Schoolgirls, identity, and agency in England, 1970-2004.

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Abstract

This thesis examines the impact of state secondary schooling on the identities of teenage girls in late twentieth century England. Equal opportunities policies and anti-sexist pedagogies aimed to expand girls' educational opportunities and disrupt patriarchal constraints on girls' lives, and this work focuses on the extent of these interventions in Inner London, and Reading, Berkshire. This thesis will examine how schooling informed girls' aspirations, expectations, and identities in relation to four major themes; motherhood, work, sex, and style. Schools aimed to prepare pupils for their futures, influencing how girls imagined their futures as mothers, as workers, and as individuals. Sex education and the imposition of school uniform rules created norms of feminine behaviour and bodies for girls. By drawing on experiential evidence from the time – girls' writing and diaries – as well as original oral history interviews, this thesis will centre the experiences of pupils and show that girls' agency lay in how they navigated and utilised discourses for their gain. Models of girls' empowerment positioned education as the key means by which girls could overcome the restrictions of their gender; girls who excelled in school drew on discourses of individual merit, choice, and hard work to construct their identities as modern, autonomous, self-determining, empowered young women. However, frameworks of female empowerment through educational attainment excluded girls who were marginalised in education or did not perform highly in school, and individualised structural inequalities such as racism and classism. This experiential focus reveals that notions of individualism, meritocracy, and girlhood transmitted through schooling were crucial to girls' understandings of their own position in the world, their awareness of the opportunities and limitations their position allowed, and the construction of their subjectivities.

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Declaration of original authorship:

I confirm that this is my own work and the use of all material from other sources has been properly and fully acknowledged.

Amy Gower

Ethical Review:

The approval of the University of Reading Ethics Committee (UREC) was sought for the oral history component of this thesis and was granted on 3rd October 2018.

Contents

Abbreviations

ADHD - Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder

BCC – Berkshire County Council

BL – The British Library

BMA – British Medical Association

BRO – Berkshire Record Office

BTEC – Business and Technical Education Council

CDT – Craft, Design and Technology

CPAG – Child Poverty Action Group

CPVE – Certificate of Pre-Vocational Education

CRE – Commission for Racial Equality

CSE – Certificate of Secondary Education

DES – Department for Education and Science

DISCO - divisional careers officers (ILEA)

EO – equal opportunities

EOC – Equal Opportunities Commission

FPA – Family Planning Association

GCE – General Certificate of Education, encompassing Ordinary Level (O-level), and Advanced

Level (A-level)

GCSE – General Certificate of Secondary Education

GLC - Greater London Council

HBC – Hackney Borough Council

HMI – Her Majesty's Inspectorate

ILEA – Inner London Education Authority

ITeC – Information Technology Centre

LCC – London County Council

LEA – Local Education Authority

LMA – London Metropolitan Archives

LRB – Learning Resources Branch

NAHT - National Association of Headteachers

NUSS – National Union of School Students

PIE – Paedophile Information Exchange

PSHE - Personal, Social, and Health Education (also known as PSE)

ROSLA – Raising of the School Leaving Age

SAU – Schools Action Union

UCAS - Universities and Colleges Admissions Service

WLM – Women's Liberation Movement

YOP – Youth Opportunities Programme

YTS – Youth Training Scheme

YWCA – Young Women's Christian Association

Schoolgirls, identity, and agency in England, 1970-2004.

I'm a Sexist adolescent

Boys are all I want, at present

I can hum a soppy song

Male Domination turns me on

Stereotyped into submission

By the sight and sound transmission

Lisping songs by fluffy females

Adverts showing brawny males

Teachers (men) insist on skirts

Pet the arrant little flirts

Only doing what they should

CONFORMITY is always good

Boys must hammer, girls must sew

Into MAN and WIFE they'll grow

I know every female art

How to play the proper part

Make the boys go all protective

All my wiles are SO effective

Can't be happy on my own

NO-ONE wants to be alone

Scheme and plan with all my might

Catch a man to hold me tight

Forget I ever had a mind

Docile, happy, deaf and blind

Get a man and share his bed

That's what all my peer-group said

Maybe this is just a stage

Symptomatic of my age

But NO it's not a teenage game

Each generation acts the same.

Sarah Hook, 'TEENAGE SEXISM'

Shocking Pink, no. 1, 1981, British Library.

Introduction

Sarah Hook's poem was published in 1981 in the first ever issue of teenage feminist magazine *Shocking Pink*. Hook adopted the voice of a girl 'stereotyped into submission' by the media, teachers, and friends. The poem highlights ironically the construction of a youthful female subjectivity in 1980s Britain; heterosexual, feminine, sexualised but also innocent, walking into the trappings of domestic womanhood. Yet Hook also indicates that this girl was self-aware, able to use to her 'wiles' to 'scheme and plan' to find a husband. Hook's poem demonstrates one girl's analysis of the ways in which femininity and girlhood were reinforced in late twentieth-century Britain, and inadvertently illustrates the dynamics of subjectivity and identity which are the focus of this research.

This thesis investigates the changing identities of teenage schoolgirls in English state schools between 1970 and 2004. The position of schoolgirl was one of relative powerlessness, as teenagers were legally children until age sixteen, subject to the authority of adults. Youth was also a transitionary stage; moving from full-time education and the familial home towards entry into the labour force and settling into one's own family.[1] Girls spent at least thirty hours a week in school; the subjects, organisation, and social relations of schooling had a significant impact on girls' identities and lives. However, as this thesis shows, patterns and attitudes changed during the late twentieth century, provoking the emergence of new subjectivities and ways of identifying. The development of equalities agendas – particularly around feminism and gender – within education contributed to a reshaping of girlhood from the 1970s onwards. This work examines how the discourses of feminism, equal opportunities, and individualism contributed to changes in girls' education, and shaped girls' identities. By closely examining the self-narratives of former schoolgirls

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[1] Jane Pilcher, *Age and Generation in Modern Britain,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 58-9.

from Inner London and Reading, I show that ideas around the empowerment and social mobility of girls, which were to be gained through education and self-mastery, became crucial discourses in the construction of girls' subjectivities.

Debates within educational feminism and the range of approaches to gender equality between LEAs demonstrate the tensions between understandings of gendered oppression, and how best to tackle it. Initial equal opportunities proponents in the 1970s focused on equalising access to school subjects and opportunities for girls and boys. Anti-sexist activism, which was at its peak in the 1980s, had a more radical agenda, focused on challenging sexism and patriarchy culturally in schools, as well as in the curriculum. Both movements did not directly challenge notions of meritocracy and both tied academic performance to the empowerment of girls.[2] Meritocracy – the idea that anybody could achieve success through talent and hard work – was already at the heart of the English education system.[3] The various approaches to gender equality struggled to account for this; for example, the focus on exam results as evidence of improvements in girls' educational experience was problematic for some London feminists.[4] Changes to the local governments which controlled education – the abolition of the Inner London Education Authority and the end of a fifteen year-long Conservative majority in Berkshire County Council – coincided with the mainstreaming of elements of anti-sexism in education throughout the 1990s. This thesis therefore focuses on the period from the advent of an organised feminist movement in Britain from 1970 to the beginning of the twenty-first century in order to trace the impact of these changes on teenage girls' identities and school experiences; 2004 was the

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[2] Madeleine Arnot, Miriam David, and Gaby Weiner, *Closing the Gender Gap: Postwar Education and Social Change* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999), 100-101.

[3] Jo Littler, 'Meritocracy as Plutocracy: The Marketising of "equality" under Neoliberalism', *New Formations*, 80/81, 2013, 52–72; Peter Mandler, *The Crisis of the Meritocracy: Britain's Transition to Mass Education since the Second World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 4.

[4] Jane Martin, 'Gender, Education and Social Change: A Study of Feminist Politics and Practice in London, 1870–1990', *Gender and Education*, 25:1 (2013), 56–74, 70-1.

year the youngest interviewee for this project left school for university. The experiences of individual pupils reveal the limits of gender equalities approaches which failed to deal with the use of meritocracy as 'a mechanism to perpetuate and create social and cultural inequality', as Jo Littler has characterised it.[5] The idea of a collective female empowerment, accessed through educational success and merit, ironically disempowered many girls, in particular girls who were marginalised in education or less academically successful.

For some girls, education was an empowering experience and contributed to the construction of their identities as modern, successful young women who were in control of their destinies. White middle-class girls often aligned with the culture and knowledge systems operating in English schools, in part due to their social capital. Grammar schools in particular promoted a version of female empowerment forged in academic and professional success; girls who did well in such settings often framed their success as the result of their own hard work in first-person narratives and later oral history interviews. This framing masked their privileges and enabled them to present themselves as empowered and autonomous young women. This group still faced gendered boundaries, especially once outside of the comfortable environment of the school, but were the predominant beneficiaries of educational reform.

Girls who did not perform highly in school were often excluded from the same benefits as their high-performing peers, benefits such as access to further educational and professional opportunities. Stereotyped ideas about classed and racialised intellect informed the low expectations teachers had of working-class and Black girls in particular, who were often placed into lower streams.[6] Streaming and setting were crucial mechanisms

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[5] Littler, 'Meritocracy as Plutocracy', 53.
[6] See for example: Jessica Gerrard, 'Gender, Community and Education: Cultures of Resistance in Socialist Sunday Schools and Black Supplementary Schools', *Gender and Education*, 23:6 (2011), 711–27; Beverley Skeggs, *Formations of Class & Gender: Becoming Respectable* (London: SAGE, 1997); Laura Tisdall, *A Progressive Education?: How Childhood Changed in Mid-Twentieth-Century English and Welsh Schools* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019). A note on language: this thesis uses 'Black' to mean

for determining pupils' options upon leaving school; these girls often found themselves with limited options, encouraged into lower-paid, lower-skilled, and more traditionally feminised jobs, such as secretarial work. Girls who were marginalised in education were often aware of these mechanisms and critiqued them. There was a clear disconnect for these girls between the self-determination and individualism promoted in schools, especially in careers education, and their apparently predetermined paths. This thesis will demonstrate that girls who were marginalised in these ways also drew on discourses of individualism to construct their selfhoods, but in distinct ways to their middle-class and/or academically elite peers. Women from working-class families interviewed for this thesis often constructed their selfhoods in opposition to schooling, presenting themselves as self-made success stories despite their lack of qualifications. Some also felt individually responsible for failing to live up to the meritocratic model of female empowerment which they struggled to access. This thesis shows that girls marginalised in education drew on the social and cultural resources available to them to not only construct themselves as self-determining individuals, but also to criticise an education system which had neglected them.

The process of making one's identity offered girls ways to exercise agency, albeit in limited ways. Chris Weedon argues that whilst subjectivity consists 'of an individual's conscious and unconscious sense of self, emotions and desires', identity is more fluid, a 'limited and temporary fixing for the individual of a particular mode of subjectivity'.[7] This fluidity of identity offered teenage girls a way to challenge, subvert, and conform to dominant social ideas of adolescent girlhood. As this thesis will demonstrate, teenage girls drew on the cultural resources within school – the language, expectations, discourses, and

people of African and African-Caribbean origin, rather than the political use of 'Black' in the 1970s and 1980s which also included South Asian people.

[7] Chris Weedon, *Identity and Culture: Narrative of Difference and Belonging,* (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2004), 18-19.

models of girlhood – to form their identities. As Weedon shows, over time, different cultural practices offered up new forms of identity, and served 'as ways of subverting and negotiating dominant forms of identity'.[8] In late twentieth century England, the discourses around girls' empowerment and cultural shifts in gender relations contributed to an ideal of the empowered girl subject. This ideal girl would have good self-knowledge, excel educationally, and find a profession which suited her individuality before finding a heterosexual relationship. I will show that teenage girls who struggled to align themselves with this ideal of academically successful girlhood took up related discourses – around individualism, self-determination, and autonomy – to construct their identities as modern empowered girls, despite not achieving this status through the acquisition of qualifications. Girls who were more academically successful were more able to identify with this figure, and present themselves as self-determining and empowered young women, masking their relative privileges. These shifting discourses provided girls with new ways of understanding themselves and their place in society, in step with broader changes in gender roles and relations in late twentieth century England.

Literature Review

Girlhood and individualism

Wider social and cultural change contributed to the changing nature of girls' subjectivities in the late twentieth century, particularly shifts around women's roles in the family and workforce. Stephen Brooke argues that whilst the economy in the 1970s and 1980s was plagued by unemployment and inflation, the world of work was opening up for

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[8] Ibid, 9.

women; this is also supported by Ben Jackson.[9] Helen McCarthy also shows that the 1970s

and 1980s were a crucial era for women's work, as the idea of the 'career woman' became

popularised.[10] Record numbers of female MPs were elected in the 1990s, and New Labour

pledged to support women by setting up a Women's Unit.[11] However, as McCarthy also

argues, the stark differences between professional and working-class women's experiences

continued into the new millennium, and discrimination was still apparent in women's

everyday lives.[12] The taken-for-granted nature of women's domestic role was also

transformed in the late twentieth century. Cohabitation, longer periods of independence

before marriage, and sexual freedom became more common and normalised, and singleness

as an identity was cultivated through dating services.[13] Divorce rates too indicated the

instability of the traditional nuclear family, seen as an arena of patriarchal oppression by

feminists.[14] In 1993, the number of children under sixteen who had experienced the divorce

of their parents peaked at 176,000, and by 1995, a third of children were born to unmarried

parents, compared to one in ten in 1975.[15] Girls growing up in the late twentieth century,

especially from the mid-1980s onwards, were therefore less likely to have been exposed

solely to the traditional nuclear family that the social democratic model had been based

on.[16] Girls saw the women around them – mothers, friends' mothers, relatives, neighbours –

living different lives to each other and to previous generations. The domestic ideal was

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[9] Stephen Brooke, 'Living in "New Times": Historicising 1980s Britain', *History Compass*, 12:1 (2014), 20–32, 23; Ben Jackson, 'Free Markets and Feminism: The Neo-Liberal Defence of the Male Breadwinner Model in Britain, c. 1980–1997', *Women's History Review*, 28:2 (2019), 297–316, 298.
[10] Helen McCarthy, *Double Lives: A History of Working Motherhood* (UK: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2020), see Chapter 12 in particular.
[11] Ibid, 377-8.
[12] Ibid, 352.
[13] Zoe Strimpel, *Seeking Love in Modern Britain: Gender, Dating and the Rise of 'the Single'* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2020).
[14] See for example: Sarah Stoller, 'Forging a Politics of Care: Theorizing Household Work in the British Women's Liberation Movement', *History Workshop Journal*, 85:1 (2018), 95–119; Margaretta Jolly, *Sisterhood and After: An Oral History of the UK Women's Liberation Movement, 1968-Present* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2019).
[15] Hugh Cunningham, *The Invention of Childhood* (London: BBC Books, 2006), 213.
[16] Jackson, 'Free Markets and Feminism', 297.

steadily eroded in the late twentieth century in girls' everyday lives and was important in determining how they saw themselves and their futures.

Furthermore, ideas of individuality, choice, and self-fulfilment present in late twentieth century British culture and society shaped girls' identities. Choice, fulfilment, self-discovery, and self-realisation came to be central aspects of the modern self, according to Claire Langhamer.[17] Whilst such features of modernity predate the twentieth century and are entwined with Enlightenment philosophy, Langhamer notes these were intensified after 1945.[18] The popularisation of the psychological sciences, the rise of identity politics, and decline of traditional class-based ways of identification and community-building facilitated the growth of individualism in the post-war period.[19] Jon Lawrence's *Me, Me, Me* develops this assessment of the decline of traditional social relations, and argues that community instead became 'personal and voluntary,' rather than based in historic social ties and proximity.[20] As Lawrence shows, post-war settlement ideals of 'betterment' and 'shared progress', along with the material gains and shifting importance of consumption in the 1950s and 1960s, informed the ways people understood themselves and their place in society.[21] Communalism and individualism could be held simultaneously by people, 'deeply enmeshed in how [they] understood everyday life.'[22]

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[17] Claire Langhamer, 'Love, Selfhood and Authenticity in Post-War Britain', *Cultural and Social History*, 9:2 (2012), 277–97, 278.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Claire Langhamer, *The English in Love: The Intimate Story of an Emotional Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Emily Robinson, Camilla Schofield, Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, and Natalie Thomlinson, 'Telling Stories about Post-War Britain: Popular Individualism and the "Crisis" of the 1970s', *Twentieth Century British History*, 28:2 (2017), 268–304; Nikolas Rose, *Governing the Soul: The Shaping of the Private Self* (London: Routledge, 1989); Mathew Thomson, *Psychological Subjects: Identity, Culture, and Health in Twentieth-Century Britain: Identity, Culture, and Health in Twentieth-Century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).
[20] Jon Lawrence, *Me, Me, Me: The Search for Community in Post-War England* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2019).
[21] Ibid, 11.
[22] Ibid, 206.

Furthermore, deindustrialisation and its effects on employment and social structures, along with post-war affluence and expansion of consumption, contributed to the heightened post-war emphasis on individualism and self-fulfilment. As Jim Tomlinson shows, de-industrialisation increased economic and employment security, and consequently impacted the subjectivities which had been informed by pre-existing social relations.[23] Emily Robinson, Camilla Schofield, Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite and Natalie Thomlinson argue that a broader series of social and cultural changes to post-war British society, such as the increasing number of non-traditional families, the explosion of identity politics, and the erosion of class-based voting patterns contributed to the development of a 'popular individualism' in the 1970s.[24] This 'popular individualism' describes the ways in which individuals increasingly asserted their claims for autonomy and control over their lives.[25] These authors indicate a fundamental shift in how individuals understood themselves and how they related to wider society in late twentieth century Britain. Whilst these authors agree that there was a post-war shift in how individuals understood themselves and society, they focus largely on adults. This thesis traces the impact of this shift on teenage girls, and shows how young people used discourses of individualism to frame their selfhoods.

Changing gender relations were a key aspect of this shift towards greater desire for autonomy and individual self-determination. For example, McCarthy has indicated an increased 'self-assertion' or self-confidence among women from the 1970s onwards in Britain.[26] Penny Tinkler argues that a transition from school to paid work and post-compulsory education was increasingly the norm for girls across all social backgrounds, and

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[23] Jim Tomlinson, 'De-industrialization Not Decline: A New Meta-narrative for Post-war British History', in *Twentieth Century British History,* 27:1, (2016), 76-99, 97.
[24] Robinson et al, 'Telling Stories about Post-War Britain, 273.
[25] Ibid, 302-3.
[26] McCarthy, *Double Lives,* 352.

whilst some structural forms of discrimination based on gender, class, and race were removed, inequalities persisted in more subtle forms.[27] These new possibilities for empowerment shaped the expectations girls made of their schooling, and how they, and the adults around them, imagined their future lives as women. Sociologists, media studies and gender studies scholars have noted a shift in the 'conditions of girlhood and in the behaviours and expectations of young women' in the late-twentieth century.[28] For instance, the second edition of Sue Sharpe's *Just Like a Girl* compared her ethnographies of Ealing schoolgirls conducted in 1976 and 1994, and concluded that girls in the 1990s were more assertive, more aware of gender equality, and warier of marriage than their 1970s counterparts.[29] As Tinkler argues, girls' media in the mid-century and into the 1970s, such as magazines, encouraged the cultivation of individuality and self-worth beyond the traditional idea of a young female self 'realised through love and marriage.'[30] But these ideas of individuality and self-assertion caused tensions with the age-related power hierarchies within education. Teenagers sought to define themselves and assert control over their lives, whilst adults – teachers, parents, and careers advisors – sought to assert their authority and expertise over girls.

Robinson et al argue that factors such as the existence of liberation movements contributed to popular individualism among adults; the same can be said for the young.[31] A short-lived children's rights movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s raised the issue of participatory rights for children, most famous in the activities of two organised groups, the School's Action Union (SAU) and National Union of School Students (NUSS), whose demands

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[27] Penny Tinkler, 'Girlhood and Growing-Up', in Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska (ed.), *Women in Twentieth-Century Britain,* (Routledge, 2001), 35-50, 48-9.
[28] Carolyn Jackson and Penny Tinkler, '"Ladettes" and "Modern Girls": "Troublesome" Young Femininities:', *The Sociological Review*, 55:2, (2017), 251-272, 264.
[29] Sue Sharpe, *'Just like a Girl' : How Girls Learn to Be Women : From the Seventies to the Nineties*, 2nd edn (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1994), 295-302.
[30] Penny Tinkler, '"Are You Really Living?" If Not, "Get With It!"', *Cultural and Social History*, 11:4 (2014), 597–619.
[31] Robinson et al, 'Telling Stories about Post-War Britain', 274-5.

included greater pupil participation in educational matters, and an end to corporal

punishment and uniform.[32] These groups dissolved by the mid-1970s. As Annie Franklin

and Bob Franklin have shown, these participatory demands were replaced by a

protectionist agenda from the 1980s, the consequences of which on children's use of space

has been explored by Mathew Thomson.[33] Hugh Cunningham also highlights this shift

towards protectionism, but notes that the participatory movement left an important legacy

of ideas of autonomy and self-determination for children on matters which concerned

them.[34] The desire for self-determination is certainly evident in the memories and

experiences of pupils in the late twentieth century which this thesis will explore. The

agenda of rights and participation contributed to a wider emboldening of young people

from the 1970s onwards and gave pupils the language to be able to articulate their demands

for greater control over their own lives.

Whilst these desires and demands can be traced amongst teenagers and young

people in the 1970s, scholars have mostly tied these discourses of individualism to the rise

of neoliberalism from the 1980s onwards. As Neil Rollings argues, neoliberalism as a term

has been used in multiple and contradictory ways.[35] Within a political context, it is often

used to refer to the ideas of the Mont Pèlerin Society, intellectuals who were 'committed to

the overthrow of the post-war social democratic order in defence of individual liberty,' and

espoused free-market ideals and individualism.[36] Amy Edwards, and Aled Davies, James

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[32] Annie Franklin and Bob Franklin, 'Growing Pains: The Developing Children's Rights Movement in the UK', in Jane Pilcher and Stephen Wagg (eds.), *Thatcher's Children? Politics, Childhood and Society in the 1980s and 1990s,* (Falmer: Falmer Press, 1996), 95–114; see also Owen Emmerson, 'No to the Cane', *Jacobin Magazine online,* 22nd October 2017, https://jacobinmag.com/2017/10/scotland-corporal-punishment-britain-schools-action-union/, (accessed 28th November 2019).

[33] See for instance: Franklin and Franklin, 'Growing Pains'; and Mathew Thomson, *Lost Freedom: The Landscape of the Child and the British Post-War Settlement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

[34] Cunningham, *The Invention of Childhood,* 225-6.

[35] Neil Rollings, 'Cracks in the Post-War Keynesian Settlement? The Role of Organised Business in Britain in the Rise of Neoliberalism Before Margaret Thatcher', *Twentieth Century British History,* 24:4, 637-659, 641.

[36] Aled Davies, James Freeman, and Hugh Pemberton, 'Everyman a capitalist' or 'free to choose'? Exploring the tensions within Thatcherite Individualism', *The Historical Journal,* 61:2, (2018), 477-501, 479.

Freeman, and Hugh Pemberton argue that aspects of this philosophy were adopted within Thatcherism, but only those that were rooted in Conservative intellectual traditions.[37] At its most broad, neoliberalism can refer in the context of late twentieth century Britain to free-market liberalism, individualism, privatisation, and popular capitalism, adopted under Thatcherism but continued under John Major and Tony Blair.[38] Within Britain specifically, neoliberalism is often tied to the tremendous economic change which occurred from the 1980s onwards, in which service industries, precarious employment, and a constantly changing global market replaced previous manufacturing industries.[39] In *Growing Up Girl,* Valerie Walkerdine, Helen Lucey and June Melody draw on Nikolas Rose to define neoliberalism as 'a form of liberal government that depends upon subjects who are free and rational agents of democracy, recreated in the context of globalism and economic rationalism'.[40] Yet neoliberal discourses were only able to find purchase on individuals due to economic insecurity and transformations in the labour market brought about by deindustrialisation. Within this definition, Walkerdine et al emphasise the way neoliberalism as an economic system has created a demand for individuals who are autonomous and can be self-sufficient in bending to the demands of a new and changeable labour market.[41]

Walkerdine, Lucey, Melody, and Rose focus on how this new economic system, and the wider political, economic, and social changes which accompanied it, contributed to changes in how people thought, behaved, and felt. This thesis draws on this approach, considering how girls' education and identities were shaped by these wider forces on a local

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[37] Amy Edwards, ''Financial Consumerism': citizenship consumerism and capital ownership in the 1980s', *Contemporary British History,* 31:2, 210-229; Davies et al, 'Everyman a capitalist', 500.
[38] Rollings, 'Cracks in the Post-War Keynesian Settlement?' 641-2; Stuart Hall, 'New Labour's Double-shuffle', *The Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies,* 27:4, (2006), 319-335, 323.
[39] Valerie Walkerdine, Helen Lucey, and June Melody, *Growing Up Girl: Psycho-Social Explorations of Class and Gender* (Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2001), 1-2.
[40] Ibid, 2.
[41] Ibid, 3.

level. Rose argues that the prevalence of popular psychology in the twentieth century – also

noted as an important post-war development by Laura Tisdall, Jennifer Crane, and Mathew

Thomson – contributed to the creation of ideal neoliberal subjects.[42] These subjects would

be self-reflective, participants in popular consumption, aspirational, and self-regulating,

able to cope with the demands of a neoliberal economic system and society.[43] These were

powerful discourses; LEA records and published education reports show that these

discourses were evident within schooling as well as wider culture and society, whilst girls'

magazines, oral histories, and self-writing by teenagers show their uptake by young people.

Jo Littler argues that neoliberalism from the 1970s onwards shaped a particular

'meritocratic discourse', which linked notions of achievement and merit to successful

consumption, rather than intelligence; for example, buying one's council house as a

particular marker of 'getting ahead'.[44] Ideas of meritocracy and neoliberalism dovetailed in

the late twentieth century, according to Littler. Paul Gilroy suggests that meritocracy is a

fundamental foundation of neoliberalism; 'The idea that anyone can be helped by

government to change themselves and thereby to alter their life chances by the sheer,

dedicated force of their own will, is now fundamental to the legitimacy of neoliberal reform

and the notions of merit that it still seems to need.'[45] Within girls' education, these

neoliberal discourses were apparent in multiple ways; most importantly, in notions of girls'

empowerment which aimed to enable girls' access to the middle-class professions and

therefore enable them to contribute to new economic regime in the wake of

deindustrialisation. The gender equality initiatives within education which this thesis

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[42] Rose, *Governing the* Soul; Jennifer Crane, *Child Protection in England, 1960–2000 - Expertise, Experience, and Emotion* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018); Nikolas S. Rose, *Inventing Our Selves: Psychology, Power, and Personhood* (Cambridge University Press, 1996); Laura Tisdall, 'Education, Parenting, and Concepts of Childhood', *Contemporary British History*, 31:1 (2017), 24–46; and Thomson, *Lost Freedom.*
[43] Rose, *Governing the Soul,* 11.
[44] Littler, 'Meritocracy as Plutocracy', 62-3.
[45] Paul Gilroy, ''…We got to get over before we go under…' fragments for a history of black vernacular neoliberalism', *New Formations,* 80/1, (2013), 23-38, 26.

examines drew on ideas of meritocracy and self-improvement to present girls with a particular mode of empowerment, one which placed onus on the individual to improve themselves, side-lining the structural aspects of girls' oppression.

In many ways, the late twentieth century was a period in which understandings of womanhood and girlhood broadened, and opportunities for education and work expanded. However, the individualisation of success contributed to a new and difficult set of tensions for girls to overcome. These ideals of individualism and self-improvement – present in girls' education, the media, and wider society – masked structural inequalities, making female empowerment contingent on becoming a self-governing, self-improving subject; this thesis will argue that this subject was a crucial figure which determined girls' feelings of success or failure. The negotiation of contradictory and competing ideas and discourses of girlhood – in a world which celebrated and prioritised a version of modern girlhood which centred the middle-class white girl as the epitome of female empowerment – individualised the 'failure' of working-class, Black, and girls who did not succeed academically to be able to conform to the normative idea of modern girlhood.

This thesis therefore addresses the complexities of individual identities, particularly how they conformed to, rejected, or were in tension with this figure of the empowered modern girl by the end of the century. Madeleine Arnot, Gaby Weiner and Miriam David have attributed girls' educational success to the different models of femininity offered to girls within and outside of school, from which evolved a norm of aspiring for social mobility, or 'getting on and getting out.'[46] This emphasis on broader models of femininity beyond school contrasts with historian Carol Dyhouse's argument that feminist intervention in education, through equalities legislation and anti-sexist education, was the most important factor in opening up educational opportunities for girls from a range of socio-economic

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[46] Arnot, David, and Weiner, *Closing the Gender Gap*, 156.

backgrounds.[47] These perspectives can be brought together, however. The wider social and cultural factors noted by Arnot, David and Weiner provided the necessary conditions for girls to take advantage of the opportunities which Dyhouse noted. Nevertheless, as this thesis will show, these necessary conditions were not evenly available to all girls and this determined the extent to which girls *could* align with the meritocratic ideal and take up educational opportunities.

This thesis argues that equal opportunities agendas in schooling perpetuated and promoted ideas of individualism, self-discipline and resilience, which in turn framed girls' selfhoods, and provided the terrain on which girls' agency could be enacted and constrained. Critically, these ideas of girls' empowerment centred education as the key to female emancipation. School was therefore a crucial space in which these girls' identities were formed, both within and against this framework of empowerment through merit. This thesis draws on analytical frameworks and interpretations from beyond the historical discipline to present a historical perspective; that the constituent influences and discourses through which girlhoods and femininities were constructed opened up new paths to opportunity for some, whilst constraining others. It will show that discourses of meritocracy provided ways for the continued inequalities in education to be concealed, but also offered a way for girls to articulate their experiences of schooling and construct a sense of self that was self-determining.

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[47] Carol Dyhouse, *Girl Trouble: Panic and Progress in the History of Young Women,* (London, Zed Books, 2013), 206-8.

Post-war Education

Political Narratives

Historical analyses of English secondary education in the late twentieth century have largely emphasised the transformation of the education system from a post-war tripartite system to the academisation of the twenty-first century, echoing a political narrative of social democracy, crisis in the 1970s, then neoliberalism.[48] The chronology of this transformation is widely presented as beginning with the egalitarian ideals of the tripartite system and the selection of pupils through the eleven-plus examination.[49] Scholars who have charted this narrative, such as Ken Jones, Roy Lowe, and Stephen Wagg, have largely focused on policy and politics; this thesis will instead centre pupil experience to present an alternative narrative of the late twentieth century.[50]

The standard narrative of English education begins from 1944, when England and Wales, and later Northern Ireland, did indeed introduce a tripartite system of education, streaming pupils by performance in the eleven-plus examination into secondary modern and grammar secondary schools, and a smaller number of technical schools.[51] Joyce Goodman has shown that within this system, at the start of the 1960s, most middle-class girls attended single-sex grammar schools, and over half of working-class girls attended

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[48] This broad political chronology has been scrutinised recently in the workshop series *Rethinking Britain in the Nineties: Towards a New Research Agenda,* see: Steer, Alfie, *Past and Present* [web blog], 28th January 2021, https://pastandpresent.org.uk/the-political-narratives-of-britain-in-the-nineties (accessed 1 February 2021).

[49] See for example: Stephen Brooke, 'Articulating the Nation: British Conservatism, Race and the 1988 Education Act', *Left History*, 14:2 (2009); David Crook, 'Local Authorities and Comprehensivisation in England and Wales, 1944-1974', *Oxford Review of Education*, 28:2/3 (2002), 247–60; Nirmala Rao, 'Labour and Education: Secondary Reorganisation and the Neighbourhood School', *Contemporary British History*, 16:2 (2002), 99–120; and Wagg, '"Don't Try to Understand Them"'.

[50] Ken Jones, *Education in Britain: 1944 to the Present,* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003); Roy Lowe, 'Secondary Education since the Second World War', in Roy Lowe (ed.), *The Changing Secondary School,* (Lewes: The Falmer Press, 1989), 4-19; Stephen Wagg, '"Don't Try to Understand Them": Politics, Childhood and the New Education Market', in Jane Pilcher and Stephen Wagg (eds.), *Thatcher's Children? Politics, Childhood and Society in the 1980s and 1990s,* (London, Falmer Press, 1996), 8-28.

[51] Crook, 'Local Authorities and Comprehensivisation'.

secondary modern schools.[52] The tripartite system had egalitarian aims when it was

established; a standardised examination in theory would allow the 'naturally bright' but

poor child access to higher level education, over the wealthier but less bright child.[53] But in

practice, long simmering criticisms that tripartite selection was socially biased and

replicated working-class children's inferior social position came to a head in the 1960s.[54]

David Crook and Stephen Wagg show that critiques of the tripartite system from the Left as

unfairly penalising working-class children, as well as broader anxieties across the political

spectrum around poor literacy rates, 'standards', and discipline, established the grounds for

further intervention in education.[55] Eventually, as a result of grassroots efforts by LEAs and

parental pressures, over 1400 comprehensive schools were established between 1970 and

1974.[56] But as Nirmala Rao shows, local variation such as the specific needs of inner-city

schools meant that comprehensive *education* remained unrealised.[57] Both Inner London and

Berkshire – the case study areas of this thesis – were unfinished comprehensive projects.

Comprehensive reform largely took place in the 1960s and early 1970s, coinciding

with the progressive education movement.[58] Laura Tisdall's work shows that progressive or

child-centred education presented an alternative vision of secondary schooling by

emphasising the importance of children's developmental stages, and encouraged

exploratory learning, rather than the rigid writing and repetition of 'chalk and talk' methods

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[52] Joyce Goodman, 'Class and Religion: Great Britain and Ireland', in James C. Albisetti, Joyce Goodman, and Rebecca Rogers, *Girls' Secondary Education in the Western World: From the 18th to the 20th Century*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 9–24, 19.
[53] Wagg, '"Don't Try to Understand Them"', 10.
[54] Crook, 'Local Authorities and Comprehensivisation', 247; Harry Hendrick, *Children, childhood and English society, 1880-1990,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 71-2; N. Rao, 'Labour and Education: Secondary Reorganisation', 100-1; Wagg, '"Don't Try to Understand Them"', 9-10.
[55] Crook, 'Local Authorities and Comprehensivisation', 258; Wagg, '"Don't Try to Understand Them"', 11-12.
[56] Crook, 'Local Authorities and Comprehensivisation', 254; Peter Mandler, 'Educating the Nation I: Schools', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society,* (published online, 2014), 14.
[57] Rao, 'Labour and Education: Secondary Reorganisation', 115.
[58] Crook, 'Local Authorities and Comprehensivisation'; Rao, 'Labour and Education', 99-100.

of teaching.[59] Within the context of anxieties over 'standards' and the prevalence of progressive and comprehensive education, the politics of childhood in education acquired a 'toxic mixture of fact, reactionary fiction, and lurid, tabloid-assisted speculation' from the mid-1970s, according to Wagg.[60] Philip Gardner argues that these highly fraught debates were followed by a period of centralised government control.[61] From the late-1980s, successive governments reinforced both traditional educational values – such as discipline, and the vague term of 'standards' – and introduced free-market rhetoric into state education with the publication of exam results to cultivate competition between schools.[62]

Yet this political narrative of education, from social democracy to neoliberalism via the crisis years of the 1970s, does not reveal the effects of this transformational period on pupils themselves, especially through the lens of gender.[63] Comprehensivisation contributed one important discourse of equality to the educational arena, which would be later complemented by feminist and anti-racist activism in the 1980s. Recent scholarship has also provided a counter-narrative which complicates this narrative of political defeat and provides scope for historians to further explore the experiences of those within education. Laura Carter's work on experimental secondary modern schools in the 1940s and 1950s has challenged the 'decline of tripartism' narrative by drawing out continuities from the interwar period.[64] By focusing on the trajectory from wartime reform to the mass education of the twenty-first century, Peter Mandler argues that meritocracy was complicated by the rise of discourses of democracy, which posited that meritocracy could

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[59] Tisdall, *A Progressive Education?* 5; 'Education, Parenting, and Concepts of Childhood'.
[60] Wagg, '"Don't Try to Understand Them"', 16.
[61] Philip Gardner, 'Classroom Teachers and Educational Change 1876-1996', *Journal of Education for Teaching*, 24.1 (1998), 33–49.
[62] Ibid, 222; Denis Lawton, *Education and Labour Party Ideologies 1900-2001 and Beyond* (London: RoutledgeFalmer, 2004), 125.
[63] Laura Tisdall's work on progressive education does engage with pupil experiences, see in particular Chapter Five of *A Progressive Education?*.
[64] Laura Carter, '"Experimental" Secondary Modern Education in Britain, 1948–1958', *Cultural and Social History*, 13:1 (2016), 23–41.

only begin on a common platform or 'level playing field.'[65] These currents were accompanied by the recognition in the post-war period that education often reproduced rather than mitigated social inequities, demonstrated by sociological surveys such as Brian Jackson and Dennis Marsden's *Education and the Working-class,* which surveyed working-class families in 1960s Huddersfield.[66] At the core of these currents was the concept of 'equality of opportunity'; as this thesis will show, with the convergence of comprehensivisation, equal opportunities legislation, multiculturalism, and feminism, equality was a central part of the educational agenda in modern Britain.

Mandler notes that historians who promote the defeatist political narrative of post-war education have mistaken the history of educational policy for the history of education; '[t]hey fixate on the blizzard of legislation and regulation that has beset education since the late 1980s and not the actual experiences, attitudes and behaviours of those who are allegedly suffering under it.'[67] Mandler suggests that this fixation may in part be due to the reluctance of left-leaning historians to credit the New Right Conservative regime with the mass expansion of educational opportunities that followed the introduction of the GCSE and National Curriculum. As this work will demonstrate, this tension can in part by explained by the locally devolved nature of educational change; teachers and local authorities were able to mediate policy and legislation within the classroom, where they were encountered by pupils. However, Mandler is correct to point this out; as social historians of post-war Britain have shown, examinations of individual experiences often complicate established historical narratives.[68] Langhamer and Hester Barron use the school essays of working-class boys to demonstrate how their sense of social status translated into an imagined adult future in the

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[65] Mandler, *The Crisis of the Meritocracy,* 4-5.
[66] Brian Jackson and Dennis Marsden, *Education and the Working Class,* (London: Routledge, 2021, first published 1962).
[67] Mandler, *The Crisis of the Meritocracy,* 143-4.
[68] Robinson et al, 'Telling Stories about Post-War Britain', 280.

1930s.[69] Jane Elliot illuminates the complex and nuanced ways in which schoolchildren constructed gendered identities in the mid twentieth century, drawing on essays written for the National Child Development Study to demonstrate how the context of a classroom informed pupils' performance of gender.[70] Eve Worth uses oral history to highlight the importance of adult education in the 1970s to working mothers, contributing a rethinking of the gendered lifecycle and social mobility to understandings of post-war education.[71] Individual narratives used in this thesis will complicate the political narrative of educational change, showing that for girls, discourses around gender equality in education provided new ways to construct their identities, whilst reinforcing some of the social inequalities inherent within a meritocratic system in which pupils were not on a 'level playing field.'

Gender and Education in Post-war English Education

The transformation of gender relations in late twentieth century Britain is the subject of much historical work, especially women's roles in the home and in the workplace.[72] However, within the history of education field, few scholars have considered the ways in which girls' education adapted to shifting expectations of modern womanhood after the advent of British feminism. Goodman's assessment of girls' secondary schooling in

[69] Hester Barron and Claire Langhamer, 'Children, Class, and the Search for Security: Writing the Future in 1930s Britain', *Twentieth Century British History*, 28:3 (2017), 367–89.

[70] Jane Elliott, 'Imagining a Gendered Future: Children's Essays from the National Child Development Study in 1969', *Sociology*, 44:6 (2010), 1073–90.

[71] Eve Worth, 'Women, Education and Social Mobility in Britain during the Long 1970s', *Cultural and Social History*, 16:1 (2019), 67–83.

[72] For instance, see: Jane Lewis, 'Gender, the Family and Women's Agency in the Building of "Welfare States": The British Case', *Social History*, 19:1 (1994), 37–55; McCarthy, *Double Lives*; Helen McCarthy, 'Women, Marriage and Paid Work in Post-War Britain', *Women's History Review*, 26:1 (2017), 46–61; Laura Paterson, '"I Didn't Feel like My Own Person": Paid Work in Women's Narratives of Self and Working Motherhood, 1950–1980', *Contemporary British History*, 33:3 (2019), 405–26; Stoller, 'Forging a Politics of Care'; Pat Thane, 'Women and the 1970s. Towards Liberation?', in Lawrence Black, Pat Thane, and Hugh Pemberton (eds.), *Reassessing 1970s Britain*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013).

Britain is a useful foundational text, drawing out continuities between late Victorian period and the 1980s.[73] Margaretta Jolly, Angela Davis, and Stephanie Spencer have examined gendered experiences of education alongside family attitudes towards women's roles. Angela Davis's work on mothering examined how young women learnt about pregnancy, childbirth, and child rearing in their schools, homes, and organised classes in the post-war period.[74] Margaretta Jolly has shown that both the investment of the welfare state in providing education after 1944 for all children, and individual experiences of schooling were highly influential for young women who went on to be involved with the Women's Liberation Movement.[75] Stephanie Spencer's work on education and careers in the 1950s shows that whilst girls were encouraged to plan for a career in the 1950s, what this career might be, how long for, and how far it would need to be balanced with the domestic role, were highly determined by class.[76] Spencer argues for a wider consideration of external factors, including family, friends, and school, which informed the ways girls and young women constituted their identities and made life choices, for instance around their career paths.[77] Crucially, these studies demonstrate the interconnectivity of home, culture, and school in shaping girls' understandings of womanhood. This thesis therefore also takes into account factors beyond the school – such as parental attitudes and girls' media – to understand girls' school experiences more fully.

Tisdall and Dyhouse stand out as examples of work which connect gender equality discourses in education to pupil experiences. Tisdall's research on progressive education highlights teachers' understandings of class, race, and gender in relation to intellect

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[73] Goodman, 'Class and Religion', 21.
[74] Angela Davis, *Modern Motherhood: Women and Family in England, 1945-2000* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012).
[75] Jolly, *Sisterhood and After,* 65, 78.
[76] Stephanie Spencer, *Gender, Work and Education in Britain in the 1950s,* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 193.
[77] Ibid, 15; 'Reflections on the "Site of Struggle": Girls' Experience of Secondary Education in the Late 1950s', *History of Education*, 33:4 (2004), 437–49.

between 1918 and 1979, and her more recent work on girls' perceptions of adulthood in the 1960s and 1970s sheds vital light on the intersections between age, class, gender, and sexuality.[78] Dyhouse's *Girl Trouble: Panic and Progress in the History of Young Women* remains one of the only historical accounts of the impact of feminism on girls' schooling and selfhoods in the late twentieth century. Dyhouse credits feminist endeavours such as equal opportunities legislation in the early 1970s and later anti-sexist teaching initiatives in the 1980s for expanding educational opportunities and improving the self-esteem of teenage girls.[79] Whilst this thesis will show that feminist interventions were important in introducing and enhancing understandings of gender equality in education, Dyhouse's emphasis on feminist intervention is perhaps overstated. As Helen McCarthy suggests, feminism formed a 'backdrop' to women's everyday lives, and as Robinson, Schofield, Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, and Thomlinson have shown, many women did not identify with the organised movement.[80] The evidence in this thesis shows that liberal, middle-class feminist discourses which focused on girls' academic attainment could in fact be detrimental to girls who did not academically achieve, lowering their self-esteem. Moreover, this thesis therefore makes a significant contribution to the field by focusing solely on the period after 1970 – Dyhouse covers the entire twentieth century – to reveal the nuances of girls' relationships to feminism and education.

Despite the fragmented historiography of gender in late twentieth-century schooling, there is an impressive range of sociological work on class, gender, race, and education in this period. Such work built on concepts of social and cultural reproduction promoted by post-structuralist and Marxist scholars such as Louis Althusser, Pierre

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[78] Laura Tisdall, '"What a Difference It Was to Be a Woman and Not a Teenager": Adolescent Girls' Conceptions of Adulthood in 1960s and 1970s Britain', *Gender & History*, (published online, 2021).
[79] Carol Dyhouse, *Girl Trouble: Panic and Progress in the History of Young Women*, (London: Zed Books, 2013), 206-8.
[80] McCarthy, *Double Lives,* 352; Robinson et al, 'Telling Stories about Post-War Britain', 291.

Bourdieu and Jean Claude Passeron in the 1970s.[81] Althusser argues that states control and placate their populations by reproducing dominant ideologies through state apparatuses, which included education.[82] Bourdieu and Passeron's *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture* in 1977 claimed that the reproduction of classed hierarchies through education was also a result of cultural knowledge and 'capital', privileging groups with the knowledge and resources which aligned with curriculum and behavioural norms.[83] These theorists concentrated predominantly on the reproduction of a class-based social hierarchy; therefore subsequent examinations aimed to demonstrate how social hierarchies were enforced through educational practice, as well as through educational structures. Madeleine Arnot developed a framework of 'gender codes' in the 2000s, a term for the modes of transmission of gendered power relations which formed individuals' gender identity and experience.[84] Beverley Skeggs adapted Bourdieu and Passeron's theories of cultural capital to examine working-class femininity and educational disadvantage.[85] Black feminists such as Avtar Brah and Rehana Minhas in the 1980s and in the 1990s, Heidi Safia Mirza, also challenged the 'eurocentric and ethnocentric' nature of feminist analyses which othered Black women and girls, developing alternative analytical lenses which moved beyond reproduction theory.[86] Whilst reproduction can be a useful framing device, the nuances of local and individual experience must be accounted for. This thesis therefore considers the social reproduction potential of schooling but also takes into account the wider

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[81] Louis Althusser, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)', in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (Monthly Review Press, 1971); Pierre Bourdieu and Jean Claude Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture* (Sage Publications, 1977).

[82] Althusser, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses'.

[83] Bourdieu and Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*.

[84] Madeleine Arnot, *Reproducing Gender?: Essays on Educational Theory and Feminist Politics* (Falmer, Routledge, 2002), 9.

[85] Skeggs, *Formations of Class & Gender.*

[86] Arnot, *Reproducing Gender?,* 17; Avtar Brah and Rehana Minhas, 'Structural Racism or Cultural Difference: Schooling for Asian Girls', in Gaby Weiner (ed.), *Just a Bunch of Girls: Feminist Approaches to Schooling*, (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1985); Heidi Safia Mirza, *Race, Gender and Educational Desire: Why Black Women Succeed and Fail* (London: Routledge, 2008).

kaleidoscope of social and cultural factors which shaped girls' educational engagement and subjectivities.

Concurrent to these developments in sociology, historians working in the 1980s also turned to social and cultural reproduction as a lens for their own analyses of gender and education. J.A. Mangan's analysis of the construction of Christian, athletic, and white masculinities amongst public school boys adopted an Althusserian emphasis on the divergence of state and private education in reproducing an imperial social hierarchy.[87] Felicity Hunt explored the competing ideologies in the schooling of middle-class Victorian girls, which focused on creating domestic, subservient, and demure girls, who would be respectable in middle class society.[88] Penny Summerfield's case study of early twentieth-century Lancashire reveals that the aims of marriage and middle-class professions such as teaching underpinned the education of her subjects.[89] More recently, historians of education and childhood have cautiously navigated the aims of schooling alongside a nuanced consideration of the effects of such schooling on pupils. Tisdall, Langhamer, and Barron, for instance, have broadened their scope to consider the role families and communities played in explaining historical trends in education, particularly in relation to imagined futures.[90] This thesis will therefore examine not just the intentions and ideologies which underpinned educational change, but also the effects on individual pupils' experiences and identities.

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[87] J.A. Mangan, 'Images of Empire in Late Victorian Public School', *Journal of Educational Administration and History*, 12:1 (1980), 31-39.

[88] Felicity Hunt, 'Divided Aims: The Educational Implications of Opposing Ideologies in Girls' Secondary Schooling, 1850-1940', in Felicity Hunt (ed.) *Lessons for Life: The Schooling of Girls and Women 1850-1940,* (London: Basil Blackwell, 1987), 3-21.

[89] Penny Summerfield, 'Cultural Reproduction in the Education of Girls: A Study of Girls' Secondary Schooling in Two Lancashire Towns, 1900-1950', in Felicity Hunt (ed.) *Lessons for Life: The Schooling of Girls and Women 1850-1940,* (London: Basil Blackwell, 1987), 149-170.

[90] Hester Barron and Claire Langhamer, 'Feeling through Practice: Subjectivity and Emotion in Children's Writing', *Journal of Social History*, 51.1 (2017), 101–23; Tisdall, 'Education, Parenting, and Concepts of Childhood'.

The reinforcement of heterosexual girlhood culturally and through schooling was potentially another key factor in the making of girls' identities; sex education, both formal and informal, therefore is the focus of one of this thesis' chapters. The topic of sex education has attracted a relatively large amount of historical scholarship; political narratives such as those provided by Lesley Hall, Hera Cook, and Jane Pilcher are complemented by recent scholarship which draws sex education and public health together by Hannah J. Elizabeth, Katherine Jones, and Caroline Rusterholtz.[91] Beth Bailey has suggested that the history of childhood and sex is 'vexed' and emotionally charged, and that sexual knowledge and experience has historically defined the boundary between childhood and adulthood.[92] Perhaps as a result, existing historiography has examined the right-wing backlash to the perceived moral decline of Britain following the permissive Sixties.[93] Hall has described sex education a 'soft target' for wider anxieties over changes in society, such as the changing structure of the family due to rising divorce and cohabitation rates.[94] Factors such as these were, for some, signs of the increased rights and self-determination of women in the late-twentieth century, but were interpreted by conservative commentators and politicians as a sign of moral degradation.[95] The tightening of policy and laws around sex education in

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[91] Hera Cook, 'Sexuality and Contraception in Modern England: Doing the History of Reproductive Sexuality', *Journal of Social History*, 40.4 (2007), 915–32; Hannah J Elizabeth, '"Private Things Affect Other People": Grange Hill's Critique of British Sex Education Policy in the Age of AIDS', *Twentieth Century British History*, (published online, 2020); Lesley A. Hall, 'Birds, Bees and General Embarrassment: Sex Education in Britain, from Social Purity to Section 28.', in Richard Aldrich (ed.), *Public Or Private Education?: Lessons from History*, (London: Woburn Press, 2004), 93-112; Katherine Jones, '"Men Too": Masculinities and Contraceptive Politics in Late Twentieth Century Britain', *Contemporary British History*, 34:1 (2020), 44–70; Jane Pilcher, 'School Sex Education: Policy and Practice in England 1870 to 2000', *Sex Education*, 5:2 (2005), 153–70; Caroline Rusterholz, 'English Women Doctors, Contraception and Family Planning in Transnational Perspective (1930s–70s)', *Medical History*, 63:2 (2019), 153–72.
[92] Beth Bailey, 'The Vexed History of Children and Sex', in Paula S. Fass (ed.), *The Routledge History of Childhood in the Western World* (London: Routledge, 2012), 191–210.
[93] James Hampshire and Jane Lewis, '"The Ravages of Permissiveness": Sex Education and the Permissive Society', *Twentieth Century British History*, 15:3 (2004), 290–312, 295-6; Lesley A. Hall, 'Birds, Bees and General Embarrassment', 109.
[94] Hall, 'Birds, Bees and General Embarrassment', 112.
[95] For women's rights and 'the family', see: Susan Reinhold, 'Through the Parliamentary Looking Glass: "Real" and "Pretend" Families in Contemporary British Politics', *Feminist Review*, 48:1, 1994, 61–79. See also Chapter Six of Cunningham, *The Invention of Childhood*.

schools which followed from 1988 into the 1990s was therefore inherently gendered in that it was in response to some of the gains made by women's liberation. The third chapter of this thesis therefore focuses on sex education as a route for the inculcation of ideas of heterosexual femininity, and reinforcing the age-determined power relations between teenagers and adults.

The content of sex education, once it was established as a part of the school curriculum, was also subject to criticism, fear, and moral panic. Mara Gregory's analysis of sex education videos created by the BBC and ITV in the 1970s included evidence of pupil reactions, which Gregory has shown suggests that there was a demand among young people in the 1970s for improved sex education, specifically regarding contraception.[96] Hannah J. Elizabeth identifies advice columns in magazines and the sharing of information among peers as key methods used by pupils to fill the gaps left by school sex education.[97] There was also a vital social component to teen sexuality; Hannah Charnock's work demonstrates that sexual knowledge and experience were crucial for teenagers, forming important homosocial bonds and affecting girls' status and selfhoods.[98] Many girls' social relations were forged within school; the delineation between the public space of school and private space of intimate relationships was therefore blurred. Girls had rich and complex lives outside and within school, and drew on an array of social, cultural, and educational resources to create their identities. Therefore, a study of girls' identities in relation to schooling must examine the changing nature of girlhood in relation to sex education, and consider influences beyond the school.

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[96] Mara Gregory, '"Beamed Directly to the Children": School Broadcasting and Sex Education in Britain in the 1960s and 1970s.', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 25 (2015), 187–214.
[97] Hannah J. Elizabeth, 'Getting around the rules of sex education', *Wellcome Collection Stories*, 7th June 2018, https://wellcomecollection.org/articles/WxZnZyQAAPoF1PS8., (accessed 22 November 2020).
[98] Hannah Charnock, 'Teenage girls, female friendship and the making of the sexual revolution in England, 1950–1980', *The Historical Journal*, 63:4 (2019), 1032–53.

This thesis therefore builds on both recent historical scholarship and sociological analyses of education, by examining the policy and teaching methods of late-twentieth century schooling, and the everyday experiences of pupils. By examining individual narratives, this thesis adds to historical understandings of the construction of girls' selfhoods, and the effects of feminist intervention in education. Penny Tinkler and Carolyn Jackson urge social scientists to adopt a historical sensibility to their research in order to 'avoid reinventing the wheel', and acknowledge feminist analyses of education over sixty years of scholarship.[99] By drawing on the work of feminist sociologists of education, for both their analytical contributions and as contemporary examples of pedagogical development during the time period studied, this thesis both acknowledges and builds on this feminist heritage, and adopts a historical lens to trace the spread of feminist analyses of education into the classroom in the late-twentieth century.

Local Approaches to Equal Opportunities

The comparative case studies at the core of this thesis show how the discourses around equality in education were utilised by teachers and local education authorities (LEAs) in two areas: Inner London and Reading. Donald K. Jones and Edward Fearn have adopted local approaches to explore the impact and implementation of reforms such as comprehensivisation, but the local implementation of gendered reforms from the 1970s onwards remains underexplored by historians.[100] Gary McCulloch argues that a key failure of educational reform in the twentieth century was 'the difference between *theory* and *practice';* McCulloch finds that whilst well-meaning experiments by teachers aimed to help

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[99] Penny Tinkler and Carolyn Jackson, 'The Past in the Present: Historicising Contemporary Debates about Gender and Education', *Gender and Education*, 26:1 (2014), 70–86.
[100] Donald K. Jones, 'The Reorganization of Secondary Education in Leicestershire, 1947-1984', 20-35, and Edward Fearn, 'The Politics of Local Reorganization', 36-51, both in Roy Lowe (ed.), *The Changing Secondary School,* (Lewes: The Falmer Press, 1989).

working-class children overcome their 'social disadvantage', they in fact limited pupils' capacity to do so.[101] This thesis builds on McCulloch's characterisation by examining efforts by individual teachers and reformers at a local level and by illustrating the strengths and failings of the implementation of radical education. By focusing on the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA), who held a Labour majority from 1970 until its abolition and was known for radical approaches to issues of equality, and the Berkshire County Council (BCC), which had a Conservative majority between 1973 and the early 1990s, this thesis will reveal the local nuances which shaped girls' educational experiences in the late twentieth century.[102]

The ILEA and its predecessor, the London County Council (LCC), were vocal supporters of the comprehensive system. However, the relative autonomy of voluntary and direct grant schools meant that some grammar and streamed schools remained throughout the 1970s and 1980s.[103] By November 1971, the ILEA had comprehensivised all but 59 grammar schools, the majority of which were voluntary-aided and therefore likely to be run by religious groups.[104] A period of progress followed, with 39 schools either closed or amalgamated between 1975 and 1977; Alan Kerckhoff, Ken Fogelman, David Crook, and David Reeder, however, conclude that full comprehensivisation was never a realisable goal, given London's diverse socio-economic composition and the presence of some voluntary-aided and private schools which persisted.[105]

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[101] Gary McCulloch, *Failing the Ordinary Child? The theory and practice of working-class secondary education,* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1998), 157.
[102] Whilst the ILEA was technically a special committee of the Greater London Council (GLC), they retained a Labour majority even when the GLC had periods of Conservative leadership.
[103] Stuart Maclure, *The History of Education in London 1870-1990,* (2nd edition, London: Allen Lane, 1990), 224. Education Committee Minutes, 10th Nov 1971, in 'Minutes, 1971 Feb-1972 Dec', ILEA/CL/MIN/01/004, LMA; and Education Committee Minutes, 7th April 1981, in 'Minutes, 1981 Jan-1982 Dec', ILEA/CL/MIN/01/009, LMA; Crook, 'Local Authorities and Comprehensivisation', 252-4.
[104] Education Committee Minutes, 10th Nov 1971, in 'Minutes, 1971 Feb-1972 Dec', ILEA/CL/MIN/01/004, LMA.
[105] Alan Kerckhoff, Ken Fogelman, David Crook, and David Reeder, *Going Comprehensive in England and Wales: A Study of Uneven Change* (London: Routledge, 2017), 80. Note: Private schools are also sometimes

Reading had also adopted a policy of full comprehensivisation just prior to its merge with Berkshire to form the BCC in 1973, with plans to either close or change existing bilateral and grammar schools into comprehensives.[106] The BCC carried out the plans for the bilateral schools in 1974, but left two remaining grammar schools along with one secondary modern, the latter of which shut its doors in 1977.[107] The BCC again attempted to close the two remaining grammar schools in the early 1980s, but were unsuccessful; at this time, over 82% of Reading secondary pupils had a comprehensive education.[108] Reading has retained a mixed system of selective and non-selective schools into the 2020s.

The issue of educational equality epitomised by the comprehensive debates was complemented by feminist activism from the 1970s. Legislation such as the Equal Pay Act 1970 and the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 was the result of feminist efforts, with the latter establishing the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC). Equal opportunity in education and work was one of the seven key demands established by the Women's Liberation Movement (WLM) in 1970 at their founding Ruskin College conference, and the Sex Discrimination Act explicitly aimed to end discrimination in entry to mixed schools and equalise access to courses.[109] As a result of the Sex Discrimination Act, LEAs acquired responsibility for equal opportunities (EO) policy for local schools. Yet, as Avtar Brah and Rosemary Deem argued, the phrase 'equal opportunities[…]conceals more than it reveals'; generalised understandings of this phrase resulted in differing results across LEAs.[110]

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referred to as 'public' or 'independent' schools, but all charge fees and function differently to state schools, which are the focus of this thesis.

[106] *Future Pattern of Education in the Reading Area: the Report of the County Council*, (Royal County of Berkshire, 1982).

[107] 'Woodley. Sect. 13(3) Notice to change the character of Bulmershe County Grammar School', 5th March 1971, C/CL/E4/135/11/10; Woodley. Sect 13(3) Notice to change the character of 'Waingel's Copse County Secondary School', 5th March 1971, C/CL/E4/135/11/11, BRO; and *Future Pattern of Education in the Reading Area*.

[108] *Future Pattern of Education in the Reading Area.*

[109] Goodman, 'Class and Religion', 19; Jolly, *Sisterhood and After*, 90.

[110] Avtar Brah and Rosemary Deem, 'Towards Anti-Sexist and Anti-Racist Schooling', *Critical Social Policy*, 6:16 (1986), 66–79; Mandler, *The Crisis of the Meritocracy,* 5.

As Gaby Weiner has suggested, at its most basic, equal opportunities strategies were reforms on behalf of girls and women within existing educational structures, whereas 'anti-sexism' aimed to more fundamentally alter unequal power relations between the sexes, 'as a means of transforming the patriarchal practices within school structures and curricula.'[111] 'Anti-sexism' was also a term adopted by some who saw themselves as radical – such as Weiner – to distinguish their girl-centred work from the ambiguities of equal opportunities, a term which implied that boys' education would also be reformed, something which was not a major focus of all anti-sexist teachers.[112] On a practical level, equal opportunities was concerned with persuading girls into a common curriculum and acquiring greater representation of women in senior positions in schools. Anti-sexist practitioners instead proposed a 'girl-centred' education in which curricula was fundamentally altered, for instance promoting women-centred history, along with encouraging staff to reflect on their own dissemination of the 'hidden curriculum.'[113] Whilst the BCC followed a mainstream equal opportunities approach, from the early 1980s, the ILEA was openly anti-sexist in its approach to girls' schooling.

In the 1970s, the ILEA had been led by an 'old guard' of relatively moderate Labour politicians.[114] With the election of Ken Livingstone as Leader in 1981, the Greater London Council (GLC) entered a period of 'radical experiment,' as younger generations of Labour activists pursued a 'more outgoing' politics by sharing power with local groups and prioritising discrimination of women, ethnic minorities, and lesbian and gay men and women.[115] According to Daniel Egan, Ken Young, and Muhammet Kösecik and Naim Kapucu, the Labour left exhibited political agency in transforming the institution into a new

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[111] Gaby Weiner, *Feminisms in Education: An Introduction* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1994), 78.
[112] Gaby Weiner, 'Feminist Education and Equal Opportunities: Unity or Discord?', *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 7:3 (1986), 265–74.
[113] Weiner, *Feminisms in Education,* 79.
[114] Maclure, *The History of Education in London 1870-1990,* 214.
[115] Stephen Brooke, 'Space, Emotions and the Everyday: The Affective Ecology of 1980s London', *Twentieth Century British History*, 28:1 (2017), 110–42.

participatory body.[116] The ILEA – a 'quasi-autonomous committee' of the GLC and

independent between 1986 and 1990 following the GLC's abolition – followed a similar

pattern by pursuing policies which aimed to enable greater community and parental

involvement, such as community schools, and by adopting anti-racist and anti-sexist stances

from the early 1980s onwards.[117] In Inner London, feminism had a direct impact on some

girls' schooling from the early 1980s onwards, after the election of feminist leader and

deputy leader, Frances Morrell and Ruth Gee. Under Morrell's leadership, the ILEA

developed policy and curriculum that decentred the domestic role from representations of

womanhood, drawing on feminist ideas of a hidden curriculum and gender stereotyping

from birth.[118] Jane Martin has argued that the activism of women in the LCC and ILEA were

part of a longer-term tradition of 'municipal feminism' in London's labour movement which

went as far back as 1870. She argued that Morrell and others engaged in a cultural praxis

which involved reforming state institutions such as LEAs to change social consciousness;

namely, to break the 'circulation of patriarchal values and male control.'[119] The ILEA's anti-

sexist reforms were therefore part of both a new left-wing approach to local government

and a longer-term feminist tradition in London education, bolstered by women's liberation

and the turning tide of gender equality debates in 1970s and 1980s Britain. The ILEA

therefore makes an excellent case study area for examining changing ideas of girlhood, and

analysing the impact of schooling on girls' selfhoods.

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[116] Daniel Egan, 'Bureaucracy and Radical Politics: The Case of the Greater London Council', *New Political Science*, 28:3 (2006), 377–400; Muhammet Kösecik and Naim Kapucu, 'Conservative Reform of Metropolitan Counties: Abolition of the GLC and MCCs in Retrospect', *Contemporary British History*, 17:3 (2003), 71–94; Ken Young, 'London Government, 1920–1986: Ideal and Reality', *The London Journal*, 26:1 (2001), 57–68.
[117] Martin, 'Gender, Education and Social Change', 58; *An Education Service for the Whole Community,* (Inner London Education Authority, 1973).
[118] Maclure, *A History of Education in London,* 218; *Race, Sex and Class 4: Anti-racist Statement and Guidelines,* (Inner London Education Authority, 1983); *Race, sex and class 6, A Policy for Equality: Sex,* (Inner London Education Authority, London, 1985).
[119] Martin, 'Gender, Education and Social Change', 71.

Gender equality reforms in the ILEA coincided with the development of multicultural and anti-racist policies; the ILEA developed both in tandem throughout the 1980s.[120] In 1972, it was estimated that there were 46,046 children in ILEA primary schools who had migrated to the UK; adapting education for these children's needs was a crucial aspect of ILEA policy in the 1970s.[121] Other LEAs pursued policies of assimilation in the 1960s and 1970s; i.e. that immigrant children should become British through English language lessons and learning about British culture and values.[122] One infamous example was the policy of bussing South Asian children in LEAs such as Ealing to predominantly white suburban schools beyond their local area, to ensure that non-Anglophone Asian children 'integrated' by internalising the 'British' way of life; Olivier Esteves's recent book explores the impact of such policies on children.[123] The ILEA was an early adopter of multiculturalism, the idea that education should reflect and celebrate the cultural diversity of its student bodies. A policy of 'community schools' in the 1970s aimed to involve local communities in school activities, and curriculum development schemes led to the inclusion of World History in the history offering.[124] Under Morrell, the ILEA adopted an anti-racist policy in 1982, which turned attention inwards towards the role of the ILEA and its staff in upholding racial inequality.[125] The *Race, Sex, Class* series, published between 1983 and 1985, further aimed to examine the interaction between racism, sexism, and classism in pupils' attainment and school experiences.[126] Anti-racist and anti-sexist reforms in the

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[120] Maclure, *The History of Education in London,* 217-8.

[121] Education Committee Minutes, 8th November 1972, 'Minutes, 1971 Feb-1972 Dec', ILEA/CL/MIN/01/004, LMA.

[122] Brah and Deem, 'Towards Anti-Sexist and Anti-Racist Schooling'; Mal Leicester, *Equal Opportunities in School: Social Class, Sexual Orientation, Race, Gender and Special Needs* (Harlow: Longman, 1991), 29-30; Barry Troyna and Jenny Williams, *Racism, Education and the State* (London: Croom Helm, 1986), 31-3; 79.

[123] Olivier Esteves, *The "desegregation" of English schools: Bussing, race and urban space, 1960s-80s,* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018).

[124] Education Committee Minutes, 11th December 1973, 'Minutes, 1973 Jan-1974 Dec', ILEA/CL/MIN/01/005, LMA; *An Education Service for the Whole Community.*

[125] Education Committee Minutes, 21st June 1982, and 12th July 1982, in 'Minutes, 1981 Jan-1982 Dec', ILEA/CL/MIN/01/009, LMA; *Race, Sex and Class 2: Multi-ethnic education in schools,* (London, Inner London Education Authority, 1983).

[126] *Race, Sex, Class 1: Achievement in Schools,* (Inner London Education Authority, 1983).

1980s included the formation of Working Parties and Sub-Committees, alongside significant

projects ran by advisory teams and school departments, but by the time the ILEA's end was

in sight, the underachievement of Black pupils continued to be a significant failure.[127] Whilst

this radical stance set ILEA apart from more assimilationist LEAs, Berry Troyna and Jenny

Williams show that these failings were largely a result of the commitment of educationalists

to upholding the meritocratic basis of education.[128] As Littler argues, meritocracy by nature

meant that some people were left behind.[129] The developments of anti-sexist and anti-racist

policies within the ILEA shows that whilst the ILEA aimed to forge a radical path, the

meritocratic foundations of the English education system meant that changes could only

ever be partial. This partial reform had important implications for the pupils whose

experiences are explored in this thesis.

The records of the BCC show that the LEA leaders did not introduce as rigorous anti-

sexist measures as the ILEA did. There is a distinct absence of reports or agenda items

pertaining to gender in the BCC Education Committee files prior to 1993; only occasional

stand-alone projects are mentioned, and these were often within the Youth Services

Department, not Education.[130] An Equal Opportunities Working Party was established in

1993; their initial report stated that up until that point, ethnicity had been the principle

emphasis of the Authority's equal opportunities work, and that this would be extended to

sex and disability from 1993.[131] Whilst there is documentation to show that there was some

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[127] Report No. 4 of the Policy Sub-Committee, *Interim report from the Chief Inspector* (dated 1st July 1987), and Report No. 5 of the Policy Sub-Committee *Equal Opportunities Annual Review 1986-7*(dated 1st July 1987)*,* in Education Committee Minutes, 14th July 1987, 'Minutes, 1986 Apr-1987 Dec', ILEA/CL/MIN/01/012, LMA.
[128] Troyna and Williams, *Racism, Education, and the State,* 71.
[129] Littler, 'Meritocracy as Plutocracy', 54.
[130] For example, in 1986 the Youth Service heard a proposal for 'The Berkshire Girls Work Development Project', which aimed to 'assist girls and young women in their social and education development'; this activity was predominantly to be undertaken within youth clubs. See Minutes of the Youth & Community Sub-Committee, 23rd July 1986, in 'Further Education and Youth & Community and Sub-Committees 1985-1989', C/CS/C3/5/2, BRO.
[131] *Final Report of the Equal Opportunities Working Party Draft,* in 'Equal Opportunities Working Party, Dec 1993 – Mar 1995', C/CS/C4/6/57, BRO.

activism around multicultural education, there is no documentation of any coordinated

anti-sexist working parties, committees, or departments within the BCC files. This may be as

a result of a lack of engagement with local gender equality groups external to the BCC,

whereas community groups played an important role in keeping the BCC active. Requests

from Reading and Slough's Councils for Community Relations recorded in the BCC minutes

suggest that there was a degree of accountability and engagement from community groups

in areas of relatively migrant populations; Reading for instance had significant Caribbean,

Pakistani, Indian, and East African Asian communities, established from the mid-twentieth

century.[132] Berkshire published policy statements in 1983 which outlined the LEA's

approach to anti-racism and the support available to teachers.[133] Teachers could be

seconded to Bulmershe College, a local teacher training institution, to develop new

curricula, and opportunities existed to involve parents and recruit teachers from ethnic

minorities.[134] From the mid-1980s, multicultural and racial equality policies were

formalised within the BCC, sub-committees formed, and Section 11 government funding

secured.[135] Yet, as with the ILEA, 'underachievement' persisted as a chronic issue, and

tensions between community groups, the Multi-Cultural Education Sub-Committee and the

central Education Committee were evident.[136]

Inner London and Reading also shared comparable economic trends, which were

crucial in shaping the job market girls encountered upon leaving school. Reading had been a

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[132] See *Routes to Reading – Stories of Immigration,* (Reading Local History Trust, 2006); see also The Immigrants Project, Reading Local History Trust, 2006, which produced the above book: https://www.theimmigrantsproject.org/about/; Further Education Sub-Committee Minutes, 10th July 1975, in 'Further Education Sub-Committee Agendas 1973-7', C/CS/C4/1/4; and Minutes of the Schools Sub-Committee, 9th July 1975, in 'Education Committee Agendas 1973-5', C/CS/C4/1/1, BRO.
[133] *Education for Racial Equality: Policy Paper 1, General Policy,* (Royal County of Berkshire, 1983).
[134] *Education for Racial Equality: Policy Paper 3, Support,* (Royal County of Berkshire, 1983).
[135] Multicultural Education Sub-Committee Minutes, 28th November 1988, in 'Multicultural Education Sub-Committee Agendas 1986-1989', C/CS/C4/4/6, BRO.
[136] Education Committee Minutes, 9th October 1986, in '1986-9 Council', C/CS/C3/4/1, BRO; Report of the Director of Education – *Education for Racial Equality,* Multicultural Education Sub-Committee Minutes 25th July 1986, in 'Multicultural Education Sub-Committee Agendas 1986-1989', C/CS/C4/4/6, BRO.

thriving industrial centre based on the famous trio of 'beer, biscuits, and bulbs', and had experienced near constant industrial growth since the 1930s.[137] However, according to James Barlow and Mike Savage, the transformation from industrial base to a booming centre for financial services in the 1980s was damaging for Reading's working and lower middle-class population.[138] This story of the expansion of service industries and the loss of manufacturing jobs and opportunities for lower skilled and manual workers was also echoed in parts of Inner London.[139] Barlow and Savage note that whilst the cost of housing in Reading skyrocketed in the early 1980s, by 1985, 18% of houses in one East Reading ward still lacked their own bathroom or toilet.[140] Despite the economic inequality in both authorities, social class was not a central focus of equal opportunities policy in either LEA until the mid-1980s, other than the data supplied in the ILEA's *Race, Sex, Class* series, published between 1983 and 1985.[141] ILEA member for Westminster, Steven Cowan, raised concerns in a 1986 Education Committee meeting that discrimination on grounds of class and sexuality had not been satisfactorily addressed between 1981 and 1986; and the only evidence offered to counter this was that there were EO working parties looking into the matter.[142]

In both areas, the responsibility for implementing equalities policy and initiatives lay with individual schools and teachers. This structure allowed individual teachers the autonomy to experiment with anti-sexist and anti-racist education, even if it was not encouraged. In the ILEA, headteachers had responsibility for the curriculum and day-to-day

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[137] More specifically, the Simonds family brewing firm, Sutton's Seeds, and Huntley and Palmers biscuit factories were all important local employers until the 1960s. James Barlow and Mike Savage, 'The Politics of Growth: Cleavage and Conflict in a Tory Heartland', *Capital & Class*, 10:3 (1986), 156–82, 157.
[138] Ibid, 163.
[139] P.W. Daniels, 'The Geography of Economic Change', in Paul Addison, Harriet Jones, and Bernard Alford (eds.), *A Companion to Contemporary Britain 1939 - 2000: 1939-2000*, (Oxford: John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, 2005), 203–25, 219.
[140] Barlow and Savage, 'The Politics of Growth', 167.
[141] *Race, Sex and Class 1: Achievement in Schools,* (London, Inner London Education Authority, 1983).
[142] Education Committee Minutes, 27th May 1986, in 'Minutes, 1986 Apr-1987 Dec', ILEA/CL/MIN/01/012, LMA.

running of the school without much LEA interference; this autonomy had already been utilised in the post-war period by experimental secondary modern teachers.[143] In this devolved structure, individual feminist teachers were crucial actors in implementing anti-sexist agendas in schools. However, due to curriculum design being decentralised to individual schools until the introduction of the National Curriculum in 1988, anti-sexist and feminist pedagogies were difficult to implement across entire LEAs. Individual teachers took the initiative, forming their own networks across local areas, sharing resources and developing plans to combat gender inequality, empower girls, and disrupt girls' paths into stereotyped gender roles after leaving school. In Berkshire, too, some individual teachers led the way in pursuing equal opportunities and anti-racist agendas.[144] Thinking about the spread of these reforms as driven by individuals, rather than structures, is crucial for any study of radical education in the post-war period.

