'Encountering difference': a study of adolescent males' masculine identity work and its relationship to secondary age phase religious education

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By

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Abstract

Evidence from examination boards and successive governments' research into gender show that examination success in RE and the numbers opting to take the subject at GCSE and 'A' level remain heavily skewed towards female learners. Drawing from poststructuralism and masculinities theory, the aim of my research is to critically investigate key stage four boys' relationship to religious education and explore the factors which produced association or disassociation with RE.

My findings indicate that the boys who had a positive relationship to RE valued the epistemological openness of pluralistic RE as it helped them make sense of social and cultural difference. The boys who associated with RE were able to use it as a discursive resource for their on-going project of the masculine self, linking it to their imagined futures and career trajectories.

Interviews with the boys who disassociated from RE showed that where the boys had a negative view of religion they tended to conflate religion with RE. In some cases the pluralistic nature of RE was rejected and for others it was simply seen as irrelevant to their masculine identity work and was a resource they chose not to use.

Throughout this study the boys' wider gendered practices are illuminated through their relationship to RE as the discursive site for the on-going construction of gendered subjectivity. The boys' narratives also show their relationship to other dominant masculinising processes at work in their lives such as their relationship to sport, physicality, violence, subject choice and authority.

The findings presented offer new insights into adolescent identity work through the use of a poststructuralist analytic, to examine the construction of the adolescent masculine

subject. The findings also suggest new directions for critical RE at a time of political change and curriculum review.

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Finally, I am deeply grateful to the teachers and the students who participated in this research with me. Without their contribution this thesis could not have been written. It is my sincere hope that this study can make a contribution to the development of curricula that enables all secondary age learners to flourish and achieve their possibilities.

Chapter 1: Introduction

In this chapter I provide a context and overview of the thesis. Firstly, I present the aims and the research questions which underpin this study. I then proceed to situate myself as a reflexive researcher with a biography in order to position my own subjectivity in relation to this study, thus seeking to avoid the hermetic compartmentalising of the personal and the professional – my aim is to show the genealogy of this study in certain formative critical incidents as I narrate my own contingent identity into existence through this 'writing as inquiry' (St.Pierre, in Denzin and Lincoln, eds. 2005:969). I offer a discussion of the emergence of my methodological standpoint and I define certain key concepts employed throughout this thesis, most notably the notion of an RE discourse. Finally, this introductory chapter provides a brief overview of the main contents of the subsequent chapters which form this thesis and my critical investigation of adolescent masculine subjectivity; identity work and the RE discourse.

The focus of the enquiry

There is a substantial body of literature on boys, education and achievement. However, critical research into boys' relationship to religious and values education is an under-researched field. Boys' underachievement in RE has been clearly identified as a policy problem (OfSTED, 2003, 2005, 2007). The context of this study lies in both my professional and personal biography. As a reflexive practitioner with twenty years classroom experience teaching RE to male and female learners, I set out to critically explore the relationship between masculinity and engagement with the discourse of RE in the light of my own experiences, policy and critical gender theory.

The aims of the study

The aim of this thesis is to critically explore the relationship between adolescent males' masculine subjectivity, achievement and engagement with the key stage four religious education discourse through the collection and analysis of qualitative empirical data obtained through field work in three research sites.

Research objectives

The objectives of my research are expressed in four research questions.

1. In what ways do the adolescent males associate with the RE discourse?

2. In what ways do the adolescent males disassociate from and resist the RE discourse?

The key theme of this thesis is masculine identity work and the project of the self. Through a consideration of qualitative interview data I seek to critically analyse how adolescent male narratives show how they are using RE as a discursive resource for their identity work and the construction of their subjectivities. Where male disassociation from the RE discourse occurs I aim to critically explore the gendered factors which produce this disassociation, again to illuminate practices of masculine identity work.

3. How does the RE discourse challenge or reinforce the masculine subjectivities of the research participants?

4. In what ways does association or disassociation with RE connect to other discursive practices apparent in the identity work of the male adolescents?

In these questions my objectives are to explore the ways in which the masculine subjectivity of the research participants was reinforced through their association with

the RE discourse. Similarly, I seek to investigate ways in which the RE discourse disrupted masculine subjectivity. The objective of my final question is the analysis of data which points to the boys' relationships with the wider 'masculinising' processes observed in the research sites.

Reasons for the choice of study

This study is the outcome of my personal and professional journey. It is a reflexive study, the product of the intersection of, 'biography and history, of self and world' (Mills, 1975: 10). I am a forty six year old white male. I am married with one child, a daughter. I am a PGCE course leader, working in initial teacher training in a new University in Lancashire. Writing this thesis has been a significant stage in the shaping of my own subjectivity and understanding of others. It has brought me into contact with new theories of identity, poststructuralism and through fieldwork in-depth encounters with students and teachers, their lives and their concerns. The reflexive processes of theorising the discursive production of gendered subjectivity has also required me to give thought to the ontological puzzle of my own identity. It is, in some ways therefore an autobiographical text, in so far as it has required me to make myself, "an object for analytical attention" (Stanley, 1993:45).

The genealogy of this study therefore lies in a number of critical events which have fashioned my personal and professional identity. The first of these events was my experience of University. As a sixteen year old boy, like many of the boys I encountered through fieldwork, I had no aspiration to go onto higher education. It was predicted that I would pass two 'O' levels and had a job waiting for me on completion of school, in the local authority - ironically I exhibited some of the characteristics of the

'underachieving' boys which populate the pages of education policy documents. However, I passed enough 'O' levels to progress to 'A' level and then to University.

Throughout this thesis I write about the ontological possibilities education can offer learners. It is impossible for me to underestimate the impact Higher Education has had on my professional life and subjectivity. The critical education I received through the exploratory, pluralistic religious studies programme I embarked on enabled me to encounter other ways of being in the world, such as the radically different perspectives of Buddhism, Zen and Taoism which seem to pre-empt much twentieth century poststructuralist theory and produced new ways of thinking in my experience, what Deleuze and Guattari (2004b) refer to as 'nomadic' thought - and a lifelong interest in Buddhist dharma.

My encounters with difference through critical religious studies also connect to my interest in postmodern theory and post-structuralism. As an MA student I studied post-Holocaust Jewish theological responses. The harnessing of technology and Darwinian principles to create a state programme of organized eugenics and racial mass murder has, for many commentators, exposed the limits of modernity producing, "incredulity toward metanarratives" (Lyotard, in Cahoone, 1996: 482). My commitment to pluralistic religious education which recognises social and cultural difference emerged as a result of that MA module. The visceral image my tutor (himself the child of Jewish refugees) presented of an einsatzgruppen soldier with rifle pointed at the Jewish mother and child, outraged me profoundly and stirred up sensitivity to the effects of the mystification of the 'other'.

My time at Lancaster University as a student of religious studies and sociology had transformed my consciousness dramatically and created a desire to become an RE

teacher with a commitment to a critical RE which could serve to develop dispositions and attitudes towards the, "inter religious and inter cultural communication that is necessary for the health of plural democracies" (Jackson, 2004: 18).

My pedagogy of RE is premised on its role in engaging with the ultimate concerns, issues of meaning, purpose and value. It is my view that RE with its emphasis on the subjective 'meaning–making' perspective of the student, provides an educational alternative discourse to the "materialism and consumerism rife in western capitalism" (Wright, 2000: 8) by creating a forum for learners to test and critique the secular and religious truth claims vying for their attention. RE which emphasises the subjective perspective of the learner offers a reflexive space:

> "Since self-aware people inevitably live with ambiguity, each individual's identity is always open to revision. Religious education is thus a conversational process in which students, whether from 'secular' or 'religious' backgrounds, continuously interpret and reinterpret their own views in the light of their studies" (Jackson, 2004: 18).

However, RE for me has never been a matter of abstract ideals. My professional practice has taken place within a real social and political space. With my colleagues I hosted world religions conferences with speakers from a range of traditions and life stances, and a special focus on a survivor's personal account of the horrors of Nazi persecution. I remember the TES headlines about OfSTED reports which condemned schools for not doing enough anti-racist education in the wake of the death of Stephen Lawrence in 1993, but we actively challenged racism through our curricula long before that awful 'affront to society' (McPherson, 1999). I heard stories of genocide from Bosnian Muslim and Croatian refugee children in my classroom. Iraqi students used my Citizenship lessons to make a case for peace when Iraq was invaded. My sense of personal purpose as an educator was strengthened by these 'affronts' which became

issues, the raw educational material of human experience which formed the basis for classroom discourse.

I owe much to Religious Studies. At a personal level this conviction of the value of pluralistic RE was further strengthened when I received terrifyingly angry racist hate mail after the local press covered the Holocaust memorial event I organised for the local authority. The event coincided with an arson attack on the school and I speculated on a connection. Cancelling the RE team's annual trip to Regents Park Mosque due to the bomb threats against the Muslim community in the wake of 9/11 is a further dramatic example of the interplay between RE, education policy and events both local and global.

I registered as an Ed.D student in 2005, the same year that I attended the HMI OfSTED annual RE subject conference at which the findings of a qualitative survey of boys' responses to RE was presented. The survey investigated the reasons behind the gender differential in achievement and engagement in RE which underpinned GCSE religious studies outcomes as a 'concern', which was to re-emerge in the 2007 HMI annual report under the heading, 'the persistent underachievement of boys'. Hearing the conference paper was a critical event and triggered my initial thoughts for this thesis proposal. As a diffident adolescent male student of 'A' level Religious Studies, I had discovered a field of enquiry that had enabled me to fulfil some of my ontological possibilities, launching me on a professional and personal trajectory I couldn't have imagined at sixteen and certainly had no identification with at that age. As a school teacher I had worked with male and female learners who developed intellectual curiosity through their RE programmes. So what were the factors informing association and disassociation from the discourse of RE, particularly amongst boys? I began to develop the basis for a thesis proposal that would allow me to explore these questions.

In 2008 I began the field work which was to continue into late spring 2009 collecting the interview data for this study. Field work took place in three research sites in the north west of England which I refer to as Milltown, Valleytown and Seaside High school.

My methodological standpoint

Encountering the critical perspectives offered by poststructuralism and feminist theories at Keele University has been another formative critical event in the evolution of this thesis. As a school teacher I had been very aware of the gender differential in engagement in RE, but coming to recognise, through theory, the factors which produce a gendered curriculum and the policy agendas which have given rise to the 'failing boys' discourse has provided me with the conceptual and analytic frameworks to undertake this study. In 2006 I undertook an organisational work ethnography (OWE) focussing on high school males' engagement in RE and began to explore the sociology of masculinity in order to theorise my findings. The gendered perspective of male students emerged in my interview data, most strikingly in the comment that RE was boring, and most likely to appeal to girls because they wanted to be, 'the vicar of Dibley' or 'teachers'. Interviews with teachers in the OWE school also pointed to the existence of tensions between pupil subcultures, some originating in religious and cultural differences.

Reading Connell (2000, 2008), Whitehead (2002) and exploring the poststructuralist theories of Foucault (1984), Butler (2007) and Deleuze (2004a, 2004b) offered me the theoretical tools to begin to make sense of what I had observed and encountered on the OWE. My classroom observations and the interviews I undertook suggested the existence of a certain type of male performance, a dominant normative discourse about

masculinity. The detailed and lengthy fieldwork undertaken for this thesis has produced further empirical data which has confirmed my choice of methodology. I have met boys who perform their identities within this normative discourse of masculinity, made visible in their social practices, but I have also interviewed boys who eluded this definition of what it means to be male and were able to occupy multiple, sometimes contradictory subject positions. It is for that reason that I use a poststructuralist concept of subjectivity in this study, meaning,

> "A process of becoming, characterised by fluidity, oppositions and alliances between particular narrative positions which speak identities" (Haywood and Mac an Ghaill, 71: 2003).

Identity, in this analysis is situational, dynamic and unstable- despite appearances. Methodologically, this is a significant position because it is nuanced and recognizes difference and agency. Poststructuralist gender theory avoids reductive determinism and the reification of boys as 'toxic' and instead recognises the precarious, on-going nature of identity construction.

There are a number of key methodological terms that I use throughout the thesis and explain in greater detail in chapter four. I use discourse in a Foucauldian context, referring to the linguistic and social forces which constitute subjectivity, inhere in policy and institutions to:

> "Constitute the 'nature' of the body, unconscious and conscious mind and emotional life of the persons they seek to govern" (Weedon, 1997:105).

However, I do not use discourse in a rigid or deterministic sense but in the way it is presented in Foucault's later writings where he aims to show how social actors constitute their subjectivities within the discursive parameters they operate in, "how an individual acts upon himself, in the technology of the self" (Foucault, 1988:19). Discourses have material effects but they have no structural or ontological ground, they

can be resisted, fractured and disrupted through reverse discourses or marginal discourses, so discourse is fluid. From this perspective discursive subjectivities have no ontological foundation.

In the context of a study of school boy masculinities this is a significant perspective:

> "A major aspect of adolescence is the process of working out what sort of person one is, and is not. This can involve the performance of and experimentation with possible selves, as part of the trying on of identity" (Paechter, 2007: 135-136).

This adolescent search for a stable identity through what Judith Butler calls 'performativity' also offers considerable existential possibility through encounter with 'alternative' discourses. I propose that some of the boys I interviewed were able to utilize their RE as a 'technology of the self' to constitute themselves as ethical subjects and subjects of knowledge, that is to develop their own epistemologies in relation to the RE field of enquiry.

It was this very epistemological openness of the boys' narratives that also attracted me to Deleuzean concepts which I shall briefly outline. The figurative concept of the 'rhizome' seemed to reflect the openness of the sometimes disparate thinking that took place in the RE classroom, where like the proliferating roots of the rhizome, thoughts weren't constrained but given scope by the RE enquiry into 'big questions'. In my mind the epistemological openness of the boys' narratives also connected to the Deleuzean concept of nomadic thought in smooth space that is unbounded space where new concepts, thoughts and connections can be made.

In this way, I have argued that the boys who associated with the RE discourse and engaged in these nomadic enquiries were actively engaged in a technology of the self and were constituting themselves by beginning to interrogate the vying secular and

religious truth claims and in doing so interpret them and re-interpret their own views in the light of this, so they are able to,

> "Find ways, not just of existing, but of flourishing as individuals- in- community within this deeply rooted cultural and ontological pluralism", of contemporary society (Wright, 2004:169).

For many of the boys who associated with the RE discourse, the RE classroom became a liminal space of, "openings and closings" (Alvermann, in St.Pierre and Pillow, eds. 2000: 115), an *'in-between'* space where they would discuss ideas and questions that they wouldn't otherwise articulate.

The relevance of this study

> "How we understand men and gender, what we believe about masculinity, what we know (or think we know) about the development of boys, may have large effects-for good or ill- in therapy, education, health services, violence prevention, policing, and social services.
>
> It matters, therefore, to get our understanding of these issues straight. We need to know the facts, connect policy debates with the best available research, and use the most effective theories" (Connell, 2000: 5)

Whilst males are not a disadvantaged group, Connell's argument aligns with the purpose of this investigation and the goal of new labour's educational strategy premised on the pursuit of gender and social justice. Not to do this means,

> "We are offering boys a degraded education-even though society may be offering them long-term justice" (Connell, 2000: 167).

Critical gender studies which focus on male achievement and attitudes in schooling recognise that an equitable experience for all is necessary if their full ontological possibilities are to be given scope, as Foster, *et al.* comment,

"How would *both* boys' and girls' development as learner-citizens be enhanced by a curriculum which fore grounded the values of caring in both public and private life?" (Foster, *et al.* 2001: 11).

This thesis has relevance on a number of levels. It represents a contribution to literature about boys and education, but it is also concerned with the ontological possibilities of all learners through programmes which can create spaces where empathic, ethical and dialogical values are foregrounded. As an ITT professional I am concerned with developing strategies for the effective delivery of my subject in the 11-16 classroom and a critical consideration of the theoretical models of RE and their pedagogic implications for beginner teachers. A trainee commenting on the boys he was teaching in a challenging inner city boys' school remarked to me, "If only they could just get past all that macho crap", "these boys have so many questions". How education professionals work with these learners has implications for the future- the men and the women they will come into contact with and the communities they will form and live in. Finding ways of supporting beginner teachers to engage learners through research and evidence from the classroom, particularly through pupil voice is a key dimension to effective reflexive practice- so this research has intrinsic relevance to the RE community, especially in the light of a pupil gender imbalance. In the same way, developing pedagogic strategies which have authentic purchase in the lives of young people is central to this enquiry and was a fundamental concern of mine when I was a classroom practitioner.

This thesis is also significant because it gives voice to young peoples' concerns and interests, providing insights into pupil cultures, and in this case *masculine* pupil cultures, which is the principal focus of this critical study. The field work seeks to

explore the responses of different groups of boys to RE and the 'values' curricula in the light of gender, class and ethnicity.

The RE discourse

In this analysis RE forms the discursive site for the performance of masculine identity, the lens through which the gendered social and cultural practices of the boys I interviewed became visible in their relationship to their metaphysical and educational spaces of RE. It is these practices of the developing masculine subject, rather than RE, which is the principal focus of this analysis.

My subjective perspective on the RE discourse was fashioned not only through teaching experience, but through my association with the Lancaster University discourse of phenomenological Religious Studies- the dominant, most far reaching methodological and theoretical discourse operating within the field. Before I describe the characteristics of this methodology, it is important to state from the outset, that RE is not religion and the two should not be conflated. The phenomenological underpinnings of the RE discourse have been translated into legislation which has remained unchanged since the 1988 ERA. In secular state schools catechesis and the promulgation of formulary is forbidden and the non-confessional educational exploratory approach is privileged. The phenomenological methodology of Ninian Smart, developed through the Lancaster approach to religious studies, has provided the script for RE since the publication of the school's council working party paper 36 in 1971, which outlined an RE curricula which was open, pluralistic, exploratory and non-confessional. Significantly, the phenomenological emphasis on neutrality, bracketing (epoche) and the primacy of the subjective view became a defining characteristic of this multi-faith world religions approach to RE.

In 2004 QCA published the Non Statutory Framework for RE which is the blue print for the development of locally determined RE curricula. The framework describes the purpose of RE in its capacity to enable pupils to, "develop their sense of identity and belonging" and to "flourish individually within their communities and as citizens in a pluralistic society and global community" (QCA, 2004:9).

I wish to argue that the basic values of phenomenological RE are still present, however, there have been some developments in the RE discourse post 9/11. A more critical dimension emerges in the QCA Framework (2004) which recognises the light and the dark sides of religion,

> "Respect for all in religious education includes pupils appreciating that some beliefs are not inclusive and considering the issues that this raises for individuals and society" (QCA, 2004:13).

The framework also acknowledges that the secular/religious binary is in some respects no longer operating in a postmodern context and is outside the experience of many young people, stating,

> "Many pupils come from religious backgrounds but others have no attachment to religious beliefs and practices" (QCA, 2004: 12)

The framework recommends that in order for all voices to be heard, pupils should engage with, "other religious traditions such as the Baha'i faith, Jainism and Zoroastrianism", and, "secular philosophies such as humanism". (QCA, 2004:12)

The recurrent theme of the document is social and community cohesion and interfaith dialogue and the appreciation of, "difference and diversity for their own good" (QCA, 2004:13). The QCA RE discourse is therefore in alignment with my subjective position. The recent emphasis on difference in a post-Christian, postmodern time and the critical position on oppressive religious practices represents a more nuanced perspective on the

social realities of religion than the uncritical approaches of earlier phenomenological models of RE.

However, the RE discourse as I have outlined in reference to key curricula documents is the pluralistic, non-confessional discourse which emerged through the work of the Schools' Council Working Party Paper (1971) and it is this dominant discourse which gives rise to the key stage four core RE programmes and GCSE Religious Studies syllabi that some of the boys in this study follow. It is because of these common features present across the RE/RS curricula that I will refer to the key stage four programmes that the boys were following as the 'RE discourse'. It is also worth noting that in a period of political change, at the time of writing no significant policy changes to RE have been announced by the coalition DfE.

Overview and structure of the thesis

Each chapter sets up the enquiry into the boys' relationship to the RE discourse I have characterised above.

In chapter two the focus is on literature produced in the political space of education policy. In order to situate this study of gender and RE, I provide some of the policy context to the wider debate about boys and education through a critical overview of policy makers and policy agencies literature on boys' achievement. Specifically, I critically consider the nature of the 'boys in crisis' discourse and the critical voices which have emerged through the work of researchers such as Skelton and Francis (2009) in recent policy agencies reports. Within this context of education literature I have also examined literature produced within the RE community. The literature survey

reveals very little has been written on masculinity and RE, and nothing from a poststructuralist masculinities perspective.

In chapter three I set out a range of critical sociological theories of masculinity through reference to some of the key theorists. I examine the contributions of feminism and the development of literature on the sociology of masculinity, including, Pleck (1976), Willis (1977), Connell (2000, 2008), Brittan (1989), Kimmel (1994) and Mac an Ghaill (1994). I have characterised their contributions as structural social constructionist theories and I focus particularly on the nuanced theory of masculinity offered by Connell. I have critically considered the contributions of concepts such as hegemonic masculinity, masculinism and Mac an Ghaill's typologies of school boy masculinity in order to identify the theoretical tools for this thesis. The emergence of poststructuralist third wave masculinities theory is identified in this chapter as offering a theory of subjectivity to provide a methodology for analysis of the empirical data presented in chapter five. To this end I have considered the concept of discourse in the work of Foucault (1998) performativity in the writings of Butler (2007) and the concept of desire in the social critiques of Deleuze and Guattari (2004a, 2004b).

In chapter four I further develop the concept of the discursive subject with reference to Foucault (1998), Butler (2007) and Martino (1999, 2000). I also develop Deleuzean concepts of the social subject through further reference to theories of becoming as expressed through the minor/molar dyad.

Chapter five develops the themes of a poststructuralist methodology through a critical discussion of the ontological and epistemological orientation of the thesis. I begin with a poststructuralist critique of foundationalism and the challenges of reconceptualising traditional reference points such as epistemology and ontology from a non

foundationalist perspective. I also consider the epistemological status of narratives with reference to the work of Ricoeur (1984). In this chapter I provide the rationale for the research methods of data gathering used in this study and aligned these methods to the methodological and theoretical perspectives outlined previously.

Chapter six consists of a presentation of the main themes which emerged through the empirical data. I provide brief vignettes of the boys, the masculine research participants whose narratives provide the qualitative data of this study. The data is organised around the four research questions and is presented as narratives of association and narratives of disassociation with the RE discourse. The narratives show how the boys use the RE discourse to constitute themselves as ethical subjects, as subjects of knowledge and in respect of their relationship to social and cultural difference. The narratives of disassociation signal the existence of gendered subject meanings for some of the boys, conflation of RE with religion and rejection of difference. The narratives also point to the effects of masculinising discourses operating to fashion the boys' subjectivities with some of the boys demonstrating the ability to occupy more than one subject position.

In chapter seven I offer a critical summary and analysis of the data and my principal findings. I return to the poststructuralist theories of Deleuze, Butler, Martino and Foucault and I make reference to Connell's (2000) concept of the vortices of masculinity to account for the social practices of the boys and its relationship to their identity work. I suggest future directions for poststructuralist theory of gendered identity in education, with particular reference to the concept of nomadic thought as it is expressed in the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari (2004b). Finally I discuss where the intellectual and personal journey commenced in this research, might lead me both personally and professionally in respect of new projects and research.

Chapter Two: Writing about the 'boys'

Introduction

The aim of this thesis is to critically analyse the relationship between male subjectivity and the RE discourse. It is important, therefore, to locate a study of boys and religious education within the wider social and policy discourses which serve to produce and shape the debate around boys and education. In this chapter I provide a critical overview of:

- Policy makers' literature on boys and education,
- Research on gender and religious education.

The chapter considers the 'gender gap' discourse which has fashioned the responses of policy makers to boys' educational achievement since the mid 1990's. Critical analysis reveals a more complex social reality than this reductive 'boys in crisis' discourse suggests, signalling the need for a nuanced theory of masculine subjectivity capable of accounting for the multiple ways of being a boy. The implications of this literature for policy, education practice and social theory will be explored in this chapter and in greater detail in subsequent chapters.

Contextualising the debate: 'boys in crisis'

Contemporary popular discourse has presented boys as being both 'difficult' and 'in difficulty' (O'Donnell, Sharpe, 2000). The outcome of this discourse is a picture of a 'boys' problem', aligned to a wider 'males in crisis' discourse (Foster, *et al*.2001). Driving much of this moral panic is a reactionary response to feminist theory which critically deconstructs the naturalised 'gender binary'. This 'lost boys' discourse presents them as the new disadvantaged, with boys' interests set against those of girls

(Bly, 1990; Biddulph, 1994). Within the British education system the 'lost boys' crisis continues to dominate the debate about gender and education started in the early 1990's. Since the introduction of school league tables, successive governments' annual reviews of GCSE statistics suggest a relationship between class and gender, prompting headlines such as, "The poorest boys in England are still let down by the school system" (Guardian, 9 December 2010)

The national debate about the educational disaffection of adolescent males has been further fuelled by media highlighting of anti-social 'hoody' behaviour and hyper masculine adolescent 'gangster' culture. In 1996 the Chief Inspector for OfSTED, Chris Woodhead declared that,

"the failure of boys and in particular, white working class boys is one of the most disturbing problems we face within the whole education system" (Woodhead, in Martino and Meyenn, eds. 2001:2).

Stephen Byers reflected similar views in 1998 with his call to schools to "challenge the laddish anti-learning culture which has been allowed to develop over recent years" (Stephen Byers, Standards Minister, in Martino and Meyenn, eds. 2001:2). Jack Straw, as Home Secretary, reiterated these views in 1999, stating that the main social issue of our time concerned the anti-social behaviour and role of young men. In 2007, Nick Gibb, now a senior coalition education minister blamed, "Forty years of 'progressive' teaching methods for the underachievement of boys" (Times, September 10, 2007).

Reports, such as the TES article, "Back of the queue: why poor white boys lose out at school" (TES, 12 January 2007) and the Guardian, " 85% of poorer white boys fall short in GCSEs" (Guardian, 1 February, 2008) continue to highlight the focus on boy's

behaviour and educational underachievement, particularly in respect of white working class boys' underachievement.

It is clear then that the preoccupation of UK policy makers with boys' achievement shows no signs of abating. With the publication of the OECD's PISA report (07.12.10) and the coalition's education 'White paper: the importance of teaching' (DfE, 2010) the 'attainment gap' has been firmly positioned as a central driver for policy,

The 'lost boys' discourse presents, what is, on the basis of the 'evidence', an overwhelming case for the existence of a 'boys' problem'. Boys are outperformed by girls in nearly all GCSE subjects, they commit three times as much crime as girls and their conduct is perceived as violent and anti-social.

The Rowntree report, 'Tackling low educational achievement', (Cassen and Kingdon, London 2007) keenly focuses on the crisis discourse and its implications for public policy with its unequivocal identification of educational failure with gender, highlighted as the decisive factor, not class or ethnic origin,

> "Disadvantage of various kinds lies behind much of low achievement. But different groups in the population respond differently to their circumstances. *There is very obviously a 'boy thing'*…The gender aspect shows that disadvantage is not a consistent factor in low achievement: the girls come from the same families and mostly go to the same schools, but do much better" (Cassen and Kingdon 2007:6)

Redefining the boys

The lost boys discourse raises a number of questions about the pathologisation of working class youth and 'failing boys', notably,

- *Are all boys failing and in crisis?*

- *What is the 'boy thing' which lies behind low achievement?*

Commenting on the crisis discourse, Haywood and Mac an Ghaill argue that this definition of boys as failing is an articulation of society's attitudes towards children, stating that the preoccupation with league tables and outcomes which produces this articulation, has resulted in a situation where, "Children are conceptualized as value added knowledge containers" (Haywood and Mac and Ghaill in Martino and Meyenn eds. 2001:29).

Nuanced critical masculinities theory offers an alternative discourse to that produced in the moral panic, offering a perspective based on post structuralist accounts of the discursively constituted, non-unitary subject. Significantly, this perspective also recognises, "those instances of classed and gendered subjectivity that work against normative understandings of the relationship between social class, gender and schooling" (Reay 2008:1). Labelling working class boys as educational failures reveals a lack of insight into the complexity of the adolescent gender identity performance. For some boys to combine educational success with the maintenance of standing within male peer group culture would require, as Reay argues, a heavy psychic price,

> "involving young men not only in an enormous amount of academic labour but also an intolerable burden of psychic reparative work if they are to avoid what Bourdieu terms 'the duality of the self'" (Reay, 2008:2).

The reactionary lost boys discourse, not only homogenises boys through the creation of a social category, "the failing boy", but fails to acknowledge the agentic capacity of children and young people, "who contribute to their own linguistic construction of meaning and reality" (Mook, 2007:173).

Critical theory serves to demonstrate that boys *learn* the practices that equate violence with manliness, which, "has far more to do with the cultural construction of manhood

than it does with the hormonal substrates of biology" (Gilligan, in Martino and Meyenn, 2001: 17).

The social reality of disaffected and excluded male adolescents is undeniable and comes at a cost to them and the communities in which they live, however, nuanced gender theory and masculinities research is a response to the social reality of the multiple ways of being male and retains a critical guard to both popular and scholarly literature which focuses exclusively on toxic boyhood, situating boys as under achievers, violent goons and louts (Coulter, 2003). The experiences and perspectives of those boys who are able to live against the grain and develop a counter hegemonic consciousness are as central to the debate as the boys whose gendered practices and subjectivities serve to sustain the boy problem.

The toxic boyhood discourse is clearly linked to the wider males in crisis thesis as Groth argues, " for the most part, only angry, potentially destructive boys are talked about with any real interest, *evidently because they anticipate the appearance of the hegemonic, domineering aggressive male*" (Groth, 2008: 8). However, when the crisis discourse is critically deconstructed it is clearly apparent that it is rooted in the, "incorrigible propositions of gender" (Kessler and McKenna in Brittan, 1989: 181) and is only a crisis, "insofar as the 'relations of gender' are perceived and experienced as being problematic by a significant proportion of men" (Brittan, 1989:181).

In respect of education policy and practice and the current public debate about underachieving boys, Foster, *et al*. (2001) situate policy makers' concerns with the gender differentials of educational attainment within the context of the accountability regime of inspections, national league tables and the centralizing effect of the national curriculum, noting that:

> "As places in the league tables were given according to examination performance then schools looked to their own results. It was in analysing the statistical results that the gender gap in performance across the majority of subjects, which had actually appeared in the 1980's but had gone relatively unremarked, *became evident*" (Foster, *et al*. 2001:4).

The clear link between outputs in the form of summative examination success and gender can be identified in articles such as, "Why do girls get better results? Can the feminisation of the curriculum really be credited with skewing the system?" (TES, 2004). How policy makers such as the DfES, DCSF, DfE and Ofsted, have responded to the gender differential revealed by league tables and the 'boys in crisis' discourse framed in questions such as the one above, is the focus of the next section.

Education Policies and Agency Responses

What follows is a survey of the key themes which emerge from policy literature in response to the 'gender gap'. A recurrent theme is the putative relationship between masculine school boy culture and academic engagement. Ofsted (2003) concludes that there is no 'simple explanation' for the gender gap but goes on to identify male social practices as a significant factor influencing boys' motivation,

> "The most important factor that prevents the motivation of boys identified by the pupils and teachers alike was the boys' peer group culture.…within the peer group the boys worked to establish their self-esteem through social interaction not academic performance" (Ofsted, 2003:10).

In DfES (2005), the report's authors, Warrington and Younger cite numerous examples of the ways in which male identity is reinforced by the adoption of strategies characterised as 'laddishness'. They conclude that acceptance as part of the male peer group outweighs the benefits of compliance to the academic regime which for some, equates with the feminine, "and the perceived stigma of homosexuality" (Jackson, 2002 in DfES, 2005: 18).

Reflecting many of the previous reports' findings, DfES (2007) also finds 'reasons for the gender gap' (DfES, 2007:7) in the gendered culture of pupil peer groups. The construction of a dominant hegemonic masculine subjectivity through some boys' anti-school performance is identified as central to the maintenance of identity within the micro-politics of the male peer group. Drawing from the research of Arnot and Forde the report asserts that schoolwork is devalued, conceptualised as feminine and therefore at odds with successful masculine identity work, confirming the view that negative anti-school strategies increase the self-worth of boys within their peer group and therefore become an identity resource.

Likewise, the Rowntree report (2007) argues that anti-education culture is a refuge for boys who have lost their self-esteem. Peer group culture and hegemonic masculine practices are identified as barriers to boys' achievement. Lack of literacy and reading skills are identified as a factor contributing to boys' disengagement, "boys may indeed identify reading as 'feminine' or an unmanly thing to do, at a time when they are forming their own identities" (Cassen and Kingdon, 2007:21). The authors conclude that, "*being* boys constitutes a source of difficulty over and above that conferred by disadvantage" (Cassen and Kingdon, 2007: 23).

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There is, however, clear recognition in this policy literature that the social reality of masculine identity is more complex than the failing boys discourse suggests. This nuanced perspective is evident in DfES (2005) where the authors openly share feminist concerns with the changed focus from female disadvantage to males as the new underprivileged. The authors acknowledge that there is, "legitimate concern over the achievement levels of *some* boys", as, "it is apparent that in some schools, *more* boys are likely to perform below their potential, as defined in value-added terms, than girls" (DfES, 2005: 17). However, the authors qualify this statement by acknowledging the diversity of gender constructions referring to academically successful boys and under-achieving girls whose needs may go unrecognised arguing strongly that, "the 'problem' needs to be carefully contextualised" (DfES, 2005: 9).

The more recent DCSF 'Gender Agenda' reports explicitly identify the social construction of gender norms as a key cultural factor influencing academic engagement stating, "Boys and girls produce constructions of gender that fit social norms in the peer group and in wider society" (DCSF, 2009: 19). Significantly these reports also reflect the nuanced perspectives of social theory and are critical of boy friendly pedagogies arguing that such strategies are, "misleading as some groups of boys achieve highly at school and some groups of girls do not" (DCSF, 2009:6).

A critical evaluation of the 'crisis' discourse

Martino and Meyenn (2001) have shown that the 'boys in crisis' discourse in education is linked to an economic context, that of the gender differential revealed by a regime of national testing- a technique which belongs to the primary economic discourse where, "what counts as important knowledge is increasingly defined as that and only that which is technically and economically 'productive'" (Apple, 1995: xxi). Given this

analysis the educational failure of any social group or their disengagement with the system is a cause for alarm. It would seem that the Ofsted and DfES reports were commissioned because of national concern with the '*underperforming* boy'.

From a critical perspective the dominant discourse in education is one of performativity, based upon a philosophy of efficiency, defined by an input/output ratio, (Ball, 2003). If the 'output' of underperforming boys is a concern it is because schools and curricula are failing to reproduce the conditions for capital accumulation and a functional social order- hence the panic at white working class boys 'bottom of the pile' status. Closer analysis of the policy literature shows that the influence of gender theorists such as Arnot, Lingard *et al* and the work of Warrington and Younger provide an alternative discourse to the economically and socially driven panic of failing boys. The empirical data referred to by these researchers *confounds, rather than confirms the boys in crisis argument* recognising that there is no such thing as a homogeneous group of male learners, but multiple ways of being male. This perspective recognises the capacity of learners to be flexible in their response to issues of gender, social, racial and cultural stereotyping (Francis, 1998).

In the following section I will consider the extent to which the literature on boys and their relationship to spiritual and religious education reflects similar conclusions and outcomes to the research produced by policy makers and the agents of policy surveillance and implementation.

Boys' relationship to religious and spiritual education

Having considered the wider policy context it is necessary to situate RE in relation to

the debate about boys' engagement with education. Ofsted (2003) and DfES (2007) both draw attention to the gender gap in attainment in RE suggesting the RE curriculum is gendered. Ofsted (2003) refers to RS GCSE data indicating that the percentage of girls achieving A*-A exceeded boys by 10% and by 16% for grades A*-C. The points difference between boys and girls in religious education was the second highest in the table of subjects, with a figure of 0.82 in the girls' favour. Similarly, DfES (2007) concludes that,

> "The gender gap in Religious Studies, a subject more popular amongst girls has been consistently large throughout the last sixty years" (DfES, 2007:15).

