Chapter Three

Thomas' (1972) dictum, 'if men [sic] define situations as real, they are real in their consequences'. It follows that others will define me, and that they will act on the basis of that definition or expectation. For example, objectively I might be very poor, but others may think that I am wealthy, and they will treat me as if I am wealthy. In Cooley's (1902) concept of the 'looking glass self', individuals must consider themselves through the eyes of others. By so doing, they may better understand their own identities. But, before we act, it is not the case that we constantly pause in order to decide how the Other sees us. That would be exhausting. For most of the time we act 'habitually'. The reason for this is that others have already made sense of the objective world for us. They have given us a definition of reality. They have rendered the objective world as 'natural', as given. This does not mean that we are socially programmed, but it means that we can make interpretations of these 'given' meanings. If we have the power to do so, it is open to us to 're-make' or to re-define reality. It is only when our definitions of reality – our expectations, or recipes for action – are *not* confirmed that we must consciously re-assign meaning to the world.

At a theoretical level, Milkie's 'presumed media influence' theory can be seen as a development of Thomas' theorem (as defined above): in both cases, *definitions of the situation* (Thomas) and *presumptions* (Milkie) *have consequences for action*. Methodologically, this thesis has been concerned to explore how these teenagers arrive at their definitions of their situation and expectations. In addition, these definitions are socially structured. That is to say, the social milieux in which teenagers find themselves will offer possibilities for assigning meaning to the world, and thereafter for action. Expectations and definitions of reality are structured by our understandings

which are made available to us from the external world, and yet are internalised to set limits to our thoughts, behaviours, life-views and the way we relate to others (Heaphy, 2009). This means that there are structural conditions which constrain teenagers, be they economic, political, religious or cultural.

There is a further relevant consideration to make about expectations. Expectations have an integral temporal component. Strathern says: '[...] futures necessarily belong to the present: they are what we imagine ourselves now. The present is itself only made visible against a past...' (Strathern, 1992: 10). This is applicable to expectations. That is to say, we take experiences in the past, consider them at this present moment, and we then project to the future what might happen as a synergy of both past and present. Accordingly, it is possible to use the concept of time as an explanatory model for the data. At the moment I interviewed the participants they could draw on a range of *past* experiences and influences to make sense of my questions; for example family, friends, lived experience and media. The *present* was also informative in the construction of their answers and the identity they wished to portray; for example my presence, the presence of peers, and the location of the interview. From here participants were requested to consider the *future.* What were their expectations? How could they imagine or project themselves in to future scenarios where, for example, relationships were concerned?

This research has shown how different stories come together; how they are entangled. For example, a participant's expectation, decision or behaviour is a mesh of interwoven influences that are present at any one time in her/his life. At the moment of vocalising an expectation of a future

relationship, for example, the thread of influence from past experiences, stories from friends and peers, advice from parents and teachers, the storyline on last night's television programme, the person to whom the expectation is being told, and the general mood of the person will all be at play here in this one moment. Some threads may be stronger than others, but nevertheless they are all there, entangled. These are the 'gathering together of the threads of life' (Ingold, 2010: 10). The same would apply when making a decision about how to act in a gender-appropriate way with regards to drinking or engaging in a sexual/romantic relationship.

4. Conclusion

This thesis has sought to understand the expectations of gender-appropriate behaviour which teenagers have of how to engage in relationships (romantic and/or sexual), and of how to 'use' alcohol. The term 'appropriate' here is not meant to be a fixed absolute, but it means appropriate within the context of their social settings (or their milieu). It has been the intention to engage with the everyday world of these teenagers, and to try to understand the common-sense meanings which they have assigned to the use of alcohol and to the conduct of their romantic and/or sexual relationships.

This thesis has been concerned mainly (but not exclusively) with the media, and how they are perceived and defined by the participants in the research. And more specifically, it has been concerned with how media portrayals are interpreted and integrated by teenagers into their common-sense taken-for-granted definitions of reality. Even more specifically, and again mainly in relation to the media, the thesis has focused upon the definitions of reality and expectations which teenagers have of gender-appropriate alcohol use and of

engaging in romantic and sexual relationships. The thesis has shown how these expectations may be a way in which gender identities can be constructed.

The research found that the mass media does shape teenagers' perceptions and expectations of drinking alcohol and engaging in sexual/romantic relationships; and in doing so shapes their gendered identities. Importantly, the research confirmed Milkie's 'influence of presumed media influence' theory that resolved the apparently incompatible 'powerful media' versus 'powerful audience' approaches to media influence. This suggests that media influence might be all the stronger for not being readily recognised or acknowledged as being influential. Media were more influential for teenagers' understandings of gender-appropriate engagement in sexual/romantic relationships than they were for teenagers' understandings of gender-appropriate drinking. A possible reason for this finding is that the participants did not have their own or others' experiences to draw from and so instead they drew on what was portrayed in the media. In other words, media portrayals of activities that are more public – in this case, drinking alcohol – are seen to be only a minor influence among other stronger influences such as peers and family. Sexual behaviour is less public therefore teenagers do not have everyday knowledge of the specificities of engaging in sexual/romantic relationships and therefore rely more on media portrayals to shape their ideas of what is appropriate behaviour.