The mainstreaming of educational feminism in the late 1980s created tensions for teachers and policy-makers in both the ILEA and BCC. Arnot, Weiner and David find that after 1988, as free-market ideals of competition, standards, and choice were introduced into schooling, feminist activism within education was forced to cater to a 'performance-oriented school system with a strong managerialist ethos'.[145] This resulted in the marginalisation of radical approaches, as a 'liberal feminism', predominantly concerned with equal access and de-gendering the public sphere, took precedent.[146] The erosion of local government powers which had facilitated the work of feminist teachers in ILEA was crucial in the development of gender equality agendas in the 1990s. Inner London also saw significant change in the 1990s; the abolition of the ILEA in 1990 resulted in control of

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[143] John Davis, 'The Inner London Education Authority and the William Tyndale Junior School Affair'; Carter, ''Experimental' secondary modern education'; Tisdall, *A Progressive Education?*.
[144] Marina Foster, 'A black perspective', in Kate Myers (ed.), *Whatever happened to equal opportunities in schools? Gender equality initiatives in education,* (Open University Press, 2000), 189-214.
[145] Arnot, David, and Weiner, *Closing the Gender Gap,* 98-9.
[146] Ibid.

education being given to the individual boroughs.[147] It has not been feasible to conduct

archival research into all twelve boroughs for the purposes of this PhD; instead, I have just

focused on Hackney's Education Committee in the period after the ILEA's abolition. I chose

Hackney because several interviewees attended school in Hackney and its neighbouring

boroughs. Hackney Borough Council (HBC) records provides substantial evidence to

support Arnot, David, and Weiner's chronology of managerialism in the borough. Whilst

equal opportunities continued to be high on the educational agenda in the 1990s, the

feminist projects which had defined the ILEA's 1980s heyday were marginalised in favour

of a liberal educational feminism agenda, which focused on equal access and attainment.[148]

These discourses of female empowerment – both radical and liberal – were drawn on by

teenage girls in agentic ways. But before girls' experiences are explored in depth, it is also

vital to provide a conceptual understanding of identity formation, subjectivity, and agency.

Subjectivity, Identity, and Agency

The late twentieth century saw shifts in understandings of womanhood, femininity,

and girlhood, affecting the way the subject positions of 'girl' and 'woman' were constructed

and were understood by individuals. Chris Weedon argues that subjectivity consists 'of an

individual's conscious and unconscious sense of self, emotions and desires,' their place in

society, their understanding of that society, and their outlook on their position within it.[149]

This thesis therefore works with an understanding of subjectivity as an individual's own

understanding of their position in the world and their sense of self. Subjectivity, as

Althusser reminds us, is constituted through discourses, as individuals are interpolated as

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[147] Pat Thane, *Divided Kingdom: A History of Britain, 1900 to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 376.
[148] Arnot, David, and Weiner, *Closing the Gender Gap,* 100-101.
[149] Weedon, *Identity and culture*, 19.

subjects, such as a worker, woman, or child. Crucially, these subject positions are not all equal, and have distinct social meanings and understandings. For instance, gender is crucial in determining individuals' subjectivity; Sidonie Smith argues that women are attributed 'an essential selfhood,' which is tied to 'biological destiny,' in other words motherhood.[150] Youth too is a category imbued with cultural meanings and values which are rooted in understandings of biological difference, as Steven Mintz argues.[151] Identity, however, whilst linked to subjectivity, can be thought of as a 'particular set of traits, beliefs and allegiances that, in short- or long-term ways, gives one a consistent personality and mode of social being,' according to Donald Hall.[152] Identity is more fluid than subjectivity, according to Weedon; it is a 'limited and temporary fixing for the individual of a particular mode of subjectivity as apparent what one *is*.'[153] An individual can hold multiple identities, which can be contextually specific and fluctuate over time. Identity is not just *what* we are, but *who* we are in a particular moment.

Joan Scott's landmark work also highlights the connections between identity, subjectivity, and 'experience,' a category which sits at the heart of this thesis. In her own words: 'Experience is at once always already an interpretation and something that needs to be interpreted.'[154] Scott here suggests that the world can only be understood through discourse, and that experience is the interpretation by the individual, by using these discourses – in this research, of gender, age, class, and race – to construct their identities and navigate their social position. This not to say that discourses around gender, age, class, and race determined girls' destinies, nor that these categories did not and do not hold

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[150] Sidonie Smith, *Subjectivity, Identity, and the Body: Women's Autobiographical Practices in the Twentieth Century,* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993) 13; 22

[151] Steven Mintz, 'Reflections on Age as a Category of Historical Analysis', *The Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth*, 1:1 (2008), 91–94, 93.

[152] Donald E. Hall, *Subjectivity,* (London: Routledge, 2004), 3.

[153] Weedon, *Identity and Culture,* 19.

[154] Joan W. Scott, 'The Evidence of Experience', *Critical Inquiry*, 17:4 (1991), 773–97, 797.

significant power to determine girls' experiences. As this thesis will show, there is need for nuance here; not all discourses were equally powerful, and not all subjects internalised discourses uncritically. Carol Bacchi argues that scholars must take care not to assume 'dominant' discourses, i.e. those of the powerful, are all pervasive. She argues that whilst subjects or identities are formed within constraints, contestation of such constraints also takes place, as individuals negotiate meanings locally to produce a version of themselves for a particular purpose, consciously and unconsciously.[155] Their lived experiences and relationships with others also influenced the extent to which girls' lives and identities were shaped by these discourses. Here is where girls' agency lies; in being able to mediate between dominant and less dominant discourses to construct their identities.

Furthermore, the act of confronting, mediating, and reshaping competing discourses and subject positions can be a way for individuals to exercise some agency.[156] Smith argues that through self-narrative or autobiography, women confront 'the mess and clutter of the many unofficial, "inauthentic," and nonidentical subjectivities available to them[…] women find narrative and rhetorical strategies through which to negotiate the laws of genre and the calls to provided subjectivities.'[157] Despite 'illusions of autonomy and self-determination' as Paul John Eakin puts it, individuals do not invent their identities out of thin air:

> Instead, we draw on the resources of the cultures we inhabit to shape them, resources that specify what it means to be a man, a woman, a worker, a person in the settings where we live our lives.[158]

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[155] Carol Bacchi, 'Discourse, Discourse Everywhere: Subject "Agency" in Feminist Discourse Methodology', *NORA - Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research*, 13:3 (2005), 198–209, 205-7.
[156] Weedon, *Identity and Culture,* 17-18.
[157] Smith, *Subjectivity, Identity, and the Body,* 22-3.
[158] Paul John Eakin, *Living Autobiographically: How We Create Identity in Narrative,* (Cornell University Press, 2008), 22.

Women – and girls – drew their identities from the discourses present within modern British society, but mediated and reworked them to construct their own sense of self. Yet the range of discourses girls could draw from was highly restricted by social conventions; as Hall states, people are given a 'a suspiciously narrow range of options that will allow us to fit comfortably into society and our particular gendered, regional, ethnic, sexual subset of it.'[159] For girls growing up in late twentieth-century Britain, discourses of modern individualism and female empowerment provided new opportunities for girls to constitute their identities, discourses which were apparent in their academic and careers education, in the media they consumed, and in the 'hidden curriculum' of their schooling.

But there were limits to these opportunities for girls. To draw from Althusser's theory of interpellation, these ideologies of female empowerment and modern individualism 'hailed' particular types of girl, girls who were able to fit the model of the ideal young female subject.[160] However, those girls marginalised in education – girls who were subject to racial or classed stereotyping, or whose intellects were underestimated – had to construct their identities differently to those who could align with new ideas of modern girlhood. Therefore, paying close attention to both how subjects are positioned within discourses, *and* how they make their own meaning from these discourses is crucial to this thesis. This research shows that the construction of identity from discourse was a crucial way in which teenage girls could be agentic amongst the oppressive power structures of a patriarchal and adult-led society.

As scholars such as Lynn M. Thomas and Mary Jo Maynes have shown, the concept of agency has an important legacy, connected to the rise of social history in the 1960s and

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[159] Hall, *Subjectivity,* 1.
[160] Althusser, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses'.

1970s.[161] As Thomas states, at the core of this was the idea 'that ordinary people, even those whose lives were structured by profound oppression, possessed the capacity or the agency to make the world a more just and equitable place'.[162] Yet scholars have also acknowledged that such understandings of agency can be simplistic and can romanticise the actions of individuals or paint them as somehow heroic.[163] Furthermore, simplistic notions of agency can exclude historical actors who do not fit with the ideal of a rational, autonomous being making informed decisions. Mona Gleason, Mary Jo Maynes, and Steven Mintz, have all considered the limitations of using ideas of agency and voice forged in a historical tradition which centred on white adult men and was rooted in ideals of a rational and autonomous historical actor.[164] Indeed, the concept of a universal rational selfhood excludes children and young people, who are often assumed to lack both rationality and capacity to make autonomous decisions.[165]

Historians of childhood have therefore struggled to reconcile the desire to acknowledge the important contributions of young people to historical change with the structural factors which leave children as relatively powerless. Yet scholarship from historians of gender as well as age have provided useful frameworks for detangling the tension between structural factors and agency. This thesis builds on such scholarship which argues that agency, like identity, cannot be separated from the historical and cultural context in which historical actors lived. Joan Scott argues that subjects 'are not unified, autonomous individuals exercising free will, but rather subjects whose agency is created

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[161] Lynn M. Thomas, 'Historicising Agency', *Gender & History,* 28:2, (2016), 324-339; and Mary Jo Maynes, 'Age as a Category of Historical Analysis: History, Agency, and Narratives of Childhood', *The Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth*, 1:1 (2008), 114–24.
[162] Thomas, 'Historicising Agency', 325.
[163] Maynes, 'Age as a Category of Historical Analysis', 118.
[164] Mona Gleason, 'Avoiding the Agency Trap: Caveats for Historians of Children, Youth, and Education.', *History of Education*, 45.4 (2016), 446–59; Maynes, 'Age as a Category of Historical Analysis', 118; Steven Mintz, 'Children's History Matters', *The American Historical Review*, 125.4 (2020), 1286–92, 1291.
[165] Maynes, 'Age as a Category of Historical Analysis', 116.

through situation and statuses conferred on them.'[166] Agency, Scott posited, was not an attribute or trait which came from the will of autonomous individuals, but an effect of the context. Rather than attempting to locate historical subjects outside of society and culture, Scott instead urged for an examination of the ways in which subjects drew on the resources available to them to understand their experiences and navigate the world.[167] Laura Lee Downs has critiqued Scott's focus on language, arguing that this focus results in the blurring the distinction between the textual and social relations, and that differentiation from others becomes the sole way in which identity is constructed.[168] Yet Scott does not deny social relations as important spaces for the construction of gender; for Scott, social relations were forged *by* the textual; she argued that gender was 'a primary way of signifying relationships of power.'[169] This thesis draws on Scott's analysis of agency, discourse, and power, to demonstrate how social relations – such as those between teachers and pupils – were forged by understandings of gender and age, and how teenage girls' agency was situationally constructed through power relations.

Useful conceptualisation of power and agency can be found among childhood scholars who have attempted to address the aforementioned problems of agency and power. Tatek Abebe offers a useful alternative to the enlightenment ideas of the autonomous rational subject. Abebe argues that this maturational model of agency – in which children are believed to acquire agency as they grow up and acquire 'knowledge, critical thinking, and skills' – is predicated on a universal notion of child development and requires scholars to quantify or measure agency, rather than examine how agency is

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[166] Scott, 'The Evidence of Experience', 793.

[167] Joan Scott, 'Review of Heroes of Their Own Lives: The Politics and History of Family Violence by Linda Gordon', *Signs*, 15:4 (1990), 848–52.

[168] Laura Lee Downs, 'If "Woman" Is Just an Empty Category, Then Why Am I Afraid to Walk Alone at Night? Identity Politics Meets the Postmodern Subject', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 35.2 (1993), 414–37, 423.

[169] Joan Scott, 'Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis', *The American Historical Review*, 91:5 (1986), 1053–75, 1067.

used.[170] This thesis focuses on teenage girls, who begin their secondary school career as eleven-year-old children and leave at sixteen or eighteen as adults; they demonstrate agency at all ages, not just upon leaving school as young adults. Teenagers occupied a complex and at times contradictory position because of discourses around age and maturity, legally defined as children but expected to discard elements of childishness in place of adult traits, like those identified by Abebe. As this thesis shows, the ways in which teenagers interpreted, navigated, and at times contested the social and cultural scripts available to them was a central part of their agency.

Therefore, any conceptualisation of children's agency requires a delicate balance between acknowledging that children are important social and historical actors, whose actions, behaviour, and choices can contribute to changes and continuities over time, and considering how power and context contribute to the form children's agency takes.[171] As Mintz argues, children, like adults, 'assume roles, take actions, make choices, respond emotionally, and develop autonomy and an ability to collaborate, all crucial components of the concept of agency.'[172] Whilst Mintz's use of 'autonomy' perhaps plays too far into the ideal of the perfect historical actor, his point that children can contribute to historical events and formulate their thoughts and responses to the world stands. Structural factors and power inequalities do indeed shape children's agency; they contribute to children's sense of their place in the world, and therefore expectations of what they can and cannot do. However, this does not mean that children are incapable of exercising agency and having an impact on the world around them. As historians of adults – such as Jon Lawrence and Claire Langhamer – have noted, small everyday behaviours and choices, once replicated, can drive

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[170] Tatek Abebe, 'Reconceptualising Children's Agency as Continuum and Interdependence', *Social Sciences*, 8:3 (2019), 81-91, 85-6.
[171] For instance, Gleason and Abebe both use agency in their work to refer to the state of children as historical actors. Gleason, 'Avoiding the Agency Trap'; Abebe, 'Reconceptualising Children's Agency'.
[172] Mintz, Children's History Matters', 1291.

significant social and cultural transformations, or uphold social and cultural norms.[173]
Therefore, context, and an acknowledgement of how power relations shape the actions children can take, is key to understanding child agency. Power relations and structure can influence the forms children's agency takes, as well as the boundaries of what they can do. Structural factors also shape the resources available to different children from different backgrounds. Therefore, as Mintz, Ishita Pande and Bengt Sandin point out, we need to acknowledge the 'spectrum' along which children's agentic expressions operate, and not create a contradictory framework in which the label of 'child' is held in opposition to 'agency'.[174]

By focusing on identity construction as a form of agency, this work moves beyond acknowledging the existence of agency, and towards a deeper understanding of how girls' agency operated. Lynn M. Thomas has cautioned against an over-reliance on agency as argument in itself. She instead thinks about agency as a starting point, a way into the '[r]eadily articulated intentions, frequently unspoken fantasies and ordinary efforts at survival'.[175] She argues that historians should 'attend to the multiple motivations that undergird meaningful action, motivations that exceed rational calculation and articulated intentions to include collective fantasies, psychical desires and struggles just to get by.'[176] The difficulty here can lie in detangling what actions can be considered as agentic, and which can be seen as a result of socio-cultural pressures. Mischa Honeck has put forward the idea of 'eigensinn', meaning 'wilfulness' and 'self-affirmation' as a placeholder for

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[173] Lawrence, *Me, Me, Me,* 12; and Langhamer, *The English in Love*, 50-1.
[174] Mintz, Pande, and Sandin's comments on this were in response to Sarah Maza's 2020 editorial in *The American Historical Review,* see: Sarah Maza, 'The Kids Aren't Alright: Historians and the Problem of Childhood', *The American Historical Review,* 125:4, (2020), 1261-1285; Mintz, 'Children's History Matters'; Ishita Pande, 'Is the History of Childhood Ready for the World? A Response to "The Kids Aren't All Right"', *The American Historical Review*, 125:4 (2020), 1300–1305; Bengt Sandin, 'History of Children and Childhood—Being and Becoming, Dependent and Independent', *The American Historical Review*, 125:4 (2020), 1306–16.
[175] Thomas, 'Historicising Agency', 330.
[176] Ibid, 335.

agency; whilst I think this is imperfect, understanding agency as wilful actions – be it contributing to broader political change, or simply asserting oneself and attempting to actualise desires and wishes – is central to understanding children's agency.[177] This conceptualisation can also help us understand the complexities of individual stories and experiences. Girls' agency was in part shaped by the context in which they lived and their place in the world, but by considering both socio-cultural pressures alongside the potential collective and individual desires and fantasies girls held, we can begin to understand how and why girls' actions contributed to historical change and continuity. For instance, as this thesis explores, the rise of individualism was a key shift in the post-war period, driven by longer term economic, political, and social developments. This thesis explores the ways in which girls from a range of socio-economic backgrounds engaged with these discourses, and how their actions consolidated or challenged this individualism. The agency of the teenage girls at the heart of this study therefore lay in how they utilised and made sense of discourses around them to understand their social position and construct their identities, and in turn, how these identity-making practices informed the ways they lived their lives and contributed to change.

This thesis works with an understanding of agency that does not neglect the structural influences which shaped girls' lives; rather, this thesis examines the form of girls' agency – as limited, relational, fluid, situational – and the ways in which girls exercised this agency to subvert – but to also uphold and position themselves within – gendered and classed expectations. To this end, this thesis does not dismiss children's actions which may appear to be the result of adult influence; Gleason argues that remaining silent or compliant with adult demands and expectations is also an important social act which has real-world

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[177] Mischa Honeck, 'Roundtable on Agency, Experience and the History of Childhood and Youth', 4th Annual History of Experiences (HEX), 2021, Tampere University, Finland, 10th March 2021.

effects.[178] She claims that we need to examine the 'in-between' of nuanced and negotiated expressions and exchanges, and look to a view of agency which is 'relational and complicated, rather than individual and rational,' in order to help historians 'to tease out the unique contributions of children and youth to historical change.'[179] Abebe goes a step further, and argues that 'western' ideals of agency have imagined agency as the individual acting in their own best interests; Abebe shows that dependency is not antithetical to agency, and that social and collective interests are also vital in understanding children's experiences and agency.[180] Drawing these key conceptualisations of agency together provides a useful model for this thesis; agency as a spectrum, as fluid, as complicit with adult demands, but also interdependent, collective, and historically and contextually specific.

This thesis makes a significant intervention into the historiography of age and gender by exploring how ideas and discourses of childhood, adolescence, and girlhood were used and reworked by girls themselves. Girls were able to construct agency for themselves – albeit in limited ways - through strategically deploying and reworking discourses around the expectations and characteristics of teenage girls to conform, navigate, and resist the gendered and age-related expectations they encountered. They made efforts to mediate between subject positions which were unable to be mediated, between classed, gendered, and other subjectivities to create an identity or sense of self.

Methodology

    This project aimed to identify the impact of education on girls' identities and on ideas of femininity; this focus on identity and experience is reflected by the choice of source

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178 Sandin, 'History of Children and Childhood', 1310; Gleason, 'Avoiding the agency trap', 446-8.
179 Gleason, 'Avoiding the Agency Trap', 458.
180 Abebe, 'Reconceptualising Children's Agency', 11.

material and methodology. Identity and agency are inherently tied to the social position of children within historical contexts and are particularly hard for scholars to recover given children's absence in traditional source materials. To uncover the 'authentic' voice of the child, historians of childhood have adopted methodologies from slavery and post-colonial studies, such as reading sources against the grain, to locate the contributions of children.[181] Such methodologies have sparked further discussions over the authenticity of voices located through the mediation of adults, leading some historians to ask whether the 'authentic' voice of the child is even possible to find.[182] Yet all sources provoke interpretative challenges, not just those which reveal experiences of children; in some ways, the issue of the 'authentic' voice can be a distraction from more provocative and useful questions around discourse, agency, and power.[183] This thesis is therefore not concerned with proving the authenticity of childhood voice. Instead, this work will examine how teenagers negotiated cultural discourses about age, as well as gender, class, and race, in the process of constructing their identities.

The experiential focus of this research is reflected in the choice of methodology and source base, primarily centred on oral histories of former pupils conducted by me in 2018 and 2019, and pupils' writing collected and published between 1967 and 2003. At the heart of this thesis is the feminist tradition of capturing women's voices and stories. This thesis uses oral history methods firstly in the traditional recovery mode – to capture recollections of their school days – and secondly to understand the layers of discourse around gender equality since the early 1970s which shaped women's identities and subjectivities, and the place of education within this. As Lynn Abrams has argued, historians have conceptualised

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[181] Gleason, 'Avoiding the Agency Trap', 452.

[182] Maza, 'The Kids Aren't Alright', 1264-6; Peter N. Stearns, 'Challenges in the History of Childhood', *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth*, 1:1 (2008), 35-42, 35-6.

[183] Robin P. Chapdelaine discusses the location of children's voices as a way into agency in 'Little Voices: The Importance and Limitations of Children's Histories', *The American Historical Review*, 125:4 (2020), 1296-1299, 1298.

the self as 'the outcome of a dialogic process as an individual's consciousness or subjectivity engages with existing discourses in society.'[184] Examining individuals' presentations of themselves – in written form or in an oral history context – reveals how they used contemporary discourses around girls' equality and education to create their identities and how these contemporary discourses constructed their subjectivities. This experiential evidence is complemented by archival research of LEA records, which provides the institutional backdrop to girls' experiences and establishes the presence and influence of discourses of individualism within Inner London and Reading. Throughout this thesis, I also bring in source material from outside of formal education – girls' media in particular – to further highlight the plethora of discourses available to girls, which impacted their identities and how they engaged with their schooling.

Oral History

Recruitment

Interviewees were recruited predominantly through social media. Of the sixteen former pupils interviewed, eleven were reached through social media, and five in person or through mutual acquaintances. This wide net did mean that my sample was predominantly white and middle class (see Appendix). Two Black women participated in this research – Aretha and Katy - and five interviewees – Maxine, Nicola*, Debbie*, Michelle*, and Aretha again – described their upbringings or families as working-class. Amongst the white interviewees, there was a range of second-generation immigrant backgrounds, comprising of Italian (Sara*), Polish (Dorota), and Irish descendants (Ali, Nicola*, Debbie*, Michelle*, and Claire, whose parents were a mixture of Irish and Northern Irish). Jacqueline*, Katie, Sara*, Emma*, Dorota, Alison, Ali, Rachel*, Lucy*, Claire, and Katy were all from middle-

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class families, although for some this changed throughout their adolescence.[185] A significant demographic missing from this small sample was working-class girls who achieved high academic success through grammar schooling; it is therefore important to note that the experiences of the working-class girls gathered here cannot be extrapolated out to all working-class girls. I recruited Ian* and Jane*, former teachers in Berkshire, through a mutual acquaintance. With the London teachers, snowballing was a great success. I met Kate Moorse through another historian of education, Laura Carter, and through Kate was introduced to several teachers who had worked at Islington Green School. These were: Sue Johne, Joy Walton, and Katy Marshall. The fifth former ILEA teacher, Steven Cowan, was reached through the National Education Union (NEU), whose current branch representatives kindly circulated information about this project to members. I interviewed seven former teachers in all, including Katy Marshall who was also a former pupil, conducting a total of twenty-two interviews.

The interviews

The interviews themselves were semi-structured and took place for the most part in interviewees' homes, apart from four which took place either at the University of Reading or in a public place. The interviews ranged from one hour to two and a half hours in length.[186] Each interview began with an open question about their family background, where they were born, and where they grew up. This was the only aspect of the interview which I managed more directly, to gather basic biographical details such as if they moved home as a child, if they had siblings, and where they attended school. The interview then

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[185] For instance, Sara's* father was a skilled labourer when she was young, but later on her mother acquired property and became a small business owner.

[186] This semi-structured format is widely used, for instance see: Spencer, 'Reflections on the 'site of struggle''; Natalie Thomlinson, 'Race and Discomposure in Oral Histories with White Feminist Activists', *Oral History*, 42:1 (2014), 84–94; Worth, 'Women, Education, and Social Mobility'.

took a life-history approach, progressing chronologically to their infant and junior school years, then to secondary schooling. This chronological movement through their childhood allowed interviewees to both become comfortable with the act of storytelling by dealing with the material of less importance to the project – infant and junior school – first, and through a familiar life-story structure. Once we moved on to secondary school, I then took a looser, more thematic approach, asking questions but largely following their own narrative flow. Kristina Minister points out that the standard, masculine question-answer format may alienate women who are not used to discussing topics without the collaboration of peers.[187] Whilst I did ask questions, I tried to keep these aspects of the interview conversational and thematic, rather than sticking rigidly to a script. The themes covered in this part of the interview included: subjects studied; teachers and teaching methods; behaviour and discipline; careers guidance; relationships with families and friends; leisure time; sex education; pastoral support; hobbies and cultural interests; and further study. This wide range of topics established a fuller sense of their lives as teenagers, not just at school. This was crucial in helping detangle the web of cultural and social influences which contributed to their selfhoods.

Transcripts of the interviews were sent to participants to review in the feminist tradition of the sharing of authority.[188] I could have deepened the collaborative aspect of this project by sharing interpretations with interviewees; the delicate balance between sharing authority and the significance that historical training, expertise, and abilities brings to the contextualisation and historicization of oral history accounts has been explored by

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[187] Kristina Minister, 'A Feminist Frame for the Oral History Interview', in Sherna Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai (eds.), *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History,* 27-41, 35.
[188] Abrams, *Oral History Theory,* 71-4; See for example: Jeska Rees, '"Are You a Lesbian?": Challenges in Recording and Analysing the Women's Liberation Movement in England', *History Workshop Journal*, 69:1 (2010), 177–87; Natalie Thomlinson, 'Race and Discomposure'.

Katherine Borland, Susan Armitage, and Sherna Berger Gluck.[189] However, not many interviewees returned the transcripts with additional notation. Wendy Rickard experienced a similar phenomenon in her work with sex workers and argues that whilst these women were largely unwilling to share this 'administrative authority' or burden, having the choice to do so was important for them.[190] A few interviewees did make changes to the transcripts to remove sensitive sections or extracts to preserve anonymity of third parties, and one edited more heavily for clarity. I did not challenge or reject any edits because it was important to make sure that the interviewees felt that the final transcript represented their story or narrative. Finally, all interviewees were also given the choice of remaining anonymous or not; it was crucial that they had the choice of claiming ownership of their stories if they wanted to, but to also have the option of protecting their identities. Eight chose to remain anonymous, and their pseudonyms are marked with an asterisk throughout.

Intersubjectivity

The relationships between myself and the interviewees are vital to explore; as Abrams has noted, oral historians cannot create a primary source and ignore our own role in its construction.[191] According to Abrams, intersubjectivity is when we, the interviewers, display aspects of ourselves, and how respondents actively devise 'appropriate performances' in response. She argues that a three-way dialogue emerges, between the respondent and themselves, between respondent and interviewer, and between respondent

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[189] Katherine Borland, 'Chapter 4: "That's Not What I Said": Interpretive Conflict in Oral Narrative Research', in Sherna Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai (eds.), *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History*, (New York: Routledge, 1991), 63–75; Susan Armitage and Sherna Berger Gluck, 'Reflections on Women's Oral History: An Exchange', *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, 19:3 (1998), 1–11.
[190] Wendy Rickard, 'Collaborating with Sex Workers in Oral History', *The Oral History Review*, 30:1 (2003), 47–59.
[191] Abrams, *Oral History Theory*, 58.

and the cultural discourses of the past and present.[192] The interview itself is, for the researcher, a professional and formal encounter, bound by institutional policy. I tried to present as professional, whilst also creating a comfortable and informal atmosphere which would facilitate a good rapport by dressing casually for interviews, by not rushing straight into the interview, and tried to offer a little of myself by remarking on shared interests. When they asked me directly about myself, or we veered slightly off topic, I was not strict at pulling them back immediately, allowing a slight meander to facilitate rapport. Such meanders were also methodologically important; Anderson and Jack advise oral historians to pay attention to such diversions, and to consider what unspoken question the woman is answering instead of the question asked.[193]

My own subject position as a white, middle-class woman, and as a representative of a university, undoubtedly influenced the interviews. Hazel Carby has argued that white female researchers often assume a woman-to-woman bond or shared gendered experience would supersede ethnic or class differences, and that their own experiences of oppression were universal.[194] But concepts of 'the family', 'patriarchy' and 'reproduction', constructed as oppressive forces by white feminists, failed to recognise the role of the family for Black women in resisting oppression and racism.[195] In more recent years, oral historians have sought to find appropriate methods which acknowledge the racial or classed power dynamics, but do not rule out research between different ethnic and class groups in their entirety. In her interviews with Black mothers enrolled in further education, Rosalind Edwards found that acknowledgement of difference was crucial in destabilising her

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[192] Ibid, 59.
[193] Katheryn Anderson and Dana C. Jack, 'Learning to Listen: Interview Techniques and Analyses', in Daphne Patai and Sherna Berger Gluck (eds.), *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History*, (London: Routledge, 1991), 11–26.
[194] Hazel Carby, 'White Woman Listen! Black Feminism and the Boundaries of Sisterhood', in Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (ed.), *Empire Strikes Back: Race and Racism in Seventies Britain*, (London, Hutchinson, 1982), 211–34.
[195] Ibid.

'pompous' position as a white representative of an institution hostile to ethnic minorities (the university). Moments of shared experiences of child-rearing were also important in establishing rapport, whilst acknowledging cultural differences.[196] I tried to tread a similar line in my own interviews, although not as explicitly as Edwards, by sharing my own experiences when appropriate to build trust, but also stepping back when interviewees shared parts of their lives that I could not possibly understand.

Researchers have also sought to break down the insider/outsider positioning of interviewers. Kalwant Bhopal argues that whilst reducing intersubjective distance is important, class and status differences can be obscured by an over-reliance on ethnic and gender 'matching' of researcher and subject. Her insider status with South Asian women enabled free conversation about experiences of racism, yet she guarded against making assumptions based on a shared identity by manufacturing distance, asking them to explain things she already knew.[197] Furthermore, as a highly educated academic, I had in some ways benefitted from a school system which some of these women had been let down by. As scholars have shown, some social groups can be suspicious of academic research (with good reason, given the power dynamics at play).[198] Predominantly though, most interviewees seemed excited to share their stories. Pattinson noted familiarity, the sharing of deep personal experiences, and interviewees' surprise to find how long or how much they had said by the end of her interviews with them; I found similar phenomena in my interviews.[199]

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[196] Rosalind Edwards, 'Connecting Method and Epistemology: A White Women Interviewing Black Women', *Women's Studies International Forum*, 13:5 (1990), 477–90.
[197] Kalwant Bhopal, 'Gender, Identity and Experience: Researching Marginalised Groups', *Women's Studies International Forum*, 33:3 (2010), 188–95.
[198] Carby, 'White Woman Listen!'.
[199] Juliette Pattinson, '"The Thing That Made Me Hesitate …": Re-Examining Gendered Intersubjectivities in Interviews with British Secret War Veterans', *Women's History Review*, 20:2 (2011), 245–63.

Interpretation

When it came to interpretation, I listened to, transcribed, and wrote a short summary of the narrative of each interview. My approach was informed by Anderson and Jack's guidance on listening. They urge researchers to be alert to the narrative structure of interviews, narrators' use of language, composure, and moments of tension or discomposure when the narrative slipped.[200] I also noted absences. As Diane Reay has noted, sometimes silences in stories can indicate when interviewees were unwilling to admit their own privileges.[201] This was certainly evident in narratives of several London-raised white women, who emphasised the cultural and racial harmony of their schools, despite the wealth of evidence which suggests school was a key site of racist encounters for Black, Asian, and ethnic minority pupils.[202]

The narratives of interviewees shared several key similarities in their overall narrative framing, a consequence of the gendered focus of the research and the historical context in which interviewees grew up. Abrams argues that the 'expressive revolution' of the 1960s and 1970s, normalisation of discourses on gender equality, and the advent of a modern confessional culture created a framework which women who became adults in the 1960s and 1970s could draw upon when narrating their own lives.[203] This 'feminography', Abrams argues, emphasised self-determination and autonomy against the odds.[204] This narrative was widely common among the interviewees for this project. As this thesis

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[200] Anderson and Jack, 'Learning to Listen', 18.
[201] Diane Reay, 'Insider Perspectives or Stealing the Words out of Women's Mouths: Interpretation in the Research Process', *Feminist Review*, 53, 1996, 57–73.
[202] For example see: Beverley Bryan, Stella Dadzie, and Suzanne Scafe, *The Heart Of The Race: Black Women's Lives in Britain*, (2nd edn, London: Virago, 1985); Bernard Coard, *How the West Indian Child Is Made Educationally Subnormal in the British School System: The Scandal of the Black Child in Schools in Britain* (New Beacon for the Caribbean Education and Community Workers' Association, 1971); Sarah Olowe (ed.) *Against The Tide: Black Experiences in the ILEA*, (London: Inner London Education Authority, 1990); Brian Richardson (ed.), *Tell It Like It Is: How Our Schools Fail Black Children* (Bookmarks, 2005).
[203] Lynn Abrams, 'Heroes of Their Own Life Stories: Narrating the Female Self in the Feminist Age', *Cultural and Social History*, 16:2 (2019), 205–24.
[204] Ibid, 206.

demonstrates, public and popular discourses around gender became more normalised in the childhoods of these interviewees, whereas Abrams' interviewees were adults. Equal opportunities legislation was passed in the mid-1970s, and throughout the late twentieth century became an ingrained part of institutions and modern life, be it in teaching methodologies, hiring and recruitment for jobs, or the everyday ways in which women and girls asserted themselves. Additionally, the title of this project, which interviewees saw on the information sheet provided and in recruitment materials, contained the phrase 'gender inequality.' Interviewees therefore had vocabulary and frameworks available which they could use to construct a self-narrative in which they overcame sexism.

As a result, nearly all composed a narrative in which they determined their own paths to self-fulfilment in adulthood. 'Composure' as an oral history concept refers to the construction of a narrative of memories which makes the interviewee feel at ease or comfortable with their life story, usually as a result of connecting their own story to familiar or popular historical narratives. Discomposure can result when an individual has difficulty aligning their own memories with such a framework. As Penny Summerfield argues, given that popular historical narratives – for example of the Second World War – are predominantly based on the experiences of men, women often find it difficult to hook their own experiences onto such frameworks, resulting in self-narratives which may contain contradictions, gaps, or inconsistencies.[205] In this project, the framework created by equal opportunities discourses within education and popular understandings of the British feminist movement produced a dominant narrative of a transformative moment for gender relations in the late twentieth century. Interviewees aimed to place themselves within this and produced a self-narrative in which they were autonomous and self-determining against

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[205] Penny Summerfield, 'Culture and Composure: Creating Narratives of the Gendered Self in Oral History Interviews', *Cultural and Social History*, 1:1 (2004), 65–93. See also: Thomlinson, 'Race and Discomposure'; Helena Mills, 'Using the Personal to Critique the Popular: Women's Memories of 1960s Youth', *Contemporary British History*, 30:4 (2016), 463–83.

the odds. However, the key differences between interviewees were largely in relation to the role of schooling in their successes; for some, schooling provided the means to overcome the limitations of traditional ideas of domestic womanhood, whilst for others schooling damaged their self-esteem and was in fact an obstacle in their narrative of self-actualisation. This thesis unpicks these nuances in individual narratives to show the scope and limitations of gender equality initiatives on the selfhoods of pupils.

Yet retrospective accounts of childhood pose methodological problems; such accounts are shaped by hindsight, very different from the contemporary sources which can reveal a subjectivity in the process of formation.[206] Adults are no longer the child they were, as is often illustrated by Carolyn Steedman: 'the child grows up and goes away.'[207] Ideas of childhood and adolescence, for some coloured by their experiences of bringing up their own children and being involved with their schooling, undoubtedly influenced the ways in which some interviewees recalled their youth. Some drew on phrases and language which emphasised the frivolity of teenage life or described themselves as silly or naïve. Whilst oral histories only give retrospective accounts of childhood from an adult perspective, they create a new and invaluable set of sources from which to understand how teenage experiences shaped the self. Utilising primary sources written by teenagers at the time also acts as a balance to this methodological problem, and they are used in tandem with the oral histories to draw out recurrent themes and discourses.

Young people's writing

The writing collections used for this thesis can be roughly grouped into three approaches: essays gathered through educational settings; writing sent into magazines; and

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[206] Barron and Langhamer, 'Children, Class, and the Search for Security', 374.
[207] Carolyn Steedman, *Childhood, Culture, and Class in Britain: Margaret McMillan, 1860-1931* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1990), 79.

essays edited and commented on by researchers. Writing about the self became an important way for children and teenagers to formulate their subjectivities in the post-war period. Promoted by progressive educationalists, but endorsed by Her Majesty's Inspectorate, Steedman points out how creative autobiographical writing became a widely-used practice that teachers hoped would help the 'dispossessed[…] come to an understanding of their own story,' and contribute to young people's political consciousness.[208] Also adopted by Black radical education collectives in the 1970s, self-writing aimed to encourage working-class, Black, and immigrant children to develop a sense of self-worth and stake in society.[209] As Kehinde Andrews and Rob Waters have shown, in the 1970s, self-writing within the Black radical education often took place in Black Supplementary Schools, a response to systemic racism within schools evidenced by high exclusion rates among Black pupils and low expectations of pupils by teachers.[210]

These radical roots of self-writing meant that within formal education, it was a method often adopted by progressive teachers in local authorities with large populations of poor or ethnic minority children, such as the ILEA. Several of these collections used in this thesis fall into this radical tradition of self-writing and were produced within the ILEA. *Fire Words* and *Stepney Words* were published by London-based socialist teacher Chris Searle in the early 1970s.[211] *Our Lives,* a collection of autobiographies written by ILEA pupils, and poetry anthology *City Lines* were published by the ILEA's English Centre, and the Afro-Caribbean

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[208] Carolyn Steedman, 'State-Sponsored Autobiography', in Becky Conekin, Frank Mort, and Chris Waters (eds.), *Moments of Modernity: Reconstructing Britain, 1945-1964*, (London: Rivers Oram Press, 1999), 41–54.
[209] Rob Waters, *Thinking Black: Britain, 1964-1985* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2019), 127.
[210] Kehinde Andrews, 'Toward a Black Radical Independent Education: Black Radicalism, Independence and the Supplementary School Movement', *The Journal of Negro Education*, 83:1 (2014), 5–14; Waters, *Thinking Black.*
[211] Chris Searle (ed.), *Stepney Words I & II,* (London: Centerprise Publications, 1976); *Fire Words,* (London: Jonathon Cape, 1972).

Education Resource Centre (ACER), an education group for young black people who were partly funded by the ILEA, published *Black Voices* in 1987.[212]

Two collections of girls' published writing are also included in this thesis. *Bitter-Sweet Dreams* drew its contents from the readership of girls' magazine *Just Seventeen,* and feminist zine *Spare Rib* published a collection entitled *Girls Are Powerful* in 1982.[213] *Girls Are Powerful* was a collection of interviews, letters, and features originally printed in *Spare Rib* itself and edited by *Spare Rib* editor Susan Hemmings. The contents are therefore a mix of essays or letters written by young *Spare Rib* readers, but also could be transcriptions of comments dictated to and edited by adult *Spare Rib* writers. By contrast, the essays printed in *Bitter-Sweet Dreams* were all responses to a notice within an issue of *Just Seventeen,* penned by readers and posted into the magazine. In some chapters, features and letters from a range of girls' magazines are also used. I focused on the best-selling girls' magazines throughout the period; *Jackie, Just Seventeen, Mizz,* and *Sugar.* Many of these were also mentioned by interviewees.[214] The majority of these texts were weekly or fortnightly; it was therefore not possible to look at every single issue. I therefore looked at all issues in randomly selected years, aimed to achieve a spread across the period studied.[215] I also chose to look at *Shocking Pink* and *Spare Rib,* two feminist publications – the former written by young women in their late teens and early twenties – but given their availability online, I was able to look at nearly of these issues and so did not randomly select years to focus on. Finally, collections of writing gathered by a national newspaper and published alongside

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[212] Paul Ashton, Michael Sions, Daphne Denaro and Mike Raleigh (eds.), *Our Lives: Young People's Autobiographies,* (London: ILEA English Centre, 1979); *City Lines,* (London: ILEA English Centre, 1982); Paul McGilchrist (ed.), *Black Voices: An Anthology of ACER's Black Young Writers Competition,* (London: ACER, 1987).

[213] *Bitter-sweet Dreams: Girls' and Young Women's Own Stories* (London: Virago, 1987); Susan Hemmings (ed.), *Girls Are Powerful: Young Women's Writing from Spare Rib*, (Sheba Feminist Publishers, 1982).

[214] Interview with Katie Beswick, Exeter, 3rd January 2019; Interview with Dorota Thomas, London, 12th January 2019; Interview with Rachel*, 12th January 2019; Interview with Sara*, 15th March 2019; Interview with Lucy*, 17th May 2019; Interview with Claire Slobodian, Reading, 24th May 2019.

[215] The years selected for sampling were: *Jackie* 1970, 1980, 1981; *Just Seventeen* 1984, 1990; *Mizz,* 1985, 1986, 1987; and *Sugar* 1996, 1998.

analysis by researchers are also used. *The Observer* newspaper launched a writing competition in 1967 entitled *The school that I'd like,* gathering the opinions of pupils about their schooling, which was repeated in 2001.[216]

All the examples of children's writing used in these collections are not in their original form. Sent in the post by teenagers or teachers, these essays, poems, and reflections were selected, possibly edited, transcribed, and published by adults, within collections with stated aims which may not have aligned with the intention of the writer. Jane Elliot has warned scholars using children's writing to be alert to this production context; such writing does not necessarily give a 'pure' or 'authentic' glimpse of what the child wanted to say, but rather what they believed the adult wanted them to say.[217] Nonetheless, such sources are invaluable in providing contemporary glimpses of young people's thoughts, feelings, and lives. The range of experiential evidence outlined here draws from a broad geographical spread. If writing solely from the pupils of Inner London and Reading was used, the evidence base would be highly limited. By using local retrospectives along with wider contemporary evidence, it is possible to chart the evolution of both shared and locally specific factors which girls used to construct their selfhoods.

Local Education Authority Records

This project aimed to understand the impact of second-wave feminism of both girls' education and their identities. Given the devolved structure of education in this era, and the ways in which feminist teachers made changes on a local level, this research therefore required a local focus. This thesis compares the approaches of two local education

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[216] Edward Blishen (ed.), *The school that I'd like,* (London: Penguin Education Special, 1969); Catherine Burke and Ian Grosvenor (eds), *The School I'd Like: Children and Young People's Reflections on an Education for the 21st Century,* (London: RoutledgeFalmer, 2003).
[217] Elliott, 'Imagining a Gendered Future'.

authorities: the ILEA and the BCC. By focusing on the records of their respective education committees – the main managerial committee for each authority, which decided policy, heard reports, and was made up of elected members – it was possible to build a picture of the development of equal opportunities policy after the Sex Discrimination Act 1975. The minutes of Sub-Committees such as Schools, Youth, and Staffing, and adjacent to those, smaller, more focused committees such as the Multicultural Education Sub-Committee in the BCC, were also researched. Institutions are made up of individuals, and these records reveal the interactions between individuals with different roles and priorities, revealing the processes that resulted in policy. Furthermore, the minutes of the BCC were starkly different to those of the ILEA. The ILEA's minutes are a rich source, with recorded speech and discussion between members in certain portions of meetings, and most reports mentioned are reproduced. However, for the BCC education committee, minutes were sparse, and reports were mentioned but not reproduced. There was no reproduced speech and votes on motions were often recorded without the contents of the motion itself. Agenda papers were also sparse, so details of reports and motions were not always possible to find. This inconsistency between the ILEA and BCC records was countered in two ways; by seeking out former teachers for interview, and by expanding the range of archival source material. Interviewees Ian* and Jane* – two retired Berkshire teachers – provided invaluable insight for contextualising and understanding the minutes of the BCC. By using local press reporting in the *Reading Evening Post,* as well as education reports and publications held by the University of Reading Special Collections – such as the BCC's applications to the Technical and Vocational Education Initiative – it was possible to build a more detailed picture of education policy in Berkshire. The ILEA was abolished in 1990; after this, I turn to the records of London borough councils, who acquired responsibility for education from 1990 to 1997. The Hackney Borough Council (HBC) records offer a glimpse of one borough's policy in the aftermath of the ILEA, and in this thesis, I am able to chart

some changes and continuities through this additional source base. This range of experiential and institutional sources contextualises girls' experiences within a broader context of educational change in the late twentieth century.

Chapter Outlines

Chapter One will examine girls' relationship to an imagined future of marriage, motherhood, and domestic life. Disrupting girls' standard route - from school to a temporary job and marrying in their early twenties - was a key aim of equalities-minded teachers and feminists, who often focused on equal access to gendered school subjects and reform to domestic subjects such as cookery, needlework, and childcare. This paradigm of empowerment through education shaped how girls related to this notion of future domesticity. For those who were academically successful, marriage and motherhood formed part of a wider tapestry of possibilities, which also included a career. A side-effect of problematising motherhood and marriage was that it triggered tensions for those who did follow a more traditionally gendered path. The focus of feminist and equal opportunities educators' critiques on domestic subjects was in many ways misplaced. Broader social changes in cohabitation and age of marriage were much more powerful in disrupting girls' acceptance of domestic life. Girls' attitudes towards marriage and motherhood became bound up in language of individual choice, one which at times clashed with the idealised route of empowerment through education which was established by equal opportunities and anti-sexist educators. Girls who aligned with this meritocratic paradigm and those who did not drew on this discourse to present themselves as autonomous individuals, pursuing their own path to self-fulfilment, as a result minimising the privileges and inequalities they faced.

Chapter Two will then focus on girls' careers education and further study. Careers education from the 1960s reinforced a connection between the self and occupational choice. Work was meant to draw on the individuals' talents, personality, and interests; this new careers education encouraged pupils to build their self-knowledge to find a job which suited their individuality. Girls used this language of choice and individuality to create a composed self, but in different ways. Working-class girls and girls in lower streams were more likely to leave at sixteen; these girls were more aware of the inequalities in the education system and the privileges of their peers. Yet these women still framed their stories within broader cultural discourses that emphasised choice and individuality; these women emphasised their success as self-made, forged outside of an education system which had low expectations of them. They often found success in feminised jobs such as clerical work and nursing, reliable and financially secure jobs which allowed them to attain some financial independence and adult status. Framing their stories in these ways was a way for them to achieve narrative composure and create a cohesive self-narrative. For middle-class girls who achieved in school and went into higher education, the narrative of hard work leading to their success as empowered modern women masked their privileges. Whilst educational opportunities for those girls most able to align with the meritocratic model of girls' empowerment expanded, opportunities remained limited for girls who attained lower qualifications or were marginalised within education.

Chapter Three will examine the development of sex education and teenage sexual identities. Sex education was highly politicised throughout the late twentieth century, and parental authority over the content of pupils' sex education was reinforced legally in the early 1990s. Whilst the BCC shied away from making any sweeping reforms of sex education, the ILEA attempted a progressive approach to sex education in the 1980s. However, pupils' responses to sex education were almost uniformly dissatisfied, highlighting continuities in sex education provision from the 1970s. A focus on

reproduction and contraception which was most common in schools failed to address girls'

desire for guidance on the social and emotional aspects of love, relationships, and sex.

However, ideas of self-knowledge, emotional maturity, and communication skills, present in

public health, feminist sex education, and in girls' media, provided a framework through

which girls could construct a limited sexual agency. Ideas of choice and self-knowledge

became crucial ways for girls to frame their sexual decisions and construct their selfhoods

as desirable and desiring, self-determining individuals.

Chapter Four will examine another aspect of girls' embodied experiences of

schooling, by arguing that school uniform was a crucial site for the making of girls'

subjectivities and identities. Despite the egalitarian aims of schooling, girls' bodies and

clothing were important sites of difference. The cost of school uniform meant that poor and

working-class girls often felt marginalised in school, as the quality of their uniform reflected

their socio-economic background, forming part of a wider process of alienation and

affecting their self-image. Adult concerns over girls' sexuality – especially in relation to

working-class girls – informed the ways in which uniform was policed by teachers,

especially around the issue of skirt length. As wider cultural understandings of girlhood and

femininity changed throughout the 1980s and 1990s, so too did the ways in which girls

adapted their uniform and expressed their identities. Being 'alternative' and expressing

one's individualism through non-mainstream dress was particularly important social

currency for girls. Girls conformed to and manipulated their school uniform in many ways:

to assimilate to school culture and gain academically; to display their identities; gain social

or cultural capital; or to assert their humanity in an environment which sought to

homogenise them.

Overall, this thesis makes a significant contribution to historical debates around

individualism in the late twentieth century, by demonstrating that discourses of equality of

opportunity and individuality were key in shaping teenage girls' selfhoods from 1970 to the early 2000s. Discourses of individualism had a direct impact on how girls understood themselves and how they imagined and planned for their futures. More specifically, girls used ideas of individualism to assert that they had control over their lives and contest adult control. For instance, girls balanced their fulfilment in the present with their preparations for their futures as adults, something which often came into conflict with the aims of their schools. Ideological conflict between teachers and within LEAs about what this future might entail, and what pupils' needs were in the present, were significant features of the period, but teachers predominantly positioned academic attainment as the key means to girls' liberation from patriarchal constraints. Girls drew on these discourses, navigated the tensions inherent in this meritocratic model of empowerment, and found ways to construct themselves as self-determining individuals. In many ways, ideas of age informed the ways teenage girls were constructed by educational feminists and staff engaged in equal opportunities. This thesis therefore argues that girls' agency in late twentieth century England lay predominantly in the ways they wielded discourses of individualism, empowerment, and choice to construct their identities and present themselves as self-determining and modern young women.

Chapter 1: 'Scheme and plan with all my might/Catch a man to hold me tight': Domesticity, marriage, and motherhood in girls' imagined futures.[1]

Sarah Hook's poem 'Teenage Sexism', printed in the youth feminist zine *Shocking Pink* in 1981, captures Hook's perceptions that finding a husband and settling into a subordinate domestic role were key expectations of her, things which would erode her mind and make her 'docile.' *Shocking Pink* published this poem in a moment of crucial cultural change in understandings of womanhood among young people. As this chapter will show, expectations of girls' future lives expanded and changed during the late twentieth century. Women's domestic role was subjected to scrutiny, challenge, and reform, through critiques from the Women's Liberation Movement (WLM), long-term changes in the family and workforce, and the expansion of 'equal opportunities' discourses and governance.[2] Teenage girls were not just growing into adults, but were also becoming women, a role which underwent some important shifts in the late twentieth century. Girls' education was at the forefront of this change, responding to and reflecting these changing ideas of womanhood, shaping how girls imagined and prepared for their lives beyond school.

This chapter begins by examining the extent to which girls imagined a domestic future in the 1970s and early 1980s. A traditional future as wife and mother was seen as inevitable for most girls for at least part of their adulthood, and for some was seen as a source of potential personal fulfilment. The popularisation of Bowlbyism – the theory that maternal presence and bonding was crucial for child development – had reinforced the

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[1] Sarah Hook, 'TEENAGE SEXISM', *Shocking Pink,* Issue 1, 1981, BL.

[2] See for instance: Stephen Brooke, 'Living in 'New Times': Historicising 1980s Britain', in *History Compass,* 12:1, (2014), 20-32, 23; Helen McCarthy, *Double Lives: A History of Working Motherhood,* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020), 352; Pat Thane, *Divided Kingdom: A History of Britain, 1900 to the Present,* (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 2018), 345.

place of women in the household and was reflected in girls' education up to this period.[3]

However, some girls were able to challenge ideas of domestic womanhood. Equal

opportunities reforms reflected the idea that girls' and women's empowerment could be

found through academic achievement and the pursuit of careers; some girls connected their

ambitions to this model. Yet the experiential evidence shows that such formulations of

equal opportunities did not always account for the complex relationships which some girls

from working-class backgrounds – and indeed some middle-class girls – had with education

and the concept of family life.

The chapter will then examine the anti-sexist reforms in the Inner London Education

Authority (ILEA). Both mainstream equal opportunities policies and the ILEA's more radical

anti-sexist work focused on the reform of gender stereotyped subjects to disrupt girls' paths

into domestic roles in the 1970s and 1980s. Teachers were concerned with how schooling

indoctrinated girls into a subordinate role, but girls saw their present lives as teenagers as

distinct from their futures once they had 'settled down'; this also extended to their romantic

relationships. Shifts in the average young adult life cycle in the 1980s suggest that a period

of independence and self-discovery became more expected for girls, and that the cultivation

of their individual identities and lives were important precursors to marriage.[4] Socio-

economic background was important in determining which girls were more likely to follow

this life course. Marriage and motherhood, along with further and higher education, travel,

and economic security formed a 'constellation of possibilities', according to Sue Sharpe,

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[3] Matthew Thomson argues that popular Bowlbyism was quite removed from the original theory
espoused by John Bowlby. See Matthew Thomson, *Lost Freedom: The Landscape of the Child and the
British Post-War Settlement,* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013), 84-7.
[4] Zoe Strimpel, *Seeking Love in Modern Britain: Gender, Dating and the Rise of 'the Single'*, (London:
Bloomsbury, 2020); Éva Beaujouan and Máire Ní Bhrolcháin, 'Cohabitation and marriage in Britain since
the 1970s', in *Population Trends,* 145, (Autumn 2011), 35-59.

which was arranged and prioritised according to class, academic success, and 'individual and collective values.'[5]

      I will then explore the ways in which feminism, both remembered and current, impacted the ways in which interviewees assessed their younger selves in the 1980s and 1990s, especially the hostility apparent in the 1980s and 1990s towards the concept of domesticity. Regimes of equal opportunities in education in the 1990s cemented the ideal of the empowered, academically successful female school subject; this model was a powerful image which some girls struggled to reconcile with their own experiences. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s especially, girls utilised the language of choice and individuality – drawn from schooling and popular feminism – to present themselves as autonomous, able to make their own choices in life to suit their individuality. As this chapter will show, girls drew from this range of discourses within and outside of school to construct their identities and articulate their expectations and aspirations for their futures.

Imagining a domestic future in the 1970s

Historians, feminists, and social commentators alike have examined the connections between womanhood and domesticity, and the nuances in the experiences of women and girls of different socio-economic backgrounds. Historians of Victorian Britain, such as Amanda Vickery, have dismantled the notion of an all-encompassing domestic womanhood to reveal individual and local narratives of agency and negotiated power relations.[6] Felicity Hunt, Penny Summerfield, and Helen Sunderland show that in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, middle-class girls enjoyed activities and learnt skills that were not

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[5] Sue Sharpe, *'Just like a Girl': How Girls Learn to Be Women: From the Seventies to the Nineties*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1994), 109-110.
[6] Amanda Vickery, 'Golden Age to Separate Spheres? A Review of the Categories and Chronology of English Women's History', *The Historical Journal*, 36:2 (1993), 383–414.

immediately applicable to home-making, including political debate and philanthropy.[7]

During the post-war period too, girls acquired greater freedoms in their everyday lives, and fundamental shifts in women's relationships to home and work occurred. Helen McCarthy argues that the 1940s and 1950s created a culturally dominant model of working motherhood that remained until the 1970s, in which women were understood to need work to fulfil their psychological need for socialising and interest beyond the home, albeit in limited ways.[8] The familial structure of a male breadwinner and female homemaker was reinforced in the post-war period, as Penny Tinkler and Thomson state, amidst pressures to revert to pre-war gender relations, and as Ben Jackson and Jane Lewis argue, this familial structure was built into economic structures and social policy in this period.[9] For instance, the 1942 Beveridge Report was built around the idea that men were primarily workers, whilst women were defined by their marital status.[10] Not only was the concept of domestic womanhood culturally pervasive, but was inbuilt into the political and economic structures which governed people's lives.[11]

The ways in which schoolgirls were 'conditioned' into stereotyped sex roles came under intensive scrutiny when some rights for women in work became legally enshrined by

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[7] For instance, see: Felicity Hunt, 'Divided Aims: The Educational Implications of Opposing Ideologies in Girls' Secondary Schooling, 1850-1940', in Felicity Hunt (ed.), *Lessons for Life: The Schooling of Girls and Women 1850-1940,* (Blackwell, 1987), 3-21; Penny Summerfield, 'Cultural Reproduction in the Education of Girls: A Study of Girls' Secondary Schooling in Two Lancashire Towns, 1900-1950', in *Lessons for Life: The Schooling of Girls and Women 1850-1950.* (Blackwell, 1987), 149-170; Helen Sunderland, 'Politics in Schoolgirl Debating Cultures in England, 1886–1914', *The Historical Journal*, 2019, 1–23.
[8] McCarthy, *Double Lives,* 333.
[9] Penny Tinkler, 'Girlhood and Growing Up', in Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska (ed.), *Women in Twentieth-Century Britain: Social, Cultural and Political Change,* (London: Routledge, 2014), 35-50, 40; Thomson, *Lost Freedom,* 84-7; Ben Jackson, 'Free Markets and Feminism: The Neo-Liberal Defence of the Male Breadwinner Model in Britain, c. 1980–1997', *Women's History Review*, 28.2 (2019), 297–316; Jane Lewis, 'Gender, the Family and Women's Agency in the Building of "Welfare States": The British Case', *Social History*, 19:1 (1994), 37–55.
[10] Denise Noble, 'Decolonizing Britain and Domesticating Women: Race, Gender, and Women's Work in Post-1945 British Decolonial and Metropolitan Liberal Reform Discourses', in *Meridians,* 13:1 (2015), 53-77, 59.
[11] For example: Ruth Davidson, 'Family Politics: Campaigning for Child Benefits in the 1980s', *Twentieth Century British History*, 31:1 (2018).

the Equal Pay Act in 1970 and the Sex Discrimination Act in 1975.[12] For individual activists within the WLM, this scrutiny was partially informed by their own experiences of growing up in the post-war period. Sue Bruley's oral history interviews with former WLM activists reveal that common catalysts for many were the limits they saw of their mothers' lives, frustration with stereotyped expectations at home, and educational inequality.[13] In *Sisterhood and After,* Margaretta Jolly argues that activism did not solely 'evolve out of personal discontent,' but that education and 'investments of time and resources' in girls' lives later 'activated' their feminist consciousness.[14] For many feminist women, then, a crucial aspect of consciousness-raising was the recognition that the social conditioning of gendered difference began in infancy and continued throughout childhood at home and at school. British feminists in the 1970s built on the concept of a binary construction of sex roles, whereby men dominated public life whilst oppressing and confining women to the private world of the home. Marxist feminists deconstructed the labour politics behind domestic and feminised work in publications such as *Red Rag,* set up in 1972, and fringe groups such as Wages for Housework campaigned for women's remuneration for running a household.[15]

Yet there were clear divides within the broader feminist movement; many key figures in the WLM were white, middle-class, educated women in heterosexual

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[12] Earlier twentieth century feminist thinkers who were hugely influential on the 1970s feminist movement include: Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. by Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier, 3rd edn (London: Vintage, 2011); and Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1963). See Carol Dyhouse, *Girl Trouble: Panic and Progress in the History of Young Women* (London, Zed Books, 2013), for a summary.

[13] Sue Bruley, '"It Didn't Just Come out of Nowhere Did It?": The Origins of the Women's Liberation Movement in 1960s Britain', *Oral History*, 45:1 (2017), 67–78. Bruley notes that this sample was predominantly middle-class and professional, and that educational experiences differed hugely for those from middle and working-class homes.

[14] Margaretta Jolly, *Sisterhood and After: An Oral History of the UK Women's Liberation Movement, 1968-Present* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2019), 79, 105.

[15] Sarah Stoller, 'Forging a Politics of Care: Theorizing Household Work in the British Women's Liberation Movement', *History Workshop Journal*, 85:1 (2018), 95–119.

partnerships, who found themselves dissatisfied with domestic life.[16] Meanwhile, working-

class women continued to put in the double-shift of paid work and running a household, a

burden which was eased for those able to afford cleaners or nannies.[17] As Jolly, Natalie

Thomlinson, and Hazel Carby point out, the white, middle-class feminist preoccupation with

problematizing the family failed to account for different family structures and experiences

for working-class and Black and Asian women.[18] This tension was crucial in shaping

feminist education policy in the late twentieth century, as academic feminist educationalists

attempted to subvert gendered expectations of domesticity which were often more

applicable to middle-class gender roles.

As Joyce Goodman has shown, echoes of Bowlbyism could be traced in national

education reports such as the Norwood (1943), Crowther (1959) and Newsom (1963)

reports which emphasised the importance of domestic instruction in girls' curriculum.[19]

After 1970, the records of the ILEA and Berkshire County Council (BCC) reveal that in both

local authorities, there were three distinct phases of action on gender equality which

challenged the assumptions of Norwood, Crowther, and Newsom. Following the Sex

Discrimination Act 1975, LEAs acquired responsibility for ensuring equality of opportunity

for all pupils regardless of sex, and the Race Relations Act 1976 established the same for

racial equality.[20] In this first phase which followed these acts, reforms centred on ensuring

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[16] Pat Thane, 'Women and the 1970s. Towards liberation?' in Lawrence Black, Pat Thane, and Hugh Pemberton, (eds.), *Reassessing 1970s Britain*, (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2013), 167-186, 176.
[17] McCarthy, *Double Lives,* 334-5.
[18] Jolly, *Sisterhood and After,* 23; Natalie Thomlinson, *Race, ethnicity and the women's movement in England, 1968-1993,* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 32, 52-4; Hazel Carby, 'White Woman Listen! Black Feminism and the Boundaries of Sisterhood', in Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (ed.), *Empire Strikes Back: Race and Racism in Seventies Britain*, (London, Hutchinson, 1982), 211–34.
[19] Joyce Goodman, 'Class and Religion: Great Britain and Ireland', in James C. Albisetti, Joyce Goodman, and Rebecca Rogers (eds.), *Girls' Secondary Education in the Western World: From the 18th to the 20th Century*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 9–24, 18-19; The Norwood Report: Curriculum and Examinations in Secondary Schools (London, HM Stationary Office, 1943); The Crowther Report: 15 to 18 (London, HM Stationary Office, 1959); Half Our Future: A Report of the Central Advisory Council for Education (England), known as the Newsom Report (1963).
[20] Equal Pay Act 1970; Sex Discrimination Act 1975.

equality of access to schools, facilities, and subjects. Yet there were clear limitations to these approaches, which failed to adequately deal with everyday discrimination; this became the focus of later anti-sexist and managerial feminist approaches to girls' education. However, in the 1970s, the majority of LEA policies directed at equalising education for girls and boys was focused on subject choice and facilities.

Many girls associated domesticity with womanhood in the late 1960s and early 1970s.[21] Within the context of the late 1960s – a time when the future of secondary education was under intense scrutiny – *The Observer* launched *The School I Would Like* writing competition. Former teacher, journalist, and writer Edward Blishen compiled extracts from some of the 943 submissions into themes and published them in 1969. In extracts published in the 1969 book, fifteen-year-old Patricia hoped for a 'huge domestic science block for girls and boys – after all some of the best chefs are men,' suggesting that even when men did cook, it was in a professional capacity. Sixteen-year-old Christa wanted greater emphasis on domestic subjects for girls and accountancy for boys, reflecting the divided household roles of women and men.[22] Anne described domestic science as 'outdated', but only in so far as the technological advances that would occur 'by the time I am a housewife'; at seventeen, Anne was closer to leaving school then Patricia and Christa, but the gap in time before she imagined becoming a housewife suggests she imagined working or studying for a few years before becoming a housewife.[23] At the start of the 1970s then, a future of domesticity was not only inevitable, but desirable to many girls; Sharpe describes the girls she encountered in her 1970 research as 'preoccupied' with men and marriage, and that marriage was an immediate concern of girls in school.[24] Patricia,

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[21] Laura Tisdall, '"What a Difference It Was to Be a Woman and Not a Teenager": Adolescent Girls' Conceptions of Adulthood in 1960s and 1970s Britain', *Gender & History*, (published online 2021).
[22] Patricia and Christa, in Edward Blishen (ed.), *The School I Would Like,* (Penguin Education, 1967), 100-101.
[23] Anne, in *The School I Would Like,* 101.
[24] Sharpe, *Just Like a Girl,* 68.

Christine, and Anne's essays also suggest that the choice of subject at school and the way such lessons were taught were seen by girls as directly relevant to their future responsibilities in the home.

Whilst all girls were expected to take on the majority of domestic labour in their adult households, the extent to which they could pursue their own paid work varied according to their class and schooling. Stephanie Spencer shows that all schools in the mid-century balanced girls' academic and domestic education in anticipation of their 'dual role'; girls were expected to work for a few years before and after marrying and having children.[25] Yet the type of school that girls attended, as well as social class, determined the extent to which domesticity was reinforced in girls' curriculum. Spencer argues that domesticity was embedded more firmly in secondary modern schools than in grammar schools.[26] Pupils of different perceived intellects were imagined by educators and politicians to have different requirements of household skills. The 1963 Newsom Report – which focused on the quality of education for pupils of 'below average' ability – suggested to the Ministry of Education that 'abler pupils' be permitted to study 'applied household science,' whilst the 'less able girl' was imagined to struggle more with time management when running a household.[27] As Tisdall has shown, assumptions about working-class pupils' 'low intellect' often informed teachers' expectations of their pupils.[28] In Griffin's study in 1985, teachers characterised working-class girls as dependable 'supermums,' inherently suited to motherhood and family life in a way that more academic pupils were not.[29] Some working-class and secondary modern girls internalised these ideas of a

[25] Stephanie Spencer, *Gender, Work and Education in Britain in the 1950s,* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 50.
[26] Stephanie Spencer, 'Reflections on the "Site of Struggle": Girls' Experience of Secondary Education in the Late 1950s', *History of Education*, 33:4 (2004), 437–49.
[27] The Newsom Report (1963).
[28] Laura Tisdall, *A Progressive Education?: How Childhood Changed in Mid-Twentieth-Century English and Welsh Schools* (Manchester University Press, 2019), 188.
[29] Christine Griffin, *Typical Girls: Young Women from School to the Full-Time Job Market,* (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985), 45.

domestic future. Tisdall's examination of narratives written by working-class adolescent girls in the 1960s and 1970s shows that marriage and motherhood were seen as the key markers of adulthood; due to their socio-economic position and need to work alongside raising children, these girls also imagined adulthood as a period of 'dutiful, self-sacrificial hard work.'[30]

Even though grammar schools provided more opportunities for girls to gain qualifications and pursue a professional job, ideas about girls' innate ability for caring and domestic skills was still reinforced. Another girl whose writing was published in *The school I would like* in 1967, sixteen-year-old Linda, highlighted the divergence in the expected domestic role for girls based on academic ability:

> The present idea that one girl must do Latin while another is fit only for cookery and needlework and, later, marriage, is a common fallacy. An academically bright young wife will undoubtedly find the ability to cook and make clothes a decided advantage, and in the same way I am sure the ability to learn about Latin roots and the derivation of our own language would be beyond few children.[31]

Whilst here Linda critiqued the status quo at the time, in which domestic skills were primarily aimed at girls who were in lower sets or streams, she also reinforced women's domestic role regardless of class or education, as even the 'academically bright young wife' would need cooking and sewing skills. Several interviewees who attended grammar schools recalled the perpetuation of a particular type of domestic femininity, which differed to the 'supermum' idea aimed at working-class and secondary modern pupils. Ali, who attended a Reading girls' grammar school in the 1970s, recollected the ways in which her school reinforced gendered stereotypes in an interview for this project. She recalled careers

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[30] Laura Tisdall, '"What a Difference It Was to Be a Woman and Not a Teenager", 2.
[31] Linda, in *The School I Would Like,* 101.

guidance which 'was very female, "this is what we think the female role should be,"' evidenced by her school encouraging girls to pursue caring jobs, such as nursing.[32] In Maxine's girls' grammar school too, nursing was a popular career, but she also recalled that many girls in her class 'were planning on doing bigger things…one of them was gonna be a doctor.'[33] Girls' grammar schools therefore had high academic expectations for pupils, but imagined a distinct professional sphere for women, one which might utilise feminine skills, such as caring. For example, a 1961 HMI report on Kendrick Girl's School, a grammar school in Reading, recommended building greater links between housecraft subjects and the sciences; two years later, the 1963 Newsom Report similarly recommended that the 'abler' pupils in domestic subjects should make links to scientific methods.[34] Furthermore, working-class girls were still more likely to drop out of grammar schools than their middle-class peers, meaning few working-class girls were able to reap the supposed benefits of an academic education.[35] Ken Jones shows that cultural processes within grammar schools which perpetuated middle-class values, activities, and meanings 'sieved out' working-class pupils.[36] Throughout the 1960s and by the start of the 1970s then, domestic duties were central expectations of girls' futures and education, but were different for girls from different social classes and who were at different schools.

In many ways, the approach of local authorities to equal opportunities was informed by the framework of separate roles for men and women. The Sex Discrimination Act 1975 required LEAs to develop policy to ensure women and girls did not experience discrimination in favour of their male counterparts.[37] To this end, both the ILEA and BCC focused their initial attention on the divergence of feminine and masculine subjects,

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[32] Interview with Ali Payne, 21st January 2019, Reading.
[33] Interview with Maxine Settle, 11th December 2018, Reading.
[34] Report by H.M. Inspectors on Kendrick Girl's School, Reading, March 1961, (Ministry of Education, 1961), in D/EX1485/17/63, BRO; the Newsom Report (1963).
[35] Spencer, *Gender, Work and Education,* 50.
[36] Ken Jones, *Education in Britain: 1944 to the present,* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003), 60.
[37] The Sex Discrimination Act, 1975.

especially domestic science and technology subjects. Concerned LEAs and teachers saw this distinction as a reflection of pupils' expectations of their future lives. Reforming this gendered education would enable girls to escape from the trappings of domestic womanhood, raise girls' academic attainment, and in turn expand the opportunities available to them once they left school for the adult world.[38]

Initial conversations about gender equality within the ILEA's Education Committee focused predominantly on girls' early outperformance of boys, most notably on the London Reading Test, an assessment similar to the 11+ exam, taken by all London primary pupils which determined their allocation to secondary school.[39] In these tests, girls largely outperformed boys in verbal reasoning; ILEA members concluded that this outperformance was not because girls were more able than boys, but a matter of adolescent development.[40] As Tisdall notes, conceptualisations of adolescence drawn from developmental psychology in the mid-century had a gendered dimension, in which girls' development accelerated at a faster pace than boys before they 'tailed off' and boys caught up.[41] Unbeknownst to pupils and parents, girls who placed in the top band of the London Reading Test were often substituted with boys from the second band in order to allow an even intake of boys and girls across the Authority's mixed-sex schools.[42] These measures were seen as egalitarian by those involved, aimed at correcting the consequences of girls' accelerated maturational pace.[43] Other initial forays into equal opportunities in the ILEA focused on equal access for

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[38] Joint report of the Further and Higher Education Sub-Committee, the Schools Sub-Committee and the Staff and General Sub-Committee, *Careers Opportunities for women and girls,* (dated 19th, 20th, and 25th February 1975), in Education Committee Minutes 4th March 1975, 'Minutes, 1975 Jan-1976 Dec', ILEA/CL/MIN/01/006, LMA. See a more in depth overview of this framework, and policy after 1975, in: Paddy Orr, 'Prudence and progress: national policy for equal opportunities (gender) in schools since 1975', in Kate Myers (ed.), *Whatever happened to equal opportunities in schools? Gender equality initiatives in education,* (Open University Press, 2000), 13-26.
[39] Minutes of the Education Committee, 28th February 1973, in 'Minutes, 1973 Jan-1975 Dec', ILEA/CL/MIN/01/005, LMA.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Tisdall, *A Progressive Education?,* 185.
[42] Frances Morrell, *Children of the Future* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1989), 67.
[43] Ibid.

girls and boys to resources and subjects. In the early 1970s, the ILEA funded the introduction of home economics facilities in boys' schools and craft and design workshops into girls' schools across the city.[44] Importantly, this interpretation of equal opportunities focused predominantly on equality of access to facilities and a common curriculum; within this understanding, girls only took up feminised professions and domestic roles because they had been restricted to certain subjects.

Examples from *Stepney Words* and *Our Lives* show that marriage was indeed seen by some girls in the 1970s as an unavoidable aspect of their future. In the case of these collections, the poems and autobiographies were predominantly written with the guidance of a teacher, most likely one who had determined the activity to be an important one for pupils' self-worth due to the popularity of self-writing among radical teachers at the time.[45] Possibly as a result of teacher instruction, many pupils used the exercise to articulate feelings of powerlessness, predominantly in connection with their age, but also to express in stark terms their experiences of poverty, discrimination, and even violence and abuse. James Greenhalgh has shown how adolescents drew on discourses available to construct their identities in relation to a particular contextual subjectivity, in his case as wartime citizens.[46] The nature of these exercises meant pupils situated themselves clearly within a socio-economic context – young and disadvantaged in urban 1970s London – over which they had little power. Given the radical context of these collections, it is likely that most entries were written by working-class, Black, and migrant children. Some of the pieces written by girls reflect their feelings towards marriage, motherhood, and domesticity.

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[44] Minutes of the Education Committee, 28th February 1973, in 'Minutes, 1973 Jan-1975 Dec', ILEA/CL/MIN/01/005, LMA.

[45] Rob Waters, *Thinking Black: Britain, 1964-1985* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2019); and Carolyn Steedman, 'State-Sponsored Autobiography', in Becky Conekin, Frank Mort, and Chris Waters, (eds.), *Moments of Modernity: Reconstructing Britain, 1945-1964*, (London: Rivers Oram Press, 1999), 41–54.

[46] James Greenhalgh, '"Till We Hear the Last All Clear": Gender and the Presentation of Self in Young Girls' Writing about the Bombing of Hull during the Second World War', *Gender & History*, 26:1 (2014), 167–83.

Two accounts given eight years apart by Sandra Balloch and Chelsea Herbert demonstrate that whilst teenage girls had differing views on whether marriage would be fulfilling, marriage was seen as an inevitable part of adulthood by girls. In *Stepney Words Vol. One,* Sandra Balloch's poem 'FACTS AND FANTASY' can be read as a reflection both on the inevitability of marriage and a comment of the 'cruelty' of growing up and adulthood. Balloch begins by fantasising about a wedding – it is unclear if it is her own or someone else's – and that it is 'nice to dream' about it. But as the poem progresses and the wedding becomes reality, the fantasy is replaced by 'cruel' truth, culminating in this final stanza:

Life flies past in a world of fantasy,

but in fact it goes quite slow.