In terms of the wider global perspective it is interesting to note that the findings of the Australian DEST report (2002) align to the conclusions of the UK reports in which the performance of masculine identity practices produce resistance to values education:

> "Anti-learning cultures amongst boys are often supported by homophobic and anti-female sentiments. For example, a number of boys suggested to us that they or other boys would not want to work hard or to appear to like school, and especially subjects such as the humanities or English, in case they were perceived to be gay or called a girl" (DEST, 2002:128).

A similar picture emerges from Ofsted's 'long' subject report on RE (2007), with its headline, 'The persistent underachievement by boys' and the annual subject report (2005) which headlines with, 'Raising the achievement of boys'. The qualitative data collected from interviews with boys from an HMI survey of 20 primary and secondary schools are analysed in the 2005 Annual report and the 2007 subject report. Both reports identify underachievement by boys as a, "major cause for concern", with girls gaining most of the A*-A grades and boys predominating in the lowest grades,

> "At post-16 the difference is far less marked. However, the numbers choosing the subject remain heavily skewed towards girls" (Ofsted, 2007:15).

The HMI interviews produce some striking data. To summarise, the boys selected for interview were not intrinsically opposed to the subject content of RE, indeed, some

identified RE as above average in terms of interest compared with other subjects. This was particularly the case at KS4 where ethical or philosophical issues were favoured. Significantly topics such as, 'the family' and 'personal relationships', which might serve as the medium through which issues of gender justice could be interrogated were identified as less popular amongst the boys than they were with the girls. A key factor impeding engagement with RE was the boys' view that a GCSE in RE, "was not a qualification they particularly valued because they did not believe it would enhance their chances of employment", whereas, "girls were keen to do well in all their subjects because 'girls don't want a poor result on their profile'" (Ofsted, 2007:15).

The outcomes of these reports represent a contribution to knowledge about boys' relationship with RE, however, they are uncritical and un-theorised. Theoretically the HMI reports suggest the need for further research and a critical perspective which disrupts the historical gender binary as a conceptual tool to explain 'troublesome' boys' underachievement and 'compliant' girls' achievement. Unlike the other policy makers' reports, at the point of publication, the RE report does not go far enough by failing to acknowledge that engaging teaching will raise standards for both boys *and* girls. Commenting on the report, Broadbent echoes the previous point, stating, " surprisingly, there are no recommendations in the report related to boys' underachievement but the evidence presented would provide an excellent basis for class-room based teacher research and action planning, something which potentially could have a national impact on strategies for teaching boys in RE" (Broadbent, 2008: 19).

Research and scholarship in religious education: national and international perspectives on gender and religious education

What follows is a survey of the literature on gender and education produced by the RE academic community. Despite its restricted scope, key themes emerge which serve to

illuminate some of the factors producing boys' association or disassociation from the RE discourse.

In their cross-cultural study of pre-adolescents' moral, religious and spiritual questions Tirri, *et al* (2005) surveyed nearly 2000 young people internationally. Statistically significant results indicated that the female students asked more religious and moral questions than the male students, suggesting a gendered response to education which "acknowledges the importance of social and affective domains in students' development including their spiritual and religious concerns" (Tirri, *et al*. 2006: 212). Tirri *et al* note that in all of their data sets girls asked more spiritual and moral questions than boys, however, significantly, they conclude that irrespective of gender, spiritual and religious questions are among the issues both boys and girls are concerned about. The focus of the moral questions dealt with terrorism and conflict in the wake of 9/11.The research carried out by Tirri *et al* could be presented as empirical basis for a gender differential in attitudes towards the RE field of enquiry, with feminine subjectivity demonstrating greater alignment with the concerns of RE.

Mol (1985, in Francis, 1997: 82) accounts for gender differences in religiosity in terms of the gendered social experiences of male and females arguing that the male ethos, characterised by aggression and the 'rough conflict game', often played as an institutional game in the male workplace, has a secular legitimation, "because steely neutrality rather than emotional surrender (love) serves its purpose better" (Mol, in Francis, 1997: 82). In poststructuralist accounts of gendered relations notions of identity are, "socially instituted and maintained norms of intelligibility" (Butler, 2007: 23), rather than some fixed essence. Therefore an investigation into the relationship of gender to religion and religious education will be a reflection of the dominant

discourses which produce the subjectivities of the social actors the researcher engages with. The data produced and analysed by Leslie Francis in his detailed comparative survey of the attitudes of 13-15 year old boys in independent Christian schools and non-denominational schools is a clear confirmation of the regulatory and formative power of a particular discourse- in this case, Christianity. His findings indicate, almost as a tautology,

> "That the values environment modelled by 13-15 year old boys attending Christian schools is significantly different from that modelled by boys in the same age range attending non-denominational state maintained schools" (Francis, 2005: 139).

Unsurprisingly, the boys in the Christian setting articulated stronger association with the religious education curricula they received than their peers in secular settings. Overall, the literature on adolescent boys and their relationship to and perceptions of the RE discourse is limited, as Wintersgill comments,

> "the omission in the UK of research into boys' spirituality is a serious one for after two decades of educational research and the development of theory regarding both spirituality and boys' attitudes and under-achievement, it is remiss that no attempt has been made to seek possible connections between the two" (Wintersgill, 2007:49).

It is this very imbalance that Wintersgill has sought to redress in her work on teenagers' spirituality producing some of the most substantial research into boys' views of RE, religion and spirituality in the UK. In her research, Wintersgill identified some interesting gendered responses to a questionnaire she used for data collection. 34% of the male pupils refused to complete the questionnaire in contrast with 10 % of the female pupils. Where they did complete the questionnaire the male respondents demonstrated a greater tendency to cynical, joking or dismissive language about religion. Equally striking was the unwillingness of the male pupils selected for interview to participate. 18 were selected and yet only half agreed to participate. One

of Wintersgill's male sample did not wish to be interviewed remarking in his questionnaire, "Some people hide their beliefs and interests from others. It's not cool to go round talking about your spirit and things," (Year 8 male pupil in Wintersgill, 2007: 52).

Wintersgill found evidence for 'contradictory masculinities' (Engebretson, 2006) and the performance of an outwardly masculine, heteronormative identity amongst the boys she interviewed. Antony and Bakir indicated that being 'nice' ran contrary to the expectations of their peer culture, "you have to act hard", "being nice don't get you nowhere" (Wintersgill, 2007: 53). Another of her respondents explained that displays of sensitivity or spiritual introspection were detrimental to social standing, "they don't show it 'cos 'ud look soft" (Wintersgill, 2007:53). The duality of self emerges as a theme in Antony's narrative where he contrasts the 'nice' inner self, with the socially necessary external hardness, a basic feature of the masculine gender performance and critical for the maintenance of an accepted identity. Antony describes the peer group's expectation of displays of remorselessness and toughness as evidence for heterosexuality. In Wintersgill's research he refers to the 'townies' in the following characterisation, "on the inside they are very nice people but they act hard but they're not. You have to act hard to have friends or they think 'ur a pufter" (Antony, in Wintersgill, 2007: 53).

Through the use of a questionnaire designed to explore students' concepts of spirituality, Wintersgill obtained data which suggests a gendered response offering a picture of reluctant males, embarrassed by the intimate language of introspection and spirituality. Wintersgill found that boys associated spirituality with religion which they tended to dismiss. A notable example being the case of 'Harry' , a sixth former who regarded spirituality as sentimentalism and those who believed in spirituality as

'simpletons'. Boys described spirituality in terms of achievement, such as, "finding out the limits of your body and mind" and, "finding our strengths and weaknesses and overcoming them" (Wintersgill, 2007:57). Wintersgill also found that boys tended to be non-committal and remote in their responses, sometimes offering minimal comment about their personal convictions and beliefs.

Wintersgill's conclusions echo much of the research findings produced both by the research teams who carried out the DfES research into gender and achievement and the perspectives of critical social theorists regarding the construction of normative masculine identities within the gender order of the high school,

> "In addition this survey has produced some evidence to suggest that the reason for this lies in the suspicion of some boys that spirituality is 'soft' and for 'pufters' and will therefore not contribute to the masculine image which they believe the world expects them to aspire to" (Wintersgill, 2007: 61).

In addition to the work of Wintersgill, in Australia, Engebretson (2004, 2006, and 2007) has researched male adolescents' perceptions of spirituality and religion, drawing on the work of social constructionists such as Connell and situating her research in the policy debates taking place in Australia around boys' engagement with education.

Engebretson's concerns are with the experiences of boys within the Roman Catholic tradition. Her theoretical starting point is a concept of spirituality derived from William James, which defines spirituality in terms of,

> "Experience of the sacred other…connectedness with and responsibility for the self, other people and the non-human world…the illumination of lived experience with meaning and value…the need for naming and expression in either traditional or non-traditional ways" (James, in Engebretson, 2006 :94).

Engebretson identifies the existence of a postmodern interest in non-institutional spirituality and a parallel phenomenon, the drift from church as an institution and the

mediator of faith and spirituality. This drift is most evident amongst adolescent boys; however in the data derived from research into 965 15-18 year old boys and their constructions of identity, masculinity and spirituality (2006), Engebretson also found evidence of tendencies to challenge dominant hegemonic ideals of masculinity. Engebretson's work confirms the existence of masculinities and creates a typology of masculinity, identifying hegemonic masculinity, defensive masculinity and the more complex contradictory masculinity. Engebretson rejects essentialist notions of masculinity and points to the challenges of maintaining a duality of identity for many boys and men who live the hegemonic norm externally, but experience it as a struggle, as she states,

> "There is no doubt that many boys struggle with a restrictive norm for masculine success, and…they often lack the emotional and conceptual skills that would enable them to distance themselves from the norm and become conscious of their own development" (Engebretson, 2006: 98).

Her conclusions reflect many of the findings of Frosh *et al.* (Frosh *et al*, in Engebretson, 2006) in a research project investigating construction of gender identities amongst 11-14 year old boys in London schools. Engebretson summarises the following observation from the work of Frosh,

> "It is difficult for boys to find a space in which they can try out masculine identities that are different from the hegemonic code of macho masculinity. Masculinities are often closely policed by peers and adults in ways that communicate that 'softer' characteristics are abnormal for males" (Frosh *et al*, in Engebretson, 2006:99).

The data Engebretson collected and analysed allowed her to conclude that a component of the spirituality of the Australian teenage boys investigated is the construction of a

masculine identity focussed in terms of personal integrity and relationship values[1] as opposed to success oriented and physical personality values, which indicates a counter hegemonic consciousness amongst the research sample and, "proposes hope for their future relationships, family lives and fulfilment" (Engebretson, 2006: 103). Engebretson acknowledges the limitations of method, noting that it is one thing for boys to talk of their masculinity in terms of personal integrity values and another thing to practice this in their daily lives. The implications of these findings for RE programmes concerned with young peoples' spiritual development and education programmes for social, racial and gender equity have some significance. Quoting Kindlon and Thompson (Kindlon and Thompson in Engebretson, 2006), Engebretson refers to the biblical figure of Cain, as an archetype for boys' silent anger, lack of empathic awareness and impulsive physical violence, a deadly link that has been documented in the work of Neroni in her analysis of the Columbine massacre and the construction of a 'real masculinity' (2000). The Catholic boys who participated in Engebretson's survey indicate,

> "That the natural basis for an education based on emotional awareness, empathy and moral courage is already there within the boys themselves, in their sense that greater happiness is to be found in personal integrity and in the development of good relationships" (Engebretson, 2006: 108).

The implication for the RE community is clear, "boys' education for spirituality needs to be given our earnest attention" (Engebretson, 2006: 108). Both Engebretson and Wintersgill show that the boys live with the complexity of their discursive subjectivities.

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[1] The most frequently mentioned values were: caring, successful, respected, kind, wealthy, honest, good, happy, loving, family man, friendly, helpful- nine of these twelve values are personal integrity/ relationship values.

These boys negotiate the tensions of the inner 'self' and the outward gender performance, confirming the view that masculinity is identity work and that the boys surveyed had learnt gender scripts. The older boys surveyed in Engebretson's research, socialised in Church schools appeared able to articulate a sense of masculinity uncoupled from the Australian archetype of the lonely bush man and perhaps had come to recognize, that, "traditional notions of masculinity do come with a price for men, particularly in respect of their ability to develop empathy, understanding and emotional intimacies" (Whitehead, 2002:56).

Conclusion

The literature review has shown that education policy makers and religious education theorists acknowledge the complexity of the interplay between gender and education. Empirical classroom based research and evidence provided from analysis of the outcomes of examinations indicate the existence of a gendered curriculum and gendered subject choices, in particular the existence of boys' underachievement in RE. Methodologically, this research seeks to avoid any fixed notions of masculinity and recognises the multiple ways that youthful masculine subjectivities might be performed. Indeed, Engebretson's research points to the existence of a more fluid masculine subjectivity, a 'contradictory' masculinity, able to negotiate subject positions, simultaneously able to perform normative masculine identities whilst recognizing within the socially safe context of a research interview the constraints of such an identity. However, this more nuanced interpretation requires further theoretical perspectives which are capable of accounting for this fluid subjectivity. However the research evidence suggests the influence of powerful social discourses about what it means to be a man and a male shape the decisions and actions of young males in respect of their educational choices and therefore their ontological possibilities. This is

a challenge as the Erricker's observe in a culture where the 'religious language game' is either suppressed or absent and where the boys they interviewed as part of their research into the personal narratives of children expressed themselves through a discourse of, "the hard man- tough, streetwise and into football" (Erricker & Erricker, in Hay & Nye, 2006: 62). However, this is a starting point, for how else can educators enter into dialogue with young people,

> "Unless we have an understanding of the views, attitudes and concerns of children nurtured in a plurality of social, religious and educational environments?" (Erricker & Erricker, in Hay & Nye, 2006: 61).

RE is concerned with ultimate existential questions of identity, meaning and purpose and provides a forum where critical questions of social, gender and racial justice can be interrogated and where pupils can reflect on that most traditional concern of philosophy, their own 'identity'. It is hoped that this research will provide some insights into ways that RE can contribute to, and develop strategies to enable full participation of *all* learners in a programme that enables the ontological possibilities of both boys and girls to be fulfilled.

Chapter three presents a critical consideration of theoretical perspectives which provide the interpretive tools to make sense of the complex relationships between gender, identity and RE highlighted in this literature review.

Chapter Three: Theorizing Masculinities

Introduction

The policy reports into male educational underachievement surveyed in chapter two are the products of the 'crisis' discourse. These reports present critical questions about the role played by dominant anti-academic cultures as masculine identity resources, but significantly, they show that the social reality underpinning educational achievement eludes simple reductive explanations in terms of the 'failing boy'. These findings produce other issues, as Warrington and Younger argue (DfES 2005), asking: what are the implications of this concern with the underachievement of certain groups of boys for academically successful boys and girls and academically unsuccessful girls? The very existence of this failing boys discourse requires the perspective of nuanced gender theory to address the questions presented by Warrington and Younger (DfES, 2005) The boy question is, therefore, not politically neutral, but rather raises critical questions about gender and power. As Kimmel (Kimmel in Brod and Kaufman, eds. 1994) argues, if cherished manhood is thought of as timeless essence, then any change in the status of this powerful gendered way of being presents a different view of masculinity and reveals it as historical, fragile, contingent and socially constructed.

It is the aim of this chapter to begin a critical exploration of theories of gender and subjectivity which might provide the theoretical tools to account for the issues which emerge in the literature produced by policy agencies and the RE academic community . Such questions, I wish to argue, require theoretical perspectives capable of analysing and deconstructing gendered curriculum choices by accounting for these choices through a theory of masculine identity which can account for the social processes observable in the practices and attitudes of the adolescent boys interviewed in this

study. In this chapter I provide a survey of gender theory aiming to trace a critical 'line of flight' through the development of theory on male subjectivity.

The first of the theoretical perspectives considered is that of structural-functionalist sex role theory, as exemplified by the contributions of Parsons and Pleck. Secondly, the particular contribution of Willis' neo-Marxist ethnography will be considered in respect of its ability to illuminate the relationship between class and boys' experience within secondary education. Thirdly, the influential perspectives of critical pro-feminist masculinities theory will be examined, with a focus on the perspectives of social constructionist 'masculinities' theory and the conceptualisation of masculinity as fluid and constructed. The influential work of Connell and Kimmel and the concept of hegemonic masculinity will provide the focus of this analysis. Finally, the theoretical and methodological possibilities offered as a result of the paradigm shift from materiality and ideology to discourse and language in poststructuralist theory will be examined. The contributions of Butler, Foucault, Deleuze, Guattari and Ricoeur to theories of gendered subjectivity and gendered ontology will be considered and presented as analytic frameworks for the investigation of male identity in this study.

Social Constructionist perspectives on gendered identity

The theoretical perspectives considered and critiqued in the remainder of this chapter reveal a shared methodological concern with the constructedness of identity and therefore, the fluidity of masculinity itself. Collectively, these theories can be identified as 'social constructionist'. Kimmel sums up this position when he states,

> "Manhood is neither static not timeless; it is historical. Manhood is not the manifestation of an inner essence; it is socially constructed. Manhood does not bubble up to consciousness from our biological makeup it is created in culture.

Manhood means different things at different times to different people," (Kimmel in Brod and Kaufman eds, 120: 1994).

Sex role theory

As a dominant theoretical discourse in educational research, sex role theory accounts for gender difference in terms of socialisation, that is, the ways in which male and female gendered identity is developed through the social messages that society provides rather than notions of essential biological difference (Skelton and Francis, 2009).

The influence of sex role theories in education can be found in the functionalism of Talcott Parsons, whose theory operates around the notion of masculinity and femininity as the natural organizing principles required for the harmonious function of the 'organism' that is society. Parsonian analysis would account for the behaviours of boys and their orientation towards certain subjects, such as RE, which carry gender meanings, as an outcome of the distinction between male 'instrumental' and female 'expressive' roles, originating in the family and other social structures, such as education and the media. The conviction that there is some sort of stable, underlying reality to gender, experienced in daily interaction and 'common sense' conceptions of socially normative roles is an outcome of, "a general sociological law of the differentiation of functions in social groups" (Connell, 2008:22). As Skelton and Francis (2009) argue, this theory opened the door to egalitarian social change,

> " if children learned their gender identities through role modelling then it was thought all that was needed was to present them with non-stereotypical models and images" (Skelton and Francis, 2009: 18).

Similarly, the work of sex role theorist Joseph H. Pleck (1976), recognized the social impact of feminism (and therefore social change) on women's self-definition and men's identities, going further than the Parsonian dichotomy between instrumental and

expressive roles, to explore what he characterised as 'contradictory demands role strain'. Implicit in Pleck's analysis of male identity is recognition of its historical contingency and constructedness, anticipating the more nuanced work of later gender theorists. Commenting in 1976 on the, "obsolescence and dysfunctionality of the traditional male role", Pleck writes, "that a major stimulus for men to examine and change their sex role is the dramatic recent change in women's definitions of themselves and their place in society" (Pleck, 1976; 162). Social role theory, therefore, marks a move from biological determinism and naturalized genders, however, despite this progress, its utility as a conceptual and theoretical tool is limited, as Connell argues,

> "Sex role theory has a fundamental difficulty in grasping issues of power...it does not have a way of understanding change as dialectic within gender relations" (Connell, 2008:27).

So, there are a number of limitations to this inherently conservative theory. Sex role theory offers no theory of the subject and cannot account for the fluidity and differentiated behaviours of 'gender roles'. Even Pleck's work, with its sensitivity to the dynamics of power and awareness of change could not accommodate identities which slipped out of the simple binary of the instrumental and the expressive (Connell, 2008).

As Connell suggests, the limitations of sex role theory, and its reactive character, are exposed by its willingness to conceptualise differences in the situations of men and women, by appeal to role differentiation. The high status anti- academic, hegemonic masculine performance of some of the boys highlighted in the policy reports would be absorbed by theories of social conditioning, but it cannot account for the multiple ways

of being a boy , and therefore curricular choices which don't appear to support the instrumental male sex role, such as RE, as Alsop comments,

> "There are a number of key problems to this approach...it does not show how we can explain changes within the lives of individual men and women...nor does it adequately explain why resistance occurs...why do some people learn, accept and follow certain roles and others reject them?" (Alsop *et al*. 2007:66).

Alsop's comments are a perceptive critique of the male sex role paradigm. The conservatism expressed by structural functionalist accounts of sex roles, lies in their premise that such roles are necessary for the stable functioning of a cohesive society, irrespective, it would appear of the political implications of such a position. The next study to be considered offers greater value precisely because it does take into account the role of class and the social function of the school as a structure whereby a type of masculinity is reproduced.

Learning to labour- social class and the construction of masculinity

As highlighted in chapter two, the reports produced by policy agents such as the DfES, OfSTED and other interested NGO's such as the Rowntree foundation have posed questions about anti-academic 'laddish' culture and the 'lad' as an expression of high status masculinity linked to negative attitudes and educational underachievement.

Paul Willis' ethnography, 'Learning to labour' (1977) is a significant case study of how classed oppositional masculine pupil cultures contribute to the, "regeneration of working class cultural forms" (Willis, 1977:2). The critical analysis of the culture of the 'lads' offered by Willis in his study is illuminating because it situates and accounts for the lads' 'way of being' within the material actuality of class, place and a tradition of working class resistance and opposition to all 'official authority'. Willis provides rich descriptions of an anti-authority male youth culture, describing the experiences and

recording the 'cultural penetrations' of the 'lads'. The 'lads' form the dominant counter school oppositional culture, in contrast to conformist boys, the 'ear' oles'. This typology of pupil cultures anticipates the more nuanced work of Mac an Ghaill (1994) on male pupil cultures.

It is clear that a hetero-normative masculinity operates within the cultural practices of the lads who express some of their most important values through the dramatic display of fighting, group solidarity and masculine hubris,

> "Violence and the judgement of violence is the most basic axis of the lads' ascendance over the conformists," (Willis, 1977: 34).

Group solidarity is also expressed through attitudes to women and to ethnic groups who assume the status of 'other' within the lads' social landscape- the emphasis on difference privileged in RE, is not valued or featured within the discursive practices of the lads. The lads define their superiority and their exclusivity *against* these 'othered' groups. If Willis' conclusions are applied to this enquiry, the pluralistic discourse of RE could be considered at worst a threat to the dominant masculine practices of the lads or simply an irrelevance.

However, Willis has been criticised by feminist educationalists (Walkerdine, in Skelton and Francis, 2009) for 'swooning' admiration for the lads and a failure to problematise their laddish identity performance. Willis' ethnography may suffer from a lack of theoretical nuance and an undeveloped theory of identity, but it is poignant in its description of the power and the self-destructiveness of certain types of masculine identity performance within tightly knit working class communities and the reproduction of such modes of masculinity. The anti-conformism described by Willis finds its parallel in the descriptions of the anti-academic male pupil culture highlighted in the policy makers reports outlined in chapter two. However, it is only *one* facet in the

multi-faceted phenomena of masculinity, and does not consider any other mode of masculinity than that of the lads and offers no critique of this gendered performance in respect of its impact on 'others'. There is little real sense that this masculinity, which is normative for the 'lads' might be intrinsically dysfunctional.

A branch of critical theory that took account of feminist concerns about male power was social constructionist 'masculinities' theory, in particular the work of Robert Connell, who like Willis, recognizes the role of class and social structures such as school in producing male pupil cultures, but provides the nuanced conceptual and theoretical framework to make greater critical sense of gender construction.

Feminism and critical masculinities theory

The significance of feminist theory and politics for theories of masculinity is central, precisely because it attends to the relationship between gender and power in a way that sex role theory and Willis' case study fail to do. Critical feminist scholarship recognises male gender blindness in earlier social theory emphasising that gender is just too important to ignore in any analysis of identity, justice and injustice in social relations, as Connell states, "Everyday life is an arena of gender politics, not an escape from it," (Connell, 2008: 3). Social reality, is therefore, inextricably 'gendered'. So feminist theory makes masculinity visible and puts it under critical scrutiny.

As Lynne Segal (1990) argues, unmasking the inequities of gendered power relations exposes the undesirability of 'masculinity'. Indeed, the theories surveyed in this next section go as far as to suggest that the very notion of masculine identity itself is an illusion- whilst responding to the material consequences of these masculine practices.

To be engaged in pro-feminist research into the way in which gender identity is constructed is, in the words of Ramazanoglu, to question common sense notions of identity and, "what was previously taken for granted" (Ramazanoglu, 1989: 59). The influence of feminist theorists such as Ramazanoglu on social constructionist theories of masculinity is made clear when one considers the definition of the social constructionist position previously offered by Kimmel,

> "Men and women in societies are cultural products. If the biological process of reproduction makes women socially inferior to or economically dependent on men, then this is a problem to be explained, not a scientific account of natural difference" (Ramazanoglu, 1989:59).

The argument for the constructedness of male identity put forward by Kimmel is essentially identical to the quotation above. The implications of this view are politically and sociologically significant for educationalists. The notion that gender is a social and cultural construction allows feminists to challenge dominant conceptions of nature and the meanings of male and female, thus exposing masculinist practices and the asymmetrical nature of power relations.

Feminist theory has opened up masculinity to critical scrutiny, accounting for social divisions and inequality in terms of a unitary notion of masculinity, namely patriarchy (Mac an Ghaill and Haywood, 2003; 8), however it was the politically and theoretically compelling ideas of second wave feminism as represented by theorists, such as Chodorow, de Beauvoir, Gilligan and Hartstock which provided the impetus for the reflexive and critical masculinities theory which will be examined in the next section. For example Hartstock (1997), drawing from psychoanalysis, Chodorow and Marxist feminism, argues that women are socialised in the world of the mother in daily life, whereas male identity is constructed around the negation of the mother and

differentiation from the 'other'. For Hartstock, this male construction of self in opposition to the other is what is at the core of the combative and hostile dualism that reverberates through both classed society and masculinism. It is precisely these sorts of feminist concerns which account for gender relations in respect of their structural location within the relationship of patriarchy to capitalism that are apparent in the theory of Robert Connell and his programme for social and gender justice. These shared concerns are particularly apparent when one compares the neo- Marxist analysis offered previously with Connell's Gramscian concepts of hegemony and hegemonic masculinity.

The more radical implications of third wave feminism and poststructuralism for theories of male identity will be considered after the discussion of Connell's theory.

Critical Structural Masculinities theory

The critical discourse of feminism exposed the relationship of masculine practices to a gendered social hierarchy and the reproduction of inequalities and social divisions. It has been shown that sex role theory and the type of neo-Marxist analysis offered by Willis did not go far enough in their accounts of masculinity, offering no critical theory of the subject, or explicit political analysis of the power dynamics inherent in the gendered social life they described, so it is to the pro-feminist theories of the influential social constructionists, and the theoretical paradigm shift evident in the work of Connell, Brittan and Kimmel that this survey turns.

As pro-feminist theories the work of Connell, Brittan and Kimmel all recognize the relationship of masculinity to oppressive practices. Gender and power are central concepts within these juridico-discursive critical structuralist theories. They align with Foucault's (1980) conception of the juridico-discursive model of power in so far as they

conceive of power hierarchically operating in a 'top down' oppression-contract schema. For Connell it is gendered relationships which form a global gender order, premised on the global subordination of women to men, the group which holds this prohibitive and coercive power. Brittan explains masculinity in terms of an ideology of patriarchy used to justify men's' dominance. Kimmel explores male power and masculine practices in terms of its flight from the feminine and homophobic self-differentiation, giving rise to the very gender blindness in men (invisible gendered subjects) that might be levelled as a criticism of Willis' ethnography.

What these theories do share in common is the conviction that social actor's identities are constructions and that there are multiple ways of being male or female. So, in this sense the 'overinflated' concept of patriarchy, as the single overarching factor in gender relations, is superseded by a more nuanced approach which recognises the multiplicity of male signs or 'masculinities'.

Hegemonic masculinity

The article, 'Towards a new sociology of masculinity' (Carrigan, Connell and Lee, 1985), represented a major contribution towards critical masculinities theory with the introduction of the concept of hegemonic masculinity. This theory makes the significant step towards an understanding of masculinity as multiple, an ontological category invested with power, but historically variable. Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity goes beyond essentialist functionalist sex role models and concepts of patriarchy which assume a, "concrete structure within which the individual either struggles too little or to no avail" (Whitehead, 2002:88), to reconceptualise masculinity as a dynamic and specific strategy centred on winning and holding power. Connell

derives the concept of hegemony from the work of the Marxist, Antonio Gramsci and his analysis of class relations. Hegemony,

> "Refers to the cultural dynamic by which a group claims and sustains a leading position in social life", in this case 'men' and is characterised by practices of subordination, complicity and marginalization by the dominant group (Connell, 2008:77).

The concept of hegemonic masculinity is predicated on the central feminist argument that the relationship between men and women is oppressive. Key to understanding this concept is the assertion that hegemony works through *persuasion*, to make the social organisation and practices of institutions such as the law, education and the family appear natural, ordinary and normal. So hegemonic masculinity refers to the practices by which a male dominance is institutionalised, as Carrigan *et al* state,

> "It is, rather, a question of how particular groups of men inhabit positions of power and wealth and how they legitimate and reproduce the social relations that generate their dominance," (Carrigan, *et al*. 1987:181).

Hegemonic masculinity, therefore, is a political technique of patriarchy and its raison d'être is the winning and the holding of power by men as the dominant social group, and therefore the oppression and exclusion of other social groups in that process. Hegemonic masculinity is characterised by a flight from and dread of the feminine. It is a culturally idealized form, both a personal and a collective project, eloquently summed up by Donaldson as,

> "...the common sense about breadwinning and manhood. It is exclusive, anxiety provoking, internally and hierarchically differentiated, brutal and violent. It is pseudo-natural, tough, contradictory, crisis-prone, rich and socially sustained....It is a lived experience, and an economic and cultural force, and dependent on social arrangement. It is constructed through difficult negotiation over a life time. Fragile it may be, but it constructs the most dangerous things we live with," (Donaldson, 1993: 645-646).

Connell's nuanced theory of multiple masculinities recognizes that gender can be contradictory and dynamic, and that many men and boys, as his study of schools, 'Cool guys, swots and wimps,' Connell (2000)), testifies, by no means conform to

stereotypical notions of masculinity. What is crucial to Connell's realist argument is his emphasis on the social and economic materiality of normative heterosexual masculine practices which offer men the advantages of the patriarchal dividend. It is this dividend which sustains hegemonic masculinity, but at a cost to women, children and other men. Central to Connell's perspective is his social constructionist view that all gender practices are, "onto-formative, as constituting reality" (Connell, 2008:81) and that, "gender is not fixed in advance of social interaction, but is constructed in interaction" (Connell, 2008:35). In Connell's social constructionist theory, it is this 'gender order', constructed in relation to the 'reproductive arena' (Connell, 2008) which structures social practices and privileges masculinity. Masculinity and femininity, in this analysis are configurations of gender practice generated through sites such as the state and its institutions, including education,

> "School studies show patterns of hegemony vividly. In certain schools the masculinity exalted through competitive sport is hegemonic: this means that sporting prowess is a test of masculinity even for boys who detest the locker room" (Connell, 2008: 37).

For Connell, schools are masculinity making devices which actively construct forms of gender and the relations between them. In 'The Men and the Boys' (2000) Connell uses life history and individual narratives to illuminate moments in the gender construction of a group of men through consideration of how their family, friendships, politics and early sexual relationships can offer a perspective on events in their schooling. In 'Getting into trouble' (2000) Connell provides the narratives of Mal, Harry the Eel and Jack Harley, men from poor labouring families. There are obvious parallels with the work of Willis, but Connell goes much further in his analysis of the men's school experience. For these men getting into trouble was their dominant gendered practice and the authority structure of the school was, "the antagonist" against which they defined their masculine identities. This ultra- masculine display is an identity resource,

manifested in intolerance of difference and exploitation of young women. It also functions as, "a means of maintaining order, the order of patriarchy, via the subordination of women and the exaltation of one's maleness" (Connell, 2000:135) but it is this very assertion of masculine pride pushes the men towards crime, as Connell comments, "the school is a relatively soft part of the state, but behind it stands the hard machinery of police, courts and prisons" (Connell, 2000: 135).

Like Willis, Connell is able to analyse the relationship between class and gender to illustrate an experience of education for working class boys, "at its most alienating" (Connell, 2000:135). In 'knowing where you stand' Connell considers the function of schools as the market place of masculinities. The 'academic triers, the swots and the wimps' (Connell, 2000) are boys who are able to claim another form of social power through academic success. The reaction of the failed is to seek power through physicality, but this very differentiation of masculinities is organised around social power, "in terms of access to higher education, entry to professions, command of communication" (Connell, 2000: 137). In conclusion, Connell's theory shows that it is boys' investment in the construction of their masculinity which is the social factor which produces resistance or compliance towards school and subject choices. For Connell subject choices are one of the vortices of masculinity (2000) which shape boys' identities. It can be argued that liberal, pluralistic RE with its emphasis on social ethics and social justice has the capacity to disrupt the hegemonic practices outlined by Connell, indeed, he argues that, " education is a key site of alliance politics…at a deeper level, education is the formation of capacities for practice", (Connell, 2006:239) advocating a curriculum for social justice.

Masculinism

Arthur Brittan's concept of 'masculinism' (1989) offers a very similar analysis to Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity. Like Connell, Brittan recognizes the fluidity of male signs, but as a structuralist, he holds onto the continuities of the unchanging structures of patriarchy and capitalism.

Brittan's theory seeks to make visible the ways in which men's power is sustained and reproduced through institutions such as education, politics, the family and economics. The relationship between masculinity and competitive capitalism is a major theme within Brittan's work. His theory, particularly his notion of an ideology of masculinism, can be used to explore the interaction between educational settings and the emerging masculine subjectivity of male pupils, as Brittan states, "boys grow up in environments which encourage certain kinds of conduct, rather than others. *They learn to be 'men'*" (Brittan, 1989: 7). Brittan acknowledges the existence of multiple masculinities, but like Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity, his theory of masculinism as the dominant ideology is premised on the social reality of gender relations in which the power of men is an a priori given, and unquestioned in both the domestic and public spheres. Masculinism is an ideology which rests on the notion of a gender binary, hetero-normativity and a view of men as possessing a naturalized male essence which justifies their exalted position, "as such it is the ideology of patriarchy," (Brittan, 1989:4).

Brittan, like Connell, seeks to expose the essentialism of masculinism as a ruse designed to maintain the power of politically, economically and socially dominant men. The competitiveness and aggression of men are nothing more than culturally sanctioned

attributes, social constructions which are functional for a particular system, as Brittan argues here,

> "Men must compete with each other, as individuals or in groups, to maximise the common good. So when little Johnny wins the hundred metre's dash, we see this not only as arising out of 'natural' ability, but also as exemplifying the laws of competition. Both nature and the market are merged to give us a picture of the ideal character structure for capitalism" (Brittan, 1989: 99).

So, how boys learn to be men through their interactions with structures and their experience of gender relations has significance for this study, particularly in terms of the author's assertion that a 'critical' RE and education should provide an alternative discourse to the rampant materialism of western capitalism, i.e. the very source of a type of dominant masculinity, as Brittan has argued.