The research also found that sexual behaviour and drinking alcohol were intertwined. Many participants talked of how sexual negotiation and activities were often accompanied by drinking. Being drunk, or, importantly, pretending to be drunk, may be understood as a process that is useful for teenagers

when trying out perceived gender-appropriate identities as they engage in their relationships.

I conclude that this research is all about possibilities. It is about the possibilities that others' stories afford teenagers. As the thesis has shown, these stories may come from peers, from family or from the media. How these stories are integrated with existing stories or personal histories may well determine what is possible, what expectations one develops for oneself and for others; and ultimately, what life decisions one makes.

Appendices

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Appendix 1: Topic Guide for main fieldwork Group Discussion at Rosefield High

Rosefield Topic Guide

- How well do you know each other?

- *how often do you see each other?*
- *have you been to each others' homes?*
- *do you live in the same area?*

- What are your interests?

- *what do you do outside school?*

- Describe to me your day-to-day use of TV, films, internet, magazines, radio.

- Do you do this alone or with others?

  If others, which others?

- Do you use TV/internet in your room alone?
- Do parents know what you're watching?

  - (lots of girls have told me boys watch porn....)

- Have you thought about any programmes or films in the last day and if so what?

- Do you talk about programmes and films when you come into school?

- Do you think anyone in the media is the same as you or anyone you know?

- Can you think of someone that you admire in the media?

- *Why do you admire them?*

- Can you tell me about celebrities' lifestyles?

  - Do you know if they drink, take drugs, smoke, how many boyfriends and girlfriends they have

  - Do you think this is morally wrong?

- Do you think that anyone you know might be influenced by media? In terms of the way they act, in terms of the way they think, or act in a sexual way or in terms of smoking drinking and drug-taking?

- What makes a good party?

- How do they compare with Skins/Shameless. What takes it too far/would be unacceptable party behaviour?

IMAGES

Can you tell me what's happening here? What do you think of them?

- How do you think these relationships are being portrayed?
- Do you have an impression from the media about what an ideal relationship is?
- Do you think there's an ideal way for a girl to act around boys they fancy and vice versa?

RESEARCH

That's interesting because what you're saying is similar / different to what this research found:

- Collins (2004) found that if young people watch sexual behaviour on TV it is likely that they will have sex at a younger age.

- Brown (2006) found that 12-14 year olds who use media that has a lot of sexual content are more likely than those who use media with not much sexual content to have engaged in sexual activity.

- In the USA watching films with smoking has been shown to be associated with young people starting smoking.

- In Germany, watching American movies which show people drinking alcohol has been linked to young people drinking alcohol without their parents knowing.

Appendix 2: Pupil information sheet for all group discussions and individual interviews.

Pupil information sheet

The media and young people's health behaviours

Why is this research being carried out?

The purpose of this research is to understand how and why young people use media, how it might influence their attitudes and if it might have an impact on their health behaviours. These health behaviours include sexual behaviour, smoking, drinking and illicit drug taking.

What will happen if you take part?

The research would involve one group discussion with four to six of your friends – in single sex groups. If it's OK with you I would like to audiotape the discussion but this would only ever be listened to by myself and, perhaps, my supervisors in Glasgow. No parents, teachers or anyone else apart from the research team will have access to that audio-recording.

If you take part:
* you don't have to answer any questions you don't want to
* you are free to opt out at any time.

Who has checked the study?

This project has been agreed by the Ethics Committee of Glasgow University's Law, Business & Social Science faculty

Who is doing this research?

This project will be carried out by Jane Hartley, a doctoral PhD student at the University of Glasgow

Thank you for reading this. If you would like to know more or have any questions, you or your parents can contact me:

Jane Hartley, MRC Social and Public Health Sciences Unit, University of Glasgow, 4 Lilybank Gardens, Glasgow, G12 8RZ

Telephone: 07722 193 494   Email: jane-h@sphsu.mrc.ac.uk

Appendix 3: Topic Guide for Group Discussions at Yatesly Academy

Today I want to discuss your opinions on certain issues in the media (this could be TV, films, magazines or the internet), such as drinking alcohol, as well as ideas about romantic (?) relationships that girls and boys have with each other.

Firstly I just want to find out a bit about you and your lives, then we'll talk about alcohol and then relationships. I'll also show you images from the TV programmes Hollyoaks, Skins and Shameless.

How do you know each other?

Who are your friends?

What do you do in your spare time?

Tell me about a typical weekend / week night.

Do you watch a lot of TV and films?
What is your favourite programme?
Who do you watch it with?

Do you have a TV/ in your room?

ALCOHOL

- o Can you tell me about the girls/boys (opposite sex) that you know drinking alcohol?

  -what they drink
  -how they drink
  -what happens when they drink

- o And what do you think of the girls/boys (opposite sex) doing this?

- o Where do you get this opinion from – what makes you think this?

- o What do you think girls/boys (opposite sex) think of the way boys/girls drink alcohol?