So why dream of fantasy

when you have to see the truth some day.[47]

Balloch's poem can be read as a reflection of her reality as well as a creative exercise; whether the wedding was real, she painted an overall negative image of her future. She presented the wedding, and by proxy, marriage, as unavoidable, the end of a time when she can dream and aspire. This bleak picture suggests that for Balloch, a wedding and marriage marked a shift from a carefree to a harsher time, from youth to womanhood. Her poem reflects the idea of marriage as an inevitability of adult womanhood, a conflation which has been noted by sociologists such as Griffin and Sharpe.[48] Robinson, Schofield, Sutcliffe-Braithwaite and Thomlinson have argued that women's critiques of marriage as unfulfilling were indicative of the contradictory ideas of gender held by women in the post-war period; girls and women could still conform to dominant expectations whilst also signalling their

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[47] Sandra Balloch, 'FACTS AND FANTASY', in *Stepney Words Vol. I & II* (Centerprise, 1973), originally published in *Stepney Words Vol I,* (Reality Press, 1971), 7.
[48] Griffin, *Typical Girls,* Chapter 4; Sharpe, *Just Like a Girl,* 92-3.

dissatisfaction.[49] Balloch's poem shows that some girls could and did express this dissatisfaction with their expected life paths.

In contrast, teenager Chelsea Herbert expressed excitement at the prospect of marriage. Her autobiography, published in *Our Lives*, created a fictional narrative of life in a block of flats mostly inhabited by Jamaican families, describing her friends and family, and social life of the main character, sixteen-year-old Charmaine. The narrative centres around her budding romance with Junior and the obstacles placed in their way by meddling friends, before ultimately ending up as a couple. She ends the story by looking forward to an engagement in the near future:

> My brother is getting engaged on Saturday. Melanie was getting engaged on she next birthday to Paul. An' me, well that time has not come yet.
>
> Me an' Junior decided that we would wait till me finished me exams. We were not in any hurry. We were in love, an' nobody could spoil it for us.[50]

The comparisons to her brother and friend demonstrate that among Herbert's social group, young engagement and marriage was a common occurrence. Girls' creative writing exercises can be understood as both reflective of their lives but also aspirational. The writers of *Our Lives* were asked to write about themselves, yet Herbert adopted another persona, and her story culminated with a fairy-tale-like conclusion in which she reconciled with her boyfriend. Such narratives of love overcoming obstacles were common in the media which girls consumed in the 1970s, including film, television, and notably girls' comics and magazines.[51] In the post-war period, love became valued above all other factors

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[49] Emily Robinson, Camilla Schofield, Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, and Natalie Thomlinson, 'Telling Stories about Post-War Britain: Popular Individualism and the "Crisis" of the 1970s', *Twentieth Century British History*, 28.2 (2017), 268–304.

[50] Chelsea Herbert, 'In the Melting Pot', in Paul Ashton, Michael Sions, Daphne Denaro, and Mike Raleigh (eds.) *Our Lives: Young People's Autobiographies* (ILEA English Centre, 1979), 181.

[51] *Jackie* magazine for instance featured comic strips in which the main character fell in love, and often ended with an image of the central couple embracing in front of sunset or other romantic view. For

for marriage, according to Claire Langhamer.[52] Teenage love was presented in girls'

magazines such as *Jackie* as a form of groundwork for future marriage, which would in turn

contribute to the realisation of the self; teenage relationships were a way of 'becoming' a

modern young woman, defined by marriage.[53] For Herbert, finding love would bring her

fulfilment, and she could gain adult status through marriage. This moment of 'becoming' a

young woman aligned with other significant age milestones; at sixteen, Herbert could leave

school with qualifications, was the age of sexual consent, and get married with parental

consent.

Sociological work conducted in the 1970s and 1980s shows that class was a vital

factor in shaping girls' future expectations and aspirations. Angela McRobbie argues that a

lack of encouragement in education meant that working-class girls were more susceptible

to the 'pernicious' messages about marriage and motherhood in girls' media and wider

society; the message that 'life without such a person [a husband] was synonymous with

failure.'[54] Sharpe also drew similar conclusions in her 1972 study of Ealing schoolgirls; for

working-class girls, marriage and motherhood were the main expectations they had of their

futures.[55] Whilst in 1971, the mean age of first marriage among women was twenty-two,

and twenty-four for men, Langhamer points out that these ages were often lower for

working-class couples due to their more rapid entry into the workforce, compared to

middle-class peers who were more likely to pursue further and higher education.[56] For

many working-class girls who had been marginalised in education, streamed into secondary

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instance, see *Jackie,* No. 314, 10th January 1970, BL. For analysis see Chapter One of Angela McRobbie, *Feminism and Youth Culture*, (2nd edn, Basingstoke, MacMillan Press, 2000).
[52] Claire Langhamer, *The English in Love: The Intimate Story of an Emotional Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 6.
[53] Penny Tinkler, '"Are You Really Living?" If Not, "Get With It!"', *Cultural and Social History*, 11:4 (2014), 597–619, 604.
[54] McRobbie, *Feminism and Youth Culture*, xiv.
[55] Sharpe, *'Just like a Girl'*, 105.
[56] Jane Lewis, 'Marriage', in Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska (ed.), *Women in Twentieth-Century Britain: Social, Cultural and Political Change,* (London: Routledge, 2001), 69-85, 71; Langhamer, *The English in Love,* 5.

modern schools where they were expected to leave early with few qualifications, marriage and motherhood were accessible routes into adulthood.[57] Yet Herbert saw the value of both marriage and an education; she imagined holding off on engagement until after her exams. As Herbert's essay demonstrates, girls could be invested in education *and* expect to marry young; the two were not mutually exclusive, and some girls found ways to mediate between these conflicting discourses.

Heterosexual partnerships could also be crucial in forming working-class girls' identities as 'respectable'. Beverley Skeggs shows that historically, working-class and Black women have been associated with the 'sexual other', marked out as uncivilised and inherently more deviant than the supposedly 'respectable' white middle-classes.[58] As Gary McCulloch shows, ideas about class and respectability were present in educational legislation, and secondary-modern curriculums often were determined in reference to this deviant image of working-class girls.[59] McCulloch cites evidence submitted to the Newsom Report, in which the National Association of Headteachers (NAHT) claimed that working-class girls left school early because they desired money, the freedom to stay out late, and because many had 'already entered the world of adult sex experience.'[60] The women in Skeggs' study in some ways distanced themselves from ideas of deviant sexuality and to conform to legitimised forms of heterosexuality by establishing long term romantic partnerships and getting married. As Skeggs argues, these young women worked hard to construct their identities as respectable: 'when heterosexuality is such a strong marker of respectability it will always induce investments from those positioned at a distance from it and pathologized as a result.'[61] For working-class Black girls like Herbert, marriage could

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[57] Tisdall, '"What a Difference It Was to Be a Woman and Not a Teenager"', 2-3.
[58] Beverley Skeggs, *Formations of Class & Gender: Becoming Respectable* (London: SAGE, 1997), 121-4.
[59] Gary McCulloch, *Failing the Ordinary Child?: The Theory and Practice of Working-Class Secondary Education,* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1998), 121.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Skeggs, *Formations of Class & Gender*, 136.

also be a way to resist being labelled as deviant and construct a respectable feminine identity. Herbert and Balloch's writing shows the ways in which individual girls absorbed ideas about marriage into their identities. Some girls saw marriage as synonymous with becoming an adult woman, whereas others saw marriage was aspirational, a way to construct their identities as respectable young women. For others, marriage signalled an end to the freedom of youth. Crucially, marriage was seen as unavoidable for most girls.

Parental influence and generation

Equal opportunities reformers were driven to disrupt this belief that marriage and motherhood were inevitable. However, some within the ILEA expressed the belief that whilst school reforms would deal with this issue, girls' parents were the primary transmitters of ideas about gendered roles and domesticity. A 1975 report on careers opportunities for girls by the ILEA posited that any change should start with the 'entrenched attitudes' of parents, 'before the influence of school can be exerted.'[62] The ILEA supported several pilot schemes which engaged parents of nursery and infant school-age children at this time, but I have found little evidence of schemes which engaged with the parents of secondary-age girls. A 1982 Inspectorate Report of the ILEA mentioned anecdotal evidence that parents could be reluctant to let their daughters stay on past the age of sixteen because they were likely to give up work in the near future to raise children; their temporary loss in earnings by being in education would not be worth it. This was something the Inspectorate recommended that schools attempt to counteract.[63] Later research by some anti-sexist teachers found that some parents prioritised their sons'

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[62] Joint report of the Further and Higher Education Sub-Committee, the Schools Sub-Committee and the Staff and General Sub-Committee, *Careers Opportunities for women and girls,* (dated 19th, 20th, and 25th February 1975), in Education Committee Minutes 4th March 1975, 'Minutes, 1975 Jan-1976 Dec', ILEA/CL/MIN/01/006, LMA.
[63] *Equal Opportunities for all: A Report by the ILEA Inspectorate,* (Inner London Education Authority, 1982, re-printed 1983).

education over their daughters', whilst girls' schooling was taken less seriously; girls often were also expected to juggle additional household chores with their school work.[64] Implied in these characterisations of some parents' behaviour was the premise that education was the best opportunity girls had to improve their lives and be empowered to take up new opportunities. Whilst these reports predominantly made recommendations for schools and teachers, the implication was there that schooling functioned to counter the proliferation of gendered stereotypes encountered in the home and wider society.

Whilst equal opportunities and anti-sexist campaigners saw schooling as a way to counter sexist assumptions which pupils might encounter in their lives, this premise was complicated by pre-existing assumptions about class and race. As Tisdall, Avtar Brah and Rehana Minhas have shown, equal opportunities-conscious educationalists often pathologized Asian and Black communities as more likely to be patriarchal and to restrict their daughters' activities and ambitions, often resisting the involvement of parents from Black or Asian communities.[65] In both the ILEA and the BCC, parental pressures were actually crucial in prompting LEAs to act on issues of racial inequality. Bernard Coard's *How the West Indian Child is made educationally subnormal* directly challenged the ILEA's streaming of Black children into schools for the 'educationally subnormal,' and in Berkshire, parental pressures drove the development of multicultural education.[66] Black parents held schools to account on an everyday level too; classicist Katherine Harloe's reflections on her

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[64] Val Millman, 'Breadwinning & babies: A redefinition of careers education', in Gaby Weiner, (ed.), *Just a Bunch of Girls: Feminist Approaches to Schooling*, (Milton Keynes, Open University Press, 1985), 89-102, 99.

[65] Tisdall, *A Progressive Education?*, 205; Avtar Brah and Rehana Minhas, 'Structural Racism or Cultural Difference: Schooling for Asian Girls', in Gaby Weiner, (ed.), *Just a Bunch of Girls: Feminist Approaches to Schooling*, (Milton Keynes, Open University Press, 1985), 14-25, 18.

[66] Bernard Coard, *How the West Indian child is made educationally subnormal in the British school system: the scandal of the Black child in schools in Britain,* originally published by New Beacon for the Caribbean Education and Community Workers' Association (CECWA), 1971, reprinted in Brian Richardson (ed.), *Tell It Like It Is: How Our Schools Fail Black Children,* (Bookmarks Publications and Trentham Books, 2005); and *Final Report of the Equal Opportunities Working Party Draft,* in 'Equal Opportunities Working Party, Dec 1993 – Mar 1995', C/CS/C4/6/57, BRO.

own childhood in London describe the 'vigilance' her mother adopted to ensure her children were not underestimated and dismissed by teachers.[67] Lucey, Melody, and Walkerdine suggest that middle-class families were 'discursively positioned in a positive light,' whilst working-class families were pathologized as having some kind of deficit, limiting their daughters' achievements.[68] Normative ideas about white middle-class families and the pathologization of working-class and ethnic minority families were not always explicit, but were often implied, as the evidence above from the ILEA suggests. As this chapter demonstrates, some equalities-oriented staff in education did become more self-reflective over time. Yet these assumptions were pervasive, a distraction from deeper issue of schools' failures to support girls from working-class and ethnic minority backgrounds.

Some women educated in the 1970s bought into this idea of a generation gap in attitudes towards women's roles, comparing their lives with their mothers to demonstrate that they themselves were the ones to break with tradition. As Penny Summerfield has shown, 'generation' as a concept can be used by individuals to create imagined communities and to tie oneself or family members to a particular historical moment.[69] Interviewees who attended school in the 1970s – at the same time as the height of WLM and the increasing adoption of equal opportunities policies and rhetoric – positioned themselves and their mothers in relation to this supposed moment of transformation for gender relations. Women throughout the post-war period increasingly took up some form of paid work; a crucial aspect of this was the return of mothers to the workforce after raising children. Between 1961 and 1981, according to Laura Paterson, mothers' participation in labour markets had increased from 27% to 49%, in part due to the expansion of educational and

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[67] Katherine Harloe, 'On 'Education'', *Gender History Cluster, University of Reading* [blog], 13th May 2021, https://blogs.reading.ac.uk/gender-history-cluster/2021/05/13/on-education/
[68] Helen Lucey, June Melody, and Valerie Walkerdine, 'Uneasy hybrids: psychosocial aspects of becoming educationally successful for working-class young women', in Christine Skelton and Becky Francis (eds.), *A Feminist Critique of Education: 15 years of gender education,* (London: Routledge, 2005), 322-336, 326.
[69] Penny Summerfield, 'The Generation of Memory', in Lucy Noakes and Juliette Pattinson (eds), *British Cultural Memory and the Second World War,* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 25-46, 27.

employment opportunities women encountered in the post-war period.[70] As Paterson demonstrates, this participation was also marked by women's desire for a sense of self and fulfilment which was not solely derived from their role as mother and wife; Paterson credits the popularity of labour saving devices in the home and isolation brought about by housing relocation with creating a 'boring' domestic existence for women, which drove many women back into the workforce after they had children. These longer term economic and technological changes contributed to an understanding that for women, work was not just desirable, but a right, according to McCarthy.[71] Women growing up at this time were more likely than previous generations to have had a mother who juggled work, mothering, and household work.

However, in some narratives, their mothers' roles were presented as examples of traditional domesticity. Interviewees often distinguished between their mothers, who they often presented as victims of a less progressive era, and themselves. Ali, who attended a girls' grammar school in Reading from 1973 onwards, recalled the certainty she felt as a teenager about her future life:

> I do remember, um (pause), you know, being quite adamant that I wanted an opportunity to work and to do whatever I wanted to do. I saw myself being, you know like, leaving school, um, getting married, having babies, I wanted that, but that, you know, I wanted a lot more than that. I do remember feeling, you know, being very much, you know, I wanted to go to university, I wanted to have a career... I didn't want the life I suppose that my mum had had. Um, I wanted to be independent, um, and self-sufficient.[72]

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[70] Laura Paterson, '"I Didn't Feel like My Own Person": Paid Work in Women's Narratives of Self and Working Motherhood, 1950–1980', *Contemporary British History*, 33:3 (2019), 405–26, 407.
[71] McCarthy, *Double Lives,* 325.
[72] Interview with Ali Payne, 21st January 2019, Reading.

Ali did imagine her future as a mother and wife, but these expectations formed part of a fuller imaginative picture. She rejected the life her mother had lived as a homemaker, and instead drew on the idea of education as a way of expanding her life choices to construct a picture of her future life. Ali did not identify herself as a particular class; however, her father was a salesman and her mother stayed in the home, something which working-class families on a single low-income were not able to do. She also later attended a boarding school, paid for by her father's employer; Ali was therefore firmly within the middle-class at this point in her adolescence. She recalled that her grammar school was in many ways 'old-fashioned', and largely encouraged girls to go into feminised professions such as nursing. Ali's recollections reflect a slow response in Berkshire to calls for the equalisation of gendered curriculum. She was only able to take needlework and cookery, and was not permitted to take metalwork, woodwork, or other 'boys' subjects; single-sex schools in Reading only acquired equal facilities in the early 1990s.[73] However, her school celebrated academic success. Encouraging success in school set the precedent that education was of value, enabling those who wanted to pursue further or higher education and professional careers to imagine these as attainable futures and as sources of personal fulfilment, along with motherhood and marriage.

Dorota, who attended an independent Catholic girls' school and a voluntary-aided sixth form in London between 1977 and the mid 1980s, echoed the sentiment expressed by Ali about generational progress, although she thought she had been less certain about what her future *would* entail:

> I don't remember anyone talking about getting married and having children, so I
> don't know whether (pause) we just didn't talk about it or whether we were talking

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[73] Interview with Ali Payne, 21st January 2019, Reading; Schools Sub-Committee Minutes, 13th April 1988, and 12th July 1988, in 'Minutes of the Schools Sub-Committee 1985-1989', C/CS/C3/4/3, BRO.

about going on and having jobs, I don't think we would've talked about careers… I think everybody felt that they were independent. I think there was a feeling that you wouldn't do what your mum had done, necessarily… that you would be moving on and you would be doing something completely different.[74]

In Dorota's recollections, the future was not something she remembered spending time worrying over or planning. However, for both her and Ali, their fulfilment would and could not be met by repeating the lives their mothers had, a sentiment also echoed in the narratives of WLM activists.[75] Ali and Dorota saw their mothers' lives as limited, defined by boundaries which they, the daughters, would cross by 'moving on,' and doing a 'lot more than that.' This was not to criticise their mothers as individuals, but to indicate an important generational and historical shift. As Lynn Abrams argues, cultural trends and the circulation of language and beliefs around gender equality since the 1960s has meant that women in the twenty-first century had a 'ready-made framework' of life history, one which presented the subject as self-determining.[76] Ali and Dorota drew on this framework, and presented themselves as more self-determining than their mothers.

However, there were other factors which also influenced these two narratives. Both women's mothers had migrated to England where they achieved some social mobility (Ali's parents were from Ireland, and Dorota's from Poland). Helen Lee argues that opportunities for education and employment for one's children has been a common reason for individuals to migrate. As a result, children of migrants were often expected to show that they had taken full advantage of these opportunities through qualifications, careers, and material goods.[77] It is therefore also likely that this intergenerational migrant aspiration informed

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[74] Interview with Dorota Thomas, 12th January 2019, London.
[75] Jolly, *Sisterhood and After,* 71-2; Bruley, *'"It didn't just come from nowhere did it?"',* 69.
[76] Lynne Abrams, 'Heroes of Their Own Life Stories: Narrating the Female Self in the Feminist Age', *Cultural and Social History*, 16:2 (2019), 205–24, 207.
[77] Helen Lee, 'Second Generation Transnationalism', in Helen Lee (ed.), *Ties to the Homeland: Second Generation Transnationalism*, (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publisher, 2008), 1–32, 16.

Dorota's and Ali's expectations of their futures, and created the premise of 'moving on' from their mothers' experiences. But both attributed their attitudes towards domesticity more to the historical context of their youth, and a popular narrative of women's progress in the twentieth century which presented the 1970s and feminism as watershed moments in gendered power relations. This narrative served as a way of achieving composure, presenting a picture of attitudes towards future motherhood and marriage in the 1970s that smoothed over the complexities of their experiences and tied them to a wider cultural and political moment.

The complex interplay between home and school values were at their most stark in Sara's* interview. Despite the conservative nature of some of the staff at her Catholic girls' grammar school in 1970s North London, Sara* felt that the majority of the messages to conform to ideas of domestic femininity came from her parents. Her mother and father featured prominently in her narrative, especially their views on Sara's future:

> I spent a lot of time being really pissed off because my parents came from a really, because they came from Italy, they'd come from a rural background and my dad in particular, they didn't want us to go to university, my mum did, but he didn't, he wanted us to get a job, "it's a waste of time, go out at sixteen and get a job, get married, look after your family, look after me when I'm old", that's basically what he used to say, all the time…I think if I'd gone to a school… where the environment was also telling me girls couldn't do certain things, I don't think I would've done as many of the things as I did.[78]

In Sara's* narrative, traditional ideas of femininity and motherhood were again presented as part of a generational conflict in the home, whereas the school offered opportunity to access higher education and a different life course. But Sara* was seemingly not convinced

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[78] Interview with Sara*, 15th March 2019.

by her parents; she was 'pissed off.' Sara's* recollections also show that not all migrant families aspired for high levels of education for their children; in Sara's* family, domestic duties came first. Sara* and Dorota, both of whom attended Catholic girls' schools between the mid-1970s and mid-1980s, recalled occasions when nuns or teachers expressed the view that girls' education was not worthwhile as they would only be homemakers and mothers. However, such teachers were regarded as outdated 'old duffer[s]' and not taken seriously.[79] Ideas of domestic womanhood persisted and were encouraged by some adults in girls' lives, but held limited power to influence the behaviour of girls who achieved academically. The limited influence of these ideas was in part because these girls had the encouragement and academic credentials to continue in education; they had an accessible and achievable alternative, one which also aligned with mainstream understandings of equal opportunities.

The attitude of Sara's* mother was more complex in her recollections than that of her father. Her working-class Italian parents were socially mobile; both from poor rural communities, her father was a skilled labourer in England, whilst her mother was a housewife who later ran a small business. Sara* described her mother as an ambitious woman, but she also recalled seeing her mother waiting on her father and grandfather, who lived with the family, taking on most of the domestic labour. Her mother had ambitions for her daughters, yet she still encouraged Sara* to be wary of putting off potential suitors:

> [My mother] certainly would say things like, "well I think you should go [to university], and I think it's better to get an education and, I wanted you to get a job and not rely on any man," but she would at the same time say, you know, "don't, don't be too strident," cos you know if I got angry it would be, "don't be too strident

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[79] Interview with Sara*, 15th March 2019; Interview with Dorota Thomas, 12th January 2019, London. Sara* attended a comprehensive school that had until recently been a grammar, and Dorota attended an independent girls' school and a voluntary-aided sixth form. Both schools were Catholic, and both were in Inner London.

cos men won't want to marry you," that sort of thing, and in the end she really just

wanted us to marry as well, um, so yeah, it was a bit of a mixed message.[80]

Whilst Sara's mother understood the importance of education for future employment and to

be financially independent, ultimately, she still saw marriage as crucial to her daughter's

adult success. In the end, Sara* rejected her father's expectations by attending university

and did not marry until later in her life. School and home promoted differing visions of the

future, but Sara* felt that she was able to prioritise educational ambitions over the

immediate need for a husband and therefore subvert her father's expectations. Sara's*

recollections reveal that even when stereotyped expectations existed within the family, girls

who achieved academically were able to draw on their success at school to resist these

expectations and access educational opportunities.

For working-class girls who struggled at school, the precedent of education as the

means to adult success was not as accepted as it was for pupils such as Sara*. Maxine

attended a girls' grammar school in Reading in the 1970s and left at age fifteen with no

qualifications, but was successful in finding work in the clerical sector immediately after

leaving. She lived with her working-class parents until she married in her mid-twenties.

Maxine conformed to her parents' expectations of her to get a job straight after school, to

the shock of her teachers. Educational success was more important to Sara's* sense of self,

whereas for Maxine, education was deeply unsatisfying. Maxine 'hated' school; she

'struggled to read' and was not interested in many of the lessons:

I had a letter, um, from the deputy head I think it was, asking my mum and dad to go

into school because, you know, my level of work, the standard of work had gone

down, and um, they wanted to discuss it but my mum and dad didn't go (pause) I

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[80] Interview with Sara*, 15th March 2019.

think it was, you know, they realised that it was a bit of a lost cause and, you know,

the sooner I got out the better.[81]

Maxine recalled that education was not 'for her,' suggesting that her personality or skills were not compatible with the environment of the school, and her parents saw that she was a 'lost cause.'[82] Despite this experience, Maxine presented herself as making choices which reflected her 'self-understanding.'[83] In Maxine's narrative, this self-understanding was clear in her claim that the school was not the problem; rather, she was not suited to school.

However, accounts of working-class girls in grammar education demonstrate the hostility of grammar school education towards some working-class girls.[84] Teachers often had lower expectations of working-class pupils and placed them in lower sets, and working-class children were more likely to be assumed to have more behavioural difficulties than middle-class children.[85] In grammar schools, working-class children were highly likely to drop out of school just as early as they did in secondary-moderns, as Maxine did.[86] David Gillborn and Heidi Safia Mirza's work on race, class, gender, and attainment shows that working-class pupils' low attainment was often pathologized as a result of parental influence.[87] This pathologization was in part responsible for working-class girls shouldering blame for their lack of educational success. As Gillian Plummer shows, negative images fed to pupils throughout their school experience often resulted in them seeing their disadvantage because of their own lack of intelligence or their families' inadequacies.[88]

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[81] Interview with Maxine Settle, 11th December 2018, Reading.
[82] Ibid.
[83] Abrams, 'Heroes of Their Own Life Stories', 207.
[84] Irene Payne, 'A Working Class Girl in a Grammar School', in Dale Spender and Elizabeth Sarah (eds.), *Learning to Lose: Sexism and Education,* (London: Women's Press, 198), 11-19, 16.
[85] Madeleine Arnot, 'Equal Opportunities and Educational Performance: Class, Gender and Race', in John Beck and Mary Earl (eds.), *Key Issues in Secondary Education: Introductory Readings*, 2nd edn (London: Continuum, 2003), 94–105, 97; Gillian Plummer, *Failing Working-Class Girls* (Stoke on Trent: Trentham Books, 2000), 30-33.
[86] Spencer, *Gender, Work and Education,* 50-1.
[87] David Gillborn and Heidi Mirza, *Educational Inequality: Mapping Race, Class and Gender - A Synthesis of Research Evidence* (Office for Standards in Education, 2000).
[88] Plummer, *Failing Working-Class Girls,* 23.

Maxine's description of grammar school as being not 'for her' reflects this internalisation of structural disadvantage. In an education system predicated on the notion of meritocracy – that grammar schooling permitted the 'bright' individual child opportunities to be 'educated out of [one's] class' – failure of the individual child to live up to this model was individualised as a failure to work hard enough, and the system remained intact.[89]

Yet some working-class girls did still perceive education to be a valuable way to challenge gendered expectations, even when their experiences of school were overwhelmingly negative. Anna Leitrim wrote her autobiography for the ILEA in the late 1970s. She was from a working-class family, and attending a comprehensive school having failed her eleven-plus exam. Leitrim had become conscious of inequalities throughout her teens, and used 'womin' or 'wommin' instead of 'woman' because she wanted to challenge the 'sexist' language of 'WO'MAN'.[90] Throughout her memoir, she criticised the education system for being 'oppressive,' treating the pupils like robots. She stated: 'school has done nothing for me and I'm sure that applies to most young people in most schools, especially if you're working class and a womin' [sic]. Leitrim's use of 'womin'' is interesting; at age fifteen or sixteen, she had an idea of herself as an adult woman rather than a child or girl. She also criticised the ways in which school prepared pupils for future gendered roles, with girls doing 'feminine things such as needlework, netball and drawing' and playing in junior school with 'dolls and prams and kitchens.'[91] Despite her criticisms of education, Leitrim saw education as a central way through which she could challenge sexual stereotypes and challenge what she saw as an unfair capitalist system:

The first thing I'll be hoping for is to get a good education. I'd like to think that in a just society all young people will have the right to further education and training

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[89] Ibid, 19.
[90] Anna Leitrim, 'Me and My Family', in *Our Lives,* 117.
[91] Ibid, 123.

with a full grant, where there was a fully democratic education system, where there was no sexual discrimination against wommin [sic] and gay people [...] To win this means ending the grip of the big companies, politicians and bureaucrats, who try to run our lives for us.[92]

Leitrim's memoir demonstrates the different understandings which working-class girls had of their expected futures and the value of education in the 1970s. She did not individualise her supposed 'failings' to get qualifications, and instead blamed the school more directly than Maxine did for her negative school experience. Positioning herself as a 'womin'' rather than a 'girl' suggests Leitrim also attempted to attribute herself some autonomy or power which was not available to pupils within what she saw as an oppressive school system. Leitrim's experiences demonstrate that individual girls internalised ideas from school and wider society about class, gender, and domesticity in different ways; in Leitrim's case, by rejecting the expectations of her school, whilst still aligning with the idea that education could improve her life chances.

These testimonies highlight the fault lines in equal opportunities in relation to class, education, and domesticity. Whilst equal opportunities policy and rhetoric aimed to challenge expectations of domesticity, these earlier formulations failed to account for the fact that marriage and the family were fulfilling for some girls, especially but not exclusively those who faced classism, racism, and hostility in the worlds of work and education. Yet experiential evidence shows how aspects of this meritocratic paradigm of equal opportunities were internalised by some middle-class girls such as Ali and Dorota, who used this paradigm to resist stereotyped assumptions about their gender. For these girls, striving for a better life than their mothers was vital for the construction of their selfhoods as modern young women who grew up on the cusp of an apparent generational revolution.

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[92] Ibid, 130-1.

But the language of individual achievement and empowerment through hard work in school could have a negative impact on girls who were already marginalised in education, such as Maxine. Girls of differing backgrounds therefore used the existing discourses available to them to construct their selfhoods as self-determining individuals, pursuing what suited them and their interests the best; yet for girls who were marginalised in education, this was a 'suspiciously narrow' range of options, reflective of the particular 'gendered, regional, ethnic, sexual subset' of society to which they belonged.[93]

From the classroom to the kitchen? Tackling gendered curriculum

The time between school and 'settling down' was a centrally important feature of girls' changing expectations of their futures. As Robinson, Schofield, Sutcliffe-Braithwaite and Thomlinson highlight, the deferral of domesticity was a crucial shift in women's experiences of youth before motherhood in the 1970s; they argue that this deferral was a way of articulating an acceptable domestic femininity, whilst also showing dissatisfaction with it.[94] Griffin also found that this deferral was a key distinction between girls who had academic prospects and those who did not; sixth formers who were academically able had been encouraged to plan their futures in relation to qualifications, higher education, and work, and applied a similar logic to their expectations of motherhood.[95] These girls imagined deferring motherhood until in secure employment, before casting off these gains for several years to raise children before returning to work; Sara* and Ali had similar images of their futures.[96] As Spencer shows, this deferral was not new; most girls imagined a period of work before domestic life, and many imagined to continue to work part-time alongside

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[93] Donald E. Hall, *Subjectivity,* (London: Routledge, 2004), 1.
[94] Robinson et al, *Telling Stories,* 294.
[95] Griffin, *Typical Girls*, 51.
[96] Interview with Sara*, 15th March 2019; Interview with Ali Payne, 21st January 2019, Reading.

mothering.[97] However, this period of independence became longer throughout the late twentieth century.

Equal opportunities frameworks in the 1970s and early 1980s drew a direct connection between which subjects girls took in school and their imagined domestic futures. Whilst the ILEA shifted its focus in the 1980s and began to draw more directly from feminist research, they continued to work under the premise that girls' interest in domestic subjects – cookery, needlework, child development, or home economics – would translate into their acceptance of a domestic role. However, girls rarely identified such neat continuities between their schooling and domestic life, and reinforced the distinct phases of their adolescence and adulthood. This disconnect between girls' expectations, and what teachers imagined their expectations to be, limited the radical potential of anti-sexist activism in the 1980s and allowed girls to present themselves as autonomous and empowered subjects.

The early 1980s signalled a fundamental shift in the ILEA's approach to equal opportunities for girls. Under the leadership of Frances Morrell, the ILEA explicitly adopted a feminist stance, drawing on concepts from women's liberation and feminist educational research.[98] The ILEA produced an 'Anti-Sexist statement', drafted in 1984 but published as part of the *Race, Sex and Class* series in 1985, which focused on the elimination of 'sex-stereotyping', and considered the ways in which education perpetuated the training of girls and boys for distinct roles:

> Recent research, however, has confirmed the strength of sexist messages through
> everything that goes on informally and/or unconsciously in schools and other places

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[97] Spencer, *Gender, Work and Education,* 50-1.
[98] Some notable academics in this field throughout the 1980s include Dale Spender, Sara Delamont, Madeleine Arnot, and Gaby Weiner. In 1989 the first issue of the peer-reviewed journal *Gender and Education* was published, featuring work on equal opportunities, race, and sexuality.

of education which contribute to pupils' and students' experience: for example, teachers having different expectations of girls and boys, or text books presenting subjects in a sex-biased way. Despite the formal availability of equal opportunities within the ILEA, in practice girls and boys, women and men make stereotyped subject choices and apply and use their achievement for different purposes when they leave the education system.[99]

This statement signals the shift in the ILEA's approach away from the 1970s equal opportunities approach – which predominantly was concerned with ensuring equal access to subjects for boys and girls – and towards a focus on the 'hidden curriculum.' The 'hidden curriculum' referred to the informal and interpersonal experiences in the classroom and content of resources such as literature which reinforced stereotyped gender roles for men and women.[100] In this understanding, girls' stereotyped subject choice was a result of this longer-term conditioning. These ideas were internalised by pupils, and shaped their expectations of their futures. This anti-sexist approach was fundamentally different to the 'equal opportunities' rhetoric of previous years. Equal opportunities policies aimed to equalise access to a common curriculum for girls and boys and focused on making changes to equalise girls' attainment and opportunities. Anti-sexism proposed a girl-centred curriculum which centred topics which teachers felt were of interest to girls, such as women's history, adopted positive discrimination in favour of girls, encouraged teachers to reflect on their own practice, and saw radical education as potentially transformative for wider society, as well as for pupil attainment.[101] Equal opportunities approaches imagined that qualifications and educational opportunities were the main way for girls to be empowered and to overcome stereotyped gender roles. Whilst anti-sexism originally aimed

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[99] 'Anti-Sexist Statement of the Inner London Education Authority', in *Race, sex and class 6: a policy for equality; sex,* (Inner London Education Authority, 1985).
[100] Tinkler, 'Girlhood and Growing Up', 41.
[101] Gaby Weiner, *Feminisms in Education: An Introduction* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1994), 78.

to transform social relations as well as improve student attainment, Jane Martin found that

towards the end of the 1980s in the ILEA, attainment became the central focus and the

radical moment was to an extent subverted.[102] Within an anti-sexist framework, gendered

subjects such as home economics and craft and design technology (CDT) were particularly

scrutinised, as these were obvious areas of contention.[103]

This framework was not a clean break with the equal opportunities policies of the

1970s; rather, ILEA feminists identified that social conditioning meant that girls often did

not take up new opportunities, despite the 'formal availability of equal opportunities.'[104] In

the early 1980s, two crucial ILEA reports – *Girls' education - Anti-discrimination* and *Equal*

Opportunities for girls and boys – argued that the gendered divergence of subject choice at

age thirteen, when pupils opted to take CSEs, O-levels, or vocational courses, as evidence

that girls had internalised ideas about feminised subjects and the role of homemaker.[105] The

prevalence of stereotyped images of men and women's roles in domestic science, and the

continued popularity of domestic subjects amongst girls after age thirteen, was a key

concern not just of the ILEA, but the EOC and anti-sexist teachers more broadly.[106] Some

girls too were conscious of the way in which these subjects prescribed stereotyped sex

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[102] Jane Martin, 'Gender, Education and Social Change: A Study of Feminist Politics and Practice in London, 1870–1990', *Gender and Education*, 25:1 (2013), 56–74, 70.
[103] The history curriculum was also a particularly active area, in part because many senior anti-sexist campaigners within the ILEA were from a history background, but also because history as a subject which confronted 'gender issues' as 'a major division of societies part and present', as former ILEA Inspector for Equal Opportunities Carol Adams claimed. See: Carol Adams, 'Foreword' to Equal Opportunities – Gender Issue of 'CLIO', History and Social Sciences Teachers' Centre REVIEW, Vol. 4 No.3, Autumn 1984, Inner London Education Authority, 5, from the personal collection of Kate Moorse; and Martin, 'Gender, education, and social change', 70.
[104] 'Anti-Sexist Statement of the Inner London Education Authority', in *Race, sex and class 6.*
[105] *Girls' Education – Anti-discrimination* (ILEA, 1982); *Equal Opportunities for all: A Report by the ILEA Inspectorate,* (Inner London Education Authority, 1982, re-printed 1983), both from the personal collection of Kate Moorse.
[106] Battersea County Women's Group, 'A School Experience: Implementing equality in a mixed comprehensive', in Gaby Weiner (ed.), *Just a Bunch of Girls: Feminist Approaches to Schooling,* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1985), 120-133.

roles. One group of girls writing for *Spare Rib* in the early 1980s pointed out the ways in which these roles were reinforced:

> Loads of girls have to do child development. But boys don't – well, only one. We don't learn anything – it's things you know from your common sense – the only difference being you have to write it all down […] And the books are very sexist, assuming you're all girls, and that you're all naturally going to be mothers. There's never much mention of fathers at all.[107]

Not only did more girls than boys take these subjects, but the texts and resources used often reinforced 'natural' sex roles.

To deal with this, the ILEA made use of subject advisory teachers, some of whom attempted to reform the curricular offerings of traditionally gendered subjects to break down assumptions about men's and women's roles. These advisory staff were ordinary teachers, seconded from their roles temporarily, who travelled around London disseminating best practice. Sue Johne had worked as a home economics and child development teacher from 1971, and was seconded in the 1980s to complete her Master's research into boys' attitudes towards home economics. Sue's research concluded that many boys imagined that only under extraordinary circumstances would they cook, clean, and care for children. One boy stated: 'if [my future wife] goes into hospital to have a baby or is ill, I will be able to cook for myself and look after the children.'[108] These boys evidently had clear ideas about gendered roles within the family, and Sue concluded that option choices alone would not be enough to raise pupils' awareness of 'gender role socialisation'; the

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[107] Linda, Dawn, Jasmine, Diane, Cynthia, and Lynda, 'Acting it Out', in *Girls Are Powerful: Young women's writings from Spare Rib,* (London: Sheba Feminist Publishers, 1982), 28.
[108] Sue Johne, '"I don't care what my friends think" – boys' attitudes towards home economics', in *Secondary issues?: Some approaches to equal opportunities,* (Inner London Education Authority, 1986), 28-9, 28.

school, as well as parents, needed to be involved in discussions.[109] As a result of her research, and in her capacity as Head of Department, Sue and her team integrated sessions on the role of women in wider society into the home economics and cookery curricula, with the aims of getting boys and girls to question the idea that women 'should be in the kitchen.'[110] Sue's experiences show the processes by which anti-sexist teachers came to make changes; they conducted their own research, and worked collaboratively to embed their curriculum with challenges to ideas of natural sex roles.

Anti-sexist teachers also produced written and visual resources which could be adapted for any subjects, including home economics. A resource entitled 'Non-Sexist Pictures' was produced in 1983 by staff at several ILEA schools, including Sue's. 'Non-sexist Pictures' was a simple sheet of cartoons, depicting men and women taking part in the traditionally gendered tasks of the opposite sex. For instance, a man was depicted feeding a baby, and women shown fixing vehicles and doing DIY.[111] This resource was especially meant for use in home economics classrooms, as part of a wider trend among feminist teachers to adapt representations of men and women across subjects to show non-stereotyped roles.[112] ILEA's policy of promoting 'positive images' of women and ethnic

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[109] Johne, '"I don't care what my friends think" – boys' attitudes towards home economics', 29.
[110] Interview with Sue Johne, 1st November 2019, London.
[111] 'Non-sexist Pictures', (ILEA, 1983), from the personal collection of Kate Moorse.
[112] Battersea County Women's Group, 'A School Experience', 123.

minority people was one of three major policy strands, which will be explored in more depth in Chapter Two, which characterised the anti-sexist phase.
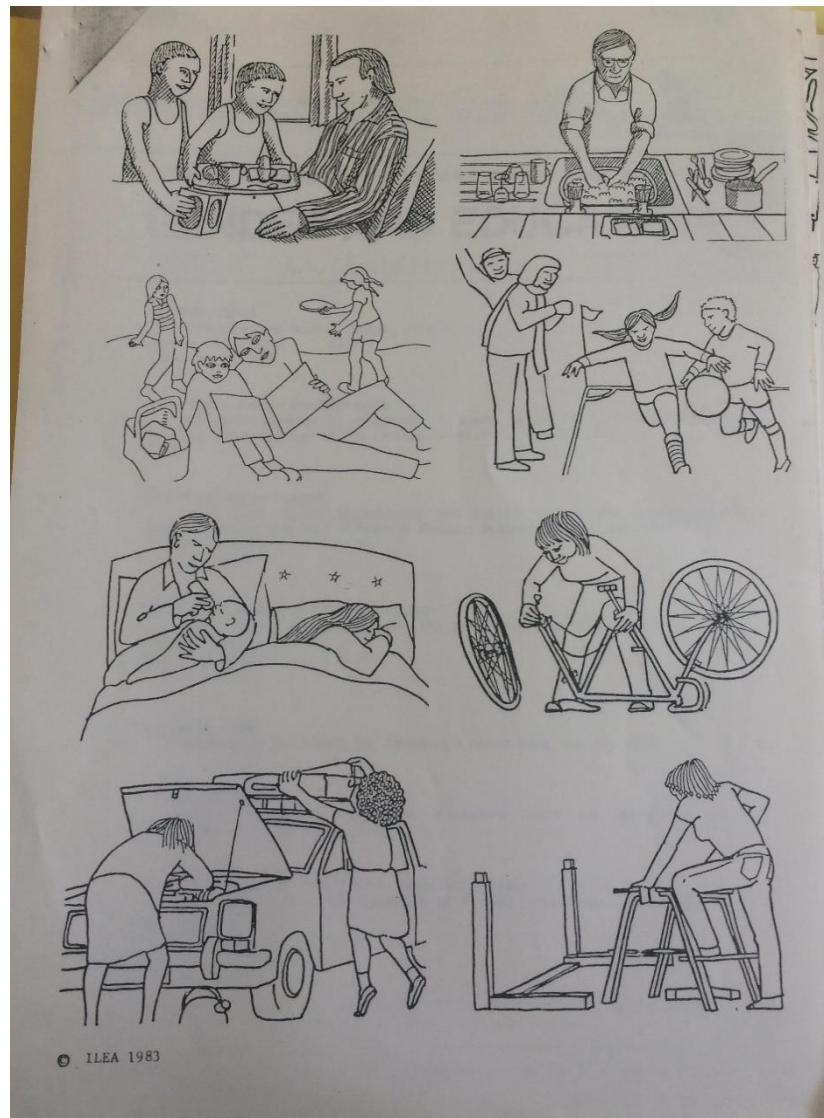
(*Figure 1*: 'Non-sexist Pictures', (ILEA, 1983), from the personal collection of Kate Moorse)

In Reading, too, teachers were able to draw on the resources of the local authority for professional and pedagogical development, but the BCC took more of a mainstream equal opportunities approach than anti-sexist. Ian* worked at several comprehensive and secondary modern schools in Berkshire during his career as a science teacher from 1964

until his retirement in the early 2000s. Drawing on the guidance of an advisory teacher, he developed his understanding of how girls and boys engaged in science lessons, such as observing how girls and boys approached tasks differently. Ian* described attending training courses which aimed to make teachers aware that there was 'an untapped pool of talent' in their female students. However, he also recalled that the explicitly 'feminist' attitude of the course leader elicited a 'strong reaction' among the male attendees at one workshop, some of whom walked out having regarded the course leader as having 'gone too far' when she discussed the neck-tie as a phallic symbol.[113] Ian's* memories are suggestive of the difficulties within equal opportunities reform. Feminists or 'women's libbers' were often regarded with derision, presented in the press as extremists or radicals throughout the 1970s and 1980s.[114] Similar challenges were reported by feminist social workers in the 1980s; the feminist intellectual foundations of schemes were often downplayed to gain support from colleagues or to access funding.[115] However, secondary modern schools, such as those Ian* worked in, were relatively free throughout the post-war period to experiment with progressive models of education, so Ian* enjoyed a degree of independence in his pursuit of further guidance and training.[116] Examples of such enthusiastic equal opportunities work by individual teachers suggest that whilst such teachers may have been in a minority, and their influence may have been limited to handfuls of schools, there were staff that attempted to challenge the reproduction of stereotypically gendered expectations of the future among their pupils.

Despite work within both the ILEA and BCC to undermine harmful stereotyping in 'feminine' and 'masculine' subjects, the experiential sources indicate that girls did not only

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[113] Interview with Jane* and Ian*, 13th June 2019.
[114] Anthony Doran, 'And now… the Sexist-Ometer', *Daily Mail,* 3rd October 1984, 13. See also the recollections of teenage feminist Viv Norman in her chapter 'She must be a women's libber', in *Girls Are Powerful,* 19-20.
[115] Jean Spence, 'Collecting Women's Lives: The Challenge of Feminism in UK Youth Work in the 1970s and 80s', *Women's History Review*, 19:1 (2010), 159–76.
[116] Laura Tisdall, *A Progressive Education?*, 184.

think of school subjects based on their applicability to a future familial role, and often took subjects for more immediate reasons. When asked about subjects such as home economics, needlework, or cookery, interviewees did not draw links between these subjects and their subsequent experiences of motherhood and running a household. In some instances, they emphasised the enjoyment they had of the subject.[117] Spencer found similar recollections among her interviewees who grew up in the 1950s, who indicated that cookery and needlework were 'at best, light relief from the more academic lessons and, at worst, subjects which had no relevance to school or future domesticity.'[118] Aretha, who attended a mixed ILEA school between the mid-1980s and mid-1990s, suggested that despite her parents' protestations, she chose subjects which she enjoyed, and treated her school classes as 'experiences', not just as means to a career.[119] Woodwork and product design were some of her most fondly remembered lessons at school. Other interviewees did relate school subjects to future careers, indicative of a shift in how girls saw their futures compared to Spencer's 1950s subjects. For instance, Michelle*, who attended a mixed-Catholic comprehensive in Reading in the mid-1980s described all aspects of CDT at her school as a 'doss' subject, and that cookery was irrelevant as she had no aspirations of becoming a chef.[120] Michelle's* comments also suggest that school and work were linked; she did not see the use of domestic skills if they were not for a future job or career, a crucial distinction between girls in the 1980s, and the girls whose essays were reproduced in *The School I Would Like* in 1967.

This attitude towards domestic science subjects was not just a retrospective phenomenon. In Sheila Riddell's 1989 research, she found that in subjects such as textiles, girls and female teachers enjoyed the opportunity to escape male confrontation by

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[117] Interviews with Michelle*, 14th May 2019; and Aretha George-Tooley, 7th May 2019, London.
[118] Spencer, *Gender, Work and Education,* 170.
[119] Interview with Aretha George-Tooley, 7th May 2019, London.
[120] Interview with Michelle*, 14th May 2019.

retreating to these spaces, establishing some bonds of female solidarity, but also reinforcing the domestic as a space for women.[121] Whilst Riddell's findings are important in indicating the continuation of typically gendered spaces in such subjects, it is clear that a causal link between feminine subjects and girls' trajectories into domesticity was not as self-evident as some equal opportunities-minded teachers believed. Girls' enjoyment of these subjects – sometimes a welcome relief from a timetable dominated by desk-bound work – or perceived usefulness for a career, also influenced their engagement. This evidence indicates that some girls prioritised more immediate factors for their choice of subject, rather than for some imagined future role in the home. The emphasis girls placed on their status as teenagers was a way to reinforce a temporal distance between their life stages of adolescence and adulthood. As this chapter will show, this was connected to the increased popularity of the importance of self-discovery in young adulthood and the prolonging of education in order to access further educational and professional opportunities.

Rejecting domesticity in the 1980s

The writing of several teenagers in the *Just 17* collection *Bitter-sweet Dreams* suggests that by the late 1980s, more girls were likely to outright reject the premise of domestic womanhood, and instead imagined that education and a career would form a more immediate part of their future lives. In her poem for *Just 17* magazine's collection of readers' writing *Bittersweet Dreams,* anonymous author 'Simone Black' violently rejected the premise of women's domestic role:

> Am I mad for not wanting

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[121] Sheila Riddell, 'Pupils, Resistance and Gender Codes: A Study of Classroom Encounters.', in Christine Skelton and Becky Francis (eds.), *A Feminist Critique of Education: 15 Years of Gender Development*, (Taylor & Francis, 2005), 11-24.

to conform to the rules?

a woman's place is in the home

what claptrap... whoever wrote

that should be shot.[122]

'Black' outright rejected the idea of domestic womanhood, and by proxy, the subordination of women, but placed herself in a minority ('Am I mad') against the 'rules' of how girls should live their lives. Very few of the other writers in the *Bittersweet Dreams* collection imagined their futures in terms of domestic life, and instead hoped for a 'personal, ambitious, brilliant (?) career', higher education, or expressed their fears for a future with a continued presence of the National Front, unemployment, and inequality.[123] 'Karen McCarthy' laid out her ambitions alongside the obstacles she faced; crucially, sexism did not feature in this:

I, too, want a career [...] This plain English girl is facing a future of unemployment, crime problems, falling living standards and the ever-present threat of destruction [reference to Cold War]. I want to be special [...] Girls in my class who want to be typists and housewives do nothing but confirm my belief that I'll die if I ever become like them.[124]

'McCarthy's' ambitions for a career and to be 'special' were restricted by the socio-economic context of the 1980s, and the aspirations of her classmates to follow a traditional path were repugnant to her. In her analysis of adolescent girls' writing, Tisdall found that the portrayal of peers as selfish or naïve could be a way for the writer to assert their own

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[122] 'Simone Black', untitled poem, in *Bitter-sweet Dreams: Girls' and Young Women's Own Stories* (Virago, 1987), 131.

[123] Various authors, in *Bitter Sweet Dreams,* 181-200.

[124] 'Karen McCarthy', in *Bitter-sweet Dreams,* 183.

maturity.[125] By presenting her peers as less agentic than her was a way for 'McCarthy' to emphasise her individuality and show she was resistant to traditional gendered norms.

The *Bitter-sweet Dreams* collection represents a particular group of girls in the 1980s, as it drew its pool of contributors from the readership of *Just Seventeen* magazine. It is therefore important to briefly consider what marked out the target audience of *Just Seventeen,* as girls drew together the model of girlhood presented in *Just Seventeen* and other girls' media with ideas of girlhood presented in school. In contrast to magazines such as *Jackie* which demonstrated a commitment to 'romantic individualism' and the pursuit of a husband, *Just Seventeen* was more 'self-confident' and independent, addressing a 'new kind of girl', less obsessed by the pursuit of a 'steady' boyfriend, 'whose future is defined by a different tempo and a different set of interests'.[126] The readers, and therefore writers of this collection, not only consumed different media to previous generations, but were encouraged to see their futures in fundamentally different ways to the readers of older, less popular magazines such as *Jackie.*[127] *Just Seventeen* included more articles on jobs, careers, education, and unemployment than its earlier competitor, and whilst was not explicitly feminist, introduced some feminist ideas 'pragmatically, translated into the practical and individual skills of the street-wise.'[128] This change in the consumption and attitudes of teenage girls between the 1970s and 1980s suggests that for some girls in the mid-1980s, the pursuit of a husband was of a lower priority than it had been for previous generations.

Some of the girls writing in *Bitter-sweet Dreams* drew together ideas about domesticity and girlhood from their schooling and from girls' media. Whilst none of these

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[125] Tisdall, '"What a Difference it was to be a Woman and not a Teenager"', 4-5.
[126] McRobbie, *Feminism and Youth Culture,* xiv.
[127] *Jackie* was Britain's biggest selling teenage magazine between the mid 1960s and mid 1970s, replaced by *Just Seventeen,* which was introduced to directly compete with *Jackie* in 1983. See: McRobbie, *Feminism and Youth Culture,* 67; and Mary Jane Kehily, 'More Sugar?: Teenage Magazines, Gender Displays and Sexual Learning', *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 2:1 (1999), 65–89.
[128] Janice Winship, '"A Girl Needs to Get Street-Wise": Magazines for the 1980s', *Feminist Review*, 21, 1985, 25–46, 40.

writers identified features of anti-sexist education in their schools, some noted that domesticity was used to motivate hard work in school, presented as an unfulfilling and disappointing route for girls who were instead expected to gain 'good' qualifications and pursue a career. Danielle Homburg, a seventeen-year-old writing for *Bittersweet Dreams*, described this formulation:

> Love took a second place for a while to exams, failure of which, I had been warned, would lead to an unfulfilled life in an office or at a kitchen sink.[129]

Homburg had been preoccupied previously with finding a boyfriend, something which her friends were doing, but put this pursuit to one side in order to work towards qualifications. Her comments show two things: firstly, that she did not associate romantic relationships in her present to a future of married life; and secondly, that schooling had reinforced the idea that domesticity was ultimately unfulfilling for her. Discourses of individual fulfilment were prevalent in this period; as Chapter Two will demonstrate in more depth, pupils' careers education increasingly emphasised the importance of finding a career which suited an individuals' personality and skills, and that brought them fulfilment. By the time of *Bitter-sweet Dreams* publication in 1987, there had been a shift in how some girls imagined their futures and made longer term plans for their lives. This was a limited success for equal opportunities; educational feminist discourses promoted academic achievement for girls, and some were able to use education to resist stereotyped gender roles.

However, some teachers in the 1980s drew on this new norm of deferred marriage to problematise the lives of Asian pupils. The ILEA's early anti-sexist work attempted to mediate between displaying multicultural sensitivies, whilst tackling the inequalities faced by girls from ethnic and religious minority groups. In the EO Inspectorate report *Equal Opportunities for Boys and Girls,* inspectors warned teachers to be alert to the implication

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[129] Danielle Homburg, in *Bitter-sweet Dreams,* 96.

that white society was 'less sexist' than those of religious minorities; the assumption that

ethnic and religious minority girls were oppressed within their own cultures was a

prominent stereotype in 1970s and 1980s schools, especially in relation to young Asian

girls.[130] As Brah, Minhas, and Griffin found, Asian girls were often imagined by teachers as

being caught 'between two cultures,' these cultures being the supposed liberal culture of the

school, and the patriarchal culture of their family.[131] Brah and Minhas used articles from the

Times Education Supplement to demonstrate the positioning of the Asian family as a

problem in educational discourses, with Asian girls imagined as 'strictly bounded by

religious and family gatherings,' passive and quiet, and victims of forced marriages.[132]

Teachers' perceptions of their Muslim students imagined them as needing 'saving' from

young marriage.[133] Several Asian girls who were interviewed by Griffin laughed off this

notion:

> *Jasbinder:* They [teachers] expect all us Asians to be having arranged marriages. Well
>
> it's not true that.

> *Dalbiro:* And anyway, what's the big problem? I know lots of English people that get
>
> into a mess with their marriages, worse even. I do have trouble with my family
>
> sometimes, but nothing like they say.[134]

For young Asian girls in the 1980s, the concerns of teachers that they needed 'empowering'

were overstated, and singled them out unfavourably to their white peers; as this chapter

has shown, white schoolgirls also faced pressures from their families to conform to ideas of

domestic womanhood. Yet familial pressures were positioned by some teachers as a

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[130] *Equal Opportunities for all: A Report by the ILEA Inspectorate*.
[131] Griffin, *Typical Girls,* 54.
[132] Brah and Minhas, 'Structural Racism or Cultural Difference', 18.
[133] Heidi Safia Mirza and Veena Meetoo, 'Empowering Muslim Girls? Post-Feminism, Multiculturalism and the Production of the "Model" Muslim Female Student in British Schools', *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 39:2 (2018), 227–41, 229.
[134] Griffin, *Typical Girls,* 54.

problem specific to ethnic and religious communities; girls such as Dalbiro and Jasbinder were critical of this lack of awareness. Paramjit Kaur wrote for *Bitter-sweet Dreams* from university in London, and whilst she was anxious about maintaining her parents' approval once she left university, her education was a great source of pride to her Indian Sikh parents.[135] Kaur saw education as an empowering opportunity for her, to explore ideas and lifestyles away from the family home, and have more choice over her life course and career; ambitions which were shared by white fellow *Bitter-sweet Dreams* writers. These stereotyped assumptions about Asian families limiting their daughters' educational opportunities continued, despite local statistics gathered by the BCC which showed that Asian pupils on the whole were more likely to remain in education than even white pupils.[136] Some Asian girls felt they had agency and could exercise choice, yet were rendered helpless by an equal opportunities rhetoric which erased the individuality of their experiences and pathologized their families in ways which white middle-class families were not.

Homburg's words in *Bitter-Sweet Dreams* suggest that for girls who enjoyed and were successful in education, academic success took priority over finding a romantic partner. Love, whilst important, would be postponed until after personal fulfilment through work and education had been achieved. As Zoe Strimpel has argued, singleness as an identity which could be embraced was established by the late-twentieth century, but was contingent on individuals having sufficient self-knowledge and self-esteem to successfully navigate a dating life.[137] Ideas of adolescence as a transitionary or developmental state were difficult for young people to reconcile with this new figure of the desirable, confident, self-

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[135] Paramjit Kaur, in *Bitter-sweet Dreams,* 65-9.
[136] Multicultural Education Sub-Committee Minutes, 11th November 1986, in 'Multicultural Education Sub-Committee Agendas 1986-1989', C/CS/C4/4/6, BRO.
[137] Strimpel, *Seeking Love in Modern Britain,* 60-1.

knowing singleton.[138] A heterosexual partnership therefore had prerequisites which young people needed to meet after a period of singledom. Furthermore, even once in heterosexual partnerships, young women were more likely to cohabit for longer periods prior to marriage. Jane Lewis demonstrates that the percentage of women marrying who had cohabited with their husbands prior to marriage rose from 33% between 1975 and 1979, to 70% in the 1990s.[139] This period of singledom, cohabitation, and self-determination became seen as crucial in laying the foundations for a happy love life in later adulthood.[140]

These shifting trends in adult romantic lifestyles had an influence on how younger women and teenage girls imagined their futures. Michelle*, who grew up in 1980s Reading, saw dating boys as a teenager and future marriage as two unrelated experiences:

> Well we all used to talk about boys, but I had this ridiculously old head on young shoulders, so I was always like, "well I'm not gonna marry them so what's the point?"[141]

Michelle* shunned romantic relationships as a teenager because teenage romance, in her view, did not lead to marriage. Marriage was part of her imagined future, but did not need her immediate attention. Michelle* was under sixteen at the time; whilst for some girls – such as ILEA teen writer Chelsea Herbert – this was an age at which they could begin to gain adult status, for Michelle*, marriage was something which was not a feature of her current stage of life. Other interviewees recalled going out with boys during their teenage years, but presented them as fleeting, immature relationships, which did not persist into adulthood.[142] Sara* for instance mentioned a boyfriend, but 'he was only a little kind of thing.'[143] Aretha

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[138] Jane Pilcher, *Age and Generation in Modern Britain,* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1995), 58-9.
[139] Lewis, 'Marriage', 72-3.
[140] Strimpel, *Seeking Love in Modern Britain,* 31; 117.
[141] Interview with Michelle*, 14th May 2019.
[142] For example: Interview with Nicola*, 3rd May 2019; Interview with Sara*, 15th March 2019; Interview with Emma*, 7th February 2019; Interview with Aretha George-Tooley, 7th May 2019, London.
[143] Interview with Sara*, 15th March 2019.

dated a boy who lived on her friend's estate, who she only saw if she hung out in the area; she used air quotes around the word 'dating' when describing her relationship with this boy as a way to signify the insignificance of this relationship.[144] Yet these characterisations may also have resulted from the life history methodology of this research; looking back on young relationships from married adulthood, the interviewees here perhaps drew on ideas of youthful immaturity to underestimate the importance of their teenage relationships at the time. However, what Michelle's* recollections *do* suggest is that future plans for marriage were at least present in her youth, but did not place a boundary on her future plans. She worked after college and spent time travelling abroad, which she saw as an important period in her life for the making of her adult self.

Further deferral of marriage and motherhood until after a period of independence, whilst a normal phenomenon for mostly academic girls in previous decades, became understood as the predominantly expected life course for many girls from the mid-1980s onwards. A 2011 study by Éva Beaujouan and Máire Ní Bhrolcháin shows that the percentage of women in Britain who had wed by the age of twenty-five fell from just over 70% in 1980 to just over 20% by the early 2000s. Beaujouan and Bhrolcháin also demonstrated that by 2011 women married five years later than they had in 1980.[145] Average age of first marriage for women jumped for twenty-two in 1971, to twenty-three in 1981, to twenty-five in 1991.[146] As the late twentieth century progressed, the time between teenage romance and marriage seemed to lengthen. Deferral of 'settling down' was a way for girls to balance the discourses of female empowerment which encouraged them to stay in education and get a good job, and still subscribe to heterosexual feminine norms.

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[144] Interview with Aretha George-Tooley, 7th May 2019, London.
[145] Beaujouan and Bhrolcháin, 'Cohabitation and marriage', 39, 53.
[146] Lewis, 'Marriage', 71.

This shift in romantic expectations is also evident in the media which girls consumed. As Elizabeth argues, magazines were the 'dominant arm' of youth media in the 1980s, and had were another way for ideas around individualism, romance, and marriage were to be transmitted.[147] These cultural ideas interacted with the increased emphasis on academic credentials towards the end of the twentieth century. In girls' magazines from the mid 1980s, teenage romance and marriage were presented very differently to the romantic individualism of magazines like *Jackie*. In the advice columns of *Jackie* in the 1970s, young engagement was not actively discouraged, with one young writer being advised that engagement at age sixteen would calm her feelings of jealousy over her boyfriend.[148] Adverts for engagement rings were also regularly featured.[149] By the mid-1980s, there were clear shifts in the expected life course, with advice columnists encouraging girls and young women to slow down their journey into marriage and motherhood. One reader wrote into *Mizz* magazine in 1985 to express her terror at the idea of childbirth. The reader was about to get married, and wanted to have a baby straight away. Tricia Kreitman – *Mizz*'s agony aunt – urged the reader to wait before trying for a baby: 'Please, please, please believe me that getting married is hard enough without *choosing* to get pregnant straight away as well [...] try to agree to have at least a year together, on your own, before you even think of starting a family.'[150] Other responses to readers concerned about the stages of cohabitation, engagement, and marriage similarly urged readers to slow down before making any commitments.[151] One reader, aged twenty, faced with an impending engagement to her boyfriend of nearly five years, found herself attracted to another man. Kreitman advised her

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[147] Hannah J. Elizabeth, 'Love Carefully and Without "Over-Bearing Fears": The Persuasive Power of Authenticity in Late 1980s British AIDS Education Material for Adolescents', *Social History of Medicine*, (published online, 2020).

[148] The Cathy and Claire page, *Jackie,* No. 317, 31st January 1970, BL.

[149] See for example, *Jackie,* No. 320, 21st February 1970, BL.

[150] Body & Soul, *Mizz,* Issue 4, May 24th-June 6th, 1985, BL. *Mizz was launched in 1985 by the International Publishing Corporation (IPC) to compete with the popular Just Seventeen, and was aimed at older teenagers from 16-19 years old. See Mary Jane Kehily, 'More Sugar?: Teenage Magazines, Gender Displays and Sexual Learning', European Journal of Cultural Studies, 2:1 (1999), 65–89.*

[151] Body & Soul, *Mizz,* Issue 5, June 21st-July 5th 1985; and Issue 12, September 13th-26th 1985, BL.

to try a period of singledom: 'Perhaps what you really need is to be single and independent for a while. After all, it's a long time since you thought of yourself as a free agent, isn't it?'[152] Kreitman's response reflects the normalisation of the identity and enjoyment of singledom explored by Strimpel; a period of self-actualisation was encouraged before settling into a long-term partnership.

Advice which encouraged girls to prolong the period between adolescence and marriage continued in the 1990s. 'Should you really get married?', an article in the December 1996 issue of *Sugar,* claimed that the magazine received hundreds of letters from newly engaged girls every month, but questioned why this was, given that 'so many young marriages fail.'[153] The article first presented an engaged couple, eighteen-year-old Vicky and twenty-year-old Tony. Vicky gave her love for Tony as the main reason for their impending nuptials: 'I'd thought I'd get married when I was 25, but I've met the man I want to spend my life with, so why not get on with it?'. This was followed with 'The truth about marrying young,' in which the Director of London Marriage Guidance, Renate Olins, offered a more critical perspective:

> Everyone needs freedom and time to grow and discover what they want from life.
> It's more sensible to find your feet outside the family first.[154]

Olins' advice drew on concepts of adult self-realisation and encouraged a period of independence before marrying. Concepts of adolescence as a period of fluidity of identity and immaturity were hinted at by Olins in this extract. The article was largely cautionary, including statistics on the cost of weddings and examples of celebrity marriages that 'didn't

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[152] Body & Soul, *Mizz,* Issue 12, September 13th-26th 1985, BL.
[153] 'Should you really get married?', December 1996, *Sugar,* Issue 26, 68-70, BL. *Sugar* was launched in 1994, and featured sex more predominantly than its predecessors; the furore this prompted led to the establishment of the Teenage Arbitration Panel in 1996 to oversee the content of teenage magazines. See: Lysanne Currie, 'Our magazine takes a very responsible attitude to sex', *The Independent,* 7th April 2004, 7.
[154] 'Should you really get married?'.

make it past the starting post.' Interestingly, the *Sugar* readers who also featured as 'talking heads' did not condemn marriage in the same way, but instead mostly agreed that it 'depends on the individual.' Whilst the writers of teen media such as Olins and Kreitman attempted to steer girls away from young marriage and motherhood in the 1980s, teenagers themselves demonstrated a more nuanced approach, and emphasised the ability of the individual to make their own decisions. Feelings towards and expectations of the future, especially pertaining to marriage and motherhood, were seen by these teenagers as a reflection of individual values, self-knowledge, and circumstances, which teenagers could use to make a 'choice.' This evidence indicates a gap between adult ideas of what was best for young people, and girls' assertion of their own expertise and autonomy over their lives. Whilst under some feminist lenses, young marriage could be taken as a sign of submitting to gendered societal expectations – as indeed many feminist teachers in the 1970s and 1980s understood it – choice was a vital part of being a young modern woman for these girls. Marriage was not the problem for these girls. Rather, it was the *expectation* of marriage; their empowerment lay in the act of choosing.

'Choice' as a feminist act

The theme of choice can be seen in relation to feminism and motherhood in some interviews, and reflects the emergence of popular feminist discourses such as those noted above in *Just Seventeen, Mizz* and *Sugar*. Rachel* and Aretha, who both attended school in inner London during the early 1990s, both emphasised the importance of 'choice' and feminism in their shifting attitudes towards motherhood. Rachel* grew up with a middle-class feminist mother and called herself a feminist from a young age, but when she became a mother in her thirties, she found herself rethinking the attitudes of her teenage self:

[It] wasn't until I became a mother that I started rediscovering feminism for myself, thinking about what feminism means, and realising that, um, the feminism that I had, all the stuff that I'd learnt from feminism and motherhood had been to do with mothers having equal, um, rights to work and, um, being able to go back to work as soon as we want, and being supported in that…and it wasn't until I became a mother that I realised that, what feminism is telling me about this, this very female role of being a mother…it's about equity, not equality.[155]

As a teenager, Rachel* understood feminism to be about equal access to formerly male-dominated spaces, and provision for women with children to access these spaces; this is what she meant when she referred to 'equity, not equality.' As this chapter has shown, feminist discourses within education were predominantly concerned with ensuring girls did not fall into a life of domesticity. Rachel's* experience of the totality of motherhood challenged these feminist discourses of her youth, which positioned motherhood as something which was an obstacle to the liberating practice of paid work. Aretha, educated at a similar time to Rachel* between the late-1980s and early-1990s, also in London, also recalled the inherent tension she felt between her own feminist understandings as a teenager with her desire to have children. She 'didn't really care about a career' but wanted to have a family:

If I had it my way (pause), despite all the feminist stuff I say, actually it is quite feminist, I'd be a housewife, like, I would volunteer, and probably earn some money, but, actually, what I want to do is look after a family and, you know, it's like, and that's what I wanted when I was younger as well, but knew that, well, but didn't know, but actually, there was a part of me, particularly when I was hitting that

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[155] Interview with Rachel*, 12th January 2019.

feminist stage of, "no, that's not ok, I can't, I can't think like that, that's just putting women down", when clearly it's not.[156]

Aretha recalled her early desires for her own family, but that her feminist consciousness led her to think that this was 'not ok.' Aretha communicated the continuation of her desire for children from her adolescence to her adult self at the time of the interview, even correcting herself: 'actually it is quite feminist.' Here Aretha drew on popular feminist understandings in the 2010s to reassess her desires for motherhood as feminist, emphasising that the choice to be a housewife was a feminist one.

Choice within feminism is a thorny concept. As Rachel Thwaites has argued, the rhetoric of 'choice' has been a useful tool for improving the position of women; for instance, the use of 'pro-choice' as a term for abortion rights.[157] Within the context of radical education in the 1980s, freeing girls' ability to 'choose' from gendered expectations was a challenge; former ILEA advisory teacher Kate Myers reflected in 2005 that 'subject choice' occurred when 'vulnerable adolescents' were likely to be influenced by peer pressure and societal expectations, resulting in girls taking up more places of traditionally feminine subjects and boys dominating the sciences.[158] However, the ILEA aimed to ensure girls did have freer choice. The ILEA Equal Opportunities inspectorate report of 1982 posited that pupils' 'eventual choices should be individual ones based on their own needs in the world as they find it, not on some notion of what might be appropriate for girls or boys in general.'[159]

However, some scholars have connected feminist discourses of choice in the late twentieth century to the rise of neoliberal economics and rhetoric. Thwaites argues that

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[156] Interview with Aretha George-Tooley, 7th May 2019, London.
[157] Rachel Thwaites, 'Making a choice or taking a stand? Choice feminism, political engagement and the contemporary feminist movement', in *Feminist Theory,* 18:1 (2017), 55-68, 65.
[158] Kate Myers, 'How did we get here?' in Kate Myers (ed.), *Whatever Happened to equal opportunities in schools? Gender equality initiatives in education,* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2000), 1-9, 3.
[159] *Equal Opportunities for all: A Report by the ILEA Inspectorate.*

within a neoliberal society, 'choice' is often evoked to maintain the status quo and remove the agency of less powerful; for example, the idea it is the 'choice' of the less powerful to not take 'responsibility for themselves to make their lives better and more prosperous.'[160] Choice as a concept also features prominently in the scholarship on post-feminism, a term which refers to patterns in culture including discourses of 'individualism, choice, and agency' and the 'muting' of vocabularies of structural inequality, according to Rosalind Gill.[161] Gill's assessment – paraphrasing Paul Gilroy – clarifies Thwaites' point; she argues that choice can be a 'watchword' used to underscore the 'neoliberal fantasy' that one can achieve anything, as long as the right choices and 'correct disposition' are adopted.[162] This rhetoric has been identified in aspects of twenty-first century popular feminism by Gill and Sara Ahmed, ranging from the 'boardroom' feminism of Sheryl Sandberg's *Lean In,* the celebrity endorsed-feminism of the 'This Is What a Feminist Looks Like' t-shirts, to the 'hot' feminism of fashion magazines such as *Grazia* and *Elle.*[163] Thwaites argues that within choice feminism, 'every decision a woman makes [is] potentially feminist, if given thought and made with a political consciousness.'[164] This formulation is apparent in Aretha recollections; she saw the choice to prioritise motherhood over careers as feminist in itself, by its very nature.

Yet as this thesis has already argued, individuals' choices are always a product of the historical context and culture they live in.[165] Traditional expectations of womanhood still

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[160] Thwaites, 'Making a choice', 65.

[161] Rosalind Gill, 'Post-Postfeminism?: New Feminist Visibilities in Postfeminist Times', *Feminist Media Studies*, 16:4 (2016), 610–30, 613.

[162] Gill, 'Post-postfeminism?', 624; Paul Gilroy, ''…We got to get over before we go under…' fragments for a history of black vernacular neoliberalism', *New Formations,* 80/1, (2013), 23-38, 26.

[163] Some examples include: Sheryl Sandberg, *Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead* (London: Random House, 2013); Karren Brady, *Strong Woman: Ambition, Grit and a Great Pair of Heels* (HarperCollins Publishers Limited, 2012); Caitlin Moran, *How to Be a Woman* (London: Random House, 2011); Polly Vernon, *Hot Feminist: Modern Feminism with Style Without Judgement* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2015). For analysis of twenty-first century feminist developments, see: Gill, 'Post-Postfeminism?'; and Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016).

[164] Thwaites, 'Making a choice', 57.

[165] Joan Scott, 'The Evidence of Experience', *Critical Inquiry*, 17:4 (1991), 773–97.

existed, and still held social and cultural capital. Angela McRobbie argues that in regard to post-feminism and the apparent expansion of girls' life possibilities in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, 'choice' as a concept acts as a 'modality of constraint'; the individual was 'compelled to be the kind of subject who can make the right choices.'[166] Individuals could align with gendered norms and reap the rewards, making the 'right' choice, or suffer socially, economically, or culturally for failing to live up to dominant notions of womanhood. As Walkerdine, Melody and Lucey demonstrate, this rhetoric had a damaging psychological impact on working-class girls in the 1990s who struggled to live up to neoliberal ideals of female success.[167] Ultimately, girls did have agency in how they constructed their identities and presented themselves to the world, but the ways in which they did this were by using existing discourses and models. Aretha felt that 'choice' in itself was feminist, reflecting a tension in the rhetoric of girls' empowerment at this time. By the very nature of the English education system – a system in which 'the majority of students are bound to fail' - not every student could overcome the limitations their social position afforded them.[168] Discourses of choice could be liberating, but also aligned with a neoliberal rhetoric which had the potential to exclude as well as empower.

Several interviewees hinted at the difficulties in exercising choice within a highly regulated education system. Dorota regretted what she saw as the narrowing of her career options by following her teachers' and parents' advice to pursue further education and do 'the things that you were supposed to do,' which she felt she was not best suited for.[169] This example highlights the tension inherent within a meritocratic education system in the context of neoliberalism; Dorota made the 'right' choice to stay in education, according to

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[166] Angela McRobbie, 'Post-feminism and Popular Culture', *Feminist Media Studies,* 4:3, (2000), 255-64, 261.
[167] Valerie Walkerdine, June Melody, and Helen Lucey, *Growing Up Girl: Psycho-Social Explorations of Class and Gender,* (Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2001), 2.
[168] Barry Troyna and Jenny Williams, *Racism, Education and the State,* (London, Croom Helm, 1986), 71.
[169] Interview with Dorota Thomas, 12th January 2019, London.

her teachers and parents, but felt that she suffered for it. Rachel* and Aretha's* recollections of their former understandings of feminism as girls in the late 1980s and early 1990s assumed that choosing to give up work to fulfil a domestic role was anti-feminist; ironically, second-wave feminism campaigned heavily for the rights of mothers, along with women's rights to reproductive control through abortion and contraception. Many within the WLM were young mothers themselves, whose children 'could not have been more welcomed and loved' as they were within activist circles, as Lynne Segal remembers it, and domestic labour was something which was highly valued.[170] In her 2007 book *Making Trouble,* Segal highlighted the prevalence of the 'unyielding dogma today that Women's Liberation ignored the needs of mothers':

> Feminists who thirty years ago fought for better conditions and resources for mothers and mothering are for the most part horrified today at what is repackaged, often meretriciously in 'our' name, in the current neo-liberal consensus.[171]

Despite the efforts of British feminists to improve the lives of mothers, the recollections of Aretha and Rachel* suggest that this 'repackaging' of feminism contributed to girls' understanding motherhood, especially young motherhood, as a trap in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Popular representations of feminism throughout the late twentieth century were undoubtedly influential here, in tandem with the increased emphasis on girls' academic success. As Dyhouse shows, in the press, feminists were often derided as over-zealous, militant, 'dungaree- and woolly-hat-wearing, cropped-headed lesbians', intent on 'bringing up children in a man-free environment.'[172] Magazines such as *Mizz,* which as Winship

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[170] Lynne Segal, *Making Trouble: Life and Politics,* (London: Serpent's Tail, 2007), 85-6; Stoller, 'Forging a Politics of Care', 85-6.
[171] Segal, *Making Trouble,* 84, 87.
[172] Dyhouse, *Girl Trouble,* 209.

shows had taken up a feminist legacy in some ways, promoted a tempered view of women's liberation. In 1985, a *Mizz* article entitled 'Are these women giving us a bad name?' argued that radical feminists put women and men off the movement by promoting separatism. Crucially, whilst the article challenged the 'myth' that feminism only promoted careers for women, it reinforced the notion that choice was in itself feminist which Aretha drew on:

> But equality for women means being free to choose what *you* want to do, whether it's staying at home and having kids, or running the country. Feminists who say that being a housewife is wrong are as misguided as men who say a woman's place is in the home.[173]

This rhetoric and the feminist strawman presented here reflect the 'undoing of feminism' which McRobbie identifies as central to post-feminism; feminists are here presented as asserting control over other women, whose choices are presented as autonomous, unaffected by patriarchal ideas of women's traditional role.[174] Education was key space in which this popular understanding of feminist ideas about the domestic came to a head. As Chapter Two will explore in more depth, throughout the 1980s and onwards, EO and anti-sexist policies aimed to encourage girls into new careers and discourage domesticity, a simplification of a dichotomy which was often the subject of more nuanced discussion within academic feminist circles.[175] This popular discourse that true equality lay in women and girls' ability to choose their life paths allowed the ideal of an empowered, career driven young woman to be promoted, and to co-exist with evidence of the continuation of girls' traditional routes into domestic life and feminised jobs.