Learning 'manhood'

The American pro-feminist sociologist Michael Kimmel has been identified as a major contributor to social constructionist gender theory throughout this chapter. In 'Masculinity as Homophobia', Kimmel (Kimmel, in Brod and Kaufman eds. 1994) aims to show that men and boys are a privileged gendered group often unaware of their gendered ontology because the mechanisms which support the construction of their identities do not impinge on their self-consciousness. In contrast what makes a person 'othered' or marginal, "are the mechanisms that we understand, because those are most painful in daily life" (Kimmel, 2007: xvi). From the perspective of studying boys' practices and emergent masculine identities, Kimmel, like Connell, sees masculinity as a construction. The experience of schooling and boyhood are a pivotal developmental moment situated within an institutional location in which the meanings of masculinity are articulated. Kimmel, like Connell and Mac an Ghaill, argues that masculinity is a

central theme within boys' lives during adolescence, a view shared by Kivel in his article, 'The Act Like a Man box',

> "The key to staying in the box is control. Boys are taught to control their bodies, control their feelings, control their relationships- to protect themselves from being vulnerable", however, "the possibility that a boy will have control over the conditions of his life varies depending on his race, class and culture." (Kivel, in Kimmel, 2007: 148)

For Kimmel the social construct 'man' is achieved through retreat from the 'feminine'. Manhood is therefore a chronically insecure ontological category, characterised by exclusion of non-normative 'others'. In social life it is manifested in the ways by which men constantly play the "field of secure gender identity", by retreating from any actions, postures or behaviours which might prove humiliating in the eyes of other men, so it is, therefore, a 'defence' (Kimmel in Brod and Kaufman eds, 1994: 138). Men construct the rules of manhood, however, the test of manhood is relentless and requires the constant reiteration and enactment of the part, but at a cost for all the social actors involved, as Kimmel states,

> "Peace of mind, relief from the gender struggle, will come only from a politics of inclusion, not exclusion, from standing up for equality and justice, and not by running away" (Kimmel, in Brod and Kaufmann, eds, 1994: 139).

Masculine subcultures

The social constructionist theories surveyed above represent substantial contributions to the literature on masculinity produced in the 1990's. As an outcome of this new body of critical work several substantive studies of masculinity within educational settings were produced. Mac an Ghaill's (1994) ethnographic study of Parnell school is a significant contribution to the literature on the social construction and regulation of masculinities in compulsory secondary education. Like Connell, Mac an Ghaill's empirical

investigation reveals schools as places where masculine perspectives are pervasively dominant, however, like Connell, he suggests that that men and boys have to invest effort in their masculinity, and, indeed, " as Connell illustrated, many men (and boys) fail to achieve, or do not seek to achieve, 'hegemonic masculinity'" (Skelton and Francis, 2009: 111).

His contribution to theory in this field is significant because he accounts for the female and male student and teacher sub cultures in terms of the specificity of the school and , "the contextual contingency of gender formation produced in this (Parnell school) cultural site" (Mac an Ghaill, 1994:11). Mac an Ghaill concludes that schools are gendered regimes which construct gender relations through the micro-cultures of management, teachers and students. These micro-cultures are infra-structural mechanisms which serve to mediate masculinities and femininities. Mac an Ghaill, like Connell and poststructuralist theorists such as Butler argues that male identity is a highly fragile socially construction. Through the ethnography he seeks to problematise and analyse the processes whereby this male identity emerges as an apparently stable unitary category with fixed meanings. For Mac an Ghaill it is the *school*, alongside other institutions, which serves to administer, regulate and reify unstable sex/gender categories. In particular it is the male pupil and teacher peer group networks that form the school's dominant social infrastructure. The male pupil cultures provide the symbolic and material locus whereby social and discursive practices are developed which serve to validate and reify the masculine subjectivities of the pupils. Mac an Ghaill develops a typology of male pupil groups, offering a sophisticated and nuanced analysis of their practices which serves to highlight the multiple masculinities available to the young men. The typologies are heuristic devices, rather than fixed unitary

categories and provide researchers with a methodology for interpreting and analysing male pupil culture and practices.

Mediated through the school and its social infrastructure, intra-class variations and ethnicities generate the gendered identities Mac an Ghaill identifies as the 'macho lads', the 'academic achievers', the 'new enterprisers' and the 'real Englishmen'. He identifies other less prominent sub cultures, such as the 'politicos' which point to the heterogeneity of masculine identities within Parnell school. Macho lads are characterised by their dominant practice, the '3 Fs'- 'fighting, fucking, football'. Like the 'lads' in Willis's study their peer group masculine identities are developed in response and in resistance to the school's differentiated forms of authority. The 'new enterprisers' were negotiating a new mode of student masculinity through the new vocational curriculum with its values of rationality, instrumentalism, forward planning and careerism. The 'academic achievers' subjectivities are formed through their access to middle class cultural capital, manifested in their engagement with the arts and drama. For Mac an Ghaill the gender politics of subject choices are clearly highlighted through these peer groups and the differentiated formal curriculum which is, "a major instrument in shaping differentiated peer-group masculine subjectivities" (Mac an Ghaill, 1994: 67).

In sum, the nuanced critical theory and the literature of the social constructionists offer this research some of the theoretical and conceptual tools to analyse the relationship of the boys' emergent masculine subjectivities and their curriculum choices and in this study, their relationship to RE. Brittan, Connell, Kimmel and Mac an Ghaill identify the pluralistic styles of male behaviour and the fluidity of these male signs (Brittan, 1989), but they highlight a particular form of high status dominant masculinity. However, a

paradigm shift in social theory from materialist realism, with its emphasis on 'structures' to a poststructuralist emphasis on language and 'discourse' has occurred, which has significant implications for methodology and theory . Mac an Ghaill captures the significance of this cultural turn, and its key analytical moves, namely, "A move beyond a system of binaries", to, "the articulation of more complex understandings of power and the centrality of identity making" (Mac a Ghaill, 2007: 34) and the resignification of the masculine subject through encounter with difference through pluralistic RE.

In the next section the methodological and theoretical possibilities of the paradigm shift from structure to contingency will be examined.

Poststructuralist theories

 "There are no core truths to men" (Whitehead, 2002: 1), Whitehead's pithy statement in the introductory section of 'Men and Masculinities' (2002) captures the central theoretical insight of the poststructuralist perspective on masculine gendered ontology. The work of the social constructionists and earlier Marxist theorists such as Willis, have provided the social researcher with powerful analytical and conceptual frameworks for the critical study of men and boys, often aligned to the political, moral and theoretical methodology of first and second wave feminism. However, the concept of hegemonic masculinity in particular has been critiqued by theorists influenced by the poststructuralist perspectives of writers such as Foucault, Butler, Irigaray, so much so that the originators of the concept have revised it in the light of new theory.

For poststructuralist theorists the concept of hegemonic masculinity assumes the existence of a unitary or essentialised self and is therefore based on, "an unsatisfactory

theory of the subject" (Connell and Messerschmitt, 2005: 841) which results in the homogenization of the subject. Discursive perspectives recognize the multiple ways of being male, the existence of non-hegemonic masculinities and avoid the oversimplification of masculinity reduced to, "a reification of power or toxicity" (Connell and Messerschmitt: 2005: 839). Connell recognizes that the model of social relations originally proposed in 'Gender and Power' in terms of a single pattern of power, "the global dominance of men over women" (Connell and Messerschmitt, 2005: 846) was over simplistic and argues for the thorough transcendence of essentialist and trait approaches to gender in contemporary theorising. It is to this theory of the masculine subject, developed in post structural analysis and literature that this review now turns.

Whitehead (2002) critiques the structuralist underpinnings of hegemonic masculinity by arguing that the concept is oxymoronic, because whilst it makes the significant step of acknowledging the complexity and plurality of ways of being male, it retains belief in the existence of unchanging structures, such as a 'gender order'. For Whitehead this view is dangerously reductive because it fails to acknowledge the agentic capacities and possibilities of the resisting subject, the 'lost subject',

> "the individual posited as caught in a set of power relations that attest to a larger will or determination to oppress and dominate by actors who are themselves somehow removed, external to or hierarchically positioned vis-à-vis this ideological condition" (Whitehead, 2002: 98).

The social constructionist view presents men as a 'strategic' group, possessing power, and intentionality, thus establishing a dichotomy between those social actors whose raison d'être is to hold power and 'othered' groups, such as feminists and gays who are positioned within the binary as, "innocent of divisive, exclusionary and oppressive tendencies" (Grimshaw, in Whitehead, 2002: 99). Such an analysis may provide insight

at the macro level, but as already discussed, it fails to capture or account for the operation of power at the micro level.

Structure and discourse

Poststructural accounts of social reality as fluid, multiple and contingent have, however, been critiqued by some theorists, such as Thompson (2001) and Brittan (2006), who retain the structuralist concept of ideology in order to theorise gender relations. Drawing from Marxist theory, Thompson argues that it is ideology which justifies domination, through the use of force, coercion and the monopolization of information. From her radical feminist perspective, ideology operates as conditions of domination which are disguised, and therefore appear to be naturalised, as she states, "Ideological meanings are whatever makes domination palatable or acceptable, or natural, real and unchallengeable" (Thompson, 2001:22).

For poststructuralist theorists, this account of the ideologically constituted subject is over-stated because, whilst, oppressive hegemonic practices are operational in social relations, the concept of ideology fails to acknowledge the agentic capacity of social actors to act collectively or individually in opposition to ideological practices. Fairclough (1994), like Whitehead (2002), argues that individuals are able to position themselves and act creatively to, "make their own connections between the diverse practices and ideologies to which they are exposed", and to restructure these positionings, transcending relations of power and therefore, "transcending ideology" (Fairclough, 1994:91).

Weedon offers a similar analysis, taking Althusser's theory of 'ideology in general' and interpellation and represents it as a theory of 'language in general'. Althusser's theory that ideology interpellates individuals and constitutes their subjectivity is a very similar

position, Weedon suggests, to the poststructuralist argument that discourse constitutes subjectivity. Ideology can only function through language; therefore the consciousness that brings ideology into existence can only operate through discourse,

"It is language which enables us to think, speak and give meaning to the world around us. Meaning and consciousness do not exist outside of language" (Weedon, 1997: 31).

Like Fairclough, Weedon also acknowledges the plurality of discourses that are not reducible to the class relations posited in Marxism, and emphasises the critical capacity offered by poststructuralist theory, which brings not just the concept of ideology, but the very notion of consciousness into question.

It is this capacity to acknowledge the multiple, fragmented and plural nature of identity, social relations and practices that the concept of discourse offers the theorist. The following section explores how this concept can operate as a heuristic device within the field of gender study and analysis.

The discursive subject

The anti-essentialist poststructural analysis of the nature of the gendered subject is premised on the notion that the masculine self is a product of discourse. As a theoretical tool, 'discourse' developed as a major methodological concept in the writing of the French Philosopher, Michel Foucault. Foucault regarded ideas, such as 'discourse', as part of his methodological toolkit, rather than a fundamental aspect of a system, indeed, he never intended to provide a systematic framework or a general theory, as he states here,

"All my books...are little tool boxes...if people want to open them, to use this sentence or that idea as a screwdriver or a spanner to short circuit, discredit or smash

systems of power, including those from which my books have emerged...so much the better," (Foucault, in Mills, 2004:15).

Foucault provides an insight into what he means by discourse in his historical analysis, 'The Archaeology of Knowledge' (2002), when he states that his method consists of a wish, "to dispense with *'things'*, to, " 'depresentify' them", in order to,

> "...substitute for the enigmatic treasure of things anterior to discourse, the regular formation of objects that emerge only in discourse. To define these objects without reference to the ground, the foundation of things, but by relating them to the body of rules that enable them to form as objects of a discourse and thus constitute the conditions of their historical appearance" (Foucault, 2002:53).

Discourses are, in Foucault's words, "Practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak," (Foucault, 2002:54) and thus conceal their origin. In this analysis, masculinity does not exist as a self-sufficient, necessary mode of being, that could be considered in isolation, as a form or an essence. The subject positions available to men and women are the outcome of a set of discourses around femininity and masculinity. Discourse constructs subjectivity through language and thus gives rise to social and cultural practices which define the parameters within which men and women perform their gendered identities.

The significance of Foucault's method lies in the way he challenges the notion of necessary, unsurpassable 'truths' in order to demonstrate that 'ideas' about social roles and gender, are historical, contingent and imbued with power. Discourse is not fixed or stable, but shaped by the concerns of the moment which produces it, which can change, as Foucault argues in the 'Archaeology' (2002).

In the context of this investigation, the critical utility of Foucauldian theory lies in its analytic capacity to show the relationships between discourse and power. In the survey of policy literature it was shown how discourse has produced the category of the failing boy and concern with the gender gap. Such an analysis enables the theorist to deconstruct the notion that educational policy is benign or value free. Similarly, the concept of discourse has been deployed by gender theorists to investigate the ways that settings such as schools function to constitute learner subjectivities, for example, see Martino (1999, 2000) and Baxter (2002). Further analysis of the methodological application of discourse in a school context is presented in the next chapter.

There is no essential self or masculine 'singularity' in this analysis. The purposeful, deliberate masculine self, presupposed by Enlightenment rationalism is an illusion in this critique, as McNay comments, "far from being the source of meaning, the subject is in fact a secondary effect or by-product of discursive formations" (McNay, 1994:5). In other words, each individual's subjectivity comes into existence through a complex interplay of language and the symbolic and social practices which are its discursive effects. The dominant humanist discourses which give rise to concepts of gendered male subjectivity are, as Weber and Foucault have argued, a notion of universal rationality, a logo- centricity,

> "Highly gendered and ethnocentric…that implicitly naturalizes a white, masculine perspective and correspondingly denigrates anything directly or analogously associated with a feminine or non-European position" (McNay, 1994: 5).

Weedon (1997) takes Foucauldian discourse theory and applies it within the context of gender theory. In Weedon's analysis, the masculine subjectivity of the boys in this study, like all gendered subjectivity is produced through discursive practices as she states,

"How we live our lives as conscious thinking subjects, and how we give meaning to the material social relations under which we live and which structure our daily lives, depends on the range and social power of existing discourses, our access to them and the political strength of the interests which they represent" (Weedon, 1997: 26).

In this analysis the words 'man' or 'boy' are plural signifiers, with no fixed or stable meanings. For example, the word 'man' has a plurality of meanings contingent upon the discursive context in which it is used, but are always open to challenge and redefinition. There are a range of competing subject positions that a boy could take up, as Mac an Ghaill's ethnography demonstrates. However, significantly, Mac an Ghaill's boys take up different subject positions, some of which are dominant and normative, the product of regulatory, discursive regimes of truth about what it is to be a 'man', and others, are marginal. Significantly, the subject positions of the academic achievers and the 'other' boys of Parnell school are not passive or dominated, but produce their own resisting and critical discourse, and thus demonstrate the possibility of thwarting dominant discourses and rendering them fragile.

From a poststructuralist interpretation, the subjectivities identified in Mac an Ghaill's study demonstrate a key aspect of the concept of the discursive subject, as it is used in gender and masculinities theory. It might appear on first reading that if one's subjectivity is entirely the product of discourse, then agency is limited and determined by discourse. However, this is a misinterpretation of Foucault's conception of discourse, for new discourses can emerge, offering alternative categories through which people can constitute their subjectivity. To understand how resisting discourses can emerge one must consider Foucault's concept of power.

Discourse and Power

Foucault's writing focuses on dominant discourses which constitute, for example, medical science, the legal system, and sexual norms. These discourses are produced by powerful groups and are linked to large scale structures of power; however, they are not monolithic or static. Key to Foucault's treatment of power and discourse is his view that wherever power is exercised, there is also the possibility of the emergence of a resistant discourse. Feminism is a clear example of such a resisting discourse, and as a discourse itself, it is able to constitute resisting subjects who provide critical challenge to discourses of 'epistemic sovereignty' (Rouse, in Gutting, 2005:95). So, significantly, for Foucault, power and knowledge are dynamic, as the following quote from the History of Sexuality indicates,

> "Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it," (Foucault, 1998: 101).

For Foucault, this dynamic conception of the operation of power entails the rejection of any notion of the reification of power, a view which can be seen in structural determinist concepts of hegemony. Foucault argues that power is not possessed,

> "Power is not something that is acquired, seized, or shared, something that one holds on to or allows to slip away; power is exercised from innumerable points, in the interplay of nonegalitarian and mobile relations," (Foucault,1998: 94).

Power is exercised in social relations by social actors in concert. Foucault's assertion that, "power is everywhere not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere" (Foucault, 1998: 93) can be seen in practice in the daily workings and activities of social organizations such as schools, where the local exercise of force and resistance is a feature of the behaviours of both teachers and students. School

buildings, the curricula documents, textbooks and the practices and rituals performed within the school are all means, or dispositifs, that distribute power. As part of a social web, which includes the school, the teachers and students (social agents), as discursively constituted subjectivities, perform their identities, either normative, or resisting; they exercise their power, agency or they resist power, but form part of a social network in which power is immanent. In such a context, power is dynamic, "something which circulates" (Foucault, in Rouse, Gutting ed. 2005: 110), manifested in a plurality of discourses, and therefore a multiplicity of ways of being.

The empirical data which forms the basis of this study could be interpreted to support the claim of poststructuralist theorists such as Foucault that identity is discursive and the means by which the boys observed and interviewed achieved their social validation and material embodiment.

Performativity and discursive subjectivity

Two significant themes emerge from poststructuralist gender theory:

 1. The nature of 'self' as decentred, non-unitary, non-essential, as fluid and unstable, and:

 2. 'Discourse'.

Both themes are related, because the self is the product of discourse and discourses are imbued with power and privilege particular ways of being and knowing. These key themes are developed in Judith Butler's (2007) text, "Gender Trouble", which provides the critical gender theorist with a poststructuralist interpretation of gendered ontology in the light of the work of Foucault, Irigaray and the psychoanalyst, Jacques Lacan. For Butler, the existence of a normative discourse which gives rise to the categories masculine and feminine is a regulatory practice which also governs, "culturally

intelligible notions of identity" (Butler, 2007:23). However this notion of a self with all the attributes of coherence and continuity does not constitute the, "analytic features of personhood", but is, "socially instituted", thus displaying the, "maintained norms of intelligibility" (Butler, 2007:5). The gender binary is therefore part of a substantive grammar of gender which suppresses difference and ways of being which might threaten, "Heterosexual, reproductive and medico-juridical hegemonies," (Butler, 2007:26).

Butler takes up Nietzsche's critique of the metaphysics of substance and rejects any view of the prior ontological reality of 'substance and being'. The subject, according to Butler's analysis is discursively produced, within the regulatory economies of gender and sexuality, lacking any 'gender core' or abiding substance and is, therefore, a 'fictive production'.

Performativity

Like Foucault, Butler's theory of identity, assumes no a priori determinate state of maleness or femininity. 'Boys being boys' are taking part in a discursive, social and symbolic practice which is a performance, offering the illusion of apparent stability through repetition. This performance is the means by which identity is brought into existence to create the illusion of grounded ontological reality. The utterance of words and corporeal styles combine to produce identity, for example, playing football, disruptive behaviour in the classroom and 'laddish' horseplay are all part of the performative subjectivity of the 'lads', so, "the doer becomes formed through the doing" (Alsop *et al*, 99: 2002).

Butler's analysis leads theory to the conclusion that masculine subjectivity is therefore 'performatively' produced as the following extract demonstrates:

"Gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to pre-exist the deed. The challenge for re-thinking gender categories outside of the metaphysics of substance will have to consider the relevance of Nietzsche's claim in, 'On the Genealogy of Morals' that, "there is no 'being' behind doing, effecting becoming; the 'doer' is merely a fiction added to the deed- the deed is everything'…There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender" (Butler, 2007:34).

Butler's analysis might prove to be problematic from the perspective of social theorists who claim such anti-realism ignores the materiality of social and gender inequity, however, both Butler and Whitehead demonstrate that poststructuralist gender theory does quite the opposite. For Butler the claim that gender is a social and linguistic construction is not equivalent to an assertion of its non existence, rather it is a critique of the structuralist *gender binary*, the naturalised and reified notion of gender which supports masculine hegemony and power. Butler seeks to expose the 'plausibility' of the binary relation as she argues through reference to de Beauvoir. If a person is not born a man or a woman, but becomes a man or a woman, then man or woman is,

"A term in process, a becoming, a constructing that cannot rightfully be said to originate or to end. As an on-going discursive practice it is open to intervention and resignification" (Butler, 2007: 45).

In other words, in Butler's analysis, the social subject is open to ontological possibility and through the technologies of the self, to self -creation, resistance and the creation of alternative discourses.

Desire and becoming

Thus far, Foucault's concept of discursive subjectivity and Butler's concept of performativity have been presented as poststructuralist interpretive analytic frameworks through which the researcher can theorise gendered identities and uncover the power relations immanent within these performances of identity; however there are further

methodological tools at the disposal of the theorist, which will be considered in this section.

The poststructuralist account of gendered identity offered by theorists such as Weedon (1997) and Whitehead (2002) argues that the category, 'man' is political, produced through powerful dominant discourses which offer the normative concept of 'man' and 'maleness' as the yardstick by which men create themselves and perform their identity work. Such normative versions of man and masculinity operate to provide the ontological security (Giddens, 1991) and the sense of a stable and 'core' identity in a transient and contingent social world. The desire to become a man clearly offers considerable social, material and political advantage to the masculine subject. Using the concept of 'desire' as it is presented in the work of Deleuze and Guattari, Whitehead shows that desire is, "a requirement to be in the social world to become an individual, or male/man" (Whitehead, 2002:213). The desires of the male subject are, therefore, discourses of 'natural superiority' as Ramazanoglu argues, "that have real effects on social relations and practices by specifying and authorizing what counts as truly superior/inferior" (Ramazanoglu, 2002:96).

The concept of desire in the work of Deleuze and Guattari (2004a, 2004b) requires further explanation if it is to be utilized as a methodological tool for analysing male identity. For Deleuze and Guattari, desire, rather than power, (as in Foucault's analysis), is primary. Desire is the unconscious primary reactive force, the engine which drives the will to become, in this case, a 'man', actualised and embodied within the social network. Desire, in this analysis, is 'production', and it invades and invests the entire social field (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004 a). Desire permeates all natural and social activity, traversing, "men, plants and animals independently of the matter of their

individuation and the form of their personality" (Deleuze and Guattari, in Bogue, 1989: 1). Desire, then is a free-floating, unbounded energy, characterised as 'libido' by Freud and the 'will to power' by Nietzsche, a pure multiplicity, pre-personal and pre-individual, indifferent to any personal identities, unconscious and free from any negation.

So far, the poststructuralist perspectives presented, offer an argument that the category 'man' is a political category imbued with power. To desire male identity, as opposed to any other identity, is therefore a political choice with consequences for those who acquire and perform this identity. The Deleuzean concept of desire owes much to Nietzsche's 'will to power', and his analysis and theory of the human passions or, 'drives'. For Nietzsche, multiple human 'drives', the passions, rather than the conscious operation of the rational ego, are what give the human subject its perspective, so why in this analysis does the male subject desire actualisation and embodiment through male identity? Using Nietzsche's schema, the answer lies in the operation of the will to power through the drives, as the following illustrates,

> "Every drive is a kind of lust to rule"... "Each one has its perspective that it would like to compel all the other drives to accept as a norm" (Nietzsche in Smith, 2007:67).

However, for Deleuze, this primary force is arranged and assembled within social formations and assemblages, human subjects find themselves in. There may appear, at first reading, to be a contradiction in this assertion, for if desire is unbounded, how can it be shaped by society? But for Deleuze and Guattari political economy (as described by Marx) and libidinal economy (as described by Freud) is the same thing. Drives and impulses form the social infrastructure and are themselves, 'economic', as the following demonstrates,

"The truth of the matter is that *social production purely and simply desires production itself under determinate conditions*. We maintain that the social field is immediately invested by desire, and that it is the historically determined product of desire, and that libido has no need of any mediation or sublimation, in order to invade and invest the productive forces and the relations of production. *There is only desire and the social, and nothing else*" (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004 a: 31).

In sum, desire, in this critical framework refers to the unconscious drives operating through the social and through discourse, acting on and fashioning the human subject. The 'interests' that the boys in this study have in particular subjects, or gendered social practices; indeed their very identities as young males, are produced by a social formation that actually allows them to have such 'interests'- not that they are aware of this process. These boys' desire is invested in a social formation which produces their practices and their identities. It is the function of the socius, the 'social body', to, "codify the flows of desire, to inscribe them, to record them, to see to it that no flow exists that is not properly damned up, channelled, regulated" (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004a: 30). Normative masculine identity, then, can be characterised within the Deleuzean schema, as the product and construction of the socius, the social formation, which has this regulatory function. The sense of ontological insecurity that is the outcome if the needs of the male subject are not achieved is the counter product within the 'real' that desire produces and is described as, "a search in a void" (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004a: 29).

The investigations presented in Anti-Oedipus (2004a) are a critical exposure of the delirium within the social body which produces social beings, as Deleuze himself, states,

"Underneath all reason lies delirium and drift. Everything about capitalism is rational, accept capital...A stock market is a perfectly rational mechanism...and yet what a delirium...it's mad" (Deleuze in Smith, 2007:75).

Therefore, through this critical exposure of the delirium at the centre of society, Deleuze progresses to consider the delirium at the centre of the self. For the gender theorist using a Deleuzean conceptual framework, identity is also a product of this social and existential delirium, although Deleuze is by no means a determinist, as I shall outline with reference to his concept of the 'rhizome' and 'becoming'. The implications of this view are profound for any social research into the gendered curriculum or the production of masculine subjectivities within an institution such as a school, precisely because the curriculum choices and the behaviours of male students are politicized and express their identity work, their, "immanent search for existence and being (male/man)" (Whitehead, 2002: 216). This study is concerned with precisely this process, seeking to examine the performance of masculine identity work in the 'situational' context of the boys' schools and the role the curriculum plays in this process; which brings us to a significant point.

The Foucauldian concept of powerful, normative discourses and the Deleuzean concept of desire offer the critical gender theorist the explanatory power to account for the performance of gendered male subjectivity. This gendered subjectivity is a powerful way of being in the world and as such is a 'majoritarian' position, as Deleuze would argue. Indeed, Connell's notion of hegemonic masculinity and his nuanced analysis of the way that even those boys on the fringes of school social life, (the 'swots, wimps and academic triers'), exercise male power and benefit from the patriarchal dividend through their demonstration of academic, and therefore social prowess as an exercise of power, support the poststructuralist view that membership of the normative mainstream is a powerful place to be. Deleuze presents his analysis of what is meant by the majority, which illustrates the power of the 'majority',

> "Majority implies a constant, of expression or content, serving as a standard measure by which to evaluate it. Let us suppose that the constant or standard is the average adult-white-heterosexual-European-male-speaking a standard language...It is obvious that 'man' holds the majority, even if he is less numerous than mosquitoes, children, women, blacks, peasants, homosexuals etc. That is because he appears twice, once in the constant and again in the variable from which the constant is extracted. *Majority assumes a state of power and domination, not the other way around"* (Deleuze and Guattari, in Allan, 2008:66).

So far, the theoretical perspective which has been presented in this analysis, might suggest the existence of a negative self-perpetuating cycle, in which desire, operating through the delirium of capitalist social formations, constructs normative identities, and therefore closes down any potential for other ways of being in the world. However, this would be a misreading of the entire project of Deleuze and Guattari's work. There are parallels between Foucault's social criticism and the theory of Deleuze, for just like Foucault, Deleuze envisages resisting discourses which he describes with his figurative metaphor of the 'rhizome', characterised by multiple connections, lines and points of rupture which create 'new sproutings'. In other words, new or resisting discourses precipitate new ways of thinking and thus deterritorialize the normative, offering other ways of being, acting, speaking and becoming. Such a perspective has something in common with Foucault's concept of the technology of the self, as the following quote suggests,

> "Maybe the target nowadays is not to discover what we are, but to refuse what we are. We have to imagine and to build up what we could be to get rid of this kind of political 'double bind', which is the simultaneous individualization and totalization of modern power structures," (Foucault, in Allan, 2008:85).

Given this perspective, it could be argued that critical masculinities research in education should pay particular attention to those boys who exhibit what the constructionists refer to as 'counter-hegemonic' consciousness, who, perhaps lack the epistemic privilege of the majority, the 'gender outlaws', who, "Assist us in the process

of transcending the boundaries... re-define our lives", and re-shape, "the territories of our world" (Frank *et al*, 2003: 130).

Indeed, as philosophers of difference, and as part of their project of anti-fascist living, Deleuze and Guattari, in common with Foucault[2], seek to critique and challenge the operations of power which absorb and negate difference. Key to Deleuze's thinking is the concept of becoming, which is in turn, linked to his project of becoming minor or minoritarian. From the point of view of those working within education and gender, the process of becoming minoritarian is exciting because it is both revolutionary, representing resistance to territorialization by the majority, and because it leads to the creation of new forms of subjectivity, new ways of being, new connections, moving like the rhizome in new directions.

Deleuze's affirmative philosophy of difference and his conceptualisation of the revolutionary process of 'becoming' align with the aims and concerns of minoritarian projects such as feminism, pro-feminist masculinities theory, and anti-racist movements, concerned with the promotion of social, racial and gender justice in education and policy. Significantly, Deleuze shows that these be-comings are produced by desire, desire to become something else, wanting more (rhizomic) connections and 'assemblages'. Education programmes such as RE which are concerned with social and cultural difference have the capacity to take both teachers and students into the nomadic spaces in which both those who occupy the 'majority' and those who are positioned as minoritarian can develop 'becoming' identities, freed from the restrictions of oppressive normative practices, or gendered identities. Patton captures this perspective

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[2] In his preface to Anti-Oedipus, Foucault writes, "The book often leads one to believe it is all fun and games, when something essential is taking place, something of extreme seriousness, the tracking down of all varieties of fascism, from the enormous ones that surround and crush us to the petty ones that constitute the tyrannical bitterness of our everyday lives" (Foucault, in Deleuze and Guattari, 2004a: xvi).

and the light, ariel, affirmative quality of Deleuze's philosophy of becoming and difference, when he writes that, "we are all capable of becoming minoritarian, by creating divergence from the norm: becoming revolutionary is a process open to all at any time," (Patton, in Allan, 2008: 68).

Narratives

Critics of poststructuralist theory outlined previously have argued that theories of the passive subject acted upon by dominant discourse results in the nominalism of a dispersed and fragmented subjectivity and an inadequate theory of agency. McNay (1999) has argued that poststructuralism is only able to provide an exclusionary paradigm of subjectification in which agency emerges only as a result of a process of exclusion and disavowal.

For McNay, it is Paul Ricouer's concept of narrative identity which resolves the aporia between constructivist and essentialist conceptions of subjectivity. However, it is the author's view that whilst McNay is right to suggest a theory of narrative identity as an analytic device for the interrogation of gendered identities, the characterisation of poststructuralist theory as nominalist is overstated. Indeed, it is the view of the author that the poststructuralist hermeneutic of the self, offered in the late Foucault and in the work of Deleuze and Guattari (2004 b) provides an account of the active subject which is further enriched by Ricouer's nuanced concept of the narrative identity. In response to characterisations of his theory of the subject as passive and 'non-free' Foucault makes his position clear,

> "I am interested… in the way in which the subject constitutes himself in an active fashion, by the practices of the self "(Foucault, 1984: 123).

Foucault goes on to qualify his position by arguing that one of the very preconditions of a technology and ethic of care for the self is 'liberty' and to be free in this sense presupposes a very active subject, politically and ethically sophisticated, working within the ensembles of truth made available by society and culture. Agency is exercised through negotiation of these 'games of truth',

> "To care for self is to fit one's self out with these truths. That is where ethics is linked to the game of truth" (Foucault, 1984; 116).

Ricouer's theory of narrative identity, like Foucault's concept of the technology of the self, acknowledges the dialectic between structure and agency, the subject and discourse, as McNay argues,

> "Ricouer's notion of narrative then also suggests a hermeneutic perspective upon the fixity of identity; the coherence and durability of identity forms are not just imposed from without but also emerge from within the individual" (McNay, 1999; 324).

For Ricoeur narrative is fundamental to social life and is the mode through which human experience in time is comprehended. Ricoeur argues that self (ipse) is dynamic and temporal, rather than fixed (idem). Narrative is the means by which subjectivities impute meaning and coherence to the flux of events and re-configure their stories in order to achieve a sense of personal identity and therefore constancy, "through and within change" (McNay, 1999; 320). Ricoeur shows that narrative is reflexive; for example, it is through the process of mimetic interpretation that subjects are able to configure and reconfigure their experiences and by reconfiguration they are able to exercise agency through the creation of new meanings and alternative horizons.

The concept of narrative identity has implications for the theory of masculine identity. Ricoeur, like Foucault, is able to show that in order to have meaning and social

authority narratives draw on, "culturally dominant discourses of truth-telling" (McNay, 1999: 327). For the boys in this study, their narrative gendered identities are stabilized by reference to dominant masculine practices and symbolism, which is a psychic and social investment which enables them to identify with or in opposition to certain persons and situations.

 Poised between stasis (idem) and change (ipse), masculine identity is a privileged and powerful subject position, as Stuart Hall suggests, possessing a relative inertness and a longer structuration, because, "some stories are just bigger than others. Certain social forces have been attached to them historically, and they are likely to go on being attached to them" (Hall, in McNay, 1999: 323). Ricoeur's concept of narrative identity shows how through the processes of mimesis, narratives of masculinity are part of a deliberate and knowing strategy by which subjects can, "actively interpret and re-deploy narrative structure to make sense of their lives" (McNay, 1999:331). However, it is the very reflexivity of language and the process of reconfiguration through encounter with marginal or 'othered' narratives that allows for agency and ontological possibilities beyond majoritarian normative masculine practices- but such radical reconfigurations of 'self' represent a capacity to care for the self which requires a high degree of ethical and political sophistication, as Foucault has argued and Deleuze has shown through his theory of 'becoming'.

Conclusion

The aim of this chapter has been to trace a critical 'line of flight' through a review of social constructionist gender theory to the new theoretical territories offered in the poststructuralist perspectives of Foucault, Butler, Deleuze and Guattari. The premise of

this thesis is that there is a *relationship* between adolescent masculine identity work and the RE discourse (Ofsted: 2005, 2007).

With its emphasis on empathy, difference, plurality, the personal and the subjective it would appear that RE would have little to offer young masculine subjectivity as an identity resource when physicality, aggression and competition are the culturally sanctioned gendered attributes required to address the unrelenting 'test' of manhood described by Brittan (1989) and Kimmel (1987).

The critical accounts of adolescent masculinity in the empirical studies of Willis, Mac an Ghaill and Connell are compelling, but they are not without their theoretical limitations. Willis explains the lads' anti-education culture in terms of working class resistance, he notes the lads' rejection of 'difference' but offers no critical analysis of the sometimes self-destructive displays of masculine hubris which form an aspect of these boys' gendered identity performances. Similarly, Willis' ethnography does not account for the multiple ways of being male that form the basis of nuanced critical masculinities theory.

The later social constructionist perspectives of Connell, Kimmel, Brittan and Mac an Ghaill recognize differentiated masculinities and the power dynamics inherent within the privileged structural location of men and boys. However, it is this foundationalist emphasis on the structures of patriarchy, and their operation through hegemony which present a theoretical tension, as Mac an Ghaill and Haywood note in their more recent writing,

> "It could be argued that in emphasizing wider social structures of oppression that determine the position of men, these accounts tend to marginalize men's subjectivities" (Mac an Ghaill and Haywood, 2003: 11).

Whitehead (2002) has shown that there is a paradox at the heart of social constructionist theory that recognises fluidity and difference but retains a commitment to unchanging structures. Therefore, in the light of this critical review the next chapter aims to develop a poststructuralist theory of masculine subjectivity capable of offering insight into masculine ontology. The philosophical perspectives of Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari introduced in this chapter will be explored in greater depth in order to provide an analytic framework capable of critically interpreting the boys' narratives of association and disassociation from the discourse of RE, thus illuminating the relationship between masculine subjectivity and RE. These poststructuralist insights offer the nuanced theoretical tools to make sense of the dynamic processes of identity and knowledge construction revealed by the boys' narratives of RE and in this sense avoid simplistic reduction of the boys' subjectivities to 'types' or reified toxicity.

Significantly, it is also the poststructuralist acknowledgement of the contingency and scrappiness of social reality that makes this a potent analytic and methodological choice, as Frank argues,

> "Surely, the hallmark of boys' and men's lives is the complexities: the fluid and diverse meanings, changing perspectives, the meshing and unmeshing of connections, confusions and contradictions and the tensions and the energies."
>
> (Frank, 2003: 130).