  -what they drink
  -how they drink
  -what happens when they drink

- o Where do you think the girls/boys (opposite sex) get these opinions from?

o Can you tell me of anything in the media that involves people drinking alcohol?
(TV, films, celebrities)

o Is drinking in the media ever related to sexual behaviour?
(are people drinking when they go on dates, at parties, hanging out with friends?)

o Are your opinions on the way that girls/boys (opposite sex) behave shaped by the media?

o Do you think that the way that girls/boys (opposite sex) behave is because of the way that boys act in the media?

SHOW ALCOHOL STILLS

[Do you think these images would influence what a girl/boy OPPOSITE SEX would think of boys/girls]

RELATIONSHIPS

[relationships are so diverse, young people often say they have relationships but I know from research that has been done that's not necessarily the case. There are all different kinds of relationships, girls and boys and same sex, so I have no preconceptions about a right or wrong relationship]

Can you define for me what you think relationships are, and what words you use to describe them?

Think about what you'd expect your next relationship to be like:

[1: all your expectations and where they came from]
[2: the way you think your partner would like you to behave and where did their expectations come from?]

o What expectations do you have about going out with someone?

Where did those expectations come from?

o How long do you think it would last?

Where did those expectations come from?

o How do you think the person you're going out with should act in the relationship?

  Where did those expectations come from?

o Do you think there are rules?

  Where did those expectations come from?

o Do you want it to be exclusive?
  Where did those expectations come from?

NOW ASK ABOVE QUESTIONS FROM THE OPPOSITE SEX PERSPECTIVE

o Do you think girls/boys (opposite sex) get any of their expectations from the media?

o Where in particular in the media do they get these expectations from?

o Can you think of any ways in which people behave in relationships in the media that are similar to the way *you* think people should behave in a relationship?

o Can you think of any ways in which people behave in relationships in the media that *you* think people should *not* behave in a relationship?

o Is your idea of an ideal relationship similar to any relationship you can think of in the media? (celebrity couples, couple in favourite TV show/film/reality show)

SHOW STILLS

[Do you think these images would influence what a girl/boy OPPOSITE SEX would think of boys/girls]

<u>Appendix 4: Topic guide for individual interviews</u>

Tell me a bit about yourself

Where were you born, where have you lived in your life?

Tell me about your family. Who do you live with? Do you do much with them?

Tell me about your friends – who are they, what do you do – typical weekend/week night

What is school like?

Do you watch a lot of TV and films? What is your favourite programme? Who do you watch it with? Do you have a TV in your room?

ALCOHOL

Can you tell about the girls/boys (ie opposite sex) in your year group drinking alcohol?

    -what they drink
    -how they drink
    -what happens when they drink

And what do you think of the girls/boys (opposite sex) doing this?

Where do you get this opinion from – what makes you think this?

What do you think girls/boys (opposite sex) think of the way boys drink alcohol?

    -what they drink
    -how they drink
    -what happens when they drink

Where do you think the girls/boys (opposite sex) get these opinions from?

SHOW ALCOHOL STILLS

Can you tell me of anything in the media that involves people drinking alcohol? (TV, films, celebrities)

Is drinking in the media ever related to sexual behaviour?

(Are people drinking when they go on dates, at parties, hanging out with friends?)

- o Is any of this similar to your life/experiences?
- o Examples, in what ways?
- o Does this have anything to do with what you see in the media?

Are your opinions on the way that girls/boys (opposite sex) behave shaped by the media?

Do you think that the way that girls/boys (opposite sex) behave is because of the way that boys act in the media?

RELATIONSHIPS

[Relationships are so diverse, young people often say they have relationships but I know that's not necessarily the case. Also state that there are all different kinds of relationships, girls and boys and same sex.]

Can you define for me what you think relationships are, and what words you use to describe them?

Have you been in a relationship? If so, would you like to discuss it? Why have you chosen that relationship to talk about?

If you haven't had a relationship then would you be happy to discuss your expectations?

[If haven't had one]

When do you think you might have a relationship?

Would that be a typical for your year group?

Where do you get that notion of what is typical?

Think back/or imagine:

[1: all your expectations and where they came from]
[2: the way you think your partner would like you to behave and where did their expectations come from?]

- o What attracted you?
  Where did those expectations come from?

- o What expectations did you have?
  Where did those expectations come from?

o How long did you think it would last?

Where did those expectations come from?

o How do you think the person you're going out with should act in the relationship?

Where did those expectations come from?

o Do you think there are rules?

Where did those expectations come from?

o Did you want it to be monogamous?
Where did those expectations come from?

o If it got physical, how far did/would that go?
Where did those expectations come from?

o If you were to have sex, who would suggest it?
Where did those expectations come from?

o If you were to have sex, who takes responsibility for contraception?
Where did those expectations come from?

o What would boys think if girls had condoms?
Where did those expectations come from?

o Do you think girls/boys (opposite sex) get any of their expectations from the media?

o Where in particular in the media do they get these expectations from?

SHOW STILLS

[Do you think these images would influence what a girl/boy OPPOSITE SEX would think of boys/girls?]