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[173] 'Are these women giving us a bad name?', *Mizz,* Issue 13, September 27th-October 10th, 1985, BL.
[174] McRobbie, 'Post-feminism and Popular Culture', 259-260.
[175] See for instance Beatrix Campbell and Valerie Charlton, 'Work to Rule: Wages and the Family', in *Red Rag,* Volume 14, 30-31, (accessed 16/6/21 via http://banmarchive.org.uk/collections/redrag/index_frame.htm).

<u>'Staying-on' and credentialization</u>

The writing of several girls in *Bitter-sweet Dreams* and the recollections of Aretha and Rachel* suggest that by the late 1980s, there had been a subtle shift in the priorities and life course of teenage girls. Contextual trends show that further education and work were prioritised over marriage and motherhood. More girls stayed on in education; in 1972, 75.7% of girls left school for paid employment, and 24.3% left for full-time education. By 1987, only 53.4% of girls left for paid employment, whilst 6.6% left for degree courses and 26.6 left for teacher training or other further education.[176] Dyhouse shows that whilst in the late 1960s, approximately 25% of all university students in the late 1960s were women, this had risen to just under 60% by 1999.[177] Peter Mandler argues that more broadly, high staying-on rates from the late 1980s were a result of a changing economy which required more qualifications, a process called 'credentialization', and that staying in education longer became a more normalised part of people's lives in this period.[178] The development of further education and emphasis on vocational opportunities following the 1991 Government White Paper *Education and Training for the 21st century* had also placed significant importance on continued education post-16.[179] Economic trends in part drove educational change, and the expansion of educational opportunities contributed to the prevalence of an altered expected life course for young women, consisting of further and possibly higher education and a period of singledom, followed by cohabitation and marriage at a later age, became a more normalised and expected future for girls leaving school. Girls expected to be 'getting on and getting out.'[180]

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[176] Laura Carter, *Briefing Paper: Gender*, produced as part of the Secondary Education and Social Change in the United Kingdom since 1945 project (https://sesc.hist.cam.ac.uk/, accessed 12th August 2019)

[177] Carol Dyhouse, *Students: A Gendered History,* (Abingdon: Routledge 2006), 99.

[178] Peter Mandler, *The Crisis of the Meritocracy: Britain's Transition to Mass Education since the Second World War,* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2020), 141.

[179] Government White Paper: Education and Training for the 21st Century, (London, HM Stationary Office, 1991).

[180] Madeleine Arnot, Miriam David, and Gaby Weiner, *Closing the Gender Gap: Postwar Education and Social Change* (Wiley, 1999), 156.

This normalisation of extended education for girls as well as boys had an impact on girls' sense of autonomy and self-determination, as education offered girls more opportunities to pursue their interests and ambitions. As this chapter has shown, being able to choose subjects and assert some control over their life paths was important to girls. Whilst Rachel* and Aretha directly related the idea of choice to feminism, Claire had not encountered feminism until her adulthood. Claire attended a mixed comprehensive Catholic school and sixth form in Reading, which she left in 2004. She achieved high grades at G.C.S.E and A-level before attending university. At the time of the interview, she had a successful professional career and was single with no children. Claire recalled that at school, she had felt that she was equal to the boys she studied with:

> I don't think I was aware of feminism at all, I've always, possibly because of my parents, possibly just because of, possibly because of school where, I never felt like I was any different to a boy, um, I've always felt, um, I guess, the essence of feminism that I am equal to the, to men, and I've always felt that, and I think when I was younger it felt like, um, it wasn't an issue because it felt like that bit had already been done, we sort of, felt like we were equal.[181]

Claire's memories are reminiscent of the shifting discourses around gender and equality in the 1990s conformed to a meritocratic model of female empowerment which had become pervasive in schools by this time. She did well at school and took up the opportunities which her educational success afforded. Yet Claire's recollections of feeling equal were temporary; she later described her realisation as an adult 'that things aren't that equal, at all.'[182] Sexism was not as apparent in Claire's school memories as it had been for Ali, Dorota,

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[181] Interview with Claire Slobodian, 24th May 2019, Reading.
[182] Ibid.

and Sara* in the 1970s. This idea that girls were 'already equal' to boys was in part

informed by the shifting place of equalities agendas within education.

Throughout the 1980s, the ILEA had been concerned with the 'hidden curriculum'

and this formed an important part of anti-sexist recommendations and was included in the

Authority's anti-sexist statement.[183] A 1987 review of EO policy within the ILEA found that

despite girls' improved performance in exam results, most still chose sex-stereotyped

subjects, as a result of a 'hidden curriculum,' which left girls 'in a disadvantaged position in

terms of their future occupational options and earning capacity.'[184] The presence of

economic language in this example suggests a shift towards mainstream ideas of equality of

opportunity, in which girls' qualifications and wage-earning capacity was a sign of progress,

rather than how women and girls were viewed in wider society. This evoking of girls' future

economic role reflects the tensions created by the meritocratic foundations of the equal

opportunities movement. Martin finds that by the end of the ILEA, a focus on achievement

had subverted the 'great liberating moment' of 1980s municipal feminism.[185] Martin quotes

advisory teacher for history Kate Myers, who stated that the focus on underachievement of

girls, whilst important, had the potential to shift focus onto the underachievers needing to

change, rather than schooling. Myers stated that 'for girls' and *boys*' sakes we need to be

much more concerned about how women and girls are treated and valued.'[186] This

increased emphasis on academic credentials was a concern to anti-sexist staff like Myers,

who believed the radical transformative potential of girls' education had become disrupted.

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[183] 'Anti-Sexist Statement of the Inner London Education Authority', in *Race, sex and class 6.*
[184] Report No. 5 of the Policy Sub-Committee, *Equal Opportunities Annual Review 1986-7,* (dated 1st July 1987), Minutes of the Education Committee, 14th July 1987, in 'Minutes, 1986 Apr-1987 Dec', ILEA/CL/MIN/01/012, LMA.
[185] Martin, 'Gender, Education and Social Change', 70.
[186] Kate Myers, 'Beware of the backlash', *School Organization* 5:1 (1985), 27– 40, in Martin, 'Gender, Education and Social Change', 70-1.

The concept of the 'hidden curriculum' had some longevity within the new era of 'managerial' equal opportunities approaches, as the term also appears in the records of Hackney Borough Council in the 1990s. The new education committee established an equal opportunities committee in 1990 and followed up with an Equalities Action Plan in 1992, an extensive review and monitoring process which considered all levels of the authority's bureaucracy and staff, from headteachers to cleaners, which considered issues of race, gender, class, religion, and disability.[187] Hackney had struggled after the abolition of the ILEA. In 1990, along with schools in Islington, Tower Hamlets, Lambeth, and Southwark, Hackney had some of the lowest GCSE results in England.[188] In part this new regime of intensive monitoring and procedure was a response to these results. Hackney's Curriculum Statement, produced in 1992, reminded headteachers that teacher perceptions and pupil aspirations should not 'be limited by stereotyped ideas about the abilities and aptitudes of different social groups, different racial groups or of boys and girls.'[189] Suggestions for ensuring equality of opportunity included curriculum content, learning resources, pupil grouping, subject choice and careers guidance as areas in which needed specific attention; areas which could be encompassed by the definition of the 'hidden curriculum.' Similarly in Berkshire, new lines of accountability were created in the 1990s. The post of Equal Opportunities Officer was established in 1994, along with an Equal Opportunities Working Party.[190] This item in the minutes of the Education Committee referred to 'initiatives and work programmes relating to achievement' but the report itself was unfortunately not

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[187] *Equalities Action Plan*, 8th December 1992, in 'December – April 1992-3', LBH/K8, London Borough of Hackney Education Committee minutes 1990 – Apr 1993, Dalston CLR James Library (hereafter CLR James).

[188] Boyle and Humphreys assert that the causes of Hackney's problems in the 1990s had their roots in the management of the borough whilst under the ILEA. Alan Boyle and Salli Humphreys, *A Revolution in a Decade: Ten out of Ten* (London: Leannta Publishing, 2012), 9.

[189] *Draft Curriculum Statement,* 21st April 1992, in 'December – April 1992-3', LBH/K8, CLR James.

[190] Education Committee Minutes, 11th March 1994; and 23rd September 1994, 'Education Committee and Urgency Committee 1993-98', C/CS/C3/6/2, BRO.

archived. What this *does* tell us is that equality of academic achievement was the central aim of equal opportunities within Berkshire by 1994.

By the mid 1990s then, equal opportunities policies within education focused on girls' qualifications as central to combatting discrimination and sexism. Arnot, David and Weiner show that equal opportunities policies were claimed by 93% of secondary schools surveyed, in part due to the national publication of exams results, media coverage of equalities issues, and the inclusion of equal opportunities in OFSTED inspections.[191] These LEA and governors' resources reveal that elements of radical anti-sexism and anti-racism were absorbed into the mainstream equal opportunities policy which was established from the late 1980s onwards. The accountability which monitoring placed on schools meant that a model of gender equality which centred girls' academic success as a sign of and cause of girls' increased opportunities was firmly cemented as the millennium inched closer. However, Sharpe argues that the efforts of teachers to challenge the domestic nature of girls' education was in tension with the need to keep girls' education relevant to their future roles; in the 1990s, this tension manifested as the popularity of subjects and qualifications which, whilst not as immediately tied to domesticity as needlework and cookery, still confined girls to service and maternal roles.[192]

This heightened emphasis on girls' academic success intensified some of the vehement anti-domesticity rhetoric identified by 'Simone Black' in *Bitter-sweet Dreams*, and suggested in the memories of Aretha and Rachel*. Interviewees Emma* and Katie recalled that in their sex education in the late 1990s, pregnancy was presented in catastrophic terms to the girls at their single-sex schools. Emma*, who attended a girls' grammar in Reading, recalled being taught about contraception 'with a kind of implied, "and you must not get

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[191] Arnot, David, and Weiner, *Closing the Gender Gap*, 25.
[192] Sharpe, *Just like a Girl,* 105-6.

pregnant because it will destroy your life".'[193] In Inner London, too, young motherhood was presented to teenage pupils as an irrevocably life-altering decision. Katie described the sex education she received at her comprehensive school in East London as highly cautionary, and that preventing teenage pregnancy among the predominantly working-class student body was an important mission of the school. She recalled that her girls' comprehensive school in East London had high rates of teenage pregnancy. But from the perspective of adulthood in the late 2010s, she acknowledged the problematic nature of this approach:

> Maybe getting pregnant when you're sixteen isn't the worst thing that could happen in your life, and you know, actually it's about being empowered to know what you want at a certain point.[194]

Katie, in a similar way to Rachel* and Aretha, used the language of choice and self-knowledge to criticise her schools' blanket condemnation of teenage pregnancy. In her memory, young motherhood was demonised and viewed as a sign of failure, 'horror stories,' the 'worst thing that could happen in your life,' whereas from a later perspective, she posited that young motherhood could be wanted, a choice that girls should be empowered to make for themselves. School sex education, as well as broader ideas about girls' empowerment through education, as promoted in equal opportunities discourses, defined whose lifestyles were a 'choice,' and whose were outcomes of unfortunate circumstances. 'Choice' as a concept was tied both to the rise of popular neoliberal discourses and the mainstreaming of gender equality policies from the late 1980s, and contributed to girls' identification with ideas of empowered modern young womanhood.

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[193] Interview with Emma*, 7th February 2019.
[194] Interview with Katie Beswick, 3rd January 2019, Exeter.

Conclusion

The opportunities for girls beyond the bounds of domestic life appear to be one of the major developments of the late twentieth century. After the advent of equal opportunities initiatives in the early-1970s, local education authorities increasingly considered the ways in which girls were subjected to discrimination. Fundamentally, education was positioned in equal opportunities policy as the main route through which girls could achieve these greater life choices and determined which girls could take advantage of such opportunities. However, Sharpe argues that whilst the domestic education for girls that was common in the 1970s had gone by the mid 1990s, 'submerged in a deceptive pool of equal opportunities', within and outside of school, girls still aligned to traditional ideas of domestic womanhood.[195]

Undoubtedly, there were significant shifts in both the average life course during this period, and in how girls constructed their identities. A longer period of self-discovery and singledom in young adulthood became more normalised during the late twentieth century, and more girls stayed on in education for longer, prolonging their entry into both the labour market and heterosexual partnerships. It is unclear whether the popularity of education among girls drove these changes in the life course, or vice versa. However, what is clear is that these changes occurred, and with them came shifts in girls' expectations of their futures and ways of identifying. Popular understandings of feminism – which were present both in schooling and in girls' media – emphasised girls' choice and individualism as empowering. Greater success in education meant greater choice and freedom, creating a model of empowered and successful girlhood, to which some girls were able to tie their own identities. Girls utilised these discourses to construct their identities and present themselves as individuals who were able to challenge their subjectification. However, this

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[195] Sharpe, *Just Like a Girl,* 106.

rhetoric of choice marked the continuities which Sharpe points to, and placed blame for failing to live up to this model with those girls who were most marginalised in education; girls from working-class and ethnic minority backgrounds. Domesticity was often placed in opposition to work, two major roles contested and balanced by women and girls in the late twentieth century. This thesis now turns to girls' careers education.

Chapter 2: 'Boys must hammer, girls must sew,/Into MAN and WIFE they'll grow': Careers education, individuality, and the self[1]

The transitionary state of childhood is often epitomised by the question asked of most young children: 'what do you want to be when you grow up?'[2] As Sarah Hook's poem illustrates, girls' and boys' curricula were shaped by their imagined future roles as wives and breadwinners respectively. Whilst Chapter One explored the gendered division of labour in the home, Chapter Two demonstrates that future expectations of work were also central to girls' education. The changing presence of women in the workforce, new discourses around gender equality, and new approaches to careers education led to a vital shift in young women's expectations of their working futures in the late twentieth century. I will show that these discourses contributed to the construction of an ideal young female subject, one who was empowered by education and able to pursue a career. However, the emphasis on keeping girls in education or training provoked particular difficulties for girls who were marginalised in education. This chapter shows that the ways in which girls framed their identities contributed to both the masking and revealing of continued inequalities in late twentieth century schooling.

This chapter will firstly explore the experiences of girls who left school at age fifteen or sixteen, the earliest legal leaving age. The chapter will then turn to the experiences of those who undertook vocational training after the mandatory leaving age. One of the ILEA's

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[1] Sarah Hook, 'TEENAGE SEXISM', *Shocking Pink,* Issue 1, 1981, BL.

[2] See for example: Hester Barron and Claire Langhamer, 'Children, Class, and the Search for Security: Writing the Future in 1930s Britain', *Twentieth Century British History*, 28:3 (2017), 367–89; Jane Elliott, 'Imagining a Gendered Future: Children's Essays from the National Child Development Study in 1969', *Sociology*, 44:6 (2010), 1073–90; Laura King, 'Future Citizens: Cultural and Political Conceptions of Children in Britain, 1930s-1950s', *Twentieth Century British History*, 27:3 (2016), 389–411; Steven Mintz, 'Reflections on Age as a Category of Historical Analysis', *The Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth*, 1:1 (2008), 91–94; Laura Tisdall, 'Education, Parenting, and Concepts of Childhood', *Contemporary British History*, 31:1 (2017), 24–46.

key anti-sexist strategies in the 1980s was to increase the numbers of girls in vocational

training for male-dominated trades, yet training for feminised professions such as clerical

work, nursing, and teaching remained popular.[3] Finally, this chapter will demonstrate that

discourses of individuality and meritocracy formed vital parts of the selfhoods of girls who

stayed in full-time education before taking up places at university.

Across all socio-economic backgrounds, girls drew from discourses of individualism,

choice, and hard work – apparent in the political rhetoric which accompanied neoliberalism

as well as in anti-sexist and equal opportunities policies and resources – to construct their

identities. Middle-class girls were more likely to assign their successes in the workplace to

their own hard work and talent, rather than acknowledging any privileges they may have

had in accessing education and professional jobs. Working-class girls and those who did not

achieve high grades were less likely to see work as a reflection of selfhood, and more likely

to see work as an economic necessity. They were also more likely to be aware of how

education functioned as a mechanism of social reproduction, presenting themselves as 'self-

made,' forging their identities outside of and in spite of a meritocratic education system

which positioned them as failures. Girls episodically conformed to and rejected the

meritocratic system of state education, positioning themselves as modern female success

stories, as self-made, as resilient, but above all, as individuals.

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[3] *Educational choice at 16: Interim report on the survey of sixth formers* (dated February 1982), in 'Careers Education and Guidance Working Party', ILEA/PS/CS/01/5, LMA. Originals under: *Educational Choice at 16: Interim Report on the survey of sixth formers* (dated February 1982), ILEA Research and Statistics Branch, Ilea/Pub/01/010/45, LMA.

<u>Girls' employment prospects at age fifteen or sixteen</u>

At the start of the 1970s, most girls left school at age fifteen for paid employment.[4] Girls

who left school at age fifteen or sixteen without qualifications were likely to find work

predominantly in feminised sectors. Whilst ideas of women's domestic roles were popular

in the mid twentieth century, girls and women were expected to take up some paid

employment at certain points in their life. Stephanie Spencer finds that by the 1950s,

rhetoric of a 'dual-role' working motherhood implied that women had a 'social duty' as

citizens to contribute to the workplace where they could.[5] Unemployment provided the

economic backdrop to many girls' school experiences throughout the 1970s and 1980s.

Bernhard Reiger argues that large birth cohorts leaving school between the late 1970s and

early 1980s were unable to be absorbed into the workforce, resulting in youth

unemployment becoming a constant throughout the period, with a second major peak

occurring in 1986.[6] Yet economic analyses of youth unemployment in the 1970s and 1980s,

such as that of Reiger, have not sufficiently examined the interaction between the aims of

equal opportunities for girls, and the specific effects of the unemployment crisis on girls

who left school in this period. Oral history and contemporary accounts show that tensions

between the idealism of careers education alongside equalities reform and the insecurity of

the economic context contributed to the continuation of uneven educational opportunities

for girls throughout the late twentieth century.

 Interviewees who left school during times of high youth unemployment in the 1970s

and 1980s did not explicitly mention unemployment in their recollections. However,

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[4] This legal leaving-age rose to sixteen with the raising of the school leaving age, or ROSLA, in 1972. *Statistics of Education 1972, volume two* (London: HMSO, 1974), 6, cited in: Briefing paper, *School leaver reasons by sex in England and Wales, 1947-87,* Secondary Education and Social Change in the United Kingdom since 1945, (accessed https://sesc.hist.cam.ac.uk/resources/statistical-tables/, 11/1/2021).
[5] Stephanie Spencer, *Gender, Work and Education in Britain in the 1950s,* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 51.
[6] Bernhard Rieger, 'Making Britain Work Again: Unemployment and the Remaking of British Social Policy in the Eighties', *The English Historical Review*, 133:562 (2018), 634–66, 639-641.

contemporary source material produced by teenagers in the same period demonstrates that unemployment was a pressing concern which shaped their transition from school to work. There are several explanations for this discrepancy. Firstly, most interviewees avoided the worst of unemployment, either because they entered traditionally feminine jobs which were more resilient to changes in the market, or had entered further education or university. The lack of memory of unemployment also suggests that whilst the situation looked bleak for those on the precipice of the job market, after decades of successful employment such anxieties no longer formed a major part of interviewees' recollections. They instead had a sense of themselves as working women which was cultivated over time. As this thesis will explore, some girls attributed their anxieties over leaving school and entering work to their stage of adolescent development. Ann-Marie Jebbett, writing in *Just Seventeen's Bitter-sweet Dreams* collection in 1987, described her feelings about a job interview as 'as panic-stricken as any other teenager, from whatever walk of life…taking the next step up onto the next rung of the ladder of my life.'[7] Finding work was an inevitable but worrisome part of becoming an adult, and such emotions could be written off as a natural part of entering adulthood.

Qualifications – or a lack of – were crucial in determining pupils' ability to find work upon leaving school, alongside the specific make-up of local labour markets. James Barlow and Mike Savage's analysis of Berkshire's economic growth up to the mid 1980s shows that women had made some gains in the local labour market, in part due to the growth of the service sector as businesses relocated to Reading from London.[8] As Barlow and Savage note, however, such growth was not a clear-cut sign of success. Whilst employment in Berkshire rose by around 2% per year during the 1970s, the majority of new jobs were aimed at male

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[7] Ann-Marie Jebbett, in *Bitter-sweet Dreams: Girls' and Young Women's Own Stories* (London: Virago, 1987), 77.
[8] P.W. Daniels, 'The Geography of Economic Change', in Paul Addison, Harriet Jones, and Bernard Alford (eds.), *A Companion to Contemporary Britain 1939 - 2000*, (Oxford: John Wiley & Sons, 2005), 203–25, 214.

professional workers; the number of skilled, semi-skilled, and unskilled manual workers actually fell in Berkshire between 1971 and 1981.[9] Full-time female employment grew roughly in step with male employment, but was largely confined to the public, service, and distribution industries.[10] This uneven growth throughout the 1970s contributed to youth unemployment, as the majority of these unemployed leavers had no formal qualifications: 34% possessed some GCE/CSEs, and 14% possessed four or more O-levels.[11] Unemployment therefore was most significant in how it affected those with no or few qualifications. From 1973 to 1976, unemployment figures for girls in Berkshire had been less than boys, but by 1977 had drawn equal.[12]

Maxine did not recall explicitly this unemployment crisis in Reading around the time she left school in 1974. She attended a bilateral school in Reading, and was placed in the grammar stream, an academic education she 'didn't feel…did [her] any good really.'[13] Maxine left school at age fifteen with no formal qualifications but did have four offers of employment in the clerical sector. Her narrative illustrates the limits of the idea of 'empowering' girls through education, and the effects of the local economic context on girls' decisions to 'stay on' or not:

> I didn't really have ambitions to be anything, you know, great, at school (pause). It's
>
> my only regret I think, that I probably should've gone to college (pause) but I
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> certainly don't remember being (pause) you know, egged on to stay. I'm sure I must
>
> have been, but I was adamant that I wasn't staying, um, and to be honest my parents

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[9] James Barlow and Mike Savage, 'The Politics of Growth: Cleavage and Conflict in a Tory Heartland', *Capital & Class*, 10.3 (1986), 156–82, 160-3.

[10] Ibid, 163-4.

[11] Appendix No. 3, *Unemployment among young people – Director of Education's Report*, in Minutes of the Further Education Sub-Committee, 8th November 1977, in '1977-1981 Council', C/CS/C3/2/2, BRO.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Bilateral schools, whilst uncommon, were a precursor of the comprehensive and often existed in areas which could not support both grammar and secondary modern schools independently due to geography or population. Such schools had grammar and secondary modern streams, with a separate curriculum; Maxine recalled that there was rarely any mixing between the two streams.

(pause) they weren't very, um, I want to say pushy, my dad was quite keen for me to get out and, and earn a living. (inaudible) And all I, I know is when I left school I had the offer of four jobs. So (pause), um, I couldn't have been that bad (both laugh).[14]

With hindsight, Maxine regretted the lack of professional qualifications that she achieved as a young woman, perhaps informed by the increased social and economic value placed in standardised academic qualifications since the 1970s. However, Maxine presented herself as agentic in her trajectory from school into work. Whilst her school 'egged [Maxine] on to stay', her father was 'keen' for her to find work. Maxine's own feelings aligned with her father's; she remembered being 'adamant that [she] wasn't staying'.[15] As Mona Gleason notes, historians must not ignore children's agentic expressions which comply with adult priorities and expectations.[16] Maxine was caught between two competing sets of adult expectations, ultimately complying with her father's, and rejecting the path mapped out for her by her teachers. She also attempted to shape her own education to strengthen her job prospects; Maxine and her friend asked to attend typing lessons at a neighbouring secondary modern school but were not permitted. She practised on a typewriter at home and credited this self-discipline with her later professional success: 'I ended up being a senior secretary at, at work, and that was, you know, really just being self-taught.'[17] Whilst vocational training in secretarial work was not a skill which her grammar school encouraged, Maxine made attempts as a girl to tailor her own education to this imagined future role.

The narrative of being 'self-made' was crucial in narratives of women who were deemed less academically able, as they subverted the low expectations of their schools over

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[14] Interview with Maxine Settle, 11th December 2018, Reading
[15] Ibid.
[16] Mona Gleason, 'Avoiding the Agency Trap: Caveats for Historians of Children, Youth, and Education.', *History of Education*, 45:4 (2016), 446–59, 446.
[17] Interview with Maxine Settle, 11th December 2018, Reading.

time, attributing their later professional success to their own hard work. Additionally, Beverley Skeggs argues that working-class girls took on caring roles not as a positive decision, but as an attempt to find work within constricting cultural and financial limits, and to be seen as respectable, responsible, and mature; clerical work was similarly 'respectable.'[18] Another Reading-based interviewee, Alison, drew on this theme of being 'self-made' in her narrative. Alison left her comprehensive school aged sixteen in the mid-1980s with few qualifications. She remembered being led into secretarial work by her school at a job fair:

> They just said, "oh look, office junior type", they were quite stereotypical then, in what you could do, so, yeah. The boys would've been sent to the uh (pause) building sites and I was sort of typing pool fodder, not that I could type.[19]

Alison's recollections emphasised her lack of control over her route into work, and the way she felt prejudged by her school as an 'office junior type' despite not possessing the relevant qualifications. She gained a Youth Training Scheme placement in an office, which she enjoyed much more than school. Much like Maxine in the mid-1970s, Alison relayed largely negative experiences of her school and felt teachers had low expectations of her. But her own experiences of work allowed her to regain a sense of control and later pride as a young adult.[20]

Stephanie Spencer noted a similar narrative to Maxine's and Alison's among some of her interviewees who attended school in the 1950s. Spencer's interviewees saw themselves as a 'hidden' generation of victims of an unfair educational or social system, overlooked in favour of more 'glamorous' decades.[21] Yet this narrative is also evident in the oral history

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[18] Beverley Skeggs, *Formations of Class & Gender: Becoming Respectable* (London: SAGE, 1997), 56-8.
[19] Interview with Alison Burford, 20th May 2019, Reading.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Stephanie Spencer, 'Reflections on the "Site of Struggle": Girls' Experience of Secondary Education in the Late 1950s', *History of Education,* 33:4 (2004), 437-49, 444.

accounts of the women in this study who left grammar, secondary modern, and comprehensive schools throughout the 1970s and 1980s, which suggests that this phenomenon was neither specific solely to the 1950s, nor tripartite education. For example, Maxine's modesty - 'I couldn't have been that bad' - suggested a lack of self-esteem, as her school saw her leaving at fifteen as a failure. Her job offers at age fifteen served as proof that she was anything but. Her narrative can be read as an implicit critique of the educational system, and the inequity of meritocracy. Whilst Maxine did not use this language, she presented herself as autonomous, overcoming the failings of her school to find success in adulthood. As Jo Littler has argued, the concept of meritocracy necessitates the positioning of certain types of job as abject, to be moved away from towards a 'better' or 'happier' life or job through education.[22] Experiences of individuals such as Maxine and Alison reveal that this model contributed not only to the alienation of working-class pupils and those who did not achieve high grades in school, but that pupils were aware of and criticised this paradigm. Maxine framed her narrative as that of an underdog, overcoming the disadvantages of her lack of qualifications by working hard on her own initiative.

The problem of limited job opportunities for girls leaving school at the earliest opportunity was not only about class but was also compounded by ideas about gendered work. Significantly, stereotyped ideas about gendered jobs for boys and girls were perpetuated by the careers service in Berkshire. During the 1970s unemployment crisis in Reading, the Berkshire County Council Careers Service split vacancies into jobs for boys and for girls. Job advertisements in the local press show that it was still common to advertise specifically by gender until the practice was outlawed by the Sex Discrimination Act in 1975.[23] Predominantly, adverts aimed at young women were for secretarial posts or office

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[22] Jo Littler, 'Meritocracy as Plutocracy: The Marketising of "equality" under Neoliberalism', *New Formations*, 80–81 (2013), 52–72, 55.
[23] Agenda of the Education Committee, 9th July 1975, in Agendas of the Education Committee and Sub-Committees, '1973-1975 Council', C/CS/C4/1/1, BRO.

work for companies such as Prudential Insurance, a major local employer, and some female-only machinist jobs in factories.[24] Reading was the third largest insurance centre in the country by 1986; companies such as Prudential were both signs of local growth and provided job security for girls leaving school in Berkshire in the 1970s and 1980s.[25] Eight interviewees attended school in Reading; four had office jobs immediately after leaving school prior to 1990; some found these jobs through training opportunities, so will be explored in more depth in the second part of this chapter.

Maxine's narrative demonstrates that for some working-class girls, the type of work they took on after school did not play a significant role in their construction of selfhood; rather, discourses of self-determination in spite of an unfair educational system were more significant for Maxine. But not all pupils at the time framed their experiences in these ways. As Chapter One showed, children's writing can reveal young people's perceptions of the world, as well as revealing what they believed adults wanted them to write about.[26] In *Fire Words* and *Stepney Words*, which were published just before the marked increase in unemployed London school leavers in 1973, some teenagers wrote about their fears of losing their identity once they became working adults. Eighteen-year-old Anita Harbottle from Bristol had her poem published in *Fire Words* in 1972. Harbottle's poem parodied a job application, but each line was coupled with her own expressions of the artifice of an application letter - ('I admire your organization/(do I hell)' - most likely for a clerical post due to her references to shorthand and typing. At the end of the poem, Harbottle asked what she will get 'at the end of it all':

A little brown packet

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[24] See for example: 'Jobs for boys plan expands', 29th August 1972, 4; and 'Situations Vacant', 6th June 1973, 15; 23rd July 1973, 14, all *Reading Evening Post.*

[25] Barlow and Savage, 'The Politics of Growth', 160.

[26] Elliott, 'Imagining a Gendered Future', 1074-5.

With which to console

A lost identity –

A breaking heart.[27]

At eighteen, it was possible that Harbottle drew from her experiences of the world of work after leaving school at age fifteen or sixteen, or that she was imagining what awaited her. Laura Paterson argues that work was increasingly a positive way for women to construct their identities in the post-war period.[28] However, girls leaving school without qualifications in the 1970s and 1980s faced limited options and a traditionally gendered job market. As this evidence shows, for some younger women, work was a negative way of defining adulthood and signalled the loss of youthful identities and freedoms.[29]

New careers education and the 'occupational self-concept'

Whilst Maxine and Harbottle did not associate their identities with their jobs, the alignment of work and the self was a major feature of careers education from the mid-1960s onwards. This shift was linked to a wider cultural transformation in twentieth century Britain, namely the development of the modern, reflexive self through the popularisation of psychological thought into the language and approaches of many public institutions and media.[30] This popularisation offered 'ordinary' people ways of understanding themselves by emphasising values and personality as well as social position; as Nikolas Rose argues, these

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[27] Anita Harbottle, 'A letter of application', in *Fire Words,* (London: Jonathan Cape Ltd, 1972), 177.

[28] Laura Paterson, '"I Didn't Feel like My Own Person": Paid Work in Women's Narratives of Self and Working Motherhood, 1950–1980', *Contemporary British History*, 33:3 (2019), 405–26.

[29] Laura Tisdall found similar conceptualisations of adulthood among her subjects in: Laura Tisdall, '"What a Difference It Was to Be a Woman and Not a Teenager": Adolescent Girls' Conceptions of Adulthood in 1960s and 1970s Britain', *Gender & History*, (published online 2021), 2.

[30] Nikolas S. Rose, *Inventing Our Selves: Psychology, Power, and Personhood* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Nikolas Rose, *Governing the Soul: The Shaping of the Private Self* (London: Routledge, 1989); and Mathew Thomson, *Psychological Subjects: Identity, Culture, and Health in Twentieth-Century Britain: Identity, Culture, and Health in Twentieth-Century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

new languages and 'techniques of the self' transformed how individuals talked, thought, and interacted with each other.[31] Careers education in the 1970s and 1980s presented work as an important aspect of attaining satisfaction in adulthood and reinforced a connection between selfhood and work through activities such as personality assessments and quizzes, activities which also featured prominently in newspapers, magazines, and other media more broadly.[32] Paul Willis characterised this shift in the late-1960s and 1970s as a move away from advisors 'objectively' ascertaining ability and aptitude, and adjusting pupil expectations to fit available jobs, towards a 'horizontal grid,' which posited that potential was not exhausted by academic difference. This 'horizontal approach' was accompanied by a wider interest in the pupil as an individual 'rather than as a […] receptacle for knowledge'.[33] This approach was encouraged in the Department of Education and Science (DES) pamphlet *Careers Guidance in Schools,* published in 1965. This pamphlet advocated for pupil choice in their future career path, after exposure to a wide range of options and facilitated by a strong pupil-teacher relationship. Crucially, this pamphlet centred pupils' self-knowledge as crucial in successful careers education: pupils needed to arrive at 'a proper understanding of themselves in relation to others.'[34]

John Hayes' and Barrie Hopson's 1971 *Careers Guidance: the role of the school in vocational development* built on the 1965 DES guidance and advocated in clearer terms the use of psychological testing on pupils to determine their most suitable career. Hayes and Hopson argued that not only did pupils need to develop their 'self-concept,' or knowledge of the self, but also their 'occupational self-concept,' or in other words the knowledge of the self in relation to an occupation. Hayes and Hopson posited that this 'occupational self-

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[31] Rose, *Governing the Soul,* 2-3.
[32] For example: *Working in A City, (Box No.41),* (1978), in 'Published Primary, Secondary and Tertiary Resources, Schools Department: Centre for Learning Resources', ILEA/S/LR/10/477, LMA; Rose, *Governing the Soul,* 214.
[33] Paul Willis, *Learning to Labour: How Working Class Kids Get Working Class Jobs* (Farnborough: Saxon House, 1977), 89.
[34] *Careers Guidance in Schools,* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1965).

concept' could be attained through the discovery of information about the self through testing and counselling.[35] Such tests included academic and aptitude testing, but also quizzing pupils on their interests and personality, the results of which would be relayed to the pupil by a careers teacher. Local authority careers services were established by the Employment and Training Act 1973, and whilst there are no overt references to Hayes and Hopson in the ILEA or BCC records, the activities of and resources produced by these LEAs' careers services reflect the guidance issued by the DES and Hayes and Hopson, namely the format of wide exposure to careers options and individual counselling, centred around the aptitude, personality, and skills of individual pupils. By 1974, then, there was a significant shift in the recommended ways pupils were expected to plan their futures, one which relied on the building of connections between the self and an ideal job.

As with all educational policy at this time, the devolved nature of schooling meant that not all schools followed this new careers education closely. A 1973 Her Majesty's Inspectorate (HMI) survey found that only 15 out of 87 schools visited were realising the central aims of careers education which had been laid out in the 1965 DES pamphlet; this report reiterated the importance of 'personal fulfilment' through occupational choice.[36] However, the tensions between ideal practice and the economic realities of this period inhibited the ability of careers officers to find work for school leavers which suited their individuality. District careers officer for central Berkshire, Martin Baker, expressed the frustrations of the careers service during a period of high unemployment in the *Reading Evening Post* in 1975:

> The careers staff all over Berkshire find the situation very frustrating. They spend
>
> months coaxing children into assessing their personality and deciding what kind of

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[35] John Hayes and Barrie Hopson, *Careers Guidance: the role of the school in vocational development,* (Heinemann Education Books Ltd, 1971), 57-9.
[36] *Careers Education in Secondary Schools,* Department of Education and Science, (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1973).

job they could succeed in only to find that the children are forced to take what is available rather than what suits them.[37]

Willis' 1977 research further demonstrates this problem. The working-class boys featured in *Learning to Labour* were recipients of this careers' education, which in Willis' view offered scope for pupils to find 'various satisfactions' in work, even for those at the 'bottom of the academic gradient.' Yet they rejected the efforts of their 'dedicated' careers teacher in favour of seeking a manual job which would allow continuity of the 'lads' culture they had enjoyed at school.[38] For some young people, the type of work itself was not an important aspect of their identity formation, something which was not appreciated by predominantly middle-class careers' advisors. Skeggs has argued that 'work on the self' and the cultivation of individuality requires certain economic and cultural conditions, and consequently working-class girls were not able to access individualism in the same way as middle-class peers.[39]

The recollections of working-class girls support Skeggs' assessment of class and identity. Nicola's* memories of her ILEA grammar school in the 1970s reveal the limitations of careers education in supporting pupils to find employment which aligned with an 'occupational self-concept.' She recalled careers meetings but found that they were not helpful in helping her decide what to do after school:

> You had one careers lesson, um, basically you went into a room with somebody who must have come from ILEA because they were not a teacher, so we didn't know them, and they didn't know us, and they had a book, and you talked about the kind of thing you might be interested in, but it was very much, you had to tell them what you

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[37] 'Jobs Crisis faces school leavers', 15th July 1975, *Reading Evening Post*.
[38] Willis, *Learning to Labour*, 89-95.
[39] Skeggs, *Formations of Class and Gender,* 163.

were interested in, there were no other lessons, and I didn't really know what I was interested in. Um, so, I don't remember it being very satisfactory for me.[40]

Like Maxine, Nicola* was from a working-class family and did not have a set idea of a fulfilling long term career path, unlike some of her friends who she remembered had distinct ideas of what they wanted to study at university. Nicola* and the majority of her friendship group stayed on at the school for A-levels, and alongside several of those friends she ended up in an office job immediately upon leaving sixth form.

Nicola's* recollections reveal some of the issues inherent in a careers education which focused on individual fulfilment. Such careers guidance relied on pupils having an adequate degree of self-knowledge and an 'occupational self-concept,' as Hayes and Hopson recommended. Yet Nicola* did not feel she had adequate self-knowledge to be able to make decisions about her future. Nicola's* socio-economic situation did not allow her time or space to spend on introspection and the 'project' of the self which was required by this new 'student-centred' careers education, which was rooted in classed ideas of 'fulfilling' professional careers.[41] This was in part because she had a disruptive home-life, but also did not have the social and cultural awareness of middle-class professions, as some of her more affluent peers may have. Working-class girls were also more likely to have paid work, as Maxine did, which ate into their leisure time. Furthermore, Nicola's* age at the time of her careers' advice – around seventeen or eighteen, whilst she was in sixth form – is worth noting here. Models of careers guidance which emphasised self-knowledge anticipated that pupils should leave school as fully developed adults with a strong sense of self; Nicola* did not have this by age seventeen or eighteen, contributing to her feelings of uncertainty. Whilst some girls were agentic in using the lessons and values from careers education to

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[40] Interview with Nicola*, 3rd May 2019.
[41] Hayes and Hopson use the term 'student-centred' in *Careers Guidance,* 57.

take advantage of new educational and career opportunities – as will be explored - for other girls who struggled to align to this model, their opportunities were much more limited.

The employment context influenced the extent to which pupils' individuality could be catered for in the ILEA as well as in Berkshire. A spike in the number of school leavers registering as unemployed at ILEA divisional Careers Offices in August 1971 was compounded by the raising of the minimum school leaving age from fifteen to sixteen (ROSLA) in 1972. Tisdall has noted that many schools and colleges were ill-prepared for the extra cohort of pupils from 1972 onwards, offering vocational training which often failed to adapt to changes in the labour market.[42] This lack of updated expertise in what type of jobs were available was a contributing factor in the scale and persistence of the youth unemployment situation in London throughout the 1970s and 1980s. As Reiger shows, large birth cohorts began to finish school in the late 1970s and 1980s, which the economy struggled to absorb.[43] This was compounded by the closure of manufacturing industries and the Docklands, and the migration of some industries from the inner city to the suburbs, resulting in jobs shortages in Inner London.[44] By August 1976, there were 5712 unemployed school leavers registered with the ILEA Careers Service, and 5098 vacancies available, yet these vacancies were inaccessible for these unemployed who held too few or irrelevant qualifications.[45]

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[42] Laura Tisdall, *A Progressive Education?: How Childhood Changed in Mid-Twentieth-Century English and Welsh Schools* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019), 189.
[43] Rieger, 'Making Britain Work Again', 640.
[44] Jim Tomlinson, 'De-industrialization Not Decline: A New Meta-narrative for Post-war British History', in *Twentieth Century British History,* 27:1, (2016), 76-99, 86; and Ken Jones, *Education in Britain, 1944 to the Present,* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003), 41.
[45] Minutes of the Education Committee, 14th September 1976, in 'Minutes, 1975 Jan-1976 Dec', ILEA/CL/MIN/01/006, LMA.

Like Berkshire, the ILEA Careers Service expanded to tackle this crisis, hiring extra staff and setting up 'clearing houses' to find further education places for leavers.[46] Teachers could be seconded to shadow local employers and attend industry conferences, in the hope that an increased awareness of local employers' needs would translate into a more careers-orientated curriculum.[47] By 1978, all secondary schools in Inner London had at least one teacher with a special responsibility for careers education, and schools were encouraged to cultivate close ties with divisional careers officers (DISCOs), who would frequently visit schools, hold open guidance sessions and careers interviews, and provide resources to pupils on their post-16 options, in line with Hayes' and Hopson's earlier recommendations.[48]

ILEA careers materials from the 1970s encouraged pupils to develop their self-knowledge to find work which suited their talents and interests through quizzes, reflective exercises, and research activities, again a clear connection with new careers education guidance.[49] However, the ILEA also balanced the encouragement of pupil individuality with the local labour needs. The ILEA ran vocational preparation courses in the late-1970s specifically in industries such as clerical work and distribution, some of the only industries still hiring unqualified school leavers in central London.[50] Perhaps more significantly, unemployment impacted the implementation of equal opportunities policy by local authorities. Equal opportunities considerations were a legal requirement of local education

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[46] Joint Report of the Further and Higher Education Sub-Committee and the Schools Sub-Committee, *Unemployment* (dated 13th and 14th October 1976), Minutes of Education, 26th October 1976, in 'Minutes, 1975 Jan-1976 Dec', ILEA/CL/MIN/01/006, LMA.

[47] Minutes of the Education Committee, 25th April 1978, in 'Minutes 1977 Jan-1978 Dec', ILEA/CL/MIN/01/007; and 22nd January 1980, in 'Minutes, 1979 Jan-1980 Dec', CL/MIN/01/008, LMA.

[48] Minutes of the Education Committee of the Inner London Education Authority, 25th April 1978, in 'Minutes, 1977 Jan-1978 Dec', ILEA/CL/MIN/01/007, LMA.

[49] See for example, *Working in A City, (Box No.41),* (1978), ILEA/S/LR/10/477; *Clerical Vocational Preparation, (Box No.41),* (1985), ILEA/S/LR/10/478; *Distribution Vocational Education, (Box No.41),* (1985), ILEA/S/LR/10/479; *'In a City' series: Work Experience, (Box No. 42),* (1980), ILEA/S/LR/10/480, all in 'Published Primary, Secondary and Tertiary Resources, Schools Department: Centre for Learning Resources', LMA.

[50] *Vocational Preparation: Clerical* (1985), in Careers and Work Experience, Published Resources, Learning Resources Branch, ILEA/S/LR/10/478.

authorities from 1975, yet in Inner London and Reading there was little sustained action until the 1980s. Furthermore, in both authorities, solutions to unemployment relied on stereotyped assumptions about men's and women's work from individuals working within LEAs. Sexist assumptions about girls' skills and preferences for work continued to be demonstrated by elected ILEA members throughout the late-1970s and into the 1980s. In 1982, the Conservative member for Kensington and Chelsea, William Bell, questioned the very basis of equal opportunities and anti-sexist work:

> Would it not be sensible for the Authority to recognise that boys and girls are endowed with different talents and different abilities and that it is a mistake to make girls attempt to rival boys in certain spheres in which boys normally excel and equally a mistake to make boys attempt to rival girls in subjects in which girls are normally more proficient?[51]

Bell here demonstrated that the concept of innate traits determined by biological sex was a persistent presence among those responsible for implementing equal opportunities policy.

However, Bell was met with vehement opposition by the then Chair of the Schools Sub-Committee, Frances Morrell, who responded that the ILEA were 'not concerned with rivalry but rather to help all our pupils fulfil themselves irrespective of their sex, or race, or social class.'[52] The convergence of unemployment and equal opportunities legislation appeared to some on the ILEA Left, including Morrell, to present an opportunity to refashion ideas of gendered roles. Under Morrell's leadership from 1983, ILEA equalities policy was marked by a transition to anti-sexist and anti-racist policies, rather than the managerialism of equal opportunities which occurred in Reading. A report of the ILEA Schools Committee in 1982 on the progress of the careers service suggested that the

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[51] Minutes of the Education Committee of the Inner London Education Authority, 14th September 1982, in 'Minutes, 1981 Jan-1982 Dec', ILEA/CL/MIN/01/009, LMA.
[52] Ibid.

flexibility that was being asked of young school leavers could be harnessed for an equalities agenda:

> [...]the rapid rise in unemployment has been increasingly affecting young people across the whole spectrum and reinforcing the need to look again at traditional attitudes to work and leisure and to male/female roles in the family and in wage earning.[53]

The ILEA made more concerted efforts from 1982 to equalise opportunities for girls, including encouraging girls into alternative subjects and careers. The Authority tackled the need to discourage girls from feminised roles such as office work and encourage them into male-dominated professions through three main strands: improving girls' and women's access to training; the promotion of positive images of women and ethnic minorities in technical professions; and combatting discrimination amongst potential employers.[54] By 1982, the Labour majority within the ILEA had begun a programme of anti-sexist work, along with pre-existing anti-racist efforts. Bell was a particularly prominent dissenting voice against the Morrell reforms of the early 1980s, but was not alone among the Conservative minority opposition; the motion to introduce an Equal Opportunities Sub-Committee, Women's Caucus, and Ethnic Minorities Section in 1983 was almost unanimously voted for by the Labour and teaching representatives, and voted against by Conservative members.[55] In 1983, several ILEA primary schools put toy shaving kits into home corners – also known as Wendy houses - to encourage boys to play in them. In

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[53] Report No.2 of the Schools Committee, *Secondary Education – Further Developments,* (dated 25th November 1982), in Minutes of the Education Committee of the Inner London Education Authority, 7th December 1982, in 'Minutes, 1981 Jan-1982 Dec', ILEA/CL/MIN/01/009, LMA.

[54] Report of the Further/Higher Education Sub-Committee, *The work of the career service, 1985-6, with pupils and students in the Authority's education establishments, with the unemployed, and in the labour market,* (dated 21st January and 11 March 1987), Minutes of the Education Committee, 24th March 1987, in 'Minutes, 1986 Apr-1987 Dec', ILEA/CL/MIN/01/012, LMA.

[55] Minutes of the Education Committee of the Inner London Education Authority, 17th May 1983, in 'Minutes, 1983 Feb-1984 Dec', ILEA/CL/MIN/01/010, LMA.

response, ILEA Opposition spokesperson Gerry Bowden asserted his own belief that 'women are unequally treated,' but incredulously described the measures in the *Daily Telegraph* as 'a spoof from the Peter Simple column.'[56] Bell and Bowden's dissent was echoed in the national press, who parodied anti-sexist reformers within the ILEA as 'fanatics' and their pupils as 'victims.' In the satirical Peter Simple column in the *Daily Telegraph,* the writer catastrophized that anti-sexist activities were 'part of a mighty process which, if unresisted, will reduce boys and girls, men and women to an undifferentiated mass of slaves.'[57] The ILEA faced opposition to their methods of challenging of stereotyped ideas of men's and women's roles, both from within their own ranks and from a hostile press.

The ILEA, despite their initial EO and later anti-sexist efforts, outlined in Chapter One, remained concerned that their activities were failing to raise girls' ambitions. A 1982 survey showed that many girls in Inner London schools took on gender stereotyped roles, a blow to the equalities committees of the ILEA.[58] However, an examination of the writing of teenage girls in the 1980s during and after the advent of equal opportunities provision – and, in some places such as ILEA, anti-sexist practice – reveals several key changes and continuities. This new careers guidance impacted the ways in which girls saw themselves; girls were self-reflective, with an acute awareness of their own traits, personality, and skills, and what kind of work was best suited to their individuality and would fulfil them. There was still a clear disconnect between work and the self for some girls, but it is also clear that others expected to have a job or career which would fulfil them, and used this to criticise their careers education and the employment situation they faced upon leaving school.

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[56] John Izbicki, "School puts toy razors in 'sexist' Wendy Houses", *Daily Telegraph*, 23rd March 1983, 19.
[57] 'Peter Simple', "Danger! Wake Up!", *Daily Telegraph*, 17th December 1982, 10.
[58] *Educational choice at 16: Research Study final report,* (May 1982), in Careers Education and Guidance Working Party, Post Schools Department: Careers Service Branch, ILEA/PS/CS/01/5, originals under: ILEA Research and Statistics Branch, ILEA/PUB/01/010/048, LMA.

Getting a job in a stable industry such as clerical work was not enough for some; they instead expected fulfilling and enjoyable jobs which aligned with their sense of self.

One girl whose writing was published in *Bittersweet Dreams* in 1987, Vicky Bass, created a fictional account of a day in the life of an unemployed job seeker, 'Christine'. In this piece, 'Christine' recalled her pride upon receiving good A-level results, only to become 'disillusioned' when it became clear that her qualifications were inadequate for many jobs. 'Christine' then enrolled in a secretarial course, 'a useful skill' which could help her 'escape the dole queue,' despite her dislike of the idea: 'The last thing she wanted was to be a secretary; with stiletto heels clicking on polished floors and typewriters clacking in grey offices – no thank you!' Having spent her dole money on an outfit for a dream job interview, 'Christine' was then left distraught when she was not selected for interview.[59]

This story which Bass created highlights some of the key issues and anxieties facing young women leaving school in the 1980s. Education and getting good results had been set up as the key to adult success. Careers education had emphasised girls' individuality and finding work which suited their skills and interests. 'Christine's' disillusionment can be understood as an implicit criticism by Bass of the meritocratic model promoted by schools that good exam results would translate into a fulfilling career. Girls could be caught between having to settle into training or a job they did not desire, in this case secretarial work, or continue to live on benefit payments, which could be a stigmatising experience. Fatima, Abigail, Denise, and Jackie were interviewed for *Spare Rib* about their experiences of unemployment, and their words reflected the disillusionment which 'Christine' found:

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[59] Vicky Bass, *Bitter-sweet Dreams*, 82-5.

> They [family and friends] look down on you as if you're a layabout, especially if they're working. You feel you're the only one because all your friends seem to have jobs. You get very lonely[...][60]

One girl in the group had gained a placement at a nursery, something she had always wanted to do, but was 'put off' by mistreatment by staff, so quit and went back on the dole. The emotional turmoil of the job-seeking cycle no doubt contributed to the decisions of some girls to find work in reliable industries such as secretarial work. Crucially however, having been on the receiving end of a careers education which centred on finding work suitable to an individuals' talents and interests, some girls saw employment in jobs they liked and felt well-suited to as a right, rather than a desire.[61]

Girls' expectations of fulfilling work as adults were also evident in girls' media. Magazines such as *Mizz* presented youth unemployment in the mid-1980s as a collective injustice that girls shared with boys. *Mizz* was aimed at both teenagers at school and young adults, and many of its features, such as the agony aunt column, fashion, beauty, and celebrity features, along with sex and relationships advice, frequently responded to the contemporary anxieties of young women. The dire employment situation was a regular feature. Often features directly addressed the reader, using phrases such as, 'So you're one of the lucky ones and you've got a job,' or 'You hate your job. You're sick of being just one of 3 million odd on the dole,' fostering a sense of shared experience amongst the readership.[62] Features on the dole and Youth Training Scheme (YTS) presented girls and boys

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[60] Fatima Meah, Abigail Macnamara, Denise Cunningham, and Jackie Jeeves, in Susan Hemmings (ed.), *Girls Are Powerful: Young Women's Writing from Spare Rib,* (London: Sheba Feminist Publishers, 1982), 83.
[61] Helen McCarthy, *Double Lives: A History of Working Motherhood* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2020), 325.
[62] *Mizz*, Issue 2, April 26th to May 9th 1985; Issue 3, May 10th to May 23rd 1985, BL.

experiences alongside each other, showing that the effects of poor employment prospects were not just a problem for young men.[63]

This collectivisation of the experience and injustice of youth unemployment also reflects a more prominent expectation among young women in the 1980s, not just for a job, but a job which provided personal satisfaction. This emphasis on the fulfilment of jobs or careers was also evident in *Just Seventeen.* One feature, entitled 'boys versus a career, which would you choose?' appeared in a 1990 issue. The article, despite its title, was heavily weighted towards a career, emphasising the happiness that work could give girls: 'Having a career that you enjoy will make your life more satisfying and you'll be happier in the long run.' In the entire double page spread, only one small list at the bottom of the second page gave five reasons 'why boys are important.' The article promoted studying hard, focusing on qualifications and finding the 'right career for you':

> The first step in choosing a career is to decide what you want from it, ie [sic]: loads of money, responsibility, travel, etc. Then try and work out which subjects you shine in at school. All this is a very good basis for finding a career that suits you. Next, write a list of things that you enjoy doing, eg [sic], writing, being outside, looking after animals, getting on with people […] All this will give you an idea of the sort of career that will suit you and those that won't.[64]

In this article, readers were encouraged to choose a career based not only on their academic skills, but also based on what they valued in life – 'money, responsibility, travel' – and what they enjoyed doing. This range of options suggests that personal satisfaction and fulfilment in a career was promoted to girls, in line with developments in anti-sexist and careers education.

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[63] *Mizz*, Issue 14, October 11th to October 24th; Issue 54, April 22nd to May 5th 1987, BL.
[64] *Just Seventeen,* Issue 328, 10th October 1990, BL.

Changes in the approach of careers education providers along with increased equal opportunities and anti-sexist intervention created a tension with the practical issues of helping girls find work in difficult economic times. The responses of interviewees when asked if they had careers education, regardless of years, type of school, and academic stream, was almost unanimously negative. Ali, who attended a grammar school in the 1970s, recalled filling in a personality questionnaire, and 'at the time thinking well that's complete rubbish'; Sara* also dubbed her careers guidance in the mid-1970s as 'completely useless.'[65] As Nicola's* earlier example showed, the premise of a new careers education cultivated and relied upon a depth of self-knowledge which not all pupils possessed, and was in tension with the 'becomingness' of adolescence. Ann-Marie Jebbett, writing in *Bittersweet-Dreams* in 1987, highlighted the limits a similarly unhelpful careers guidance placed on her ambitions:

> Unemployment is still high in my area and there's still a lot of advice for school-leavers regarding their skills. But you can hardly answer your careers teacher: 'I want to be an author and a song-writer." They would probably look at me in complete amazement and push a careers leaflet into my hands either to do with college courses or starting up your own business![66]

Criticisms of careers education as unhelpful by pupils such as Jebbett were sometimes due to this mismatch in pupil expectations of advice and their futures, and the practicalities of local labour markets. Careers advisors needed to help pupils be 'realistic' about their ambitions, in the face of troubling economic times, but through the social interaction of the careers interview, some pupils understood this realism as a form of educational disadvantage. Equal opportunities and anti-sexism had aimed to raise ambitions, but such

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[65] Interview with Ali Payne, 21st January 2019, Reading; Interview with Sara*, 15th March 2019.
[66] Ann-Marie Jebbett, *Bitter-sweet Dreams,* 73-7.

ambition raising was tempered, especially when it came to artistic and creative industries which were perhaps seen as less economically secure. Personal fulfilment was in tension with long-term economic security for girls, and impacted girls' interests and educational choices in the short-term.

Walkerdine, Lucey, and Melody's study of working- and middle-class girls in the early 1990s demonstrates the effects of meritocratic formulations of success, discourses of female empowerment, and harsh economic realities for working-class girls. According to Walkerdine et al, working-class girls faced 'a "girl power" that tells[sic] them they can be what they want in a labour market that cruelly sets limits on any ambition, together with an educational system that classifies them as fit for certain kinds of work depending on their academic capabilities.'[67] As a result, working-class girls faced a psychological burden unlike their middle-class peers, and as Skeggs has shown, had less time and cultural resources to dedicate to self-actualisation.[68] Middle-class girls were more able to devote themselves to considering their individual strengths, weaknesses, and making decisions based on this self-knowledge.

Claire attended a mixed comprehensive school in Reading and left sixth-form in the early 2000s for university. Whilst her parents had not attended university and had working-class backgrounds themselves, they were socially mobile, meaning Claire had an economically secure upbringing. She performed very well at school in academic subjects, but to the surprise of her mother chose Drama as one of her GCSE subjects:

> I think around that time, sort of fourteen, fifteen, had realised that I was becoming shy…I knew that it was something that would maybe help me with like, a life skill, rather than like, a subject, and also because quite a few of the people that were

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[67] Valerie Walkerdine, Helen Lucey, and June Melody, *Growing Up Girl: Psycho-Social Explorations of Class and Gender* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 21.
[68] Skeggs, *Formations of Class and Gender,* 163.

taking drama were, to me, they seemed like the more confident kids in the school, and, um, I don't know if I wanted to be around them or pick up something from them or something like that…I think it probably gave me more, yeah, like confidence or something about myself.[69]

Claire made decisions to take subjects based on their potential for self-improvement and the building of life-skills. Whilst her decision appears to favour self-improvement over economic reasoning, the building of life-skills can also be understood as a form of economic planning. 'Soft' skills such as confidence or assertiveness were imagined as important skills for professional careers, whilst practical skills were the domain of the vocational occupations. Claire, consciously or not, was engaged from a young age in the building of a well-rounded, academically successful self, which would then give her an advantage in a professional work environment. Her narrative positioned her educational experience as a natural progression from a child to her present role as a successful journalist. Despite her social and cultural privileges which allowed her to embark on this project of self-improvement, her presentation of herself as agentic and autonomous demonstrates the internalisation of the model of female achievement through meritocracy prevalent in schools in the late-twentieth century.

A 'student-centred' careers education, therefore, had several key effects on girls' leaving school in the late-twentieth century. Firstly, it established a language of individualism which pupils could draw on to construct their identities. Some working-class girls used this language of individualism to critique their education and compose their life narratives. For middle-class girls, this language could be used to mask their privilege and frame a 'project of the self,' in which they were agentic in their own self-improvement and later professional success. Crucially, this new careers education contributed to the

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[69] Interview with Claire Slobodian, 24th May 2019, Reading.

prominence of girls' expectations for fulfilling and individually appropriate jobs as the

1980s progressed. However, the paths of pupils headed straight for the labour market

without further training or qualifications were of a lower priority for educationalists. In the

meritocratic model of education, further education equated to greater life chances and

increased opportunity; therefore vocational education and training was at the crux of the

ILEA's anti-sexist work.

Vocational Education and Training

The new career education implemented from the mid 1960s onwards offered girls a

language of individualism with which to critique the limited array of gendered job

opportunities which greeted them upon leaving school at age fifteen or sixteen. Within the

ILEA, further education or vocational training were seen by ILEA politicians, careers

advisors, and teachers as a way of both mitigating the youth unemployment situation, and

disrupting girls' stereotyped career paths. During the 1970s, the ILEA introduced

'preparation for employment' short courses, and encouraged unemployed pupils back into

education or training.[70] As Peter Mandler has shown, by the 1980s further education and

qualifications were more widely seen as beneficial to young people in a labour market no

longer based on manual work and industry.[71] For some young school leavers, this transition

– from an economy in which a lack of qualifications did not preclude them from finding

work, to a credentialized labour market – limited their choice and led some pupils to

rethink their futures. In surveys conducted by the ILEA in 1982, many pupils in further

education expressed their dissatisfaction with their educational experiences, but that

[70] Report (No. 2) of the Further and Higher Education Sub-Committee, *Annual Report of the Careers Service,* (dated 26th November 1975), in Minutes of Meeting of the Education Committee, 18th November 1975, 'Minutes, 1975 Jan-1976 Dec', ILEA/CL/MIN/01/006, LMA; *Working in A City,* 1978.
[71] Peter Mandler, *The Crisis of the Meritocracy: Britain's Transition to Mass Education since the Second World War* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2020), 111.

further qualifications were necessary to avoid unemployment. One pupil responded: 'If there were jobs going I would leave school because I don't enjoy what I am doing.'[72]

Examining girls' experiences of vocational education demonstrates the consequences of the liberal faith in meritocracy as a tool for girls' liberation. Whilst equal opportunities and anti-sexist reformers attempted to raise girls' aspirations, deep-rooted understandings about class, race, and intellect undermined such efforts. Tisdall shows that vocational education and the lower CSE qualification were seen as more 'natural' routes for the less academic pupil prior to the 1970s, resulting in many working-class and Black girls being advised to pursue vocational rather than academic qualifications in the 1970s and 1980s.[73] The tensions between discourses of female empowerment through education, stereotyped ideas of intellect and labour potential, and practical considerations therefore triggered distinct problems for such girls. This complex web of factors resulted in some women constructing narratives of their youth which both critiqued and upheld ideas of meritocracy, and utilised neoliberal language of individuality and choice to compose subjectivities in which they had some control over their lives.

Only a handful of interviewees embarked on vocational training courses upon leaving school. None of the London interviewees had done vocational training after school; this evidence is therefore complemented by experiential sources written by pupils in London and nationwide in the 1970s and 1980s. Alison, Michelle*, and Debbie* – who all left Reading schools during the 1980s – had experience of vocational training in the immediate years after school. All three took on office work prior to or alongside training. Michelle* and Debbie* were from working-class families, whilst Alison's father held a professional occupation, and all attended mixed secondary moderns or comprehensives. As

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[72] *Educational choice at 16: Interim report on the survey of sixth formers* (February 1982), in Careers Education and Guidance Working Party, Post Schools Department: Careers Service Branch, ILEA/PS/CS/01/5, originals under: ILEA Research and Statistics Branch, ILEA/PUB/01/010/45, LMA.
[73] Tisdall, *A Progressive Education?* 187, 193-4.

closer examination of their recollections will show, cultural and social resources determined their position within the educational hierarchy created by streaming pupils into CSEs and O-levels. All three women left school during this period of increased uptake of formal education. However, the economic context of Reading meant that traditionally feminised jobs persisted in popularity. These women constructed their identities by drawing on the cultural resources around them – the importance of education, and discourses of individuality and choice promoted in careers education – to achieve composure and present themselves as having some control over their lives.

Michelle's* interview highlights the influence of cultural and social capital on her routes into the labour force. Michelle* had enjoyed school in the mid 1980s and received good results at age sixteen, but did not follow her more 'academic' friends into sixth-form. She explained why in her interview:

> I didn't know what A-levels were, no one had spoken to me about A-levels, or certainly not so I'd remember. Mum and Dad had no idea what A-levels were... so that just wasn't an option, but my sister went to [redacted] College to study, to study Travel and Tourism, and so I was like, 'oh, well I'll go to [redacted] College then', um, and I think I did Business and Finance, oh yeah, cos I thought, "yeah, that'll be good for me."[74]

Michelle* suggests that she did not 'inherit' expertise or knowledge of higher education from her working-class parents, and perceptions about her identity by teachers shaped her 'access' to this knowledge.[75] Yet Michelle* still 'bought into' the idea of education as means to secure rewards in the labour market. After an unhappy experience in her first year of college, she found an office job in an insurance firm, who supported her return to college.

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[74] Interview with Michelle*, 14th May 2019.
[75] Skeggs, *Formations of Class and Gender,* 8-9.

Michelle* demonstrated a commitment to education and self-improvement but balanced this with her need to earn a living. She attributed this practicality to her parents who emphasised the 'functionality' of work over enjoyment: 'it wasn't something that you could enjoy, it was just something that would earn you money to, to live.' Michelle's* narrative demonstrates the complexities which structured some working-class girls' identities. Like Maxine, office work itself was not intrinsically tied to Michelle's* selfhood, and she critiqued the inequities she experienced as a working-class girl in terms of social and cultural capital. Simultaneously, she sought self-improvement, as reflected in her investment in education and its economic and social gains, and as an adult, her pride in her later academic and professional achievements was important to her sense of self.

The records of the BCC suggest that LEA understandings of girls' motives for staying on in education were more simplistic. The BCC had expected many pupils to take up places in college during the 1970s unemployment crisis, and the local press reported an increased uptake in training and education throughout the 1980s.[76] One local news report noted in 1988 that despite this uptake, pupils' job choices 'remained traditional,' with girls predominantly entering office occupations.[77] The continuation of the popularity of office work in Reading among school leavers despite increased staying-on rates and girls' improved exam performance demonstrates that simply raising attainment was not enough to counter the attractiveness of local opportunities. There is little evidence that the BCC was as engaged with severing this connection from school to office work as the ILEA.

Anti-sexist reformers within the ILEA were concerned that girls were largely following stereotyped gender scripts when it came to training and work, evidenced by the large proportions of girls pursuing vocational training in areas such as secretarial work and

[76] 'Britain lags behind Europe in education', 24th May 1979, *Reading Evening Post,* 3; 'Increase in pupils staying on at school', 16th February 1988, *Reading Evening Post,* 'Recruit among youth, firms urged', 16th June 1992, *Reading Evening Post,* 16.
[77] 'Increase in pupils staying on at school', 16th February 1988, *Reading Evening Post.*

nursing. In part, the popularity of such professions were due to secretarial work's associations with a glamourous femininity. Issues of *Jackie* in the early-1970s included advertisements for typing courses which appealed to aspirations of desirability and attractiveness, such as 'How to become one of the most sought after girls in the world in just 4 weeks.'[78] In her 1985 study *Typical Girls,* Griffin noted that some girls liked the idea of glamourous womanhood associated with the 'office girl' figure, enjoying the opportunity to 'dress up.'[79] This desire for attractive adult status was also evident in Debbie's* interview. Debbie*, educated in Reading in the 1980s, described her friend who became a secretary after school as seeming very 'womanly' to her at the time.[80] This kind of glamourous femininity was appealing for some girls, connoting adult status, attractiveness, and respectability.[81]

Many sixth form and further education colleges had some form of commercial courses to cater for this demand for skilled clerical labour, providing training in office skills, typing, and shorthand, as well as advertising work experience in feminised roles. For instance, around 1970, Lavender Hills School for Girls promoted their already established links with local schools, play groups, and nursing; experience in commercial subjects and 'spheres of interest such as laboratories and computers' were to be pursued at the students' request.[82] The language of individual fulfilment and female professional success, evident in careers education recommendations and equal opportunities discourses, also featured in some of the promotion of these courses. At Islington grammar school Highbury Hill High School, the vocational 'Commerce' qualification was described in a 1977 school newsletter as not just

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[78] *Jackie*, Issue 340, July 11th 1970, British Library, London.
[79] Christine Griffin, *Typical Girls: Young Women from School to the Full-Time Job Market* (Routledge, Chapman & Hall, Incorporated, 1985), 119.
[80] Interview with Debbie*, 10th June 2019.
[81] See Skeggs, *Formations of Class and Gender,* 120-1; and Spencer, *Gender, Work and Education,* 129.
[82] *Educational Opportunities at 16 plus,* Official Publications Volume 34, ILEA/PUB/1/B4. This guidebook was undated, but references to upcoming building works in 1972 suggest that it was published between 1965 and 1971.

providing 'the means to a pay packet but might also be a stepping stone to a promising career.'[83] For some feminist educationalists however, office work represented the narrow options available to girls upon leaving education and traditional notions of femininity. In 1983, Barrie Stead – then chair of the ILEA Schools Sub-Committee – defended further education courses which analysed 'sexual politics' by drawing attention to the ways gender informed young people's careers options:

> In our own society, the assumption that the bright 16 year-old will do well as a secretary applies if that person happens to be a girl; but that assumption is not made if the young person happens to be a boy – and that is something we also ought to think about.[84]

In the *Race, Sex, Class* series, it was noted that girls were 'clustered in the sectors where skills and functions are closely associated with the servicing role women also expect to perform within the family, such as education, nursing, catering and secretarial work.'[85] The ILEA's anti-sexist movement identified such feminised jobs as a sign of girls' internalisation of ideas of gendered inferiority.

Yet as Val Millman – former teacher and anti-sexist education adviser – noted, girls needed more than a '"tentative foothold" in Further Education and the "women's end" of the job market.'[86] To counter the predominance of gendered jobs for girls, the ILEA aimed to make vocational education in more male-dominated fields more 'girl-centred.'[87] The ILEA introduced women-only technical courses in ILEA colleges and polytechnics in the early

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[83] School Bulletin of Highbury Hill High School, 1977, from anon personal collection.
[84] Minutes of the Education Committee, 17th May 1983, 'Minutes, 1983 Feb-1984 Dec', ILEA/CL/MIN/01/010, LMA.
[85] *Race, Sex and Class 6, A Policy for Equality: Sex* (London: Inner London Education Authority, 1985).
[86] Val Millman, 'Breadwinning & babies: A redefinition of careers education', in Gaby Weiner (ed.), *Just a Bunch of Girls: Feminist Approaches to Schooling*, (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1985), 89-102, 101.
[87] Report of the Further and Higher Education Sub-Committee, *The work of the career service, 1985-6, with pupils and students in the Authority's educational establishments, with the unemployed, and in the labour market,* (dated 21st January and 11th March 1987), Minutes of the Education Committee, 24th March 1987, in 'Minutes, 1986 Apr-1987 Dec', ILEA/CL/MIN/01/012, LMA; Gaby Weiner, *Feminisms in Education: An Introduction* (Buckingham, Open University Press, 1994), 79.

1980s. Courses such as 'Wider horizons for women,' 'Introductory electronic wiring for women,' and 'Construction drawing for women' were accompanied by increased funding of crèches and timetabled to enable women with caring responsibilities to attend.[88] Furthermore, anti-sexist advocates within the ILEA hoped that promoting 'positive images' of women and people of colour would improve self-esteem and empower pupils to pursue a wider range of professions. This approach drew on contemporary research by feminist activists and scholars such as Dale Spender, Eileen Byrne, Glenys Lobban, and Gaby Weiner, which emphasised the pervasive influence of sexist representations of men and women in educational materials.[89] Byrne and Lobban concluded that images of women as homemakers or in passive roles contributed to the internalisation of traditional gender roles and expectations among children.[90] The ILEA drew directly from this theory in their anti-sexist policy, creating resources which showed women in roles not often associated with femininity; one example is the 'Anti-Sexist Images' resource examined in Chapter One. In the ILEA's anti-sexist statement, published in 1985, the connection between education, gender roles, and work was made clear:

> The extent to which the educational experience of girls and women is governed by assumptions about their gender roles leads them to a severely disadvantaged position as adults, in terms of careers and occupations.[91]

Drawing on these feminist critiques of education, the ILEA's strategy aimed to alter perceptions of gender roles and expectations among pupils and therefore encourage girls into roles and professions traditionally held by men.

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[88] Minutes of the Education Committee, 20th September 1983, 'Minutes, 1983 Feb-1984 Dec', ILEA/CL/MIN/01/010, LMA.

[89] Eileen M. Byrne, *Women and Education,* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1978), 87-9.

[90] Dale Spender, 'Education or Indoctrination?' in Dale Spender and Elizabeth Sarah (eds.), 2nd edn (London: Women's Press, 1980), 22-31; Glenys Lobban, 'Sex-Roles in Reading Schemes', *Educational Review*, 27.3 (1975), 202–10; Byrne, *Women and Education,* 87-9.