The next chapter offers a poststructuralist theory of ontology which will inform both methodology and the interpretation of empirical data in chapter six.

Chapter Four: Poststructuralism, Subjectivity and Education

Introduction

The review of gender theory presented in chapter two aimed to trace a critical line through juridico-discursive structuralist theories to poststructuralist concepts of subjectivity. Within poststructuralism emphasis is placed on the fluidity of subjectivity and dynamic processes of becoming and self-constitution. The aim of this chapter is to explore the theoretical and analytical potential of poststructuralism, notably Butler's concepts of performativity and re-signification; Foucault's concept of the technology of the self and Deleuze's 'minor/ molar' dyad as the methodological tools required to interrogate the masculine identity practices of the young male subjects of this study. It is also my aim to justify the theoretical and methodological choices I have made in adopting a poststructural perspective to analyse masculine ontology. Critical consideration will also be made of the possibilities offered by poststructuralist thought for re-conceptualising education in which the philosophical scope of RE as a technology of the self and an epistemologically open 'nomadic' space is explored.

Interpretive 'tools'

Firstly, I wish to outline how I arrived at these theoretical and methodological choices. By utilizing a range of interconnected conceptual tools I am practising what Denzin and Lincoln characterise as 'interpretive bricolage', that is a commitment to using more than one interpretive perspective. It is a choice of practice that is, "pragmatic, strategic and self-reflexive" (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003:6).

It has already been established in chapter three that the theory of the subject offered in this analysis is of an 'ungrounded' and fluid, social subject. As such, as one of the

major theoretical moves available to the qualitative researcher, phenomenology, with its humanistic emphasis on the primacy of subjective consciousness and its aim to uncover the essential structures of consciousness (*aletheia*) are also rejected in favour of poststructuralist conceptions of fluid, discursive subjectivity and dynamic becoming. The main theoretical principles of this perspective have already been rehearsed in previous sections, however as much of the analysis and the investigation of this study focuses on the identity work of the masculine subject, some additional explanation is required. RE is the *site* for the practice and performance of masculine identity work in this study and a central focus is on the *relationship* of the self to the RE discourse. This study therefore, makes use of the later Foucauldian concept of the technology of the self to illuminate the research questions. Theories around the technology of power, offered in Foucault's earlier work such as 'Discipline and Punish' are refined in his later works which offer a more nuanced theory of the self through the concept of the technology of the self. In works such as the 'History of Sexuality', Foucault turns to practices of self-regulation, and the active constitution of the self through ethical self-constitution.

Of particular interest is the way in which for some of the boys interviewed, RE could be characterised as a technique of the self. As Besley (2005) argues, the Foucauldian concept of the technology of the self, derived from his study of the self-constituting practices prevalent in the Greek city states, has implications for religious and ethical education programmes and offers considerable possibility to both educators and learners as a technique for the care of the self (*epimel_sthai sautou*) (Foucault, 1990),

> "Foucault's main aspects of the self's relationship to itself or 'ethical self-constitution' point to various ways that education of young people can help them to ethically constitute themselves: by ethical work that a person performs on their self with the aim of becoming an ethical subject; the way in which individuals relate to moral obligations and rules; and the type of person one aims to become in behaving

ethically. One element that might be derived from Foucault is the importance of 'writing' and 'reading' the self, alongside conversational or dialogical forms of 'talking' or confessing the self". (Besley, 2005: 12).

In the context of this educational research Foucault's concept of the technology of the self is a useful methodological tool through which to analyse the techniques used by male subjects to constitute themselves and fulfil their desires within the complex social field in which they are positioned- and this would include, of course, the secondary school. Therefore, a key focus of this study will be to analyse the relationship between RE as a discourse, (made available through the educational regime) and the practices of the 'self', that is the cultural practices and techniques of desiring subjects, which produce association, disassociation or indifference of self towards the RE discourse. Central to this analysis is the examination of the ways in which the masculine subjectivities of the boys surveyed are related to the RE discourse as a site for the performance of identity. Martino has shown that schools can function as disciplinary sites for the fashioning of the gendered self within a game of truth where boys, "learn about what it means to be a man" (Martino, 1999:240).

Foucault's concern with self-fashioning techniques, the artistry of existence as the means by which oppressive discourses can be resisted and his ethical imagination are also reflected in the work of Deleuze and Guattari, for whom he had considerable praise, and whose work he characterised as 'ethical'. As Bernauer and Mahon (in Gutting, ed. 2005) write, a shared concern for Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari was the 'modern ethical task', that is, to drive out all forms of fascism, (a task that is paralleled with the ethical task of the Christian, to drive out sin).

Foucault's later ethical work, "points to the ethical task of detaching ourselves from those forces that would subordinate human existence to biological life", so, "an

'esthetics of existence' resists a 'science of life'... endless self-decipherment ...from subjecting ourselves to psychological norms" (Bernauer and Mahon in Gutting, ed. 2005:163). These concerns have serious implications for the development of educational programmes which might provide the site for the very exercise of these practices of the self, described by Foucault and will be considered in detail in the discussion of research findings and recommendations.

To that end, the poststructural philosophical concepts of Deleuze and Guattari provide further methodological, interpretive instruments with which to analyse the relationship of subjectivity to educational choice.

Firstly, it is necessary to return to a theory of the subject, that is, ontology in traditional philosophical terms and to consider some the implications of the philosophical stylistics and figurations that populate the nomadic philosophical thinking of Deleuze and Guattari.

In Martino's (1999) case study, the self-fashioning techniques of the boys, as they negotiate their identities within the discursive parameters of the school, reveal a hierarchy of masculine subject positions, with the footballers and the cool guys emerging as the powerful, dominant majority. These performances of identity and expressions of masculine desire are also made visible through subject choices and the value attributed to these educational discourses, with their attendant values and schemata.

The concepts of 'desire', the 'majoritarian' and the related adjective 'minoritarian' offered in the work of Deleuze provide further methodological tools for the analysis of the masculine subjects of this study-that is, 'masculine' ontology. For Deleuze to be a

man is to be majoritarian and therefore 'molar', that is to possess the illusion of a quality of stability and foundation. In the Deleuzean social analysis molar entities belong to the state, to the civic world, they are well defined, normative and are often affiliated with a governing apparatus (Conley, in Parr, 2005: 172). This 'molar' masculine subject is, therefore, the outcome of the orchestration of desire, standardisation and homogenization characteristic of the politics of 'molarisation' and the dominant normative gender discourses at work within the capitalist socius.

The molar, majoritarian masculine subject corresponds to an abstract standard measure, as Conley suggests, alluding to Deleuze, this standard is, "an armed, white male", (Conley, in Parr, 2005: 165) and is always linked to a state of power and domination. Like Foucault, Deleuze does not conceive of power as an entity one can possess, as, "formations of power in society are merely effects of the workings of desire" (Goodchild, 1996: 72). Power, as described by Deleuze and Guattari (2004a), is immanent to social relations and it derives from desire, but significantly in its majoritarian expressions and operations, it also turns to repress desires that express minoritarian ways of being. A key focus, therefore, in relation to the application of Deleuzean methodology to the research questions is the ontological status of the masculine subjectivities of the boys interviewed- can they be characterised as majoritarian or minoritarian, or do they occupy those spaces where identity slips through this dichotomy, are they 'becoming –minor'[3]? Does this ontological status give rise to engagement or disengagement with the RE discourse?

A further question to be considered is the extent to which the masculine molar self is disrupted through the encounter with other ways of being, with the concerns of

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[3] A majority in the process of change can become a minority (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004b).

minorities, minor cultural practices, philosophical and ethical projects which constitute the curricula for RE, RS and values education? How then is the self-fashioned reflexively through this encounter with difference and multiplicity (the primary philosophical facts for Deleuze)? With this question in mind the methodologies of both Deleuze and Foucault through his theory of the technology of the self; provide the interpretive framework necessary for this analysis.

So, it has been shown that for Deleuze the desires of the molar, majoritarian organism that is the masculine subject (subject in Foucault's terms because it is 'subject' to dominant discourses, organism in Deleuze's terms, but it is 'organised' through subjectification) are channelled by social codes, but as Bogue (2005) suggests, the implications of a scrambling, a disruption or a deterritorialisation of these codes are significant. In 'A Thousand Plateaus', Deleuze asks the question,

> "Why are there so many becomings of man, but no becoming-man? First, because 'man' is majoritarian par excellence, whereas becomings are minoritarian; all becoming is a becoming minoritarian," (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004b: 320).

The molar category 'man' is an abstract standard, denoting fixity and therefore cannot 'become'; the male subject, however, can *become* minoritarian and masculinity therefore becomes deterritorialized to produce a nomadic subject, as Deleuze states, "There is no subject of the becoming except as a deterritorialized variable of the majority" (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004b: 322). For Deleuze, there are no fundamental pre-existing unities; indeed, all things and states are products of becoming. The human subject is a constantly changing assemblage. Difference, becoming and multiplicity are, therefore, the primary philosophical facts in Deleuzean theory. However, the concept of becoming minor needs further elaboration if it is to be used as a methodological tool and as a concept with implications for education and pedagogy. Deleuze provides the

following definition, "A becoming minoritarian...means to be rent from one's standard of measure." (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004b:321). In this case, the standard of measure is the 'average white male'. Deleuze gives the example of Arthur Miller's story, 'Focus', in which a non-Jew becomes Jewish through this process of becoming rent from his standard of measure. In his characteristically playful mode Deleuze notes that,

> "We can be thrown into a becoming by anything at all, by the most unexpected, most insignificant of things. You don't deviate from the majority unless there is a little detail that starts to swell and carries you off." (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004b: 322)

Perhaps these little details and nuances that may be experienced within a nomadic classroom could give rise to the becomings described by Deleuze? However, there is also 'something essential taking place' in this writing, as Foucault notes (Foucault, in Deleuze and Guattari, 2004a, xxvi), because, "Becoming minoritarian is always a political affair and necessitates a labour of power (puissance), active micro politics", (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004a: 322).

A minoritarian educational programme which privileges the dialogical, empathy, difference, multiplicity, rhizo- analysis, the 'non-normative', is, by its very nature, capable of producing the molecular becomings that Deleuze describes, and therefore deterritorialising majoritarian masculine subjectivity. Indeed, for Braidotti (1999) this nomadic philosophical process is a 'becoming woman', as Deleuze states, "...it must be said that all becomings begin with and pass through becoming- woman. It is the key to all the other becomings." (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004b: 306).

This re-conceptualised poststructuralist ontology has significant implications for theories of male subjectivity and the development of educational programmes, precisely because it conceives of subjectivity in terms of 'fluid becoming' in contrast to 'static being'. Recognition of the playful freedoms of transitory identity and the re-

conceptualization of the learner as the nomadic subject is expressed by Joughlin, who characterises becoming as, "intrinsically transformative, creative and marginal", and as, "intrinsically multiple" (Joughlin, in Gould, 2007:218). Religious and values education can function as an alternative discourse within the curriculum in such a way as to offer possibilities for becoming minoritarian. As Gould comments in her paper on the potential of a minoritarian music education, such practice would require both learner and teacher to take chances, to use intuition and to develop unusual combinations. These principles can also be applied to the practice of a transformative minoritarian religious education. Such a programme could be a 'children's poetics', taking student needs and interests as the starting point for curricula design- themes which will be developed in detail in the chapter on key findings and recommendations.

The implications of this Deleuzean ontology and epistemology are significant, politically, educationally and pedagogically. If this philosophical perspective is applied in education practice, it serves to trouble and deterritorialize the molar (masculine) subject through encounter with difference and those unfamiliar, exilic spaces which require the subject to become nomadic, releasing it into, " a zone of dynamism, affirmation and becoming" (Bryden, 2001:1). It is, of course, important to qualify the distinction between a non-confessional, pluralistic, open exploratory religious education or 'religious studies', with its critical multi-disciplinary heritage and the contested, heterogeneous, fragmented social and cultural phenomenon, the plural signifier referred to as 'religion'- the two cannot be conflated. However, it is equally important to note that whilst the application of Deleuzean concepts to educational programmes might seem like a valid project, the specific focus on religion does not seem obvious, given the apparent materialistic orientation of Deleuze's philosophical thought and its emphasis on immanence rather than the transcendent. However, it can

be argued equally, on Deleuze's terms, that a contact zone can be created between an RE discourse and the Deleuzean oeuvre, as Deleuze states, "We can establish neighbouring zones with absolutely anything, if we provide the literary means to do so" (Deleuze, in Bryden, 2001:1).

So it is in the spirit of Deleuze's own philosophising which delights in the exhilaration of radical encounters of apparent incongruities, that this methodological perspective is utilized.

Performativity and resignification

As a methodological tool in the analysis of the performance of gendered subjectivity, the contribution of Judith Butler's theory has been outlined in the previous chapter, however, it is necessary to explore the relationship between Butler's theory and the previous discussion of becoming and Foucauldian notions of techniques of the self. For Butler the subject must be reconstituted repeatedly through the processes of iteration, repetition and reiteration of dominant norms which precede the 'performer'- however, it is this very requirement for processes, or rituals of repetition that makes re-signification possible. For Butler, agency consists in both the displacement and subversion of the norms that enable subjectivity or through the taking up of the dominant rule bound discourse that makes identity culturally intelligible. The taking up of normative 'molar' masculine identity, therefore requires some work and application, as indeed does the resistance of such performances and their attendant social practices. Butler argues that,

> "...to qualify as a substantive identity is an arduous task, for such appearances are
> rule generated identities, one which rely on the consistent and repeated invocation of
> rules that condition and restrict culturally intelligible practices of identity" (Butler,
> 2007:198).

Furthermore,

> "Construction is not opposed to agency; it is the necessary scene of agency, the very terms in which agency is articulated and becomes culturally articulated" (Butler, 2007:201).

This last point is crucial; agency is articulated either through the repetition and the performance of the rule bound discourse or through its subversion or displacement and the resulting resignification of identity. Deleuzean notions of becoming minoritarian and the deterritorialisation of the molar subject correspond to Butler's discussion of resignification and subversion of the rule bound discourse- in the sense that both positions privilege difference and becoming, but also recognise that, "The processes of becoming vary according to one's positionality as majoritarian or minoritarian" (Gould, 2007; 211).

How the social subject 'becomes', is, from the Foucauldian perspective outlined previously, a technique of the self, the site of the relationship between truth, power and self, the process whereby an individual acts upon their self.

Conclusion

The aim of this chapter has been to demonstrate the analytical potential of poststructural theories of subjectivity for the critical interpretation of the masculine identity work of the boys in this study as they perform and narrate their identities through the discursive site of RE. The poststructural analysis outlined in this chapter provides the interpretive framework and the 'ontological' orientation of this study, informing choices about methodology and method. The next chapter builds on these perspectives and addresses some of the challenges poststructuralism presents for qualitative enquiry and field work in a post-foundationalist moment where traditional

concepts of epistemology and ontology are 'troubled' by the poststructuralist 'line of

flight' (Deleuze, 2004b) that disturbs binaries and rigid segmentarity to trace,

> "...a line of thought not assimilated to binaries or to the master narratives of what
> counts as truth or real" (Leach, & Boler, in Peters, 1998: 152).

By utilizing a poststructuralist methodology, this study seeks to provide insights into

the localised positions and the boys' performance of identity and it is to the matter of

qualitative methodology and method that the next chapter turns.

Chapter Five: Methodology and Method

Introduction

In chapter four the theoretical perspectives of poststructuralism were identified as offering the nuanced conception of subjectivity required for the analysis of the masculine identity work which is the focus of this study. The aim of this chapter is to outline how the adoption of poststructuralist theory aligns to the methodological perspective and to the methods of data collection utilized by this study. Consideration will be given to important methodological issues around traditional conceptions of epistemology and ontology which have been problematized by post-foundational and poststructuralist thought. In the light of this re-conceptualisation of ontology, a theory of the gendered subject is offered in this chapter which builds on the insights of Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari and Butler presented in the previous chapter.

Finally, an overview of the data collection methods, taking account of reflexivity, the biography of the researcher, the validity, generalizabilty and the ethical implications of this study are provided. The rationale for the methods adopted is aligned to the post structuralist and qualitative methodology presented in the first section of this chapter.

The research perspective

The theoretical research perspective that informs the interpretive framework and methodology of this investigation is 'qualitative'. The adoption of a qualitative theoretical 'paradigm' requires some justification, as it reflects the epistemological and ontological orientation of this research, that is, the researcher's conclusions about the nature of knowledge and the human subject. Furthermore, the adoption of a particular methodological perspective cannot be detached from its, "inescapable political content"

(Lather, 2001:90). The term 'paradigm' is not used in this study in favour of the term 'perspective' as it is used by Denzin (2003) who, like Lather, argues that the use of the concept of paradigm attaches the researcher to a particular world view and set of beliefs. Lather refers to paradigmatic thinking as underpinned by a 'desire for definition' which seeks to analytically fix social phenomena which are, by their discursive and constructed nature, "complex, contradictory and relational constructs", which elude simple reductive analysis (Lather, 2001:90). For Denzin the term paradigm denotes an 'overarching', and therefore, totalising philosophical system (2003:9). In place of the term paradigm Denzin suggests the phrase 'interpretive perspectives', which, he argues, allow the researcher, that is, the interpretive bricoleur, to move between them with greater ease. It is the very nature of social experience that informs Denzin's view, as he comments,

> "No single method can grasp all of the subtle variations in ongoing human experience. Consequently, qualitative researchers deploy a range of interconnected interpretive methods, always seeking better ways to make more understandable the worlds of experience they have studied." (Denzin, 2003:31).

The broad range of interpretive perspectives that make up qualitative methodology, may 'mean many things to many people' constituting a 'field of enquiry' in own right (Denzin, 2003:3), but, there are certain features that are shared within this theoretical position which also inform the interpretation of the data presented in this study and the research methods used.

An initial generic characterisation of qualitative research methodology can be offered, however, this tentative attempt to capture some of its epistemological and ontological features illuminates the complexity of this flexible heuristic instrument. Denzin and Lincoln (2003) highlight the importance of situating current definitions of qualitative

research within the context of its historical development through what they refer to as the 'seven moments' of qualitative research. It is beyond the scope of this discussion to rehearse the characteristics of each of these moments, other than to highlight the features of the 'postmodern moment' which provides the theoretical site of the methodology informing this study.

Within the postmodern moment, qualitative research moves away from foundational and positivist criteria in its account of social reality. Qualitative research within the postmodern moment represents a 'critical' paradigmatic shift away from grand narratives and generalizable universal truths, to a concern with the contingent and situated micro narratives of local understandings. Ramazanoglu and Holland describe this as a move away from universality and ethnocentrism, citing Lyotard,

> "In place of claims to universal knowledge, Lyotard argues that all truths are local rather than general because they are produced within the rules of particular, limited, and language games" (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2003:93).

Qualitative research methodology is ideally aligned to the sensibilities of the postmodern perspective, as Cohen, *et al*. (2008) illustrate in their summary of the characteristics of a qualitative research approach. As the 'other' to the quantitative paradigm, qualitative research methodology avoids what it regards as the dangers of an instrumental reason which seeks to account for human actions through the passivity of behaviourism. For the qualitative researcher the cultural dope presupposed by positivism is replaced by active social agents who construct their social worlds. In this perspective situations are unstable and fluid and the empirical investigation of events does not guarantee generalizabilty because social reality is complex and multi faceted, leading to the possibility of multiple interpretations. Fidelity to the social phenomena being investigated through the contextual sensitivity of the qualitative researcher means

that events cannot be accounted for through the simplistic reductionism of quantification. The richness of thick descriptions, as advocated by Geertz, aims to capture the nuances of varied situated, contingent social realities in a more naturalistic way than quantification, which rests on the essentialist assumption that the human agent is rational, means what it says, and says what it means. Indeed, by adopting a qualitative research perspective, there is an implicit critique of positivism inherent within this study. Quantification and positivism have no way of arriving at authoritative generalisations, as Flick argues,

> "Rapid social change and the resulting diversification of life worlds are increasingly confronting social researchers with new social contexts and perspectives...traditional deductive methodologies...are failing...thus research is increasingly forced to make use of inductive strategies instead of starting from theories and testing them...knowledge and practice are studied as local knowledge and practice", (Flick, in Denzin and Lincoln, eds. 2003:15).

Indeed, the criteria used within the positivist discourse, privileges the foundationalist master narrative and is simply seen as irrelevant by qualitative researchers because it is a science that silences and colonises voices.

So, the deductive logic of positivism is replaced in favour of a methodology that seeks to emphasise the qualities of entities, processes and the contingent and discursive meanings social actors bring to their worlds. Qualitative theory also recognises the relationship between the researcher and the researched, acknowledging that behind all social research is the biography of the classed, gendered researcher, so the value-laden nature of social scientific enquiry and the situational constraints of the research site are emphasised within this perspective.

To conclude this outline of the characteristics of the qualitative methodology, it has been established that this perspective is premised on an interpretive, naturalistic view of

the social world. Qualitative researchers, such as ethnographers, seek to study cultures in their natural settings and the meanings social actors bring to these worlds. It is concerned with the emic, the idiographic and the specifics of particular cases, building, inductively, local, "small scale theories fitted to specific problems and particular situations" (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003: 29).

Epistemological and ontological orientation

Qualitative research is a philosophical project in the sense that researchers are guided by abstract principles which combine beliefs about ontology and epistemology which in turn gives rise to the methodological perspective employed. These abstract principles can be likened to Foucault's notion of concepts and ideas as the contents of a heuristic, interpretive methodological tool kit. However, both of these traditional philosophical considerations have been problematised by non-foundational poststructuralist theory, but the philosophical questions which they point to, still remain and will be examined in the context of this discussion, even if the purpose of this discussion is to critique the concepts of epistemology and ontology.

Ontology is the branch of traditional western metaphysics which is concerned with the nature of being, that is, the way of being in the world, made visible in the actions and the interactions of the human subject. In social research ontology requires the researcher to ask the questions, "What kind of being is the human being? What is the nature of reality" (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003: 33).

Epistemology is the branch of metaphysics concerned with how we gain knowledge of the world and the nature of that knowledge, addressing questions regarding the nature of types of knowledge and the relationship between the inquirer and the object of the inquiry.

In this context, methodology is a combination of the epistemological and ontological orientations of the researcher, as Bateson states, the researcher is, "bound within a net of epistemological and ontological premises which- regardless of ultimate truth or falsity-become partially self-validating" (Bateson, in Denzin and Lincoln, eds. 2003: 33).

It is this net that contains the researcher's epistemological, ontological and methodological premises which may be termed a theoretical perspective, or paradigm, or an interpretive framework, that is, a set of beliefs about the world, the "basic set of beliefs that guides actions" (Guba , in Denzin and Lincoln, eds. 2003: 33). From this analysis one is able to assert that all research is interpretive, in the sense that it is guided by a set of beliefs about social reality and how it should be studied and understood.

As a construct, the very notion of epistemology and its objectivist presupposition of a foundation to what can be known, has been problematised by the epistemic rupture, known as the crisis of legitimation, produced by the emergence of poststructuralist theories of the human subject and the discursive, historical nature of all truth claims. From the critical perspective of poststructuralists such as Michel Foucault, epistemology is the outcome of the Cartesian discourse which functions as a, "knowledge of a domain of objects", guaranteeing, "a universal and apriori access to the truth" (Han, in Gutting, ed. 2006: 197), which can be grasped and observed by the mind of a knowing subject. Clearly, this poststructuralist critique also presents problems for ontology, with its primary focus on 'being', which is predicated on the grounds that the self is stable, unitary and possesses an 'essence'.

From this post-foundational perspective all authoritative claims to knowledge become problematic and are not innocent or politically neutral, as Pillow and St.Pierre (2000) write in their commentary on the relationship between the ontology of humanism and Enlightenment conceptions of knowledge, stating that humanism is,

> "A grand theory with a long and varied history that has described the truth of things for centuries. An amazingly supple philosophy, it has produced a diverse range of knowledge projects, since man (a specific Western, Enlightened male) first began to believe that he, as well as God, could, through the right use of reason, produce truth and knowledge" (Pillow and St.Pierre, 2000:5).

Foucault shows that the very notion of a truth, a foundation to what can be known, and therefore the very construct of epistemology, is the outcome of a dominant, discursive regime that is a truth ensemble. The truth claims that objectivist enlightenment conceptions of epistemology rest upon are, therefore, in this Foucauldian analysis, the discursive creations of a particular political economy of what counts as truth,

> "Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true" (Foucault, 1980:131).

Foucault's analysis of what counts as knowledge and truth within western society allows one to situate positivist and objectivist conceptions of epistemology within his genealogical critique,

> "'Truth' is centred on the form of scientific discourse and the institutions which produce it; it is subject to constant economic and political incitement (the demand for truth, as much for economic production as for political power)" (Foucault, 1980: 131).

The very notion of a 'boys in crisis' debate and the discourse of the failing boy, the ostensible drivers of this investigation, are themselves exposed as the constructions of a discourse underpinned by economic and political incitement, for until the introduction of school league tables, 'under-performing boys' were not deemed a worthy subject for political and educational attention.

For St.Pierrre, educational and social researchers are working in the 'twilight of foundationalism' and therefore, the attention of ethnographers should be upon the local, the situated, the discursive and the performative. There is in this perspective, no guarantee of transparent and objective truth, as Denzin and Lincoln write,

> "There are no objective observations, only observations socially situated in the worlds of- and between- the observer and the observed. Subjects or individuals, are seldom able to give full explanations of their actions or intentions; all they can offer are accounts or stories, about what they did and why." (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003: 31).

St. Pierre, Pillow, and Britzman (2000), describe the process of qualitative research in a post positivist, post foundational time as 'working the ruins', a process that requires, at the very least a re-contextualisation of epistemology and ontology, which have been shown to be historical and contingent, the discursive creations of Enlightenment rationalism. Just as traditional conceptions of epistemology have been troubled by post structuralism, so too has the concept of the sovereign rational human subject, the legacy of the Cartesian cogito.

Citing Foucault, Butler shows that, what she refers to as the foundationalist illusion of the subject, has implications for identity politics, because the subject is produced by juridical structures of power which regulate and govern it. Equally, Butler argues, it is the very grammatical formulation of the ontological categories of substance and being

which supports the notion of the sovereign self of humanism. Michel Haar, quoted in Butler, argues that the psychological category of a substantial identity,

> "Goes back basically to a superstition...namely the belief in language and, more precisely in the truth of grammatical categories" (Haar, in Butler, 2007:28).

For Butler belief in the grammatical formulation of subject and predicate cannot be taken to guarantee the "prior ontological reality of substance and attribute," (Butler, 2007:28).So, the human subject of poststructuralist theory, has no prior ontological foundation, but is actively constituted in discourse, that is social, linguistic and cultural practice. It may be concluded that such a position is deterministic or nihilist, however, in the field of gender theory, this perspective has significant implications, as Pillow and St. Pierre comment,

> "Butler (1992) explains that the agency of this subject lies in its ongoing constitution- the 'subject is neither a ground nor a product, but the permanent possibility of a certain resignifying process," (Pillow and St.Pierre, 2000:7).

It is this very recognition of the fluidity of the social subject that allows for greater ontological possibility, for the minoritarian projects, becoming and the rhizomatics of Deleuze and Guattari. In agreement with Derrida, Pillow and St. Pierre comment,

> "That this loosening of the category (of the subject) does not imply the, 'liquidation of the subject, but rather a, 'subject that can be reinterpreted, re-stored, re-inscribed'". (Pillow and St.Pierre, 2000:7)

There are clear implications of a poststructuralist theory of subjectivity for this study. David Gutterman takes up the Foucauldian, Nietzschean perspective that the fluid form of social subjects is an effect of power, and that the social subject is produced discursively, but he raises a significant question, "Is the social subject the construction of any one discourse or a plenitude of discourses?" (Gutterman in Whitehead and

Barrett, eds. 2001:57). The ethnographies of Mac an Ghaill and Connell's case studies show that the boys in their school studies are produced by a variety of discourses and that the category 'boy' reflects varying ethnicities, sexualities, social class, cultural and religious influences.

A central focus of this study is the identity work of the research participants, the boys and their relationship to the religious education discourse as a site for their identity work. As a theory of the subject, this study adopts a poststructuralist ontology that conceives of the masculine subject as produced by a multitude of discourses, eluding simplistic essentialist categories. This theory of the subject recognises that the boys interviewed in this study are multiple and therefore contradictory subjects, "produced by a multiplicity of discourses", which may, in certain instances, "create an arena where the governing conceptions of a particular discourse suffer a sort of slippage where predominant roles and values lose their claims to absolute authority and subsequently can be altered". Quoting Barbara Herrnstein Smith, Gutterman refers to this subjective heterogeneity as, "our irreducible scrappiness" (Gutterman, in Whitehead and Barrett, eds. 2001: 57).

To conclude this introductory discussion of ontology and epistemology, some conclusions have been reached which have implications for the interpretation and theorising of the data presented in this study.

Reflexivity

As a reflexive qualitative researcher, it is necessary to position myself in relation to the theoretical and methodological choices outlined above. Alignment to these theoretical and philosophical perspectives is the outcome of my own intellectual, personal and professional trajectory, indeed, I would wish to argue, my own becomings as a nomadic

subject in thought. Indeed, this very study and intellectual enquiry is a technology of the self, a self-fashioning technique that I am performing upon myself, a reflection upon the ontological puzzle that is my own fluid and discursive identity and its relationship to the worlds and the social subjects that it encounters. Peter Clough expresses this relationship between the researcher and the researched in this statement,

> "For despite the sterility of instruments, we never come innocent to a research task, or a situation of events; rather we situate these events not merely in the institutional meanings which our profession provides, but also constitute them as expression of ourselves." (Clough, 2002:64)

Epistemology was defined earlier as the branch of philosophy that is concerned with knowledge of the world and the nature of that knowledge. Thus far a position has been articulated which regards social reality, (that is the world, epistemologically speaking, that can be 'known'), as constructed, discursive and gendered. However, behind any research project, stands the biographically situated researcher, so the knowledge which is 'produced' or constructed constitutes the interpretive perspective of the researcher and their 'guilty readings' and representations of the research participants' lives. Denzin sums up this feature of qualitative methodology in the following observation,

> "Poststructuralists and post modernists have contributed to the understanding that there is no clear window into the inner life of an individual. Any gaze is always filtered through the lenses of language, gender, social class, race and ethnicity. There are no objective observations, only observations socially situated in the worlds of- and between- the observer and the observed. Subjects or individuals, are seldom able to give full explanations of their actions or intentions; all they can offer are accounts or stories, about what they did and why" (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003:31).

From this perspective there can be no single interpretive truth or positivistic generalizable outcomes, other than, perhaps, fuzzy generalisations which may or may not have a bearing in other settings. Instead the qualitative researcher can offer interpretations and analysis of the situational, the relational, local contingent and

provisional truths and this entails recognition of the messy and uncertain nature of human experience.

Gender, specifically young male subjectivity is a central focus of this study; however this statement requires me to position myself as part of this research and enquiry into masculine identity, as Jarviluoma et al state,

> "The ideology of objective research has given way to the demand for explicit positioning and self-reflection. The point of departure is that every choice made by the scholar, his/her theoretical background, methodological tool and resources of interpretation, is loaded with ideological and cultural assumptions. The scholar him/herself is also a part of the research; another scholar working with the same research material is likely to arrive at different interpretations and research results," (Jarviluoma, Moisala and Vikko, 2003: 33).

The focus of this thesis is inextricably bound up with my own personal and professional biography as a religious studies student and a religious education practitioner of twenty one years having worked as both a secondary school teacher and a tutor in initial teacher education. As a reflexive researcher I am aware of my own subjective gaze, my 'shadows in the field of enquiry' for this thesis. Research for this study and the pilot organisational ethnography has required me to give some thought to my own ontological puzzles through a consideration of critical masculinities theory, theoretical perspectives on the gendered classroom and gendered subject choices. Recognizing, as Sikes argues, that the hermetic compartmentalising of the binaries of the private and public self, the life of the individual from public issues of social structure, is fundamentally dishonest, I wish to acknowledge the situatedness of this proposal within my own biography, as a male, and an education professional engaged in work within a gendered curriculum (Sikes and Everington, 2001). In doing so I am following Stanley's argument for reflexivity in the research process, "treating oneself as subject for intellectual inquiry" (Stanley, 1993:44), and the focus for analytical sociological

attention. My encounters with poststructuralism, pro-feminist masculinities theory and the boys, the research participants of this study have required me to examine and become aware of my own gendered 'conventions' and classed identity. This encounter in itself is a deterritorialisation of my own identity, a process I have embraced and sought regarding my own 'self' as a reflexive project.

As Whitehead argues the challenge for educators engaged in social and gender studies is paradoxical, *how to be men, but different men?* (Whitehead, 2002:6), or from a Deleuzean perspective how to become minor? It matters therefore both personally and professionally to investigate the factors, that is the identity work, the discursive fashioning of subjectivity which leads to engagement or disengagement from such educational programmes.

Method

In this section consideration will be given to the methods of data collection utilized in this study. The rationale for the adoption of these methods will be provided through a discussion of their alignment to the methodological and theoretical perspectives of this investigation. The following methods were adopted:

- An ethnographically informed fieldwork schedule in three contrasting schools, the 'discursive sites' for data gathering;

- Preliminary observations of key stage four RE classrooms in each discursive site;

- A schedule of group interviews in each discursive site;

- Individual semi structured interviews with key stage four boys, girls and an exit interview with class teachers in each of the discursive sites.

Cohen, *et al.* define methods as the, "range of approaches used in educational research to gather data which are to be used as a basis for inference and interpretation, for explanation and prediction" (Cohen, *et al*., 2008: 47). They continue to distinguish methods from methodology by stating that methods are the techniques and the procedures used in the process of data gathering whereas methodology refers to the theoretical perspective through which the data is analysed and interpreted. Methodology is therefore premised on certain ontological and epistemological assumptions about the nature of the social world and the social actors participating in their social worlds.

To sum up, the poststructuralist theoretical perspectives described in this discussion and chapter three when applied to the critical study of the masculine subject, represent what Whitehead refers to as a third wave of critical masculinities theory. From this methodological perspective the school research sites are the sites for the performance, resistance and reproduction of normative dominant masculinities within the context of a politicized and gendered curriculum.

Consideration will now be given to the methods used to collect the qualitative data and the alignment of these methods to the theoretical perspectives on the subject and the nature of social reality, which is the methodology of this investigation.

The epistemological orientation of the proposed research is founded on a view of social reality and human consciousness as fluid and changing, therefore requiring the researcher to view that social world in its natural state. Research was carried out in *three* contrasting school settings as qualitative studies[4], in which I, as the researcher,

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[4] Full naturalistic immersion in the research sites was not be feasible given time constraints, however, the research draws from the model provided by the OWE project and the underlying principle of ethnography as the study of cultures through in-situ participant observations.

and, therefore as the primary research instrument, gathered data in a naturalistic manner, inductively as it emerged from the 'ground', through ethnographically informed methods of lesson observations, group and individual interviews.

Full ethnographic, naturalistic immersion was not possible, however, my field work shares with ethnography a concern to engage in the study of cultures, in this case the male student cultures of the schools, the research sites. This process is far from straightforward requiring a reflexive self-awareness on my part and the conscious operation of the sociological imagination in order for the familiar to become strange and in doing so uncover the operations of discourse and the performances of identity- the arduous business of constructing and maintaining subjectivity within a social site.