FACULTY OF LAW, BUSINESS & SOCIAL SCIENCES ETHICS COMMITTEE

APPLICATION FOR ETHICAL APPROVAL

NOTES:

THIS APPLICATION AND ANY ACCOMPANYING DOCUMENTS MUST BE SENT ELECTRONICALLY TO L.Stevenson@lbss.gla.ac.uk

THIS APPLICATION FORM SHOULD BE TYPED NOT HAND WRITTEN.

ALL QUESTIONS MUST BE ANSWERED. "NOT APPLICABLE" IS A SATISFACTORY ANSWER WHERE APPROPRIATE.

INTERNAL IDENTIFICATION NUMBER   SSL/06/

Project Title   Young people, the media and health behaviours

Date of submission   13/03/08

Name of all person(s) submitting research proposal

Jane E.K. Hartley

Position: Student or Staff   Student   x

[**If Student**: UG or PG   PG x   Student No: 0708006

Full Course Name:

PhD Medical Sociology   ]

Department/Group/Institute/Centre

MRC Social & Public Health Sciences Unit

Address for correspondence relating to this submission:

MRC Social & Public Health Sciences Unit
4 Lilybank Gardens,
Glasgow,
G12 8RZ.

Name of Principal Researcher (if different from above e.g., Student's Supervisor)

Position held

1. Describe the purposes of the research proposed. The overall aim of this project is to further our understanding of young people's consumption of mass media and any effects that this may have on their health behaviours. This project is an addendum to the larger quantitative evaluation of the Healthy Respect 2 National Demonstration Project. Healthy Respect is promoting young people's sexual health in Lothian by supporting professionals working with young people, providing sexual health information, and running media campaigns. In particular, it is supporting the delivery of high standard sex education in schools within Personal and Social Education. The evaluation is being conducted by the MRC Social and Public Health Sciences Unit, Napier University, Dundee University and ScotCen. Part of it involves a school based survey with S4 pupils with self-complete questionnaires asking about their home, lifestyle, attitudes to sex and experience of relationships (if any). There are three waves to this survey over three years, and it is currently in the middle of the second wave. Healthy Respect has been granted full ethics permission by Napier University.

2. Please give a summary of the design and methodology of the project. Please also include in this section details of the proposed sample size, giving indications of the calculations used to determine the required sample size, including any assumptions you may have made. (If in doubt, please obtain statistical advice).

The study will employ qualitative research methods: focus groups, one-to-one interviews and possibly participant observation. If circumstances allow, I aim to return to participants on several occasions to develop a good relationship with them and to collect data using different methods. Participant observation would only be carried out if I had built a strong rapport with the participants during interviews and focus groups. An example of participant observation might be accompanying a group to the cinema or watching television or a DVD with them.

My initial plan is to achieve a sample size of 32, allowing for four cells of 8 each, by gender and social class. The participants will be 15 and 16 year olds. I have chosen this age range because if I were to choose the next year up, I would risk losing such a wide socio-economic range, as many pupils leave school at the end of S4. The focus groups will be single sex and will comprise of friendship groups. However, if the school environment proves not to be the most productive in recruiting and establishing the appropriate circumstances for in-depth discussions about the media, I may have to extend my approach. Such developments could include recruiting from youth clubs instead of schools, changing the order of interviews and group discussions, or modifying the discussion/ interview schedule in the light of ongoing analysis of data generated.

3. Describe the research procedures as they affect the research subject and any other parties involved.

The content of the focus groups and one-to-one interviews will cover sensitive topics such as risky behaviours including sexual behaviour, smoking, drinking and illicit drug use. I will be interested in how presentations of these behaviours in the media are interpreted by the particpants, and how this relates to the participants' own behaviours. During the focus groups I will strongly discourage any potentially sensitive disclosure not already shared with the group participants, e.g. on personal sexual history, but rather will be seeking to learn about more general use and interpretations of the media. The focus groups may include the use of various prompts to the discussion, such as showing the participants clips of programmes currently being screened on terrestrial or digital/satellite television channels.

Recruiting young people through schools will be done by first negotiating with teaching staff. I will request that pupils are given leave from their normal classes (probably PSE lessons) in order to take part in group discussions or interviews in a separate classroom. Having got permission from teachers I will introduce the research to PSE classes, provide the information sheet, answer questions and then invite participants. Teachers will not be present during the research. In the instance that teachers or youth development workers are involved in a gate-keeping role in recruiting participants, I will make sure that the participants are aware that their participation is voluntary. Once the research has been explained to them they will be asked to sign separate consent forms.

If I recruit from youth clubs or centres I will negotiate through youth development workers and plan to conduct the research in a separate room in the youth club/ community centre. Again I will introduce the research, provide the information sheet, answer questions and then invite participants.

All participants will be required to give active consent. Parents of potential participants will be issued a letter well in advance informing them about the study and seeking passive consent. Participants may withdraw at any stage of the research process should they so choose and this will be made explicit. Permission will be sought to audiotape interviews and focus groups. Any transcripts will be anonymised.

I have Enhanced Disclosure from the Disclosure Scotland Police Check in order to administer surveys in schools for the Healthy Respect evaluation.

4. What in your opinion are the ethical considerations involved in this proposal? (You may wish for example to comment on issues to do with consent, confidentiality, risk to subjects, etc.)