[91] *Race, Sex and Class 6.*

The ILEA was certainly guilty of reproducing stereotyped images of women and girls in careers guidance itself. The ILEA published guidebooks for pupils on careers in sectors within Inner London that were still hiring throughout the 1970s and into the 1980s. One guidebook focused on clerical work, offering information on what office work could entail, as well as outlining the range of potential roles, such as receptionist, office machine operator, and clerk.[92] Almost all of the images used within this pamphlet depicted women working in these office jobs. The materials for a 1985 vocational course, *Vocational Preparation (Clerical),* intended for school leavers between the ages of fifteen and nineteen, similarly depicted mostly women within the accompanying photos and illustrations (see *Figure 1*).[93]
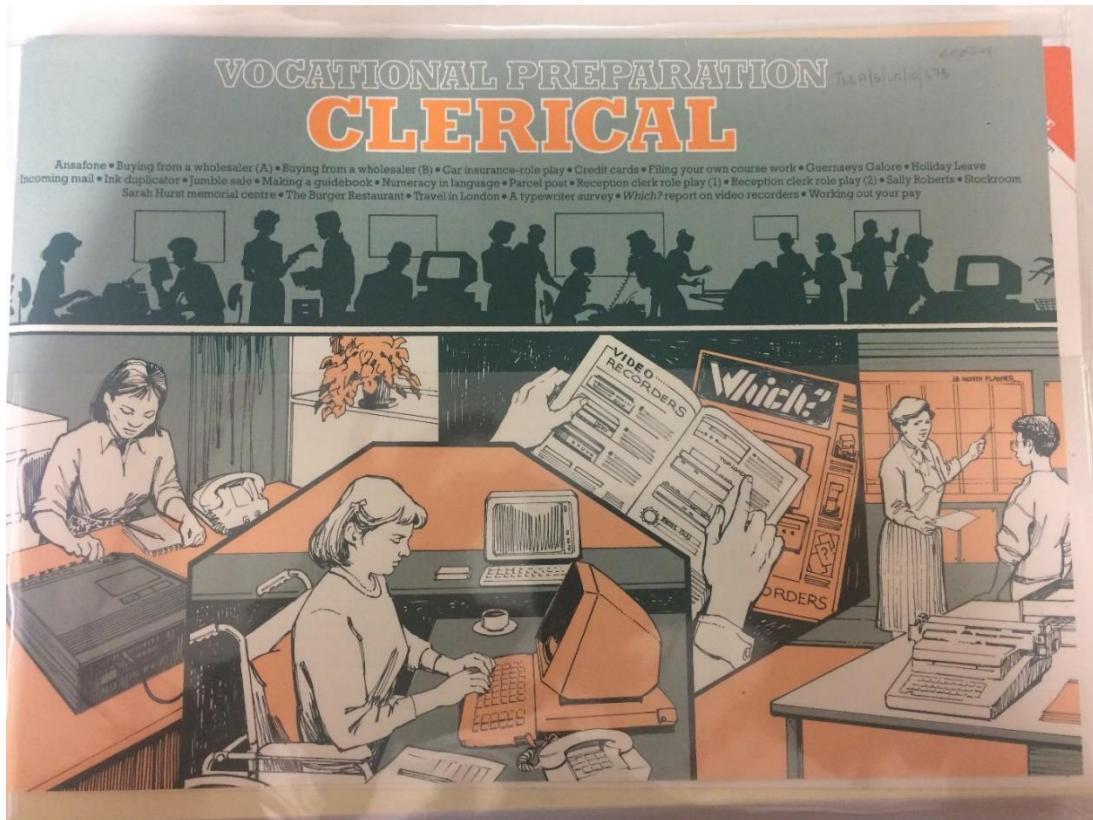
[92] *Working in A City,* 1978.
[93] *Vocational Preparation: Clerical* (1985), in Careers and Work Experience, Published Resources, Learning Resources Branch, ILEA/S/LR/10/478.

Figure 1: Front cover of course book for *Vocational Preparation: Clerical* (1985), in Careers and Work Experience, Published Resources, Learning Resources Branch, ILEA/S/LR/10/478.

However, from around 1983, under Morrell's leadership, the ILEA prioritised the promotion of 'positive images' more stringently: through the reform of curricula such as history; the training of librarians to diversify their collections; and by producing visual resources depicting women, girls, and people of colour in aspirational ways. The Learning Resources Branch (LRB) was a particularly active wing of the ILEA, with anti-racist and anti-sexist working parties which produced resources for teachers and school librarians, alongside promoting materials from groups such as the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) and the Afro-Caribbean Resource Centre (ACER).[94] ACER aimed to provide materials for schools which related to African and Caribbean students, and would help teachers broaden their curriculum and counter racism.[95] The ILEA financially supported ACER, and encouraged staff to use ACER materials.[96] Subject-specific advisory teachers also produced schemes of work which challenged the centring of white male perspectives and the erasure of women and people of colour, collaborating with examination bodies and curriculum design groups such as the Schools Council.[97]

[94] See for example: Media Resources Officers Multi-Ethnic Initiatives Working Party, (1983-4), ILEA/S/LR/02/017/012, Policy Files; and Anti-Sexist Resource Guide and Correspondence (1984-7), Director's Files, ILEA/S/LR/06/006; all in Schools Department: Centre for Learning Resources, LMA.

[95] See *the African-Caribbean Education Resource Project: Len Garrison, ACER, and the British education system*, Google Arts page, courtesy of the Black Cultural Archives (https://artsandculture.google.com/story/the-african-caribbean-educational-resource-project-black-cultural-archives/2wWBny6CCazBpQ?hl=en, accessed 25th November 2020).

[96] *Secondary Catalogue 1987-88*, ILEA/S/LR/01/041; *Educational materials for a multiethnic society*, ILEA/S/LR/01/043, both in 'Published advice for teachers on the use of resources', Schools Department: Centre for Learning Resources, LMA.

[97] Interview with Kate Moorse, 26th June 2019, London.

One strand of this approach was to encourage girls, especially Black and Asian girls, into training for careers in technology. In 1986, the ILEA collaborated with a production company, Social Film Productions, for a film named *Girls in ITeCs,* which aimed to demonstrate the possibility of a high technology career for 'ordinary girls.' ITeCs, or Information Technology Centres, were centres funded by the Manpower Services Commission and local authority to provide hi-tech training. The script of the film was sent to the ILEA, along with the research conducted by the production company. This research suggested that the burden of racism and low expectations meant that many Black youngsters 'appeared to have given up'; whilst the film did feature white girls, Black and Asian girls were centred to give Black and Asian viewers a role model '[w]hom <u>they</u> could believe in'. In the ITeCs researched, only those with Black women in managerial roles succeeded in enthusing Black girls about working in non-traditional careers: 'unless girls saw women "there", they were not coming forward in great numbers.'[98] Representation was clearly considered vital in the empowerment of young Black and Asian women to widen their aspirations. Within the file, however, there is nothing to show if this film was finished, and if so, how far it was circulated within the ILEA.

Similarly, the LRB produced a series of posters (Figure 2) which depicted young women working in traditionally masculine fields. *Women in Engineering* showed young women in marine engineering and aviation roles, and *Women in Construction* showed female brick layers, carpenters, and plasterers.[99]

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[98] *Girls in ITeCs*, (1986), ILEA/S/LR/06/002, Directors Files, in Schools Department: Centre for Learning Resources, LMA.

[99] *Women in Engineering,* (undated), 'Resource Posters', ILEA/S/LR/13/004; *Women in Construction,* (1983), in 'Resource Posters', ILEA/S/LR/13/003, both in Schools Department: Centre for Learning Resources, LMA.
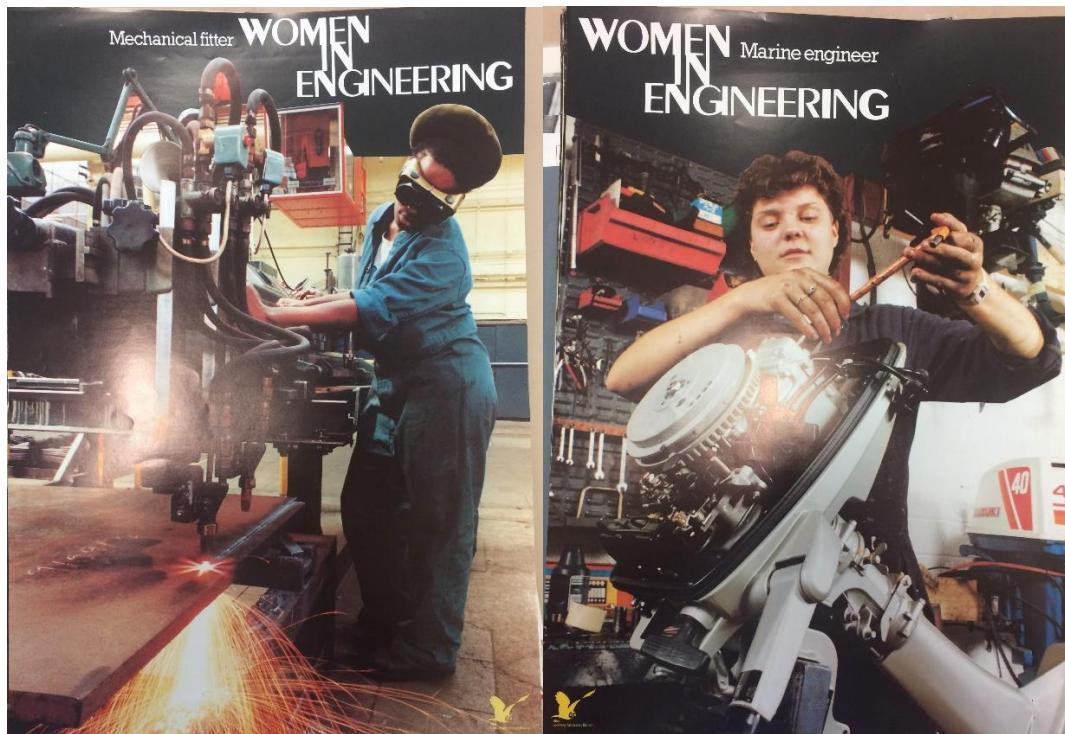
Figure 2: *Mechanical Fitter* and *Marine Engineer* from the *Women in Engineering* poster collection. [undated]

Such posters were typical of the ILEA's anti-sexist policy approach to careers education and aimed to demonstrate to pupils the possibility that women of all ethnicities could succeed in jobs traditionally dominated by men. By placing these in classrooms and careers offices, girls would be encouraged to imagine themselves in such roles. The *Engineering* posters were undated, but *Women in Construction* was copyrighted in 1983; it is therefore reasonable to assume these were introduced as part of the anti-sexist movement in ILEA after 1983.[100]

However, some feminist educationalists found such imagery inadequate. Feminist teacher Irene Payne pointed out in 1981 that stereotyped ideas of gender could not be

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[100] Ibid.

rebuilt without dismantling the ideology that produced such images.[101] Payne drew

attention here to the schism in feminist education in the 1980s noted by Weiner, between

gender inequality as a pedagogical problem, or as a wider structural and societal

problem.[102] Payne and Weiner both highlighted the limits of treating equal opportunities as

a purely pedagogical issue with solutions in education alone. As Jane Martin shows, the

emphasis on achievement and academic success, whilst important, meant that the more

radically transformative potential of the anti-sexist movement 'got subverted.'[103] Whilst the

ILEA pursued a more transformative approach to gender equality, it is clear that in practice,

this approach was limited.

The BCC's approach to equality in careers education echoed the first, more limited

approach identified by Weiner. Schools were often positioned by equal opportunities

proponents as neutral spaces, in which pupils, if provided with equal options to pursue all

kinds of path, would be able to rectify imbalances in the labour market. Yet these

perspectives did not consider the role of the school itself in perpetuating inequalities and in

some cases alienating young people from education.

For some young women leaving school, vocational training provided a different

pedagogical style to the formal 'chalk and talk' methods they had experienced in school.

Debbie* had struggled at her mixed secondary modern in Reading and found the lack of

structure and discipline difficult to cope with alongside problems in her home life. After she

left school in the mid 1980s, she had several short-term jobs, before returning to college for

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[101] Irene Payne, *Sexist Ideology and Education,* in *Learning to Lose: Sexism and Education*, ed. by Dale Spender and Elizabeth Sarah, 2nd edn (Women's Press, 1980), 32-6.

[102] Gaby Weiner, 'Feminist Education and Equal Opportunities: Unity or Discord?' *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 7:3 (1986), 265-74, 266-7.

[103] Jane Martin, 'Gender, Education and Social Change: A Study of Feminist Politics and Practice in London, 1870–1990', *Gender and Education*, 25:1 (2013), 56–74, 70-1.

the O-levels necessary to pursue a vocational degree in nursing. For her, vocational training was the highlight of her educational journey:

> It was quite strict vocational training, and I'm not sure that exists anywhere in the world anymore, because people are kind of scared to be, (pause), like, (pause), you know, people would literally, ball us out for not having clean fingernails, or our hair, or our hair was wrong, there was a standard in all of that that's quite, it can give people with, who've got no discipline, a sense of order, and I think that's, that's what I was looking for. I was looking for a sense of order, and I didn't get it from school… there was no order there.[104]

The disjointed nature of Debbie's* words when describing the training contrast with the clarity of her final statements, suggesting that the vocational training and job itself were not what she was most drawn to, but the discipline and her need for order. Debbie* drew on concepts of individual suitability to frame her memories, achieve narrative composure, and find meaning in her educational journey. She presented her vocational route as a choice, despite the limited range of opportunities she had available to her. By utilising rhetoric which painted her vocational education as a positive choice, Debbie* attributed agency to her younger self, something which rarely came through elsewhere in her interview. Her career in this vocational field had progressed since her young adult years, and now formed an important part of her selfhood. For instance, Debbie* recalled 'bumping into' a former classmate whilst she was doing her vocational training; she felt 'really proud that I'd done something and they'd just had kids'.[105] Debbie* here again emphasised her own agency as a teenager, emphasising her own pride at having avoided the fate of her classmate.

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[104] Interview with Debbie*, 10th June 2019.
[105] Ibid.

National campaigns ran by bodies such as the EOC attempted to encourage girls into previously male-dominated careers. *Letter to a thirteen-year-old from members of YWCA Girl Apprentice Courses* was a booklet produced in 1985 and published as part of the Women into Science and Engineering Campaign by the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) and the EOC. The YWCA, founded in 1884, had historically aimed to support young working women in London, with each establishment providing Sunday meals, libraries, and the guidance of a resident missionary.[106] Over time, their focus shifted towards campaigning against discrimination towards women, and as Caitríona Beaumont shows, had an important role in facilitating women's engagement with politics in the wake of universal suffrage in 1928.[107] The *Letter* pamphlet was aimed to encourage younger girls, perhaps who were yet to choose their subjects for CSE or O-level, into a career in mechanical and engineering industries by printing letters written by older girls on apprenticeship schemes.

The twelve published letters were selected from around forty submissions. Unemployment was once again a spectre which existed in the background of many of these accounts, as the writers emphasised job security and the decent pay. However, the writers clearly felt it was important to communicate the potential downsides of their professions to younger girls. Many writers emphasised the demanding physical labour and the 'unglamorous' side of finishing work covered in dirt and grease, placing their work in opposition to feminine professions such as office work. One writer, Claire Edridge, presented engineering as freeing:

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[106] The records of the YWCA are held at the Warwick Modern Records Centre, which also gives background information into the association on their catalogue page: https://mrc-catalogue.warwick.ac.uk/names/DS/UK/22.

[107] Caitríona Beaumont, 'Fighting for the 'Privileges of Citizenship': the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), feminism and the women's movement, 1928-1945', *Women's History Review,* 23:3, (2014), 463-479.

Never feel that because you are a woman you must stay imprisoned in a house or an office for the rest of your life.[108]

Clearly for some girls, training and working in such a trade was a way to construct an alternative version of womanhood for themselves, which did not align with the 'glamorous' or feminine ideals of domesticity and secretarial work. Edridge's statement above echoes the transformative potential of vocational education which the EOC undoubtedly aimed to promote to younger girls.

This evidence further demonstrates the inculcation of traits such as resilience among young women. In spite of this presentation of industrial work as liberating, nearly all the writers highlighted the difficulties they faced. Many writers described the lengths they had gone to in pursuit of their careers; teachers were presented mostly as obstructive. Secondly, nearly all the writers mentioned the attitudes of male colleagues and peers who would deride the girls with 'mickey-taking' and 'insensitive' comments. Sue Burden advised younger girls how to handle such unwanted attention from men and boys in her trade:

You have to be able to turn the other cheek in such a trade, as it can be heart-breaking when they don't know you've had enough! The older men, especially, will try and tell you how much you don't belong, but you've just got to prove how much you *do* belong.[109]

Dealing with hostility and stereotyping from boys and men was portrayed by Burden here as a way through which girls could build their personal skillset. Another writer, Suzanne

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[108] Claire Edridge, in *Letters to a Thirteen Year Old - From Members of the YWCA Girl Apprentice Courses 1983-84*, (1985), 595/4/6/19, 'records of the Equal Opportunities Commission', Warwick Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick, Coventry, 15.
[109] Sue Burden, in *Letters to a Thirteen Year Old,* 7.

Stewert, suggested that girls having to prove themselves was 'not such a bad thing because you need to have determination to survive in a predominantly male environment.'[110]

The development of personal attributes such as resilience and determination was also a key aim of ILEA careers education in the face of ongoing unemployment. Correspondence from within the Careers Service of the ILEA in 1983 reveals that these staff understood flexibility, motivation, and 'lifeskills for coping' to be key attributes for school leavers.[111] Short courses such as the Certificate of Pre-Vocational Education (CPVE), introduced to tackle unemployment in the ILEA and the BCC, also aimed to develop pupils' characters, equip them with a 'flexible, self-confident approach' and the ability to 'cope with life under different and changing circumstances.'[112] Pupils who could not find work were encouraged into courses which aimed to equip them as individuals with attributes which would make them more accepting of the economic and emotional strains of unstable employment. Crucially, this line of logic assumed that the responsibility lay with the individual pupil to cope with economic uncertainty, rather than looking to politicians and employers to solve unemployment.

Valerie Walkerdine, Helen Lucey and June Melody argue that economic uncertainty in the 1990s – as 'jobs for life' were replaced with widespread precarity – directly contributed to girls transformation into 'the right kind of employable subject.'[113] Whilst girls' possibilities were presented as endless in the 1990s, simultaneously girls were 'increasingly held accountable for their own fate.'[114] Diane Reay's research into working-

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[110] Suzanne Stewert, in *Letters to a Thirteen Year Old,* 10.
[111] Minutes of meeting (8th September 1983), Careers Education and Guidance Working Party, ILEA/PS/CS/01/5, in Post Schools Department: Careers Service Branch, LMA.
[112] 'Pupils stage a careers course display', 4th March 1987, *Reading Evening Post*; Letter from Greenwich Park School and copy of Policy Statement and Departmental Review of Personal Development course, (dated 25th January 1984), the Careers Education and Guidance Working Party, ILEA/PS/CS/01/5, in Post Schools Department: Careers Service Branch, LMA.
[113] Walkerdine, Lucey, and Melody, *Growing Up Girl,* 2-3
[114] Ibid, 81.

class students' experiences of higher education in the 2000s similarly notes that these students frequently credited their 'resilience' as key to their success and survival at an elite university. Reay argues that this resilience was borne out of necessity, as students developed important internal resources in lieu of external formal support structures.[115] They accepted the 'meritocratic myth,' despite its clear strains on their identities.[116] The development of individual attributes for success – such as resilience, hard-work, and flexibility – from the early 1980s and into the 1990s was a way of encouraging pupils to guard their wellbeing in difficult circumstances. However, the focus on these attributes also perpetuated a version of equal opportunities which some feminist educationalists critiqued, in which barriers to girls' success were conceptualised as an individual issue rather than as systemic. Discourses of individuality and resilience therefore allowed structural inequalities to be obscured; individuals bore the burden of their inability to ascend the social hierarchy.

The internalisation of discourses of individual responsibility is clear in Alison's interview. Alison left her mixed comprehensive school in Reading at age sixteen in the late 1980s and joined a Youth Training Scheme (YTS) placement. The YTS, introduced under Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in 1983, was a combination of workplace training and classroom-based training. Alison was based in a computer company, working as a junior secretary four days a week and attending college on Fridays; this YTS placement resulted in her obtaining a BTEC. Whilst she remembered the office team as 'nice' and that 'they all looked after me,' Alison felt that she 'just wasn't cut out for that sort of work.' A major criticism of the YTS was the low employment rates amongst leavers. In Berkshire this was investigated, and Project Contact set up in 1982 to monitor YTS leavers who had been

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[115] Diane Reay, Gill Crozier, and John Clayton, ''Strangers in Paradise'? Working-class Students in Elite Universities', *Sociology,* 43:6, (2009), 1103-1121, 1107.
[116] Ibid, 1108.

unable to find work.[117] In the ILEA too, the Youth Opportunities Programme (YOP) and later YTS had low success rates. In 1980, only between 31% and 35% of YOP trainees gained a permanent job at the end of the programme, leaving approximately 1000 to 1500 YOP trainees in Inner London facing unemployment.[118] Alison did not get a permanent job upon leaving the scheme. She 'temped for a while', before joining the civil service, where she stayed for many decades and was promoted. Her eventual success and satisfaction in her work was clear in her interview, yet in her recollections of her young adulthood, Alison drew on language of individual suitability to account for the difficulties she found. By describing herself as not 'cut out for' the YTS placement, Alison demonstrated an understanding of self in which she was responsible for not being the right kind of person for the job. Alison internalised ideas perpetuated in careers education that success in training and employment required self-knowledge and self-improvement. Her failure to find a job which suited her was due to her in her mind, not the failures of vocational schemes to translate into permanent employment which was apparent in both Reading and Inner London; Reay found similar patterns of 'self-blame' for educational failings amongst the young people interviewed for her own research.[119] This understanding impacted Alison's selfhood and individualised what were structural failings of the YTS.

This individualisation of structural failings is also clear in ILEA materials relating to work experience and discrimination. The ILEA had a policy after 1985 to penalize partner organisations and employers that discriminated against pupils on the basis of sex, disability, or race.[120] Employers could essentially be blacklisted by the Authority and rejected as an

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[117] Meeting of the Further Education Committee, 6th April 1988, in Further Education and Youth & Community and Sub Committees 1985-9, C/CS/C3/4/2, BRO; Minutes of the Schools Consultative Committee, 15th October 1986, in Schools Sub-Committee 1985-1989, C/CS/C3/4/3, BRO.

[118] Summary of report (dated 1st December 1980), in Minutes of the Education Committee, 10th December 1980, 'Minutes, 1979 Jan-1980 Dec', ILEA/CL/MIN/01/008, LMA.

[119] Diane Reay, *Miseducation: Inequality, Education and the Working Classes,* (Bristol: Policy Press, 2017), 110-1.

[120] Report of the Further/Higher Education Sub-Committee, *The work of the career service, 1985-6, with pupils and students in the Authority's education establishments, with the unemployed, and in the labour*

external partner by the careers service. However, I found no examples in the ILEA Education Committee Minutes that any partners or employers were removed on such grounds. The potential of pupils encountering racist and sexist discrimination was addressed in *Work Experience: teachers manual* produced in 1978, prior to the ILEA's anti-sexist and anti-racist policies. The guide advised teachers of ways to make pupils aware that discriminatory encounters could occur and suggested activities to help pupils cope with such encounters. There was nothing in this guide to advise teachers how to escalate a complaint about such discriminatory behaviour.[121] Sexist and racist discrimination was presented as just a possibility of the 'real world' of work, ignoring the likelihood that pupils had already experienced racism or sexism within and outside of school. This vague guidance serves as further evidence of the concept of individual strengths and resilience as necessary attributes for pupil success, in lieu of more transformative change. Pupils internalised such discourses to account for their own experiences, masking the barriers which continued to determine their post-school life courses.

The ILEA's inability to deal more directly with structural oppression can be further demonstrated by examining the experiences of Black pupils, who were especially disadvantaged by such policies. Whilst for some girls, vocational education could be a positive sign of progress, the encouragement of Black girls into vocational education reinforced their inferior social position.[122] Black families were aware that their children were unfairly streamed into lower ability classes. Bernard Coard's foundational 1971 text *How the West Indian child is made educationally subnormal in the British school system* highlighted this chronic underachievement and low streaming of Black Caribbean children

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market, (dated 21st January and 11 March 1987), Minutes of the Education Committee, 24th March 1987, in 'Minutes, 1986 Apr-1987 Dec', ILEA/CL/MIN/01/012, LMA.
[121] *Work Experience (Box No. 42), (*1980), ILEA/S/LR/10/480, in Published Primary, Secondary and Tertiary Resources, Schools Department: Centre for Learning Resources, LMA.
[122] Beverley Bryan, Stella Dadzie, and Suzanne Scafe, *The Heart of The Race: Black Women's Lives in Britain*, (London: Virago, 1985), 67-8.

in ILEA schools, epitomised by the overrepresentation of Black children in schools for the 'educationally subnormal.'[123] The issue of the underachievement and the low expectations teachers held of Black children was not acknowledged officially until the 1985 Swann Report and the DES report *Education for Some* in 1986.[124] Whilst *Education for Some* was supportive of many of the Swann Report's recommendations, the report was more direct in identifying the allocation of pupils into sets, streams, and bands as a key mechanism for creating a low 'profile of expectations' for Black children.[125] *Education for Some* cautiously suggested that both careers officers and teachers in the sample tended to suggest a lower social class occupation for Black pupils.[126] The experiences of Black girls show how the interactions between advisors and pupils reinforced ideas about the jobs and roles expected of Black women and girls.[127]

In *Black Voices,* an anthology of writing submitted to the ACER Young Writers' Competition between 1979 and 1984, the figure of the careers advisor or teacher was a recurring example of the everyday racial biases faced by young Black school pupils. This anthology collated essays submitted by young adults and teenagers; it is not clear from the anthology if these were written in schools, supplementary schools, or other institutional settings. In one of the submissions, a short play written in 1983 by Mewe Olugbo and Sharon Ellis entitled *A Black British childhood*, the reader follows three main characters, school friends Carol, Patience, and Beverley through their different paths from school into

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[123] Bernard Coard, *How the West Indian child is made educationally subnormal in the British school system: the scandal of the Black child in schools in Britain,* originally published by New Beacon for the Caribbean Education and Community Workers' Association (CECWA), 1971, reprinted in *Tell It Like It Is: How Our Schools Fail Black Children,* ed. Brian Richardson, (Bookmarks Publications and Trentham Books, 2005).
[124] *The Swann Report: Education for All,* Report of the Committee of Enquiry into the Education of Children from Ethnic Minority Groups, (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1985).
[125] John Eggleston, David Dunn, and Mahdu Anjali, *Education for Some: the educational & vocational experiences of 15-18 year-old members of minority ethnic groups,* (Stoke-on-Trent: Trentham Books, 1986), 284.
[126] Eggleston, Dunn, and Anjali, *Education for Some*, 97-8.
[127] It is worth noting that the two Black women interviewed for this project – Katy and Aretha – did not experience this streaming and low expectations; both were encouraged to pursue professional careers.

adulthood roles. In this extract, a careers advisor attempted to convince Carol to rethink her plans for university:

> CAREERS OFFICER: Carol, I realise you're doing 'A' levels and hope to go on to University, but I really do think you ought to contemplate alternatives. Things don't always work out the way we want them to.

> CAROL: Are you saying I'm going to fail?

> CAREERS OFFICER: Well, (*hesitating*) No…. but I'm just pointing out possibilities, I mean, have you thought about a job with some form of training? Retail management, in the catering industry, for example…. No….doesn't appeal to you…well, go away and think about it. Come back and see me next term.[128]

Olugbo and Ellis' play reflects the everyday mechanisms of racism and misogyny in education. Carol, a high performing, university-bound pupil, has her ambitions for higher education undermined by an older white male authority figure, who attempted to influence her into a vocational course in a feminised sector. The careers adviser was also picked out by Beverley Bryan, Stella Dadzie, and Suzanne Scafe in *Heart of the Race,* whose 'undermining attitudes […] were designed to make [Black girls] believe in the myth that [they] had nothing to offer British society.'[129] In her 1983 poem, also entitled *A Black British Childhood,* Nicola Williams used the format of a careers interview to demonstrate the manoeuvring of Black pupils into lower academic streams and towards lower status jobs:

> Or (to the 'O' level ones)

> 'So you want to be a *doctor?*

[128] Mewe Olugbo and Sharon Ellis, 'a Black British Childhood', in Paul McGilchrist (ed.), *Black Voices: An Anthology of ACER's Black Young Writers Competition,* (London: ACER Centre, 1987), 177-8.
[129] Bryan, Dadzie, and Scafe, *The Heart Of The Race,* 68.

Well perhaps, but what about becoming a nurse? I feel it would suit your caring

nature so much more...'[130]

Again, the mechanisms of racism and misogyny are demonstrated in Williams' poem, as the

pupil was moved away from a professional career towards a feminised vocation. The

repeated use of the careers interview reflects the significance of white, middle-aged

educators wielding their power – framed as concern or guidance – to reinforce Black girls'

position in a social and economic hierarchy. Girls were asked to take an emotional risk by

articulating their hopes for the future, before having these hopes scrutinised and

undermined by an adult whom they may not have known well. This emotional burden of the

particular moment of the careers interview is evident in its repeated use as a trope in these

essays. Female empowerment through educational success, in these extracts, was removed

from the grasp of some Black girls, who were encouraged to accept the very same female

vocations that middle-class white girls were encouraged to reject.

Yet the sources suggest that many Black girls did not passively accept these roles; as

Bryan, Dadzie and Scafe show, some girls 'knew [their] own value' and 'rejected the careers

which had been mapped out [...] determined not to follow [their] mothers' footsteps to the

hospitals and factories.'[131] The experiences of a group of girls who wrote and performed a

play about sexism in 1982 were reproduced in *Girls Are Powerful.* The girls – Linda, Dawn,

Jasmine, Diane, Cynthia, and Lynda – expressed that the first injustice they noticed in school

was the streaming, before they became interested in anti-sexism:

When you come here if you're Black, or working class white, or coloured, or Greek or

Turkish Cypriot, you automatically get put into the lower streams. Recently a girl of

fourth year age came back again to this area from spending time in Jamaica. The

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[130] Nicola Williams, 'a Black British Childhood', in *Black Voices,* 236.
[131] Bryan, Dadzie, and Scafe, *The Heart of the Race,* 68.

teacher said to one of us who is Black, 'What stream are you in?' On hearing it was stream four, he said, 'Yes, that's the one I was thinking of for her,' and that was it![132]

Whilst this source was co-produced by a group of white and Black girls, the emotions communicated in these extracts hint at the impact these practices had on Black girls' selfhoods. The group stated that streaming and being labelled as 'thick' made them angry, 'pissed us off,' and was 'unfair,' resulting in a lack of confidence. Yet the girls formed a group to create a play which criticised their school; these girls were aware of their social and cultural positions – and indeed suggested an understanding of their different experiences from each other – and were able to name and challenge racist and sexist practices such as streaming. Black girls, often ignored in assessments of gendered educational success, were also more likely than any other group to continue in education after the statutory leaving age. Statistics gathered by the ILEA showed that Afro-Caribbean pupils were more likely to be unemployed or in further education after age sixteen than white pupils, possibly due to the difficulties in finding work.[133] The ILEA aimed to raise pupils' esteem through posters, film, and educational resources; however, as these experiential sources show, the everyday racist assumptions of staff and low expectations they had of Black pupils were far more critical in determining Black girls' educational trajectories.

The complexities of Black teenagers' internalisation of discourses prominent in careers education along with their lived experiences of racism are exemplified in Jacqueline Balfour's piece in *Black Voices.* In her essay, eighteen-year-old Balfour told stories of being passed over for jobs in favour of less qualified white teenagers, and assessed the problems faced by Black school leavers seeking work. Balfour evoked moral language in relation to

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[132] Linda, Dawn, Jasmine, Diane, Cynthia, and Lynda, in *Girls Are Powerful,* 30.
[133] *Educational choice at 16: Research Study final report,* (May 1982), in ILEA/PS/CS/01/5, records and correspondence of the Careers Education and Guidance Working Party, (originally found under ILEA/PUB/01/010/048, Research and Statistics Branch).

joblessness; she argued that Black youth needed to be 'strong minded' to keep up the hunt for jobs in an unfair job market, and that some were likely to 'give up' and 'go on the dole queue because they couldn't get a job because they have no qualifications, no ambition, and know they can't get a job without trying really hard.'[134] Balfour laid out the obstacles which racist employers placed in young Black school leavers' paths to employment, but also emphasised individual will and hard work to highlight the effects on young Black school leavers' psyches.

Balfour's cleaving to meritocracy is reminiscent of the complex relationship to meritocracy that Heidi Safia Mirza has identified in her research with African Caribbean girls. Mirza's participants identified with notions of 'credentialism, meritocracy and female autonomy,' and she found that they 'strategically employ every means at their disposal in the educational system and classroom to achieve a modicum of mobility in a world of limited opportunities.'[135] In Mirza's study, these girls drew on the 'African Caribbean working-class migrant orientation towards the meritocratic ideal' to rationalise their educational experiences, 'resist domination,' and achieve social change.[136] The involvement of Balfour, Williams, Olugbo, and Ellis in ACER suggests that they were engaged in a process of self-discovery, consciousness-raising, and community-building through writing and educational programming, and that they 'bought in' to the power of education for social and individual transformation. Balfour therefore drew on the cultural resources available to her to engage in self-improvement, within *and* outside the formal educational structures which sought to limit her opportunities.

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[134] Jacqueline Balfour, 'Being without employment in Britain today is a tragedy for a young Black person because…', in *Black Voices,* 219-221.
[135] Heidi Safia Mirza, *Race, Gender and Educational Desire: Why Black Women Succeed and Fail,* (London, Routledge, 2008), 11.
[136] Ibid, 15-6; 25.

Vocational education was therefore seen as a liberating force by many feminist reformers. Yet, the streaming of pupils into vocational or academic streams still upheld racist, sexist, and classist ideas of intellect and capability. For working-class girls, vocational education could be a way for them to find success through education outside of an academic school education in which they were marginalised. For Black girls, alternative education could also be a lifeline in resisting the limited opportunities available to them. Discourses of individualism provided ways for these girls to claim agency. The ways girls framed their experiences of vocational education reveal the impact of meritocratic ideas of empowerment on girls who were often side lined in favour of those pupils who were expected to head for university.

Higher education, class, and aspiration

Higher education was another route after school which could offer girls a way to align with ideals of empowered and successful girlhood. Vocational education was seen by ILEA anti-sexist teachers as a way to overcome gendered expectations; a university degree was similarly thought of by teachers and girls. But as with vocational education, streaming by academic ability and stereotypes about class and race meant that a particular group of girls were more likely to be able to enter higher education: white middle-class girls who were academically successful. It is therefore important to note that most interviewees had one or two professional parents and attended university after school or college. Their narratives of their school to work transition, via a university degree, were predominantly smooth and rarely caused obvious discomposure. This widespread composure among this group of interviewees is evidence of the prevalence and powerful internalisation of meritocracy and the idea of female empowerment and self-improvement through education. They composed coherent life trajectories in which they succeeded educationally and professionally through

their own efforts and abilities. But as Walkerdine et al noted in their research, this educational privilege did not mean that this group of women had easy paths into professional working womanhood.[137] This chapter show that the framework of meritocratic empowerment and emphasis on higher education came into tension with pupils' self-knowledge.

In the early 1970s, the proportion of female students in higher education was fairly low; just under 30% of students were female in 1971.[138] Statistics compiled by the ILEA Statistics and Research Division shows that just 5.9% of ILEA school leavers from maintained schools went onto degree courses, in comparison to 28.6% of those from independent schools; these statistics prompted a heated debate about independent schools and the 'purchase of privilege.'[139] Whilst the proportion of female students had risen by 1983 to around 35%, it would not be until 1996 that numbers drew even with male students.[140] By the 1990s, girls' outperformance of boys in examinations, and their increased presence in universities was attributed as a sign of gender equality successes in education, generating anxieties about boys' underperformance.[141] Walkerdine, Lucey, and Melody have challenged the assumption that girls as a whole saw their prospects improve. Rather, they argue that by the 1990s, the gendered composition of middle-class educational success had changed; in other words, more middle-class girls were achieving higher qualifications and attending university, threatening the hegemony of boys from

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[137] Walkerdine et al, *Growing Up Girl,* 82.

[138] Carol Dyhouse, *Students: A Gendered History,* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), 99.

[139] Minutes of the Education Committee, 22nd March 1983, 'Minutes, 1983 Feb-1984 Dec', ILEA/CL/MIN/01/010, LMA. These statistics were not given in full here, but it is unlikely that these included teacher training, which was largely at colleges at this point.

[140] Dyhouse, *Students,* 99.

[141] See for example: Madeleine Arnot, Miriam David, and Gaby Weiner, *Closing the Gender Gap: Postwar Education and Social Change* (Cambridge, Polity Press, 1999)*,* 150-2. Tinkler and Jackson argue that girls and women were blamed for boys' underperformance, leading to the side-lining of girls' problems: Penny Tinkler and Carolyn Jackson, 'The Past in the Present: Historicising Contemporary Debates about Gender and Education', *Gender and Education*, 26:1 (2014), 70–86, 75; see also: Estelle Morris, 'Labour's plans to give boys new hope', in *The Times,* 1st November 1996, 38; and John Carvel, 'Help for boys lagging behind girls at school', *The Guardian,* 5th January 1998, 4.

professional families.[142] Diane Reay, Jacqueline Davies, Miriam David and Stephen J. Ball show that whilst more working-class and ethnic minority students were able to access higher education towards the end of the millennium, their choice of university and subject were more limited than their white middle-class peers.[143] These authors highlight the importance of interrogating this supposed story of girls' educational progress, and paying closer attention to which girls benefitted and which girls were less able to take advantage of new educational opportunities.

For some girls, their schooling provided the social and cultural resources necessary to access higher education and overcome stereotyped ideas of gendered work. Sara*, the daughter of Italian parents, attended a Catholic girls' grammar school in London in the 1970s. She pursued science at A-level before studying for a degree, against the advice of her father and grandfather:

> My mum was great, but my dad…and my grandad who lived with us, I mean my grandad said, I said, "oh I might do an engineering degree," I didn't really want to do one, but I said, "I could do that," and he said, "you can't be an engineer, you're a woman." I mean that is, I mean, you know, I loved my grandad, but I just was like, "what do you mean I can't be an engineer?! I can be an engineer if I want."[144]

Sara* recalled outrage at her grandfather's outdated notions of what type of work a woman should do. Yet the effect of this on her was not to curtail her ambitions but instead prompted her to pursue them more vehemently; Sara* went on to do a science degree. Despite, as Sharpe found, the significant pressures placed on girls by their families to conform to gendered scripts in the 1970s, Sara* rejected her family's notions of gendered

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[142] Walkerdine, Lucey, and Melody, *Growing Up Girl,* 16.

[143] Mirza, *Race, Gender, and Educational Desire,* 18-9; Diane Reay, Jacqueline Davies, Miriam David, and Stephen J Ball, 'Choices of Degree or Degrees of Choice? Class, 'Race' and the Higher Education Choice Process', *Sociology,* 35:4, (2001), 855-874, 871-2.

[144] Interview with Sara*, 15th March 2019.

attributes.[145] Sara's* own analysis of her younger self suggested that she would not have had the tenacity to challenge her grandfather if she had not attended a school which encouraged girls' academic success in traditionally masculine subjects. Sara's* experience suggests that subverting gendered expectations may have been easier for girls who felt supported by their schools, who were more academically successful, and did not face the same structural inequalities with regard to race and class as their peers.

Some working-class ILEA pupils and girls who had migrated to England also saw higher education as a way to access a fulfilling career in the late 1970s. Two girls whose writing was published by the ILEA – Zohra El Kssmi and Anna Leitrim – had clearly laid plans for their future education and work. El Kssmi's autobiography described her childhood in Morocco prior to joining her mother in West London as a teenager. She described the challenges in adapting to life in London and concluded her life story by looking to her future:

> Now, I have got all the opportunities to make good progress at school and get good grades in my exams, so that I can take up journalism as a career. To do that means a lot of hard work, but this does not worry me as I am determined to succeed.[146]

El Kssmi saw education as a route to a professional career that did not seem limited by her gender. She had a clear plan of the steps it would take to reach her career goal, something which was encouraged in ILEA careers education. Claire Langhamer and Hester Barron, in their exploration of schoolboys' essays in 1930s Middlesbrough, have highlighted the theme of security as a way of understanding the relationship between economic context and the plans which boys made in a period of economic uncertainty.[147] Whilst Langhamer and

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[145] Sharpe, *'Just like a Girl',* 69.
[146] Zohra El Kssmi, 'Families', in Paul Ashton, Michael Sions, Daphne Denaro, and Mike Raleigh (eds.), *Our Lives: Young People's Autobiographies,* (London: ILEA English Centre, 1979), 20.
[147] Barron and Langhamer, 'Children, Class, and the Search for Security'.

Barron focus on a very different historical context, looking for this theme of security in girls'

writing about their futures in the 1970s can reveal how economic uncertainty shaped girls'

decisions to stay in education or training, or whether to risk seeking work. El Kssmi was

one of several teenagers writing in the 1970s who laid out clear plans leading directly from

her current situation as a pupil to her future career. Having clear plans and committing, at

least on paper, to working hard for such goals was a way for pupils to feel a sense of control

and agency over their futures, and guard against periods of unemployment.

However, some Inner London pupils were more wary in their plans than El Kssmi.

Leitrim, also published in *Our Lives,* was one such cautious planner:

> Obviously I would be very silly if I started drawing up great big plans for the future
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> because through past experiences I have found out that when you plan something it
>
> never really happens the way you want it to. However there is no real harm in
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> 'hoping' things for the future[...] the first thing I'll be hoping for is to get a good
>
> education.[148]

Despite Leitrim's awareness that even the best laid plans did not always come to pass, she

placed education as a vital foundation to future satisfaction, a reflection of the increased

awareness throughout the late 1970s and into the 1980s that formal qualifications and

higher levels of education were necessary for pupils to adapt to the new economic

context.[149] Leitrim was not career-driven in her imagined future; she instead hoped for a

'socialist society,' with 'no imperialism and oppression, no threats of nuclear war, where

young people would have complete control of all areas of our lives in our work, education,

leisure time and personal relationships.'[150] Whilst El Kssmi hoped for personal career

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148 Anna Leitrim, 'Me and My History', in *Our Lives,* 131.
149 Mandler, *Meritocracy,* 111.
150 Anna Leitrim, *Our Lives,* 131.

satisfaction, Leitrim hoped for wider political and social transformation; for both, education, however problematic, was a foundational first step in meeting these goals.

However, for some girls, higher education did not offer a chance for them to fulfil personal career goals, but was still expected of them. Interviewee Rachel's* experiences further demonstrate the tension between ideas of individuality and the emphasis on education as self-improvement. Rachel* finished her A-levels in the early 1990s at a mixed sixth-form college in North West London. She recalled female teachers in her sixth form encouraged her entire form to apply for university and helped her with her Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) applications. An academically able and middle-class pupil, Rachel* had no doubt that she would attend university: 'I mean there was no question that I wouldn't go to university at the time, although I dropped out of university, I only did complete a year.'[151] As Dyhouse has noted, aspiring to university was 'taken for granted' by middle class girls and was reflected by girls becoming a majority of higher education entrants in the 1990s.[152] However, this expectation came into tension with pupils' self-knowledge of their individual attributes. Rachel* had recently begun to seek a diagnosis for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) at the time of the interview; as part of the referral process, she had begun to compile evidence from her time at school. Therefore, her narrative often revolved around demonstrating the ways in which ADHD affected her studies. She struggled with organisation and concentration throughout school but was expected to go to university because she performed well academically and was from an educated, middle-class family:

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[151] Interview with Rachel*, 12th January 2019.
[152] Carol Dyhouse, *Girl Trouble: Panic and Progress in the History of Young Women,* (London; Zed Books, 2013), 206; Dyhouse, *Students,* 99; Mandler, *The Crisis of Meritocracy,* 133.

Obviously I now know I have ADHD but my, I just wasn't, I didn't know how to organise myself, I didn't know how to, um, I didn't really know what I was doing there, other than I was supposed to go there, I didn't have an end goal in mind.[153]

Rachel* saw her path to university as beyond her control, something which girls of her perceived intelligence and class were expected to do, despite university being ill-suited to her learning style and needs.

Rachel's* experiences demonstrate one of the issues with overreliance on academic performance to determine education and career trajectories. For high-performing pupils who teachers saw as intelligent and capable, few alternatives to university were presented. Rachel's* narrative reveals that whilst undoubtedly middle-class girls had more educational privileges, they still faced a degree of predetermination in their futures. Furthermore, this predetermination was in tension with their own self-awareness of their strengths and weaknesses, instilled through careers education and wider social and cultural understandings of self-mastery. As a result, Rachel* dropped out of university, and spent several years working in short-term jobs in pubs, offices, and schools. Her recent self-diagnosis had helped her achieve composure and brought meaning to a post-school trajectory which had not met her prior expectations. Rachel* used the language of individuality, but unlike previous interviewees such as Alison who used language of individuality to place responsibility on themselves for not living up to expectations as a teenager, her individuality explained that her inability to live up to expectations was beyond her control.

Expectations of fulfilling career paths after university which were held by middle-class girls contrasted with working-class girls who had not pursued higher or further

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[153] Interview with Rachel*, 12th January 2019.

education, who were more likely to be uncertain about their futures.[154] Walkerdine, Lucey, and Melody argue that middle-class girls who aimed to take up places in arts degrees, like Rachel*, regarded their futures as 'open', and whilst they did not have a firm idea of what their future profession would be, they expected to find 'interesting' and 'fulfilling' work.[155] These vague expectations of university-bound girls can be connected to the nature of careers education and guidance. Within the records of the Careers Education and Guidance Working Party from the early 1980s, university education was rarely discussed, suggesting that as these students would be deferring their entry to the labour market, attention was most effectively spent on those leaving school and entering the labour market much sooner at age sixteen or eighteen.[156] University marked the terminus of school careers counsellors' responsibility to pupils.

Girls' grammar schools which had survived comprehensivisation continued to promote ideas of female empowerment through education into the 1990s. The language of individuality and self-knowledge were also used to detangle the influence of parents over their daughters' subject and career choices in some schools. For instance Emma* attended a girls' grammar school in Reading from the mid-1990s to the early 2000s. In her memory, part of the schools' approach to pupils' option choices for G.C.S.E.s, A-levels, and university was to undermine parental assumptions about what was most suitable for the job market:

> There was an assembly about choosing options for the parents, and I remember the headteacher saying, like quite emphatically, that, you know, they should, we should be allowed to pick what we wanted to do and what we were good at, and you know, our

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[154] Walkerdine, Lucey, and Melody, *Growing Up Girl,* 80.
[155] Ibid, 80.
[156] Minutes of meeting (dated 8th September 1983), of Careers Education and Guidance Working Party, ILEA/PS/CS/01/5, Post Schools Department: Careers Service Branch, LMA.

parents shouldn't force us to do things they thought were more employable, or for university or whatever, because it just wouldn't work.[157]

Emma's* memories of this assembly suggest that her school actively pushed against the idea that subject choices should be immediately applicable to a job, and instead reinforced the middle-class notions identified by Walkerdine, Lucey, and Melody that a university education could lead to an open array of potential professions for girls, and be fulfilling in itself. There may also have been a subject bias to this; ideas about what subjects did and did not offer employable skills. Aretha encountered this at her London comprehensive in the early 1990s. she recalled the careers guidance given by a teacher when she expressed an interest in pursuing Art:

> ...all they could think of was, you either become an artist, which will lead you into a world of poverty, and disappointment, or you become and art teacher, which is pretty much the same thing (laughs).[158]

Teachers then trod a fine line between guarding their pupils' economic futures and encouraging their individuality and self-fulfilment. The teachers in Emma's* school possibly aimed to stop parents having a similar influence over their daughters' choices. Her memories show the continued connection within grammar schools of middle-class ideas of female empowerment to academic qualifications.

> I think they had high aspirations for us but I don't think they had a clear, sort of sense, of how, other than educating us, they could achieve this.

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[157] Interview with Emma*, 7th January 2019.
[158] Interview with Aretha George-Tooley, 7th May 2019, London.

I don't remember any guidance around choosing universities for example, or um

writing personal statements or anything like that. I think they just kind of…let us get

on with it.[159]

Emma's* recollections suggest that grammar schools – in which girls' had already proved

themselves academically by passing the entrance exam – expected their pupils to naturally

choose university.

As Emma's* memories showed, some teachers and schools relied on further and

higher education as the main route to self-improvement and success. Middle-class and

academically successful pupils were encouraged to go to university as a way of self-

improving and gaining professional success, and had benefitted the most from the

expansion of higher education.[160] There was a particularly narrow, middle-class feminist

aspect to this; Emma* also recalled being taught in her girls' grammar school that they

'owed it to' previous generations of women to be successful adults and subvert the

limitations of traditional womanhood; the only way this was possible, according to the

school, was through a university degree.[161] Yet by the 1990s, further and higher education

welcomed more students of all classes, genders, and ethnicities.[162] As both Eve Worth and

Mandler have noted, qualifications and indeed education 'simply became a more normal

part of most people's lives,' in particular after the introduction of the GCSE in 1988.[163] At a

local authority level, higher education admissions were important. After the publishing of

examination results was established in 1988, which aimed to promote competition between

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[159] Interview with Emma*, 7th January 2019.
[160] Walkerdine, Lucey, and Melody, *Growing Up Girl,* 16.
[161] Interview with Emma*, 7th January 2019.
[162] Mandler, *The Crisis of the Meritocracy,* 135.
[163] Ibid*,* 141.

schools, staying on rates and high A-level grades were also proof of schools' prowess, a benefit in the supposed 'marketplace' of education.[164]

Despite the move towards mass education which Mandler noted, provision for pupils to apply for and enter university was highly localised and dependent on teachers' perceptions of the student body. Katie, educated in the 1990s, recalled that her experience of applying to university was not the norm in her comprehensive girls' school in East London: most of her classmates left school for work. Whilst her school had a careers teacher and pupils had weekly careers lessons, university applications were rare even among her sixth form cohort. As a result, she received very little help when she did apply, even entering her choices incorrectly on her application form. Katie was the daughter of teachers, and one of few middle-class pupils at her school; she emphasised the exceptionality of her experiences of her school throughout her narrative, acknowledging that her friends had very different ideas and expectations of education. Katie was able to draw on her social and cultural capital – inherited knowledge and value in education from her middle-class, university educated parents – to access higher education. Her working-class peers, in contrast, had few such cultural resources, like Michelle*, possibly lacking the knowledge of university education and admissions needed to apply.

However, several interviewees from working-class homes returned to higher education as adults. Five interviewees gained degrees after several years out of education; three of those five – Nicola*, Michelle*, and Debbie* – were from working-class families. Along with Rachel* and Alison, these women had already had careers or jobs prior to their degree courses. Worth has highlighted the non-linear nature of women's employment and educational histories in the long 1970s. Further education expansion under the Labour

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[164] Although as Wagg notes, this imagined marketplace did not fundamentally alter local admissions in the ways Education Secretary Baker imagined it to. Stephen Wagg, '"Don't Try to Understand Them": Politics, Childhood and the New Education Market', in Jane Pilcher and Stephen Wagg (eds.), *Thatcher's Children? Politics, Childhood and Society in the 1980s and 1990s,* (London: Falmer Press, 1996), 8-28, 18-9.

governments of the 1960s permitted more women to gain post-secondary qualifications and re-enter the labour market once their children were less dependent.[165] Nicola*, Michelle*, and Debbie* were now living in more affluent socio-economic conditions to those they had grown up in; as Worth argues, returning to education was an important way for women to become socially mobile.[166] Most of these women positioned their degrees as part of their journeys towards personal fulfilment, emphasising their enjoyment of these degrees rather than any significant impact on their earning potential or social mobility. Michelle* did her degree after several years of working, giving up 'that London life, and all the money, and fancy car…to go back and live with [her] parents…and do a full three-year degree.' She chose a creative arts subject and described her decision-making process very differently to when she first left school at sixteen:

> So I literally got out the piece of paper and went, "what do I like? What do I not like? What am I good at, what am I not good at?"… I was able to go back and do my education and get a first in my degree when I was focused and ready to do it.[167]

Michelle's* decision-making process demonstrates the influence of self-knowledge as a paradigm for determining a career path, considering both her skills and personal enjoyment rather than what was an economically safe option. This process is in stark contrast to her decision-making process when she was a teenager, deciding to take on a vocational qualification and a 'safe' job in an office. The economic urgency she felt as a teenager was replaced some years later with an impetus to find a personally fulfilling career which aligned with her sense of self. Mandler has identified an increase in confidence in education

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[165] Eve Worth, 'Women, Education and Social Mobility in Britain during the Long 1970s', *Cultural and Social History*, 16:1 (2019), 67–83.

[166] Worth, 'Women, Education and Social Mobility', 78-9. Worth's article focused on women returning to work after education, however as Mandler has shown, qualifications became normalised and established as the key to school leavers success in the public's imagination.

[167] Interview with Michelle*, 14th May 2019.

from the 1990s.[168] For Nicola*, Debbie*, and Michelle*, who did degrees in the 1990s and 2000s, their schooling in the 1970s and 1980s had not led to sustained economic or occupational gains. They returned to education when their personal circumstances allowed; their economic position then permitted a greater investment in their project of self-improvement than when they left school, further demonstrating the importance of class and economic stability for determining educational opportunities for girls.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that discourses of individuality, self-improvement or development, and resilience were perpetuated in careers education, and formed important parts of girls' subjectivities in their youth and as adults. 'Student-centred' careers guidance aimed to facilitate a greater connection between work and the individual. These discourses were also harnessed to fulfil an equalities agenda in education. However, the experiences of girls of a range of socio-economic backgrounds show that the effects of such discourses shaped girls' gendered and classed subjectivities in different ways. Girls who did well at school and were from middle-class families saw themselves as agentic, overcoming the boundaries of traditional femininity to achieve academic and professional success through their own merit and efforts, despite their relative privilege. They constructed their selfhoods through this success, and their jobs formed an important part of their identities. In contrast, for pupils marginalised in education, their identities were formed not through their specific job, but as a result of their own efforts outside of the educational structures which had failed them. For working-class girls who did not achieve high grades at school, presenting themselves as self-made was crucial in constructing a sense of agency over their lives. Despite clear differences in terms of class, race, and academic achievement, the need to

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[168] Mandler, *The Crisis of Meritocracy,* 140-1.

construct oneself as an autonomous, self-determining being, unconfined by traditional

scripts of womanhood, was an important development in girls' subjectivities in the late-

twentieth century Britain.

Chapter 3: 'Get a man and share his bed/That's what all my peer-group said': formal and informal sex education[1]

Sex education was a politically divisive issue during the late twentieth century. On one side, public health bodies, charities, and progressive LEAs and teachers advocated for 'clean, healthy scientific knowledge' to tackle misinformation, as Lesley Hall has argued.[2] On the other, the powerful 'family values' lobby assumed sexual knowledge would corrupt children's 'innate' innocence.[3] Whilst this political battle raged on, teenage girls got on with acquiring sexual knowledge and constructing their adolescent identities. Sarah Hook's poem, from the perspective of a 'brain-washed' adolescent girl, suggests that girls reinforced ideas of sexuality amongst themselves. This chapter shows that discourses of individuality and choice became central aspects in forming girls' sexual subjectivities. From the 1970s, public health bodies such as the Family Planning Association (FPA) constructed a framework of 'acceptable' teenage sexuality, through which teenagers could legitimise their sexual activity by meeting certain prerequisites. These prerequisites included: factual knowledge of sexual biology; self-knowledge of one's own values; physical and emotional maturity; and communication skills. This framework was taken up by some schools, anti-sexist educators, and in girls' media. Some girls used this framework to present themselves as sexually agentic, and therefore construct their identities as modern liberated young women. I will be using the term sexually agentic or sexual agent – a term used by Hannah J.

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[1] Sarah Hook, 'TEENAGE SEXISM', *Shocking Pink,* Issue 1, 1981, BL.
[2] Lesley Hall, 'In Ignorance and in Knowledge: Reflections on the History of Sex Education in Britain', in Lutz Sauerteig and Roger Davidson (eds.), *Shaping Sexual Knowledge: A Cultural History of Sex Education in Twentieth Century Europe*, (London: Routledge, 2008), 19–36.
[3] Hannah J Elizabeth, 'Love Carefully and Without "Over-Bearing Fears": The Persuasive Power of Authenticity in Late 1980s British AIDS Education Material for Adolescents', *Social History of Medicine*, (published online, 2020).

Elizabeth in their work on public health and adolescents – to refer to these ways in which girls constructed themselves as self-determining beings, following their own desires.[4]

This chapter first examines the importance of puberty and sexual maturity for girls. Silences from school and parents around girls' changing bodies, along with shifts in adolescent gender relations, reinforced girls' need for discretion and self-management of their bodies, and informed pupils' understandings of their own physical and psychological maturity. Secondly, this chapter examines the cultural framework of acceptable teenage sexual agency, which was established by public health discourses, in girls' magazines, and in some progressive education circles. Progressive sex educators and magazine columnists promoted the idea that girls could be sexually agentic and have choice over their bodies, but only if they had sufficient factual and self-knowledge, were emotionally and physically mature, and could communicate their desires to a partner. From the late 1980s, girls prioritised these aspects of sex education, and used their mastery of these skills to position their sexual behaviour as agentic.

Finally, this chapter will show that girls' friendships were crucial in shaping their sexual identities. Girls' comparisons with their peers reinforced the model of female empowerment which has been discussed in Chapters One and Two; 'cool' or 'promiscuous' girls were seen by interviewees as lacking the knowledge or self-management to be able to take advantage of educational opportunities. Carol Dyhouse connected girls' educational success to the increased availability of contraception in the post-war period; it was 'easier to focus the mind on education when you were in control of your own body.'[5] Yet this is too simplistic; sex education and contraceptive control could be used to distinguish between the girls who were models of female empowerment and exercised reproductive control, and

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[4] Elizabeth, 'Love Carefully and Without "Over-Bearing Fears"', 8.
[5] Carol Dyhouse, *Girl Trouble: Panic and Progress in the History of Young Women*, (London: Zed Books, 2013), 205.

those who were responsible for their own failure to live up to new expectations, such as girls who had children at a young age. By examining sex education thematically, this chapter will reveal the continuities and subtle shifts from the 1970s to the early 2000s which shaped girls' sexualities and identities. I argue that a cultural shift occurred from the late 1980s as a result of public health agendas, limited changes in school sex education, and wider shifts in attitudes towards sex, which allowed girls some limited scope to construct their selfhoods as sexually agentic.

Growing up: puberty, self-management, and sexual maturity

Despite legislative changes in the late 1980s, the story of school sex education is predominantly one of continuity for the majority of pupils between 1970 and the late 1990s. No formal curricular framework for sex education existed in the late twentieth century; local education authorities were responsible for curriculum guidance, meaning the provision of sex education was patchy across the country and even locally.[6] Rachel Thomson and Lesley Hall argue that there were some small-scale efforts to adapt school sex education in line with recommendations from progressive public health bodies in the 1970s and 1980s.[7] Such projects – sometimes initiated by anti-sexist teachers – exploited the devolution of curricular decisions to schools and teachers, but were limited to individual schools or teachers and were never widespread. From the late 1980s, classroom practice was even more restricted. Government Circular 11/87 placed restrictions on discussions of homosexuality in schools in 1986 and warned teachers that 'giving an individual pupil advice [on contraception] without parental knowledge or consent would be an

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[6] Lesley A. Hall, 'Birds, Bees and General Embarrassment: Sex Education in Britain, from Social Purity to Section 28.', in Richard Aldrich (ed.), *Public Or Private Education?: Lessons from History*, (Psychology Press, 2004), 93–112, 103-4; Rachel Thomson, 'Moral Rhetoric and Public Health Pragmatism: The Recent Politics of Sex Education', *Feminist Review*, 48, 1994, 40–60, 44.

[7] Lesley A. Hall 'Birds, Bees and General Embarrassment', 107; Rachel Thomson, 'Moral Rhetoric and Public Health Pragmatism', 44-5.

inappropriate exercise of a teacher's professional responsibilities.'[8] This overt threat to teachers' professional standing was reinforced by Section 28 of the Local Government Act 1988, which forbid the 'promotion' of 'homosexuality as a pretended family relationship,' further restricting the topics and guidance teachers could legally offer their pupils.[9] In 1986, parents' right to withdraw their children from sex education was legalised, whilst contraception, sexually transmitted infections, and HIV/AIDS were relegated to the non-statutory curriculum, meaning the only compulsory sex education came with the inclusion of reproduction in the science curriculum.[10]

For much of the period between 1970 and 2000 then, pupils were likely to receive a sex education which emphasised the importance of marriage and focused on the biological facts of reproduction and adolescent development. Given the devolved nature of school curricula, it is challenging to connect national and local policy with the approaches of individual schools and teachers. I only found a handful of sex education policy files in the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA), Berkshire County Council (BCC) and Hackney Borough Council (HBC) records.[11] Therefore, this chapter turns to additional sources of evidence from beyond school – girls' magazines and FPA records – to compliment the few educational sources which do remain. It is also important to note that the absence of records does not mean that teachers did not discuss matters such as homosexuality and contraception at all. As Elizabeth notes, whilst Section 28 'might have made teachers careful

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[8] Jane Pilcher, 'Gillick and After: Children and Sex in the 1980s and 1990s', in Jane Pilcher and Stephen Wagg (eds.), *Thatcher's Children? Politics, Childhood and Society in the 1980s and 1990s* (London: Falmer Press, 1996), 78–94, 91.

[9] Susan Reinhold, 'Through the Parliamentary Looking Glass: "Real" and "Pretend" Families in Contemporary British Politics', *Feminist Review*, 48:1, 1994, 61–79.

[10] Hannah J Elizabeth, '"Private Things Affect Other People": Grange Hill's Critique of British Sex Education Policy in the Age of AIDS', *Twentieth Century British History*, (published online, 2020), 3; Jane Pilcher, 'School Sex Education: Policy and Practice in England 1870 to 2000', *Sex Education,* 5:2, (2005), 153-70, 165.

[11] Some examples include: Sandra Jowett, *Sex Education in Berkshire Secondary Schools,* (National Foundation for Educational Research, 1995); 'Policy Statement', Appendix 1 of Report of the Director of Education, Minutes of the Education Committee, 8th December 1992, in 'Dec-April 92-3', LBH/K8, CLR James; and Minutes of the Education Committee, 29th October 1974, in '1973 Jan-1974 Dec', ILEA/CL/MIN/01/005, and 20th January 1976, in '1975 Jan-1976 Dec', ILEA/CL/MIN/01/006, LMA.

about what they'd *admit* to teaching[...] the availability of limited funding for anti-stigma AIDS education allowed some teachers to circumvent sex education policy that they found distasteful or unworkable.'[12] It is therefore likely that sex education not only varied school to school, but sometimes even teacher to teacher.

In her 1983 book *The Ostrich Position,* sex education specialist Carol Lee recounted her experience in creating a film on menstruation which would be shown in schools to eleven- to fourteen-year-old girls. Lee had faced censorship of terminology such as 'vagina' in her work, and argued that language was crucial in sex and health education.[13] As Lee demonstrated, despite menstruation being an important aspect of health education in schools and, the ways it was taught, the language used meant that education about puberty and periods often left girls confused. Educating young adolescents about puberty and menstruation was not standardised; it was sometimes taught within health education, sometimes in science along with reproduction processes, and occasionally as a separate subject. Nicola* for instance did not recall learning about puberty, but guessed that she 'would've learnt the biology of it' only.[14] Sometimes it was left to a school nurse or outside experts such as commercial producers of sanitary products, for example Tampax.[15] Sometimes educators such as Lee were able to intervene, but often it was left to teachers to prepare pupils for puberty.

Hall has identified three big questions always found within sex education discourse: who tells children about sex, when do they tell them, and what exactly do they tell them?[16] The 'who' featured in much of the sex education discourse of the late twentieth century.

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[12] Hannah J. Elizabeth, 'Getting around the rules of sex education', [web blog], *Wellcome Collection Stories*, 7th June 2018, https://wellcomecollection.org/articles/WxZnZyQAAPoF1PS8, (accessed 20th June 2021).

[13] Carol Lee, *The ostrich position: sex, schooling and mystification,* (2nd edition, London: Unwin Paperbacks, 1986), 3.

[14] Interview with Nicola*, 3rd May 2019.

[15] Jane Pilcher, 'School Sex Education', 163.

[16] Hall, 'Birds, Bees, and General Embarrassment', 99.

Angela Davis shows that in the mid twentieth century, psychologists and midwives largely believed that girls learnt about their bodies and mothering from watching their own mothers; however, as mothers often did not tell their daughters about sex and childbirth, this silence had traumatic and distressing effects on women's later experiences of both.[17] Whilst the children of the sixties encountered less rigid barriers in talking to their parents about sex compared to previous generations, parental silence was still a widespread problem into the 1990s.[18] In the FPA guide *School Sex Education* in 1991, sex educator Doreen Massey cited quantitative research by scholar John Balding to demonstrate the gap between the idealism and realities of parental sex education:

> John Balding's questionnaire on sex education involving 18,000 11-16 year olds showed that most young people thought that their main source of information about sex should be their parents, followed by teachers. But in reality, especially amongst boys, friends were the major source of information, with teachers coming third after parents. The figures indicate that young people often rely on information from friends which is perhaps inaccurate, rather than getting it from home or school.[19]

This extract reveals the anxiety among sex educators that parents were failing to inform their children about sexual matters, leading teenagers to seek out unreliable information elsewhere.[20] AnnMarie Wolpe argued in 1987 that this shift in responsibility was a partial recognition that parents could not always be relied upon to educate their children.[21] By the mid-1990s, polls also revealed that parents believed they should be responsible for educating their children about sex, yet *The Guardian* reported in 2000 that only one in six

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[17] Angela Davis, '"Oh No, Nothing, We Didn't Learn Anything": Sex Education and the Preparation of Girls for Motherhood, c.1930–1970', *History of Education*, 37:5 (2008), 661–77, 667.
[18] Hugh Cunningham, *The Invention of Childhood* (London, BBC Books, 2006), 216.
[19] Doreen Massey, *School Sex Education: Why, what and how,* (Family Planning Association, 2nd edition, 1991), 13.
[20] AnnMarie Wolpe, 'Sex in Schools: Back to the Future', *Feminist Review*, 27, (1987), 37.
[21] Ibid, 39.

parents admitted that they did not implement this with their own teenage children.[22] Teens surveyed in Berkshire in 1995 also expressed that embarrassment inhibited any useful conversations they might have had with their parents.[23] Parental silences around sex were therefore common throughout the late twentieth century, with teenagers left to find information out elsewhere.

Whether these statistics were also similar for discussions of puberty is unclear, but most interviewees remembered a lack of open communication with their parents around menstruation as well as sex. Sara* was encouraged by her mother in the early 1970s to keep the fact that she had begun menstruating a secret from her father. Sara* remembered that she gained information about puberty and menstruation from comics such as *Mandy* and *Debbie,* aimed at young teenage or pubescent girls:

> In fact that's where I got most of my advice and my, kind of, um, stuff about being a girl and periods and that, cos to be honest, my mum went, oh! Cos I had early periods, I was only about eleven, or ten maybe, um, and she just went, "oh here's a pad, don't tell your father, don't let him see them," that kind of thing.[24]

In this recollection, Sara's* mother was the one who maintained her husband's ignorance of his daughter's physical maturity, and reinforced a silence between Sara* and her father around the subject of periods. This silence potentially reinforced the idea that menstruation was a private knowledge, only knowable to other women, although Sara's* mother was also reluctant to talk to her, with Sara* instead relying on comics. Several other interviewees who grew up in the 1980s and into the early 1990s also learnt about 'growing up' from texts rather than conversations with their mothers. Dorota and Lucy* were both given a book by

[22] 'One in six parents shirk sex education', *The Guardian,* October 5th 2000, 12; Hall, 'Birds, Bees, and General Embarrassment', 106.
[23] Jowett, *Sex Education in Berkshire Secondary Schools,* 29.
[24] Interview with Sara*, 15th March 2019.

their mothers with no further discussion.[25] Dorota attributed her mother's silences around sex, puberty, and menstruation to a Catholic moral framework around sex and the body, despite her mother being quite young, not a 'fuddy-duddy':

> When we were growing up there was a great deal of guilt and shame and there were certain things you do not discuss, and you certainly don't discuss anything to do with um, your body, with s-, with anything to do with sex, nothing at all.[26]

Dorota's mother's silence contributed to her seeking out information elsewhere, from friends, friends' sisters, and magazines. These experiences set a precedent that for girls, managing their bodies was something private, that they needed to research and manage alone.

Dorota and another interviewee, Aretha, criticised their mothers for failing to give them this vital education. Aretha – educated approximately ten years after Dorota from the mid-1980s to early 1990s – connected this silence much more explicitly than Dorota to her own traumatic first experiences of puberty. Aretha's mother had endured a 'horrible' experience as a girl in Dominica, having not been told about menstruation, but 'despite that horribleness, and despite that experience, she chose not to tell [Aretha] anything.'[27] Aretha described her experience of early puberty as being quite traumatic, and recalled being 'really angry' that her mother had not communicated relevant information. Aretha assembled some basic information from a book belonging to her sister, and swapped information with a friend. The friend's mother told Aretha's mother about the exchange, who later explained that this exchange was the reason for her silence; she had thought that her daughter was already well versed in this information. Aretha's frustration with her mother conveys not only the silences and taboos around matters such as sex education and

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[25] Interview with Dorota Thomas, 12th February 2019, London; Interview with Lucy*, 17th May 2019.
[26] Interview with Dorota Thomas, 12th February, London.
[27] Interview with Aretha George-Tooley, 7th May 2019, London.

puberty, but also expectations of the mother's role. Both Dorota and Aretha believed that their mothers had a duty to tell them pertinent information and protect them from the shock they had experienced. Davis found that the reluctance of mothers in the 1960s to tell their daughters about reproductive matters might explain the openness of the daughters' generation for advice from external sources.[28] Girls' first experiences of the physical processes associated with impending adulthood set a precedent of silence and shame, which was compounded by a lack of information. Furthermore, by emphasising their naivety and responsibility of their mothers, both Dorota and Aretha emphasised their child-status, helpless and unknowing and reliant on their mothers. These recollections suggest that knowledge could be an empowering thing and help to assuage any emotional distress.

School-based lessons on puberty and sex were seen as a necessity by some girls to fill the gaps in knowledge left by reticent parents. Not all interviewees remembered learning about puberty or menstruation as a young teenager or even as a child in primary school, but most assumed that they would have been taught about puberty in primary school or in the first year of secondary school, something which was recommended in sex education guidance in the 1990s.[29] In the ILEA, sex education was taught across the curriculum, but was largely in the context of science, home economics and health; puberty was likely to be included either in science, health, or both.[30] A Health Advisory teacher and health inspectors added additional layers of oversight.[31] It is unclear if Berkshire had similar structures in place during the 1970s, but the experiences of girls attending

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[28] Davis, '"Oh No, Nothing, We Didn't Learn Anything"', 669.
[29] Jowett, *Sex Education in Berkshire Secondary Schools*; 'Policy Statement', Appendix 1 of Report of the Director of Education, Minutes of the Education Committee, 8th December 1992, in 'Dec-April 92-3', LBH/K8, CLR James; Interview with Nicola*, 3rd May 2019; Interview with Michelle*, 14th May 2019; and interview with Claire Slobodian, 24th May 2019, Reading.
[30] Minutes of the Education Committee of the Inner London Education Authority, 20th January 1976, in '1975 Jan-1976 Dec', ILEA/CL/MIN/01/006, LMA.
[31] Minutes of the Education Committee of the Inner London Education Authority, 29th October 1974, in '1973 Jan-1974 Dec', ILEA/CL/MIN/01/005, LMA.

Berkshire schools in this era and the findings of a 1995 survey of Berkshire schools suggest that school sex education was limited in many schools to biological facts.

With regard to puberty and menstruation, both Maxine and Sara*, who attended girls' grammar schools in Reading and London respectively in the 1970s, said that they were expected to handle this new aspect of their teenaged bodies themselves, with little to no support or sympathy at school for the pain and self-management involved:

> They was just weren't sympathetic to, towards that at all, it was all, "just go on and get on with it."[32] (Maxine)

> I don't remember anything from school…I think I started at home, and my mum gave me this thing and explained it, and that was it, and I just remember having to deal with it.[33] (Sara*)

The sentiments of 'get on with it' and 'having to deal with it' from Maxine and Sara* reflect the social silences around menstruation. In their recollections, it was expected that painful symptoms and the logistics of finding and changing sanitary products throughout the day were to be managed without drawing attention to themselves. Jill M. Wood argues that medicalising discourses around menstruation and menstruating bodies resulted in women's internalisation of 'the culture of concealment,' which Wood argues is a form of oppressive social control.[34] This self-surveillance, Wood argues, benefits women in that they transform their bodies to appear competent, clean, and sexually appealing, the opposite to patriarchal ideas of menstruation as disgusting or diseased.[35] Concealment also acted as a tool for female career advancement by deflecting attention from the hormonal female body, often

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[32] Interview with Maxine Settle, 11th December 2018, Reading.
[33] Interview with Sara*, 15th March 2019.
[34] Jill M. Wood, '(In)Visible Bleeding: The Menstrual Concealment Imperative', in Chris Bobel, Inga T. Winkler, Breanne Fahs, Katie Ann Hasson, Elizabeth Arveda Kissling, and Tomi-Ann Roberts (eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of Critical Menstruation Studies*, (Springer Nature, 2020), 319-320.
[35] Ibid, 328.

depicted in popular culture and in society as emotional and irrational.[36] Within the academic space of school, concealment of menstruation could be a way for girls to conform to expectations of gendered behaviour – cleanliness and discretion – whilst also avoiding being identified as irrational.