As an observer I was able to immerse myself, albeit for a relatively short period, in the commonplace everyday routines of the school, informally interacting with staff and by attending informal meetings and briefings. By adopting this experiential ethnographically informed method I was able to get a feel for the idiographic nature of the organisations, their local concerns and the micro-narratives that operated within the institutions. My aim, as far as it was achievable in a short time frame, was to gain some footing in the indexicality of the everyday life of each school and the masculine *doxa* of pupil culture in order to illuminate my research concerns. Indeed, as Hammersley and Atkinson observe, "we cannot study the social world without being part of it" (Hammersley and Atkinson in Denzin and Lincoln, eds. 1994:248). The epistemological and ontological orientation of this interpretive, qualitative method can be characterised as *Verstehen*, (understanding), as Schwandt comments,

> " This goal is variously spoken of as an abiding concern for the life world, for the emic point of view, for understanding meaning, for grasping the actor's definition of a situation, for Verstehen" (Schwandt, in Denzin and Lincoln, eds. 1994:118)

My research data, therefore, is an interpretive story, a reconstructed narrative about the school communities I observe and interact with. The thesis seeks to present the empirical data collected in the field as interpretive studies providing, "unique example(s) of real people in real situations" (Cohen, *et al.* 2008: 253). However, given the emphasis on poststructuralist theory of the subject rehearsed in the earlier section of this chapter, some qualification must be offered regarding the adoption of an ethnographically informed method of field working, as Britzman argues, ethnography in its traditionalist sense promised, "fidelity to some great original" (Said in Britzman, in St Pierre and Pillow, eds. 2000:27). The poststructuralist emphasis of this investigation requires some re-conceptualisation of qualitative fieldwork. The 'straight' version suggests that rational non contradictory social actors will be able to provide truths that the researcher is able to reproduce in their report. The unruly poststructuralist version moves towards offering 'partial truths', what Britzman calls the 'move beyond simple empiricism', where there are no innocent readings and only 'guilty interpretations' (Britzman, in St.Pierre and Pillow, eds. 2000:28).

The social 'real' of this study, is therefore, messy, contested territory and requires a methodological acknowledgement of not only the hesitant voices of adolescents whose identities are, by their nature, going through a process of refashioning, challenging notions of a unitary self, but the nature of the writing presented in this study. Britzman captures the epistemological tensions involved in the production of poststructuralist qualitative empirical research, when she characterises ethnographic writing as an interpretation, a, 'second glance', when, "making sense of oneself is understood as occurring through the construction of the other." (Britzman, in St.Pierre and Pillow, eds. 29: 2000)

In sum, therefore, the research perspective adopted in this study is premised on an anti-positivistic view of social reality which must be interpreted through the contextualizing procedures of qualitative methods in order to interpret data to obtain the thick descriptions of the culture under investigation. Epistemologically, this proposal is premised on the view that social reality is not, "amenable to the sort of causal analysis and manipulation of variables that are characteristic of the quantitative research inspired by positivism" (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995:8).

Research settings: the discursive sites

My original intention was to present my field work as case studies; however, my encounter with poststructuralism has produced through my sociological imagination, new interpretations of the epistemological character of the three settings of my research. I have replaced the usual term 'case study' with 'research settings' which are theoretically reconceptualised as 'discursive' sites which fashion the subjectivities of social actor. From a poststructuralist perspective the schools have no 'ontological' foundation and are the social sites for the operation of discourses of race, age, culture and gender.

From a Foucauldian perspective education is a discursive field where relations of power, subjectivity and language operate. Schools as social institutions are the sites of this discursive field in which dominant discourses such as a model of curriculum a school implements become operational and in turn give rise to teacher and learner subjectivities within a complex set of power relations between language and subjectivity. However, as demonstrated in my empirical data these discursive sites (the schools) are both dynamic and permeable, absorbing idiosyncratic local influences as well as wider social and institutional ones. The research sites contain competing and

sometimes contradictory discourses of gender, ethnicity, religious and cultural identity. As localised settings each discursive site is highly contingent, with its own history, norms, culture and practices as well as being subject to wider social and institutional influences that impact on each of the research settings. To illustrate this point, the data demonstrates that within Valleytown High School specific discourses of race, social class, religious and cultural identity emerge as dominant discourses giving rise to different masculine subjectivities to the middle class, secularised subjectivities of the boys in Seaside High School .

Through the group and individual interviews with the boys, observations in their classrooms and of wider interactions with teachers, their male and female peers, I was able to participate in the social life of these local, temporally limited settings interpreting situationally limited 'micro narratives'. Each discursive research site represented a classed, raced and gendered space. I wish to argue that the strength of this method for the investigation of key stage 4 boys was that it recognized the causal significance of context and its impact on identity, as Cohen *et al* elaborate,

> "Contexts are unique and dynamic", hence my fieldwork aimed to, "investigate and report the complex dynamic and unfolding interactions of events, human relationships and other factors in a unique instance" (Cohen, *et al.* 2008: 253).

In addition, the investigation in the three schools has something of the characteristics of what Stake (1994) refers to as the 'instrumental' method, in the sense that each site provided insights into the overarching aim of the research the interpretation and analysis of the relationship between male subjectivity and the RE discourse. The three schools, the discursive sites were selected to facilitate an understanding of my research questions and produce a refinement of theory from the perspectives of three different

settings, each with their own highly characteristic dynamics and qualities, as Stake states,

> "With its own unique history", the research setting, "is a complex entity operating within a number of contexts, including the physical, economic, ethical and aesthetic" (Stake, in Denzin and Lincoln, eds. 1994: 239).

Selection of the research settings

As an ITT tutor working within a large partnership I have access to a wide variety of educational settings throughout the north west of England. On an earlier pilot study I found that the relationships that I had already established through the partnership helped the smooth running of the organisational study. The intrinsic *mutual* interest of the staff I worked with generated productive collaborative outcomes and assisted with matters of access.

Selection of the research settings was informed by a desire to gain social and cultural depth through the perspectives of pupils from a wide socio- economic and cultural demographic. Through negotiation with gatekeepers, the senior managers and teaching staff, I was able to gain the consent and agreement of three contrasting school settings in which to undertake this research. Part of the rationale for this approach stemmed from my desire to observe and be part of the micro dynamics of each site in order to research the construction of the boys' subjectivities within their localised setting and to analyse the limits and possibilities afforded by the discourses and the cultural practices available to the boys in these settings. I will describe each setting in greater detail in the next chapter, however, a brief overview is offered here, in order to provide a context for the research. Each school has been anonymised.

Research settings:

A) Milltown High School

The first research setting was a medium sized 11-16 co-educational community high school in a suburb of Manchester. The school served a truly comprehensive catchment, with pupils coming from a range of social backgrounds, including the more affluent private residential areas and local authority housing estates. There were very few ethnic minority pupils in the school

B) Valleytown High School:

The second research setting was a medium sized 11-16 co-educational community high school in an area of social and economic deprivation of north east Lancashire. Pupils were predominantly working class and there were a sizeable proportion of ethnic minority pupils from a variety of backgrounds, but mainly of Pakistani origin.

C) Seasidetown High School:

The third research setting was an academically high achieving 11-18 medium sized co-educational community high school with specialist maths and computing status, situated in an affluent Merseyside suburb. Pupils were drawn from a very affluent catchment, where the majority of their parents and guardians were professionals.

The diversity of these settings is representative of the types of schools and communities found nationally and provided me as researcher with the cultural[5] and social depth that is required to illuminate the proposed research questions.

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[5] Including both the secular and the notionally religious perspectives of Christian and Muslim pupils.

There is of course, a reflexive dimension to this study and the selection of these discursive sites, the schools which make up the research settings. As a teacher and an ITT tutor schools serve as the 'ground of my consciousnesses, part of my mental and physical terrain. Indeed the social and the cultural practices of many the boys and the teachers I observed and interacted with, have, to quote St.Pierre, "sedimented out in my own subjectivity" (St.Pierre in St.Pierre and Pillow, eds. 2000:259) since like the boys and the teachers I interacted with, I too have learnt about what it means to be a man in schools. I grew up in Manchester and Merseyside. I taught in East Lancashire and Manchester. Through the technology of this extended essay, I am, therefore engaged in a process of deterritorialising my own molar identity, coming up against my own past, "to learn to what extent the effort to think one's own history can free thought from what it silently thinks, and so enable it to think differently" (Foucault, in St .Pierre and Pillow, eds. 2000:260).

Classroom observations

I was able to observe a range of classes in each research setting, primarily the key stage 4 classes from whom I was going to identify pupils for the group and the individual interviews. The classroom observations were highly significant because they provided me with an opportunity to observe classroom dynamics, micro-cultures, discourse and interactions in a naturally occurring social setting in situ. My approach was semi-structured in so far as I had an agenda of issues, my research questions, but my aim was to allow data to emerge naturalistically and inductively from the 'ground', rather than through a pre-defined framework.

I took the role of 'participant- as- observer', as defined by Cohen, *et al.*

> "In schools this might be taking on some particular activities, sharing supervisions, participating in school life, recording impressions, conversations, observations, comments, behaviour, events and activities" (Cohen, *et al*. 2008: 404-405).

Where possible I attended form periods, interacting informally with members of staff in the staff room, ate my lunch in the Humanities staff room, joined staff on break duty, remaining in the school settings for as long as possible between observations, group and individual interviews. During the classroom observations I was also able to talk to pupils about their work and their lives in school. I recorded my observations in the form of field notes written in-situ. I also recorded descriptions of the physical settings of the classroom, noting where pupils sat and interacted. I was also able to take notes and describe critical events, (Wragg, 1994) such as classroom disruption or conflict to illuminate the research questions.

Group interviews

The observation week in each setting enabled me to grow in familiarity with the pupil cultures thus providing the basis for the pupil samples that would make the group interviews. These naturalistic in-situ observations also allowed me to capture something of the serendipities of the classroom and the corridors, allowing me to orientate myself within the organisation and to gain a sense of its character and the local drivers influencing its function and direction.

In Milltown School I was able to interview pupils who had opted for the 'Philosophy of Religion' GCSE and pupils who were sitting the compulsory short course GCSE in Religious Studies, but hadn't chosen it as an option. At Valleytown School all pupils were entered for full course GCSE Religious Studies and in Seaside school C all pupils undertook a compulsory non-GCSE Key Stage Four Religion, Philosophy and Ethics

course, accredited by a local University. Clearly the status of RE as either an option or a prescribed course of study had an impact on the way it was regarded by the pupils and their relationship to the subject. The various ways in which the RE curricula was organised is representative of the most common modes of delivery in state schools, so my sample can be regarded as valid because of its representativeness.

In each setting I was able to repeat a schedule of 4 semi- structured group interviews, undertaken with year ten and year eleven pupils, consisting of 3 male groups and 1 female group (see appendix 3 for interview schedule). The group interviews were approximately 30 minutes in duration and consisted of 4 pupils, thus providing a sample of 12 group interviews in total. The classes which pupils were sampled from varied in composition, for example in school A. the ratio of male to female pupils in the GCSE option group was smaller. In school B. factors such as ethnicity, social and complex cultural diversity, such as caste made this an even more multiple, diffuse and heterogeneous sample. The pupil sample in school C. represented a more homogeneous population in respect of social and cultural background.

Sampling pupils for the group interviews was undertaken, initially on the basis of their representativeness of the diversity within each population and in this sense could be characterised as 'purposive' (Silverman, 2006), with the intention of illuminating as many of the variations of response, that is, engagement, resistance or indifference to the RE discourse. I was able to identify particular pupils who appeared from the observations to represent the male student cultures of their locale and had consented to take part in the research. No pupil was interviewed unless they had signed a consent form and gained permission from their parent(s) or guardian(s).

The focus of this study is masculine subjectivity; however, the decision to include girls' perspectives lies in the recognition that gender is relational and, "like a play with multiple speaking parts" (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003:8), or a crystal prism, their voices offer another vision of the gendered context, as Denzin and Lincoln state "each telling, like light hitting a crystal, reflects a different perspective on this incident" (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003:8), or in this case masculine identity and the daily performance of this identity within the classrooms and the corridors of the school.

The group interviews provided a valuable function allowing for exploration of the central themes, to test hunches and to assist in the refinement of the formative theoretical framework. The rationale behind the group interview method was to generate a wide range of responses, gain insight into what might be pursued in individual interviews, enable discussions to develop and to, "detect how participants support, influence, complement, agree and disagree with each other" (Cohen, *et al.* 2008: 373). This last point is significant, the group interviews also provided insights into identity work, what Willig calls the deployment of discursive constructions, "which afford positionings and help them meet objectives within a particular social context" (Willig, in Allen, 2005: 43).

Semi structured interview method

Group interviews were followed up with individual interviews designed to produce further insight into the boys' identity work, subjectivities and relationship to the RE discourse. The individual interviews were undertaken with boys who had consented to the interviews. The interviews were tape recorded. Of the boys who participated in the group interview, three in total actively declined to be interviewed individually, citing lack of interest and availability as their reasons. In total I was able to record six thirty

minute individual interviews in each school, eighteen in total. There were some logistical challenges involved in setting up the interviews, for example, gaining consent from staff for the boys to be released from lessons, however, the sample obtained provides a broad enough range of perspectives to illuminate the research questions and to make a gesture towards new theory in RE research.

Why interview?

The semi-structured interview process aimed at a double hermeneutic combining an empathic hermeneutic with a questioning hermeneutic. This method of interpretative analysis involves a sort of oscillation between participants 'trying to make their sense' of the common sense world of everyday experience, whilst, "the researcher is trying to make sense of the participants trying to making sense of their world" (Smith and Osborn, 51:2003).

The advantages of the semi-structured method are that it is naturalistic and empathic. The aim of the interviews was to gain the boys' perspective on RE, but also to gain interesting material regarding localised male pupil cultures and the discourses producing masculine identities within the schools, prompted by my interpretation of Mac an Ghaill's ethnography (1994).

My rationale for adopting this method was to allow pupils to contribute freely and openly,

> "As this enables respondents to project their own ways of defining the world. It permits flexibility rather than fixity of sequence of discussions, and it also enables participants to raise and pursue issues and matters that might not have been included in a pre-devised schedule," (Cohen, *et al.* 2008: 182).

There are, of course, issues around the validity of qualitative interviewing, which require consideration. I have already stated that I am the primary research instrument as the author of this investigation and the subsequent mimetic construction, the thesis. However, as Silverman (2006) notes in his analysis of Rapley's work on interview method, the interview data is collaboratively produced. In the interview situation both interviewer and interviewee use their 'mundane skills', as co-constructors of meaning within the space that is the inter 'view'.

My adoption of a poststructuralist methodology and theory of subjectivity also aligns to the semi-structured method described above. The semi-structured interviews allow for the serendipitous tangential talk, so through these 'entryways,' created by the questions, the practices and desires of the boys become visible. I was conscious that the boys were narrating their selves, in the way that all discourse about 'self' is a reflexive backwards second glance.

In this sense the interview can function like a rhizome, not as a self-contained unity, an exact reproduction of the social world or the experience of the interviewee, but rather as an "a parallel evolution", a narrating of self and a reflexive 'experimentation' with the social 'real' of experience. In this way, as Deleuze argues, a rhizomatic approach to interviewing can operate like a meditation or a work of art. Indeed, for Deleuze, "thought is not arborescent, and the brain is not rooted or ramified matter" (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004b:17). For Deleuze the method of the 'rhizome type' analyses language, the dialogue between interviewer and interviewee, "by decentering it onto other dimensions and other registers" (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004b:8), subsequently through the interpretation of the dialogue through the methodological perspectives adopted.

Epistemological status of the narratives of association

Through the interviewing process I sought to treat the boys, not as objects of a positivistic scientific enquiry, unformed future citizens but as learner citizens with valid stories to tell (Ashley, 2002: 259) The boys' narratives are 'small narratives', genealogies of the self (Erricker and Erricker, 2000) through which they, as discursive masculine subjects, fashioned by discourses of adolescence, family, gender, class and religion narrate themselves. The narratives are sometimes contradictory, situated and contingent, reflecting the complexity and diversity of the social settings these boys are part of. The value of these narratives lies in their capacity to illuminate the practices of these adolescent males and their identity work, their projects of the self in relation to RE, as Ricoeur suggests in his question,

> "Do not human lives become more readily intelligible when they are interpreted in the light of the stories that people tell about them?" (Ricoeur in Wood, 1991:188).

It is through the boys' talk that their narratives 'construct ', the, "durable properties of a character, what one would call a narrative identity" (Ricoeur in Wood, 1991:195).

What was interesting was the way in which these boys who valued RE as a form of cultural knowledge or an ethical resource were able to narrate their future selves, their imagined futures, in relationship to RE and their future masculine projects as journalists, lawyers, politicians and university students. In this sense their narratives provide a sense of 'continuity' for what are fluid identities in transition.

However, something must be stated about the challenge involved in interviewing boys of this age group. Asking adolescent boys to share their beliefs, aspirations and values, their key masculine identity ' investments', particularly given the complexities of a setting as diverse as Valleytown High, sometimes required me to approach the

discussions from an oblique angle. Some of the boys' responses are diffident, gauche and naive as they try to articulate their 'stuttering' thoughts (Goodchild, 1996), conforming to stereotypical images of masculinity and teenage boys' group behaviour, however others are rich, but as the authentic qualitative datum I collected these heterogeneous narratives provide valid pointers for new theoretical directions in gender research on RE and values education which will be discussed in the conclusion. In particular I wish to return to Deleuzean concepts of becoming- other, nomadic thought and the minor/molar dyad (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004b; Semetsky, 2007). I will also argue that Foucauldian perspectives on ethics and the care of the self have potential explanatory power illuminating the relationship of the RE discourse to gendered adolescent identity work (Foucault, in Rabinow and Dreyfus, 1983)

Interpreting the data

Interview data was recorded using a digital device and transcribed over a period of three months. I rejected the use of computer programmes to categorise the transcribed texts because of the artificiality of such a process which would remove the reflexive dimension and the familiarity with the boys' narratives I was able to achieve through continual listening and re-listening to the recordings. As I listened to the interviews and produced the lengthy transcriptions I attempted to code the data, however, the diversity of responses made the ordering process of categorising and coding difficult. The boys' narratives eluded easy reduction instead they reflected the individuality of their interpretations of the value of RE in their local contexts. As I wrote up the transcriptions I found the very act of writing became a form of inquiry, "thought happened in the writing" (St.Pierre in Denzin and Lincoln, eds. 2005:970), giving rise to my interpretations of the data which I have arranged around the broad themes of

association and disassociation from the RE discourse, themes which emerged inductively through the boys' narratives.

Deleuze and Guattari differentiate between striated and smooth space. The coded, defined, bounded and limited space of traditional qualitative inquiry is a form of striated space, a weak form of positivism, which absorbs difference, reifies subjectivity and does not recognise the contingent, ephemeral nature of social subjects' accounts of their experiences (St Pierre in Denzin and Lincoln, eds. 2005:970). St. Pierre, acknowledging there is no model for poststructuralist qualitative fieldwork suggests that all qualitative enquiry and data, such as the analysis of the transcripts of this thesis are a provisional space, "coded as soon as it is imagined" (St Pierre in Denzin and Lincoln, eds. 2005:970) but in the smooth, nomadic space of poststructuralism, qualitative data becomes open to new perspectives and interpretations, reformulations and change. So, my data interpretation is simply this, a provisional interpretive space. My desire has been to tell the boys' stories through their *narratives* and to offer an interpretation through my own academic sense making and encounter with the theories of poststructuralism.

Validity and generalizabilty

Following from this analysis, my study is not able to make any absolute claims to positivistic objective knowledge, principally because such knowledge is not obtainable; rather, I recognize my own shadows in the field, personal and professional history, methodological perspective and it is from this perspective that I engage in the mimetic representation of other's views- thus rejecting the concept of the aloof ethnographer. For these reasons I am attracted to the notion of the fuzzy generalization that hedges its claims with uncertainties, conscious of the temporal and situationally limited character

of the research sites. The fuzzy generalization takes into account the idiographic nature of the research sites and the multiple perspectives of the people involved in the study allowing the researcher to make tentative propositions which *may* apply in other settings in an intellectually honest way (Bassey, 1999).

Working through an interpretive perspective I recognise therefore, that no single method can grasp the subtle variations of human experience, "only observations socially situated in the worlds of the observer and the observed" (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998: 24). Geertz (in Denzin and Lincoln, 1998) argued that all anthropological writing is an interpretation of an interpretation and therefore the central task of theory is to make sense of local situations, which is my aim through the analysis and interpretation of my data.

Given this analysis, positivistic issues of reliability and bias have little relevance when discursive social subjects are not able to give empirically verifiable accounts of themselves and their experiences, offering instead, narratives of their experiences, their stories about what they believe, who they think they are and why. It is these very narratives of teacher and pupil experience and my own reconstruction of lived experiences through my observation data that my research aims to document. In the context of an interpretive paradigm, validity is essentially a question of the researcher's ability to access the interpretations and meanings the teachers and pupils have of their social and existential reality.

However, I have endeavoured to reflect the views and experiences of the research participants in a credible and authentic way so that explanations are congruent and fit the descriptions provided. For Hammersley (1995) validity also lies in the researcher's capacity to remain true to the phenomenon under study. The presentation of findings

offered in the next chapter is not impressionistic, but recognises that remaining true to the social reality and existential experience of the research participants requires recognition of the sometimes contradictory nature of their narratives- but it is this very scrappiness that is true to the complexity and messiness of social life. Indeed, as Lincoln and Guba argue (Lincoln and Guba in Gomm *et al.* 2000), the generalizations sought in positivism and realist methodologies fail on their own terms, because there are no generalizations in nature or the social world, generalisations are, "the active creations of the mind", that is , interpretations. They conclude, "There are no absolutes; all truth is relative; there are no final meta-criteria" (Lincoln and Guba in Gomm *et al.* 2000:31).

Drawing from Hammersley, Whittemore *et al* (2001) also identify criticality and integrity as primary concerns for the validity of qualitative research, stating that, "reflexivity, open inquiry, and critical analysis of all aspects of inquiry contribute to validity in qualitative research" and, "integrity and criticality are represented through recursive and repetitive checks of interpretations" (Whittemore *et al*, 2001:531). In addition further secondary checks of validity are offered, including explicitness, vividness, creativity, thoroughness, congruence and sensitivity as guiding principles. It is my aspiration to demonstrate that all of these criteria have been addressed in this study, both through my critical analysis of theory, policy and the presentation of the boys' narratives offered in the next chapter.

Ethical considerations

My principal ethical considerations in undertaking this research related to gaining informed consent from the research participants and subsequently, fair representation in the research write-up. Special sensitivity was shown to the representation of children

and young peoples' views, who I regarded as active social agents rather than the colonised, "primary unit of analysis" (David, *et al.* 2001: 347). The young people's views and feelings were considered in the light of Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The aims of the research were shared in the form of a letter addressed to the individual student, so they were competent to make their own understandings of the purpose of the research. Before each group and individual interview was undertaken I briefed the pupils that they had the right to withdraw, or could decline to allow me to use their contributions in the write up. Pupils were also assured that they, their teachers and the schools would be anonymised.

Prior to undertaking the research, I shared the aims of the study and its focus on identity construction and gendered curriculum choices with the respective teachers I was working alongside. Following Stake I ensured that issues of observation and reportage were discussed both in advance and during the data gathering phase. Drafts of interviews, my field notes and observations were shared and made available to the teachers. I had anticipated that the greatest challenges would come from obstructive gatekeepers who sought to prevent access to certain classes or staff. This fear was unfounded; however, I was aware that the teachers' version of the school and the boys was a 'narration', the subjective, narrative version rooted in the teachers' own biographies as classed and gendered subjects.

Efforts were made to assure teachers that I was not making any evaluative assessments of teachers' classroom practice- the focus was on the performance of identity in the micro-social setting that is the classroom. However, I have sought to achieve balance between my critical, interpretive analysis of the qualitative data and sensitivity to the research participants. Pring (Pring in Sikes *et al.* 2003: 65) argues for virtuous communities of researchers and a spirit of openness premised on the view that,

notwithstanding the potential damage done to the esteem of participants and researcher alike, educational research is concerned with the search for knowledge and the elimination of error, and that should be the central guiding principle. I have outlined some of the methodological challenges involved in 'claims to knowledge', but I can align to the spirit of Pring's argument and would hope that this work at least possesses something of the integrity that might result in it being a gesture towards, theory and " a political practice for interrogating masculinities in schools" (Martino, 1999:242).

I anticipated a relationship of trust with participants in the case study schools and at the very least an informal contract, "a disclosing and protective covenant…a moral obligation" (Stake in Denzin and Lincoln, eds. 2003: 154).This expectation was fulfilled, however, my excursion into the 'different dimensions and registers' of poststructural analysis meant I was looking at the social from a critical reflexive perspective, a nomadic thinking process deterritorialized from the safe parameters of the organisational and policy norms the teachers operated in. Indeed, I find myself asking the same question Britzman posed to herself in her ethnographic study of ITT "would the people in this text see themselves as inventions of discourses and as fragmented subjectivities?" (Britzman in St.Pierre and Pillow, eds. 2000:37).

I was keenly aware of the implications of the power differentials involved in my relationship to the key stage four boys and the girls who participated in the group interviews. I was introduced by teaching staff as a researcher and from the first week in each school I positioned myself in the classroom on the tables with the pupils, rather than sitting aloof from them. I made no reference to having been a teacher until I got to know pupils better and only if the question arose in naturally occurring talk. My method of self-presentation clearly worked- pupils did not perceive me as a member of staff or as an authoritarian figure, allowing for a relationship that was free from any

preconceptions or other factors that could influence their responses. The Merseyside boys nicknamed me 'Rafa' and the Lancashire boys continuously speculated about my sporting allegiances, perceiving me, it would appear, as a more benign figure than their class teachers, simultaneously permitting me to gain a rich insight into their techniques of the self and the discourses that give rise to masculine subjectivity.

Conclusion

The aim of this chapter has been to outline how the theory, methodology and method align in this study. Throughout the discussion attention has been paid to critical questions around the concepts of epistemology and ontology, the nature and status of truth claims and concepts of objectivity and knowledge. Throughout this discussion I have endeavoured to situate myself reflexively in relation to the research project and the choice of methodology, indeed, the experience of researching this project, and the identification of a methodological perspective have required me to operate as a nomadic thinker in the Deleuzean sense, that is to think outside of the normative categories and the familiar ontological and epistemic terrain of my experience. The reflexive dimension to this investigation emerges from the feminist perspective that the, "scientific is personal" and, "may be regarded as a logical extension of the feminist claim that the personal is political" (Jarviluoma *et al.* 2003:108).

The themes presented in chapter five and the analysis offered in chapter six develop these methodological perspectives in a consideration of the empirical data, the boys' narratives of their selves, in order to explore the themes of association and disassociation of the masculine self with the RE discourse as the site in which desires become apparent. This poststructuralist analytic has interesting implications for (religious) education policy and practice and gender theory in education. In Anti-

Oedipus (2004a), Deleuze and Guattari describe the social world as all desire, production and process, what Bogue characterises as, "an active becoming of positive forces" (Bogue, 2005: 152). The process of becoming and production takes place through molecular, minoritarian practices and projects and through the molar majoritarian projects of social machines, fixed in the striated places of the social plane, the socius. At the heart of this analysis is Deleuze's assertion of 'difference' as the primary philosophical fact, based around his conception of a Nietzschean social world, the, "ceaseless becoming of a multiplicity of interconnected forces" (Bogue, 2005:150).

The next chapter seeks to present and interpret the empirical data from the poststructuralist theories of the subject and the social outlined in this discussion. In particular the boys' relationship to the RE discourse will be explored through the concept of identity work and the related concepts of the molar and minor subjectivities. These themes will be further explored in the conclusion and discussion of findings in which the implications and the possibilities of an education programme which operates through the 'smooth space' of 'nomadic' thought will be considered.

Chapter Six: Data analysis and principal findings

Introduction

In this chapter I present the boys' narratives of RE, the qualitative data which illuminates their relationship with RE and provides the principal focus of the thesis. Within the constraints of this study, brief interpretive vignettes of the principal research participants are offered to provide depth and dimension to the subjectivities of the boys who participated in the interviews.

The overarching aim of this thesis is the critical exploration of the relationship between adolescent males' masculine subjectivity and the religious education discourse through the framework of the following research questions

1. In what ways do the adolescent males associate with the RE discourse?

2. In what ways do the adolescent males dissociate from and resist the RE discourse?

3. How does the RE discourse challenge or reinforce the masculine subjectivities of the research participants?

4. In what ways does association or disassociation with RE connect to other discursive practices apparent in the identity work of the male adolescents?

The interview data demonstrates the ways in which RE forms the discursive site for the performance of the masculine identities of the boys and serves to illuminate their gendered practices, providing the lens through which the school boy masculinities of the research participants can be interrogated. The overarching theme of this chapter is the 'project of the self' (Foucault, 1984) which is structured around empirical evidence

considering the themes of the association of the self and the disassociation of the self from the RE discourse *and* the connection between association and disassociation from RE and other masculinising discursive practices shaping the boys' subjectivities.

The Participants

What follows are interpretive vignettes, situating the boys within the discourses of ethnicity, age and gender which fashioned their fluid adolescent identities. These are vignettes of the more dominant voices that emerged through the group interviews and individual interviews, providing the richer, deeper descriptions sought through my fieldwork.

Milltown High School

The first three boys described were all identified as 'gifted and talented' by their school. GCSE Religious Studies was referred to as 'philosophy' in the year nine option booklet. All of the boys are white, aged fourteen and just at the start of year ten. None of the boys identified themselves as religious. All of the boys outlined articulated narratives of strong association with the RE discourse and made a positive option to study Religious Studies at GCSE. These boys described themselves as 'mature' and regarded themselves as distinct from the majority of male students who they characterised as 'chavs'.

Nick lives in an affluent semi-rural commuter village on the outskirts of Milltown. Nick's hobbies include the Japanese martial art Kendo and cricket. Nick aspires to attend university and considered philosophy as a degree choice. Nick's imagined future is as a journalist or a published writer. Nick's favourite subjects are RE, English and media studies.

Mike lives in Milltown and is the son of a police officer. Mike is a member of his local harriers running club and he plays football and rugby for the school team. His favourite subjects are RE, English and media studies. He has an aspiration to attend university and an imagined future as a lawyer.

James lives in Milltown. He enjoys rugby league and plays for the school team. His favourite subjects are RE and English. He aspires to university and has an imagined future as a journalist.

Will lives in Milltown and is the son of a local authority education inspector. RE and English are his favourite subjects. Will is a very keen sportsman and plays football and rugby union. He enjoys going to the gym. Will is interested in reading, cinema and politics. He aspires to university and has an imagined future as a politician, inspired by Barack Obama.

Dan lives in Milltown and is an only child. His father is a policeman. He enjoys rugby, football and the gym. His favourite subjects are RE, citizenship and drama. Dan wants to go to Sixth Form College but has an imagined future working for the CID and is considering joining the police after college.

Wayne self identifies as 'annoying' in 'other subjects' and his RE teacher describes him as a 'pawn in someone else's game'. He lives in Milltown on a local authority housing estate which has a 'reputation'. He is compliant in RE but outside the lesson associates with an anti-school peer group. He has an imagined future as a businessman and does not aspire to attend university.

Valleytown High School

I was able to interview year ten and year eleven boys because all key stage four students were required to undertake GCSE Religious Studies. Paul and Simon, both aged fourteen, were top set year ten students and the year eleven boys, all age fifteen, were in a C/D borderline GCSE group. Saquib and Murad were Asian heritage students and the other boys were white.

Paul lives in a rural village outside Valleytown. He is in top sets for all of his subjects and is identified as gifted and talented. He exhibits a weak association with RE and his favourite subjects are history and drama. He as an aspiration to attend university but is not able to articulate an imagined future beyond education.

Simon lives in Valleytown. He is a top set student and his favourite subjects are science and mathematics. His hobby is computing. He demonstrates a strong disassociation with RE and is unable to narrate an imagined future beyond year eleven.

Saquib is a Pakistani heritage student, a religious Muslim and he lives in Valleytown. His father owns a shop and he has a brother who studies law. Saquib is regarded as a gang leader and has an ambivalent relationship with school. He has previously been excluded. He enjoys cricket and has an imagined future as a law student, although his RE teacher, Jane, says 'he doesn't stand a chance', he exhibits a strong association with RE.

Jack lives in Valleytown with his mother and his sisters. He is regarded as a 'gang leader' and like Saquib, has an ambivalent relationship with school. He associates strongly with sport and his imagined future is as an army physical fitness instructor. He

is influenced by older male relatives who are in the army. PE is his favourite subject, but he articulates a strong narrative of association with RE.

Kain lives in Valleytown with foster parents. Staff regard him as able but 'dangerous' and volatile. He is interested in cars and engineering and has an imagined future in army logistics as a tank driver. He articulates a strong narrative of association with RE.

Murad is a Gujarati heritage student and a practising Muslim. He was able to articulate a strong narrative of association with RE. He lives in Valleytown with his parents. He belongs to a large, influential family. He is regarded as the 'cock' of the school. He is captain of the school rugby team. He aspires to university and is interested in local politics. His imagined future is as a pharmacist or a lawyer.

Seasidetown High School

I was able to interview both year ten and eleven boys, all of whom were following a statutory core non examination RE programme. Tom and Mark were aged fifteen and in year ten. The remaining boys were in year eleven, and apart from Rob, were aged sixteen. All the boys lived with their families in Seaside town.

Tom articulates weak narratives of disassociation from the RE discourse. His interests are BMX biking, camping and his imagined future is as a vet. He aspires to university.

Mark articulates a weak narrative of disassociation from RE. He prefers creative subjects like art and doesn't like writing because he is dyslexic. Mark wants to study psychology at 'A' level but is unable to describe an imagined future beyond sixth form.

Anthony has a very strong association with sport and his identity is shaped by his aspirations to study sports science at university with an imagined future as a professional sportsman. He articulates a weak narrative of association with RE.

George exhibits a strong disassociation with the RE discourse. He prefers 'practical subjects', cooking, 'making things' and has an imagined future as an engineer with his own business. He enjoys sport and plays rugby for the school team.

Rob is described by his friend Josh as the 'class clown'. With Josh, much of his social life takes place at his local cricket club and he has a strong identification with sport. His favourite subjects are maths and business education. He exhibits a weak disassociation from the RE discourse. His imagined future is as an accountant after studying business at university.

Josh is friends with Rob and identifies strongly with the cricket club and sport. His identity is also shaped by a hyper- masculine discourse of physicality through his association with the army cadets. His imagined future is as a vet or a member of the parachute regiment after university studies. He exhibits a weak narrative of association with RE.

Association of the masculine self with the RE discourse

1. In what ways do the adolescent males associate with the RE discourse?

The group and the individual interviews produced learner narratives that demonstrated varying levels of association and disassociation from the RE discourse. The narratives of association produced qualitative data pointing to varying degrees of association with RE. Narratives of strong association were produced by boys who had made the positive decision to opt for RE and according to this criterion, the Milltown boys' talk all conformed to this analysis. The Valleytown boys were on a compulsory RS GCSE programme, however, the year eleven boys I interviewed were able to demonstrate the features of this strong association because they indicated that they would have opted for

RS, or were glad that they were doing RS at GCSE. The other narratives of association were produced by boys who felt RE had some value, but indicated that it was a peripheral interest to them, characterising the subject as instrumental (Kallioniemi, 2003) in enabling them to acquire some knowledge of cultures other than their own. With some of these boys there was very little sense of real engagement with RE, it was something imposed on them, with no intrinsic value to their projects of the self. However, Josh, one of the Seaside town boys who exhibited an ambivalence towards RE, produced a striking narrative in which he argued for a critical RE, pointing out, in his language and terms, the limitations of the dominant phenomenological pedagogical approach which characterises much RE practice.

Several themes emerge from my analysis and interpretation of this data. The boys' responses to my questions about why they chose RE, how they used RE in their lives and how and what they like to learn in RE produced narratives of RE which I have categorised, using the concepts which emerged through the boys' narratives, as the *'big questions'* narrative, the *'respect'* narrative and the *'everyday life'* narrative. The narratives provided insights into the boys' concerns and projects of the self through their reflexive relationship with the 'big' philosophical questions of meaning and purpose, ethical issues, described by the boys as the 'common sense' dilemmas of 'everyday' living and their encounter with social and cultural difference through their RE.

The dominant narrative found in all three research settings was the *'respect'* narrative which articulated a discourse around social and religious pluralism and RE as cultural knowledge, although it was particularly strong in Valleytown high school, reflecting the effect situational dynamics had on the ways the boys related to the RE discourse. The 'big questions' narrative was a strong feature of the Milltown boys' talk, and the

'everyday life' narrative of RE as a resource for exploring ethical issues was evident across all three settings.