Although the focus groups and interviews will focus on the mass media and some potentially sensitive issues, the media content being reflected upon and interpreted will largely be in response to what the participants say they have already chosen to watch and discuss or on material that participants in the Healthy Respect evaluation have indicated are the most popular programmes with our target audience.

Informed consent should not be problematic since the purpose and nature of the research are straightforward to explain.

It is possible that engaging in discussion surrounding sensitive areas such as sexual behaviour and risky health behaviour may cause emotional distress. However, these participants receive sex education as part of their curriculum and are already part of the Healthy Respect survey which asks in-depth question about young people's sexual behaviour. For this reason I suspect any emotional distress will be unlikely. At most, participants may feel embarrased, but everyone will be assured that they do not have to answer any questions that they do not feel comfortable answering. I will be sensitive to embarrassment and try to avoid it, having trained in conducting research with children and young people. Furthermore, in the group discussions young people will be with existing friends.

During the interview I will be sensitive to anyone becoming distressed, in which case I will move off the topic altogether and make a point of talking to the participant after the interview. I will ensure that I always have an hour free after interviews in case it is necessary to talk to a distressed participant. I will ensure that I can be somewhere private and without distraction and, if it seems appropriate, suggest professionals who might be able to help the respondent.

Confidentiality will be sought by conducting the research in private where possible (without teachers present), requiring group discussion participants to respect the confidentiality of fellow participants, and anonymising all references to individuals when disseminating findings. In group discussions it is never possible to be sure of total confidentiality, since this depends on the behaviour of each participant. This will be fully discussed at the start of each group discussion in order to strongly discourage disclosures that might subsequently be regretted. The only people who will see or hear the original, non-anonymised, data will be myself and my two PhD supervisors.

The particular advantage of a focus group, and the reason why it outweighs rights to total privacy, is because it allows different and rich kinds of data to emerge. As the participants will be interviewed within their existing friendship groups, the discussion and social setting should allow me to see how meanings and interpretations can emerge out of social interaction. This should allow a closer understanding of how media is received and interpreted in reality, since it is a slightly less artificial research environment than an individual interview. Jenny Kitzinger states that focus groups are a form of group interview that capitalises on communication between research participants in order to generate data. The idea behind this method is that group processes can help people to explore and clarify their views in ways that would be less easily accessible in a one to one interview (Jenny Kitzinger(1995) Qualitative

5. **Outline the reasons which lead you to be satisfied that the possible benefits to be gained from the project justify any risks or discomforts involved.**

This research is a qualitative research study following on from the Healthy Respect study. The Healthy Respect study – in the form of a questionnaire – aims to find out about young people's home, lifestyle, attitudes to sex and experience of relationships (if any). Included within this questionnaire is a section on media use among young people. My research seeks to understand in greater depth how and why young people use the media, how it influences their perceptions and whether or not the use of media can impact, be it directly or indirectly, on their health behaviours.

Two thirds of UK children and teenagers have a TV in their bedroom. Over half of UK homes with children have a computer, with internet access growing rapidly. Six to seventeen year- olds are spending on average five hours daily with media (Livingstone 2002: 139). Young people today are the first generation who can live in an environment in which electronic media technologies are an engrained and integral part of everyday life, yet we have little understanding of what impact this may have on their health. I therefore feel that any risk or discomforts as outlined in the above section are more than justified considering what an urgent and timely issue media presents for young people. My main questions are: why and how do young people consume media and how might this affect their perceptions, identity and health behaviours such as sexual behaviour, smoking, drinking and illicit drug use?

6. **Who are the investigators (including assistants) who will conduct the research and what are their qualifications and experience?**

Jane Hartley

MA (1st Class Honours) Art History and Social Anthropology, University of St. Andrews. My undergraduate dissertation was an interdisciplinary theoretical study entitled 'The anthropology of minimalist sculpture: how the individual relates to the material object'.

MRes in Social Anthropology, University of Edinburgh. My masters dissertation was entitled: 'The consumption of sensory experience: a study of the Sonar festival in Barcelona'. This involved practical fieldwork including participant observation, one-to-one interviews and questionnaires as well as visual methods including photography and video.

I am currently working as a part-time sessional researcher for the Healthy Respect survey.

I have one year's experience working as a telephone researcher for a Market Research company whereby I conducted qualitative telephone interviews with members of the public and various companies. I am currently undertaking a part-time 10 week course at Centre for Research on Families and Relationships on 'Listening to Children'. This course is designed for those who work with children and young people and want to improve their skills of research and consultation. The content of the course includes:

- Exploring the ethical considerations in undertaking research and consultation with children and young people
- Reflecting on the impact of different conceptual understandings of childhood
- Discussing how to identify research questions and selecting an appropriate research method
- Reviewing methods and techniques of data collection and data analysis
- Developing an informed view on the extent to which conducting research with children is significantly different from conducting research with adults
- Discussing how to tackle sensitive topics
- Considering the variations among children (by factors such as gender, ethnicity, cultural and linguistic backgrounds, disability, and age) and how these impact upon research and consultation
- Considering how children can be involved as part of the research team
- Looking at ways to present and disseminate your findings and to feedback to your participants.