The ways in which schools taught puberty also reinforced the need for girls' discretion. Splitting up girls and boys in mixed schools for lessons on sex-specific topics was a method which was not always unanimously agreed upon. The dynamics of mixed-sex classrooms were highly debated, and discussions of sex and puberty could be delicate minefields to navigate. Debbie's* experience in a mixed-secondary modern school in 1980s Reading highlighted the issues around privacy which came to a head when splitting up the class:

> We had a lesson on periods, and it was like, "all of the girls are going to come into this room now, but it's all a big secret, it's just for the girls! I don't want any of you talking to the boys about this afterwards"… We went straight out and the boys went, "talking about MENSTRUATION are you?" I just remember feeling like really embarrassed, like, "oh they know, someone's broken the code and told them."[37]

In Debbie's* memory, the framing of education about periods by teachers, and the reaction of boys on hearing what the topic was, reinforced the secrecy of menstruation as a 'female' issue, to be kept secret from the opposite sex. Claire also remembered being split by gender, with the girls being taught about periods and given a pack of sanitary products, in her primary school in the 1990s.[38] In Debbie's* case, trying to split up girls and boys reinforced ideas of female bodily functions as a taboo subject, only for girls, but also one that boys

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[36] See for example: Lauren Rosewarne, *Periods in Pop Culture: Menstruation in Film and Television* (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2012).
[37] Interview with Debbie*, 10th June 2019.
[38] Interview with Claire Slobodian, 24th May 2019, Reading.

could invade and make visible. However, as an adult, Debbie* spoke quite freely about menstruation, as did most interviewees, despite having received relatively little education about puberty, menstruation, or sex; it is likely that our shared gendered experience facilitated this openness.[39] Whilst most interviewees used the words 'period' or 'menstruation', some were more reluctant than others to talk at length about their experiences. Ali's interview showed the most hesitancy:

> I had already started so, I think again, it was very much, um, going through what it is, and, you know, what you use and, I think, yeah, just trying to make sure that everybody understood.[40]

Ali's use of filler words – such as 'um' and 'you know' – suggest that articulating this experience was not necessarily a comfortable thing for her to do. Not all interviewees took ideas of privacy which were ingrained in their childhoods into their adulthoods, and many reflected on the increasingly open nature of conversation about such topics in the twenty-first century, some drawing comparisons with their own children's experiences.[41]

The issue of whether single or mixed-sex schooling was more beneficial to girls was hotly debated throughout the 1970s and 1980s. The ILEA stood by the mixed comprehensive ideal, and refuted the idea that girls benefitted from girls-only settings.[42] A 1985 report from the ILEA's Women's Caucus of members concluded that whilst single-sex schools could 'offer a more positive framework for education for girls than mixed schools', the ILEA's policy of anti-sexist education should be pursued across all schools to ensure

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[39] Interview with Debbie*, 10th June 2019; interview with Nicola*, 3rd May 2019; and interview with Sara*, 15th March 2019.
[40] Interview with Ali Payne, 21st January 2019, Reading.
[41] For example: Interview with Nicola*, 3rd May 2019; Interview with Lucy*, 17th May 2019.
[42] Rosemary Deem, 'Introduction: Co-education reconsidered – reviving the debate', in Rosemary Deem (ed.), *Co-education reconsidered*, (Open University Press, 1984), xv.

girls in mixed schools were offered 'a fair deal.'[43] The co-education issue was a particularly

important bone of contention within the ILEA feminist project. Anti-sexist educators of a

range of subjects had experimented with mixed and single groupings, and some argued that

there was a 'case for single-sex schools.'[44] For example, Sheila Riddell's 1989 study of

classroom dynamics revealed that cultures of masculinity in a school where boys engaged in

the sexual harassment of female teachers and pupils resulted in the reproduction of male

dominance.[45] The antics of boys were also recalled by some interviewees, and as in

Debbie's* recollections, fed into the stigmatisation of menstruation.[46] In the sex education

literature, there does not appear to be much discussion about whether mixed or separate

groups would be most beneficial to pupils, but by the 1990s, it seems that some pupils

expected to learn about the development and traits of both sexes. The 1995 study of

Berkshire secondary schools reported that the pupils interviewed were strongly committed

to mixed-sex groups for sex education, but, crucially, some girls wanted to discuss the

'intimate' details of menstruation in a girls-only grouping.[47]

A rare example of girls' using taboos around menstruation for their own benefit

appears in Shane Blackman's 1998 study of 'New Wave Girls', a group of working- and

lower-middle-class girls who resisted masculine control in their school through their dress

and behaviour.[48] Blackman reported an incident when the girls were being harassed and

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[43] Report of the Equal Opportunities Sub-Committee, *Report of the Working Party on Single-sex and Co-education,* (dated 23rd October 1985), in Minutes of the Education Committee, 10th December 1985, in 'Minutes, 1985 Jan-1986 Mar', ILEA/CL/MIN/01/011, LMA.

[44] See: Elizabeth Sarah, Marion Scott and Dale Spender, 'The education of feminists: the case for Single-Sex Schools', in Dale Spencer and Elizabeth Sarah (eds.), *Learning to Lose: Sexism and Education,* (The Women's Press, 1980), 55-66; and Mel Kathchild, 'Mixed Schools = Equal Opportunities?', in *CLIO: History and Social Sciences Teachers' Centre REVIEW,* (Equal Opportunities – Gender Issue), 4:3, (Autumn 1984), 36-7.

[45] Sheila Riddell, 'Pupils, Resistance and Gender Codes: A Study of Classroom Encounters.', in Christine Skelton and Becky Francis (eds.), *A Feminist Critique of Education: 15 Years of Gender Development*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005), 11-24, 19-22.

[46] Interview with Aretha George-Tooley, 15th May 2019, London; Interview with Debbie*, 10th June 2019.

[47] Jowett, *Sex Education in Berkshire Secondary Schools,* 28.

[48] Shane Blackman, ''Poxy Cupid': an ethnographic and feminist account of a resistant female youth culture – the New Wave Girls', in Tracy Skelton and Gill Valentine (eds.), *Cool Places: Geographies of Youth Cultures,* (London: Routledge, 1998), 207-228.

verbally abused by boys; in response, the girls waved tampons in the boys' faces, scaring them away and disrupting their abuse.[49] Blackman's interpretation was that these girls used their bodies in resistant ways by referencing their female physicality in this way. But such an incident also highlights the power of taboos around menstruation; the tampons were unused, but the boys were so horrified by the sight of them that they relinquished their harassment of these girls. This example suggests that girls could use ideas of female respectability and taboo to interrupt everyday incidents of patriarchal domination. Girls had agency in this respect, as they sometimes wielded these ideas for their own benefit. However, for the most part, the evidence suggests that silences around periods largely resulted in emotional distress among girls. Hilary Edwards, writing for *Bitter-Sweet Dreams* in 1987, described a friend's reaction to starting her period:

> [..]when she started her periods, just couldn't face telling her mum. She cried about it and used loo paper – until we found out. We gave her our stuff but we never found out when she did tell her mum.[50]

Edwards's friend not only concealed her periods from her mum, but also her friends, who only 'found out' later. Edwards accounts for her friend's reluctance due to her family, which was not as 'open' as her own; the silencing and taboo around menstruation was enough to make even 'rock hard' girls crack. This source supports the memories of Aretha and Dorota, in that girls often imagined their mothers as crucial in fulfilling this role in educating them about puberty, yet were often left to work things out themselves or rely on friends.

The power dynamics between pupils and teachers were also likely to shape sex and health education encounters. Mara Gregory noted that teachers' policing of behaviour might

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49 Blackman, ''Poxy Cupid'', 215.
50 Hilary Edwards, in *Bitter-Sweet Dreams: Girls' and Young Women's Own Stories* (London: Virago, 1987), 3.

have prevented pupils from voicing their full reactions to sex education content.[51] Feminist scholar Stevi Jackson argued in 1981 that the way knowledge was transmitted within schools was crucial in understanding how girls came to know so little about their anatomy and sexuality.[52] She argued that teaching in schools relied on conventional definitions of expert knowledge and 'facts', external to both the teacher and pupil, which were differentiated from 'common sense' or everyday knowledge gained through experience. Such knowledge or 'facts' were presented in the form of academic subjects. Sex and sexuality were experiential, featuring in pupils' 'present and future everyday lives'; discussing this topic within the context of school lessons then meant that linking academic fact and real world experience was a fraught activity. Such a pedagogy, which would centre pupils' experience and expertise, would potentially undermine the authority and expertise of the teacher, who would also need to mask their own sexuality to uphold authority and protect their professional status.[53] Discussions of sex and menstruation which privileged the experiential could change the ways pupils saw their teachers and their morality.

Emma's* recollections of her girls' grammar school in 1990s Reading reflect this prioritisation of academic over experiential knowledge which featured in traditional, 'fact-based' sex education:

> I think they preferred optimally to think of us as minds only, I think they would rather have not dealt with or rather acknowledge, um, any kind of aspect of our kind of physical-ness, as like, developing women… I certainly can't remember any kind of

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[51] Mara Gregory, '"Beamed Directly to the Children": School Broadcasting and Sex Education in Britain in the 1960s and 1970s.', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 25 (2015), 187–214, 212.
[52] Stevi Jackson, 'Girls and Sexual Knowledge', in Dale Spender and Elizabeth Sarah, *Learning to Lose: Sexism and Education*, (London: The Women's Press, 1980), 131-145, 141.
[53] Ibid.

lesson about when you uh, yeah, any school input on issues relating to puberty, at all.[54]

It is likely Emma* had some education relating to puberty, but she was left as an adult with the impression that girls' bodies were a distraction to the academic imperative of her school. The female body was presented as something to overcome and that bodily functions were distractions from the more important mission of education. These experiences demonstrate that the ways in which girls learnt about their developing bodies reinforced their responsibilities to self-manage and maintain discretion about puberty and menstruation, and laid the foundations for girls' later understandings of their sexuality.

Girls' changing bodies were largely beyond their control. However, girls drew from cultural understandings of sexual maturity and adolescence to assert control over their bodies and identities. Pilcher shows that in modern Britain, physical sexual maturity – or puberty – did not signal the end of childhood and beginning of adulthood; the ways in which societies could 'interpret, understand, and attach significance to physiological aging' was of more importance in creating societal understandings of sexual maturity.[55] The broader cultural understandings of sexual maturity and the changing social relations this maturation prompted were therefore hugely important in distinguishing girls from their childhood selves, and constructing their gendered identities as they approached adulthood. In her research with American high school pupils in the early 2000s, Laura Fingerson argues that menstruation was important and salient in girls' social lives, in contrast to the routine and irrelevant place of menstruation in *adult* social life. In her analysis of Judy Blume's 1970 novel, *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret,* Fingerson notes that the titular character learns about menstruation from peers and adults, which ultimately shapes her own

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[54] Interview with Emma*, 7th February 2019.
[55] Jane Pilcher, *Age and Generation in Modern Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 60.

understandings of herself.[56] It is therefore worth exploring the ways in which girls'

understandings of sexual maturity were reinforced by their peers.

For girls who attended English secondary schools in the late twentieth century,

puberty was an important social experience for their construction as sexualised and

objectified female subjects. This was in part because their relationships with male peers and

adults shifted as they grew older. Aretha remembered the heartache of being rejected by a

male friend when she was still in primary school:

> My best friend was a boy, until it got to, until we got to that age when he said, "I can't
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> be your best friend anymore because you're a girl," and it broke my heart, like I was
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> gutted, so upset, because I, you know, this was my best mate and I trusted him, and,
>
> you know, it upset me, um, but then all the girls were like, "well he shouldn't have
>
> been your best mate anyway."[57]

Whilst Aretha was upset by the loss of a friend, her peers' reaction suggested that a

separation of the sexes was considered normal, and that relations between the sexes were

transformed once pupils reached a certain stage of maturation. This distinction in

relationships with boys was heightened at secondary school. Already more physically

developed than some of her peers, Aretha recalled feeling 'aware' and 'self-conscious' of her

body. Her self-consciousness was rooted in a sexual understanding of gender relations: 'I

didn't think they would ever be interested in me.' Aretha's experiences reflect a new

visibility that pubescent bodies acquired at secondary school, as boys would see her

differently to the way they had as primary school children. This anecdote also highlights the

limitations of girls' agency; here, Aretha's relationship with her male friend was determined

by socio-cultural influences and she had little agency to challenge this in the moment. This

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[56] Laura Fingerson, *Girls in Power: Gender, Body, and Menstruation in Adolescence* (Ithaca: State University of New York Press, 2006), 2-3.
[57] Interview with Aretha George-Tooley, 7th May 2019, London.

social separation of the sexes was also remarked upon by one teenager, Lisa, in *Girls Are Powerful* in 1982*.* Lisa remarked that whilst she was younger, school and home seemed 'all-important,' as a teenager, relationships with boys became the 'emphasis of [her] life':

> I think that most boys and girls are conscious from a very early age of a feeling of separateness between the sexes. Perhaps this feeling has become less strong now, but I still feel that we're programmed in our relationships with boys – we can't talk to them as if they were simply other human beings. You tend to do and say what you think you are supposed to be doing or saying.[58]

Like Aretha, Lisa noticed a distinct change in gendered relationships; as adolescents, communication between girls and boys was stilted by ideas about what male-female relationships should look like. For Lisa, adolescence marked a transition in her friendships, much like Aretha recalled.

Claire – educated from the mid-1990s onwards – also remembered the realisation that her body would be understood differently at secondary school compared to primary school. This realisation came when she wore a short skirt on a non-uniform day early in her secondary school career:

> I just didn't feel very comfortable with it, and I remember, um, I think that's probably like the first time I remember, like boys, paying attention to my body, in like a (pause) sexual way, I guess, although we were all eleven, but, um, yeah, I just remember then feeling, 'oh this is different, this isn't just like school, you can be yourself and run around and do what you want'… Yeah, there was sort of, an older, like older pupils as well, then paying attention to what younger girls were wearing,

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[58] Lisa, in Susan Hemmings (ed.), *Girls Are Powerful: Young Women's Writing from Spare Rib,* (London: Sheba Feminist Publishers, 1982), 121.

and I, yeah, just remember then, "oh this is about more than just being smart and getting through school."[59]

Claire's reluctance to use the word 'sexual' to describe this new dynamic between eleven-year-olds reflects the unease adults often feel about acknowledging young sexuality. Her recollections of that non-uniform day were of being visible, that her body was noticed by boys in ways that made her feel 'awkward.' These experiences of the realisation of girls in their young adolescent years that their bodies held meaning beyond their control, affecting gendered social relations within school. This example again illustrates the limitations on girls' agency as Claire lacked the power to be able to challenge or subvert the sexualisation of her body by boys; no matter what she wore, she was likely to garner attention in unwanted ways. This realisation was an important moment for her understanding of gendered power dynamics.

A poem written by an ILEA pupil in the early 1980s, Jennifer Mitchell, further reflects the ways in which girls understood themselves to be objectified by boys. In *The Backslappers,* Mitchell described a group of boys in the school toilets, smoking and sharing 'tales of girls succumbing.'[60] The sexual encounter described is possibly not consensual, and definitely presented as an awful experience for the girl; she is described as drunk, with 'eyes bulging' and with 'after-fumble tears' as she 'ran' away afterwards, vomiting beer 'behind someone's fence like the/words he told them.' The boys are presented as callous, as they 'simply smile/ and count their belt loads/ of broken hymens, doubtless'. The setting of this poem in a boys' toilet reinforces the age of the adolescent characters, and reflects the understanding which many girls seem to have gained in adolescence that boys were no longer their childhood playmates, but could also be sexually threatening.

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[59] Interview with Claire Slobodian, 24th May 2019, Reading.
[60] Jennifer Mitchell, 'The Backslappers', in *City Lines,* (London: ILEA English Centre, 1982), 54.

Some girls also understood puberty to be a precursor to sexual activity. In her essay for *Bittersweet Dreams,* Danielle Homburg – aged around seventeen at the time of writing in the late 1980s – reflected on her maturation from a young pre-pubescent girl to 'neither a child nor a woman.'[61] Homburg felt left behind her more developed and romantically experienced friends:

> I strived for maturity in my childish demands for a bra (though I had no chest), and prayed daily to God to let me become a woman, however uncomfortable my friends said it was.[62]

Feeling abnormal or different to her friends was a recurrent theme in Homburg's essay. Whilst her friends experimented with boys, she waited for 'the outward signs of maturity to develop.' Magazines soothed her anxiety at feeling abnormal, and 'everything came in due course.' Homburg's reflections on her thirteen-year-old self, from her perspective as a twenty-one-year-old, reveal how some girls understood their physical, emotional, and psychological development. Homburg understood physical development and sexual maturity to be connected in a social sense, that she had to wait until her body had developed to experiment with boys. Furthermore, at thirteen, Danielle was still at the beginning stages of puberty, and socially was not expected to be sexually adventurous; however, the development and behaviour of her friends impacted on her construction of herself as being 'behind'. Despite her chronological age and her own desires, she felt that her physical development was an obstacle in allowing her to be sexually experimental in a socially acceptable way.

Girls were not just objectified by their male peers. Nearly all interviewees had an anecdote about a 'pervy' teacher. Girls warned each other at Sara's* school in 1970s

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[61] Danielle, in *Bitter-sweet Dreams,* 97.
[62] Ibid, 95.

London: "'Don't get too close cos otherwise he'll put his hand up your skirt.'"[63] Some twenty-five years later, at Katie's girls' school in London, one male teacher was the subject of rumours that he had engaged in sexual conduct with a girl in a classroom cupboard.[64] Such rumours that male staff members were lecherous – along with incidents of staff-pupil sexual encounters that were known among the student body – were often glossed over as a sign of the times by interviewees talking in 2018 and 2019. Whilst the age of consent was sixteen, sexual relations between teaching staff and pupils over sixteen were only made a criminal offence with the Sexual Offences (Amendment) Act 2000 (although teachers engaging in such activities could be disciplined by LEAs).[65] Some interviewees acknowledged that such rumours were unfounded and in the case of female physical education teachers, likely based on homophobic stereotypes of gay and lesbian adults as predatory figures. Others asserted the validity of rumours about male teachers' so-called 'relationships' with female pupils. Determining whether these rumoured encounters were true or not is not the place of this thesis. What is clear is that the commonality of such rumours among school pupils demonstrates girls' understanding that as adolescents, they could be sexualised and objectified by adults. Crucially, this awareness was at odds with the sex education they received which reinforced their status as children and actively sought to desexualise them.

Girls' experiences of and education about puberty laid important foundations in establishing their sexual subjectivities. Girls were taught to be discrete and to self-manage their newly adult bodies, yet were also aware that they were sexualised by peers and adults. Using the language and ideas of natural physical development and maturity meant that some girls could frame their own entry into the world of sex and love as a natural part of

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[63] Interview with Sara*, 15th March 2019.
[64] Interview with Katie Beswick, 3rd January 2019, Exeter.
[65] *Sex and Relationship Education Guidance,* (Department for Education and Employment, 2000); Sexual Offences (Amendment) Act, 2000.

adolescence. By drawing on concepts of competence and emotional maturity from sex education and public discourse over teen sex, girls attempted to assert control over their sexualisation by presenting themselves as emotionally and psychologically mature sexual agents.

The making of adolescent sexual agency: feminism, magazines, and schools

A model of acceptable teenage sexuality developed, as discourses from public health bodies, girls' media, and in limited ways, school sex education converged in the mid 1980s and onwards. Predominantly emanating from progressive public health bodies such as the FPA, this model consisted of a series of pre-requisites which teenagers needed to meet before embarking on a sexual relationship. These prerequisites were: the acquisition of factual knowledge about sex and its risks; acquisition of self-knowledge, namely awareness of one's own values, desires, and maturity; and the mastery of skills such as communication and assertiveness. This model was in part borne out of the contradictory and situationally specific constructions of teenage sexual agency in the 1980s. As Elizabeth has shown, the Gillick Competency – the legal ability of doctors to determine if girls under sixteen were 'competent' enough to obtain birth control – was important in providing *some* credence to the idea that teenage girls could be 'quasi-adults,' albeit in limited ways.[66] Youthful sexual freedom was represented in television, film, books, and magazines from around the mid-1980s, through images of teens who were 'as sexy and as knowing as the celebrities.'[67] Yet teenage girls' sexuality was also supressed. As Elizabeth has stated, the classroom 'marked a space where children's agency was limited, where they had no right to confidentiality, and

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[66] Elizabeth, '"Private Things Affect Other People"', 3. Victoria Gillick brought a legal case to restrict doctors prescribing girls under the Age of Consent with birth control without parental consent, but was eventually defeated. The medical judgement of doctors of girls' competency for sexual activity was named the Gillick Competency.
[67] Patricia Holland, *Picturing Childhood: The Myth of the Child in Popular Imagery* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2004), 195.

teachers had no jurisdiction beyond the strict dictates of the National Curriculum or the power gifted to them by parents.'[68] Teenage sexual agency was, as Elizabeth argues, contextually and situationally constructed. But as this chapter shows, girls drew together ideas from the media, school, and public health to construct their own models of sexual agency. It is therefore important to look not only at school sex education resources, but also the informal spaces – such as media – in which ideas of teenage sexual agency were cultivated and encountered by girls.

Evidence from girls educated in the 1970s and 1980s demonstrates the ways in which girls' sexual agency was limited in school education. Nicola* drew comparison with her daughter's sex education in the 2000s to illustrate the gaps in her own sex education, in an ILEA girls' grammar school in the 1970s:

> It was very, um, biological, they didn't really talk about, I guess, from what I've heard from my daughter, you know, things that she, that they were discussing now about relationships and stuff like that…very sort of clinical with the diagrams and stuff like that, not about, so like reproductive system, rather than anything about relationships and stuff… It was definitely the physical act of childbearing as opposed to talking about… why you would want to be with someone and want a baby, and stuff like that (laughs).[69]

Nicola's* experience of reproductively focused sex education in science lessons was shared by most other interviewees. Her comparison with her daughter's experiences also suggests a shift in school sex education by the 2000s to include relationships; the inclusion of relationships in sex education will be explored further in this chapter.

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[68] Elizabeth, '"Private Things Affect Other People"', 3-4.
[69] Interview with Nicola*, 3rd May 2019.

Nicola's* recollections support evidence from the ILEA archives which shows that in the 1960s and 1970s, there was a mixed picture of sex education provision within London. The Authority recommended an approach to sex education which prioritised marriage and cautioned against casual sexual encounters.[70] However, they did condone teachers' use of some progressive sex education curricula. The ILEA collaborated with the FPA to create resources on contraception, and actively encouraged teachers to undertake training courses provided by the FPA by covering all expenses, although it is unclear how popular these courses were.[71] Sex education resources were subject to review by the ILEA, and several films were debated in the Education Committee minutes. The film *Growing Up* (1971) – produced by geneticist, sexologist, and abortion law reform campaigner Dr Martin Cole - had been met with criticism from both 'family values' and women's liberation groups, due to its reinforcement of stereotypical gender roles and explicit representations of sex and masturbation.[72] *Growing Up* was not banned by the ILEA, and its consideration for use in ILEA schools was defended in 1971 by Reverend Canon Harvey Hinds, chairman of the Schools Sub-Committee.[73] The BBC's *Merry-Go-Round* series (1970), and ITV's *Living and Growing* (1968) were also both mentioned as possible sources for use by teachers in ILEA Education Committee discussions around sex education provision, some six to eight years after their initial releases.[74] Both films focused on puberty, conception, and birth through anatomical diagrams, and in *Merry-Go-Round,* a brief but explicit film of a human birth; both also emphasised the importance of marriage.[75] This range of materials approved or under consideration demonstrates the mixed approach of the ILEA in the 1970s; sexually explicit

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[70] Jackson, 'Girls and Sexual Knowledge', 139.
[71] *Contraception: A Teacher's Guide,* (Inner London Education Authority, undated), in 'Published Advice for Teachers on the Use of Resources', ILEA/S/LR/01, LMA; Minutes of the Education Committee, 20th January 1976, 'Minutes, 1975 Jan-1976 Dec', ILEA/CL/MIN/01/006, LMA.
[72] Roger Lewin, 'Growing up too fast?', *New Scientist and Science Journal,* 50.750, 6th May 1971, 301.
[73] Minutes of the Education Committee of the Inner London Education Authority, 12th May 1971, 'Minutes, 1971 Feb-1972 Dec', ILEA/CL/MIN/01/004, LMA.
[74] Minutes of the Education Committee of the Inner London Education Authority, 20th January 1976, in 'Minutes, 1975 Jan-1976 Dec', ILEA/CL/MIN/01/006, LMA.
[75] Gregory, '"Beamed Directly to the Children"', 202-206.

and potentially controversial topics and visuals were not banned, but marriage was widely reinforced as the only morally acceptable context for sex. Even under supposedly progressive LEAs such as the ILEA, the devolved decision-making to teachers and schools meant that girls – such as Nicola* - were still left with basic biological understandings of sex from school.

These basic biological lessons were critiqued by a group of older teenage girls in *Girls Are Powerful* in 1982. These girls' accounts of school sex education echo those of Nicola's*, specifically that all aspects of sex education other than the biological were left unmentioned:

> Part of the reason I've felt powerless in the past is because sex education is so bad. It's all biological – there's very little about contraception, abortion is all hushed up, and no one ever mentions pleasure.

> You never see any proper diagrams of the genitals, and girls know so little about their bodies I didn't even know about the existence of the clitoris until about two years ago.[76]

These girls more explicitly named the topics that they thought would help them navigate sexual relationships, namely contraception, abortion, and girls' pleasure. The criticisms from these girls illustrate Elizabeth's point that school sex education offered little scope for girls to see themselves as sexually active or agentic.[77] Some feminist academics picked up these criticisms in the 1980s. AnnMarie Wolpe highlighted the normalisation of boys' teenaged sexuality as a developmental stage, in comparison to girls' adolescent sexuality, which was perceived as deviancy.[78] Stevi Jackson argued that sex education for girls focused

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[76] Anon girls, in *Girls Are Powerful,* 127-9.
[77] Elizabeth, '"Private Things Affect Other People"', 3-4.
[78] Wolpe, 'Sex in Schools', 45-6.

on their future sexuality – in the context of marriage – rather than acknowledging their teenage sexuality. As a result, Jackson argued, female pleasure was predominantly concealed and obscured.[79] Sex education in the 1970s and 1980s also perpetuated myths and stereotypes about lesbians and gay men, leading to negative understandings of both among the pupils surveyed by Jackson.[80] Another of the girls who were interviewed for *Girls Are Powerful* connected the lack of knowledge of girls' pleasure to her own experiences:

> After I'd had sex with boys I always felt used because I'd given them a lot of pleasure[...] he could always say things to me like, 'Faster', but if I'd come out and said things like that[...] well![81]

In the experiences of sexually active teenage girls, the limits of sex education reinforced female passivity and the prioritising of male pleasure. These girls wanted to be sexually agentic and explore their individual desires but felt hampered by the weight of the sexist expectations of boys.

Feminist approaches to sex education

In response to the limitations of school sex education, some feminist teachers – including those active in anti-sexist teaching – took advantage of the devolution of local powers to teachers to develop new curricula. Thomson argues that in some areas, including the ILEA, there was a move beyond the reproductive model to 'social or rights-based' interventions, which tackled sexual stereotyping and gender roles.[82] The pedagogical models of anti-sexism and longer-term trends in child-centred teaching could allow some teachers influenced by feminism to experiment with sex education. For example, the *Skills for Life*

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[79] Jackson, 'Girls and sexual knowledge', 143.
[80] Ibid, 144.
[81] Anon girls, in *Girls Are Powerful,* 128-9.
[82] Thomson, 'Moral Rhetoric and Public Health Pragmatism', 44.

course, which ran at an ILEA boys' comprehensive between 1980 and 1984, trialled a two-fold approach which encouraged boys to think about 'what [their] body does and how [they] feel about it; and relationships, what [their] feelings are in relation to other people.'[83] This course was devised and run by the one-time ILEA inspector for equal opportunities, Frances Magee, and ten other teachers; this highlights the connections between the ILEA's anti-sexist movement, and the reform of sex education. By exploring self-image and relationships, Magee and her colleagues aimed to help boys understand stereotypes of masculinity and femininity, and promote empathy, emotional literacy, and responsibility among boys, which they hoped would provide a strong foundation for future relationships.[84]

The ILEA's collaborations with the FPA also facilitated their radical work. The FPA had shifted their focus in the early 1970s from married women to the young and socially disadvantaged, and adapted to a new educational and advisory role.[85] Working alongside LEAs such as the ILEA became one strand of the FPA's activity. The ILEA promoted sex education which followed FPA advice from the mid-1970s onwards. Materials for FPA courses in the early 1980s on Personal Relationships and Sexuality show that such courses were aimed at increasing staff awareness of young peoples' needs, developing teachers' 'sensitivity and comfort' with the topic of sex, and at demonstrating participatory pedagogical methods.[86] For instance, the FPA's resource pack, *Danny's Big Night,* advised teachers or youth workers to use role play to practice conversations between intimate partners, and to create a 'values continuum' on which learners could place their own

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[83] Frances Magee, 'Working with boys at Hackney Downs Schools 1980-4', in Kate Myers, *Whatever happened to equal opportunities in schools? Gender equality initiatives in education,* (Open University Press, 2000), 156-165, 163-4.
[84] Ibid, 163-4.
[85] Katherine Jones, '"Men Too": Masculinities and Contraceptive Politics in Late Twentieth Century Britain', *Contemporary British History*, 34.1 (2020), 44–70, 47.
[86] 'Course in personal relationships and sexuality for professionals: Dates of 1981-82 London Courses', in 'FPA Education Unit materials 1978-1981', SA/FPA/C/D/5/1, Wellcome Collection.

opinions on behaviour such as 'girls carrying condoms.'[87] The film had been created as part

of the FPA's *Men Too* campaign in 1984, which Katherine Jones has examined in more depth.

Jones argues that this campaign aimed to engage young men to be responsible, caring, and

emotionally expressive; especially in how they communicated with intimate partners.[88]

Staff who wanted to engage with these new resources were supported by the Authority;

former ILEA teachers interviewed for this project commented on the ILEA's strength in

providing teachers with a wealth of training opportunities.[89] Young progressive teachers

found the ILEA an ideal environment for professional development. The collaboration

between the ILEA and the FPA demonstrates how the progressive sex education consensus

operated in practice; the provision of anti-sexist sex education was entirely dependent on

individual teachers working in individual schools.[90]

The joint FPA-ILEA resource *Contraception: a teacher's guide* offers a glimpse at

these attempts to create a more progressive sex education for girls. The guide was likely

published around 1975 or 1976, indicating the involvement of the FPA and ILEA earlier

than the advent of the 'feminist' ILEA years of the 1980s.[91] The resource aimed to help

young people understand sexual relationships 'without moralising.'[92] The guide was

recommended for use with fifteen- and sixteen-year-old girls, but could be adapted for

mixed or male groups. The guide presented a suggested sequence of lessons consisting of

six 'fields', covering conception, hormones, reasons for family planning, attitudes,

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[87] 'Danny's Big Night: Notes for Group Leaders', in 'FPA Education Unit materials 1984 – 1988', SA/FPA/C/D/5/3, Wellcome Collection.
[88] Jones, '"Men Too"', 61.
[89] Interview with Kate Moorse, 26th May 2019, London; interview with Katy Marshall, 31st October 2019, London; Interview with Sue Johne, 1st November 2019; and interview with Joy Walton, 15th August 2019, Suffolk.
[90] Thomson, 'Moral Rhetoric and Public Health Pragmatism', 44-5.
[91] The teacher's guide references recent statistics from 1974, and indicates that another publication was forthcoming in 1977, leading me to conclude it was published 1975 or 1976 in lieu of a visible publication or copyright date.
[92] *Contraception: A Teacher's Guide,* (Inner London Education Authority, undated), in 'Published Advice for Teachers on the Use of Resources', ILEA/S/LR/01, LMA.

contraceptive methods, and ways of seeking contraceptive advice, with corresponding films and slides. What is particularly striking about this guide was that 'individual beliefs and values' were scheduled as a specific session, in which the guide suggested exploring religious, social, gendered and personal attitudes towards contraception with pupils. This resource was a clear attempt to provide pupils with practical advice, whilst also reinforcing the importance of their individual beliefs and values, in line with child-centred pedagogies. The guide did not emphasise abstinence, and instead encouraged young people to make informed decisions about birth control and sex. Education, information, and a consideration of one's own beliefs and values were presented as things which would empower pupils to make decisions which suited them as individuals.

This emphasis on empowerment throughout education and information was a common thread in sex education and sexual health discourse. Since the early 1970s, the FPA's approach to sex education focused on 'individuality, choice, and personal responsibility.'[93] Sex was presented in FPA and ILEA resources as an individual choice; however, this choice could only be made after consideration of relevant information and introspection. Sexual maturity was therefore associated with a cohesive sense of self; teenagers needed to understand their values and desires before making decisions about sex. As Danielle R. Egan and Gail L. Hawkes have argued, the cultural creation of adolescence offered young people a way to gain 'conditional social recognition' by connecting maturity to 'the rhetoric of development.'[94] In other words, adolescence and the language of development offered teenagers a way to move between childhood and adulthood, gaining the privileges of the latter, and legitimising the acquisition of these privileges. Michel Foucault argued in *The History of Sexuality* that sexuality had become an

[93] James Hampshire and Jane Lewis, '"The Ravages of Permissiveness": Sex Education and the Permissive Society', *Twentieth Century British History*, 15:3 (2004), 290–312, 312.
[94] Danielle R. Egan, and Gail L. Hawkes, 'Imperiled and Perilous: Exploring the History of Childhood Sexuality', *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 21:4 (2008), 355–67, 361.

object of knowledge and the domain of experts since the 18th century. The classification and intellectualisation of sex, by identifying 'perversions' and heightening discourse around them, Foucault famously argued that these 'perversions' are proliferated even further.[95] Foucault does not distinguish between children and adolescents in his discussions of age, knowledge and sexuality, but contextually specific ideas of childhood and adolescence are crucial in understanding how teenagers thought about sex and sexual knowledge. School sex education and teenage-aimed media placed immense significance on the value of knowledge. Adults were the experts or gatekeepers of such knowledge. However, under this new framework, girls might be able to gain sufficient knowledge to move between childhood and adulthood. This framework – of factual and self-knowledge as vital precursors to sexual activity – was reflected in the cultural developments of the 1980s and 1990s, presenting teenagers with a paradigm through which they could legitimise their teenage sexual behaviour, and a way for adults to ensure that teenagers who were sexually active were not exploited.

Yet some within British feminism found it difficult to acknowledge that an agentic teenage sexual subject could even exist. Jane Pilcher and Fenella Cannell show that feminists defended the sexual autonomy of women during the Gillick case, but there is little sense in Pilcher and Cannell's analysis of how feminist activists squared these individual liberties with the legal status of under-sixteen-year-olds, and the politics of protection which surrounded questions about teenagers' sexual agency. Despite some local attempts at progressive sex education, informed by feminist pedagogies, sex education was rarely mentioned in the feminist education research consulted for this thesis.[96] Whilst feminism

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[95] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality. Vol. 1, An Introduction*, trans. by Robert Hurley (Allen Lane, 1979), i.

[96] For instance: Christine Griffin, *Typical Girls: Young Women from School to the Full-Time Job Market* (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985); Kate Myers (ed.), *Whatever Happened to Equal Opportunities in Schools?: Gender Equality Initiatives in Education*, (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2000); Sue Sharpe, *'Just like a Girl' : How Girls Learn to Be Women: From the Seventies to the Nineties*, 2nd edn (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1994); Spender and Sarah, *Learning to Lose*; Valerie Walkerdine, Helen Lucey,

sought to protect the fragility of reproductive rights throughout the 1970s and 1980s, some feminists struggled to imagine an empowered teenage sexual subject without relying on ideas of childhood innocence.

The protection of women and children from violence, abuse, and sexual exploitation was a major area of feminist activism.[97] Yet at the same time, the WLM struggled to sustain a participatory model of adolescence when it came to questions of sexuality, in part due to the attempts of the Paedophile Information Exchange (PIE) to align themselves with progressive bodies such as gay liberation groups, the British Medical Association (BMA), and the FPA in lobbying for the lowering of the age of consent.[98] In 1979, the International Year of the Child, Barbara Robb and Susan Hemmings penned an overview of children's rights in relation to feminism in *Spare Rib*. They posited that whilst the desire of feminist women 'to protect children from sexual, as well as economic, exploitation [had] its roots in generous impulses,' activists needed to exercise caution in how they imagined sexuality in relation to age:

> The so-called sexual liberation of the 1960's did little to liberate women's sexuality – it simply made us more available to male-defined needs. Extending this availability to children would clearly make them more vulnerable – not more liberated. Our experience as women[…] makes us wary about defining children's sexuality – but it cannot mean that children are in themselves less sexual than adults, or asexual, or do not have demands to make about their sexuality. Girls, in particular, are asking

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and June Melody, *Growing Up Girl: Psycho-Social Explorations of Class and Gender* (NYU Press, 2001); Gaby Weiner (ed.), *Just a Bunch of Girls: Feminist Approaches to Schooling*, (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1985).

[97] Dyhouse, *Girl Trouble,* 208.

[98] Mathew Thomson, *Lost Freedom: The Landscape of the Child and the British Post-War Settlement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 178; Lucy Robinson, *Gay Men and the Left in Post-War Britain: How the Personal Got Political,* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 129.

for more and better sex education – about contraception, abortion and different ways of expressing their sexuality.[99]

In this, Robb and Hemmings attempted to acknowledge the existence of childhood sexuality – especially of adolescent girls – whilst also reinforcing the vulnerability of children. At other times, more traditional notions of childhood innocence came through in *Spare Rib*. In a 1981 issue of *Spare Rib,* Angela Hamblin and Romi Bowen of the London Rape Crisis Centre offered a vehement opposition to proposed legal changes to the age of consent, giving a raw and explicit overview of patterns of abuse and exploitation common in child sexual abuse cases:

> We argue that a child does not have the power to say yes or no. Children do not have the knowledge or independence to make a decision about sex with an adult. They have been brought up to obey adults. They depend on adults for the resources to live.[100]

Using arguments about child dependency and adult authority to distinguish the power relationship between children and adults from that between men and women, Hamblin and Bowen articulated a clear position in which the legal boundary established by the age of consent was impermeable and morally steadfast, a contrast to Robb and Hemmings' earlier interpretation.

The age of consent was contested by the teenage girls interviewed for the same *Spare Rib* series as Hamblin and Bowen's article.[101] These girls were vehement that despite their limited sex education, they *could* be sexually agentic, but acknowledged that they had been subject to pressure from boys in the past. Their assertion that young women 'should

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[99] Barbara Ribb and Susan Hemmings, 'Childhood – a feminist focus on this year's fad', in *Spare Rib,* issue 81, (April 1979), 43-47, 46.
[100] Angela Hamblin and Romi Bowen, 'Sexual Abuse of Children', in *Spare Rib,* issue 106, (May 1981) 6-8, BL.
[101] Dianne Ceresa, 'Sex under sixteen', in *Spare Rib*, issue 108, (July 1981), 32-3, BL.

be able to make decisions based on knowledge, not only about heterosexual sex but also about relationships with other women' reflects the ideal of progressive sex education that knowledge could be empowering for teenagers.[102] Young women and teenagers' ideas of participatory childhood and teenage sexual agency were therefore important to women's liberation, but were in tension with some adult feminists' concerns about protecting girls from sexual exploitation. The campaign to lower the age of consent, which was debated within feminist circles, heightened and drew out more keenly the boundaries of adolescent sexual agency in some feminist thought. But some teenage girls used this debate to reject the assumption that they were solely victims of patriarchal power structures.[103]

These anxieties around girls' sexual victimhood were compounded by a developing child protection agenda in the 1980s. Child protection and sex education were distinct but related spheres. A key distinction between child protection and school sex education was that child or adolescent participation and agency was promoted within child protection contexts.[104] Jennifer Crane shows that child protection charities in the 1980s found ways of constructing children as 'experiential and emotional experts', centring 'authentic' child testimony and providing education to children in bodily autonomy, self-determination, and assertion.[105] Within the medical and sex education communities there was an acknowledgement that adolescents could have a degree of sexual agency. Elizabeth has argued that the Gillick Competency constructed the possibility of an agentic child, able to make competent decisions, albeit 'within the specific geography of the medical setting.'[106] Sex education materials for use outside of school, such as FPA materials, and even storylines

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[102] Ibid, 35.
[103] See Issues 106, 107, and 108 of *Spare Rib,* and Chapter 6 of Mathew Thomson, *Lost Freedom*.
[104] Annie Franklin and Bob Franklin, 'Growing Pains: The Developing Children's Rights Movement in the UK', in Jane Pilcher and Stephen Wagg (eds.), *Thatcher's Children? Politics, Childhood and Society in the 1980s and 1990s,* (London: Falmer Press, 1996), 95–114, 98.
[105] Jennifer Crane, *Child Protection in England, 1960–2000 - Expertise, Experience, and Emotion* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018) 92-6.
[106] Elizabeth, 'Love Carefully and Without "Over-Bearing Fears"', 8.

in popular children's television shows such as *Grange Hill*, showed young people and children making informed choices and taking an active role in their own sexual choices.[107] Yet within school sex education, there was little scope throughout the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s to construct the adolescent sexual subject as agentic. Thomson has effectively summarised the situation by the late 1980s with regard to children, sexuality, and child protection:

> Although children emerged as subjects with a firmer right to sexual protection, surrounded by increasingly extensive safeguards, this was a right that, judged by rates of under-age pregnancy and sexual disease and the high rate of sexual abuse of children on children, has proved very difficult to realize effectively and was arguable in some respects misdirected, not least because within an increasingly sexualised culture they were placed in the position of challenging protection in expressing sexuality.[108]

As Thomson's closing line above suggests, girls' expressions of this new youthful playful sexuality might have appeared to challenge the protection which ideas of natural childhood innocence offered them. In her examination of media portrayals of girlhood sexuality in the 1990s and early 2000s, Patricia Holland argues that the 'girl power' of the mid 1990s saw 'no contradiction between assertiveness and old-fashioned sexiness,' and that in teenage magazines, the 'confidence of childhood' had 'taken on board the sexual knowledge of the adult world and refused to be cowed by it.'[109] At a time when commentators and the media identified a 'sexualised culture' as a threat to girls, demonstrations of teenage sexuality were difficult to identify as either victimisation or as demonstrations of teenage sexual

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[107] A storyline about AIDS featured in *Grange Hill* is the focus of Elizabeth, '"Private Things Affect Other People"'.
[108] Thomson, *Lost Freedom,* 183.
[109] Holland, *Picturing Childhood*, 200.

agency, as constructed through the model of the empowered teenage girl.[110] This tension demonstrates the complications which emerge when exploring age and agency. Whilst girls' agency lay in the ways they constructed their identities, patriarchal and potentially damaging ideals – which worked against the model of the empowered teenage girl – could be incorporated into girls' identities, concealing the influence of patriarchal power dynamics. This furthermore highlights that in some cases, ideas of agency could be used to replicate and uphold patriarchal ideals.

Magazine agony aunts

Whilst for adult feminists, balancing ideas of child liberation and sexual protection was an issue which they were no longer living themselves, girls drew from discourses around them to mediate these tensions and present themselves as sexually agentic. Magazine advice columns were a particularly powerful site in which girls and adults negotiated and articulated an 'acceptable' adolescent sexuality. Whilst magazines existed beyond the boundaries of formal education, they were valuable sources of sexual knowledge in lieu of the gaps left by schooling. Furthermore, as Mary Jane Kehily shows, girls often used them in tandem with ideas drawn from school sex education; it is therefore crucial to factor in ideas presented in girls' magazines when discussing girls' sexual identities.[111]

The advice given in *Just Seventeen, Sugar,* and *Mizz* contributed to the production of an acceptable model of teenage sexual agency in the 1980s and 1990s. Magazines were a 'dominant arm' of Britain's youth-oriented media in the late twentieth century, providing information about sex and girls' bodies which went beyond the biological education given in school, demystifying adolescent sex whilst also providing information on pleasure and

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[110] Dyhouse, *Girl Trouble,* 223-5.
[111] Mary Jane Kehily, 'More Sugar?: Teenage Magazines, Gender Displays and Sexual Learning', *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 2:1 (1999), 65–89.

relationships.[112] This was no coincidence; there were vital connections between magazine agony aunts and professional sexual health services. Elizabeth has shown that 'sex sold magazines', and this commercial appeal offered opportunities for collaboration between the FPA, Brook, and magazines; magazines often ran adverts for sexual health services, and agony aunts from *Mizz* and *Just Seventeen* also leant their expertise to the production of leaflets and materials for these groups.[113] The FPA also ran a training course for 'Staff on Problem Columns' in the early 1980s.[114] Whilst some girls might have had limited direct contact with the FPA or Brook's services, the participatory aims and moral sexual frameworks of these groups were transmitted through girls' media, and had an important impact on how girls constructed their identities. Crucially, magazines were able to provide the type of sexual information and guidance which was rarely shared in schools.

Of the four magazines explored here, *Jackie* – published between 1964 and 1993 – is the most obvious outlier, described by Janice Winship in 1985 as looking and reading 'like a naïve younger cousin from the rural backwoods'.[115] Yet *Jackie* was Britain's biggest-selling teen magazine between 1964 and 1976.[116] *Jackie*'s emphasis on individual fulfilment through the pursuit of a committed heterosexual romance contrasts remarkably with presentations of romance, desire and sex in *Just Seventeen, Mizz,* and *Sugar. Just Seventeen* magazine was launched in 1983 for the under-seventeens, and its fortnightly issues covered a wider range of topics than *Jackie.* An idealised romantic commitment was shunned in favour of wider cultural engagement, which included but was not centred on romantic fulfilment. *Mizz* was launched in 1985 and was aimed at a slightly older demographic of

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[112] Elizabeth, 'Love Carefully and Without "Over-Bearing Fears"', 4.
[113] Ibid, 6-7.
[114] 'Courses organised by education unit 1979-84', in 'FPA Education Unit materials 1978 – 1981', SA/FPA/C/D/5/1, Wellcome Collection. (Please note: some paperwork dated up to 1984 was incorrectly filed in this box of materials from 1978-1981).
[115] Janice Winship, '"A Girl Needs to Get Street-Wise": Magazines for the 1980s', *Feminist Review*, 21, (1985), 25–46, 33.
[116] Angela McRobbie, *Feminism and Youth Culture*, 2nd edn (Basingstoke, MacMillan Press, 2000), 67.

sixteen- to nineteen-year-olds, and along with *Sugar* from 1994 featured sex more prominently than its predecessors.[117] The evolution of representations of romance, desire, and sexuality in these magazines represents a shift towards the acceptance of teenage sexual activity within certain boundaries.

Girls' heterosexual desire was encouraged in magazines; the prominence of the centre page 'pin up' alongside other 'cut-out-and-keep' posters of male celebrities was a common feature across *Jackie, Just Seventeen, Mizz,* and *Sugar.* Whilst in the 1960s, magazines reflected an increasing permissiveness towards sex, by the end of the decade, magazines still did not embrace sexual liberation fully.[118] In contrast, *Just Seventeen, Mizz,* and *Etcetera* provided a 'cultural space to play with gender and heterosexuality,' according to Winship, through the topics discussed within the pages, such as sexual double standards, and visually through imagery of boys in make-up and girls in androgynous looks.[119] Texts such as *Just Seventeen* therefore reflected at least a partial break with older traditional gender norms, and cultivated a new kind of youthful liberated femininity in the 1980s.[120] The language of desire in *Just Seventeen* was also more forceful and assertive, encouraging 'guy-grabbing' rather than the 'wait and see' attitude towards romance in *Jackie* in the 1970s.[121] This language of physical assertiveness, even aggression, of girls initiating romantic or sexual contact, suggests the development of a model of teenage sexual agency.

Magazines also provided a space for girls to ask questions about sex and desire in the form of advice columns and letters pages. From the late 1970s, *Jackie* adapted to reflect changing permissiveness towards sexuality, and increasingly, more explicit questions about

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[117] Winship, '"A Girl Needs to Get Street-Wise"', 29; Kehily, 'More Sugar?', 65-7.

[118] Penny Tinkler, '"Are You Really Living?" If Not, "Get With It!"', *Cultural and Social History,* 11:4 (December 2014), 597–619, 611-2.

[119] Winship, '"A Girl Needs to Get Street-Wise"', 42.

[120] Ibid.

[121] See for example: 'The Night People', *Jackie,* January 10th, 1970, BL; *Just Seventeen,* July 11th 1990, BL. The format of picture stories was one of the first elements of girls' magazines that *Just Seventeen* rejected: see Winship, 31.

sex and bodies were printed in the *Dear Doctor* and *Cathy and Claire* sections. Letters from readers who were concerned that they had 'gone too far' were published in many issues throughout 1980.[122] However, some responses from agony aunts reflected more conservative ideas of sexual morality. For instance, this exchange between a reader who was confused by her later guilt after engaging in low-level sexual activity with her boyfriend was met with the reinforcement of her negative thoughts of the experience in *Jackie*:

> *Reader:* He didn't go any further, though, but at the time I felt completely happy. It didn't even occur to me till afterwards that maybe I *should* have stopped him. We've petted like this twice since and always at the time I'm really happy, but afterwards I feel really guilty and dirty.

> *Agony Aunt:* You feel guilty and disturbed about the petting sessions because you know it *is* wrong for you[…] If you can explain, Steve will understand your point of view, we're sure, and won't feel hurt or rejected when you stop him going further than you know is right.[123]

The advice columnists here reinforced the reader's shame after the sexual experience, and did not address her positive experience at the time. The writers of *Cathy and Claire* framed their response in a language of individual choice, repackaging and presenting the reader's feelings of shame back to her as an intuitive gut feeling ('you know [what] is right'). Penny Tinkler argues that mid-century girls' comics and magazines reflected 'discourses of the late-modern self' through their emphasis on individuality, choice and self-fulfilment, but still remained conservative in their attitudes towards sexuality.[124] These extracts demonstrate that a framework of appropriate sexual behaviour for teenagers – established

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[122] See for instance: 'They want me to go too far', January 5th 1980; 'Could I be Pregnant?' January 12th 1980; 'What is Right?' January 26th 1980; 'I feel so cheap', May 17th 1980; and 'No-one to turn to', September 27th 1980, all *Jackie,* BL.
[123] 'What is right?', January 26th 1980, *Jackie,* BL.
[124] Tinkler, '"Are You Really Living?"', 598.

by adults – could still cleave to notions of conservative sexual morality, but also established teenagers' awareness of their own desires and values as a form of expertise.

In contrast, by 1984, sexual encounters in readers' letters were received with matter-of-fact acceptance in *Just Seventeen*. The advice given to readers also drew on the discourse of self-knowledge and individual choice, but did not impose limitations on sexual freedom as the columnists in *Jackie* did. *Just Seventeen* advice columnists actively attempted to destigmatise teenage sexuality. One reader wrote in after being called a 'whore' by her friends; the response asserted that 'as long as nobody else is suffering, why shouldn't you be free to enjoy sex?'[125] Readers also wrote in for advice on making sex more pleasurable, and *Just Seventeen* columnists provided advice in response. One reader wrote in after she had sex for the first time with her boyfriend, describing it as 'horrible.' *Just Seventeen* advice columnist Maroushka Monro encouraged the reader to take time to explore with her boyfriend:

> It takes time, understanding, and experience before you can really find out how to give each other pleasure, so try to think of sex as another part of your relationship that you want to develop.[126]

In *Mizz* too, agony aunts distributed guidance on making sex more pleasurable for girls, whilst reinforcing the benefits of a good relationship and strong communication. For example, when a reader wrote in to ask what foreplay was in 1985, Tricia Kreitman responded that it was 'very enjoyable and, with the right person, it can make the difference between sex and great sex.'[127] In the 1980s and early 1990s, magazines reinforced the idea that factual knowledge could be empowering, and that self-knowledge and good

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[125] 'I have sex with boys and I enjoy it', *Just Seventeen,* July 12th 1984, BL.
[126] 'Sex was horrible', in *Just Seventeen,* July 11th 1990, 26, BL.
[127] 'Body & Soul', *Mizz,* Issue 4, May 24-June 6 1985, 46, BL.

communication within the context of a loving relationship were important pre-requisites for girls to have fulfilling sexual relationships and be sexually agentic.

Girls did not just passively absorb dominant adult messages from magazines however. In *Feminism and Youth Culture,* Angela McRobbie argues that magazines attempted to 'win and shape the consent of the readers to a particular set of values,' whilst also reflecting girls' pre-existing interests, 'giving them what they want.'[128] Kehily shows that sexual information in magazines provided a vocabulary and framework which girls 'could juxtapose their personal experiences to media constructions,' but that information was also viewed critically by girls, and mediated by girls' group dynamics.[129] For instance, in an interview for this project, Rachel* recalled that she and her female friends would read magazines in their London comprehensive school for the sexual information in problem pages, because 'that's where all the juicy bits were,' but also recalled laughing over the contents.[130] Rachel* recalled one such incident in the late 1980s:

> Someone had written in to the advice column because she's obviously never looked at herself before and she'd written a description of, of her vulva... she thought there was something wrong with her...and my friend [withdrawn] was like, "errrr, that's disgusting, errrr", and obviously we realised hadn't herself ever looked at herself, you know, so for her obviously that must have been an education, probably a bit of an abrupt one, cos all the rest of us were like, "what you on about!"[131]

Rachel's* recollection of her own incredulous reaction was framed as a humorous anecdote; she and her friends laughed at her friend, who was presented as the butt of the joke. Rachel* had become sexually active at a fairly young age, several years before reaching the age of

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[128] McRobbie, *Feminism and Youth Culture*, 68, 72.
[129] Kehily, 'More Sugar?', 68.
[130] Interview with Rachel*, 12th January 2019.
[131] Ibid.

consent; her mediation of sexual knowledge at the expense of her less-experienced or knowledgeable friend was a way for Rachel* to construct her own identity, show her maturity, and gain social capital. Kehily shows that girls found problem pages in magazines compelling, but dismissed or laughed at extreme examples or displays of ignorance which they found unbelievable.[132] Magazines were therefore also a cultural resource for establishing girls' own cultural capital by demonstrating their knowingness in comparison to readers of *Just Seventeen* or *Mizz,* and their peers, and producing their sexual identities.

Agony aunts walked a fine line between acceptance of teenager sexuality and being seen to encourage improper sexual behaviour; as Elizabeth argues, concerns among MPs and the tabloid press eventually culminated in the creation of an industry body to monitor teenage magazines' sexual content in the 1990s.[133] Any teenage letter-writer enquiring about sex who was under the legal age of consent was reminded of the illegality of their own sexual activity by agony aunts. The emotional maturity and knowledge of contraception and sexual health/protection were also emphasised as key prerequisites to sexual activity. An extract from *Just Seventeen* in 1990 demonstrates a careful balance between discouraging the 13-year-old reader and reinforcing the importance of developing sexual knowledge beforehand:

> This is a difficult letter for me to write because I don't want to turn around and tell you that you're too young, as I know that's not what you want to hear[…] you're asking me if you can get pregnant from oral sex. Well the answer is no, you can't, and frankly I think you should already know this. You should have the facts straight if you think you're ready to take part in a sexual relationship[…] Knowledge about what sex really involves, what the risks are and the dangers[…] is power, security,

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[132] Kehily, 'More Sugar?', 73.
[133] Elizabeth, 'Getting around the rules of sex education' [blog].

safety and happiness[…] Also, as you already realise, if you have sex now, at 13, you are breaking the law and your boyfriend could get into a lot of trouble. Remember that the law is there to protect you, and though you may not particularly respect what it says, you must respect yourself.[134]

The columnist synonymised sexual knowledge and emotional maturity, and encouraged the reader to look inward, 'respect yourself,' and consider all the risks before having sexual intercourse. This suggests a new moral code of sexuality in the 1980s. Sex was no longer presented as something shameful or secretive and was accepted as a fact of teenage life; however, it was emphasised that there were important precursors to meet before having sex. Magazines upheld and promoted the framework for acceptable teenage sexuality - of factual knowledge, self-awareness, and good communication – which had been evident within public sexual health discourses since the 1970s. These magazines were a vital source of informal sex education for girls, who found their school sex education to be lacking.

LEAs and Schools

The collaboration between sex education specialists like the FPA with magazines contributed to the presence of ideas around assertiveness, communication, and the empowering potential of sexual knowledge in girls' media. But it was not just magazines which emphasised the importance of these skills in providing the foundations of a healthy sexuality for girls. 'Relationships' had been a theme in FPA training since the early 1970s, who ran 'Personal Relationships and Sexuality for Professionals' courses in London in 1981 and 1982, which teachers could attend.[135] Resources produced in the late 1980s for use in

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[134] 'Sex at 13', *Just Seventeen,* July 11th 1990, BL.
[135] 'Courses organised by Education Unit 1975-1977' and 'Courses organised by Education Unit 1984-87', in 'FPA Education Unit materials 1978 – 1981', SA/FPA/C/D/5/1, Wellcome Collection. It should be noted that one of these three was specifically for teachers and carers 'of the Mentally Handicapped'; it appears that these courses were in highest demand.

schools stressed the importance of self-knowledge, authenticity of emotion, and communication. Evidence from the BCC and HBC suggests that from the early 1990s onwards, emotional literacy, communication, and relationships entered LEA and national sex education policy, albeit in limited ways. These themes also emerged in the narratives of several women educated between the late 1980s and early 2000s.

Several interviewees who left school in the 1990s or 2000s stressed that setting boundaries, bodily autonomy, and communication skills were vital parts of their own adolescent sexual development. For Aretha, educated in a mixed comprehensive in London from the late 1980s to early 1990s, school sex education was limited, but she had become aware of her own bodily autonomy through discussions with friends:

> I think it's important to know and understand what your boundaries are as well, you know, like, I was saying, at fourteen, I felt like, I knew I didn't have to, but somehow I felt I should? Allow this guy to put his hands wherever he wanted to, even though I was really uncomfortable with it, um, and yes, that stopped very quickly, but that's because of the character I am, rather than me knowing... that I was allowed to do that, and that it was ok, that if a guy was after that, said "well I don't want to see you," like, I respect myself more than that, you know, it, its, I'm not gonna let a guy do that just because he says if he doesn't then, I, I'm out the picture then so be it, and so, yeah, it wasn't, sex education wasn't great.[136]

Whilst this increased awareness of bodily autonomy and confidence in communicating her wishes did not appear to come from school sex education, Aretha's recollections suggest that teenagers in the late 1980s and early 1990s encountered and internalised these messages. However, here Aretha attributed her assertiveness to her own character; she

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[136] Interview with Aretha George-Tooley, 7th May 2019, London

drew on concepts of individuality and self-knowledge that came from a cultural framework about sex that emphasised this to assert her ownership of her body.

Aretha attended school firstly under the ILEA's remit, and then after 1990, her local borough council of Tower Hamlets; despite this, her memories suggest that her school adopted a more traditional approach to sex education grounded in the teaching of biological facts. In nearby Hackney, however, sex education which covered skills such as communication and assertiveness was promoted. The HBC's *Guidelines for Sex Education Policy* were produced in 1992 for school governors, who acquired responsibility for producing a sex education policy statement under the 1986 Education Act.[137] These guidelines aimed to provide legal clarity to school governing bodies to counter the confusing legal status of teachers' interactions with pupils after Section 28, which had limited teachers' ability to speak freely to pupils about homosexuality.[138] Hackney's guidelines stated that teachers *could* talk to pupils about this topic, but that pupils seeking contraceptive advice should be encouraged to speak to their parents, carefully striking a balance between being seen to usurp the parental role, whilst also providing scope for teachers to counsel pupils in need. Furthermore, during the 1990s, tumultuous press and public debates over teenage pregnancy rates continued to dominate the tabloid media.[139] Hackney's Youth Service 'Barrier Protection Policy' – which advocated the promotion of condoms and dental dams in youth service settings – was a direct response to government targets to reduce AIDS transmission and unwanted teenage pregnancy, the latter of which

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[137] Education Act 1986 (London, HM Stationary Office, 1986); 'Policy Statement', Appendix 1 of Report of the Director of Education, Minutes of the Education Committee, 8th December 1992, in 'Dec-April 92-3', LBH/K8, CLR James.

[138] Section 28, Local Government Act 1988 (London, HM Stationary Office, 1988); Education Act 1993 (London, HM Stationary Office, 1993).

[139] Andrew Loudon, ''Bored schoolgirls in a seaside baby boom', *Daily Mail,* 1st October 1991, 17; Clare Campbell, 'Virginity: the healthy option for teenagers?', *Daily Mail,* 6th October 1992,36-7; Rosemary Dunn, 'Pregnancy among teens on the rise', in *Reading Evening Post,* 29th March 1993, 5; Andrew Hartley, 'Safe sex warning to teenagers', in *Reading Evening Post,* 10th August 1994, 43; Kate Magee, 'Teenagers targeted on unwanted births', *Reading Evening Post,* 31st March 1995, 87.

Hackney had particularly high rates of in the mid-1990s.[140] It has not been possible to locate an LEA-wide policy guidance document for Reading. However, the 1995 report *Sex Education in Berkshire Secondary Schools* assessed sex education provision in sixty-five of seventy-one Berkshire schools. Similarly to Hackney, the report identified reducing teenage pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections as key aims, alongside aiming to 'encourage exploration of values and moral issues[…] and the development of communication and decision making skills.'[141] These policies were part of the broader sex education strategy identified by Elizabeth as 'damage limitation' by limiting rates of pregnancy and sexually transmitted disease amongst the young.[142]

Despite this obvious 'damage limitation' focus, the Hackney guidelines cite the government, HMI, and health educators in emphasising the importance of relationships in sex education, and encouraged governors to consider how their sex education policy would develop pupils' confidence and 'assertive skills', as well as their 'awareness of feelings.'[143] The Hackney guidelines also recommended teaching sex education as cross-curricular, and crucially, as part of Personal, Social, and Health Education (PSHE or just PSE), a non-statutory subject as this point. 'Relationships' was to be introduced as a subject in year nine – when pupils were aged thirteen to fourteen – and were to be accompanied by topics such as 'sexual lifestyles', 'loving and caring', and 'emotions' in year ten, and 'assertiveness' in the final year of compulsory schooling, when pupils would be reaching the legal age of consent of sixteen. This 'spiral' method of teaching – repeating the same topic once a year with slightly different information – was a common strategy for sex education, in theory allowing

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[140] 'Appendix B, Hackney Youth Service – Barrier Protection Policy', in Report of the Acting Director of Education and Leisure Services, Minutes of the Education and Leisure Services Committee, 15th October 1996, LBH/KLS/D/1/8, CLR James.

[141] Jowett, *Sex Education in Berkshire Secondary Schools,* iv.

[142] Elizabeth, 'Love Carefully and Without "Over-Bearing Fears"', 9.

[143] Report of the Acting Director of Education and Leisure Services, *Appendix A: Hackney Youth Service – Sex Education Policy,* Minutes of the Education and Leisure Services Committee, 15th October 1996, LBH/KLS/D/1/8, CLR James.

pupils to build and deepen their knowledge and skills over time. In the case of the Hackney guidance, this curriculum was aimed to mirror the development of pupils' own romantic or sexual relationships as they matured from pre-teens to sexually agentic young people who were considering a sexual relationship.

A similar spiral structure of teaching sex education was present in some Berkshire schools, although not all. One secondary school's policy split the topics into those covered within science and those within timetabled PSE lessons. These PSE lesson topics included boy-girl relationships and social pressures around relationships in years eight and nine, expectations in relationships and contraception in year ten, and AIDS and parenting in year eleven. [144] There was no explicit mention of emotions, or assertiveness; this school's policy can be seen as an example of an alternative, more conservative interpretation of government guidelines to include relationships within sex education planning. Other examples of school policy in the Berkshire report were even more limited.[145] However, the report emphasised the importance of incorporating these aspects as soon as possible.

This method of 'spiral' teaching about sex and relationships is also evident in the 1986 FPA scheme of work *Adolescents and Relationships: A Positive Approach to Loving, Sharing and Caring.* This resource aimed to address adolescents' demands for more discussion 'about the positive emotional aspects [of sex]' and 'about the formation and maintenance of mature and lasting relationships.'[146] The scheme was 'carefully designed to fulfil the requirements listed by government bodies, adolescents, parents and teachers'; the framework of heterosexual marriage as the ultimate, most fulfilling form of relationship was apparent throughout the lesson plans. However, the scheme aimed to address its

[144] Jowett, *Sex Education in Berkshire Secondary Schools,* 42.
[145] Ibid, 8.
[146] *Adolescents and Relationships: A Positive Approach to Loving, Sharing and Caring,* (Lifetime Productions, 1986), in 'FPA Education Unit materials 1983 – 1987', SA/FPA/C/D/5/2, Wellcome Collection.

sixteen-year-old audience in their present, by moving from puberty and friendship, towards flirtation and boyfriend/girlfriend relationships. The sessions were split into sections. Section One, 'what pupils are likely to be experiencing now,' covered the importance of 'effective communication in all relationships'. Authenticity of emotion and honesty with close friends and partners was emphasised and noted 'the difficulty of talking about feelings' and 'dropping public defences and exposing private selves.' The next section, about issues that pupils were 'likely to face during older adolescence,' also emphasised the importance of honest and authentic communication, such as 'what the individual boy/girl wants from their relationship' and the 'relative importance of sex and romance to boys and girls,' suggesting that key gendered stereotypes and expectations were likely to shape how partners of different genders imagined a sexual and romantic relationship.

Despite LEA and professional guidelines to include relationships, communication, and assertiveness within sex education, there was still some local discrepancies. Schools could still interpret the rules within their own institutional ethos, staffing levels, and competency. Claire's experiences in the 1990s and early 2000s demonstrate this variation. Slobodian attended a mixed Catholic school in Reading, which opposed contraceptives. Catholic schools were largely voluntary-aided, as Claire's was, meaning they largely exercised curricular control outside of LEA influence, although were expected to follow much of the National Curriculum after 1988. Despite this limited sex education, Claire recalled an 'away day' when pupils took part in activities such as imitating a chain of infection to caution against sexually transmitted diseases, supervised from staff from Science and Religious Education. The role-plays however stuck in her mind:

> Where a girl and a boy were like partnered, and you had to sort of role-play a talk
> about, you know, talking about sex… I guess trying to get us to think about setting
> our boundaries and not just, like, going along with it… I remember it being really

awkward and uncomfortable, in the room, but looking back on it I think it was quite good, because then when I did have my boyfriend (laughs), I remember, I remembered having that conversation, um, and saying oh, "I can talk about it, it's not just embarrassing," and just like, get on with it, so, yeah, in, in some ways I think it was, and I think it was probably a really, um, a really good grounding in sex education.[147]

Whilst Claire remembered people messing around on the day itself, for her and her friends, the lesson 'made us take it a lot more seriously.' In this example, Claire's agency lay in her mediation of messages and discourses from a limited school sex education to inform her own understandings around sexuality morality and maturity. By 2000, even schools with limited sex education drew on familiar elements of this cultural framework which emphasised individuality, emotional literacy, and clear communication.

The FPA, Hackney, and Berkshire sources reveal that school sex education materials produced by public health bodies from the 1980s onwards placed a greater emphasis on knowledge of individual desires and communication of these desires to intimate partners.[148] Teaching pupils about setting boundaries and being aware of social influence was a pedagogy which suited both traditionalist and progressive needs. For traditionalists, teaching pupils about setting boundaries and communicating with partners could be a coded way of limiting teenage sexual activity. For instance, the 2000 Sex and Relationships Guidance frequently mentioned pupil 'choice' and the development of 'empathy for others' – phrases more common in progressive sex education materials in the 1980s – but reinforced the 'importance of marriage for family life.' Pupils, the report recommended, should 'learn the reasons for delaying sexual activity and the benefits to be gained from such delay,'

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[147] Interview with Claire Slobodian, 24th May 2019, Reading.
[148] Elizabeth, 'Love Carefully and Without "Over-Bearing Fears"', 9.

reinforcing pupil choice whilst also emphasising a traditionalist moral stance.[149] In contrast,

for progressives, emotional literacy and clear communication of values would contribute to

teenagers' sexual agency. Interpretative freedom could leave room for individual schools or

teachers to push the limits of sex education guidance and find ways to permit some teenage

sexual agency. Social influence, termed 'peer pressure' by the 1990s, was a real concern for

both traditionalists and progressives too. The experiences of pupils suggest that they were

right to be concerned; sexual experience and expertise were crucial in making pupils' social

status in school.

'Cool' girls: social constructions of teenage sexuality

Hannah Charnock has revealed that sexual activity and knowledge were highly

prized sources of cultural capital among homosocial friendship groups in the mid-twentieth

century onwards. She argues that sexual discourse and practice were inherently social, and

platonic peer relationships directly shaped girls' sexual lives.[150] Throughout the 1980s and

into the 1990s, as sexual discourse became increasingly visible within British society and

culture, sex was seen as a sign of social status among teenagers. Whilst this was evident in

the 1970s and even before, as evidenced by Charnock, by the 1980s teenage sexual activity

acquired a different type of social currency, one which reflected the idea of the new,

sexually liberated and assertive teenage girl seen in the pages of *Just Seventeen, Sugar,* and

Mizz.

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[149] *Sex and Relationship Education Guidance*, (Department for Education and Employment, 2000).
[150] Hannah Charnock, 'Teenage Girls, Female Friendship and the Making of the Sexual Revolution in England, 1950-1980', *The Historical Journal*, 63:4 (2019), 1032–53.

Several of the *Bitter-sweet Dreams* writers noted their relationships with their peers were key sites for monitoring and speculating about peers' sexual activity. 'Maisy Hamilton' was one such writer:

> The main thing my girlfriends and I discuss is boys, boys, boys and more boys…we openly discuss sex with no problems. We even talk to boys about sex. They say, "Did you hear about Doreen and David? They did such and such last night."[151]

'Hamilton' positioned herself as a non-conformist in this piece; like many of my interviewees, she distanced herself from the surveillance and conformity of her peers to these social norms. 'Hamilton' also stated that out of her class of 28 fourteen-year-olds, 6 claimed to have 'gone the whole way'; 'if they have, they have to brag about it.' Making one's sexual status known could therefore have important social benefits. The surveillance noted by 'Hamilton' among her peers is also reflective of Alison Winch's idea of the 'girlfriend gaze' in her work on representations of female friendship in film, television, and mainstream women's literature including magazines.[152] Winch argues that mutual surveillance among women and girls, shrouded in the language of empowerment and sisterly support, upheld and replicated patriarchal ideas of gender. Whilst Winch focuses on representations of this 'gaze' within the media, the concept of the 'girlfriend gaze' can also help us understand how girls' relationships operated in real life. The experiences of *Bitter-sweet Dreams* writers 'Niamh Yorke' and Danielle Homburg reflect this 'gaze':

> Everyone has an idea about the time in a girl's life when she should have a boyfriend. If she does not, and does not appear to have any interest in boys, some people will regard her as an outsider, a late starter.[153] ('Niamh Yorke')

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[151] 'Maisy Hamilton', *Bitter-sweet Dreams,* 99.
[152] Alison Winch, 'The Girlfriend Gaze', *Soundings*, 52, (2012), 21-32.
[153] 'Niamh', *Bitter-sweet Dreams,* 93.

Perhaps it was part of the social crowd I circulated in[…]that demanded I should have long lists of my conquests, and should be able to answer, confidently, the most embarrassing questions like 'How far did you go?'[154] (Danielle Homburg)

'Yorke' expressed the social consequences for not displaying her heterosexuality in her essay, whilst Homburg echoed the gossiping and lack of privacy expressed by 'Hamilton'. Charnock also notes that having *not* engaged in such activity meant it was hard for some girls to engage in conversations about sex.[155] These examples highlight the limitations of girls' agency in determining their identities; socio-cultural pressures and cultural norms around sex as social currency were important influences on how 'Hamilton' and 'Yorke' understood themselves. Sexual liberation can be seen in the above extracts as a double-edged sword; throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s, teenage culture eroded silences around sex, whilst the dynamics of social groups meant that some girls experienced pressure to conform to these norms.

The framework of acceptable sexual agency based on acquisition of sexual knowledge is evident here. By demonstrating that they had sexual knowledge, girls could establish their maturity and 'knowingness.' Adults were gate-keepers of this knowledge, be it parents, school teachers, or magazine writers. Therefore, for teenage girls, acquiring sexual knowledge through experience was a way of asserting their own expertise and challenging the adult monopoly, achieving a position of relative power within peer groups. Further evidence from interviewees demonstrates how girls constructed their own sexual codes to achieve status as mature and knowing sexual agents. Interviewee Katie, who attended an Inner London girls' comprehensive in the 1990s, tied the pressures she and her friends placed upon each other to the teenage desire for the freedom of adulthood:

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[154] Danielle Homburg, *Bitter-sweet Dreams*, 96.
[155] Charnock, 'Teenage Girls, Female Friendship', 1035.

People wanted, you sort of wanted to be sexually active in that way and be seen in that way cos I guess it was being seen as grown-up, and I guess being wanted by somebody.[156]

Katie identified the need to be 'grown-up' and desirable as the main reasons girls at her school became sexually active under the age of consent, suggesting that the social significance of sex also reflected deeper-rooted anxieties around the experience of adolescence. Teenagers often expressed the idea that during this period that this transitional age between childhood and adulthood presented them with problems and difficulties in finding an identity.[157] For example, one *Bittersweet Dreams* writer, Julia Bell, expressed her view that teenagers were 'straining at the leashes of parental constraint, whilst reaching for the elusive goal of adulthood.'[158] Girls associated sex with maturity, and could use sex as a way to subvert parental constraints and reach the perceived freedom of adulthood before they reached any of the other legal or social boundaries, such as leaving school, finding work, and living independently. If age is hierarchical, then the acquisition of adult knowledge around sex could enable girls to acquire power, and distinguish themselves from their less-sexually experienced peers. [159] Girls such as Katie – who became sexually active after turning sixteen – framed their sexuality as something they had ownership and control over, and that it was *other* girls that had sex because of social pressure. Some girls therefore drew on the discourses and codes of sexuality which were present around them to construct themselves as desirable and desiring individuals, autonomous in their sexual exploits. The framework established by school sex education –

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156 Interview with Katie Beswick, 3rd January 2019, Exeter.
157 See for example: Chris Searle (ed.) *Fire Words,* (London: Jonathon Cape, 1972) and *Stepney Words I & II,* (London: Centerprise Publications, 1976; originally published in two volumes by Reality Press, 1971).
158 Julia Bell, *Bitter-sweet Dreams,* 98-9.
159 Steven Mintz, "Reflections on Age as a Category of Historical Analysis," *The Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth,* 1:1, (2008), 91–94, 93.

knowledge and self-knowledge as prerequisites for sexual activity – contributed to the prizing of experiential knowledge among peer groups.

In the context of the mainstreaming of gender equality discourses, and of girls' increased academic success, the ideas about female empowerment explored in Chapters One and Two were a crucial factor in girls' identities. Girls created identities which could incorporate these ideas of the empowered girl, in charge of her academic and professional success, along with developing sexual permissiveness. This framework of acceptable teenage sexual agency was a way of mediating between the expectations of girls to achieve in school, whilst also being sexually liberated subjects; girls could not let sex or romance get in the way of their academic and professional goals. Media and culture were important factors in creating cultural ideas of acceptable teenage sexualities, but the ideals of empowered girlhood promoted in girls' schooling provided the boundaries within which this could be enacted, and girls' social relations saw that these codes and ideals were reinforced. Girls therefore used this framework to distinguish between their own acceptable sexual behaviour, and that of girls who were seen as more promiscuous and less able to make their own decisions.

Charnock found that girls in the mid twentieth century often evoked the Madonna/whore binary through the figure of the 'popular' and attractive girl, an 'other' which they could construct their femininities against.[160] These established archetypes of morality and femininity were reconfigured and reframed by girls and young women throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Dorota and Lucy* both drew distinctions between the sexually promiscuous 'cool' girls at their schools in the 1980s and their own naivety. Dorota recalled one girl who left school at around age sixteen after becoming pregnant:

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[160] Hannah Charnock, *Girlhood, Sexuality and Identity in England, 1950-1980* (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Exeter, 2017, Chapter Three, 29.