The 'big ideas' narrative

Chronologically the first phase of my fieldwork was undertaken at Milltown High. The Milltown boys represented the significant minority at key stage four who opted for GCSE Religious Studies. Religious Studies was presented as 'philosophy' in the year nine option columns. Some of the boys differentiate between the RE they experienced at key stage three and their 'philosophy'. There were two GCSE groups in year ten with ten boys following the course in contrast to the even smaller number of two boys doing RS GCSE in year eleven. The boys were in their first term as members of the upper school and had only just begun their GCSE studies, so they were only able to refer to the limited amount of study they had undertaken; however as a 'significant' minority their narratives provide interesting insights into young male subjectivity. The boys differentiate themselves from the majority of their peers who had opted for PE and vocational courses, referring to themselves as more , 'mature', this is an important dimension of their practices which will be explored further in relation to research question 4. However, as a key masculine signifier, all the boys had a strong association with sport, but they chose not to pursue PE as a GCSE option.

In the following group interview extract (12.11.08), Nick, Mike and James narrate why they chose RE (philosophy). They claimed they liked, "thinking outside the box" and creativity as opposed to what Nick called 'clockwork subjects'.

Francis: Where does RE come into all this? You opted for it at the end of year nine.

Mike : ' Cos like when we grow up we need to know why people dress a certain way and why they do that and I want to be a lawyer so it's not, I'm dead, I should say really interested about peoples' beliefs and why they do things because of their religions so..I'm interested to know.

Nick: It gives...it gives good understanding skills about different things as well like learning to debate and stuff as well as just knowing people's beliefs.

James: I chose because it was, like, just a different subject, like, to all the others...I don't know... just different really.

Francis: Was it the philosophy tag that really got you excited?

James: Yeah...um.

Mike: With philosophy it's not all just writing down, it's more creative and big ideas is what I like doing... like doing them alot.

Notably, all of the themes narrated in this extract were encountered again in the boys' individual interviews and the other group interview (11.11.08). Mike's comments show that he regards RE as cultural knowledge and a resource for understanding social and cultural difference. Mike's references to 'big ideas' position RE as a heuristic device providing a framework through which to explore ultimate concerns and existential questions, a theme which re-emerged in his individual interview,

Mike: We're doing what I always wanted to do, which is like big ideas, like who created the world and stuff like that, I always wanted to know about and cultures, we're doing that, yeah.

James' comments that RE is a 'different' subject; an unconventional choice offers him a way of distinguishing himself from the majority. James reiterated this view in his individual interview,

James: Well the reason I chose it really was because it was different and I didn't really know much about it, so it was something that I thought you could have your own opinion on, like with philosophy how we, how we are here, something like, put your own opinion to and there's no real right or wrong answer.

A similar 'big ideas/questions' narrative emerges in this extract with the other year ten boys, in response to questions about what the boys would like to learn about in RE,

Will: Big questions I think is quite a big one I'd quite like to learn about 'cos you can have so many arguments...say like is there a heaven or a hell? You could try and prove the point, is there a heaven or a hell?

Wayne: Oh, science like why don't we believe like that God, 'cos science they've got their own views against God.

Dan: Might be the big bang?

Wayne and Dan show they are aware of conflicting religious and scientific meta-narratives.

Francis: Any other thoughts about that?

Will: Like why didn't God like interfere with stuff like the Holocaust and all that but you could argue that there was some individual cases like 'erm that woman who prayed to God and helped other people and she got let out by default or something

so you could say well he was there in some ways but you could say why is he letting it happen in the first place?

Will's 'big questions' narrative suggests an emerging philosophical capacity with his references to the theological problem of evil and the Holocaust, a recurrent theme which also emerged in his individual interview.

Dan was also able to articulate a narrative around 'big ideas' when I asked why RE was a favourite subject for him he responded;

Dan: ...and then RE because it just covers so many aspects of, of like beliefs and then I can put my own opinion on to their belief and then I can make my decisions if I'm like I'm an agnostic or an atheist or whatever...my view.

I asked Dan to further elaborate about his beliefs, and in common with the rest of the Milltown boys, there is no sense of a central religious meta-narrative informing his perspective, just a weak, 'provisional agnosticism' (Ashley, 2002:260) but there is evidence of an emerging ethical subjectivity.

Dan: I would...probably describe them at the minute unsure because....if there's lots of bad things that happens and God's all powerful, like why can't he stop it? Like why do people die? And say if that's happened to me in the past I'm obviously going to think twice about the, the religion and that, 'erm, then, like the major ones like the twin towers...should somebody have shot that plane down? 'Cos it was that low and should God have made that decision if they were going to die? All them people that dies on 9/11?

In his individual interview Wayne also revealed that one of the reasons he had picked RE was because he wanted to find out what he believed in, indicating that for these

boys, they were prepared to make an investment in a philosophical discourse centring on the testing of truth claims (Wright, 2004) and through their relationship to questions of truth were beginning to constitute themselves as, "subjects of knowledge" (Foucault, in Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1983:237) articulating emergent epistemologies in relation to questions of meaning, truth and purpose.

The big questions narrative aligned to another theme that emerged in these boys' talk. They valued the open-endedness of the RE field of enquiry, characterising it as 'different' (James), a 'unique subject' with the capacity to 'lead anywhere' (Will). These narratives suggest that RE has the capacity to function as a smooth space for nomadic thought on an otherwise striated curriculum (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004b; Semetsky, 2007) and the big questions narrative suggest emerging 'nomadic subjectivities'. In his individual interview, Nick elaborated further on differentiation between creative subjects and 'clockwork' subjects,

> *Nick: ...I don't like the lessons which are like I said, just like clockwork, y'know, like maths, y'know like there's only one answer and you have to know that answer and if you don't you are just wrong, but I like the ones where you can make it your own and where people recognise it as your own work and see it as your work, y'know they don't see it as lots of the same work and then they can see how may... in some ways you are right and in some ways you are wrong and just, y'know...it's still live to yourself really...like you can be right in your own way, but people can see it as different.*

I was interested in this statement of Nick's because it suggested the capacity for nomadic thought also produces the spaces for experimentation in thought and new concepts.

Equally interesting is the recognition of the gender meanings of subjects (Connell, 2000). Mathematics is, "strongly constructed as masculine", and "doing mathematics, enjoying or being good at it, is therefore discursively constructed as doing masculinity" (Paetcher, 2007: 119, Martino, 2000). Nick and the Milltown boys, with their preferences for subjects that could be positioned as the 'Other' to the Maths/Science discourse within the 'binary machine' (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004b), English, drama, Citizenship and RE (Philosophy) disassociate from this logocentric style of thought and practice.

There was little explicit evidence of this 'big ideas' narrative in the talk of the Valleytown or Seaside town boys' narratives, however, there was evidence that the boys in all three sites who demonstrated varying degrees of association with the RE discourse were able to use RE as a resource for the exploration of ethical issues, and to some degree, constitute themselves as ethical subjects.

Ethics-'just day to day stuff'

From a Foucauldian perspective Religious Education, like all curricula, is a discursive technology of the state, because it is a practice that seeks to achieve, "...the government of individuals...the government of souls, the government of the self by the self...the government of children", (Foucault, in Besley, 2002:419) and therefore to 'shape' their subjectivities.

As a discursive resource and a technique of the self made available to the boys their narratives of association showed that RE was being taken up as a discourse through which they were beginning to constitute themselves as moral subjects through their relationship to ethical problems such as euthanasia, racism, and to their own immediate

personal concerns, such as bullying. In his group interview Will called these ethical issues, "day to day questions".

Using Besley's Foucauldian analysis the boys' relationship to ethical questions encountered in RE contributed to what I characterise as ethical 'becomings', "that is, the, 'forging of an identity through processes of self-formation" (Besley, 2002:430) made available through the discourse of religious education.

In the group interview Will's comments in response to my question about how the boys were able to make use of their RE, show how RE is contributing to his emerging ethical subjectivity,

Will: Say if you are watching the news, you might like better understand it, say if there's like a fight you can look at both ways not just that one person's side that the person who started it has got a reason for that and that's why RE is like a good subject just to know even if you're not going on to college or to Uni.

Francis: Are there particular issues that RE deals with that are important?

Will: There's that one on the news a couple of weeks ago where that guy who wanted to do euthanasia but couldn't and I wouldn't have known what that was 'cos we only just learned about and then it I was just like saying well y'know my opinion on it like if he should or shouldn't so like it sort of helps on your view on stuff like that.

Nick articulates a similar position,

Francis: Do you find that the study of different viewpoints helps you make sense of your world?

Nick : I think...yeah...in some ways maybe...say if you're in a situation and you want to think about something and you can't think about it in your own way and you think...not really like what a Buddhist would do, but that's what a Buddhist would think about this in some ways y'know...

The strongest narrative of association with RE emerged in all three sites and was concerned with the boys' relationship to social and cultural difference, to the 'Other'. It appears to me that there are three dimensions to these narratives. They reveal, in my interpretation, an ethical dimension centred on relationship to difference.

There is a weaker 'knowledge' dimension centred on competing religious truth claims and thirdly, the narratives have a social and political dimension as Saquib, a Valleytown student, comments,

Saquib: I think nowadays RE's is more about what's going outside in the world and stuff more political in the world, y'know, you understand what I'm saying, it gives you like an idea of what really, what's going on in religions in the news and stuff.

In the following extract I asked Wayne, what topics he wanted to investigate in RE,

Wayne: In equality.

Francis: Why's that?

Wayne: 'Cos I believe that, all of us should be more similar and not different, all of us should be the same 'cos we've got the same 'air and we've got the same flesh and the same blood.

Francis: Right, so that's something you feel quite strongly about?

Wayne: 'Cos, I, I've got loads of mates and they've got loads of, they get loads of rubbish 'cos of what race they are, some of them do.

Francis: Are there any other topics that you'd like to look at?

Wayne: Justice and injustice.

Francis: and that's very similar, just tell me why you are interested in that?

Wayne: Because, most of the people that are put away for the things they didn't do 'cos most of them are black and they try to give them their story, but most of the people just don't accept the story and they just have to take the pain.

Wayne, unlike his peers in the Milltown group, didn't occupy the same middle class social position and he shows how through his involvement with black youths and their conflicts his ethical subjectivity was being fashioned through discourses of class, race and gender, with his RE functioning as a forum through which he could begin to define for himself, what Foucault refers to as an, "admissible and acceptable form of existence" within political society (Foucault, in Besley, 2002:430).

RE as cultural knowledge

The value of RE as a form of cultural knowledge was the strongest narrative of association to emerge across all three sites. Even the weaker narratives of association articulated by the Seaside town boys exhibited an instrumental recognition that some cultural knowledge of religion might have purpose within a pluralistic community. For the Milltown boys, living on the fringes of a big, diverse urban conurbation, cultural knowledge emerged as a strong narrative, however it is within the narratives of the Valleytown boys, who, as Jack commented, were 'living' within the social and

gendered realities of an ethnically diverse and complex discursive site where RE emerges as a resource through which these realities could be considered.

The 'respect' narrative

The Milltown boys expressed their value for RE as a form of cultural knowledge in so far as it enabled them to understand why certain people wore certain clothes, did certain things and behaved in a particular way, thus providing them with an insight into local cultures. However, a feature of much of the boys' talk is evidence of the way in which a post 9/11 discourse has shaped attitudes to cultural difference. In the following narrative from group interview (26.11.08) James' comments offer an insight into the practices of his peers when asked about their attitudes to RE,

> *James : I think it is, 'cos y'know like with all the terrorist things that are going on outside the school people think like why do we have to learn about other religions, y'know there's only ours so why would we want to learn about any others? 'Cos it not really going to affect us, why do I want to learn about your religion because you're a terrorist?*

> *All: Yeah, that's like really stereotyping.*

James and his peers' comments reveal openness to the horizon of alterity but also a reflexive relationship with RE and encounter with other traditions as a resource (Jackson, 2004) capable of edifying their own concerns and questions, as Nick's talk suggests,

> *Francis: And are you interested in spirituality and religions?*

> *Nick: Well, I think it is important, for a start to respect other peoples' religions not just, say if you have your own or your culture has its own, you shouldn't just accept*

that and nothing else, you should be responsible enough to admit that there are others and it's important to know what the others think, 'cos that's the world aspect and you need to know about it, I think.

Nick also demonstrates an emergent criticality capable of recognizing the relativity of competing truth claims,

Nick: But you need to, y'know cross them, you need to see how they are different, you need to see how they are similar and how to relate to them in some ways.

When asked about how he'd like to learn in RE, Nick's response, reflecting the answers given by all of his peers in their interviews, shows how the Milltown boys were able to articulate an emergent theory of RE as dialogical, reflexive and questioning with an appreciation of experiential learning. I asked Nick what he considered to be the best way to learn in RE,

Nick: I'd think actually like seeing the religion itself, y'know going out of school. I know Sir's been trying to organise a trip to the Buddhist centre, I think that would actually be close to perfect, to go there to see how their culture looks, to actually meet one and to ask them questions and what they think about things and say if you ask them a question and like they said how they would do it and then you thought how you'd do it and then see how them two were similar and different... so yeah, actually seeing them and communicating with them would be a good way to.

Dan commented that RE enabled him to,

Dan: See the beliefs and the understandings of others...See their side of the story as well as yours.

The "getting it out into the open" narrative: negotiating identity in the political space of the RE classroom

The Valleytown boys' narratives of association were clearly fashioned by the discourses of race, religion and gender that operated within that religiously and culturally complex setting, stratified not only by class and race, but divisions within the Muslim community by caste, internally contested religious practices and regional backgrounds. When I asked Murad whether his RE and Guidance programmes were having an impact on attitudes within the pupil community, he responded,

> *Murad: I think it will in this school, 'cos Asian heritage versus whites, you solve that there'll be no problems in society.*

When asked about the nature of these 'problems', Murad added,

> *Murad: 'Cos if you ask a white heritage, a white...they'll say a man with a beard is a terrorist, and I'm offended by that, 'cos a beard, like in our religion, is something to be proud of, so I do get offended by those people who say you are a terrorist if you have a beard and all that, so it does irritate.*

Murad suggested that compulsory RE was an answer to problems of religious conflict when asked if RE could challenge the problems he had described,

> *Murad: It can, seriously. If you go like, compulsory, all schools have compulsory RE... all the students are working hard and they not get too like, arrogant and they to get to know that, they're not really that, (referring to Muslims) they just get, believe the same as Christianity, so it probably will help.*

Murad and his Year 11 peer Saquib were both acutely conscious of the effects of a post 9/11 discourse which threatened to undermine their subjectivity and Islamic identity.

Both boys made reference to the wider political issues of Palestine and Israel, talking of 'bad' states and the perceived unfairness of the conflict, which Saquib likened to bullying.

When asked about the value of exploring Islamic and Christian perspectives on the social ethics topics on the RS GCSE syllabus, Saquib was quick to refer to terrorism and to disassociate his beliefs from such practices,

> *Saquib: ...and no religion, if you look at it whereas Muslims, Christian whatever, I can't say like everyone's getting pinpointed at terrorists, stuff like that, people can't say like I'm doing this for my religion because no religion tells you to do this, do you understand? So people can't go blowing themselves up or fighting for Islam, Christianity and that, 'cos no religion tells you to do that, do you understand, y'know what I'm trying to say it gives you, ...no religion tells you to do what's going on today.*

Saquib and Murad's narratives display an oscillation between the epistemological openness of the RE classroom with its emphasis on pluralism and the certainties of their Islamic discourse. In this sense they appeared to deterritorialize their Islamic masculine subjectivities, displaying a readiness to make connections with other religious discourses. In class and through their talk they engaged in the nomadic processes of RE, discussion, problematizing religious and ethical positions, evaluating and managing argument and counter argument and then in the same narratives reterritorialize their RE as a resource for the reinforcement of their identities.

In his interview Saquib strongly values RE as a form of cultural knowledge,

Saquib: I live with people I don't know, I go to work, I work with people I don't know, obviously I know my limits, I know that, I know, I can be on the level with them when it comes to religion and stuff, so it (RE) can help in that thing.

In the next sequence Saquib's Muslim identity emerges as the dominant discourse fashioning his world view and he refers to the Qur'an, rather than RE as a resource for making meaning and sense out his experiences,

Francis: and does it (RE), er, help you to make sense out your life and the world around you?

Saquib: What like religion and stuff now? Yeah, I think it does a bit now, yeah, because firstly we are learning about religion and stuff, you'd be shocked like all the religions teach the same stuff, all the bad stuff not to do and stuff like that, on what's going on in the world now, I think that this is a challenge for every Muslim I think, our faith can grow stronger here, it's a challenge because when you read the Qur'an and stuff you realise the Qur'an was written a long, long time ago before, a long, long time ago and it tells yer about what's going to happen in this world, like what's going to happen and erm in the twentieth century and stuff and whatever is said in there, I know it's a miracle in the way it sounds, whatever is said, it's actually happening today and people are trying to go against Muslims and being accused of stuff like that, so I think if anything makes it my faith and me stronger, 'cos obviously everyone thinks of their faith and their religion, everyone has like , their thoughts and no one is sure, why, what am I a Muslim?

His talk expresses something of the complexity of his cultural experience but shows he is able, through his RE, to utilize a range of cultural resources,

Saquib: Yeah, yeah it's good to like even, it's good to like to read a book like this, even if you're not a Muslim yeah, like Bible or 'summat, like a few Christian books, I read them actually to see the similarities and stuff, to see actually what it brings to mind, to see what it teaches us, what the difference in 'it.

Saquib's talk reflects Jackson's assertion that,

"In late modern pluralistic societies, individuals might identify with aspects of a cultural tradition, argue with other aspects and also draw creatively on new resources in reshaping their own cultural identities" (Jackson, 2004: 90).

What is significant, however, is unlike their white peers; there is a religious meta-narrative shaping Murad and Saquib's subjectivities. However, as masculine subjects the gender meta-narrative of masculinity fashions *all* of the boys' identity work.

The white Valleytown boys I interviewed who associated with RE spoke of their RE through the lens of cultural difference and its capacity to speak to their immediate concerns and experiences of diversity. In the group discussion Jack and Saquib described their role in the school's community cohesion 'gang' project designed to resolve tensions between white and Asian gangs. When asked about the value of RE Jack interpreted the question in the light of his knowledge of religion and conflict and Saquib compared these wider tensions to the boys' experiences in the school project,

Jack: In a way, I can't see why they all fight and that it gives me understanding 'cos I know about it, I don't see why they fight 'cos they got, they religion says we can't do this, you just can't fight, they shouldn't do stuff y'know so

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Kain: I still don't know why they do it

Jack: So, why do they do it the, y'know?

Saquib: This is, er, this is exactly what gets people angry today, it's using religion and how, you know stuff like this, we shouldn't have to say like, with the gang project, our job was to be the bigger men, bigger people and come to a solution and stuff like that and come to a conclusion.

I picked these themes up again in Jack's individual interview which revealed the gendered dimension to the tensions between white and Asian boys, the very situationally specific gendered dynamics which informed their talk about RE. Jack described these tensions,

Jack : 'er, when I first started the school, it was, I'd say it was pretty bad, I mean there was always alot of tension, it was like a cold fire, just, it was always like, if you see alot of Asian lads you wouldn't walk through, you'd walk around 'em, y'know and if you saw an Asian lad on 'is own, you'd obviously stare 'im out, it's obviously like that, and there'd be silly fights and alot of fights, just because you'd look at each other, just like that, because since I think, if you ask me, I blame it on the people that were older than us because I looked up to lads in year 11, when I was year seven, I just wanted to be like them when they 'wuz...bad racists and I'd come into school in the morning and there'd be England flags over the canteen and stuff, y'know, and er, like Pakistani flags being burnt and stuff. It was pretty bad and out of school, that's, that's just horrendous.

Francis: Do you think then that studying a subject like RE has helped you and your mates and the Asian kids understand each other a bit better?

Jack: 'er, it 'as a bit but it's just, I think we knew alot through RE, it was just that thing that we 'ad to, just get over, there's alot of bad stuff that had happened in school, like fights and stuff and one fight would just send us back to step one, but once you got over all the steps and you got to the top of the stairs there wuz no way of going back down. It can, like, alot of people, younger people in this school try and mess it up for the older ones, like a little lad, a little Asian lad give you a bit of gob you give it back and then they'll go and try get all the older lads in my year, y'know to get involved.

Jack's narrative reveals how dominant masculinising practises based around physicality, aggression, territorialism and gang loyalty were shaping the identities of the majority of his white and Asian peers, yet in some of his talk, such as his narrative about the film, 'Remember the Titans' and his behaviour within the liminal space of the RE classroom, he displays a capacity to perform his identity differently, demonstrating an almost tender concern to know more about the cultural experiences of his peers in the home,

Jack: I'd always wanted to know, what do they do when they go 'ome, how they work with their mother and stuff like that. Like me you see, I can go home and have an argument with my mother and stuff, I wonder if they do that, I wonder if they're the same, y'know, whether they watch Eastenders? Just 'summat like that y'know?

 He also shows he is able to value the epistemological openness and experimentation of ethical debate,

Jack: But I enjoy, I find interesting in a sense I find er, I'd say the discussions, alot of the discussions they're about racism, I like to get it, get it out in the open, y'know, any problems, we can sort it out with talking, you're at one side of the class, I'm at

the other, but that's what I enjoy about people, like I don't like it when people say

this and I don't like it when Asian 'eritage do this, so, y'know, just 'cos we get on in

the school it doesn't mean that we don't have our arguments y'know?

Kain's talk also demonstrates a narrative of RE as cultural knowledge which he could

draw upon as a resource for his imagined future as a member of the logistics corps. He

values RE and regards it as a 'cool subject', dismissing some of his peers indifference

to the subjects value as a source of cultural knowledge on the grounds that they are

'kiddies',

Kain: Yeah, 'cos say if, d' you know in the army you've got loads of different

countries aven't yer? So you got to know how they're religions works, so that's a lot

of help, so you can know what they think, gonna know what their law is and stuff

that you do, so I'll know what they think and do, so I won't do stuff.

Narratives of weak association: the 'we have to learn about other cultures' narrative

The white Year 10 Valleytown boys mostly disassociated from the RE discourse,

however, of the boys I interviewed, Paul expressed a weak association with RE as an

instrumental subject that would get him an easy GCSE, but was, in his words, 'glorified

guidance' and 'common sense'.

Paul: 'Er, I don't find it interesting, I don't believe in God, but alot of people do and

I suppose it's about learning about other peoples' cultures. It's because, like in

Valleytown it's, erm a massive mix, but, no it doesn't really interest me, but I

acknowledge that I've got to, like, learn about it because it's respectful to other

people.

The same weak association with RE as a form of instrumental cultural knowledge emerged in the talk of the Year 10 Seaside High boys, who admit a pragmatic value to learning about religions and cultures, useful in their imagined futures, for example setting up an IT business, but were quick to denounce what they considered to be overly permissive tolerant attitudes to the hijab.

Tom's comments capture the tone of these boys' views in their group interview,

Tom: I like the lesson, it's a nice laid back, relaxed kind of atmosphere, but I just don't think the work...it's like, I understand that we have to learn about other cultures and religions to kind of respect them and stuff but I just don't enjoy doing that.

The majority of the Seaside High boys acknowledged that they lived in a 'sheltered' mono-cultural community, but what was clear from their talk was that pluralistic RE was not a subject that connected to their immediate concerns or represented an investment in their masculine identity work which was worth taking- a theme which will be explored in subsequent sections of this chapter.

A critical RE – the 'getting the real story' narrative

One striking narrative which emerged from the Seaside High Year 11 boy's interviews, was Josh's critique of what he called the 'cushy', 'sheltered' version of religious, cultural and social issues that was presented in RE. Josh is able to articulate an emergent critical perspective. He was able to talk about Palestine, Israel, Al-Qaeda and the Iraq conflict and was eager to explore the political dimensions of religion and the effects of competing, conflicting truth claims through his RE. In the following sequence

he describes what he perceives to be the value of experiential RE in contrast with his experience of phenomenological RE with its tendency to descriptiveness,

> *Josh: If you debate it and look at it in, but not the sheltered version, if you got the real, a proper story on it and not just like, oh well this is what the government would like you to hear, none of the censorship, and like taking us on trips like to a Muslim community, a Jewish community, a Hindu community, do you know what I mean? A community where people are going to tell you the truth and be honest with you and not like sheltering us too much from us, you know what I mean? 'Cos it's all very well and good talking about it in the classroom and saying oh well if you met someone who is this religion you would, like actually talking to someone and saying, you know like when you talk to someone you get a better impression when you meet someone, facts and figures are good, but it's not the real McCoy, you need someone whose going to sit down and is going to level with you, going to talk to you about it and help you understand it.*

Josh also talked about religion and politics in a similar critical fashion, referring to Al Qaeda, competing religious truth claims about the status of Israel, Palestine and the conflict in Iraq. His narrative, like the earlier ethical, philosophical and cultural narratives of RE also point to ways he interacts with the RE discourse as he constitutes his subjectivity.

The boys' talk and the concerns they express align to Wright's argument for a critical RE which creates spaces for learners to interrogate the, "rich diversity of mutually incompatible world views", that is the array of competing religious and secular discourses with their, "fundamentally incompatible ontological foundations" (Wright, 2004:168). Besley (2005), referencing Foucault, writes about the curriculum as a 'truth

regime', citing government educational goals which refer to the 'type of person' or 'Citizen' they are trying to form, "shaping the student's self and their identities" (Besley, 2005: 80). The evidence from these narratives therefore points to RE as an educational technology which when taken up enables these processes of self-constitution to take place.

2. In what ways do the adolescent males dissociate from and resist the RE discourse?

The boys who demonstrated association with the RE discourse also showed, through their narratives of RE as cultural knowledge, not only a propensity to think differently, but a recognition of social and cultural difference. Even where this recognition is unsophisticated or emergent, it is significant, for as Olsson suggests, "an awareness of Others means we change...we understand ourselves differently" (Olsson, 2010:46).

The narratives of the boys who disassociated from the RE discourse do so for a number of reasons which I have grouped according to the dominant themes emerging from their talk. However, a key feature of their narratives is a rejection of RE as a resource for their masculine identity work expressed also as a distancing from the RE as a heuristic tool for ethical and epistemological enquiry. In some cases there is a rejection of cultural difference and evidence of an 'othering' narrative.

The central themes are: disassociation because of the gender meanings ascribed to the subject; rejection of religion; rejection of the values of liberal pluralistic education and lastly, the perceived irrelevance of RE to the boys' imagined futures and projects of the masculine self.

Gendered perspectives: the 'girls are more interested in stuff like that' narrative

The narratives of both the male and female pupils I interviewed revealed strong constructions of a naturalised gender binary in which dominant discourses of masculinity and femininity were reified through their language, subject choices and their social practices. The non-option Year 11 Milltown boys were not conscious of subjects having gender meanings. When asked why there were so few of their peers taking GCSE RS, Alex's response demonstrates how he implicitly positions geography and history as subjects with more masculine meanings and girls as 'different' to boys, thus accounting for the gender bias in RS,

> *Alex: 'Cos I don't think really that they're more into the History and Geography side 'cos they had in the options we had like RE down in the same column so they might like, they might have thought I don't want to do History, 'cos girls are more generally different to boys.*

His peer, Brad, demonstrates a more questioning perspective, commenting

> *Brad: It's a good question, it's weird that...I suppose there's less girls in geography maybe, but I don't know actually, it's really weird...but more boys take wood work and stuff like that.*

When asked which boys might pick RE, Brad, to the amusement of his peers, referred to Geoff, who:

> *"Wants to be the next prime minister!"*

RE was perceived by Brad as a subject for their 'more clevery' peers, aspirational middle class boys and not a subject that the majority of male pupils, characterised as 'chavs', 'sporty people' and the more 'practical people' would associate with. It was

clear from their talk that these boys' subjectivities were being fashioned within the 'vortices' of masculinity, the masculine truth games, described previously.

In the all girl group interview a similar reification of the gender binary emerged through their talk. The girls' narratives revealed strong identification between the boys and sport and practical subjects. In addition, masculine group loyalty and the peer group were identified as key social practices, which influenced which subjects boys would associate with. I asked the girls why they thought there was a gender differential in RE. Becky accounted for this in terms of the option columns for GCSE choices, implying that with PE and DT to compete with; RE had little chance of attracting male students,

> *Becky: I think it's like because of the option table, like PE's in it and there's a lot of D&Ts in it.*

Leanne accounted for this differential in terms of male peer group culture and the need to appear 'cool',

> *Leanne: I think there's a stigma attached to boys doing it though 'cos we don't care like RE isn't cool is it? Like boys don't want to do it... 'Cos I know alot of boys who, alot of people who would want to do it but they didn't because they thought it would look stupid so they did graphics, wood work.*

> *Francis: do you mean girls or boys?*

> *Leanne: Boys...girls don't care really do they?*

> *Jade: I think 'cos like with girls, there's like more, you have to look at both sides and lads... like sort of have a... stereotypical point of view.*

Leanne: Have a narrow minded view...yeah.

Jade's critical comments suggest an inability or unwillingness amongst her male peers to engage with the ambiguities and fuzziness of the issues considered in the RE 'Philosophy' classroom. In a similar manner, the girls I interviewed at Valleytown school, characterised their male peers as immature and lazy, not liking 'sitting down and writing', a description which resonates with Becky Francis' (2000) discussion of sensible/silly constructions of gendered class room practice,

Aysha: I think it's, most lads just can't be bothered, because quite alot of lads are...really clever...but they just can't be bothered to use it, they just think, I can't be bothered.

Disassociation from religion: the 'I just don't get it' narrative

For some of the boys disassociation from RE was produced by their rejection of religion itself which they conflated with RE. The narratives varied from a weak disassociation which they account for in terms of the irrelevance of the RE field of enquiry to their concerns and practices, as Tom's comments confirm. The ethical, philosophical and social issues considered in Tom's class on the Holocaust were marginalised in favour of his interest in football, a key masculine signifier. When asked about his views on the theme of moral evil, he responded,

Tom: To be honest, don't really go that deep into that...thinking about whether Everton are going to win at the weekend (laughter). I worry about that!

The explanatory capacity of post structuralist theories of discursive subjectivity lies in the way they account for the role of language in the production of socially constructed identities. In Lyotard's (2005) analysis of the postmodern condition the critical role of

language through the legitimation and delegitimation of meta-narratives serves to make sense of some of the boys' talk about religion and their relationship to RE. For Harry, one of the lower band Year 10 Valleytown boys, religion and therefore, for him, RE, was irrelevant to his identity work. I asked him why RE seemed pointless to him,

Francis: and is it because it (RE) doesn't connect to your life?

Harry: Yeah. It doesn't really do 'owt does it? You're not gonna like, when you're talking about mosques and stuff, Asians, yeah, they know everything about 'em and stuff like that, so they're doing it, like and there's Asians like answering questions and stuff. When it comes to Churches, whites don't know 'owt, they don't know 'owt about 'em. Churches, they don't know 'owt about churches we don't know 'owt about mosques.

Harry's characterisation of secular whites and religious Asians demonstrates that the gendered subjectivities of the boys are situated and fashioned within the discursive contours of a postmodern time, in which 'religion' is decentred, thus adding a further factor to the production of their narratives of disassociation.

For two other boys, Simon and George, their disassociation from RE as a form of knowledge takes this form of an epistemological rejection of the legitimacy of the concerns of the subject. Simon's disassociation is also related to his antipathy towards cultural difference, most visibly signified by his Muslim peers whereas George's disengagement can be explained principally in terms of his preference for maths, science and set answers with their masculine meanings, as identified by Weiner (1994) in her critique of the gendered curriculum. George also disassociated with RE because he saw it as irrelevant to his masculine project of an imagined future as an engineer, a technical 'expert' and a boss with his own business, themes which will be further

explored in section two. In this sequence George provides his reasons for disassociation from the RE discourse,

Francis: Right, ok, erm, so you have a bug bear then with the study of religion, because you don't see religion as a credible thing?

George: No, no, it's not, it just doesn't...there's too many holes isn't there? There's too many gaps, y' know? That's always been my argument why haven't there been miracles today, why haven't there? Y'know...I just fail to see it, I just fail to see it.

Francis: Over the years you will have studied a range of world religions as part of your compulsory education, has that knowledge that you've acquired has it been of any use to you? Is it something you can use to make sense of the world?

George: Again, I don't, to be honest, I don't, the only thing I think is y'know, you know what's appropriate within different peoples or whatever. To be honest, I don't think I've really learnt anything from it, I really don't, because, you know, it's very, what can you learn about from knowing about Muslims or knowing about Hindus or whatever, what can you really learn about? You know not to say certain things, not to do certain things, not to, y'know, you can't do this, you can't do that, you can't eat this; you can't eat that, whatever. I'm not a Muslim, to be honest I'm not a Christian, I'm not an anything, to be honest it's irrelevant to me, it doesn't really apply to me.

George accounted for his dismissal of social and cultural difference on the grounds that he lived in a mono-cultural town however he was closed to the idea of learning about religion experientially through field trips to communities other than his own. His talk demonstrates that he has no need for RE as either an ethical, philosophical or cultural

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resource for his project of the self. From a Deleuzean perspective it could be argued, that as a white middle class majoritarian male, there was no existential need or desire for George to deterritorialize his molar subjectivity in this way as the following extract indicates,

George: No, if you said to me right class, we're going on a trip to the church, you'd get a urgh, you'd get a whole class, going, oh, jeez, where would you take us though? If you were going on a trip where would you take us? Say to a Muslim community centre, you'd still get, urgh, or at least I think you would. What would you do there, get someone to give you a talk; you can get that off the teacher, can't you?

Similar narratives of disassociation from RE emerged in the group interviews with the top set white Valleytown year ten boys who dismissed RE as 'guidance' and an easy subject. The boys talked about divisions between Asian and white youths pointing to competing masculinities in their discussion of gang culture, framing differences in a masculinising discourse of fighting and physicality- with their Asian peers positioned as ineffectual fighters with a crowd mentality, unable to 'stand their own.' The boys were quick to point out the Asian boys *tried* to look cool, like gangsters. They joked freely about racism, laughing about a local man who they described as the BNP racist, referring to a friend's Granny's comments about the family coming home from Turkey looking like niggers and 'someone's Aunty' who had a dog called 'negro'.

I have characterised RE in terms of its epistemological openness, a critical discourse privileging cultural and ontological plurality (Wright, 2004), but it was clear that these boys were not responding to RE in this way. If, as Olsson (2010) argues, to encounter the 'Other' is to change, these boys weren't changing. They positioned their Asian

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classmates as 'Other' and wanted to maintain this differentiation as the following sequence illustrates,

Joe: It's when they're in groups, they're just... I don't know...they're just in their world and people.

Simon: Like, like we are different and I don't mean this in any racist way, I think that we, 'er we have different senses of humour and things and if you hear, if you listen to 'em talking sometimes you'll hear them say something and they'll talk to their mate and they'll just burst out laughing and it's not even funny in any way, I wouldn't, I couldn't even get on with them If I tried to 'cos, I don't know...

Joe: That's, that's probably a religious thing again 'cos most of them are Muslims aren't they and we don't have a religion.

The boys went on to make references to football and Asian heritage boys 'shouting things' at matches. The dialogue moved towards general comments about football chants and the capacity to combine racist and heterosexist abuse into chants,

Joe: When you're at a football match they...they shout things don't they?

Ashley: Sol Campbell...that was racist.

Simon: That was really bad.

Paul: That was racist, homophobic, quite a few other...it's amazing they got it all into one song though, you gotta give 'em credit for that!

When I asked the boys about how they might use their RE they dismissed its value as education for community cohesion, as Ashley states

Ashley: Just get on with what they want to do. If you want to be a Muslim fine, if you want to be a Christian fine, fine just let 'em get on with it. Why, why should you get busy learning what other people are doing when you're not going to do anything about?