My supervisors are Dr. Danny Wight and Prof. Kate Hunt, both at the MRC Social and Public Health Sciences Unit. They each have more than 20 years experience in social science research and have supervised a large number of PhDs. Danny Wight has conducted and supervised research with young people on sexual health for seventeen years.

7. Are arrangements for the provision of clinical facilities to handle emergencies necessary? If so, briefly describe the arrangements made.

If the interviews and focus groups are located within a school I will familiarise myself with the standard emergency procedures and these will be followed in the event of pupil illness or accident during the focus groups or interviews. Any emergencies will be reported to the appropriate member of staff. If research is located in youth or community centres, similarly I will familiarise myself with the standard emergency procedures.

8. In cases where subjects will be identified from information held by another party (for example, a doctor or hospital) describe the arrangements you intend to make to gain access to this information including, where appropriate, which Multi Centre Research Ethics Committee or Local Research Ethics Committee will be applied to.

N/A

9. Specify whether subjects will include students or others in a dependent relationship.

My target age group are 14-16 year olds, some of whom will be in their S4 year at various High Schools. I anticipate that participants in my study will be living at home with parents / guardians.

10. Specify whether the research will include children or people with mental illness, disability or handicap. If so, please explain the necessity of involving these individuals as research subjects.

Participants will be recruited from secondary schools and youth centres. Some may have some form of disability. The participation of all pupils is entirely voluntary: we are not specifically seeking to interview people with mental illness, disability or handicap.

11. Will payment or any other incentive, such as a gift or free services, be made to any research subject? If so, please specify and state the level of payment to be made and/or the source of the funds/gift/free

service to be used. **Please explain the justification for offering payment or other incentive.**

No gift or incentive will be given, however refreshments may be offered during interviews or focus groups. If attending group discussions or interviews involves extra expense for participants, e.g. transport costs, these expenses will be met by the MRC SPHSU.

12. Please give details of how consent is to be obtained. A copy of the proposed consent form, along with a separate information sheet, written in simple, non-technical language MUST ACCOMPANY THIS PROPOSAL FORM.

After negotiating access to schools/ youth groups I will introduce the research to young people, provide the information sheet and answer questions. I will then invite participants to take part. Well in advance of the fieldwork a letter will be issued to the parents of those who volunteer for the study, explaining the research and seeking passive consent. All participants will be required to give active consent to the study. Participants may withdraw at any stage of the research process should they so choose and this will be made explicit. Written permission will be sought to audiotape interviews and focus groups.

13. Comment on any cultural, social or gender-based characteristics of the subject which have affected the design of the project or which may affect its conduct.

I am interested in analysing gender differences and how aspects of gender identity may influence young people's consumption, and interpretation, of images in the mass media. I will seek to include both male and female teenagers from a range of backgrounds and plan to conduct the focus groups with single sex groups within schools (and, where possible, with any participants recruited from youth groups).

14. Please state who will have access to the data and what measures which will be adopted to maintain the confidentiality of the research subject and to comply with data protection requirements e.g. will the data be anonymised?

Confidentiality will be sought by conducting the research in private (without teachers present) and requiring group discussion participants to respect the confidentiality of fellow participants. In group discussions it is never possible to be sure of total confidentiality, since this depends on the behaviour of each participant after the interview/focuc group. This will be fully discussed at the start of each group discussion in order to strongly discourage participants from making any disclosures that they might subsequently regret.

The information sheets also make the participants aware that only the researcher team will have access to the tapes and transcripts.

All participants will be given psuedonyms prior to the research analysis. Transcripts will be stored on a network computer which requires a password in order to gain access. Tapes will be stored for at least ten years in the MRC Social and Public Health Sciences Unit, in accordance with the MRC 'Good Research Practice' guidelines. During this time, only my supervisors and any other legitimate researchers will have access to these. This allows audit checks to be carried out to prevent fraud. Any researchers' legitimacy would be determined by the MRC.

15. Will the intended group of research subjects, to your knowledge, be involved in other research? If so, please justify.

Yes, the Healthy Respect evaluation, involving self-completion of an anonymous questionnaire.

16. Date on which the project will begin … *December 2003*… and end … *February 2004*

April 2008 to August 2009 for fieldwork. My studentship will end in September 2010

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17. Please state location(s) where the project will be carried out.

Rosefield High School, Edinburgh and, possibly, other secondary schools or youth centres in Scotland or elsewhere in the UK. In all these locations the research will be negotiated through headteachers and youth workers. Full consent would be required at all times by these parties and participants.

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18. Please state briefly any precautions being taken to protect the health and safety of researchers and others associated with the project (as distinct from the research subjects) e.g. where blood samples are being taken

The MRC SPHSU requires all staff and students to complete a risk assessment before conducting fieldwork. My supervisors will review this risk assessment at regular supervisions during the course of field work and will discourage me from taking unnecessary risks. They will make arrangement to be available to discuss any difficult or uncomfortable situations should they arise.