She was a real cool girl, and yeah, I mean, I was told that she, she um got pregnant, but she, this would have been, because we all left at sixteen, well most of us left at sixteen to go to other schools, not everybody but most people did, or to go to work or college, and I heard about it then so I wouldn't have known her after that anyway. Um, but yeah, the fact that you were having sex, when you were a teenager, to me, then at the time, because I was brought up in such an old-fashioned way, I remember being really shocked, of course I didn't say that I was, but I remember thinking, "oh my god, is that, can you actually do that?"[161]

Dorota's positioning of herself in comparison to these other girls is striking here. She described earlier on how many girls at her Catholic school – including the girl who became pregnant – were from Irish Catholic backgrounds, and referenced the 'terrible things' that were done in Ireland to a 'fallen woman,' an allusion to homes for unwed mothers which were in the public eye at the time of the interview.[162] However, despite sharing a religious background with her peers, she attributed her own naivety to this Catholic upbringing. Her shock at learning that her peers were sexually active, and her mention of leaving school for college, also distanced her from other girls. Popularity, attractiveness, and the social capital of being seen as 'cool' went along with sexual activity, and by extension, maturity. But this girl was removed from the narrative at this point; Dorota and her friends went on to college, and this girl did not. Within Dorota's use of this anecdote we can see traces of the discourse of girls' empowerment through meritocracy, discussed in Chapters One and Two. Sex outside of acceptable pre-requisites of knowledge attainment and maturity could lead to serious consequences – in this case, pregnancy – and therefore this girl was unable to empower herself through education. This binary was also evident in the 1980s; teenage

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[161] Interview with Dorota Thomas, 12th January 2019, London.

[162] Donal O'Keeffe, 'Despite Church, mother and baby home sites need excavation', *Irish Examiner,* 29th August 2019, https://www.irishexaminer.com/opinion/commentanalysis/arid-30946925.html (accessed 9/4/2021).

pregnancy was the ultimate sign that girls had failed to balance the many responsibilities of the modern, sexually liberated, but also ambitious and career-minded girl. This example also highlights the importance of thinking about girls' agency as sometimes complicit in maintaining cultural norms and aligning to adult demands. Whilst Dorota often railed against the ideals of modest and chaste morality she understood the Catholic school to epitomise, when it came to her own identity, she implicitly upheld notions of 'good' and 'bad' girlhood and sexual morality.

Lucy* also recalled how sexual codes and behaviours differed between the 'cool' and 'alternative' crowds at her Berkshire comprehensive school in the mid-1980s:

> And there was a, there was a sort of rating of…sexual promiscuity, how many people you were shagging, right, basically (laughs), um, but, so there was, yeah, as we'd gone up through the school, there was this kind of, a kind of who was sleeping with who, not in our little group, but certainly the other, looking in at others, you know, they were, they were known for that sort of thing, and it was always the girls that were known for it, really rather than, well, no, it was the boys and girls that were known for it, but it was the girls that were judged for it, um… whereas it was just accepted that the, that's what the skanky boys would be doing.[163]

Girls' sexual activity was then something which could be read by peers as social capital, but also could be seen as immoral within the wider pupil community. Lucy* used her status as part of an 'alternative' crowd to suggest that she was less wedded to mainstream notions of femininity and masculinity which influenced the sexual 'promiscuity' of her underage peers. Her perceptions of the sexual behaviour of the 'cool' group contributed to her identity as 'alternative,' something which had its own form of social capital, as Chapter Four will explore further. Sarah Kenny's work reveals that people who described their younger selves

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[163] Interview with Lucy*, 17th May 2019.

as 'alternative' often perceived their engagement with music, style, and leisure activities as of a higher cultural value to those who they perceived as 'mainstream.'[164] Lucy* presented the 'cool' group as being 'mainstream.' Her mention of a sexual double standard – that the girls' reputations suffered more than the boys' – suggests that she saw these girls as victims in some ways. As 'alternative', she was on the outside of these social pressures, describing herself as more 'individual.' What is common in both Dorota's and Lucy's* recollections is that the girls in question were framed as having little agency of their own, suffering from the negative effects of sexual risk, both social and biological. As with Dorota's example, Lucy's* agency in this instance lay in her capacity to uphold traditional concepts of sexual morality and promiscuity, but adapted for a new cultural landscape in the 1980s.

The relationship between sexuality and educational opportunity is more explicit in the writing of teenage girls from the time. In extracts from *Black Voices* and *Girls Are Powerful,* there was a clear commitment to meritocracy among several girls, who also drew on language of risk to frame their decisions to either abstain from sex or seek contraception or abortion. Maria, a Cypriot teenager writing for *Girls Are Powerful* in 1982, had held off a sexual relationship with her boyfriend of several years, who she had kept secret from her strict family. The surveillance of her family was an important factor in her choice to abstain from sex, as was the freedom and opportunity that further study offered her:

> I have now reached a decision that there is no point in messing up my life and as soon as I am guaranteed a place in a college or a university where I can break away from home happily and be able to return if I ever want to, then I definitely will use

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[164] Sarah Kenny, '"Basically You Were Either a Mainstream Sort of Person or You Went to the Leadmill and the Limit": Understanding Post-War British Youth Culture Through Oral History', in Kristine Moruzi, Nell Musgrove, and Carla Pascoe Leahy (eds.), *Children's Voices from the Past: New Historical and Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 233–59, 254.

some form of contraception and once away from home the relationships I have will be complete.[165]

Maria demonstrates an understanding that sexual activity could risk the gains she could make by leaving home and seeking out further study. The concerns she voiced that becoming pregnant could 'mess[sic] up my life' reflect the binary drawn between academic and non-academic girls, those who had most to gain by taking up educational opportunities and those who were excluded by meritocratic equal opportunities discourses. Maria lacked agency in this scenario; she had little power to be able to openly express her love and desire for her boyfriend, and whilst she chose to abstain from sex, this was a decision shaped almost entirely by the risk she faced of losing the support and intimacy of her family.

The dichotomy between girls with 'promise' and those whose futures were considered as less in need of protection is clear in a play written by Mewe Olugbo and Sharon Ellis for *Black Voices* in 1987. In their play, *A Black British childhood,* the character of Carol tells her pregnant friend, Beverley, how their circumstances compare:

> It's different for me, because if I get my 'A' levels, then I'm going to do a degree and then probably go abroad. But then you dropped out of school and haven't got that to look to at the moment. If it was me I would probably talk to my Mum, but I suppose I would think about getting it aborted, simply because I don't want anyone standing in the way of my exams.[166]

Here the writers, Olugbo and Ellis, demonstrate a clear demarcation between girls who had academic promise, and those who did not. They attempted to show in this play that within British society, perceptions of their educational potential hugely shaped Black girls' life

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[165] Maria, *Girls Are Powerful,* 113.
[166] Mewe Olugbo and Sharon Ellis, 'A Black British childhood'*,* in Paul McGilchrist (ed.), *Black Voices: An Anthology of ACER's Black Young Writers Competition,* (London: ACER, 1987), 182.

chances. Carol suggests that Beverley's future does not hold the same high stakes as her own, and therefore that Beverley had fewer reasons to consider ending her pregnancy. At the end of the play, Beverley is left alone with a baby after her partner is imprisoned, whilst Carol is at university. Beverley's story is complicated by the competing social pressures to be sexually active, like her white friends, and the expectations of her Caribbean parents to be abstinent and do well in her studies. Black parents who had migrated to England from the Caribbean were often anxious that their daughters should 'escape the menial, low-paid work they had been forced to accept,' urging their daughters 'to seize any educational opportunity which came [their] way.'[167] Education was seen to be everything by some girls, the key to surviving and thriving in a hostile world; pregnancy was the ultimate barrier to these aspirations.

The importance of succeeding academically also impacted the ways in which middle-class white girls engaged with ideas of sexual permissiveness and educational attainment, albeit very differently. Katie reflected on the pressures at her school in the mid-1990s to become sexually active in our interview:

> I definitely grew up kind of feeling like you don't have to have sex until you really want to, and you know, I didn't have sex until I was with somebody who I really, felt like, yeah I'm into this. So [pause] yeah, I think it, it [pause] you know, if I hadn't had that things would've been different, cause there was also a lot of pressure at school to be sexually active, like it was very [pause] like peer pressure-wise, you know, who was a virgin, who wasn't a virgin and who'd been, like, fingered or who hadn't done like certain sexual things, was something that we talked about a lot.[168]

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[167] Beverley Bryan, Stella Dadzie, and Suzanne Scafe, *The Heart Of The Race: Black Women's Lives in Britain*, 2nd edn (London: Virago, 1985), 68.
[168] Interview with Katie Beswick, 3rd January 2019, Exeter.

Katie described the peer pressure at her school to become sexually active but placed herself outside of this paradigm due to having parents who encouraged her to follow her own instincts with regards to having sex. Katie certainly did not benefit from progressive school sex education; she recalled 'horror stories about girls who got pregnant, not a lot of like, real education about relationships or about pleasure.' She positioned herself as less susceptible to falling into these traps of sexualised young femininity that her peers did because of her confidence and self-knowledge, instilled in her by her liberal middle-class parents. The girls she discussed in her narrative were also not presented as agentic, but as victims. Undoubtedly there were girls at any school who might have been in exploitative sexual relationships, and the concern that interviewees showed for these vulnerable girls should not be undermined. However, these girls also provided a figure of unknowing, misled, and 'fallen' girlhood against which Katie could construct her own sexuality as agentic. The framework of acceptable teenage sexuality in the 1980s and 1990s was cultivated through magazines and girls' media, by a sex education which emphasised the negative consequences of sex, and by a discourse of educational success as the most important route for female empowerment. This framework allowed some girls to bolster their claims to individuality and self-determination.

Mainstreamed equal opportunities discourses combined with wider moral panic around teenage sexual behaviour in the 1990s to reinforce the need for girls' sexual agency as a way of ensuring they did not risk their educational and occupational gains. As Chapter One showed, teenage pregnancy and motherhood were positioned as 'abject zones' from which to flee, which could prevent girls from accessing the gains made by gender equality reforms, and the potential liberation a successful education could afford them.[169] Anxieties around teenage pregnancy rates provided the backdrop to sex education discourses

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[169] Jo Littler, 'Meritocracy as Plutocracy: The Marketising of "equality" under Neoliberalism', *New Formations*, 80/81, 2013, 52–72, 55.

throughout the late twentieth century, and LEAs committed to reducing teen pregnancy rates throughout the 1980s and 1990s.[170] Limiting teenagers' 'risk-taking behaviour' and tackling the newly identified 'peer pressure' was at the core of this, as New Labour laid out new targets to reduce teenage pregnancy by 50% by the year 2000 in the 1991 publication *The Health of the Nation*.[171] As a result, a precautionary sex education became common in the 1990s, focused on limiting the damaging consequences of sexual activity like pregnancy and disease through advocating condom use, with the HBC and BCC advocating for greater availability of condoms throughout the 1990s.[172] AIDS education in schools, statutory between 1991 and 1993 only, likely also contributed to the availability and prevalence of basic contraceptive provision for teenagers.[173] Contraceptive advice could therefore fulfil both pragmatic public health needs, and be worked into understandings of young, empowered womanhood. Girls could be free to pursue their ambitions and contribute to the economy if they practiced safe sex and did not become burdensome to the state by becoming pregnant; girls' conditional liberation extended to their sexual lives as well as their academic ones.

Education about condoms, often the 'obligatory… putting a condom on a banana lesson' was recalled by most interviewees who attended school in the 1990s. Emma*, who attended a girls' grammar in Reading, recalled the disappointment after rumours of this particular exercise were proved false.[174] Katie recalled her headmistress at her girls'

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[170] For example, on FPA's approach, see Jones, '"Men Too"'; 'Policy Statement', Appendix 1 of Report of the Director of Education, Minutes of the Education Committee, 8th December 1992, in 'Dec-April 92-3', LBH/K8, CLR James; Jowett, *Sex Education in Berkshire Secondary Schools.*

[171] *Sex and Relationship Education Guidance*, (Department for Education and Employment, 2000); Thomson, 'Moral Rhetoric and Public Health Pragmatism', 50.

[172] For Hackney, see: 'Policy Statement', Appendix 1 of Report of the Director of Education, Minutes of the Education Committee, 8th December 1992, in 'Dec-April 92-3', LBH/K8; and 'Appendix A: Hackney Youth Service – Sex Education Policy', and 'Appendix B, Hackney Youth Service – Barrier Protection Policy', both in Report of the Acting Director of Education and Leisure Services, Minutes of the Education and Leisure Services Committee, 15th October 1996, LBH/KLS/D/1/8, CLR James. For the BCC, see: Education Committee Minutes, 20th July 1988, in 'Minutes of the Further Education and Youth & Community and Sub Committees 1985-9', C/CS/C3/4/2, BRO.

[173] Elizabeth, 'Love Carefully and Without "Over-Bearing Fears"', 13.

[174] Interview with Katie Beswick, 3rd January 2019, Exeter; Interview with Emma*, 7th February 2019.

comprehensive in London repeating the slogan; 'if it's not on, it's not in.'[175] But contraceptive advice was still patchy into the early 2000s, especially given the continuation of religious schools' rights to determine their own sex education curriculum. Claire's form tutor in her Catholic school – which did not teach pupils about contraception – provided the pupils with some basic contraceptive advice, in all likelihood against school policy:

> She used to every so often, probably like once a month, um, have this like lunchtime session where she called all the girls, and I think she did a separate one for the boys, where she'd just say, like separate to PSE, um, is there anything you want to talk about, um, and I remember in one of those, her saying, "I'm not allowed to tell you that you should be using condoms, but, if you are having sex, you should be using condoms".[176]

This basic advice was likely to provide one important piece of the jigsaw which pupils put together of sexual and contraceptive information. Whilst inconsistent and mostly limited to comprehensive schools, basic information about condoms fulfilled schools and governments' anxieties about AIDS prevention as well as providing a basic form of contraception to lessen the prevalence of teenage pregnancy. By the time Emma*, Katie, and Claire attended secondary school, condom use was widespread. The National Surveys of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles report, published in 2000, showed that by the millennium, the percentage of girls using condoms the first time they had heterosexual intercourse had skyrocketed from 37.2% in the oldest cohorts born between roughly 1967 and 1971, to 75.6% among the cohort born between the late 1970s and early 1980s.[177] Use of the Pill had remained largely the same, at around 25%, and significantly fewer girls had used no contraception.[178] Contraceptive use was largely up. The sample of oral history interviewees

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[175] Interview with Katie Beswick, 3rd January 2019, Exeter.
[176] Interview with Claire Slobodian, 24th May 2019, Reading.
[177] Kaye Wellings, Kiran Nanchahal, Wendy Macdowall, Sally McManus, Bob Erens, Catherine H Mercer, Anne M Johnson, Andrew J Copas, Christos Korovessis, Kevin A Fenton, and Julia Field, 'Sexual Behaviour in Britain: Early Heterosexual Experience', *The Lancet*, 358:9296 (2001), 1843–50, 1844.
[178] Ibid, 1844.

for this project is too small to make significant conclusions about changes in sexual behaviour, but it does tell us how the ways in which girls made sense of their sexual behaviour and sexualities changed over time, and how sexuality impacted on girls' senses of self. The ways in which women were educated towards the end of the twentieth century allowed them who to frame their sexualities by comparing themselves to other, seemingly less agentic, and less empowered girls. This suggests that sexual health self-management became an important aspect of teenage girls' lives. Katie had little trouble in drawing together her own sexual activity as a teenager with her academic side, forming a cohesive sense of self which was more in control of her own body and more in touch with her individual desires than her peers appeared to be. By the early 2000s then, teenage girls found ways to be sexually active and mitigate the potential moral judgement and risk that this could bring, through self-management by way of contraceptive use, and by drawing on the discourses of individual self-knowledge and emotional maturity perpetuated in sex education, in order to position themselves as sexually agentic.

Conclusion

As this chapter has shown, girls' understandings of themselves as sexual beings were entwined with their understandings of themselves as modern, liberated, and assertive young women, understandings which became prevalent from the end of the 1980s and towards the millennium. Schools were formal, academic spaces in which there was little space for discussion of sexuality, and where the possibility of girls having a degree of sexual agency was not usually acknowledged. Girls' bodies were positioned as distractions from the task of overcoming the limitations of their gender. But outside of school, teenage sexuality was visible in media such as magazines, and the Gillick Competency created the possibility that girls could assert some control over their own sexual behaviour and

identities. Therefore, the framework of acceptable sexual behaviour established in the 1980s provided a way for girls to mediate between their identities as sexual beings *and* as school pupils. This framework was largely established outside of school, but key elements, such as the emphasis on relationships, self-knowledge of values and desires, and effective communication slowly became incorporated into school sex education as a way to keep teenage pregnancy rates down and allow girls to focus on their education. Whilst the majority of school sex education remained tightly limited, as parental control was reinforced and teacher autonomy eroded, there were small glimmers of opportunity for girls to engage in sexual behaviour which could be constructed as legitimate. Social groups were the space in which girls mediated the ideas from school, as well as the media and culture, and applied it to their lived experiences; this supports Charnock's assertion that sexuality was a social phenomenon, 'shaped by and performed through individuals' relationships…'.[179] The framework presented here demonstrates how girls' agency lay in constructing codes and frameworks through which they could challenge the adult monopoly over sexual expertise and construct their identities as self-determining and sexually liberated young women.

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[179] Charnock, 'Teenage Girls, Female Friendship', 1036.

Chapter 4:'Teachers (men) insist on skirts/Pet the arrant little flirts':

School uniform and girlhood[1]

Chapter Three showed that girls' bodies and social lives were as important in determining their identities in school as ideas drawn from the formal curriculum. Chapter Four will demonstrate that school uniform was another crucial aspect of girls' school lives which informed their understandings of femininity and shaped their identities. As Hook's poem suggests, girls' uniform – in this case skirts – bolstered adult control over girls' bodies. Despite some feminist critiques of school uniform, such as Hook's work in *Shocking Pink,* many feminists working within education focused predominantly on curriculum and attainment.[2] Yet clothing was a vital method for inscribing social meaning and controlling young people's bodies. Inés Dussell's work on school uniform in the US, France, and Argentina treats appearance as discourse, one which helps to produce ideas about the societies the wearers live in.[3] Thinking about dress as a discourse or communicative medium helps us to understand how girls' subjectivities were inscribed on their bodies by those determining their dress, and how they navigated their social positions through this medium. Ideas about class, femininity, and cultural identity were present in the media as well as in school; girls drew from these sources of visual and aesthetic language to construct and present their identities within school. These experiences of school uniform reveal the

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[1] Sarah Hook, 'TEENAGE SEXISM', *Shocking Pink,* Issue 1, 1981, BL.

[2] For some critiques of uniform, see: Susan Hemmings, 'It's Trousers Time', in *Spare Rib,* Issue 89, 1979, 53-55, BL; Avtar Brah and Rehana Minhas, 'Structural Racism or Cultural Difference: Schooling for Asian Girls', in Gaby Weiner (ed.) *Just a Bunch of Girls: Feminist Approaches to Schooling*, (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1985), 14-25; Anne Madden, 'Challenging inequalities in the classroom: the role and contribution of the Equal Opportunities Commission', in Kate Myers (ed.), *Whatever happened to equal opportunities in schools? Gender equality initiatives in education,* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 2000), 27-60.

[3] Inés Dussel, 'School Uniforms and the Disciplining of Appearances: Towards a Comparative History of the Regulation of Bodies in Early Modern France, Argentina, and the United States', (unpublished PhD Thesis, The University of Wisconsin, 2001), 39.

significance of the body for girls' everyday lives, and consequently how they engaged with school.

The first part of this chapter shows how school uniform could communicate or conceal pupils' class, reinforcing ideals of respectable middle-class femininity and provoking particular emotional and social tensions for working-class girls. The second part of this chapter focuses on the reinforcement of modest femininity through school uniform by examining girls' memories of skirt-wearing. Nearly all interviewees who attended school prior to the mid-1990s were only permitted to wear skirts at school; debates around skirt length and trousers reflect tensions between adults and girls over what schoolgirl femininity should be. The third part of this chapter will examine how girls used elements from popular and alternative culture in their uniform to frame their identities and gain cultural capital. This chapter argues that girls used their bodies and adapted their school uniform in agentic ways: for social mobility; to assimilate to or reject the values of their schools; to gain social or cultural capital with peers; and to adapt to changing ideas of girlhood in late-twentieth century England.

Class and the cost of uniform

Whilst accounts of schooling in modern Britain have largely focused on the content of schooling, very few scholars have given attention to the area of school uniform.[4] However, uniform is the most obvious visual marker of an individual's status in a school, both as a child and as a member of an institution. As Kate Stephenson has shown, school uniform records 'place in society and relation to other individuals and institutions as well as

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[4] Stephanie Spencer and Kate Stephenson remain the only notable exceptions to this. See: Stephanie Spencer, 'A Uniform Identity: Schoolgirl Snapshots and the Spoken Visual', *History of Education*, 36:2 (2007), 227–46; Kate Stephenson, *A Cultural History of School Uniform*, (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2021).

demonstrating and operating…as a significant method of gender differentiation.'[5] But schoolchildren did not just passively absorb the values and meanings inscribed by uniform. Ulinka Rublack stresses the connectivity of dress, the body, and the social; in other words, how the meaning of clothing was constructed by interaction between wearer and onlooker.[6] Fashion theorist Jennifer Craik argues that uniforms have two functions: communicating shared meanings to the wearer and viewer, and the reinforcement of the behaviour of the wearer through 'body techniques', or the behaviour associated with the rules of said dress.[7] Conceptualisations of clothing from subcultural theory also emphasise the importance of meaning created by the wearer and the attire. Dick Hebdige characterises subcultural style as 'intentional communication'.[8] Drawing from these various threads – history of clothing and subcultural scholarship – it is possible to build an analytical framework which not only examines the symbolic meaning of clothing, but also its social life. Young people and children were unable to wield power in the ways in which adults could.[9] Therefore, for schoolgirls, clothing held the potential to help portray themselves a certain way, in order to assimilate to or reject different social groups and identities.

Several key reasons have underpinned the continued support for school uniform throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, among educationalists, parents, and even pupils. First, school uniform displayed institutional identity, which in turn had connotations of class and social position, yet was also tied to ideas of egalitarianism in the era of compulsory state education. Second, teachers, parents, politicians, and even pupils

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[5] Kate Stephenson, '"It's Not for the Sake of a Ribboned Coat": A History of British School Uniform', PhD Thesis, University of York, 2016, 1.
[6] Ulinka Rublack, *Dressing Up: Cultural Identity in Renaissance Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 28-9.
[7] Jennifer Craik, 'The Cultural Politics of the Uniform', *Fashion Theory*, 7:2 (2003), 127–47, 130.
[8] Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London: Methuen, 1979), 101.
[9] See for example: Anna Davin, 'What Is a Child?', in Anthony Fletcher and Stephen Hussey (eds.), *Childhood in Question: Children, Parents and the State*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 15–36; Steven Mintz, 'Reflections on Age as a Category of Historical Analysis', *The Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth*, 1:1 (2008), 91–94.

argued that uniform acted as a social leveller, and that allowing pupils to display the newest fashions would undermine social cohesion within school cultures. Third, that uniform acted as a disciplinary tool to maintain order within a school. This chapter engages with these three premises, and shows how these uses and ideas of uniform's purpose formed the basis of girls' own manipulation of uniform codes and practice.

While the historical origins of English school uniform lie in elite public schools in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, school uniforms became commonly adopted across Britain after the 1944 Education Act, which established universal state education.[10] After the Second World War, uniform was widely understood as a method of erasing social background, connected to the egalitarian and meritocratic aims of post-war compulsory education. The 'informalisation' of school uniform which accompanied experimental education in the 1960s was eventually followed by a strengthening of uniform policies in the 1990s, reflecting concerns over indiscipline and violence in schools.[11] Girls' uniform underwent its own evolution in the twentieth century. In the 1950s and 1960s, school uniforms were adapted to be both more fashionable and more practical, and gymslips or pinafores were widely replaced with blouses and skirts.[12] As mixed education became more prevalent due to comprehensivisation in the 1960s onwards, uniforms were streamlined to create more similarity between the sexes, although trousers were often not permitted for girls.[13] The debate over whether trousers were suitable school attire for girls persisted throughout the 1970s and into the 1990s, attracting the attention of feminists, MPs, and the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC).[14] The evolution of girls' uniform was not just

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[10] Spencer, 'A Uniform Identity', 237.
[11] Stephenson, *A Cultural History of School Uniform*, 120-5.
[12] Ibid, 124.
[13] Stephenson, '"It's Not for the Sake of a Ribboned Coat"', 195.
[14] Hemmings, 'Its Trousers Time!'; David Thompson, 'Trouser-ban teachers face a caning', *Daily Mirror,* 13 March 1976, 5; 'Let girls wear the trousers!', *Daily Mirror,* 13 March 1989, 6.

connected to developments in post-war education, but also had specific gendered implications and meanings.

This broader national context is crucial in contextualising the sparse records of LEAs regarding school uniform. In the records of the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA), Berkshire County Council, and Hackney Borough Council, school uniform was rarely mentioned, and only in the context of grants given to low-income families to pay for uniform.[15] However, uniform fell under the remit of school discipline, which is easier to trace in the records. School rules were decided by the headteacher in line with the 'articles of government' set by the LEA.[16] Governing bodies also acquired responsibility for providing the head with a written policy on behaviour after the 1986 Education Act, but headteachers ultimately had the power to decide the rules and enforce them.[17] In the late twentieth century, some headteachers decided against adapting school uniform, especially those of older independent and grammar schools with established uniforms, strong school identities, and influential alumni networks.[18] Thinking of school uniform policy under the remit of 'discipline' helps to contextualise individual narratives.

Despite some small stylistic differences, there were consistencies across the uniforms of all interviewees. Most women reported a uniform consisting of some combination of a single colour jumper, black or grey skirts (and eventually trousers) and a

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[15] Report No.2 of the Schools Sub-Committee, *Uniform grants and clothing for physical education*, Minutes of the Education Committee, 14 March 1973, in 'Minutes, 1973 Jan-1974 Dec', ILEA/CL/MIN/01/005, Inner London Education Authority, London Metropolitan Archives, City of London (hereafter LMA); Education Committee Minutes, 4th March 1987, in 'Education Committee Agendas 1975-77', C/CS/C4/1/2, Records of Berkshire County Council, Berkshire Record Office, Reading, (hereafter BRO); and Minutes of Meeting of the (special) Education Committee, 30th April 1991, in 'Education Committee Vol. 3 Part 2, Jan-April 1990-91', LBH K4, Records of Hackney Borough Council, Hackney Archives, CLR James Library (hereafter CLR James Library).
[16] See Section 17 of Education Act 1944; Report of the Schools Sub-Committee, *Articles of Government of an Inner London County Secondary School*, Minutes of the Inner London Education Authority Education Committee, 31st March 1971, in 'Minutes 1971 Feb-1972 Dec', ILEA/CL/MIN/01/004, LMA.
[17] Neville Harris, 'The Legislative Response to Indiscipline in Schools in England and Wales', *Education and the Law*, 14.1–2 (2002), 57–76.
[18] Stephenson, *A Cultural History of School Uniform,* 124.

plain white shirt or blouse. Most wore blazers and ties, regulation shoes, and very little make-up or jewellery, and one or two wore hats. Only one – Rachel* - had no uniform at her school; several others reported non-uniform sixth forms or colleges. Five of the sixteen women interviewed for this project identified themselves or their families as working class. By examining their recollections, it is possible to reveal how ideas of class inequality affected how girls engaged with the institutions of school as a whole. As Stephanie Spencer has argued, despite the egalitarian aims of school uniform design, 'the uniform itself becomes the site where identities of class and gender become played out.'[19] By emphasising their own experiences of inequality, working-class women resisted the conceptualisation of uniform as an equaliser and could critique class inequalities in school.

Anxieties about the impact of school uniform rules on poor children were apparent among supporters of school uniform, both young and old, in the late 1960s and early 1970s.[20] In response to calls for the abolition of uniform from the pupils' rights group, the Schools Action Union (SAU), in 1972, one girl worried that if uniform was abolished, poorer pupils could 'be badly hurt by the sneering of unkind children who have well-off parents that can afford to buy their children expensive clothes.'[21] Commentators in the 1960s, Harry Hendrick argues, had identified a 'widening gulf' between children whose standards of living had increased and a significant impoverished minority; child poverty therefore becoming a pressing public issue in the 1970s.[22] Frequent stories in the tabloid press – brought to the publics' attention by charities and campaigners – told tales of pupils in poor quality or unwashed uniform, or who were unceremoniously ejected from school when they

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[19] Spencer, 'A Uniform Identity', 238.
[20] For further evidence, see: Catherine Henderson, 'School uniform: the right sort of gear', *The Guardian,* 14th August 1973, 19; Melisa Treasure, 'School uniforms', *The Times,* March 28th 1990, 13; Eleanor Mills, 'Mum, please can I wear my uniform?', *The Observer,* 15th October 1995.
[21] Letter from Jane Turner, 'School uniforms', *The Times,* 19 May 1972, 17.
[22] Hugh Cunningham, *The Invention of Childhood* (London: BBC Books, 2006), 212; Harry Hendrick, *Children, Childhood and English Society, 1880-1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 61.

were unable to afford the correct attire.[23] In the *Daily Mail* in 1973, the Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) shared sensationalist accounts of the 'stigma and humiliation' caused by teachers disciplining poor pupils for incorrect attire:

> A girl whose parents could not afford to buy her regulation sports kit was made to walk around the playing field picking up litter while the rest of the class enjoyed hockey and netball. Then she had to write an essay on the importance of physical education. Without reading it, the teacher tore it up in front of the class.[24]

Founded in 1965 to shine a light on family poverty and campaign for improved benefits for families, the activities of CPAG were crucial in reinstating poverty as a crucial social issue in the public sphere.[25] Uniform played a distinct role in illustrating this working-poverty; for some children, the purchasing of school uniform could cause difficulties and 'fuss' for their parents.

Several interviewees from working-class families brought up similar incidents in their own accounts. Nicola* grew up in North London and attended a girls' grammar school between 1972 and 1980. Spencer's exploration of class and uniform in the mid-century shows that grammar school uniforms may have 'imposed a class-based appearance' on pupils – in other words, an assumption that grammar schoolgirls had high academic aspirations for a future as a middle-class wife and mother, which led to a difficult juxtaposition for some working-class girls between their home and school identities.[26] She describes her family as working class, 'quite poor', and 'dysfunctional'. When asked about

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[23] F.M. Wickenden, 'The 'evil' case of a banished schoolgirl.', *Daily Mail*, 26th February 1970, 4; Douglas Thompson, 'Teachers 'show up' pupils who can't buy sports kit', in *Daily Mail*, 19th April 1973, 17; Author unknown, 'Girl forced to wear 'old, musty uniform'', *Daily Mail*, 2 October 1973, 3; Clare Longrigg, 'Wrong trousers mean days out of school for sisters', *The Guardian*, 30th November 1996, 6. See also: Ruth Davidson, 'Family Politics: Campaigning for Child Benefits in the 1980s', *Twentieth Century British History*, 31:1 (2020), 101-124.

[24] Douglas Thompson, 'Teachers 'show up' pupils who can't buy sports kit', *Daily Mail*, 19th April 1973, 17.

[25] Davidson, 'Family Politics', 103.

[26] Spencer, 'A Uniform Identity', 235-8.

her first day of grammar school, she remembered more clearly the difficulties of buying the uniform beforehand:

> Amy: Do you remember what it was like going on the first day?
>
> Nicola*: Not really, not really. I remember getting my uniform, that was a big deal, cos there was some expense and that was a worry.[27]

Nicola* often illustrated her experiences of economic hardship throughout her narrative through anecdotes but did not always reflect on her own feelings about events, using passive voice to distance the emotion from herself or her parents ('that was a worry'). Oral historians have examined anecdotes in relation to composure and discomposure; 'narrative snapshots', as Penny Summerfield has called them, were often used by subjects who found it difficult to describe their memories due to a lack of publicly available accounts from which they could compose their memories coherently.[28] Nicola* therefore often used anecdotes to illustrate the tensions between her home life and her school life; a 'double life' of a working-class home and middle-class schooling which was difficult for her to fit into an existing narrative framework.[29] These 'narrative snapshots' allowed her a way in to explore the difficulties she found in conforming to a regimented grammar school femininity. Spencer found with her interviewees that telling stories about uniform allowed women to express their reactions towards the homogenising effects of grammar school, and the challenge this posed to their sense of self.[30] It is worth noting that Spencer's interviewees

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[27] Interview with Nicola*, 3rd May 2019.
[28] Penny Summerfield, 'Culture and Composure: Creating Narratives of the Gendered Self in Oral History Interviews', *Cultural and Social History*, 1:1 (2004), 65–93, 89. See also: Helena Mills, 'Using the Personal to Critique the Popular: Women's Memories of 1960s Youth', *Contemporary British History*, 30:4 (2016), 463–83; and Natalie Thomlinson, 'Race and Discomposure in Oral Histories with White Feminist Activists', *Oral History*, 42:1 (2014), 84–94.
[29] Feminist teacher Irene Payne uses the term 'double life' to describe her mediation between her working-class home and the middle-class grammar school she attended in the 1960s. Irene Payne, 'A Working-Class Girl in a Grammar School', in Dale Spencer and Elizabeth Spender (eds.), *Learning to Lose: Sexism and Education,* (2nd edition, Women's Press, 1980), 11-19.
[30] Spencer, 'A Uniform Identity', 239.

were largely grammar schoolgirls who went into higher education after leaving school at eighteen; the working-class girls in my sample predominantly attended non-selective education, apart from Maxine and Nicola*, who both found their grammar school experiences difficult at times, and did not achieve high grades. The ways in which class was understood and lived throughout the post-war period had become more 'complex, confusing and suspect'.[31] As Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite has shown, relative affluence in the 1980s had disrupted previously recognisable class boundaries, yet class and inequality remained important ways in which people understood themselves, albeit in complex and often contradictory ways.[32] Nicola's* recollections of her school uniform were a way to articulate the tensions between her identities across these spaces. She told a story about her mother purchasing the incorrect colour of shoes for her school uniform:

> This was awful for me, for me with my mum, because the uniform was a big deal in the year I joined, because it was a lot of money, and there were these shoes…and they [Clark's shoe shop] sold us a pair in brown, and it wasn't the uniform, it should've been black…and when I got there, they sent me home, and there was no way we could afford to buy another pair of shoes, and it was so mortifying, to be sent home. My mum was obviously angry, but also embarrassed and probably ashamed of herself, it was a whole load of stuff that I obviously didn't understand at the time, but I had to go in the next day with a note from her…to say, 'this is what the shop sold me, we cannot afford to buy another pair of shoes'… and so that was awful, and so I did wear them, but then periodically a teacher would tell you off in the corridor, not knowing (pause) the whole sort of scenario.[33]

[31] Emily Robinson, Camilla Schofield, Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, and Natalie Thomlinson, 'Telling Stories about Post-War Britain: Popular Individualism and the "Crisis" of the 1970s', *Twentieth Century British History*, 28:2 (2017), 268–304; 281, 288.
[32] Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, 'Discourses of "Class" in Britain in "New Times"', *Contemporary British History*, 31:2 (2017), 294–317, 309-310.
[33] Interview with Nicola*, 3rd May 2019.

This extract reveals how uniform was a source of tension both within the home and for Nicola* as she attempted to mediate between home and school. For poor parents, affording school uniform often meant sacrificing other necessities such as electricity or gas, or putting items on credit.[34] Therefore to reveal the issue of the wrong shoes to her mother could have caused knock-on consequences for Nicola's* family.

Debbie* also came from a working-class family, but attended a comprehensive school in Reading from around 1980. Similarly to Nicola*, Debbie* often told anecdotes to illustrate her family's financial situation. One day whilst out shopping in the early 1980s, her mother handed her £5 to buy school uniform for herself and her sister. When asked if the uniform was expensive, Debbie* responded:

I mean it was more than a fiver, even then…she literally just gave us a fiver…I think that might have been for both of us.[35]

Whether uniform was deemed 'expensive' or not had little bearing on Debbie's* experience; whatever it cost, her family were unable to afford it. Gillian Plummer notes that mothers often handled the household finances, so were often the ones to pay for uniform.[36] Expectations of working-class children to contribute to the household earnings often meant children felt burdensome when they had a significant expense, such as uniform.[37] Debbie* did not tell her mother that £5 was not enough, possibly attempting to shield her mother from the negative emotions this could provoke. In both Debbie* and Nicola's* memories, their mothers were the ones who dealt with their uniform, and therefore the complex

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[34] House of Commons, *Orders of the Day,* (26th October 1976, volume 918, column 431) https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/1976-10-26/debates/48e75f79-4baf-4ac0-9cde-2f766948c756/SchoolUniform(Grants) (accessed 3rd October 2019); Irene Payne, 'A Working-Class Girl in a Grammar School', 13.
[35] Interview with Debbie*, 10th June 2019.
[36] Gillian Plummer, *Failing Working-Class Girls* (Stoke-on-Trent: Trentham, 2000), 143.
[37] Ibid*,* 144-5.

emotions such experiences could trigger either meant sharing these emotions with their mothers or attempting to shield their mothers from an additional burden.

Despite an emotional distance between herself and her mother in her narrative, Nicola* presented her and her mothers' emotions as shared ('it was so mortifying'/'[she was] embarrassed and probably ashamed'). However, she presented her mother's emotional reaction as more complex than her own ('it was a whole load of stuff that I obviously didn't understand at the time'). Walkerdine, Lucey, and Melody's research into class and girlhood in the 1990s attempted to detangle the psychic turmoil caused by the financial burdens of middle-class education.[38] They identified guilt as the predominant emotion of working-class girls whose parents struggled to support them through education. Working-class girls found it hard to contemplate the sacrifice of their parents, and therefore accept the premise that their parents' lives had been 'worse' than their own, contributing to their own guilt at seeing their parents in this way.[39] Nicola* had a difficult relationship with her mother at times, yet expressed feelings of shame and embarrassment when her family's financial situation was made public through her mother's note to the school or punishment by teachers. Whilst the emotions of these experiences were complex and hard for Nicola* to articulate, she expressed feelings of hypervisibility in relation to her uniform. In some ways, the egalitarian nature of school uniform offered a way for Nicola* to conceal her socio-economic background in a predominantly middle-class school, but the consequences of financial precarity meant that she was acutely aware of potential signs that could reveal her social status. This sentiment is echoed in Irene Payne's 1980 essay in the feminist education collection *Learning to Lose,* in which Payne recalled the fear of being discovered as an imposter in her Liverpool grammar school in the 1960s.[40] By abiding by uniform rules,

[38] Valerie Walkerdine, Helen Lucey, and June Melody, *Growing Up Girl: Psycho-Social Explorations of Class and Gender* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001).
[39] Ibid*,* 160-161.
[40] Irene Payne, 'A Working-Class Girl', 16.

Nicola* could assimilate into the middle-class school and fit in with her peers; she recalled that among her friendship group, they rarely visited each other's homes, preferring to go out to socialise. Yet this concealment also triggered complex emotions and necessitated an emotional distance with being working-class. Nicola's* experience here demonstrates the limits of some working-class girls' agency. She was able to choose how and when to conform to her school uniform rules to disguise her family's hardship, but for Nicola*, this came at an emotional and psychological cost.

It is important to note here that conforming to school uniform codes did not mean that Nicola* automatically conformed to school ideology. Martin Hammersley and Glenn Turner's analysis of 'conformist' pupils in 1984 suggested that a focus on anti-school cultures among scholars had resulted in conforming pupils being under-researched and assumed to conform to middle-class school values. They argued that scholars should pay attention to the ambivalence that underpinned much of pupils' interactions within schools and consider the possibility that conformity may also be a calculated strategy rather than evidence of 'successful socialisation into school values and norms.'[41] Aesthetically, uniform communicated conformity; how pupils used their symbolic conformity instrumentally to gain payoffs, such as good school reports, must also be considered. Being a visible member of a school community, for instance of a grammar school, and not rebelling against it must also be considered a strategic action for girls.[42] For some girls, conforming to uniform and behavioural rules might have been a way of gaining 'good' qualifications and a job; for Nicola*, conforming was more about maintaining a home-school demarcation and fitting in with her friends.

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[41] M. Hammersley and G. Turner, 'Conformist pupils?' in Martyn Hammersley and Peter Woods (eds.), *Life in School: The Sociology of Pupil Culture,* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1984), 161-175, 161-2.
[42] A particularly significant example is Heidi Safia Mirza, *Race, Gender and Educational Desire: Why Black Women Succeed and Fail* (London: Routledge, 2008).

Some interviewees linked the cost of uniform to its availability, to illustrate the exclusive culture at their school. Sara* could only buy her Catholic grammar school uniform directly from the school in 1975 and commented on the expense.[43] Rachel* emphasised the exclusivity and elitism of the independent school she briefly attended in the mid 1980s by recounting the trip to Harrods department store to buy her uniform; 'you have to book an appointment or know where you're going.'[44] Elsewhere, parents at the time also expressed concern at the spiralling cost of clothing their children. For instance, in response to Mass Observation Summer 1984 Directive 'Electronic Banking and Miscellany', which asked respondents about financial matters, one respondent wrote about the expense: 'Sending children to school is quite expensive. I think "thank God I am working and can manage all of this."'[45] The respondent had spent over seventy pounds on her daughter's senior school uniform, roughly half a week's pay for the average full-time non-manual female employee in 1984.[46] The extortionate expense was also a common analysis of school uniform in mainstream media commentary across this time period and into the millennium. In 1979, the *Daily Mail* reported that parents could face uniform costs of up to two hundred pounds, and in 2001 that parents were being forced to turn to local charities for support.[47] In part thanks to the activities of charities like the CPAG, there was strong public awareness of the

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[43] Interview with Sara*, 15th March 2019.

[44] Interview with Rachel*, 12th January 2019.

[45] Mass Observation Archive (University of Sussex): Replies to Summer Directive 1984 [S496, female b.1920s].

[46] According to the Office for National Statistics, in 1984 the average woman in non-manual work aged between 50 and 59 earned a gross weekly earning of £121.20. See: 'New Earnings Survey (NES) – Age Group Gross Weekly and Hourly excluding Overtime data', Office of National Statistics Online, https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/earningsandworkinghours/adho cs/006810newearningssurveynesagegroupgrossweeklyandhourlyexcludingovertimedata (last updated 21st March 2017, accessed 16th December 2019); Tony Halpin, 'Pupils priced out of their uniforms.' *Daily Mail*, 23rd January 2001, 74.

[47] See: Author unknown, 'The big waste on those school uniforms.', *Daily Mail*, 4th October 1971, 11; Harvey Elliott, '£200 That's what your Child's School Uniform Could Set You Back for the Autumn Term.', *Daily Mail*, 1st September 1979, 2; Sally Bain, 'A case for uniform prices', *The Guardian,* 26th August 1981, 11; Alexander Garrett, 'When charity begins in class: Parents are forced to be expert fund-raisers to meet a lengthening list of school needs', *The Observer,* 11th September 1991, 103; Tony Halpin, 'Pupils priced out of their uniforms.' *Daily Mail*, 23rd January 2001, 74.

cost of uniform throughout the late twentieth century. The cost of school uniform was clearly notable even to affluent families. For girls from lower-income families in the 1970s and 1980s, the cost was also associated with tensions within the home, with the school, and significant struggles to assimilate with their more prosperous peers.

There would have been financial support available to some families. LEAs were required by the 1944 Education Act to provide grants for school uniform to those families which needed them.[48] However, applying for or accepting financial support for school uniform came with its own social and emotional burdens. Debbie* did not recall that her family had received these grants.[49] Nicola* recalled her mother's complex emotional reaction to grants:

> I don't know whether we would have got a… grant, for that, I think we probably would have done, we would have been considered very poor, um, for example in the last year at primary school I went on a school holiday… and I know we got a grant for that, because I know there was a big fuss because my mum didn't want to apply for it because she considered it was somehow demeaning or embarrassing or shameful.[50]

As with purchasing the uniform, Nicola* recalled the 'fuss' made by her mother in response to the expense of school uniform, and the emotions she later suspected her mother of concealing at the time. The unwillingness of Nicola's* mother to apply for financial support for extra-curricular activities and possibly school uniform demonstrates the emotional burden of everyday experiences of financial hardship for working-class families in the 1970s. The use of 'shameful' particularly here highlights the way in which accessing

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[48] Education Act 1944 (London, HM Stationary Office, 1944); Minutes of the Education Committee, 14th March 1973, in 'Minutes, 1973 Jan-1974 Dec', ILEA/CL/MIN/01/005, LMA.
[49] Interview with Debbie*, 10th June 2019.
[50] Interview with Nicola*, 3rd May 2019.

financial support could be a stigmatising experience. Imogen Tyler argues that stigmatisation is intentional, a form of political power and practice which is deliberately designed into systems of social provision, making help-seeking a desperate task.[51] Whilst financial aid existed in the form of uniform grants, the practicalities of accessing support to purchase school uniform prompted tensions within the family, as the privacy of the home would be violated by having to reveal the family's hardship to the local authority. Stephanie Ward argues that the 'most damaging effects' of means-testing during the unemployment of the 1930s were psychological; the means test 'damaged the carefully constructed sense of working-class respectability' and connoted an individual's 'failure, destitution and an inability to support one's own family.'[52] Pamela Graves found similar emotions among inter-war East End working-classes.[53] Seeking support to clothe or feed one's child could therefore trigger tensions for working-class parents, whose sense of respectability and self-worth could be eroded.

In Reading and Inner London, grants were not means-tested; families who qualified for free school meals also automatically qualified for uniform grants, with care providers of girls receiving two pounds more than those buying for boys.[54] Yet annual re-application and the visibility of also being a free school meal receiver posed problems for parents and children alike. Sara* recalled that teachers attempted to shield pupils from the stigma of receiving free school meals in her Catholic grammar school in the late 1970s by distributing tokens; free school dinners in some schools were an outward sign of difference and could

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[51] Imogen Tyler, *Stigma: The Machinery of Inequality,* (London: Zed Books, 2020), 9, 17.

[52] Stephanie Ward, *Unemployment and the State in Britain: The Means Test and Protest in 1930s South Wales and North-East England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 94, 98-9.

[53] Pamela M. Graves, 'A Blessing or a Curse? Working-Class Attitudes to State Welfare Programmes in Britain 1919-1939', *London History Review,* 74:2, (2009), 160-184.

[54] It is unclear why this was, but one possibility is that it was due to girls' requirements for tights or specialised socks: Minutes of the Inner London Education Authority Education Committee, 14th March 1973, in 'Minutes, 1973 Jan-1974 Dec', ILEA/CL/MIN/01/005, LMA; Education Committee Minutes, 4th March 1987, in 'Education Committee Agendas 1975-77', C/CS/C4/1/2, BRO.

contribute to increased visibility of poor pupils.[55] Furthermore, the terms of eligibility for free school meals changed throughout this period. The 1980 Education Act limited eligibility for free meals to children from families on certain types of family benefit, and these terms were again restricted with the 1986 Social Security Act.[56] Even before these acts, parents' investments in girls' education, as Young and Willimot found in their 1957 study of East London families, meant foregoing the earnings their daughters would have made after school hours, which grants were unable to cover.[57] Whilst in practice authorities could lessen the financial burden on families to provide school uniform for their children, in some cases, poor quality uniform or school meal tokens could single out children from low-income homes and did not entirely mitigate the burden on family finances.

Such singling out contributed to the wider alienation of some working-class pupils from education. Grants for uniform were debated in parliament several times, once in 1976 and again in 1983. In the 1976 debate, as well as the 1983 Education (Grants and Awards) Bill, the MP for Stockport Andrew F. Bennett alluded to the individual social and emotional impact on children attending school from poor families; that the singling out of children from poorer families contributed to their alienation from school. [58] Whilst members of the government were keen to show in 1983 that nationally, the proportion of teenagers from low-income families 'staying on' in education had improved since the late-1970s, opposition MPs argued that in deprived areas, this was not the case. Data on 'staying on' rates, Bennett argued, could not reveal the complex emotional and social circumstances which informed

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[55] Interview with Sara*, 15th March 2019.
[56] Education Act 1980 (London, HM Stationary Office, 1980; Social Security Act 1986, https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1986/50/introduction; Sheena M. Somerville, Roberto J. Rona, Susan Chinn, and Sameena Qureshi, 'Family Credit and uptake of school meals in primary school', *Journal of Public Medicine,* 18:1, (1996), 98-106.
[57] Michael Young and Peter Willmot, *Family and Kinship in East London,* (London: Routledge, 1957), 149.
[58] House of Commons, *Orders of the Day,* (26th October 1976, volume 918, column 431); House of Commons, *House of Commons Education (Grants and Awards) Bill Debate* (6th December 1983, volume 50, column 219).

how girls from low-income families engaged with school.[59] Nicola* and Debbie's* memories reveal some of these fraught emotional acrobatics for girls from low-income families.

Nicola* had gone to some lengths to disguise her socio-economic background at school. Despite enjoying learning, she found it hard to keep up with her work. She described herself as 'bobbing along in the middle', neither drawing attention to herself for misbehaviour or excellence. The school too were seemingly unaware of her family's circumstances, attributing her frequent absences to illness thanks to the excuse notes written by her mother; these were a cover for simple truancy. School uniform was therefore one aspect of Nicola's* management of her school's perception of her, and a way for her to clearly demarcate the school world – a place of some enjoyment and the site of important friendships – and her unhappy home life. In their 1962 study of working-class children in grammar education, Brian Jackson and Dennis Marsden found that behavioural conformity did not just signal pupils' identification with school values; rather, some working-class children found a sense of security in the work during an uncertain period of their lives.[60] Nicola's* recollections show that conformity to school uniform did not always signal alignment with school values and culture, but rather her ambivalence towards the school's culture, despite wanting to conform.[61] These worlds were difficult for her to mediate between effectively, despite her efforts and limited agency in conforming at least partially.

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[59] House of Commons, *House of Commons Education (Grants and Awards) Bill Debate* (6th December 1983, volume 50, column 219).

[60] Brian Jackson and Dennis Marsden, *Education and the Working Class* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011; originally published 1962), 113.

[61] Nicola* talked about a 'love of learning', despite her sometimes hard experiences at school. She had also returned to higher education after having children. It is important to note that her use of this phrase might be to reflect what she believed an interviewer who is clearly invested in education, as a researcher and teaching staff, wanted to hear; this topic requires greater exploration and consideration by oral historians.

Class and the quality of uniform

Even once families had bought uniform, some girls experienced incidents which reinforced the visibility of their social status. Gillian Plummer's semi-autobiographical research of working-class women demonstrates the ways in which class was made visible through uniform:

> As poorer families, our uniform identified us, the cheapness of the material, its home-made look, the fact that it was too big, the way it faded and frayed over time.[62]

Interviewee Maxine recounted a similar story to Plummer's. In 1970, eleven-year-old Maxine attended her first day of grammar school in Reading. As an adult, the first thing Maxine recalled of that day was that she did not like her new school, in part due to the reception her uniform received:

> Well right from day one I can remember turning up at school…and the first thing that I noticed was that my blazer was a different colour to everyone else, where it was third hand, and I got comments, you know, throughout probably the first few days, I suppose, you know, why is your blazer a different colour, and the badge thing was faded, and, just didn't make me feel very good.[63]

As with Nicola's* recollections, her emotional response to this exposure was difficult for Maxine to articulate. Wearing the same blazer that her two older sisters had worn, Maxine recalled discomfort at the attention this item of clothing drew to her. Maxine's parents wanted her to attend a grammar school, but she felt it 'didn't do me any good', stating at one point that she 'hated' school. Her disengagement with the formal education of grammar school was exacerbated by her feeling singled out by 'nasty' girls who stole her possessions

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[62] Plummer, *Failing Working-Class Girls,* 144.
[63] Interview with Maxine Settle, 11th December 2018, Reading.

and gave her 'funny looks'.[64] Maxine lacked agency in this instance, as she had little power to influence how others read and understood her appearance.

As Carolyn Steedman argues, for children and teenagers, removed from 'realms of production' by virtue of their age, 'still reach[ed] understandings of social position, exclusion and difference'.[65] For some working-class girls, grammar school could reinforce their exclusion from the middle-class through their social interactions with peers. A grammar school education was seen as having the potential to transform pupils' lives; Steedman's own mother hoped that grammar school would mean her daughter would get a good job and marry a man who would buy them both houses.[66] Yet working-class children dropped out of grammar school earlier and at higher rates than their middle class peers; in the 1950s, only five percent of children from semi-skilled and unskilled families who went to grammar school left with A-levels.[67] Similar statistics are difficult to find for the post-comprehensivisation period, given the much smaller numbers of grammar schools. This perceived promise of social and financial improvement through education meant working-class girls who stayed in education past the age of fifteen or sixteen faced the possibility of having to replace their working-class identity with a self that could assimilate to middle-class society, triggering emotional and psychological unease. Nicola* is one such example. For other girls such as Maxine, this exclusion no doubt contributed to their alienation from education. It is worth noting that the working-class grammar schoolgirls in my small sample all left education after school; working-class girls who achieved high grades, stayed on in education, and immediately entered middle-class professions may well have had different interpretations of the role of uniform in their school experiences and identities. But the different ways in which Nicola* and Maxine coped with the tensions which uniform

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[64] Ibid.

[65] Carolyn Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman: A Story of Two Lives* (London: Virago, 1986), 14.

[66] Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman,* 43.

[67] Plummer, *Failing Working-Class Girls,* 16.

provoked for them shows how their agency was situational and contextual, as they navigated their social position within and outside of school.

In contrast, for some girls who attended secondary modern or comprehensive schools with a larger proportion of working-class pupils, the potential of school uniform as a signifier of class or wealth did not have such exclusionary consequences; cost was still a factor, but girls who were unable to afford new uniform were not in as small a minority. Michelle* attended a mixed Catholic comprehensive in Reading in the mid-1980s, and whilst she recalled the poor quality of her school uniform, handed down from older siblings, she did not express emotional distress in relation to these hand-me-downs. One of four children born to working-class Irish parents, Michelle* recalled wearing the same skirt in fifth year that she had worn in her first year; 'it was just a lot shorter.'[68] Michelle* described her school as being a very 'Irish environment', and 'boring but nice'; as many of her peers were from similar backgrounds to her own, the school was a familiar and comfortable place for her. Whilst she critiqued the inequalities brought about by an education system which relied on social and cultural capital – as explored in Chapter Two – she did positively identify with meritocratic ideas of hard work and using education as a tool of self-improvement and social mobility. Michelle* did not experience the same exclusion as Nicola* and Maxine did some ten years before as a result of having incorrect or obviously hand-me-down uniform. Uniform was not always a marker of social exclusion in some comprehensive or secondary modern schools in the same way as it was in grammar schools. Incorrect uniform was not a source of shame or anxiety for Michelle* as it was for Maxine and Nicola*, because she did not feel that she was in an obvious minority as they did. For Michelle*, this meant she strongly identified as being working-class throughout her youth, which contributed to her sense of pride at her achievements and professional success as an

[68] Interview with Michelle*, 14th May 2019.

adult. By examining Maxine, Nicola*, and Michelle's* memories, the importance of the interaction between the body and the social for girls' selfhoods is made clear. Girls' identities were formed in relation to their bodies but not by their bodies alone; the reception their clothing and bodies received from others, the images they projected, and the meanings their clothing communicated were created by social relations.

Skirts and the reinforcement of modest femininity

Whilst Michelle* reported very few issues with her uniform, uniform rules within non-selective and selective schools had other important implications for girls' classed and sexualised femininities. Historically, girls' school uniform aimed to instil specific classed and racialised femininities. Early Victorian adopters of girls' education were careful to construct an image of the 'feminine ideal' to counter claims that schooling would produce 'unfeminine' women who would neglect their domestic duties.[69] Such girls' uniform was often highly decorative and restricted movement, with elements such as corsets, heavily trimmed hats, and gloves; these fashions and feminine ideals were distinctly upper and upper-middle class.[70] As uniform rules relaxed and school populations became more multicultural from the mid-century, schools showed that they were inflexible to the cultural and sartorial shifts which multiculturalism and evolving gender norms demanded; crucially, school trousers for girls were not commonly adopted until the millennium. Rather than being a supposedly neutral aesthetic, school uniform retained elements of older imperial and upper-middle class femininity in the late twentieth century. This second part of the chapter demonstrates that issues around class, femininity, and modesty crystallised around the issue of skirt or trouser wearing by girls.

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[69] Stephenson, *A Cultural History of School Uniform,* 71-3.
[70] Ibid.

The policing of skirt length was mentioned by several interviewees. Michelle*, Lucy*, and Aretha all remembered the surveillance of teachers who would send pupils home or dispense discipline if skirts were too short in the 1980s and early 1990s.[71] Whilst most received sanctions for having short skirts, two interviewees remember a ritual in which their hemlines were measured when they first joined their grammar school at age eleven. In the early 1970s, Nicola* and her classmates were made to line up and have their hemlines and shoe heels measured one-by-one:

> When you joined, aged eleven, at the beginning of each term, the uh, the mean needlework teacher, [redacted], you would all line up outside her classroom and she would sit at the desk like where you are (Nicola* indicates my chair), and uh, on the other side of the desk there would be a chair, like this, and you'd all line up, and, no it can't have been a desk, it must have been a chair, and you would stand on the, um, chair, and she would check the length of your skirt and the height of your heels, and you'd get off and carry on, and if she didn't like it, um, you would have to go home.[72]

Nicola's* narrative around uniform – as explored in Part One of this chapter – centred around her experience of alienation at her grammar school as a working-class girl. The introduction of this skirt-measuring ceremony at the beginning of girls' schooling as described by Nicola* appears to mark an initiation into the rules, values, and power structures of secondary school. Being made to stand on a chair one-by-one and have the inches of one's body and attire measured set a precedent early on about the classed and gendered expectations schools had of girls. Grammar schools were culturally middle-class institutions; their academic and professional expectations of pupils, as well as the behaviour and culture of those within the school, sparked difficulties for working-class girls

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71 Interview with Michelle*, 14th May 2019; Interview with Lucy*, 17th May 2019; and interview with Aretha George-Tooley, 7th May 2019, London.
72 Interview with Nicola*, 3rd May 2019.

who had to mediate the cultural codes and social mores of two distinct worlds.[73] As Chapter 3 showed, working-class girls were imagined by some teachers and in the Newsom Report as more sexually deviant than their middle-class peers. Classed ideas of sexuality and femininity informed some school uniform practices and policies.

Tammy M. Proctor has shown that the uniform of girl guides was used to repress and control girls' sexuality in the early twentieth century; she argues that the regulation of the 'smartness' and skirt length was a reminder of girls' feminine role and to keep their tomboyish tendencies in check, as well as an attempt by leaders to control sexuality in adolescents by encouraging discipline and not permitting the wearing of revealing clothing.[74] This control of sexuality through dress extended to schoolgirls. For instance, in 1977, sixty pupils walked out of a non-uniform secondary modern school in Norfolk to protest at the local education office, following their headmaster's remarks that the fashions worn to school by some of the girls made them look like 'tarts'. The headmaster had also attempted to discourage the wearing of open-neck shirts, ripped jeans, and 'teeshirts with sexy slogans' and encourage the wearing of ties and skirts. Whilst some boys joined the protest – in opposition to a ban on polo-neck sweaters – the comment that girls looked like 'tarts' was the central reason for the demonstration.[75] Rules set around attire were one way through which teachers could reinforce an acceptable and modest femininity around girls, and limit what they saw as an overt sexuality, communicated through short skirts and low necklines.

The anecdote of skirt-measuring shared by Nicola* connotes a similar aim to repress the sexuality of adolescent girls. But class is also important here; Nicola* was a working-class girl attending a culturally middle-class grammar school. The policing of skirt length

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[73] Spencer, 'Reflections on the "Site of Struggle"', 446-7.
[74] Tammy M. Proctor, '(Uni)Forming Youth: Girl Guides and Boy Scouts in Britain, 1908-39', *History Workshop Journal*, 45, 1998, 103–34, 124, 127.
[75] 'Protest at 'tarts' jibe', *The Guardian,* 5 February 1977, 6.

can also be understood as another way in which a kind of middle-class respectable femininity was reinforced in grammar education. As Beverley Skeggs has argued, respectability has always been a crucial 'marker and a burden of class, a standard to which to aspire'.[76] Working-class women were, according to Skeggs, continually marked as sexual through a multitude of signifiers, including loudness, bluntness, and openness, whereas the concealment or supposed self-control of sexuality until marriage was associated with the respectable bourgeoisie.[77] By repressing any visible hint of youthful sexuality, Nicola's* school could establish a norm of middle-class heterosexual femininity amongst its new pupils. Nicola* however did not remember this ritual measuring continuing throughout her school career, but skirt length was policed and girls disciplined for obvious infractions.

Emma* remembered a very similar event at her girls' grammar school, some twenty years after Nicola*, in Reading:

> I think on the first day of term there'd be this kind of ceremony where everybody would have to have the distance between their knee and the hem of their skirt measured, and it couldn't exceed a certain amount.[78]

Emma's* use of ceremony is of note here; the term connotes tradition, ritual, and public spectacle. The measuring of skirts was not just to ensure the rules were abided by, but marked out publicly girls which girls were modest or immodest. Emma did however note that 'the skirt thing more felt like something they thought they should do.' Despite being a well-established and historic grammar school for girls with a local reputation for elite academic education the school was not strict in enforcing uniform rules other than in this ceremony. In her memory, this was because the majority of girls followed these rules, those with short skirts rolling them down when passing by teachers to avoid detection. As with

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[76] Beverley Skeggs, *Formations of Class & Gender: Becoming Respectable,* (London: SAGE, 1997), 3.
[77] Ibid, 124.
[78] Interview with Emma*, 7th January 2019.

Nicola's* school, this ritual seemed to be a way to set a behavioural precedent among new pupils, one which it seems was largely followed.

The work of scholars from beyond history who have also analysed uniform rules as a way to reinforce particular values and behaviours among children is useful here. Daphne Meadmore and Colin Symes' work on Australian school uniforms relied heavily on Foucauldian analysis of power to argue that school uniform policy and discipline were used to achieve behavioural and social conformity among pupils.[79] Similarly, Dussel argues that school uniforms were effective disciplinary tactics in France, the United States, and Argentina by encouraging different 'technologies' of the body, from self-monitoring to external regulation.[80] Dussel connects this 'régime of appearance,' as she terms it, to the age of schoolchildren; for example, cleanliness and decency were adult traits that young people were thought to learn through the wearing of uniform.[81] For teenage girls, traits such as modesty and discretion were reinforced through skirt-wearing. As Alison Happel argues, enforcing skirt-wearing means that girls are held responsible for what can and cannot be seen, restricting their movement to preserve modesty by crossing their legs or moving with care.[82]

The use of uniform rules as a disciplinary tactic to enforce preferred behaviours among pupils was a popular reason for widespread support of uniform throughout the late twentieth century. For many contemporary commentators in the late twentieth and twenty-first century, school uniform reinforced behavioural conformity in pupils by ensuring they conform stylistically to a symbolic representation of the school.[83] One member of the public,

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[79] Daphne Meadmore and Colin Symes, 'Keeping up Appearances: Uniform Policy for School Diversity?', *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 45:2 (1997), 174–86.
[80] Ines Dussel, 'School Uniforms and the Disciplining of Appearances', 297-9.
[81] Ibid, 34, 39.
[82] Alison Happel, 'Ritualized Girling: School Uniforms and the Compulsory Performance of Gender', *Journal of Gender Studies*, 22:1 (2013), 92–96, 95.
[83] Letter from Melisa Treasure, in 'Letters to the Editor', *The Times,* 28th March 1990, 13; Francis Beckett, 'His master's voice: Francis Beckett meets a stickler for standards who maintains he runs a truly

writing into *The Times* in 1990, also further commended the benefits of uniform for

identifying the schools of 'anti-social or delinquent schoolchildren[...] which, at best, is an

incentive to good behaviour.'[84] The authors of the Black Papers – a collection of essays

written by academics and headmasters in 1969 – called for the restoration of traditional

discipline in British schools, of which uniform rules were an important aspect. In 1974,

Black Paper author Dr Rhodes Boyson – headteacher of Highbury Grove comprehensive in

North London – claimed in the press that uniforms would contribute to ending the 'chaos' in

schools:

> 'Boys want to belong to some worthwhile organisation,' he says. 'If the school
>
> provides no badge of belonging, an outside gang will.'[85]

Discipline and order were linked here to institutional identity; being part of a unified school

would, according to Boyson, lead to greater discipline amongst pupils. These anxieties

around indiscipline were exacerbated after the abolition of corporal punishment in 1986.[86]

Andrew Burchell has shown that anti-corporal punishment campaign groups had called for

caning to be replaced by the encouragement of 'self-control' and 'self-discipline' in children,

reflecting the widespread idea that school uniform could reinforce good behaviours among

teenagers.[87]

Teachers' right to enforce skirt-wearing and discipline uniform-rule infractions had

an important legal basis. In 1953, the *Spiers v Warrington Corporation* case set a legal

precedent for headteachers' right to insist girls wear skirts. Citing the 1944 Education Act,

the ruling established that because the school articles of government empowered a

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comprehensive school', *The Guardian*, 13th December 1994, 4; Ray Massey, 'Patten's lesson on how to tame the scoundrels', *The Daily Mail*, 5th January 1994, 11.

[84] Letter from Melisa Treasure, in 'Letters to the Editor', *The Times,* 28th March 1990, 13.

[85] 'Uniforms 'can stop chaos in schools'', *Daily Mail,* 28th October 1974, 14.

[86] Stephenson, 'It's Not for the Sake of a Ribboned Coat', 165.

[87] Andrew Burchell, 'In Loco Parentis, Corporal Punishment and the Moral Economy of Discipline in English Schools, 1945-1986', *Cultural and Social History,* 15:4, (2018), 551-70, 560. It should be noted that girls were far less likely than boys to receive corporal punishment.

headteacher to 'control the internal organisation, management and discipline of the school', the headmistress in question was within her rights to not permit fourteen-year-old Eva Spiers to school in trousers, an item banned by the school's uniform rules.[88] Similar clauses can be found in the ILEA's articles of governance for schools.[89] Culturally as well as legally, teachers took their responsibility for maintaining order in school through the policing of uniform seriously. When Berkshire teacher Jane* took over headship of a secondary school in the early 1980s, the first thing she tackled was behaviour; she specifically focused on swearing at teachers, large fights, and uniform infractions:

> The answer had to be that there was a consequence, and a serious consequence, to any particular breach of that kind.[90]

In Jane's* eyes, establishing strict discipline for minor infractions such as uniform would act as a deterrent against more serious behavioural issues such as violence, and establish the necessary authority of the teacher.[91] Jane was not a radical teacher or involved with anti-sexist or anti-racist education, but was driven by a moral imperative to reform 'problem' schools by making big changes; her uniform policies were one such example fo this. Trainers were a particular issue at Jane's* school. Parents were required to bring in proper shoes if the pupils were in breach of this rule, and pupils faced internal exclusion in a separate area of the school. Jane* felt that this strategy worked, and that behavioural problems lessened as a result of these rules; however it is unclear if other staff or pupils shared in her assessment. Some pupils were certainly supportive of uniform rules as a way of maintaining order. One fourteen-year-old, writing to the *Daily Mail* in 1977, made the

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88 Spiers v Warrington Corporation, 14th October 1953, Divisional Court, [1953] 3 W.L.R. 695, Westlaw; 'Right of Headmistress to stop girl wearing slacks', *The Times,* 15 October 1953, 2.
89 Report of the Schools Sub-Committee, *Articles of Government of an Inner London County Secondary School*, Minutes of the Education Committee, 31st March 1971, 'Minutes, 1971 Feb-1972 Dec', ILEA/CL/MIN/01/004, LMA.
90 Interview with Jane* and Ian*, 12th June 2019.
91 Ibid.

case that '[c]orporal punishment, the prefect system, and school uniform are all essential to maintain school discipline. If these standards were removed there would be total anarchy.'[92] The perspectives of this teenager and of Jane* show how uniform and behavioural conformity were imagined to go hand-in-hand; neither reflected critically on the school uniform itself, however.

However, not all teachers agreed with school uniform. The relaxation or informalisation of uniform rules from the 1960s was tied to the advent of progressive education in secondary modern and comprehensive schools.[93] In Inner London, where secondary moderns were largely replaced by comprehensives, there was also some informality in uniform codes. Kate Moorse taught at ILEA comprehensive Islington Green in the mid-1980s after working in a school in Outer London. The first difference she recalled noticing upon moving schools was the way school uniform was policed:

> That school uniform syndrome drove me mad, in [Outer London school], because it was all this, you know, having to challenge kids all the time cos something wasn't right with their uniform, and it meant, as far as I was concerned that became, that got in the way of ac-, of teaching and education generally (laughs), and when I got to Islington there was no, well it was a sort of a uniform, a voluntary t shirt, coloured t shirt for the year group, but people didn't have to wear it, and it was just such a relief not to have to fuss about it all, get on with the job.[94]

As a progressive teacher involved with anti-sexism and anti-racism – who had moved to Inner London to pursue more social-justice focused teaching – Kate was perhaps more likely than others to reflect critically on the use of uniform as a disciplinary tool, and did not

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[92] D.M. Cooper, 'Please Sir… You're in charge!', Junior Letters, *Daily Mail,* 12th February 1977, 25.
[93] Stephenson, 'It's Not for the Sake of a Ribboned Coat', 123; Laura Tisdall, *A Progressive Education? How Childhood Changed in Mid-Twentieth-Century English and Welsh Schools* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019).
[94] Interview with Kate Moorse, 26th June 2019, London.

see the benefits in the same way as other staff. Kate's recollections reflect the prioritisation of curriculum and pedagogy by anti-sexist teachers, but also suggest that uniform rules were not tightly enforced by all teachers and in all schools in this period.

Given the variation between school uniform policies and even individual teachers, most interviewees did not experience measuring rituals as Nicola* and Emma* did. Instead, many girls adapted their skirts throughout the day, rolling them up when they could and rolling them down to an appropriate length when teachers were likely to catch them. Michelle* remembered a rule against rolling up skirts at her Reading comprehensive school in the 1980s.[95] Aretha recalled the girls at her London comprehensive school adjusting both their skirt length and shirts in the late 1980s and early 1990s:

> The girls would obviously go in the toilet and turn their skirts up, um, sometimes if they weren't wearing a regulation blouse, then they would undo, try and undo a few buttons, they might tie their shirt at the waist, but I had a bit of a stomach, nowhere near what it is at the moment (laughs), but, but at the time I thought it was a big stomach, it wasn't, but I felt like that, so I never would have dreamt of tying up a shirt, I had massive boobs that were busting out of my shirt anyway, there was no way I was gonna undo another button, that would've been bra out, um, yeah, rolling up the skirt, it would've cut me in half and made my legs look even bigger, so for me, I was like, "school uniform's fine."[96]

Aretha consciously chose not to adapt her uniform to be more revealing, in part due to already feeling that her body could not be restrained – her description of her shirt straining against her bust suggests this – but also due to feeling that her body type was not attractive. As Katrina-Louise Moseley shows, by the 1980s, dieting had become big business, and as

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[95] Interview with Michelle*, 14th May 2019.
[96] Interview with Aretha George-Tooley, 7th May 2019, London.

Louise Foxcroft shows, the ideal woman became smaller and skinnier.[97] Aretha attended

school in the early 1990s, a time when the skinny 'waif' and 'heroin chic' were becoming

prominent beauty ideals.[98] Aretha faced a difficult choice, caught between patriarchal

expectations of the school for her to be 'modest' and control her 'unruly' body, and the

patriarchal expectations of society that she be 'sexy.' This bind illustrates the limited agency

girls had over their bodies and identities, caught between patriarchal expectations from

multiple sources.

Despite school uniform being a signal of the wearer's adolescence, school uniform

became sexualised in itself over the late twentieth century. The idea of uniform as

restraining girls' bodies as well as minds has been explored by Craik; she argues that the

aesthetics of restraining 'an unruly feminine overabundance' which was encoded in female

bodies incited the eroticisation of uniformed bodies.[99] Cultural reference points from the

mid twentieth century contributed to the aesthetic of eroticised and uniformed bodies.

Stephenson ties the sexualisation of school uniform in twentieth century Britain to the

publication of Lolita in 1955, the sexual availability of the uniformed characters of the St

Trinian's series, adult adaptation of school uniform elements in mainstream fashion, and

increased sexual liberation amongst the young.[100] Later in the 1980s and 1990s, the

sexualised images of young girls prevalent in tabloids and pornography further reinforced a

connection between schoolgirls and eroticism. Young celebrities were presented in a sexual

[97] Katrina-Louise Moseley, 'Slimming One's Way to a Better Self? Weight Loss Clubs and Women in Britain, 1967-1990', *Twentieth Century British History,* 31:4, (2020), 427-453, 433-4; Louise Foxcroft, *Calories & Corsets, A history of dieting over 2,000 years,* (Profile Books, 2011), 2-3.
[98] Patricia Holland, *Picturing Childhood: The Myth of the Child in Popular Imagery* (I.B.Tauris, 2004) 179; Dyhouse, *Girl Trouble,* 231. Sabrina Strings' work also examines the aesthetic, moral, and racial underpinnings of anti-fat rhetoric in America, tying the celebration of thinness and demonization of fatness to the development of medical science, the transatlantic slave trade, and Protestantism, from the Renaissance to the twenty-first century. See Sabrina Strings, *Fearing the Black Body: The Racial Origins of Fat Phobia,* (New York University Press, 2019).
[99] Craik, 'The Cultural Politics of the Uniform', 142.
[100] Stephenson, *A Cultural History of School Uniform,* 131.

light, epitomised by Samantha Fox's topless photoshoot on her sixteenth birthday.[101]

Commentators in the 1990s grew concerned that girls were either 'growing up too soon,'

that they were exploited by commercialism, or that they were the victims of a more broadly

'sexualised culture.'[102] Holland argues that such images transgressed the category of

childhood, suggesting that these uncontrollable bodies can no longer be held back by

uniform as 'breasts and buttocks burst out and insist that femininity will not be contained

by the limits imposed by the institutions of childhood.'[103] Girls such as Aretha growing up in

the late 1980s and early 1990s were likely aware of these images of eroticised girlhood; the

tying up of shirts to waist height and shortening of skirts reported by Aretha were

premonitions of the outfit wore by teenage pop star Britney Spears in her *Baby One More*

Time video, released in 1999. Whilst Aretha actively tried to distance herself from this

sexualised image of adolescent girlhood, some of her peers actively engaged with it by

showing their bodies, manipulating the language of uniform to display their bodies and

reject the enforced modesty of school uniform.

In her poem for *Bitter-sweet Dreams,* teenager Lauri Owens similarly drew on ideas

of 'burst[ing] out' of her clothing to emphasise her sexuality and to present herself as in

control of the image she projected to society. Owens's poem described her body in detail,

her 'bosoms…/Breathing sexuality in jaded fullness,' 'tousled porn,' with her face 'plastered

to the hilt' and running at a 'trollop's tilt.' Her description is one of excess, leading to her

concluding lines:

My womankind do not appreciate the line,

looking constipated left or right

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[101] Holland, *Picturing Childhood,* 193-4.
[102] Dyhouse, *Girl Trouble,* 223.
[103] Ibid, 194.

never in the eyes of this wanton sight.

