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Feeling your age:
Pre-teen fashionable femininity

by

Julie Louise Blanchard-Emmerson

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This thesis explores the importance of clothing in the lives of pre-teen girls; how do girls of 8 to 9 and 10 to 11-years-old understand both the discourses of fashion, that suggest how girls' bodies should be dressed, as well as the material garments that they chose to put on their bodies, and make sense of these meanings on and through their bodies? What part does clothing play in their understanding of personhood and in particular the interconnection of gender, age, class, ethnicity and sexuality? What might the study of young girls and fashionable clothes tell us about the creation and negotiation of contemporary young feminine identities?

Much popular discussion in the twenty-first century, including government policy debate, has focused on the sexualisation of young girls, and the wearing of certain fashionable dress is seen as a contributory factor in this sexualizing process. Academics have begun to assess what fashion means to those who consume it, yet this literature usually assumes an adult consumer. Turning to the sociology of childhood and the recognition of childhood agency, this thesis suggests that girls' own relationship with fashion needs to be investigated in order to consider if, and to what extent, this sexualisation is taking place, to add to our knowledge both in childhood, and fashion, sociology. This thesis examines girls as meaningful consumers of fashion and explores the relationship between clothes and identity for these girls. By carrying out focus groups, asking participants to photograph their clothes and undertaking interviews with those photographs, this research asks girls what fashion means to them. In response to concerns raised in popular debate about the 'loss of childhood innocence' through fashion consumption, the girls' consumption of dress is explored in relation to the following of fashion trends, the emulating of pop stars and parental influence. This thesis refutes any simplistic mapping of these influences onto girls' ways of dressing, demonstrating the complexities of girls' interactions with popular ideas about what to wear and how clothes are understood. Rather, I argue that girls' negotiations of sexuality, subject positions and fashion are complex and nuanced.

This thesis addresses key themes arising from my data that show that girls in my research are alert to social expectations and deem dress to be context-dependent. The sample demonstrated a thoughtful, thorough sense of learned social rules and taste, and individual aesthetics. Moreover, evidence from this study shows that girls are able to create multiple, fluid identities through dress, from the habitual, everyday self to the hetero-sexualised 'girlie' girl and back again. Clothes prove useful tools in thinking through what it means to be different types of person, but also enable girls to display kinship and friendship.

Another crucial element of fashion arising from this research is that of materiality and temporality. Dress is inextricably linked to memory and biography, acting as a memento of past events or important relationships but also enabling girls to articulate their own biographical narratives. The materiality of clothes on the body also informed them of the passing of time, acting as transitional objects. An original contribution of this thesis is a demonstration of the ways in which girls positioned themselves in the present, through previous interactions between body and garments, and the increasing tightness of those garments as the girls grew. Yet girls also tried on future identities through experiencing certain clothes on their bodies. The sensuous experience of dress allows girls to feel that they are growing up and therefore to situate themselves temporally on their life course as, this thesis argues, we may all do.

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Declaration Of Authorship

I, JULIE LOUISE BLANCHARD-EMMERSON

declare that this thesis and the work presented in it are my own and has been generated by me as the result of my own original research.

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I confirm that:

1. This work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;

2. Where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated;

3. Where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;

4. Where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;

5. I have acknowledged all main sources of help;

6. Where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;

7. None of this work has been published before submission.

Signed: …………………………………………………………………………

Date: …………………………………………………………………

Acknowledgements

Chapter One - Overview

1.1   Introduction

'High street shops to ban padded bras and "sexually suggestive" clothes for young girls' (Shipman, *MailOnline* 2011[1]). So reads the headline of an article in the British tabloid newspaper the *Daily Mail* reporting on public disquiet about the marketing of 'suggestive clothes' to young girls and their possible sexualisation. It was not a lone voice, as broadsheets and tabloids alike (Cochrane, *Guardian* 2010; Cox, *The Sun* 2016; Jamieson, *Telegraph* 2010; Hamilton, *The Sun* 2010), numerous parenting books and websites (Palmer 2007; Levin and Kilbourne 2009, Mumsnet 2013), and government reviews (Bailey 2011; Buckingham et al 2010; Papadopoulos 2010) focus on the links between twenty-first century consumer culture and potential premature sexualisation of pre-teen girls in Britain. The wearing of 'sexy', 'fashionable' dress, such as the items discussed above, is often seen as a contributory factor in this sexualizing process. Retail guidelines have been introduced to try and prevent the production of certain clothes (British Retail Consortium 2011) and mounting public pressure causes some garments to be taken off the shelves, such a Primark padded bikini (see for example newspaper reports such as Cochrane, *Guardian* 2010; Daily Mail 2010; Elliott, *TimesOnline* 2010), because of their possible effects on young girls.