Name   Jane Hartley
(Proposer of research)

Date   13/03/08

Where the proposal is from a student, the Supervisor is asked to certify the accuracy of the above account.

Name   Dr Danny Wight   Date   13 March 2008
(Supervisor of student)

COMMENT FROM HEAD OF DEPARTMENT/GROUP/INSTITUTE/CENTRE

This is an ethically low risk proposal from a student experienced in field work, and the particular context in which this study will take place (schools

participating in the Healthy Respect programme), and supervised by two extremely experienced social scientists with familiarity with the ethical issues of focus groups and working with adolescents.

Sally Macintyre

Name   Professor Sally Macintyre   Date   13 March 2008

(Head of Department/Group/Institute/Centre)

Send completed form to Leeann Stevenson

L.Stevenson@lbss.gla.ac.uk

Appendix 6: Participant consent form

Young people, the media and health behaviours

The purpose of this research is to understand how and why young people use media, how it might influence their attitudes and if it might have an impact on their health behaviours. These health behaviours include sexual behaviour and drinking alcohol.

The research would involve one group discussion with three to four of your friends. If it's OK with you I would like to audiotape the discussion but this would only ever be listened to by myself and my supervisors at Glasgow University. No parents, teachers or anyone else apart from the research team will have access to that audio-recording. This research is confidential.

If you take part:

- you don't have to answer any questions you don't want to
- you are free to opt out at any time

Who has checked the study?

This project has been approved by the Ethics Committee of Glasgow University's Law, Business & Social Science faculty.

Who is doing this research?

This project will be carried out by Jane Hartley, a doctoral PhD student at the University of Glasgow. The research is funded by the Medical Research Council. The outcome of this research will be a PhD paper and parts of this may be published as articles in academic journals.
This is a consent letter. If you agree to take part you are also agreeing to have the interview taped.

If you would like to know more or have any questions, you or your parents can contact me:

Jane Hartley, MRC Social and Public Health Sciences Unit, University of Glasgow, 4 Lilybank Gardens, Glasgow, G12 8RZ

Telephone: 07904 630312 Email: jane-h@sphsu.mrc.ac.uk

Or Catherine Ferrell, who is an independent contact
Telephone: 0141 357 7561 Email: c.ferrell@sphsu.mrc.ac.uk

I, ...consent / do not consent (delete as appropriate) to take part in this research.

Appendix 7: Parent consent form

Dear parent / guardian

Young people, the media and health behaviours

The purpose of this my research is to understand how and why young people use media, how it might influence their attitudes and if it might have an impact on their health behaviours. These health behaviours include sexual behaviour, smoking, drinking and illicit drug taking.

The research would involve one group discussion in single sex groups and possibly one – to – one interviews with me. If your child takes part:

- they don't have to answer any questions you don't want to
- they are free to opt out at any time.

Who has checked the study?

This project has been agreed by the Ethics Committee of Glasgow University's Law, Business & Social Science faculty

Who is doing this research?

This project will be carried out by Jane Hartley, a doctoral PhD student at the University of Glasgow

If you would like to know more or have any questions, you can contact me:

Jane Hartley, MRC Social and Public Health Sciences Unit, University of Glasgow, 4 Lilybank Gardens, Glasgow, G12 8RZ

Telephone: 07722 193 494   Email: jane-h@sphsu.mrc.ac.uk

Yours sincerely
Jane Hartley

Appendix 8: Fieldnote excerpts

Mixed media group at Rosefield High:

The scabby little cupboard seemed like an even more depressing space than it had yesterday and certainly not big enough for me and six people to sit and have a good discussion in. I had thought after yesterday that if the adjacent classroom had been free then I would have asked if I could go in there, but unfortunately it was occupied. The group sat down awkwardly around the room, not returning my smiles and looking pretty glum. Because of the size of the room, the shape in which they had sat down was more like a long slug rather than a circle. I sat down too in amongst them and started explaining the schpeel. Most of them were just looking at the ground. I said if you don't feel like taking part today (which was the impression I was getting) then that's absolutely fine, you can just go back next door. No one said anything.

To be honest though, the way in which the teacher had organised it, it was almost like that was what their lesson consisted of today, rather than something they had volunteered to do. I thought there was no way we could have a good discussion sitting in the shape we were so I asked everyone to get up and try and move their chairs in a more circle-like formation. They did this. I then said if they were fine with all the points on the consent letter could they sign it please. I highlighted again that I wanted to record it. Is that fine with everyone? One of the boys said, 'nut', as in 'no'. Ok then, I said, whilst thinking shit what should I do, carry on with the discussion without recording it or ask him to go back to the class. But as these thoughts were going through my head he said, 'nah, its ok I suppose'. 'Are you absolutely sure?' I asked. 'Yeh', he replied as he signed the form. I didn't exactly feel comfortable with it, but didn't know what else to do.

I put the recorder in the middle on another chair (there was no table around which we could sit. I don't think that helped the situation, as I feel like people, myself included, like to sit around a table as it offers a comforting barrier behind- this would have been especially useful with a group like this) and switched it on.