[…]

Jeez, some days I do so enjoy sending both sides up.[104]

In these lines, Owens sets herself apart from other girls or young women, who in her eyes have been limited and do not want to express themselves as she does. It is unclear who 'both sides' are, but her mention of 'sending both sides up' communicates Owens' feeling of control or knowingness in comparison to the womankind who do not dare to act or look as she does, and those in their cars who honk their horns as she runs. The image created by Owens is one of youthful sexual abundance, an image which she asserts some control over. Much like the girls which Aretha mentions, Owens uses this imagery to reject ideas of youthful innocence and engage with images and ideas of sexualised girlhood.

Some girls also adapted their uniform to display their sexual availability and desirability. As Chapter 3 showed, being seen as 'sexy' was a way for adolescent girls to claim adult status; adapting one's uniform to display sexual or romantic availability was one such way in which girls could do this. Girls in Aretha's school were not permitted to wear ties, but boys were. As an act of 'badging,' as Aretha termed it, boys would give their tie to the girl they were dating or romantically interested in. She recalled that this was monitored and disciplined by teachers, but not with much force:

> If they saw a girl with a tie, they'd probably try and find the guy that had given her that tie and reprimand him, um, but also saying to the girl, "well why are you wearing a tie, that's not your uniform and blah blah."[105]

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[104] Lauri Owens, *Bitter-sweet Dreams,* 11.
[105] Interview with Aretha George-Tooley, 7th May 2019, London.

The girls and boys at Aretha's school used the gendered school uniform codes as a tool to show the social status and romantic ties between pupils, creating a new code of heterosexuality within their school. These girls drew on a symbolic language to mark out the end of their childhood and engage with heterosexual social cultures, such as those examined by Hannah Charnock and in Chapter Three of this thesis.[106]

Aretha's distancing from using uniform to portray herself in a sexual light may have also been a reaction towards the hyper-sexualisation of Black women's bodies, racist stereotypes which state actors such as health professionals and social workers were known to draw upon.[107] In education too, stereotypes about Black girls as hyper-sexual were drawn upon by white pupils and staff. In Christine Griffin's study in 1985, white girls used terms like 'slag' and 'slut' towards their Black peers; this racist abuse was tied to white girls' construction of respectable heterosexuality.[108] For some Black and working-class girls, aligning with respectable notions of femininity was a way to negate some sexual and racial stereotypes.[109] Whilst Aretha might have lost some cultural capital among her peers, by not modifying her uniform, she ensured she did not have to deal with the negative consequences she could receive both from the school and her parents, and potentially shielded herself from sexualised racial stereotyping. Aretha was in a difficult position, facing a choice between conforming to uniform regulations or expressing a youthful sexuality as some of her peers did; making this choice illustrates the partial and limited agency of schoolgirls in this era.

Ideas of modesty, morality, and classed femininity were also apparent in Dorota's memories about school uniform. Dorota spent a significant portion of the interview talking

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[106] See: Charnock, 'Teenage Girls, Female Friendship'.
[107] Beverley Bryan, Stella Dadzie, and Suzanne Scafe, *The Heart Of The Race: Black Women's Lives in Britain*, 2nd edn (London: Virago, 1985), 103-113.
[108] Christine Griffin, *Typical Girls: Young Women from School to the Full-Time Job Market* (Routledge, Chapman & Hall, Incorporated, 1985), 59.
[109] Skeggs, *Formations of Class & Gender,* 121.

about ideas of 'shame' and 'obedience' which she strongly associated with Catholicism; she linked her own experiences in a London Catholic school to practices such as unwed mothers' homes to illustrate her opinions about morality and shame in the Catholic church. At other times in the interview, she used terms such as 'rigid,' 'offensive,' 'hypocritical,' and 'cruel' to describe Catholic morality in the late 1970s and early 1980s, demonstrating her perspective on the rules and moral framework taught in her school. The school was independent, but Dorota's comparisons with the voluntary-aided Catholic sixth form she attended afterwards reveal how she used uniform at the time to present a particular image of herself to her peers. When it came to discussing school uniform, Dorota recalled the uniform rules in comparison to her daughter's experiences, and ideas of modesty:

> I think the whole idea was that obviously you were supposed to conform, I mean schools are like that now, if there's a uniform you're supposed to wear it, um, and you're supposed to be modest.[110]

Despite speaking in the present tense, it is likely that Dorota was speaking about modesty in relation to her own school, not current schools. She flitted between her own analysis of uniform rules ('you were supposed to conform') to the lack of change today ('schools are like that now'), and then returned to what rules she remembered. She recalled having hemlines measured; 'if it was too short, you were sent home.' For her, school uniform was another way in which her Catholic school reinforced ideas of shame around girls' bodies, a recurring theme in her narrative.

Dorota also used uniform and fashion to present a particular image of herself to others and to mask her insecurities. Whilst she disliked her secondary school, Dorota did not remember the school being particularly strict and pupils did not strictly abide by or directly abide by school uniform rules, stating: 'we could give no hoots, nobody cared.'

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[110] Interview with Dorota Thomas, 12th January 2019, London.

Dorota remembered sixth form as being much stricter than her previous school. At the time she was 'deeply unhappy' after her parents' divorce and described the sixth form as a 'dreadful place':

> And that was where I completely customised the uniform, and that was, and I had a really short tight skirt… these are all my outward signs now, of like rebelling against this place.[111]

Dorota's stress on the 'short tight skirt' emphasises the rejection of modesty which she had earlier discussed through her dress. This sixth form was previously a selective boys' school; Dorota found the rigid traditions at this place to be intolerable and left with one A-level. Dorota's rejection as a teenager and still as an adult of what she viewed as an oppressive Catholic morality contributed to her construction of a 'survival narrative.' She referred to the visibility of her rebellion ('outward signs'); girls were aware of the power of the image to communicate meaning and used their uniform to communicate their relationship to their school. She constructed a resistant image of herself at school to demonstrate her dissatisfaction with her Catholic education, but also to conceal her vulnerability and emotional upheaval brought about by her parents' divorce. Dorota's sartorial choices articulated her rejection of school authority and values through her uniform, and allowed her to assert control over how others saw and engaged with her; as a rebel, rather than as someone who was unhappy.

Skirt length was therefore understood by Dorota as an indicator of Christian modesty and morality. Yet the experiences of and policies around Muslim adaptations to uniform show that this was a racialised version of modesty. Amrit Wilson showed in her 1978 research that the need to cover arms and legs made the wearing of school uniform 'difficult' for some Muslim girls, particularly in schools in which the wearing of trousers by

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[111] Ibid.

girls was still considered 'rude' or not permitted.[112] Calls from Muslim children and parents

for girls to be permitted to wear the shalwar kameeze in the name of modesty were often

met with inflexibility from schools. For instance, in 1986, Berkshire's Multicultural

Education Sub-Committee attempted to draw up guidelines for schools on modifications to

typical school uniform, to 'be in harmony with the cultural and religious traditions of the

ethnic minority communities.'[113] The records of this sub-committee reveal that whilst

numerous head teachers had worked with the BCC to make adaptations, the governors in

one school in nearby Slough refused to allow Muslim girls to wear trousers or shalwar

kameeze, instead recommending 'the wearing of long skirts or dark coloured tights.' The

BCC, along with Muslim and Sikh community groups, directly opposed this stance,

instructing the school in question to permit similar adaptations to other schools in the area;

however, the records frustratingly do not reveal the end result of this conflict.[114] This

incident in Slough was not isolated. Throughout the late twentieth century, several petitions

and campaigns from local parent and religious groups were supported by major public

bodies. For example, in 1989, the Commission for Racial Equality released a new code of

practice for eliminating racial discrimination in schools which warned that uniform rules

which did not permit items such as the shalwar kameeze could make schools guilty of racial

discrimination.[115] Such incidents are indicative of wider tensions between schools, LEAs,

and community groups. As Barry Troyna and Jenny Williams demonstrate, Berkshire and

ILEA's anti-racist policies relied on underlying assumptions that the problem of racism

came from the outside, from structural inequalities in wider society which threatened the

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[112] Amrit Wilson, *Finding a Voice: Asian Women in Britain,* (London: Virago, 1978), 98.

[113] Minutes of meeting, 25th July 1986, in 'Multicultural Education Sub-Committee Agendas 1986-1989', C/CS/C4/4/6, BRO.

[114] Minutes of meetings, 17th November 1986; 2nd February 1987, 'Multicultural Education Sub-Committee Agendas 1986-1989', C/CS/C4/4/6, BRO.

[115] Education Editor, 'Rules on school uniforms could break race laws', in *The Times,* 14th December 1989, 6.

internal stability of the school.[116] The devolved power of schools to interpret guidance from the LEA meant that individual schools were not compelled to make adaptations, and the limited press reporting of such cases suggest often schools were steadfast in their refusals.

As a result, Muslim girls in some schools adapted their uniforms in lieu of formal rules. In Avtar Brah and Rehana Minhas' 1985 case study, girls were not permitted to wear shalwar kameeze, so wore school uniform trousers under their school skirts instead; Emma* recalled girls at her Berkshire girls' grammar school doing the same.[117] This small adaptation was crucial for these girls' cultural and religious identity, particularly in the face of the stereotyping and sexual harassment they faced. Brah and Minhas argue that stereotypes about Asian girls' docility underpinned teachers' reactions to incidents of sexual harassment of Asian girls, quoting one teacher as stating that staff 'can't shelter them[…] they might as well learn to cope.'[118] The lack of flexibility to the requirements of Muslim parents and girls suggests that the 'norm' of modest girlhood which was reinforced through school uniform rules was in fact a white Christian modest girlhood, one to which girls of other faiths and ethnicities were expected to assimilate. Girls such as those at Emma's* school adapted their uniforms as best they could, demonstrating the very limited agency of girls in conforming to school policies whilst also asserting their own identities.

The issue of girls not being permitted to wear trousers was not limited to Muslim girls, although these rules had particular implications for Muslim girls' identities which they did not for white and Christian girls. Some girls launched their own small-scale protests in the 1970s and 1980s over their right to wear trousers; they were mostly unsuccessful. A handful were reported in the national and local press. For example, in 1978, Purna Sen and Fiona Marks were suspended from their sixth-form in Finchley, London, for 'dressing as

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[116] Barry Troyna and Jenny Williams, *Racism, Education and the State,* (London: Croom Helm, 1986), 88.
[117] Interview with Emma*, 12th February 2019.
[118] Brah and Minhas, 'Structural Racism or Cultural Difference', 20.

boys' in protest of sexist learning materials and uniform rules. These girls were only permitted by their headteacher to return to sit their A-level exams if they wore correct uniform, which they did; the uniform rules remained unchanged.[119] Anti-uniform protests by schools' unions and small groups of pupils drew the attention of the editors of feminist periodical *Spare Rib* in 1979. *Spare Rib* published a feature on school trousers for girls, and editor Susan Hemmings linked these small-scale protests for school trousers to the broader feminist question of the reinforcement of sex-roles from a young age:

> School is the place where, if you haven't learnt it already, you get taught how to be conventional girls and boys. So gradually trouser-wearing girls get the message, which can come just as strongly from the other girls as from grownups. "Wear skirts and dresses, or you're not a proper girl."[120]

A junior school girl, Finley Mahoney, also echoed the idea held among friends that trousers were incompatible with girlhood: 'I think some girls worry that if they wear trousers people will think they are not proper girls.'[121] Also in 1978, two protests – one organised by a lone *Spare Rib* reader, the other a mass protest organised by the National Union of School Students (NUSS) – both ended in failure.[122]

However, by the late 1990s, there is some evidence to suggest a change in attitudes amongst some teachers and parents. At Claire's mixed-sex Catholic comprehensive, a pupil protest in the late 1990s had precipitated a rule change to allow girls to wear trousers:

> At some point there was like a petition, and I remember some of the boys, who would've been year eleven at the time, so like older, um, boys, turned up to school

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[119] 'Banned girls allowed back for exams', *The Guardian,* 26th May 1978, 3.
[120] Hemmings, 'It's Trousers Time', 53, BL.
[121] Finley Mahoney, 'It's Trousers Time', 54, BL.
[122] Susan Hemmings, 'It's Trousers Time', 53-55, BL.

wearing like a skirt, and saying, like, there was this protest that girls should be

allowed to wear trousers, and um… it, it came in at some point so I think maybe by

year eight or year nine, girls were allowed to wear trousers, but again, they had to be

grey, and that was another big thing because, everybody had black trousers, so we

tried to get away with wearing black trousers, but, um, I'm not sure what they

would, like, we were never sent home for the wrong uniform.[123]

Claire did not fully recall the details of this protest, but as the protest and rule change were around the same time, suggested that they were connected. The success of such a small-scale protest at Claire's school reflects the shift in attitudes and popularity of trousers around the millennium. Whilst I have been unable to recover national statistics on school uniform rules regarding girls' school trousers, press coverage suggest that trousers became more widely adopted in the early 2000s. In 2005, *The Times* reported that school skirts were on their 'last legs'. Citing sales numbers from high-street retailer Woolworths, *The Times* reported that between 2002 and 2005, sales of skirts had decreased almost as much as sales of trousers had increased, going from 98% skirt to 2% trouser sales in 2002 to 48% skirt to 52% trouser sales.[124] Clearly around the millennium, trousers were becoming a more common item of school uniform for girls.

This shift was linked to the case of Jo Hale, who in 2000 won a legal challenge to be able to wear trousers to school. Hale, aged fourteen at the time, was supported by the EOC in bringing legal action against her school after her mother had unsuccessfully petitioned school governors to change uniform rules. Despite publicly declaring in 1976 and again in 1989 that schools could face legal action if they did not permit girls to wear trousers, the

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[123] Interview with Claire Slobodian, 24th May 2019, Reading.
[124] Alexandra Blair, 'School skirts on last legs as trousers have uniform appeal', *The Times,* 12 August 2005, 8.

EOC did not launch a legal challenge until Hale's case in 1999.[125] In the press reporting surrounding the case, EOC spokespeople, Hale's mother, and supporters of the Hales evoked several key justifications for girls to be allowed to wear trousers; predominantly, that trousers were more comfortable in winter, and that trousers were acceptable workwear in wider society. In the *Daily Mail,* one supporter of the Hales', Pauline Willoughby, highlighted the complex messages girls received about their bodies in relation to skirts:

> Schools complain that girls hoist up their skirts and some even measure the length above the knee. Wouldn't it be simpler if they scrapped the policy? Conflicting messages are common: girls must not look overtly sexy but mustn't cover up either. Jo only wants to study and be warm.[126]

Crucially, the way in which the Hale case was framed as 'common-sense' did not attack any of the underlying assumptions about the purpose of uniform as a whole. This was most likely intentional; uniform was popular, and had in fact become much stricter in the 1990s, introduced as an easy-fix to the perceived indiscipline and poor behaviour which was taken as a sign of the failings of comprehensive education.[127] At the same time, legal frameworks and discourses of individual rights – such as New Labour's wealth of policies regarding gender equality – had created a climate in which rules regarding skirts seemed outdated.[128] Trousers had been acceptable clothing for women since the mid-century. As one girl

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[125] David Thompson, 'Trouser-ban teachers face a caning', in *Daily Mirror,* 13th March 1976, 5; 'Let Girls Wear the Trousers!', in *Daily Mirror,* 13th March 1989, 6.

[126] Pauline Willoughby, 'Should schools insist on skirts?', *Daily Mail,* London, 3rd September 1999, 58.

[127] Stephenson, *A Cultural History of School Uniform,* 124; Harris, 'The Legislative Response to Indiscipline', 58-9. There was widespread newspaper reporting of this new popularity and John Major's support for uniform in his 'back to basics' education campaign: James Melkie and Michael White, 'Major taps Tory anger on schools', *The Guardian,* 10th January 1994, 1; Ray Massey, 'Patten's lesson on how to tame the scoundrels', *Daily Mail,* 5th January 1994, 11; James Melkie and Donald MacLeod, 'Teaching unions sceptical of Patten's discipline drive', *The Guardian,* 5th January 1994, 1; Christopher Rowlands, 'A code of discipline!', *Daily Mail,* 19th November 1985, 8; and Eleanor Mills, 'Mum, please can I wear my uniform?', *The Observer,* 15th October 1995, 10-11.

[128] Helen McCarthy, *Double Lives: A History of Working Motherhood* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2020), 377; Pat Thane, *Divided Kingdom: A History of Britain, 1900 to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 431.

expressed in a letter to the *Daily Mail* in 1975: '[T]rousers are no longer way-out gear. Our sisters and mothers wear them to work, they are accepted nowadays nearly everywhere… so why not school?'[129] In the press drive that surrounded the case, the fact that trousers were well-established items of adult formal workwear was emphasised both by Claire Hale and the EOC. EOC chairman Julie Mellor was quoted in *The Times* stating that: '[m]any women wear trousers to work, including female MPs, businesswomen, barristers and myself. For schoolgirls, trousers can be a smart alternative to skirts, as well as being warm and practical.'[130] To equalise uniform for girls and boys was only to reflect the changes already evident in the adult workplace and to ensure girls' education was not negatively impacted because they were cold or uncomfortable.

This framing of the issue as 'common-sense' along with girls' right to comfort created a clear justification for uniform equalisation which centred girls' right to study at the core. By 2002, it had become clear that maintaining gender distinct uniforms was no longer tenable. The general secretaries for two headteacher unions – the Secondary Heads Association (SHA) and National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) – publicly stated that schools policies needed changing.[131] John Dunford of the SHA stated the common-sense view plainly: 'Most schools changed their policies five or 10 years ago. Why should the boys be warm in winter and not the girls?'[132] These examples of small-scale protests and the wider change of policy on trousers around the millennium demonstrates the limited agency of girls such as Hale and the classmates of interviewee Claire, who were able to challenge uniform rules by aligning with changing public opinion, and in the case of Hale, by garnering the support of adults.

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[129] Jean Gordon, 'Girls in trousers', *Letters, Daily Mail,* 27th May 1975, 19.

[130] Paul Wilkinson, 'Schoolgirl wins backing in row over trousers', *The Times,* 1 September 1999, 4.

[131] Nicholas Pyke, 'Girls in trousers an issue for EOC', *The Guardian* online, 4th July 2002, https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2002/jul/04/schools.education1, (accessed 13th May 2021).

[132] Ibid.

Claire did not recall feelings of hypervisibility when dressed in school uniform; her awareness of being sexualised were more apparent when she wore a short skirt on a non-uniform day, as explored in Chapter Three. The bringing in of trousers was hardly noteworthy, reflecting 'common-sense' understandings of girls' trousers and wide acceptance by the early 2000s. The erosion of gender distinct uniform by the early 2000s was also tied to changes in popular culture, in particular representations of femininity in teenage media. The next part of this chapter examines more closely the cultural influences on girls' identities and stylistic interruptions of school uniformity.

Popular culture and consumption

As Jennifer Craik argues, the enforcement of uniform rules was central to the social life of uniform, involving both reward and punishment for transgression.[133] Transgressing uniform rules resulted in punishment from the school, but also could elicit rewards such as respect or admiration from peers for proving alignment with a social or cultural group. The ways in which uniforms were adapted by pupils communicated alternative meanings, and pupils could gain social and cultural capital through presenting themselves as members of certain social groups or by displaying their individuality.

As Spencer has argued, the homogenisation of pupil appearance was in conflict with the teenage consumer identity from the mid-century onwards.[134] Stephenson ties this to the emergence of youth cultures of the 1950s; developing an individual identity was also seen at this time as a vital part of growing up.[135] Scholarship by Gary Clarke and Christine Griffin characterised the manipulation of uniform rules as a form of resistance against the

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[133] Craik, 'The Cultural Politics of the Uniform', 128.
[134] Spencer, 'A Uniform Identity', 239.
[135] Stephenson, 'It's Not for the Sake of a Ribboned Coat', 166.

authority of the school and adult society.[136] Sheila Riddell developed this to argue that girls

manipulated traditional codes of femininity by parodying and exaggerating elements of

feminine aesthetics in school to signal their criticism of distinctions between acceptable and

subversive femininity.[137] Rather than simply being seen as resistance, uniform

customisation was therefore one manifestation of the wider impact of culture and

consumption on girls' identity-making practices. The consumption and creativity of fashion

allowed girls to align with or reject group identities and cultivate their individuality.

Thinking about these practices as fluid, rather than characterising them as either resistant

or conformist, is useful in understanding how girls navigated complex social relations and

shaped their identities in school through uniform.

Demonstrating their adherence to trends and feminine aesthetics was also

important for girls' sense of belonging as part of a gendered peer group. As Carol Smart,

Katherine Davies, Brian Heaphy, and Jennifer Mason show, ideas of female friendships as

uniquely intimate from the 1980s onwards meant that the cultivation of friendships often

played into the construction of a gendered self; being a trustworthy or 'good' friend could

contribute to a positive sense of self, whilst friendship breakdowns could be

destabilising.[138] Smart and Beccy Shipman encourage scholars to think about individual

choice and preserving kinship networks as a continuum in her work on families; examining

how girls' constructed their identities in relation to peers is not to detract from the

meaningful bonds and intimacy shared by friends.[139] However, how one engaged with peers

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[136] Gary Clarke, 'Defending ski-jumpers: A Critique of Theories of Youth Subcultures', in Simon Frith and Andrew Goodwin, *On Record: Rock, Pop and the Written Word,* (London: Routledge, 1990. First presented as an occasional paper 1981), 69-80, 77-8; Griffin, *Typical Girls?* 20-1.
[137] Sheila Riddell, 'Pupils, Resistance and Gender Codes: A Study of Classroom Encounters', in Christine Skelton and Becky Francis, *A Feminist Critique of Education: 15 Years of Gender Development*, (Abingdon: Taylor & Francis, 2005), 20-21.
[138] Carol Smart, Katherine Davies, Brian Heaphy, and Jennifer Mason, 'Difficult friendships and ontological insecurity', *The Sociological Review,* 60:1 (2012), 91-109, 104-6.
[139] Carol Smart and Beccy Shipman, 'Visions in monochrome: families, marriage and the individualization thesis', *The British Journal of Sociology,* 55:4 (2004), 491-509.

or friends was an important factor in constructing identity. Whilst the oral history life story format can elicit responses which centre the individual interviewee, interviewees often discussed their engagement with fashion and trends as a social activity which had important implications for their peer relationships and sense of self. Manipulating uniform can therefore not only be understood as a way for girls to gain cultural capital and navigate social hierarchies among peers, but also to build intimate bonds with friends, which in turn contributed to the construction of a gendered self.

One reason for the intrusion of fashion into school uniform was the emphasis in mainstream teenage culture on individuality as a source of cultural capital. Penny Tinkler's research on teenage consumerism and selfhood suggests that magazines between 1957 and 1970 emphasised that girls should know who they were and express themselves through consumption.[140] Magazines such as *Jackie* and *Just Seventeen* from the late-1970s and throughout the 1980s encouraged readers to express their individuality and style by making their own accessories and customising clothes with patches and other additions.[141] Often this customisation was associated with how much of an 'individual' the reader could be. In one *Jackie* feature in 1981 entitled 'Do you really need to be into fashion?', one girl, Lesley, worried that she was too much of a 'conformist': 'I'm just not enough of an individual to stick to my own style regardless.'[142] Lesley's comments suggest a sense of inadequacy at not being 'enough of an individual,' suggesting the cultural capital individuality held at this time. Lesley's words were accompanied by a quotation from singer Annie Lennox, who emphasised the cultural capital of being an individual with a celebrity endorsement: 'There's nothing worse than looking the same as everyone else.' Frank Mort argues that

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[140] Penny Tinkler, '"Are You Really Living?" If Not, "Get With It!"', *Cultural and Social History*, 11.4 (2014), 597–619, 602-3.
[141] See for example: 'Zap into the 1980s', *Jackie,* no. 839, 2nd February 1980 (page number unknown); 'Do you really have to be into fashion?', *Jackie* no. 888, 10th January 1981, 5, all BL.
[142] 'Do you really have to be into fashion?', *Jackie,* no. 888, 10th January 1981, 5, BL.

during the consumer boom of 1982 to 1989 – a period bookended by recessions – fashion and market experts deemed that the youth market had been fractured, reflecting the plurality of youth identities beyond the previous homogenised category of 'teenager'.[143] The popularisation of customisation provided a way for girls to bring a sense of 'authenticity' to their image and subvert the homogenising effects of school uniform.

Customising school uniform became entangled with the quest for self-knowledge as advocated by teenage magazines. Lucy*, who attended a mixed-comprehensive in Reading between the early-1980s and 1990, was enthusiastic about customising. She described her teenage self as a 'unique character' and created garments in her leisure time and her A-level Textiles and Dress class by sewing things onto jeans and cutting up her dad's cast-off items. This customisation was important for her sense of self: 'it was like my passport to, to you know, be the creative person that I kind of was.'[144] When asked about if this customisation translated to her school uniform, she enthusiastically recounted a story in which she thwarted the attempts of the head of sixth form to stop her wearing non-regulation handsewn skirts in school:

> I said, "If you can come up with a really good answer for me, yeah sure, I'll wear your colours, and if you can't," and do you know what, he went, "fair enough, you win," and I remember that (laughs) and I remember that, yeah, cos I was just like, "yes, yes! Yes!" (both laugh) So carried on wearing me red skirt (laughs).[145]

Lucy's* recollections here reflect the informalisation of uniform and teacher-pupil relations in non-selective schools noted by Stephenson.[146] But more importantly, Lucy* presented herself throughout her narrative as independent and self-motivated, carrying out voluntary

[143] Frank Mort, *Cultures of Consumption: Masculinities and Social Space in Late Twentieth-Century Britain* (Routledge, 1996), 3, 25, 106.
[144] Interview with Lucy*, 17th May 2019.
[145] Ibid.
[146] Stephenson, *A Cultural History of School Uniform,* 165.

work in the community to educate herself towards her desired career path in lieu of academic success within school. By challenging her teacher, Lucy* tried to demonstrate that her style had no bearing on her ability to be successful in school and in work. Similarly, *Bitter-sweet Dreams* writer 'C.R.W.' clashed with her teachers over her dyed hair in the late 1980s:

> I don't dye my hair much now. At school when my hair was pink the teachers told me it affected my school work and told me to wash it out. But as Toyah said in one of her songs, "So what if I dye my hair, I've still got a brain up there."[147]

Quoting pop star Toyah Willcox, 'C.R.W.' asserted that appearance and ability were not correlated, challenging the notions implicit in school uniform that appearance was conducive to good learning. Both 'C.R.W.' and Lucy* asserted that their individuality was important, as well as their education; the two were not mutually exclusive. Lucy's* fashion sense and love of customisation provided a medium through which to communicate her 'alternative' or 'hippie' identity, but also to reject the authority of the school. Her alignment with 'hippie' subculture, demonstrated by her dread-locking her hair and shopping in 'Indian-y' shops, was a rejection of mainstream consumer culture, yet aligned with the cultural capital that being 'individual' afforded her. As a result, Lucy* could maintain good – albeit distant – relationships with 'cool' girls whilst enjoying her close bonds within her 'alternative' friendship group. By presenting elements of an 'authentic' self in school through customisation, girls could gain the respect of peers and align with different social and subcultural groups.

Other girls throughout the 1980s and 1990s used accessories to align themselves with a trend or peer group. Trainers were an important aspect of uniform rule-bending for

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[147] 'C.R.W.', *Bitter-sweet Dreams,* 114.

Claire, who attended a mixed-sex Catholic comprehensive school in Reading between 1997 and 2004:

> Back then I guess it was like following the trends of like, you know, everyone was wearing, they were like these shoes that were like a canvas on top, and they had like this rubber sole, I think, like All Saints wore them, maybe? But yeah, everybody wanted those, instead of like proper school shoes... Maybe I bought a pair with my pocket money or something and was wearing them? ...That's the only thing I got told off for.[148]

In Claire's memory, breaking school uniform rules was often linked to wider cultural engagement with popular culture, copying trends set by celebrities and music stars. Claire largely obeyed school rules, including uniform rules, and wearing trainers instead of school shoes was the only thing she was 'told off for.' Claire largely conformed to uniform rules; both interviewees for this thesis and teenage writers from the time did not openly identify themselves as conformist. But some such as Claire hinted that the rule-breaking they referred to was largely done by other girls:

> My mum was always a stickler to what, like, buying exactly what was on the list, but I do remember sort of, as we got older, you know like, rolling your like, rolling our skirts up, um, and trying to get away without wearing a tie as much as possible, um, uh, there was also this thing where I'm not sure why we did it, probably so we could break rules, but like having, where you did your tie, the, the fat bit of the tie at the front being really short, cos that was a trend at the time, um, so it was just like those little things that we could do at the time, to like, I guess I guess, looking back on it, it was to like express our individuality or something.[149]

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[148] Interview with Claire Slobodian, 24th May 2019, Reading.
[149] Ibid.

Claire remembered this trend as a way of being seen as individual, but without actually breaking uniform rules. Claire's own uncertainty – indicated by phrases such as 'I'm not sure why we did it' to 'I guess' - suggests that she made meaning of this incident as she told the story, finally concluding that this trend was to 'express our individuality'. Claire also later revealed a shift in her own style and cultural interests when she was around fifteen years old to being more 'alternative'. Whilst Claire framed this story as one of self-realisation – part of her longer narrative of her evolution into a more 'authentic' self, her repeated use of 'we' and 'our individuality' indicates that this trend was a group activity, a way of signalling peer bonds and constructing a gendered identity.

Other women also recalled minor subversions of uniform rules to follow trends and express individuality. Aretha experimented with nail varnish and wore jewellery and hoop earrings in the late-1980s and early-1990s, until several incidents of accidental injury – including a boy losing part of a finger when his ring got caught in a woodwork lathe – halted her, and Lucy* recalled trends for stiletto shoes and suspender belts in her Reading school in the late-1980s.[150] The stilettos and suspender belts mentioned by Lucy* were perhaps also manifestations of the sexualised culture present at Aretha's school, illustrated by the bearing of midriffs and rolling up of skirts. The presence of fashion trends in school reveals the effects of teenage consumer culture on shifting attitudes towards uniform by girls towards the end of the twentieth century. Girls who engaged heavily with mainstream popular culture broke school uniform rules not because they rejected education or their school, but because of the cultural capital that being seen as 'individual' provided them with, whilst also building bonds with friends. Claire was very academic, achieving top grades and rarely disciplined, but the trend for All Saints-inspired trainers, as well as trends in tie-shape, proved too important to leave for leisure time alone; she remembers uniform

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[150] Interview with Aretha George-Tooley, 7th May 2019, London; Interview with Lucy*, 17th May 2019. Note: It is unclear how the suspender belts were monitored among Lucy's* peer groups.

rule breaking to 'express our individuality or something,' but that she 'stuck to the school uniform rules.'[151] Peer relationships were therefore highly significant in determining girls' incorporation of fashion into their uniform, whether it was to build friendship bonds within groups, or to gain cultural capital within a social hierarchy.

Scholars have found that maintaining an expression of one's own style and identity is a vital part of self-fulfilment, with important psychological and emotional benefits for the individual. Monica Sklar and Marilyn DeLong's work on punks at work found that maintaining subtle punk aesthetics under their work attire allowed their subjects to retain a sense of authenticity of self and personal happiness.[152] Sklar and DeLong's conclusions suggest that style was not just a leisure activity, but intrinsic to being oneself and feeling authentically oneself. This idea of self-assertion is implied in Donna-Marie McLoughlin's reflections of her school experiences, published in *Bitter-sweet Dreams*:

> When my final year did eventually come, then it was time to get down to some serious thinking. Thinking about exams and the future which was lying ahead. Every day it was always the same, what should I wear to school today and how should I wear my hair? […] I used to dye my hair all different colours which is why they called me a walking advertisement for punks. I was trying to dress up for myself now and I did seem to get more attention. I suppose my ambitions were finally coming out on me.[153]

McLoughlin's experience here shows how the rebellion against uniform rules was important to girls' assertion of their identities. As Chapter Two showed, girls were encouraged to plan their future careers and work out what sort of work would suit their

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[151] Interview with Claire Slobodian, 24th May 2019, Reading.
[152] Monica Sklar and Marilyn DeLong, 'Punk Dress in the Workplace: Aesthetic Expression and Accommodation', *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal*, 30:4 (2012), 285–99.
[153] Donna-Marie McLoughlin, *Bitter-sweet Dreams,* 79-80.

individual talents and interests. McLoughlin felt her talents and interests lay in beauty, but her experimentation with these skills was repressed by her school's uniform rules. She felt that her hair and make-up were an expression of her ambitions, ambitions which would help her 'make something of [her] life on [her] own.' McLoughlin's agency lay in her prioritisation of the complex and seemingly contradictory messages presented by her school, and the way she adapted her appearance to reflect an 'occupational self-concept'.

For girls who were marginalised by Eurocentric beauty ideals in popular culture, dressing to feel 'authentic' and assert oneself was even more crucial. Carol Tulloch argues that the representations of the self among the African diaspora aimed to 'imprint a sense of self on society,' and offer a 'counter-narrative to the persistent objectification, marginalization and stereotyping of the black body.'[154] Aretha grew up in East London in an Afro-Caribbean family and attended a mixed-sex Catholic school from the late 1980s and to early 1990s. Her recollections of fashion and school uniform were peppered with the memories of a painful internal struggle over her body image and sense of self-worth. Aretha encountered basic feminist principles through her friends around the age of fourteen but conceded that she had very little in-depth understanding and presented herself as a feminist in order to mask insecurity about her own appearance:

> I'd be like, "yeah, I'm a feminist, I don't need to dress up, and I don't need to do all of
> this stuff," but actually I wasn't doing that stuff because I didn't feel that, that
> dressing up made me any prettier…I then started using it to mask how I was feeling
> about myself. Rather than going, "actually I'm good enough as I am", I was like, "well
> I'm never gonna be great, so I'll just use this as a, I don't care."[155]

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[154] Carol Tulloch, *The Birth of Cool: Style Narratives of the African Diaspora* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 199.
[155] Interview with Aretha George-Tooley, 7th May 2019, London.

By presenting herself as outside the societal pressures to look or dress in an overtly feminine way, Aretha could assert control over how others read her appearance. By declaring that her lack of interest in fashion was a political statement, she could maintain the illusion of control, rather than revealing her vulnerability. A keen field athlete, Aretha changed her 'style to reflect what [she] loved' by dressing in tracksuits, and entered what she called a 'slobby, indie phase.' She rejected overt femininity at a time when more masculinised or 'alternative' forms of dress for girls were becoming fashionable. In school, this phase manifested in her wearing of nail varnish and jewellery, which she described as 'my thing', linking these habits of dress and accessorising to the creation of an individual identity. For marginalised groups, this self-assertion and expression was more vital than for most, a refusal to succumb to stereotyping. As Tulloch argues, small acts, such as the wearing of particular nail or hair styles, or jewellery, were important ways for Black pupils to assert their individuality and humanity, and to retain a sense of self and satisfaction in hostile culture which sought to undermine their self-worth.

As well as relaying the ways she used her style to mask her insecurities, Aretha also emphasised the additional costs she had if she tried to conform to mainstream trends:

> As a black girl, like, you know, you have to put your hair into the situation, it's like… do I relax it, so it kind of straightens it out? But then I need to be able to afford to keep that up, otherwise my hair's gonna break… It was just bad because I couldn't afford to keep going to the hairdressers and getting it done.[156]

Aretha concluded her account of her experimentation with fashion and her hair by stating that she 'just didn't think [she] was pretty enough to pull off looking nice in something.'[157] Black hairstyles have long been a site of struggle and oppression, in particular for girls and

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[156] Interview with Aretha George-Tooley, 7th May 2019, London.
[157] Ibid.

women.[158] The prevalence of European-centric beauty ideals in popular culture and wider society throughout the twentieth century in Britain marginalised and othered Black bodies.[159] The emotional and financial cost of trying to keep up with popular trends which took thin white bodies as the default consumer – who also had a certain amount of disposable income – was impossible for Aretha, hence her experimentation with alternative styles of dress. Aretha's experiences highlight the differences of embodied experience of school uniform; exclusion from trends because of euro-centric beauty ideals also shaped girls' ability to keep up with trends in school uniform customisation. However, crucially, Aretha's memories reveal insight into how we might examine girls' agency in relation to their bodies. Aretha chose to present herself in a way in which she could mask her insecurity about her appearance by framing herself as a feminist, resistant to mainstream ideas of femininity. As a result, she could gain social capital among her friends for being outspoken and demonstrating her individuality. For girls in late-twentieth century secondary schools, the body was of utmost importance in navigating their social lives and shaping their sense of belonging and collective selfhood.

Several interviewees also rejected mainstream femininity in favour of identifying with alternative cultures such as the post-punk 'goth' scene and 'hippie' culture, such as Lucy* and Emma*. Girls' friendship groups based in school were often distinguishable based on collective identities which fell into either 'cool' or 'popular' girls, or the 'misfits' and 'alternative' crowds. But Sarah Kenny's work on youth culture in Sheffield has shown that group labels were used, not to accurately describe groupings, but to distinguish the experience of the individual speaker from the masses and present their experience as more

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[158] For the US context, see: Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (Psychology Press, 2000).
[159] Bryan, Dadzie, and Scafe, *The Heart Of The Race,* 222-4.

'authentic' than others.[160] Kenny found that most teenagers flitted across different groups, spaces, and scenes; teenagers' cultural engagement was fluid and served different purposes. Crucially, this mainstream/alternative binary functioned as a way of imposing and upholding a cultural hierarchy, in which 'alternative' individuals' experiences were presented as of higher value than those peers who enjoyed 'crass' and 'commercialised' popular culture.[161] The ways in which interviewees for this project described their cultural lives and social groupings reflect Kenny's findings about cultural capital and authenticity. In both mine and Kenny's research, interviewees found it difficult to articulate their cultural or subcultural identities clearly; it was easier to identify what you were *not* rather than articulate what you *were*.

Some women educated from the late-1980s onwards characterised the friendship groupings of girls at their schools using this 'cool'/'alternative' binary, and positioned themselves in opposition to the 'cool' girls. Natalie Carlton, writing in *Bitter-sweet Dreams* in 1987, described the difficulties of being a 'misfit' as opposed to a 'popular' girl:

> You have to grow a thick skin against some of the bitches in class, who find amusement in continually criticising your hair, clothes, way of speech. If you retaliate, it's bound to cause trouble, and the amount of fuss an argument or fight would cause is just not worth it for a few empty-headed comments on your hairstyle.[162]

This type of policing described by Natalie is also reflective of the policing and surveillance of girls' sexual practices examined in Chapter 3; girls monitored each other's behaviour and

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[160] Sarah Kenny, '"Basically You Were Either a Mainstream Sort of Person or You Went to the Leadmill and the Limit": Understanding Post-War British Youth Culture Through Oral History', in Kristine Moruzi, Nell Musgrove, and Carla Pascoe Leahy (eds.), *Children's Voices from the Past: New Historical and Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 233–59, 248-9.
[161] Ibid, 235, 254.
[162] Natalie Carlton, *Bittersweet Dreams,* 122.

bodies to uphold ideas about respectable heterosexual femininity. The day-to-day contact with classmates could be used to uphold ideas of beauty and girlhood. Emma* also remembered a distinction at her Reading girls' grammar in the 1990s between the 'posh' girls who commuted in from the countryside, who 'thought of themselves as the cool group,' and the girls from within 'urban' Reading.[163] Due to the emphasis on engagement with mainstream consumer culture as a group identifier, in Emma's* experience, class and wealth also shaped the formation of group identity.

The persistence of ideas of hostile 'popular' girls and a social hierarchy in schools in women's narratives about the 1990s and early 2000s is perhaps informed by cultural influences in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Several interviewees educated in the 1990s and early 2000s made references to the 2004 film *Mean Girls* when describing their secondary school friendship groups. Popular American high school films such as *Mean Girls* (2004) presented female friendships as competitive, with social hierarchies arranged around looks, cultural capital and 'cool.' *Mean Girls* especially has achieved a 'cult' status in internet culture since its release, achieving a second cultural life online through meme culture, especially the presentation of the hierarchy of 'plastics' or 'cool' girls.[164] Such films could provide women educated in the 1990s with a framework to illustrate their memories to an interviewer who would recognise these shared cultural reference points. Emma* described her same-sex friendships at her school as being 'Mean Girls-y' due to the prevalence of fights and tensions, often triggered by girls attempting to integrate into new social groups by copying each others' clothes and hair.[165] Claire also

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[163] Interview with Emma*, 7th February 2019.
[164] See for example: Kimberley Dadds, '93 Hilarious "Mean Girls" Memes That Will Make You Go "LOL, That's Fetch"', *Buzzfeed* https://www.buzzfeed.com/kimberleydadds/meme-girls 24 th March 2017, accessed 27th May 2021.
[165] Interview with Emma*, 7th February 2019.

referenced *Mean Girls* when describing her shift aged 15 from a mainstream to alternative identity, around the time of the millennium:

> Rather than just, oh you know, everybody likes 5ive so that's what we'd do, you know, "on Wednesdays we'd wear pink," that type of thing.[166]

The line 'on Wednesdays we wear pink' from *Mean Girls*, used by 'popular' girl Gretchen to establish group rules with newcomer Cady, has become infamous since the film's debut. The film came out around the time that Claire left school, so was not a cultural reference point during her school years. Her use of this line was as a shorthand reference for group conformity through peer policing, based on uniformity of dress.

Claire later rejected this social identity when she was fifteen in favour of an 'alternative' identity based on a love of indie music, such as the Stone Roses. Whilst cultural and social capital could be gained by customising school uniform to reflect popular trends, and therefore enabling girls to fit into a 'cool' group identity, 'alternative' group identities for girls were also important ways for girls to identify in the 1990s. Interest in mainstream culture and being a 'popular' girl was associated with competitiveness and conformity by some girls, in contrast to the more socially altruistic 'alternative' groupings which were seen as more authentically individual. This alternative identity was expressed at school through piercings (Emma*) and a rejection of impractical feminine attire such as stilettos (Lucy*). Claire also mentioned the emergence of ladette culture when she was around fourteen or fifteen and described a reimagining of girlhood which took place among her peer group around the millennium:

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[166] Interview with Claire Slobodian, 24th May 2019, Reading. 5ive were a popular boy band, active between 1997 and 2001.

Like it was cool for girls to act like boys and for girls to be like, more feminine, was, like, I don't know… sort of, under, like you weren't being a sort of true woman if you were acting like a girl.[167]

Claire struggled to articulate this sentiment coherently; she mentioned before the interview that she had recently watched the Netflix documentary *Feminists: What Were They Thinking?,* which may have resulted in her struggling to reconcile her own experiences with this popular narrative of feminism. Yet her comments also reflect tensions between the feminists of the 1970s and 1980s and a new generation of young women in the 1990s. The emergence of a commercialised 'girl power' in 1990s popular culture was epitomised by bands such as the Spice Girls and All Saints, both of whom Claire recalled enjoying as a teenager. Girl power, according to Lucy O'Brien, adapted radical riot grrrl aesthetics for a consumer market of eleven to thirteen-year-old 'tweenagers,' who 'flocked to the High Street to buy Spice Girls boob tubes and leopard-skin jumpsuits.'[168] Second-wave feminists such as Germaine Greer criticised this mainstream 'girl power' of the 1990s for its commercialisation, depoliticization of women's liberation, and the infantilization of adult women as 'girls.'[169] Yet this commercialised girl power offered girls new ways of expressing themselves by building upon the assertiveness and playful expressions of gender in mid to late 1980s media, as explored by Janice Winship and in Chapter Three.[170] Identifying with different groups, with alternative, goth, hippy, and commercial girl power styles and subcultures could allow girls to obtain cultural capital. Girls such as Claire drew from these styles to align themselves with groups, but also mark themselves out from others and be seen as individual. This fluidity of identification with femininity, the mainstream, and the

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[167] Interview with Claire Slobodian, 24th May 2019, Reading.

[168] Lucy O'Brien, *She Bop: The Definitive History of Women in Popular Culture*, (3rd edition, London: Jawbone Press, 2012).

[169] Stacy Gillis and Rebecca Munford, 'Genealogies and Generations: The Politics and Praxis of Third Wave Feminism', *Women's History Review*, 13.2 (2004), 165–82, 170.

[170] Janice Winship, '"A Girl Needs to Get Street-Wise": Magazines for the 1980s', *Feminist Review*, 21, 1985, 25–46.

alternative demonstrated by Claire, Emma*, and Lucy* suggests that from the mid-1980s to the early 2000s, categories of identification were not static; girls flitted between social groups and scenes, and individuality was a desirable trait. Girls' agency lay in how they adapted their appearances and their school uniform to gain social capital or challenge notions of femininity reinforced by school uniform. The customisation of school uniform was a way for girls to communicate these identities to others and align themselves with social groups; in spite of rules which aimed to erase pupils' social difference, difference was crucial in establishing an identity and gaining cultural and social capital.

Conclusion

This chapter has illustrated that whilst school uniform could be a tool for the reinforcement of white middle-class femininity, girls had small opportunities to use school uniform in agentic ways, to present themselves in certain ways to make social or academic gains. For working-class girls in grammar education, uniform was a way through which their social background – which some worked hard to conceal – could be revealed. Girls such as Nicola* and Maxine could use uniform in agentic ways, to assimilate to or reject the middle-class cultures at their schools. Some girls, such as Aretha's classmates, used their uniform to subvert the child-status their uniform conferred. Finally, the emergence of individuality as a desirable attribute in popular and consumer culture in the mid-1980s meant that even 'good girls' often broke uniform rules to gain social capital and achieve an elevated position within social hierarchies. Yet throughout the 1990s, definitions of teenage girlhood became more malleable as 'alternative' identities came to also hold significant social currency; expressing these identities by adapting uniform to display features of subcultures or styles allowed girls entry to different social groups. As this chapter has shown, school uniform was intended to symbolise egalitarian aims, erasing social

difference. But difference and individual identity were important for young people; bringing in small stylistic elements of their identities to their school uniform were crucial for pupils in maintaining a sense of self and belonging. This chapter has shown that by thinking about agency as fluid and contextually constructed reveals the limited use of binary conceptions of conformity and resistance. Considering cultural understandings tied to teenage consumer culture – such as the valorisation of supposed 'individuality' – and the importance of friendship networks, belonging, and social hierarchies has revealed the motivations and discourses which shaped the construction of girls' identities. Whilst a seemingly minor part of girls' school experiences, school uniform was an important site for the contestation of meaning and identity, and provided a space for girls to exercise their limited agency.

Conclusion

Girls' schooling underwent a significant transformation between 1970 and the early 2000s. At the start of the 1970s, most girls left school for work at age fifteen or sixteen and were often expected to marry not long afterwards.[1] Boys dominated higher education and the professional spheres. By the end of the century, feminist observations of the informal curriculum had been incorporated into mainstream equal opportunities requirements for schools, and girls consistently outperformed boys and increasingly took up more space within universities. Discourses of equal opportunities and cultural change around gender roles contributed to a model of the ideal empowered female subject – who had a good self-knowledge, excelled educationally and was able to take up professional opportunities which suited her individuality before finding a heterosexual relationship – and featured prominently in women's recollections and girls' experiences. This figure presented a way for some girls to construct their identities as self-determining, as they took up new opportunities. Yet this thesis has shown that this apparent progress for girls was limited, contested, and uneven, as inequalities from the 1970s lingered on. Working-class, Black, and white middle-class girls faced different challenges in aligning themselves with the figure of the ideal girl subject, an ideal which centred academic success.

Agency and Identity

This thesis makes an important intervention into scholarly debates about the nature of children's agency. Drawing on conceptualisations of agency by Mona Gleason and Tatek Abebe in particular, I have shown that the agency of young people – and perhaps even

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[1] *Statistics of Education 1972*, volume two (London: HMSO, 1974), 6; in Briefing paper, *School leaver reasons by sex in England and Wales, 1947-87,* Secondary Education and Social Change in the United Kingdom since 1945, accessed https://sesc.hist.cam.ac.uk/resources/statistical-tables/, 11/1/2021).

adults – must be thought of as fluid, and contextually specific.[2] Girls faced traditionally

gendered expectations of their futures in the 1970s, and some girls could contest these

expectations to marry and look after their families by prioritising their education and

ignoring the demands made by their parents.[3] Working-class girls also contested ideas of

working-class deviancy by seeking out a stable romantic partner.[4] This thesis further shows

how girls' agency could also align to adult demands and expectations. Conforming to school

uniform rules could be a way for working-class girls who felt out of place in grammar

schools to conceal their socio-economic background and conform to the behavioural and

sartorial expectations from teachers.[5] Following these rules allowed them to focus on their

education and gain qualifications, contributing to their social mobility. Being alert to these

ways in which agency was enacted will allow historians to further excavate how young

people made sense of and moved through the world, and how girls contributed to social and

cultural change across the late twentieth century.

By drawing from Joan Scott's ideas of agency as discursively constructed, and by

centring the experiences of girls, this thesis has shown that teenage girls' agency lay in their

construction of their identities from the discourses around them.[6] Oral history and close

examination of teenage girls' writing reveal the frameworks, language, and cultural

influences that made up the identities and expression of teenagers. Teenage girls' position

in society was one of economic and legal dependency, and ideas of class, race, and gender

interacted with conceptualisations of adolescent irrationality and immaturity to reinforce

this idea that teenagers were reliant on adult authority. At the same time, ideas of

individualism, self-discipline, and resilience were perpetuated in educational reforms

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[2] Mona Gleason, 'Avoiding the Agency Trap: Caveats for Historians of Children, Youth, and Education.', *History of Education*, 45.4 (2016), 446–59; Tatek Abebe, 'Reconceptualising Children's Agency as Continuum and Interdependence', *Social Sciences*, 8:3 (2019), 81-91.
[3] Chapter One, 95-7.
[4] Chapter One, 86-8.
[5] Chapter Four, 267-9.
[6] Joan W. Scott, 'The Evidence of Experience', *Critical Inquiry*, 17:4 (1991), 773–97.

influenced by equal opportunities discourses. These discourses could be used agentically by girls with new ways to present themselves as having control over their lives and as autonomous and empowered individuals.

Yet girls were able to confront, mediate, and reshape competing discourses and navigate their subject positions. Interviewees wielded discourses of choice – present within popular feminism, progressive education, and neoliberalism – to present their teenage selves as autonomous and empowered young women, who went against traditional ideals of womanhood. For working-class girls who struggled at school, neoliberalism also provided the language to construct their identities as self-made and in charge of their own fates, despite their implicit critiques of a schooling system which they felt had let them down.[7] Girls also used ideas of teenage sexual agency – present in progressive public health discourses and in teenage media in the 1980s – to mediate between ideas of sexual maturity and their own desires and behaviour, and construct their identities as knowing, sexually liberated young women. Girls wielded ideas and discourses for alternative purposes, challenging ideas of teenage powerlessness and claiming autonomy. Instrumentalising such discourses allowed girls to assert control over their lives and identities, albeit in limited ways.

Education

I have demonstrated that gender is crucial to understanding how English schooling operated in the late twentieth century. Whilst gender and class have been explored within broader accounts of post-war education, or within studies focused on the mid-twentieth century, this work has shown that ideas of gender, class, and race remained salient and vital factors in shaping pupil experiences after the end of the tripartite era and into the new

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[7] Chapter Two, 139-141.

millennium.[8] To some extent, religion also continued to be an important factor in shaping the types of schooling girls received – especially given the continued prevalence of Catholic schools post-comprehensivisation – as well as the values around femininity which girls were exposed to. Furthermore, as this thesis has shown, religion featured predominantly in debates over femininity and uniform, as schools' adaptations to multiculturalism failed to account for the needs and identities of Muslim girls. Even after comprehensivisation, some single-sex schools had their own cultures and practices which reinforced middle-class femininity. Comprehensivisation had uneven benefits for girls, as many schools continued to perpetuate gendered curriculum and working-class girls continued to leave with few qualifications.[9] The emergence of equal opportunities discourses from the mid 1970s alongside the development of feminist pedagogy in the 1980s had a tangible impact on education as a whole, bringing some feminist ideas about sexism in education into the mainstream. This thesis complements the work of social scientists and education scholars by bringing a historical analysis to the issue of girlhood in the late twentieth century, and shows that whilst girls' academic attainment suggested that the battle for gender equality in education had been successful, inequalities in attainment and job prospects continued throughout the late twentieth century, especially for working-class and Black girls.

By adopting a local focus on two distinct urban areas – Inner London and Reading – this thesis has also highlighted the importance of the local in examining educational change in the post-war era. LEAs had significant powers to determine local education policy, powers which were steadily eroded during the 1980s culminating in the abolition of the

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[8] Carol Dyhouse, *Girl Trouble: Panic and Progress in the History of Young Women*, (London ; New York: Zed Books, 2013); Joyce Goodman, 'Class and Religion: Great Britain and Ireland', in James C. Albisetti, Joyce Goodman, and Rebecca Rogers (eds.), *Girls' Secondary Education in the Western World: From the 18th to the 20th Century*, (2010), 9–24; Stephanie Spencer, 'Reflections on the "Site of Struggle": Girls' Experience of Secondary Education in the Late 1950s', *History of Education*, 33:4 (2004), 437–49; Laura Tisdall, *A Progressive Education?: How Childhood Changed in Mid-Twentieth-Century English and Welsh Schools* (Manchester University Press, 2019).
[9] Goodman, 'Class and Religion', 19.

ILEA in 1990. The politics and ideologies of individual actors working within LEAs were crucial in determining the policy of LEAs. Crucially, the politics of LEAs determined the extent to which radical education initiatives which tackled racial and gender inequality were introduced, supported, and funded. As Jane Martin shows, the ILEA's municipal feminist tradition allowed anti-sexist pedagogies and initiatives to flourish.[10] The ILEA's feminist phase from 1983 permitted teachers to pursue radical education initiatives, to take on training, design curriculum, and advise colleagues about best practice. The internal devolved structures of LEAs also meant that individual schools, head teachers, and class teachers had important responsibilities and freedoms. Schools had the freedom to implement anti-sexist work; they also had the freedom to reject it. Schools determined their own sex education curriculum until 1986 – when responsibility transferred to school governing bodies in the 1986 Education Act – and their own school uniform policies.[11] The recollections of the teachers interviewed for this project reveal the power and importance of individual actors in reshaping curriculum and implementing progressive reforms at a local and even individual school level.

Furthermore, this thesis reveals the limits of teachers' instrumentalization of equalities discourses in the late twentieth century. Peter Mandler has shown that the threads of meritocracy and democracy were constantly in tension throughout the postwar period.[12] Meritocracy posited that only the brightest, best, and hardest working could attain the highest social positions, irrespective of background. But in the postwar period, the concept of equality of opportunity was problematised, first with the comprehensivisation movement and later by feminist and anti-racist campaigners.[13] The pitfalls of tripartite

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[10] Jane Martin, 'Gender, Education and Social Change: A Study of Feminist Politics and Practice in London, 1870–1990', *Gender and Education*, 25.1 (2013), 56–74, 68-71.
[11] Education Act 1986 (London, HM Stationary Office, 1986).
[12] Peter Mandler, *The Crisis of the Meritocracy: Britain's Transition to Mass Education since the Second World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 17.
[13] Mandler, *The Crisis of the Meritocracy,* 4-5.

education were made clear; education, as it stood, could not grant all pupils equal access to opportunities. Feminist educationalists such as Frances Morrell, and teachers such as Kate Moorse, Sue Johne, and many more, believed that they were 'making their own world' through their work; anti-sexist education had the potential to transform society, not just improve girls' attainment.[14] But, as Tisdall has shown in relation to progressive education in the mid-twentieth century, there was a conflict inherent between pedagogical theory and practice, as teachers moulded progressive ideals to fit existing orthodoxies about the intellect and aspirations of working-class and ethnic minority pupils.[15] Equal opportunities interventions in education, whilst an important initial step in tackling gender inequalities in education, were in many ways limited by the very nature of the English education system. Mandler's assertion that there was a feeling across all classes 'that people ought to 'earn' their rewards through a combination of hard work and ability' is evident throughout this thesis.[16] Anti-sexist teachers sought to erode the barriers which hindered girls' ability to take advantage of this system; girls needed a level playing field from which to succeed on the level that boys had for decades. However, this playing field could never be truly levelled. The model of female empowerment created in education prized middle-class jobs and the deferral of marriage, and problematized young marriage and traditional female jobs. Equal opportunities discourses in education helped to construct an ideal female subject, who was assertive, self-determining, academically successful, and worked within the meritocratic foundations of English education to grasp this empowerment. But meritocracy, by its very nature, reinforced a social hierarchy of class, in which working-class lives and experiences were treated as abject, things to be left behind in the name of social mobility.

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[14] Martin, 'Gender, Education and Social Change', 70-1.
[15] Tisdall, *A Progressive Education?*, 249.
[16] Mandler, *The Crisis of the Meritocracy*, 4.

This conditional liberation is apparent across the chapters of this thesis. Girls who were seen to be of lower intellect or academic ability – often working-class girls, Black girls, and girls who had migrated to England – were less likely to be encouraged or supported in pursuing higher education or careers. The meritocratic framework of girls' empowerment problematised marriage and motherhood, and positioned education and work as key to girls' liberation from patriarchal binds. However, this framework failed to acknowledge the value and importance marriage and motherhood held for some girls. Marriage and motherhood offered girls both a respectable heterosexual identity, and a way to access the status and power of adulthood, something which was delayed by further education. Increasing unemployment in the 1970s and 1980s meant many working-class girls continued to take up traditionally feminised jobs, for instance in the clerical sector. Girls who left school with few qualifications critiqued their schools – in some ways implicitly – for letting them down, but also individualised their lack of qualifications as their own failings. The discourse of individualism and choice provided a way for working-class girls without many qualifications to assert ownership over their paths, and present themselves as 'self-made', working hard to 'get ahead' outside of formal institutions of school.

As this thesis shows, whilst middle-class girls benefitted the most from the expansion of educational and professional opportunities from the 1970s onwards, they also faced their own challenges, as Walkerdine, Lucey, and Melody have also shown.[17] Patriarchal ideas about women's roles continued to dominate education and the workplace.[18] However, discourses of individualism and choice allowed this group of women to construct themselves as 'empowered' and 'modern' teenagers with some control over

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[17] Valerie Walkerdine, Helen Lucey, and June Melody, *Growing Up Girl: Psycho-Social Explorations of Class and Gender* (New York: NYU Press, 2001), 216.
[18] Helen McCarthy, *Double Lives: A History of Working Motherhood* (UK: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2020), 361.

their lives. Some middle-class girls such as Ali and Dorota aligned themselves with popular understandings of a feminist moment in the 1970s, when girls' horizons and expectations of their futures expanded beyond the home; in part this was because they attended schools which had high academic aspirations and had always seen education as part of their futures. Social and cultural capital allowed these girls to access further and higher education more readily than their working-class peers, whose families perhaps had less educational experience. This group could also respond to new careers education by developing their self-knowledge and applying it to longer term plans for their futures. They were also less likely to be affected by unemployment; the sectors which required fewer qualifications were hit hardest by job losses, whereas girls who did well at school were still able to pursue a degree and enter a stable profession.

Whilst some interviewees from middle-class families were aware of their relative privileges compared to their less affluent peers, working-class girls often featured as figures in their narratives to construct their identities in opposition too; this was especially true in relation to sex and social groupings. The framework of acceptable teenage sexuality centred factual and self-knowledge as prerequisites for an agentic sexual relationship; by comparing themselves to girls who were promiscuous, who did not do well in school, or were too distracted by boys, presenting them as victims, middle class girls could claim sexual agency for themselves. School uniform operated in a similar way; these girls could display aspects of their identities through adapting their appearance, something which required a certain among of disposable income. However, many working-class girls also had to carefully navigate the ways they were perceived in school through their bodies. Uniform provided a way for them to conceal their social background in the more elite, middle-class world of the grammar school, and communicate their alignment with modest and respectable middle-class femininity, both aiding them in taking advantage of the education and social mobility offered to them.

By centring pupil experiences in this way, this thesis also demonstrates the significance of school as a social space for girls. Whilst curriculum and attainment are important factors in shaping girls' experiences, girls' relationships with their peers were also vital in shaping their identities as well as influencing their engagement with their schooling. When it came to subject choice, staying on past the mandatory leaving age, and thinking about careers, girls' social and cultural capital were vital in setting limits on their opportunities. Girls compared their decisions and educational paths to their friends and peers, and highlighted the inequalities they faced, by emphasising the differences in the ways they were treated compared to girls who were seen as more academically able. Chapter Three showed that peer surveillance was central in constructing girls' sexual identities, as some girls aimed to illustrate their maturity by constructing their identities in opposition to peers who transgressed ideas of sexual agency. Being seen as sexually knowing among peer groups also had important social benefits, allowing girls to gain expertise and cultural capital themselves. This work builds on Hannah Charnock's conclusion that school was a key site for girls' social and sexual lives, forging platonic and romantic intimate relations with their classmates.[19] Cultural capital was also important in how girls wielded school uniform for their own means. Being seen as 'individual' or 'alternative' could allow girls to assimilate into different social groups and assert control over their individual and group identities.

Girlhood

I have argued in this thesis that an important shift in girlhood materialised around the mid-1980s. A new model of the ideal empowered female subject emerged, one who had good

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[19] Hannah Charnock, 'Teenage girls, female friendship and the making of the sexual revolution in England, 1950–1980', *The Historical Journal*, 63:4 (2019), 1032–53.

self-knowledge of her own values and skills, excelled educationally and could take up new opportunities for work, was self-determining and autonomous, and pursued a heterosexual relationship. This figure was drawn from popular interpretations of feminism; mainstream and radical equal opportunities movements within education; girls' culture and media; and from neoliberal ideas of self-knowledge, resilience, and adaptability. The emergence of this figure was not only the result of changes within education, but also the result of longer term economic and political processes. De-industrialisation and the shift towards an economy in which precarity and instability were the norm no doubt contributed to making this version of girlhood which could 'cope' with the liberties afforded under neoliberalism.[20] In particular, careers education perpetuated these ideas of 'coping' and resilience in work to reflect this economic transformation. However, as Robinson et al show, Thatcherism and neoliberalism were not the only possible outcome of these processes.[21] The social and cultural changes which accompanied deindustrialisation and the post-war settlement – such as affluence, the emergence of liberation movements, and the welfare state – contributed to a rising individualism. This in turn created new possibilities for girls to challenge and contest new classed and gendered norms by reinforcing the notion that girls could determine their own futures. Girls used this figure to frame their own experiences and selfhoods, aligning themselves with this ideal as best they could within the limits of their own social position. The concept of this new kind of girl, who could balance education, work, and a romantic life, perpetuated the idea that girls could choose their lives for themselves. The concept of 'choice' was central to this ideal; 'choice' could be freeing in the eyes of educationalists, yet 'choice' could also mask the structural factors which affected

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[20] Jim Tomlinson, 'De-industrialization Not Decline: A New Meta-narrative for Post-war British History', in *Twentieth Century British History,* 27:1, (2016), 76-99, 97; Walkerdine, Lucey, and Melody, *Growing Up Girl,* 1-3.

[21] Emily Robinson, Camilla Schofield, Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, and Natalie Thomlinson, 'Telling Stories about Post-War Britain: Popular Individualism and the "Crisis" of the 1970s', *Twentieth Century British History*, 28:2 (2017), 268–304, 275.

girls' life courses, and individualised their supposed failures to take advantage of this new period of 'self-discovery'. New opportunities for education and jobs emerged for girls as equal opportunities reforms spread throughout the education system, Teenage girls who could not align easily with these ideals of academically successful girlhood took up related discourses – around individualism, self-determination, and autonomy – to construct their identities as modern, self-determining girls. In the case of education and work, this often took the form of being 'self-made', having achieved success in adulthood in spite of limited educational opportunities and attainment.

Ideas about girlhood from outside of education were also crucial in constructing this ideal of the modern empowered girl. Discourses around teenage sexual agency in public health materials and girls' media emphasised the importance of self-knowledge of values and desires and communication skills as prerequisites for sexual activity. These prerequisites provided a way for girls to claim agency over their sexual experiences, something which was denied to them in school sex education. The shifting aesthetics within teenage youth culture were also crucial in establishing this ideal model of girlhood. The 1980s were a time where a myriad of ways of identifying and the cultural capital of being 'individual' were at a peak. 'Alternative' cultures and styles were important signs of social status, and fashions were less demarcated by gender. These trends were at odds with conventionally gendered uniform traditions, leading to clashes between girls and teachers over skirt length and trousers. Attire was vital in the making of teen girls' identities, and girls asserted themselves in school through the disruption of uniform. These shifting discourses provided girls with new ways of understanding themselves and their place in society, as gender roles and relations in late twentieth century England changed. By expanding my evidence base to include girls' media and include questions about friendships, leisure, and home in interviews, I have shown that looking purely at the discourses of girlhood within school is too limiting. The ideals of individualism, 'choice', and

empowerment – which were present beyond school as well as within – were crucial in the construction of girls' identities, as they wielded these discourses to frame their lives and experiences as a result of their autonomous action and self-determination.

Individualism and Modern Britain

This work has shown that individualism – a key post-war trend according to historians of modern Britain – had a significant impact on the young.[22] Ideas of individualism were central in making the identities and shaping the experiences of teenage girls, as well as allowing girls to contest conceptualisations of age promoted by adults. As Robinson, Schofield, Sutcliffe-Braithwaite and Thomlinson have shown, individualism in the 1970s was not necessarily about greed, but rather was about having more autonomy and control over one's life.[23] Not only was this an emergent trend among adult populations, but also was present among school pupils, transmitted through their education and in teen culture. Girls were encouraged to be aware of their own talents, personality, and aspirations in careers education and in their wider schooling. Some teachers attempted to disrupt the social reproduction of gender stereotyped roles, and in careers education, self-knowledge in relation to occupation was encouraged from the 1960s. More girls worked and remained single after leaving education, undergoing a period of 'self-discovery' before cohabiting and marrying. By asserting their individuality, girls could resist gendered expectations of their futures and claim self-determination. Discourses of individualism also allowed girls who aligned with traditional ideas of domestic womanhood to claim autonomy. The experiences

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[22] Claire Langhamer, *The English in Love: The Intimate Story of an Emotional Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Nikolas Rose, *Governing the Soul: The Shaping of the Private Self* (London: Routledge, 1989); Mathew Thomson, *Psychological Subjects: Identity, Culture, and Health in Twentieth-Century Britain: Identity, Culture, and Health in Twentieth-Century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Jon Lawrence, *Me, Me, Me: The Search for Community in Post-War England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019); Robinson, Schofield, Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, and Thomlinson, 'Telling Stories about Post-War Britain'.
[23] Robinson et al, 'Telling Stories about Post-War Britain', 302.

of working-class girls who left education and presented themselves as 'self-made', show that even those most marginalised by middle-class feminist interventions into education constructed their selfhoods as self-determining and autonomous. Expressing an individual identity was also a form of cultural capital, forged in opposition to a mainstream commercial femininity. Girls adapted their uniform to display their individuality and gain social capital among their peers. This discourse of the importance of individuality – in life choices, careers, identity, and expression – was central to girls' identities. At the same time, structural inequalities and the so-called 'meritocracy' of education disadvantaged working-class and ethnic minority pupils and limited the extent to which they could exercise control over their lives. These girls drew from this discourse even when it did not serve them, presenting themselves as self-made, or agentic over their lives, even if they did not align with the meritocratic model of female empowerment.

Furthermore, this research suggests that education was a crucial factor in post-war British society and culture. Historians of the late twentieth century have highlighted the important of deindustrialisation, the rise of neoliberalism, changing gender relations, and many more as fundamental in driving key social and cultural shifts towards the millennium. However, as Jo Littler argues, meritocracy needs to be understood as a mechanism for the perpetuation and creation of social and cultural inequality; education was a meritocratic system, and functioned to uphold social and cultural hierarchies.[24] Education in the late twentieth century made attempts to adapt to wider changes in English society – as a result of migration, shifts in gender relations, and the transformation of the economy – but these adaptations were always partial, upholding the central foundation of meritocracy.

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[24] Jo Littler, 'Meritocracy as Plutocracy: The Marketising of "equality" under Neoliberalism', *New Formations*, 80/81, 2013, 52–72, 53.

Education was therefore fundamental in perpetuating social inequalities throughout the late twentieth century, and shaping English society as a whole.

This thesis challenges the idea of girls' educational progress in the late twentieth by by drawing attention to the lives of girls from a range of socio-economic backgrounds and showing that class and race were still vital factors in shaping girls' educational experiences and opportunities into the millennium. However, this research is limited by the predominantly middle-class and white interviewee pool. Five interviewees identified explicitly as working-class, and two Black women were interviewed; the narratives of these women shed crucial light on uneven effects of gender reforms in schooling. This thesis has shown that some working-class Black girls drew on the meritocratic framework of empowerment to take up the limited opportunities available to them, despite consistent low expectations and a lack of support from teachers. Black female bodies were also othered and sexualised within and outside of school. However, middle-class Black girls and girls from other ethnic minorities are not represented in this small sample. Gillborn and Mirza's research in 2000 showed that whilst social class and gender did have an impact on attainment, ethnic inequalities were starker: 'comparing like with like, African-Caribbean, Pakistani and Bangladeshi pupils do not enjoy equal opportunities.'[25] Girls from these specific groups warrant dedicated attention in order to comprehend the nuances of their experiences.

Additionally, whilst it is inappropriate to speculate about the sexual preferences of those interviewed for this project, all interviewees talked solely about romantic and sexual relationships as teenagers and as adults with men. Therefore, future work is needed to explore the experiences of girls whose sexualities and identities fall under the LGBTQ+

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[25] David Gillborn and Heidi Mirza, *Educational Inequality: Mapping Race, Class and Gender - A Synthesis of Research Evidence* (Office for Standards in Education, 2000), 27.

umbrella. As Chapter Three showed, sex education was a particularly fraught part of the curriculum, especially with the restrictions put in place by Section 28. Heterosexuality was an important social currency for girls, and heterosexual marriage formed an important part of girls' imagined futures throughout the period. Laura Tisdall's recent article has begun to excavate the nuances in how teenage lesbians understood themselves and their futures in the light of these dominant cultural expectations.[26] Yet much more work needs to be done to examine the school experiences of lesbian, bisexual, and queer girls. Similarly, the school experiences of transgender and non-binary people requires particular historical attention.

Furthermore, this thesis has revealed that reforms aimed at gender equality largely came from individual teachers, working within networks of progressive educationalists who shared resources and expertise. However, as with the broader feminist movement, tensions were likely to emerge between white anti-sexist teachers and their Black, Asian, and ethnic minority colleagues.[27] These radical teaching networks had significant crossover of staff between anti-sexist and anti-racist working groups, the inspectorate, and broader activist networks. This thesis provides a historical foundation for further exploring these interpersonal connections. In a similar vein, the comparative nature of this thesis shows the importance of looking at local education in the late twentieth century; the devolved power structures of the English education system meant that there was significant variation across the country. Comparative studies of northern, Welsh, and rural LEAs would yield greater insight into the spread of radical education, from comprehensivisation through to anti-sexism and anti-racism.

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[26] Laura Tisdall, '"What a Difference It Was to Be a Woman and Not a Teenager": Adolescent Girls' Conceptions of Adulthood in 1960s and 1970s Britain', *Gender & History*, (published online, 2021).
[27] Natalie Thomlinson, *Race, Ethnicity and the Women's Movement in England, 1968-1993*, (Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2016). See also: Sarah Olowe (ed.) *Against The Tide: Black Experiences in the ILEA*, (London: Inner London Education Authority, 1990).

The feminist motivation to centre the experiences of teenage girls and to take their experiences seriously has been at the heart of this research. As this thesis has shown, teenage girls, and their needs, interests, and aspirations, were often dismissed as silly or frivolous. Yet as Sarah Hook points out in her poem, 'TEENAGE SEXISM', teenage girls were not unique in pursuing romantic interests, taking inspiration from popular culture, or other things associated with adolescent girlhood. She lampoons adults for making generalisations about teenage girls, and finishes her poem by turning the attention back on adults.

Maybe this is just a stage

Symptomatic of my age

But NO it's not a teenage game

Each generation acts the same.[28]

Hook stresses that not only could girls be wily, coy, and docile, but that adults could also act like teenagers, challenging stereotyped assumptions about adolescence and adulthood. This thesis has shown that teenage girls in the late twentieth century faced difficult and evolving challenges and pressures. As ideas of girlhood shifted around them, subsequent cohorts of girls from the 1970s to the early 2000s faced complex and at times contradictory messaging about how they should live their lives. This work shows that girls were able to utilise these complex and contradictory ideals to understand, navigate and sometimes challenge their position in society, and to construct their selfhoods.

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[28] Sarah Hook, 'TEENAGE SEXISM', *Shocking Pink,* Issue 1, 1981, BL.

Appendix

1: Table of interviewee demographic information

Name/pseudonym	Year of Birth	Location	Began secondary school at age 11 (year)	Type of school	Social class (as described by interviewee)
Jacqueline*	1978	London	1990	Independent	Middle-class
Maxine Settle	1958	Reading	1970	Bilateral (grammar stream)	Working-class
Katie Beswick	1983	London	1995	Comprehensive	Middle-class
Sara*	1964	London	1976	Grammar	Middle-class
Emma*	1985	Reading	1996	Grammar	Middle-class
Aretha George-Tooley	1974	London	1985	Comprehensive	Working-class
Dorota Thomas	1965	London	1977	Independent & Voluntary-aided	Middle-class
Alison Burford	1967	Reading	1979	Comprehensive	Middle-class
Ali Payne	1962	Reading	1973	Grammar & Independent	Middle-class
Rachel*	1975	London	1986	Independent & Comprehensive	Middle-class
Nicola*	1963	London	1974	Grammar	Working-class
Lucy*	1971	Reading	1982	Comprehensive	Middle-class
Michelle*	1972	Reading	1984	Comprehensive	Working-class
Claire Slobodian	1985	Reading	1996	Comprehensive	Middle-class
Debbie*	1969	Reading	1980	Comprehensive	Working-class
Katy Marshall	1958	London	1969	Grammar	Middle-class

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Interview with Rachel*, 12th January 2019

Interview with Ali Payne, Reading, 21st January 2019

Interview with Emma*, 7th February 2019

Interview with Sara*, 15th March 2019

Interview with Nicola*, 3rd May 2019

Interview with Aretha George-Tooley, London, 7th May 2019

Interview with Michelle*, 14th May 2019

Interview with Lucy*, 17th May 2019

Interview with Alison Burford, Reading, 20th May 2019

Interview with Claire Slobodian, Reading, 24th May 2019

Interview with Debbie*, 10th June 2019

Interview with Jane* and Ian*, 12th June 2019

Interview with Joy Walton, Suffolk, 15th August 2019

Interview with Steven Cowan, London, 16th August 2019

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