I was able to follow up some of the themes which emerged from the previous group interview. Simon's individual interview produced striking narratives in which he characterised himself as a mathematician and a scientist, antipathetic towards religion. Commenting on RE he states,

Simon: It wouldn't bother me because, I'm not too interested in it all anyway, 'cos to me, I, I just don't get it.

Francis: Right, ok, you don't get religion, is that what you're saying?

Simon: To me I just don't see what the big....it's just such a big thing in the world, and I don't get it...I don't get it. If you want to believe in a god then, fair enough but, I don't believe in some sort of after- life or that but I don't see the rules and restrictions that religion has on everyone, I don't understand it.

In the wake of the group interview, I asked Simon individually whether he thought that RE could contribute to greater social cohesion and understanding. His response points to the gendered nature of what he characterised as the 'gap' between Asian heritage youths and white youths,

Simon: I don't think it does because to me, I think it is not understanding each other, cos they have...I don't want to sound racist, but I'll say it anyway so, but they sound com...they have a different sense of humour. In general I think they're more

arrogant, erm, just cocky, 'cos they're just like, they think they own the place, alot of them and it does annoy me sometimes.

Francis: And these are lads aren't they, particularly, rather than the girls?

Simon: Yeah, because the lads , they walk, they travel into places, they move in big groups of alot of people and they sort, they walk down the corridor and that's it, you got to get out of the way all they'll just walk into yer and you can't do 'owt about it 'cos if you say to 'em, one of the, get out of the way and the rest of them'll start saying shut up and just, and it gets out of hand then.

Simon's position reflects the social complexities of the situational power dynamics that formed the discursive field of Valleytown. Simon and his peers' talk show how dominant discourses of masculinity fashioned their relationships within the school. Territorial references to the corridors, the physical 'disciplinary' space of the school, group loyalties, fighting and football all reflect the ritualised social dramas of these adolescent boys' iterative identity performances. It appeared to me as a participant observer that the tensions produced by these competing dominant masculinities went some way to explaining Simon's disassociation from the liberal, pluralistic RE discourse which might require him to reconsider his perspective on his Asian heritage peers.

Weak disassociation

 With the exception of Josh and George, the Seaside town boys demonstrated the most neutral or indifferent responses to RE, their narratives are ones of either weak association or disassociation from RE. A recurring feature of their talk is disassociation due to the perceived lack of value of RE for their future projects. Rob described to me

an imagined future in which he was a successful builder, like his father, but his investment in the RE discourse was minimal and he could be disruptive, described by his friend Josh, as the 'class clown'- so the lesson did perform a function in so far as it provided him with a space to enact his 'silly' (Francis, 2000) construction of masculine subjectivity. Rob articulates his weak disassociation with RE in the following,

> *Rob: Nothing to do with the subject, I reckon its quite an important subject that you can get, I just reckon that, I don't think it's got any standing in the world to be honest, no one looks at A level RE and goes, well yeah we'll have you, you know?*

3. How does the RE discourse challenge or reinforce the masculine subjectivities of the research participants?

The predominantly middle class Milltown boys who associated with RE, demonstrated a reflexive awareness of the gendered hierarchy of subjects. Maintaining 'reputation' amongst friends and peer group loyalty were identified as practices required for the enactment of a successful social identity and therefore these practices had a significant bearing on which subject choices the boys would make. In the group interview (11.11.08) I asked the boys to talk about the social influences on their subject choices,

> *Nick: It's more like your reputation in some ways, amongst your other friends.*

> *All: Yeah.*

> *Nick: Say like if you were in a group and they all did PE and you like did something different, like cooking, they all have different feelings about, (pause) well not feelings... thoughts towards you.*

> *Francis: Why are some people influenced by their peers?*

Mike: I don't know. They...well; say there's a person who's a hard, a hard person yeah? And he's got alot of reputation and there's a person who's not as hard as him, 'erm what he'll want to do is stay friends with him because then he'll, I don't know why they think this, but he'll think he'll protect him in any case and then they do what they do.

Mike added that in his case choosing RE had no impact on his social standing

Mike: Because I'd picked Philosophy (RE) instead of PE and many people thought I'd have picked PE instead of philosophy but it's gone down well...I mean nothing's happened... I've not lost my reputation...or so called reputation.

This sequence demonstrates the social reality of normative discourses of masculinity circulating amongst the pupil culture of key stage four for whom the most popular option for GCSE was PE. However Mike is able to resist this, perhaps through his ability to occupy more than one subject position, as both 'sportsman' and 'philosopher', both high status performances of male identity within the wider milieu of the school and his middle class home background. He has the social and cultural resources and the ontological security to occupy these subject positions and there is no dissonance or disruption to a self that is able to maintain the appearance of stability.

The boys in this group interview also implied that the RE classroom was a liminal space for the articulation of concepts and ideas the majority of their peers would regard as 'weird', the delegitimized narratives of spirit or theology (Lyotard, 2005),

Nick : When you're in groups on the tables and stuff like when he says discuss say God as a being or stuff like that you don't really have a chance to say that to other

people your own age...'cos if you said that in public or someone people would say, you know like...

James: You weirdo... (Laughter from the rest of the group).

Similar narratives emerged through the talk of the other Milltown boys who associated with RE. I explored the popular subject choices with the boys and again PE emerged as a dominant option,

Francis: So what do most of your mates go for?

Dan: Usually the PE, any of the PE's.

Wayne: Woodwork.

Dan: Yeah, like resistant materials and then vocation... sort of go for the safe option, which is triple science 'cos they think if you do that then you're guaranteed of a grade.

The notion of popular subjects being safe options, suggested the boys saw what I have characterised as their nomadic RE as requiring an investment in an alternative discourse which carried with it risks inherent in epistemological openness,

Dan: They just say it's pretty boring.

Will: Yeah. Too deep. They just want to take the safe option and just live life as it comes instead of trying to realise what it actually is.

These year ten 'philosophers' had positioned themselves as academics, the 'mature people', able to take greater social and intellectual risks than their peers, the 'chavs' and the 'big majority', the 'sporty people'. The data points to the existence of different communities of masculine practice, but the boys' talk about the relationship between

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RE and their imagined futures suggests that RE reinforced their masculine subjectivities.

The narratives of the Milltown boys suggest they constituted themselves within a middle class discourse of 'credentialism' (Connell, 2000) where academic achievement is valued. Rejection of the socially 'safe option' did not come at a cost to their masculine identity work expressed through imagined futures in professions such as law, journalism and aspirations to attend University. However, the connection to a critical RE was producing an ethical subjectivity and aspiration as Will's talk about his future self indicates,

Will : Well, I always like wanted to be a successful businessman and that, but then I thought, well anyone can be a business person if they want, but I thought actually when I'm older I don't want to look back and think well, I didn't take the easy route and did something to change the world and that...I want to do something I won't regret...'cos I think like anyone can be a lawyer...well not a lawyer, but work in an office and all that and never actually do anything significant to change the world, so I want to do something like that.

Will continued to talk about the significance of the recently elected Barack Obama as a (male) political role model, describing his own desire to become a politician. These idealistic aspirations and the existence of the 'big questions' narrative of the Milltown boys suggests to me that their association with the RE discourse could not be accounted for entirely by classed practices such as 'credentialism'. The interviews with the boys of Seaside High, who exhibited the strongest disassociation with RE confirms my analysis. Here were boys from a similar middle class social and discursive location engaged in masculinising practices through, for example their rejection of the offer of

ethical discourse as the following sequence reveals. In the year eleven group interview (24.02.09), Josh, Rob, George and Robbie's gendered talk points to a binary in which girls are positioned as emotional and boys as impervious to the dilemmas posed by an analysis of the ethical issue of euthanasia. The RE field of enquiry is feminized and therefore rejected as unmasculine in their talk,

Josh: That lesson on euthanasia was great, upsetting the girls, they were all crying about that guy who had to go to Switzerland, but the boys couldn't give a stuff.

Ben: No one wants to think about death, we're teenagers!

Josh: This fella, Adam from our cricket club killed himself, I was a bit gutted, but at the end of the day there was nothing I could do, he just did it.

Rob: If that was a family member how would you feel then?

Josh: If that was my Dad I wouldn't be bothered 'cos my Dad's just not interested. I'd do it, I'd give him the pill. I passed my shooting test at cadets, but no matter what I do it's not good enough.

I was able to observe this lesson and this group of boys' disengagement with powerful and emotive materials. The collective performative aspect of the gendered self is conveyed through this characterisation of hard boys who 'couldn't give stuff'. To engage with RE in this context would require a re-presentation of their gendered subjectivities to their peers. Josh's talk about his father suggests hyper- masculine practices of the self through denial of emotions, detachment from his Dad; practising the self through sport and cadet involvement. These boys are working hard at the maintenance of their molar masculine self in contrast with the Milltown philosophers

who freely engaged in a discussion about the morality of euthanasia in the course of a group interview.

A similar discourse of disassociation from RE emerged in the narratives of the year ten Seaside boys when I asked them to comment on the topics (the problem of moral evil and suffering) they were studying and how they responded to them,

Dylan: I don't like 'er, when we was watching the Holocaust and we, like they start crying and everything cos like they really like relate to all the stuff and the lads just sit there and just, they obviously take in what's happening but, just, but that's in everything though, but girls are sensitive anyway.

Mark: Girls show their emotions.

Tom: Girls just show an exaggerated version of what we feel.

Tom's comments suggest a realisation of the constructedness of the gender binary because boys experience the same emotions as girls, but the girls demonstrate these emotions more freely. The notion of the school as a disciplinary space where practices were subject to a panoptic surveillance emerged through subsequent talk where the boys describe the unwritten performative rules of the school yard. They are aware of the social rules governing their masculine identity performance,

Dylan: I think though that if any lad in our year was to cry though over something emotional, I think everything, everyone would laugh, all the groups of people.

Mark: Yeah, I think all of them would laugh but some would try not to, like if you were from that group, I think.

Francis: Ok, so there are certain rules that govern how you operate as a lad in this school then?

Mark: It's just like an unwritten law of the playground...I don't know, no one tells you about them, you don't hear about them but you just know them and go by them.

Strong association and identification with the RE discourse amongst this group would entail some disruption to masculine subjectivity; however the boys' talk suggests an emerging reflexive awareness of the social construction of masculinity. In the individual interview with Josh I followed up his observations about the lesson on euthanasia. Like his year ten peers, Josh shows some insight into the performative nature of masculinity, but, as Seidler (1997) argues, through his talk, Josh demonstrates that he is tough by showing that *others* are weak.

I asked him about what he characterised as the unemotional responses of the boys in the lesson on euthanasia,

Josh: Yes, 'cos the girls are alot more open with their emotions than the lads. The lads are more like shut it out and block it out, lads I think, most lads I think have more of that capacity than girls do, cos girls are naturally more emotional, lads can just put up a wall and say 'bang', I don't want to hear that, I'm not going to hear that and that's like the way it's going to be.

Josh's talk points to how he and his peers maintained their masculine selves by shutting out emotion, a practice Seidler describes,

"It becomes crucial for boys to conceal what they are experiencing because vulnerability opens you to ridicule and rejection" (Seidler, 1997:137).

I invited Josh to elaborate further and asked him whether an expression of any feelings would attract ridicule,

Josh: Exactly, people would laugh, like there was a topic on euthanasia, that doesn't bother me anyway, that's off the record, on the record, whatever you want, but some of the lads in there, might have been bothered, but they're not going to show it because that's weakness in other peoples' eyes, not in my eyes, I've got no problem with you being upset about it but it is weakness in some peoples' eyes and alot of lads don't like to think that they are weak, they don't like to get looked down on.

'Erm, on the first day, two girls in our class who I'm mates with and I know quite well, they were crying, they cried at the thought of this guy taking his own life, saying goodbye to his wife and everything but that's just the way some people are, I'm lucky I'm one of those people who can shut it out...

There's an implicit recognition that such denial of emotion could come at a cost to some of his peers, but Josh is keen to deny any such disruption to his successful hyper masculine performance and is unwilling to acknowledge any such feelings himself.

Interviews with the Seaside High boys also confirmed that their imagined futures were constructed around normative high status middle class masculine ideals as an accountant, or quantity surveyor (Rob), a soldier or vet (Josh), a sports therapist (Anthony) or engineering (George). RE and other humanities or arts subjects didn't feature in these projects of the self.

When asked about his future aspirations, the sort of man he wanted to be, George dismissed RE as irrelevant and narrates his idealised, imagined masculine self as a molar singularity free from restriction, dominant and with power over his employees,

George: I want to own me own business, I love business and I want to take business and economics for 'A' level and I love business and that kind of thing. Anything I

can do well in basically. I've got er, one of my Mum's cousins started like that and he's now got two multi-million pound engineering businesses and I'd just like to go and do something like that. I want to be my own boss, like, I want to be, I want to, I don't want to have restrictions, if I want to sack someone, I'll sack 'em, whatever. I want to be able to be myself, not have to go in at a certain time, If I want to have a lie-in one morning, y'know, but at the same time it's not going to happen overnight, you're going to have work and what not but that's what I aim to be like.

This data confirms the existence of different communities of masculine practice and ways of being a boy. The Seaside boys demonstrate the sort of characteristics of the boys that the Milltown philosophers characterise as going for the 'safe option', not just in terms of their subject choices but their projects of the gendered self. It was a striking feature of these contrasting groups of boys that the Seaside High boys maintained their masculine power (Francis, 2000) in the classroom by laddish banter and resisting the emotional demands of challenging ethical subject matter which involved distancing themselves from their female peers, both physically, in terms of where they sat and socially. My observations of the Milltown boys and girls revealed a very different gendered dynamic within the classroom. I was able to observe boys and girls freely working together in groups in discussion with no sense of contrivance in this arrangement. Nick compared the safety of the liminal space of the RE classroom, where 'philosophy' and RE themes could be discussed safely with the 'corridor':

Nick: Yeah, I think the classroom is good as well, y'know to discuss it alright, 'cos like we were saying the boundary of the classroom, you feel alright to discuss it, because you wouldn't talk about it in the corridor going there.

Nick compared this dynamic with other classes,

Nick: I think because, 'cos if you go to other classes and other group work in other classes, there is quite a division between the boys and the girls, like even in PE, y'know like pick your teams, boys go with boys, girls go with girls,

Analysis of the Milltown and the Seaside boys' narratives point to different practices of identity construction where the Milltown boys demonstrate an epistemological openness to experimentation, a capacity to create newly formed concepts and 'becoming-other' (Deleuze in Semetsky, 2008: 154).

Multiple subject positions

The discourses which produced the social landscape of Valleytown high gave rise to greater cultural and social complexity than Milltown and Seaside high. For some of the boys I spoke to their relationship to the RE discourse was a simple one, whereas for others, such as Jack and Saquib there appeared to be a dissonance between what they said and how they acted. The Valleytown boys who rejected RE did so because of the threats to the self by the privileging of difference and pluralism offered through the RE discourse. Their talk points to a raced binary, the existence of which sustained their masculine practices around fighting, as Harry (year ten) says about his Asian peers,

Harry: Yeah, they always cause stuff, like, they're always causing trouble, stuff like that, it's like being racist and stuff like that towards the whites and the whites like say stuff back and it causes fights and stuff

Jack, Saquib, Kain and Murad, the year eleven boys who associated with RE, exhibited a capacity to move between a range of subject positions unlike some of their Valleytown peers, the white top set year ten boys I interviewed . Jack and Saquib, in particular displayed contradictory subjectivities. Their narratives showed they valued

the openness of the RE discourse and their involvement in community cohesion and anti-gang projects, however their identities had been shaped by discursive masculinising practices of physicality, territorialism and fighting. It was clear that there was a social dividend for these boys to be gained through their selection as high status males with the credibility to act as role models, policing younger boys who, like Jack and Saquib, expressed their gendered desires through fighting and gang culture as powerful identity resources,

> *Saquib: They want their legacy, they want their legacy in 'it.*

> *Jack: They want to be the best and they want to be the cock of the school.*

Saquib describes his role as a dominant male with the authority to settle fights, positioning himself as more powerful than his teachers in his capacity to mediate between his peers,

> *Saquib: That's why teachers, we have teachers, white teachers have been doing gang projects because it can happen to you, teacher, when a student says sometimes has an attack on a teacher say, like if one of the boys is messing about now, I'm not saying they look up to me or anything but if they were to look up to me and they were fighting or sum 'ut and a teacher come on and said 'Oi break it up, don't listen to 'im', if I was to move in and say 'Oi, what are you doing come on break it up', sometimes it can have more of an effect. That's why I've messed about, I've had trouble in the past, I've had fights and stuff like that...you can't just keep fighting for the rest of your life, you gotta wake up, look around.*

Like Saquib, Jack's narrative suggests he occupies a socially secure position which affords him the capacity to make choices about engaging or disengaging from these

dominant practices of fighting. In this way, like Saquib, he is able to perform his self with agency and deliberation,

Jack: When you see it, when you see it for yourself, was I really like that y'know? It's good to know that we don't actually do that anymore. If I was to have an argument with Saquib I'd have a standing argument, but if someone younger, you get a big group of people coming over, whoa, what's going on? We can have just a normal conversation, people just walk by, normally people everyone would get together, loads of white lads 'd be behind me, loads of Asian heritage lads would be behind Saquib ready for a big fight and we, it's just a stupid, little argument, just an argument that you can have.

Jane, Jack and Saquib's RE teacher explained how for many of the boys, particularly the Asian lads, the male role models that they aspired to were 'flashy drug dealers' in town. Jane described an entrenched gang culture and a fluid identity amongst the Asian boys which enabled them to move between an outwardly strong professed identification with the discourse of Islam and the shaping of identity in a contradictory masculinised discourse of violence, symbolised by 'bling',

Jane: Alot of Asian women don't speak English even though they've been here for years and therefore the boys really have a free run and they've no control over what's going on and the boys to find some sense of identity look at other people in the community. There's a big drugs problem around here, so be a drug dealer, big flashy car, no job, that's what I'll adhere to, 'cos there's no jobs. So you've got that kind of element at home and that comes into school as well so you've got the big brother syndrome whereby, you know, they've all got brothers in school so they all look after them, but it's the gangster type, you know, you touch my brother and this

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is going to happen and that sort of thing, so we've got alot of that going on at the minute...

So, so you've got a whole major issue really, it's not just a matter of you know, Muslim identity, I think it's how they feel, something about this the community that they live in and how they get that. You know so many lads look to cars, big flashy cars and drug money, oh yeah, that makes me somebody...but I'm still a Muslim at the same time.

Despite Jack and Saquib's disavowal of violence and espousal of cultural openness in RE, Jane was able to inform me that the day after I interviewed them they both became involved in a tense confrontation with each other and their respective 'crews'(gangs), divided along racial lines after a white boy had punched an Asian girl in the school foyer. In the previous week violence had broken out on Saquib's street,

Jane: Er, last week we had a bit of a race riot going on, with Saquib and people like that were in the middle of it, we had a massive, something going on outside school, erm there was a fight outside Saquib's house... it's all gang culture, we walk from one lesson, we pick up someone else, we pick up someone else, we shake their hand and we do this and we do this and the other and then we go to lessons if we feel like it.

Murad, outwardly the most unassuming boy of the group, an appearance which could be accounted for by his status as the 'cock' of the school captured the tensions produced by the offer of a gangster identity or a hardworking professional identity, two 'moves' in his masculine identity work,

Murad: Yeah, there are, there's two families in 'it, one family, they are my cousins and they like really bad, they got influenced by all these drug dealers and all that, and they've been in prison as well, but there's one family, their Father's a barrister, the son's a doctor, one's er a lawyer and they really offer to help me out with life and all that, they really good.

Murad aspired to be a lawyer, as did Saquib. RE did not appear to threaten or disrupt these boys' subjectivities, they lived with the tensions produced within their own communities and in their own performances of the gendered self, indeed, there is a sense in which both Jack and Saquib had used their RE to reinforce their subjectivities as members of the anti-gang 'community cohesion' project.

This contradictory subjectivity was particularly highlighted to me in my interview with Jack. Jack fashioned himself through hyper-masculine practices and aspirations, describing his future self, enjoying an army career. His search for a stable male ontology was reached through practices of fighting, sport and a contradictory relationship with his Asian peers. However, in his private interview with me he expressed liberal views on heterosexism, displaying an open mindedness,

Jack: Some of the views, that Muslims have against gay people and stuff, I find it just silly really.

Jack's subjectivity, like his Asian peers seemed to be fashioned through his choices, which appeared to be deliberate and agentic- even to the extent of acknowledging 'gay people'.

4. In what ways does association or disassociation with RE connect to other discursive practices apparent in the identity work of the male adolescents?

From a Foucauldian perspective, I was interested in how the boys constituted themselves as subjects within their school settings through the range of cultural resources made available to them. Analysis of the boys' narratives and reflection on the evidence obtained through from my observations of their enactment of their gendered identities indicated a relationship with certain key discursive masculinising processes and practices. Subject choice carried gender meanings, as the previous data on association and disassociation from the RE discourse indicates. Relationship to sport and physicality emerged as a dominant signifier of masculinity as did relationship to authority, either as conformity or resistance to authority. Together these 'vortices of masculinity' (Connell, 2000) emerged as significant indices of masculinity, central to the performance and maintenance of the masculine subjectivity of the boys I interviewed. I was interested in the relationship between association and disassociation with RE and the boys' connection to these other dominant indices of masculine subjectivity. When asked to describe themselves and their favourite subjects all the boys I spoke to defined themselves in relation to sport and physical education. For some of the boys this was expressed as a hyper-masculine relationship to physicality and sport, also related to other gendered practices such as loyalty, territorialism and in the case of the Valleytown boys, fighting and physical violence.

What follows is a selective snapshot to illustrate the relationship between association and disassociation from RE and the masculine 'truth game' (Martino, 1999) of sport as a masculinising practice.

The Milltown boys I interviewed who associated with the RE discourse were able to display the characteristics of a 'personalised masculinity' (Swain, 2006) through the way in which they performed their identities, demonstrating an artistry of the self as Nick's description of his practice of Kendo demonstrates,

Nick: It's a, erm, it's the martial art, it's the Japanese martial art of the, erm, samurai sword and it's with all the armour and all that and erm...Actually it goes deeper into philosophy as well, the Japanese philosophy...alot of its actual Buddhist teachings.

I asked Nick to explain the relationship between Kendo and Buddhism,

Nick: It's about what everything represents each other...y'know, like how your sword represents your life and like, y'know, your sword is everything and yet but it's nothing without you and stuff like that, so it goes into all that sort of thing...I really like the Japanese culture. I'm actually a big fan of it, and most of my teachers are actually scholars in the culture and Buddhist and all that, so yeah.

In this second example Will shows that whilst he is able to perform his identity through activities, "defined as properly masculine" (Connell, 2000: 158), he stresses his interest in literature, with its more feminine gender meanings, showing he is able to negotiate more than one subject position;

Will : Ok...well...erm...I like sport alot, this year like, I'm doing alot of sport like, tonight I'm going rugby training, tomorrow night I'm going rugby training, and then I go to the gym alot, both Mondays and Fridays and then I play rugby on Sundays...but like...non-sporting activities...I like reading, 'cos, I just like literature generally and I like, erm, I like going to the cinema as well, I like film.

Nick and Will's practices, their interest in sport and physicality, their subject choices and their career/educational trajectories all contributed to their middle class projects of the self and suggest a level of ontological security that enabled them to personalize their masculine identity work.

Like the Milltown boys the relationship between masculine subjectivity and sport as an index of masculinity was striking in the narratives of the Valleytown boys, however they occupied a more complex discursive site and gender regime where factors such as religious and ethnic identity dominated and competing Asian and working class white masculinities seemed to oscillate between truce and conflict. Physicality and physical prowess extended beyond the boundaries of PE and sport for many of the working class Valleytown boys as Kain's narrative illustrates;

Kain: Well, I'm fifteen, I like to go out, play on X box, get...have a drink. I'm not into violence, but if I 'av to, I will do, erm, I like Maths, Excel, RS (Religious Studies), it's quite interesting and that's about it.

Kain elaborated on his references to violence and physicality amongst his peers,

Kain: Every weekend, there's always like people fighting and everything and I just look at it and say I'm not getting involved. If someone like comes up to me and is starting I just say listen, I don't want to start wi' yer, if you want to carry on, I'll just like put you on your behind and if they just walk away, they walk away ,then I walk away. Takes more of a man to walk away.

In the following sequence Jack narrates a discourse around sport and race relations. He had earlier identified himself as 'sporty', with an ambition to become an army physical

fitness instructor. He contextualises his RE, and in this narrative, his sport, in terms of the relationships between white and Asian 'heritage' youths.

Jack: I watched a film 'Remember the Titans', y'know, it's about black and white people having to come together for a game of American football, well it sort of reminds me of this school, 'cos the football team never did well in the school but we always used to have individual good players but never worked as a team and, I don't know, we hadn't won a game in like two year, but it felt good y'know 'cos we came together as a team and then, like when we scored a goal, before all of it, when you scored a goal, you walked off to your white mates, the Asian 'eritage put their 'ead down, obviously like to, like celebrate to themselves, whereas now like when you score a goal we're all diving on each other just, there's no difference now, it's good, but you walk out of school, like you can come into school and you can have such a good day with an Asian 'eritage boy, y'know and get on with 'em, but you can walk out of school and sum u't stuff you see, it's just horrible, some of the things people do to each other, it's just, y'know, it's not right.

For the boys who exhibited a strong disassociation or ambivalence towards RE I noted a greater association with other practices of the self and as the dominant masculinising practice, sport and PE emerged as important sites for their identity work. At Milltown school Brad reflected the view of his peers, indifference to RE, in the year 11 core RE (non-option group) that I interviewed in the following sequence;

Brad: Right if one of us, like? I don't know 'cos none of my friends ...I don't know anyone who's taken RE, any of the boys... I just think boys are just not that into it...I'm sat there thinking about football or something.

Similarly, the year ten core RE (non-option group) at Seaside High express a belief that competition and aggressiveness in sport are naturalised masculine attributes. I asked Carl, who had dismissed RE as a 'sit off subject' with no relevance to his future ambitions why PE was a favourite subject amongst the boys. Carl responded;

Carl: And it's more competitive as well, erm, just like in anything to do with PE, usually its games and your own team and partners so, to win the other team it's just, it gets competitive. Loads of lads like that.

Josh, one of the Seaside High boys who demonstrated a weak association with RE, narrates himself as a hyper masculine subject, a dedicated cadet with an imagined future as a member of the parachute regiment. He describes his relationship with sport as a truth about what it means to be a boy,

Josh: ...I don't play for enjoyment, I play to win, there's no point in second place, it's not worth it. If I'm going to do something, it's all or nothing.

Josh was close friends with Rob and together they spent most of their free time at their local cricket club. In the year eleven group interview Rob's response to my question about favourite subjects makes visible the significance of sport as a key investment in the construction of masculine subjectivity.

Rob: I'm not being sexist but PE is quite a boy subject. It's not the most important subject but it is the most enjoyable. The practical side of PE is more natural and the theory side harder.

In sum this snapshot of the boys' narratives reveals that sport and physical activity is a significant discursive resource for the enactment of desired masculine identity, with boys who associated and boys who disassociated from the RE discourse fashioning

their masculine subjectivities and maintaining their social selves in the school boy hierarchy within the masculine truth game of sport. Where disassociation from the RE discourse is strong, as in the case of the majority of the Seaside High school boys, sport is revealed as a key masculine signifier, however, like the cool boys of Martino's study (1999), these boys are not academic failures, but their social and psychic investments are not in subjects they regard as peripheral or feminine, such as RE.

Relationship to authority

Relationship to authority has been well documented in research (Mac an Ghaill, 1994; Willis, 1977; Connell, 2000; Martino, 1999) as an index of masculinity and a focus for masculinity formation. The theme of authority emerged inductively through the boys' narratives and I was interested in the ways in which the boys who associated with RE related to authority within their school settings, were they the academic 'ear 'oles' of Willis' ethnography, the 'swots' and 'wimps' of Connell's research or the 'poofters' of Martino's analysis? Was it a relationship of compliance or resistance? Equally, I wanted to explore the relationship of disassociation with the RE discourse and the boys' relationship to authority. Again, the empirical research suggests nothing quite as simple as the 'ear 'ole/lad' binary (Willis, 1977).

Association with RE and relationship to authority: "We're the mature people"

The Milltown boys exhibited a strong association with RE and six of the seven boys interviewed demonstrated identification with the aims of their school and their teachers. From the position of ontological security afforded by their social, gender and cultural advantage these boys' identification with authority in the school could be interpreted as a tacit recognition that they too possess authority and will be authorities in their future

lives. In the following narrative Mike, the son of a Policeman, with aspirations to become a lawyer comments:

Mike: One teacher said I was an asset to every classroom, which is good to know...I dunno, I just, it's like erm being rather big headed of me but I'm clever and a bit popular, so the people who tend to be naughty in classes, when they're in the class, like next to me, and they see me working, they start, they tend to start to work, so that's good.

Mike, in common with the other Milltown boys has a relationship with teachers and school that poses no threat to his ontological security. School reinforces and affirms Mike's sense of a stable self and rewards his identity work,

Mike: Well, we're the mature people. I think everyone who picked Philosophy is mature...and RE, it's just when you...in some classes you'll meet you'll get people who'll mess around...I think there's one lesson where people mess around and that's English, yeah.

Mike characterises his RE, (which he refers to as Philosophy), group as the 'mature people', differentiating himself from the majority of his peers whose dominant practices are 'messing around'.

Negotiating contradictory relationships with authority: "I just end up joining in"

The situationally specific dynamics of each research school as the discursive sites in which masculinities are produced and fashioned is powerfully demonstrated by the data collected in Valleytown High School. Displays of anti-authoritarianism at Valleytown High School were one of the ways in which power was exercised by the boys described by one of the Asian girls as 'animals', acting collectively and publically in gangs,

Haneela: Like last year and stuff like it used to be really bad and like kick off with year 11 and there used to be riot vans like just driving by school and keep driving by and police men used to stand outside the school gates.

I was interested in the collective dimension to this gang culture and its performative character. Jack and Saquib demonstrated association with RE. They enjoyed the openness of the discussions and respected their teacher and her skill in managing them and their peers. Superficially they conformed to the working class 'macho lad' type of Mac an Ghaill's (1994) analysis and were regarded by their teachers and their peers as dominant boys, leaders of their respective white and Asian peer groups. Their talk revealed a contradictory relationship to authority. They had reputations as gang leaders and as Jack states, he is agentic, he can be 'good' when he wants to do, but his peer group exercises a strong influence on him. However both boys had been recruited by the school management to lead on student community cohesion and the citizenship project aimed at challenging the very gang culture Jack and Saquib had been instrumental in constructing and sustaining. The school had, in effect, absorbed this oppositional masculinity and re-territorialised it by giving Jack and Saquib a high profile role as male role models for younger pupils. In the following narrative both boys disassociate themselves from the oppositional gang culture they have been recruited to challenge, however, the day after this interview took place Jack and Saquib were both involved in racial gang violence. Jack and Saquib's techniques of the self, involved a complex and contradictory identity performance where they occupied multiple subject positions in contrast with Mike and the Milltown boys' ontologically secure subjectivities,

Jack: We used to look up to people that were bad characters to us, we did look up to bad people, so we sort of went into that, but we've moved into right, we just went our own ways and now people look up to us.

Saquib: And that's how it is in 'it, that's part of growing up like I was saying before, now we look up to bad people y'know what I mean in year seven, that's the whole point in' it they were our role models, now we're in year eleven the whole project was 'cos people in year seven look up to year eleven and they look up to you in a positive way, not oh look he's a gangster I wanna be like him or oh he's knocking him out, you understand? It works like that you've been at school yourself and in year seven you're always looking up to year eleven , oh he's the cock of the year, they always look at the big one.

Jack and Saquib's narratives indicate that for many of the Asian and white boys the 'gangster' discourse which produced influential 'bad people' was a dominant masculinising practice within the school and therefore a key investment for the boys as an index of their masculine identities. The high status oppositional gang culture was also embodied by the boys through symbols, their clothes and postures, captured by one of the middle class Valleytown boys in his description of 'chav' lads as, "walking on a pendulum". All of this evidence suggested that this positioning as a 'cock' or a bad character represented the hight of achievement within the masculine hierarchy amongst the boys and was a resource worth risking one's academic achievements in order to secure as Jack states,

Jack: Er, they'd say, they'd say that when I wanna do sum 'ut, when I set my mind to sum 'ut then I'd be determined to do it, I've got alot of determination, erm in some

subjects they'd say I've got alot of enthusiasm, er, specially PE, so erm, they'd say,

I'm good when I want to be good, I may be getting with the wrong crowds.

Francis: So can you kind of, sort of, pick and choose who you hang around with?

Jack: Yeah, it's not, it's just sometimes when I'm with my mates they be bad, or they

be silly and I just end up joining in.

In this next sequence Saquib describes his relationship to authority,

Saquib: Well, different, because, er when I started I had a bit of er, a shake, a couple

of years I think, messed about, been excluded and attitude problem and stuff like

that, that's why I thought, I don't know, but like obviously the teachers I've had now

they'll, they'll probably say, I don't know what they'll say, I probably still have a bit

of an attitude problem still sometimes, but I'm good like, y'know a good person,

y'know when I'm on the level I'm a good person to talk to. I try hard.

From a poststructural perspective, Jack and Saquib's subject positions are constructions, performances they work hard at, the cultural fictions produced by powerful gendered social practices, the truth games around what it means to be a boy in the disciplinary space of the high school.

Disassociation from RE and rejection of authority: "An absolute pain in the bum"

In contrast, the less socially and culturally complex discursive site of Seaside High school produced fewer threats to ontological security. George articulated a strong disassociation from the RE discourse. His imagined future and desired future masculinity derived from his interest in making things and engineering. George, like many of the Seaside boys, exhibited the qualities of Martino's middle class cool boys with their stylised demeanour. He simply had no need for RE as resource for his

identity work and regarded it as 'pointless'. He identified strongly with his male IT teacher, who he describes as almost a 'mate', and as this narrative indicates, where he disassociates with subjects with more feminine gender meanings, such as English his relationship to authority shifts,

George: A few years back, y'know, an absolute pain in the bum, but now I'm much more...more, I think they'd generally describe me as quite a nice lad I think, a few years back it was y'know, I had teachers refusing to teach me, that kind of thing, so I was bad. I was. I was bad... They had a little book for me in the staffroom, y'know, when I'd been bad. They have all sorts in that staffroom, have you been in? I don't know if it's still in there, I believe so, so they had books on me, it's how I ended up in this class. I got kicked out of the old one into here. I was quite bad, and I still am in some cases but the same time, er, I was sent downstairs in English and I don't get on with her at all, she doesn't respect me and they always say, oh it's both ways and that but you don't get any respect from her she screams all the time alot.

George rejected subjects that he characterised as 'theory'. In common with other less compliant Seaside Town boys such as Josh and Rob, George's social practices as, "a pain in the bum," were not connected to a working class location, however these boys' talk revealed strong evidence of culturally exalted masculinising practices which produced a dominant culture of confident, ontologically secure molar masculinity, where sport, academic success, on a middle class professional or business trajectory were the desired masculine futures. However mischief and having a laugh in subjects which were perceived as irrelevant to these futures was a feature of these normalising practices.

When asked about the relative appeal of RE to boys and girls, in the group interview, the year 11 boys, including Rob and his peers offered the following narrative,

Rob: Boys are more bothered about what their mates think.

Josh: Mind you, I wouldn't care if a gay lad fancied me!

Rob: Yeah but, I'm taking RE for 'A' level that would just take the biscuit!

[Group laughter]

Phil: Boys wouldn't take it unless they were feminine.

Josh: Yeah, lads who were gay, more in touch with their feelings.

[Group laughter]

I found similar evidence of this masculinising of the curriculum in the group interviews with the Seaside town year ten boys, and the Milltown non-option year eleven boys. However, what this data does indicate is the way in which the masculine subjectivities of these Seaside town boys were sustained and constructed through differentiation from anything that they regarded as feminine. Similarly, this extract points to the way in which gendered identities are also constructed within local communities of masculinity practice contrasting with the narratives of the Valleytown boys who didn't attribute feminine meanings to RE.