The group consisted of four girls and two boys. To my immediate right was an utterly miserable looking girl who said not one word the whole time. She sat with her arms tightly folded and merely shrugged in reply to any of my questions or attempts to include her in the (limited!) discussion. She shook her head when I was asking the group how well they knew each other and if they were friends. Next to her was the chattiest of the girls, Rosa. I had the impression she was quite shy anyway, but that she did want to speak and had opinions to offer, but felt held back by the uncomfortable group dynamic. She'd often start speaking, and then tail off, giggling in an embarrassed way. When I tried to get her to continue, she'd look around her, but wouldn't. Next to her was her friend Anna, who was quiet for most of the time, but was obviously friends with Rosa as they'd often giggle at

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the same time. I feel that had it just been the two of them we could have had a really good and interesting discussion.

Next to her was a boy, John, who was apparently their friend, but who was also completely silent throughout the discussion, but not in such a miserable and fierce way as the mute girl 'M'. (When I asked them to choose a name, for anonymity, she didn't say anything. I said, don't worry, I can choose one for you if you like. She shrugged. At which point one boys said 'just call her Milk'. 'Milk?' I said, 'why?' the others were kind of sniggering at this point. He laughed, 'just cos, just call her Milk'. Still she didn't respond, but just glared at him. 'I don't think I'll call her that, I'll pick another name for her.' I'm not sure what he was referring to, but it didn't help the atmosphere.

The second boy was the loudmouth, and a bit of a smartass, but at least he spoke. When I asked him what he got up to in his spare time he said he liked to just sleep, and he had a really cheeky grin on his face for most of the time. He commented to the other boy at one stage – 'you haven't said a thing have you?' He said that he wasn't really friends with anyone there. He also imitated M girl a few times by folding his arms and sticking his bottom lip out and looking at her. The others laughed, which in a way was a welcome relief and helped to diffuse the somewhat uncomfortable atmosphere. However, I was really unsure of how to react; I didn't want to laugh along so as to appear to also be taking the piss out of her, but I didn't want to not react either as I felt at least it was a bond in the group. I found myself beginning to actually dislike the mute girl. I just felt she was being so rude by not even responding to me, or else glowering at me. I didn't know how much to keep attempting to include her by asking 'and what do you think?' or 'do you agree with that?'. By the end I was finding it difficult to be cheery towards her. I don't know if it was me she had a problem with, or the situation, or if she was just like that all the time, or having a bad day. I felt like saying to her if you don't want to be here then you're free to leave because I really felt that her mood was affecting the mood of the group, but I didn't feel like I could do that because it would be like asking her to leave. I had said explicitly at the beginning that they were not obliged to be there and that they were free to leave at any time; what else could I do?

Appendix 9: Pilot fieldwork topic guide

ROUTINE

Can you describe a general day to me, and how media features in it? Which kind of media do you use? TV, films, video, internet (including social networking sites), magazines etc

How and where do you actually use media? And which do you prefer? Alone, with friends, family? Does this make any difference to how you use media, what you think about when you're using it?

Living room politics - how does it work being used within the family or a private setting. Does this make a difference in terms of regulation?

How much time do you spend in your bedroom using media?

Why do you use media? How does media fit into your lifestyle? Do you regularly talk about media content in day to day conversation?

TASTE

What is your favourite programme or film? What are your top 10 programmes or films?

Why? What do you think makes a programme good or bad?

What makes a programme quality or trashy?

What about the difference between American shows and other shows? Do you notice any difference?

IDENTITY / LIFESTYLE/ EFFECTS

Do you like certain programmes because you can identify with your life, or at least the way you wish it could be? – reality/fantasy

Do you think using media affects any of your behaviours? Does it change your attitudes?

Would you ever feel more likely to do something if you've seen it done in the media: sex, smoking, drinking, drugs?

What is normal behaviour? Where do you see this behaviour?
How have your opinions changed as you've grown up?
How do you think your own sexual related experiences affect the way you perceive sex in the media?

CELEBRITIES

Who is your favourite celebrity? Which celebrity do you identify with the most?
If you saw them doing something would you be more inclined to do it? Do you like knowing about celebrities lives?

What do you think about them taking drugs, smoking and drinking? What think about Paris, Linsay Lohan, Britney etc?

REGULATION, MORALITY

Does anyone tell what you can and cannot watch? If not now, when you were younger? Do you ever pay attention to regulations?

Are the risks shown of these behaviours shown in the media or is it all care-free fun?

Who do you think behaves in morally unacceptable ways in the media? Is there anything that you think is wrong, or disgusting and that you'd rather not see? If you do come across it what do you do?

GENDER

What kind of people do you admire, fancy, find attractive?
What kind of people do you dislike, find repulsive, not fancy?

What is the normal way for a couple to act in the media in terms of dating, relationships, marriage, sex?

How are gay people and lesbians depicted in the media?

BODY IMAGE

Do you think your idea of what is attractive is shaped by what you see in the media?

Do you think advertising shapes how you think about your body?

What kind of body image do you think is portrayed to be the ideal in the media? What kind is seen as sexy, and that boys would find attractive? What do you think of the size-zero phenomenon? Does it affect your behaviour in any way?

GENERAL

How would you feel if the media were taken away?

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