Conclusion

In sum the data presented demonstrates that as a discursive resource RE is taken up by some of the boys in the study as part of their 'project of the self', that is, their wider masculine project and has implications for how these boys constitute themselves as ethical subjects through their engagement with the RE field of enquiry and how RE

connects to their imagined futures, the career and educational trajectories that form part of their project of the masculine self. The data also reveals the boys' relationship to social and cultural difference, in some cases within their own communities and for some by their encounter with ontological and cultural pluralism through the RE curricula.

Where disassociation of the masculine self from the RE discourse was identified the boys' narratives demonstrate that RE was not an identity resource they chose to utilize. For these boys their masculine identity work was performed through other subject choices and it was in those subjects that their social and psychic energies were invested. Disengagement with the RE field of enquiry, its ethical questions and in many cases, a conflation between a negative characterisation of religion and RE, gave rise to strong disassociation. The masculine gender politics of Valleytown High School, expressed as ambivalence and animosity between the white and Asian boys also emerged through the boys' narratives as a factor which produced disassociation from the RE discourse. For the boys who disassociated with RE, the subject was not relevant to their project of the future masculine self, their career aspirations and, 'imagined futures'.

In the next chapter the implications of these findings will be analysed in the light of poststructuralist theory of Foucault, Butler and Deleuze with the aim of achieving a critical deconstruction of the masculinising discourses that shaped the boys' subjectivities.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion

Introduction

This investigation began because of my own experiences as a teacher and an ITT tutor working in RE. My encounter with the disciplines of religious studies and sociology as an undergraduate student had been a critical turning point in the shaping of my own subjectivity, leading me into teaching and ultimately to my work as an ITT tutor. Throughout my career I had experienced greater engagement with RE from female students, a gender differential still evident in the undergraduate and postgraduate RE ITT courses I deliver. The OfSTED RE subject conference I attended in 2005 focussed on what it described as the 'persistent underachievement of boys in RE' and it was as a result of the findings presented at the conference and my engagement with critical masculinities theory at Keele University that the proposal for this thesis emerged.

In this chapter I present a series of reflections, critically reviewing my methodological standpoint, reflecting on ethics, validity, and I offer a summary of the main findings with recommendations for future research.

Reflections on methodology and method

"The ethnographic life is not separable from the Self", Richardson writes that the critical qualitative researcher should not flinch from where writing takes him/her critically, politically, spiritually and emotionally to, "evoke new questions about the self and the subject...or even alter one's sense of identity" (Richardson in Denzin and Lincoln, eds. 2005:965). I wish to start the final chapter of this thesis with some observations around the personal and intellectual journey that this study has taken me on by considering the rhizomatic relationship between my subjectivity, encounters with

poststructuralism and my relationship with the boys. Ethics, method and methodology all intersect here and connect. My project is, to use Richardson's words, "humanly situated, always filtered through human eyes and human perception, and bearing both the limitations and the strengths of human feelings" (Richardson in Denzin and Lincoln, eds. 2005: 964.

I believe that the validity of my project stems from its authenticity and reflexivity, its situatedness in my own personal and professional journey- I hold myself accountable to, "the standards of knowing and telling of the people" I have studied (Richardson in Denzin and Lincoln, eds. 2005:964). Prior to registering for the Ed.D I had been interested in an untheorised and tacit way in the nature of boys' relationships to RE in my own practice as a teacher but also in respect of the emergence of policy discourses of the failing boy in the nineties, of which I had become aware- so, these discourses were also acting on my professional subjectivity.

There is, of course, another dimension to this focus. An enquiry into the relationship between male subjectivity and RE is also an enquiry into my own subjectivity. Like a Deleuzean line of flight my 'connection' with poststructuralist theory has not only served as an interpretive tool to interrogate the boys' subjectivities, but it has also helped me to develop my sociological imagination and fashioned my subjective gaze and standpoint on the social.

My adoption of poststructuralist theory, particularly the concept of discourse has been especially powerful in producing a significant shift in my own self understanding and understanding of others. Theoretically I had been shaped in the phenomenological traditions of critical Religious Studies and its Husserlian propositions that, "there is a layer of pre-linguistic meaning that language can express" (St.Pierre in Denzin and

Lincoln, eds. 2005:968), an essence that could be got at through social actors' talk. Transcribing the boys' narratives and reflecting on my classroom observations produced a powerful realisation of the discursive nature of their identities and the discourses at work in their lives, producing their subjectivities. This realisation has been something of an epiphany producing, what I wish to argue, is empirical evidence for post structuralist theory- the boys I spoke to were performing discursively produced identities through the masculine 'truth games', the dominant discourses about school boy masculinity that Martino and Connell had described. As I transcribed my interview data the presence of these discourses operating through what I have come to refer to as masculinising processes of subject choice, sport, physicality and the ongoing construction of a masculine self through imagined futures, the project of the self have shown how discourse constitutes the masculine subject. The multiple subject positions of boys described by Jane, like Saquib, who were able to perform an identity as both a religious Muslim and a gang leader demonstrate the very contingency, the situational nature and fluidity of these identity constructions which are by no means essential or fixed as Archer acknowledges in her ethnographies of Muslim male adolescents,

> "While the boys claimed authentic Muslim identities through a notion of strength of feeling, or belief, they also acknowledged their more peripheral location in relation to ideals of Muslim identity as enacted through religious practices" (Archer, 2003:54).

However, it is the very fluidity of the boys' discursive identities that opens up possibilities for resignification and reconstruction of identities through education as I have outlined in the previous section. The ariel, creative and playful horizons that open up through the adoption of Deleuzean concepts such as nomadic thought and rhizomatics have inspired me as a researcher and as an education professional.

Interpreting the data and writing this thesis has not been tidy or linear. Encountering poststructuralism has required considerable intellectual efforts on my part as I have embarked on qualitative research in a context where there are few signposts for poststructuralist empirical fieldwork- indeed, as I have shown in my methodology chapter, foundationalism has been critiqued in the 'turn to narrative' that has produced poststructural theory. I believe my choice of theory and methods have been justified in as much as I have the reference points provided by the feminist poststructuralist scholars Lather, Pillow and St.Pierre- I have also been 'working the ruins' (Lather, in St.Pierre and Pillow, 2000) of foundationalism.

I have had to undertake some challenging methodological re-conceptualisations, replacing what might have seemed like the easier option of phenomenological case study field work with my notion of the research setting as a discursive site with no ontological foundation. I have become deeply sceptical of the notion of a phenomenological essence and the concept of the epoche strikes me as hermeneutical naivety- I have been compelled to venture into poststructuralism to find valid alternatives for this enquiry to take place. As a result I have developed the concept of 'masculinising processes' and applied Deleuzean concepts such as the molar/minor dyad in the field of school boy masculinities in a way that has not been evident in my own literature searches. My writing, with its provisional interpretations is a nomadic 'field of play', where the old meanings of qualitative research have been loosened and where, "thought happened in the writing" (St.Pierre, in Denzin and Lincoln, eds. 2005: 970) through drafting, transcribing and reflection.

Ethics

There is also a clear ethical dimension to this fieldwork, which I believe is related to the questions of what type of methodology, method and interpretation should be adopted to make some sense of my empirical data. I followed both BERA (2004) and the British Association of Sociology (2002) guidelines, by securing informed consent from all the research participants, emphasising right to withdrawal, confidentiality and anonymity at all points in the data gathering process. Respect for persons, particularly given the age of the young males I was interviewing was central to my conduct as an interviewer. I was able to use my own professional skills as a former teacher, familiar with talking to adolescent boys, to help me conduct the interviews in a non- intrusive manner. The semi structured interview schedule provided enough scope for the often illuminating unprompted tangential serendipities of the boys' narratives to emerge in the naturalistic manner I had hoped for- but the existence of a schedule meant there was enough structure to prevent the exchange to drift into peripheral issues. The boys knew I was a former teacher but didn't relate to me as such, they saw me as a researcher from a University, and I believe this perception was instrumental in achieving a degree of trust and therefore authenticity I sought through the interviews. The power differential that exists between teachers and pupils was not strongly apparent in my relationships with the boys and I consciously avoided any such relationship in the research gathering process.

Revisiting the social space of school required me to reflect on my relationship to the boys as the fieldwork developed. I found myself inspired, irritated, concerned and at times annoyed by them. As an adult attempting to renegotiate entry into the social worlds of adolescent boys I found it useful to strategically retreat from the research sites at the end of the school day and reflect on their talk to avoid data saturation and to

regain my critical sociological perspective. My ethical practice intersects with questions of validity and I believe this study adheres to criteria identified by Denzin as characteristics of the goals of critical research, and is therefore both valid and ethical:

- The thesis presents "in-depth, intimate stories of problematic everyday life lived up close."

- It requires the perspective of an ethnographer who is "an expert in the life of the local community, 'who knows how to listen to and talk to citizens.'"

- It seeks, "dramatic stories, narratives that separate facts from stories, telling moving accounts that join private troubles with public issues" (Denzin, 2003: 264-265).

In the next section I wish to demonstrate how my investigation achieved the above through a summary of the main findings and most importantly offer critical consideration of the implications of these findings for new directions in the field of RE, gender and masculinities research.

Meeting the research objectives

The aim of this thesis is to critically explore the relationship between adolescent males' masculine subjectivity and the religious education discourse. My research objectives are framed in the following research questions:

1. In what ways do the adolescent males associate with the RE discourse?

2. In what ways do the adolescent males dissociate and resist the RE discourse?

3. How does the RE discourse challenge or reinforce the masculine subjectivities of the adolescent males?

4. In what ways does association or disassociation with RE connect to other discursive practices apparent in the identity work of the male adolescents?

My qualitative field work has enabled me to collect rich narratives of association which demonstrate that where RE is taken up as a discursive resource by some of the boys as part of their project of the self, it contributes to their constitution as subjects of knowledge, as ethical subjectivities and as social subjects, in some cases within their own communities and for some by their encounter with ontological and cultural pluralism through the RE curricula.

Similarly, my field work and interview schedule have produced empirical data which signals that where disassociation of the masculine self from the RE discourse occurred, RE was not an identity resource the boys chose to utilize. For these boys their masculine identity work was performed through other subject choices and it was in those subjects that their social and psychic energies were invested. Disengagement with the RE field of enquiry, its ethical questions and in many cases, a conflation between a negative characterisation of religion and RE, gave rise to strong disassociation. For the boys who disassociated with RE, the subject was not relevant to their project of the future masculine self, their career aspirations and, 'imagined futures'. The masculine gender politics of Valleytown High School, expressed as ambivalence and animosity between the white and Asian boys also emerged through the boys' narratives as a factor which produced disassociation from the RE discourse.

I have also aimed to explore the relationship between association and disassociation with the RE discourse and the other discursive practices evident through the boys' identity work. Using Deleuze and Guattari's figurative concept of the rhizome, I wanted to explore what might appear at first sight to be a disparate connection between

the boys' association with the masculinising social processes of sport, physicality, violence, conformity or resistance to authority their imagined futures and subject choice through RE; however, these are all aspects of their identity work that is: technologies made available to the discursive self. A rhizo-analysis of the boys' narratives of the self requires a new way of looking at their talk about themselves, in a way which nullifies beginnings and endings, as Deleuze and Guattari state, "is it not of the essence of the rhizome to intersect roots and sometimes merge them?" (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004b:14). It is this very 'intersection' between the boys' practices in relation to key masculine signifiers and their association with the RE discourse that I wished to explore in order to further illuminate the ways in which the boys actively constituted their subjectivities.

The interview data pointed to the existence of a gendered hierarchy of subjects, with PE emerging as a consistent favourite amongst the boys. The data therefore reflects Connell's (2000) argument that subject choices are one of the three 'vortices of masculinity' through which gendered subjectivity is fashioned within the high school context.

For the small group of boys who had opted for RE at Milltown High School, there was a sense that picking RE required them to go against the practices of their male peer group who had picked vocational subjects or PE as their main GCSE option. However, they were able to successfully negotiate this dissonance as highly visible members of the school sports teams, maintaining their gendered identities as masculine subjects. Significantly, these boys' talk points to the way in which their RE classroom functioned as a liminal space in contrast with the gendered dynamics within the disciplinary space of the sports field or other classroom settings.

The data also indicates that the boy's identities are fashioned in localised sites with situationally specific dynamics, as suggested by the narratives of the Valleytown boys. As contradictory subjects some of these boys articulated a strong narrative of association with RE valuing it as a form of cultural knowledge that helped reduce racial tensions and promoted openness in the classroom between white and Asian youths. However, this discourse of understanding was revealed as fragile, when exposed to the tensions of competing white and Asian masculine peer groups within the wider gendered disciplinary space of the school and the local community. The data also demonstrates the ways in which the Muslim Asian youths were able to re-territorialize the RE discourse to validate their own, albeit, contradictory, Islamic masculinities.

The narratives of the Seaside High boys revealed the strongest disassociation of the masculine self from the RE discourse, with some of the boys positioning RE as a feminine subject that boys who were, 'in touch with their feelings' or gay boys would undertake. Both year ten and year eleven boys in their group interviews, articulate a gendered discourse which positions the girls as emotional and able to respond emotionally to topics considered in the RE classroom and the boys as emotionally unresponsive. Significantly, some of these boys were aware that these disciplinary discursive practices are socially fashioned and monitored by the male peer group and they understand the social value of maintaining the 'constructed' masculine self.

In summary this overview of the themes identified in the empirical data indicate that the boys are engaged in the construction, performance and maintenance of a masculine self, a project which exhibits a degree of agency but only in the context of the discursive parameters they find themselves operating within. The boys' performance of the self involves the negotiation of more than one subject position, confirming the contingent nature of masculine subjectivity and the multiple ways of being a boy.

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Constructing the masculine self

A central premise of this study is the concept of masculine identity work, the construction of subjectivity. Analysis of the boys' narratives has already demonstrated that they were engaged in the discursive process of becoming masculine through a range of masculinising practices, characterised by Connell as the 'vortices of masculinity', panoptic disciplinary practices enacted through sport, physicality, relationship to authority and subject choice within the situationally specific contexts of the research sites. Of particular interest to me was the relationship of the boys I interviewed to these masculinising social processes and their engagement or disengagement with RE. Were they 'other' boys, the 'squids' and 'poofters' of Martino's study, or the 'swots' and 'wimps' of Connell's analysis? Were they the 'academic achievers' or the middle class 'Real Englishmen' of Mac an Ghaill's ethnography?

My findings indicate that the boys' identity work and narratives of the self were fashioned through their relationship to what Connell describes as the vortices of masculinity, or what I would argue following Martino's poststructural perspective, are the 'games of truth', dominant discourses about what it means to be a man. In this context my investigation shares the same preoccupation as Foucault's work on the hermeneutic of the subject, as stated in the following:

> "I have tried to discover how the human subject entered into games of truth, whether they be games of truth which take on the form of science...or games of truth like those that can be found in institutions or practices of control" (Foucault, 1984: 112).

The interviews indicate that from their relative position of ontological security, the Milltown boys were able to negotiate a range of subject positions, with the

characteristics of 'personalised masculinity' (Swain, 2006), simultaneously able to enjoy the gendered space of masculine competitive sport and then enter the egalitarian space of the RE classroom. On first analysis it seemed easy to account for the Milltown boys' ability to occupy these subject positions. At one level these boys' subjectivities appeared to be shaped by what Connell (2000) refers to as the, "mechanism of educational credentials", where the central themes of their masculine identity work are, "rationality and responsibility rather than pride and aggressiveness" (Connell, 2000:140). James and Nick aspired to be journalists. Mike and Dan's constructions of a future self, lay in careers in law and the CID. RE, or 'philosophy', as a GCSE option available to academically able pupils provided these boys with validation of their successful projects of the self. It might be argued that RE was part of their practice of 'credentialling', as Connell (2000) argues,

> "Young men from more privileged class backgrounds are here, so to speak, from the start. Their families' collective practice is likely to be organized around credential and careers from before they were born" (Connell, 2000:140).

However, as Coulter (2003) suggests in her paper on gender equity projects in high school, 'Boys doing good', young men can, "become agents in a new political project", becoming part of the solution where social justice projects are being developed. Similarly, as Connell argues the men who go on to engage with the complexities of critical thinking, ethics, politics and social issues, "are likely to be from privileged class backgrounds" (Connell, 2000: 144).

Where disassociation from the RE discourse was strong, as in the case of the majority of the Seaside High School boys, sport was revealed as a key masculine signifier. However, like the cool boys of Martino's study (1999), the Seaside boys were not academic failures, but their social and psychic investments were not in subjects they

regarded as peripheral or feminine, such as RE. Like their Milltown peers, these boys occupied a similar middle class cultural location and the practice of credentialism was evident in their narratives, yet no male pupils opted for GCSE RS in that setting.

Sport and physicality emerged as dominant practices and masculine markers for the Valleytown boys, taking on a raced dimension through the social gender politics of white and Asian gang culture. The gang violence of the Valleytown boys aligns to Butler's analysis of performativity (2006), as a ritual social drama and a masculinising practice, legitimising the power of the rival gangs as powerful story line within the school boy culture of Valleytown high. Jack's tendency to join in with his mates and Saquib's attitude problem can be accounted for as gendered school boy 'ritual social dramas' (Butler, 2000: 191). The persistence of the territorialism and the physicality of gang culture struck me as part of this social drama; this was the way these boys were performing gender and achieving their desired masculine identities (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004a).

However, the fragility of these identity constructions became apparent in Jack's discussion of RE. Jack described himself to me as 'open minded' and when asked about the relevance of RE to his life, he responded that he and his peers were 'living it', that is living the social realities of religious and cultural pluralism and it was this which predisposed him to RE. The epistemological openness Murad, Saquib, Kain and Jack demonstrated within the political space of the RE classroom contrasted with their gendered practices in the contested raced and gendered spaces created through the high stakes social drama of their gang member identity performance. Notwithstanding the social reality of the cultural tensions evident in Valleytown, my fieldwork shows that where the RE discourse is taken up by masculine subjects it offers an alternative

discourse to the masculine metanarrative, with potential to produce greater ontological freedoms as I shall now argue in my consideration of the implications of my research.

New directions

In terms of current scholarship on gender and RE, my adoption of a poststructuralist perspective presents radically new directions for qualitative research into learner engagement in RE and potentially offers new possibilities for both RE pedagogy and policy. The theoretical implications of a Deleuzean and Foucauldian analysis are considerable. The literature on school boy masculinities is extensive, whereas literature on the relationship between boys' identity work and religious and values education is virtually nonexistent. This thesis therefore represents a contribution to this field. My conclusions aren't final by any means, simply my provisional interpretations, new trajectories, lines of flight through which the educational potential of what I characterise as a 'nomadic' pedagogy are described. The boys' narratives of association, I propose, suggest ways in which the RE discourse offers ontological possibilities for self-creation, for constituting the self as an ethical subject, for deterritorialising and resignifying the molar self through encounter with social and cultural difference and perhaps becomes minoritarian where opportunities for nomadic thought are provided within the liminal space of the RE classroom.

The 'big questions' narratives of association which emerged most strongly in the interviews with the Milltown boys reflect the emphasis on 'ultimate questions' within RE practice. On initial reflection, from my standpoint as a former RE classroom practitioner, there is nothing unusual or novel about these findings. However, throughout this project I have sought to make the familiar strange in order to develop a critical reflexive perspective, but also to examine new possibilities for the pedagogy of

RE. In particular, I was struck by the narratives of the year ten philosophers, Nick, Dan, Will and Mike who articulated a capacity to think differently and expansively through their RE. The boys narrated their disillusionment with what Nick called 'clockwork subjects', maths and science with their masculine subject meanings. Theoretically the boys' narratives suggest new directions for educational programmes which function as 'nomadic spaces' in the curriculum.

The narratives of association point to ways, in which RE can create new territory, epistemologically open 'nomadic' spaces in the curriculum which can begin to disrupt molar masculine subjectivity- a process which Deleuze and Guattari call, 'transformational pragmatics' (Deleuze and Guattari, in Semetsky, 2007). Pedagogically this concept refers to new ways of thinking, perceiving and feeling produced through encounter with cultural and ontological pluralism and is therefore, "oriented towards becoming-other" and, "overcoming one's old mode of knowledge and existence" and producing new modes of being, "characterised by new percepts and new affects" (Deleuze in Semetsky, 2007: 210). In Deleuzean philosophy these thought experiments with new concepts teach us to think 'differently', as Deleuze states,

> "Once one ventures outside what's familiar and reassuring...one has to invent new concepts for unknown lands" (Deleuze in Semetsky, 2008: 154).

In a similar way the 'everyday life' narratives of association signalled the ways in which the boys were using their RE to constitute themselves as ethical subjects. From a Foucauldian perspective this process of identity work is an expression of the 'care for self', (Foucault, 1984:118).

The Milltown boys' 'big questions' narratives, Josh's critical 'getting the real story' narrative and the Valleytown boys' 'getting it out in the open' narratives all signalled a

capacity to think critically as well as ethically and nomadically through the creation of new concepts. The evidence from these narratives therefore points to RE as an educational technology which when taken up enables processes of self-constitution to take place. Foucault's final lectures on the 'culture of the self' explore the concept of *parresia*, 'truth telling' and 'free-spokenness'. He argues that where modern philosophy takes up these practices, it is taking up the 'mode of being' of ancient Greek philosophy, that is, by seeking to critique truth claims, philosophy challenges, "deception, trickery, and illusion" (Foucault, 2010:354). To engage in this philosophical parresia is also, '*ascesis*', that is, "constitution of the subject by himself" and has as its object, a 'becoming', the, "process of the transformation of the subject" (Foucault, 2010:354). Foucault's concept of parresia resonates with the boys' narratives which reveal an emergent, albeit stuttering relationship to questions of truth, moral obligation, ethics and cultural difference. In this way it can be argued that RE enabled engagement with parresiastic projects, greater experimentation in thought as they begin to 'problematise the problematic' (Gould, 2007) and perhaps become nomadic subjects as Semetsky (2007) argues, these boys are also beginning to 'constitute problems' for themselves.

Where disassociation from RE was evidenced, a key feature of the boys' narratives was a distancing from the RE field of enquiry and the processes I have characterised as parresia and transformational pragmatics. These practices were irrelevant as resources for the construction of a desired masculine self, indeed, as the narratives show; such practices were positioned as feminine by some of the boys. If, as Olson (2010) argues, to encounter the 'Other' is to change, these boys weren't changing. They were decidedly closed to the horizon of alterity and cultural plurality offered through engagement with the liberal RE discourse. In some cases there was a rejection of

cultural difference and evidence of an 'othering' narrative evidenced in the talk of some of the white Valleytown boys and specifically the Seaside boy, George. George rejected the value of RE as a form of cultural knowledge on the basis that since he wasn't a Hindu, he had no need to learn about Hinduism. His talk encapsulated what Deleuze and Guattari refer to as 'molar subjectivity' and there was no sense that he could become rent from his 'standard of measure' (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004b).

Interestingly there was also a conflation of RE with religion in the talk of some of the boys such as Harry and George. What is central to this analysis is that the gendered subjectivities of the boys are situated and fashioned within the discursive contours of a postmodern time, in which 'religion'[6] is decentred, thus adding a further factor to the production of their narratives of disassociation.

The narratives of disassociation and the refusal of some boys to take up the offer of exploratory, pluralistic RE are described in this study, however, if my argument for a nomadic pedagogy is to become no more than theory some consideration must be given to the current state of RE policy and practice. Is RE ever fully capable of being a vehicle for critical, expansive nomadic pedagogy?

Policy, practice and implications for future research

The boys' narratives suggest directions for the development of a nomadic RE curricula however any such innovation will take place within the broader context of the coalition government's policy priorities in education, as outlined in the DfE White Paper (2010). The narratives of association reveal a capacity for critical thinking, epistemological openness to ethical questions, social and political awareness of social and cultural plurality. For a nomadic pedagogy to thrive in RE, syllabi and curricula that privilege

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[6] 'The grand narrative has lost its credibility, regardless of what mode of unification it uses, regardless of whether it is a speculative narrative or a narrative of emancipation' Lyotard, 2005:37

critical thinking must be retained and, I would argue, developed further to encourage 'enquiry'. OfSTED's 2010 long report on RE presents an argument for 'enquiry' based RE where pupils take responsibility for setting up enquiries into religion. The OfSTED 2007 report also resonates with the arguments of boys like Josh, or even George who exhibited a deeply critical view of RE which presented religions in a surface level way, as a dry, irrelevant collection of facts with no interrogation of truth claims or consideration of the political implications of religion,

> "RE cannot ignore controversy. We should dispense with the notion that we should encourage pupils to think uncritically of religion as a 'good thing'. Religion is complex and its impact is ambiguous. Pupils are aware of this ambiguity and must be given the opportunity to explore the issues openly" (Ofsted, 2007:40).

My interviews with the boys who thought RE was irrelevant are amongst the most useful for educators seeking to engage learners. The evidence of my interviews suggests the influence of powerful social discourses about what it means to be a man and a male shape the decisions and actions of young males in respect of their educational choices and therefore their ontological possibilities. The 'getting the real story' narrative of Josh, even Harry's observations that there was no religious narrative in the lives of his white working class peers show these boys need an enquiry based RE which is authentic and speaks to their existential concerns.

Andrew Wright argues that a critical RE must take account of young peoples' position in a society,

> "That offers contrasting and conflicting accounts of the ultimate order of things, making it, fundamentally important that we provide pupils with an education capable of enabling them to begin to make sense of conflicting and contradictory understanding of the universe and our place within it" (Wright, 2004: 173).

To cite Paulo Freire in bell hook's essay on feminist pedagogy (1989) it is this sort of critical pedagogy described by Wright that sees "education as the practice of freedom."

RE is concerned with questions of identity, meaning and purpose and provides a forum where critical questions of social, gender and racial justice can be interrogated and where pupils can reflect on that most traditional concern of philosophy, their own 'identity'. It is my hope that this research provides some insights into ways that RE can contribute to, and develop strategies to enable full participation of all learners in a programme that enables the ontological possibilities of both boys and girls to be fulfilled. How then might my conclusions translate into practice and what recommendations can be made for future policy?

The debates about the character and purpose of RE which are taking place in the academic and professional RE community in the light of the DfE's proposed reviews of the National Curriculum must take into account the recommendations made in OfSTED 2007 and 2010 for a critical enquiry based RE if it is to engage all learners, irrespective of gender. Marginalisation of RE/RS from the English baccalaureate may have implications for the development of the subject; however, effective theoretically and pedagogically informed practice on the ground will always have an impact on learners. The DfE state that primary legislation for RE will not change, but in a climate of financial cut backs, closure of some ITT provision in RE, the argument for new approaches to pedagogy, teacher education and research in RE is compelling if the subject is to prosper by being perceived by learners as relevant to their concerns. The messages within the DfE 2010 white paper appear to be contradictory. On the one hand there is a welcome recognition of the need to free teachers from the over prescription of the national curriculum, but on the other hand there is a reassertion of the need for subject content, a body of knowledge, presumably at the expense of skills and processes. After twenty two years in state education my experience teaches me that policy pronouncements are rarely operationalised in a smooth and unproblematic

fashion at the local level- their success or failure is contingent on a number of factors, principally the will and the capacity of the people charged with their implementation. Whatever these policy positions assert, there is, as Foucault has argued, always the possibility of a resisting discourse and the production of such critical and resisting discourses is present both in the RE academic and professional community.

To this end I seek to contribute to the ongoing development of pedagogical models in RE through future research into the development and the implementation of educational programmes modelled around Deleuzean concepts of the rhizome and nomadic thought, to be applied in the RE classroom. My research at Valleytown high school has also made visible the operation of complex discourses of religious, ethnic and cultural identity on masculine subjectivity. Simplistic reduction of Asian male learners' identities to the category 'Asian heritage' fails to recognise the interaction of factors such as caste, regional identity, and religious affiliation. I wish to pursue further research into the production of masculine subjectivity amongst underrepresented groups such as the refugee and asylum seeker children I encounter in schools and the community, who are making challenging transitions into UK society and schools as they connect with the discursive sites of UK culture.

Both projects have a common theme, the exploration of the social subject- in- process, the becoming-other of Deleuzean thought, through narrative and the ontological possibilities offered through education as the 'practice of freedom'.

A personal and professional journey

The production of this thesis, and its provisional arguments, are part of a reflexive nomadic journey in thought and theory, but by no means an end point-the thesis as self-contained authoritative singularity. My encounter with poststructuralism, or to use a

Deleuzean expression 'connection' has produced new territories in my own thought, rhizomatic connections between learner subjectivity, subject choice and gendered identity. Not least of all my relationship with myself, *'rapport a soi'*, has shifted as I come to reconceptualise my own identity as a masculine subjectivity in transition, in becoming- but that was one of the principal reasons for embarking on this project. As an educator and novice researcher working with, what are for me, new perspectives of sociological theory has been deeply rewarding and most significantly has provided me with the resource to continue working with the projects outlined above. I am aware of the limitations of this work, the constraints of wordage, and it is, therefore presented as open to reinterpretation, under erasure in the light of new insights and theory. There is still much work to be done around the gendered subjectivities of the male learner-citizens of our schools. It is the experience of working in the 'field' which has confirmed to me the value of social research in making visible what had seemed abstract to me, (perhaps as a result of my positioning as a highly privileged 'invisible' gendered subject), that is, the material effects of discourses which are fashioning the very real choices, possibilities and life chances of the boys I met. I agree with Goodchild when he writes that,

> "Thoughts are the genes of the spirit. They will only maintain their appeal if they can form some kind of alliance with what we do" (Goodchild, 1996:211).

So, it is within this spirit of alliance between social theory and the 'social' that I wish to continue subsequent projects, projects in which,

> "Life will no longer be made to appear before the categories of thought; thought will be plunged into the categories of life" (Deleuze, in Goodchild, 1996:211).

Conclusion

To conclude, I believe RE has provided a particularly powerful lens through which the performance of gendered identity has become visible. Of the three sites, Valley Town High School revealed, most keenly, the operation of a discourse of masculinity and the desires of the adolescent masculine research participants. The material power effects of this dominant masculine discourse were captured most aptly by Jack in his observation that he just, "ends up joining in" with fighting and other resistant masculinising behaviours.

However, it is Jack and Saquib's multiple and contradictory subject positions which also point to the possibility of resignification through encounter with alternative discourses offered through the educational technology of RE. In a sense this is where ruptures appear in the dominant masculine discourse. The Milltown 'philosophers' similarly negotiated their subject positions as socially and academically successful boys, performing the masculine 'truth game' with a reflexive self-awareness of a gendered curriculum where PE or Technology were the 'natural' choices of their male peers.

It is my view that this study demonstrates that the choices boys make should be taken seriously by policy makers, critical theorists and educators. The complexity of the pluralistic social, cultural and gendered landscape that these boys must negotiate, means that 'encounter with difference', epistemological openness and nomadic thought are more than just "fun and games", (Foucault, in Deleuze and Guattari, 2004 a). The previous century witnessed regimes of terror based on totalising concepts of truth and race, prompting Deleuze's observation that the majoritarian standard of our times is the "white, armed male" (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004b). Educational programmes such as

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critical RE offer alternative discourses, technologies of the self, enabling education to function as philosophy, enabling learners to think 'otherwise', and thus question dominant constructions of subjectivity, 'becoming-other' through education as the "practice of freedom" (Foucault, in Peters ed. 1998: 69).

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Field work schedule

1. **Research site: Milltown high school**

Observation week: 03.11.08

Group interviews:

11.11.08

Year 11 GCSE option group (girls)

Year 11 Core RE non-option group (boys)

Year 10 GCSE option group (boys)

12.11.08

Year 10 GCSE option group (boys)

Individual interviews

18.11.08 Dan & Will

19.11.08 Mike & Nick

25.11.08 Wayne

26.11.08 James

28.11.08 Class teacher

2. **Research site: Valleytown high school**

Observation week: 24.12.08

Group interviews:

05.12.08

Year 10 Compulsory GCSE group (girls)

Year 11 Compulsory GCSE group (boys)

09.01.09

Year 10 Compulsory GCSE group (boys)

13.01.09

Year 11 Compulsory GCSE group (boys)

Individual interviews

09.01.09 Paul& Simon

16.01.09 Jack & Kain

20.01.09 Saquib

22.01.09 Murad

23.01.09 Class teacher

3. **Research site: Seasidetown high school**

Observation week: 09.02.09

Group interviews:

24.02.09 Year 11 compulsory 'core' RE non GCSE group 1 (boys)

Year 11 compulsory 'core' RE non GCSE group 2 (boys)

27.02.09

Year 10 compulsory 'core' RE non GCSE group 1 (boys)

11.03.09

Year 10 compulsory 'core' RE non GCSE group 1 (girls)

Individual interviews

10.03.09 Josh & George

20.03.09 Rob & Anthony

01.04.09 Tom& Mark

01.05.09 Class teacher

Appendix 2. Student consent letter

[insert date]

Dear Student-

My name is Francis Farrell. I am a researcher from Edge Hill University's Faculty of Education. I work in University's secondary education programme and as part of my role I research the secondary curriculum. I'm interested in student opinions of their learning to help me and my teacher colleagues understand more about how we can make learning an enjoyable and rewarding experience for students like your selves. You may be aware that the education world has become very focussed on the achievement of boys and girls. Some education research suggests that girls do better than boys in certain subjects, RE being one of the subjects where girls generally achieve higher results in their GCSEs and 'A' levels. Recent data shows that RE is becoming a lot more popular with boys who are getting better results.

I'd like to invite you, with the permission of your parents/guardians and your RE teacher to join with me and a small group of your peers for a group interview 'discussion' group to discuss your views on RE.

I hope that you feel able to join me and I look forward to hearing your opinions. Everything you say will be treated in total confidence.

- You won't be named in the research. If I include any of your comments you will be anonymised.

- Your school and your teachers won't be named, they will be anonymised.

- If you decide you want to withdraw from this research you can do at any point.

- If you decide you don't want me to use your comments in the research I won't- I'll only go ahead with full permission from you and your parent(s)/guardian(s).

- If there's anything you don't understand I'll make it clear for you.

If you are able to join me please ask your parent/guardian to make a note in your planner confirming they are happy for you to go ahead and sign the consent form attached below. Your thoughts and ideas will help contribute to our thinking about how we can make your learning the best possible experience.

Best Wishes-

Francis Farrell- RE Course Leader/Senior Lecturer, Secondary Programmes.

Student name:

Student consent: I (wish to/do not wish to) to participate in group and individual interviews on the topic of boys and RE.

Parent/guardian consent: I (give/do not give permission) for my son/daughter to participate in group and individual interviews on the topic of boys and RE.

I have (signed/ not signed) my son/daughter's planner to (give/refuse) permission for them to participate in the research project on RE.

Parent/guardian signature:

Date:

Appendix 3:

Group interview questions

Individual interview questions

Group Interview Questions:

1. Which subjects are your favourite subjects and why?

2. Why did you pick Religious Studies /Philosophy of religion?

3. Why didn't you pick Religious Studies as a GCSE option?

4. How do you make use of your RE? Do you think about the topics you have studied outside of the classroom how does RE/Philosophy affect the way you think about yourself and other people?

Interview questions:

- Tell me a little about yourself- what are your interests, what is important to you. **How would you describe yourself?** How do you think your teachers might describe you? How would your mates describe you?

- What would you like to do in the future, **what kind of man would you like to be?** Who and what are the influences in your life?

- **How do you make use of RE?** Is it a subject you just want to pass? Does it give you a deeper view of life? Is it just a way of collecting facts about cultures and the world?

- **Does RE challenge the way you think and live?**

- **Are you religious or spiritual? Are you an atheist, an agnostic or a theist?**

- **What subjects/topics would you like to be on the RE curriculum?**

- **What do you think is the best way to be taught about religion?**

- **What do you like best about RE/ what do you like least about RE?**

- **Who has most to say in RE and who has least to say?**