There is little in the way of research with this age of girls in relation to fashion that explicitly explores whether such concerns are justified (see Pilcher 2009 and Cook 2008 for critiques of this dearth). How are fashionable clothes understood and worn by the girls themselves, and what is the impact on their sense of identity? Yet, girls are increasingly considered in the sociology of childhood to be competent social actors, able to articulate something of their own interactions and understanding of their social worlds (Buckingham 1996, 2000, 2005; James, *et al* 2005). My thesis aims to examine pre-teen girls' fashion consumption practices in the UK, in order to address this gap in our knowledge, so as to enrich the sociology of childhood, fashion and consumption. It suggests the critical awareness of girls but also the limits of that awareness, and explores in what ways we may need to help girls critique their dressed position in the world, so that they can further understand the gendered, hetero-sexualised, classed, raced, aged expectations that shape their subjectivity. This introduction first lays out the background motivation that shaped the instigation of the research. It then goes on to set out the main research questions and arguments that are pursued in the thesis and, finally, how those arguments are structured throughout my chapters.

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[1] To demonstrate the widespread nature of these concerns, newspaper titles are attributed, as well as the surnames of the journalists who wrote the articles cited.

1.2   Research background

As a part-time Postgraduate student, with family and work commitments that periodically intervened in my research, I first began my doctorate in 2007. In my role as a lecturer in the history and theory of fashion, dress and identity, I introduced graduate students to the early work of Angela McRobbie and Jenny Garber (1976) and their analysis of the lack of popular and academic acknowledgement of the role of girls in youth culture. Many of my students and I became politically engaged by McRobbie and Garber's (1976) suggestion that there was a gendered bias in academia that had led to young men's consumption being considered active, resistant and worthy of study, but young women's consumption practices as conformist and therefore side-lined in research (McRobbie and Garber 1976). Yet it is not just in the work of male scholars that girls' consumption is assumed passive, but also in contemporary popular discourse, and I began to collect newspaper and magazine stories that concentrated on young girls' culture and consumption, to critique the ways in which girls were being constructed within this discourse.

I noted from the beginning of the twenty-first century, the rise of the 'tween' or 'tweenager', a marketing term rife in popular media discussion at the time (Frean, *TimesOnline* 2003; Lister, *The Independent* 2001; Mattins, *TimesOnline* 2004). Used to describe a young, usually feminine (Key Note 2001: 3), consumer, the 'tween' or 'tweenager' – between childhood and her teenage years – was increasingly of consternation to commentators because of the sexualised music videos she was watching and the sexualised magazines, dolls, make-up and clothes that she was being sold (Brooks, *Guardian* 2007; Frean, *TimesOnline* 2003; Lister, *The Independent* 2001; Womack, *Telegraph* 2007). As a feminist, I recognised that here was an example of a social concern that could be linked to the continuous judgment of, and disquiet about, young women's sexuality. Yet, simultaneously, in Western society women are praised for looking youthful and sexually attractive (see Renolds 2005 and Scott and Jackson 2010 for critiques of this dichotomy).

Whilst in the twentieth century the focus of popular attention was generally on teenage girls (see McRobbie 1991 and Harris 2004a for discussions about this focus), twenty-first century anxiety has spread to concentrate on girls who are not yet teenagers, but are 'pre' their teens. Market research was being carried out for British retailers to enable them to target these pre-teens, such as set out in the *Tweenagers: 2001 Market Assessment* (Key Note 2001), in which the core market was described as being 10 to 12-year-olds.[2] This attention on girls of pre-teen age led me to conduct previous research with 10 and 11-year-old girls (Blanchard 2006) that investigated the ways in which girls themselves responded to this marketing of fashionable goods and what their

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[2] All ages, school year numbers and focus group numbers will be in digits.

perspective on fashion, gender and identity could offer to understanding of the construction and negotiation of young feminine identities through dress. My research showed that, whilst internalising the ideal of hetero-normative femininity, the girls deliberated what that norm should be like, particular in terms of what was acceptable fashionable dress. The girls also recognised that identities were not firmly fixed, as they described how they took up, rejected, debated and disputed various subjectivities (Blanchard 2006). Despite young girls being knowledgeable and insightful about their own identity construction and able to offer understanding of how, why and in what ways they responded to consumer culture and in particular fashion (Blanchard 2006), still their voices are, as yet, largely absent from the public debate.

The popular discussion also expresses concern about the sexualisation of girls as young as 8 (Cliff, *MailOnline* 2016; Cox, *The Sun* 2016) and the Key Note's *Tweenager* report (2001) states that its assessment of the market concentrates on 8 to 12-year-olds, suggesting that girls as young as 8 would respond to the same strategies as the older tween girls. This thesis was instigated in order to consider how young girls, including those of the younger age of the marketing focus, are interacting with these marketing strategies and in what ways they are consuming fashionable clothes. This study aims to carry out research in order to consider what a comparison between girls aged 8 to 9-years-old, and those at the older age of 10 to 11-years-old, might elicit in terms of their relative knowledge of fashion, gender and identity and their access to resources with which to perform their identities. White, middle-class girls, as will be seen in the next chapter, are assumed as the unmarked norm on which the concern is focussed, and my research is conducted with predominately white, middle-class girls in order to explore the ways in which they might construct themselves as raced and classed through dress.

My interest in fashion as a particular form of popular, material culture was honed whilst studying for an MA in the History of Dress and Textiles. I became increasingly aware of the burgeoning area of Fashion Theory that was productively seeking to focus study on specific pieces of clothing (Palmer 1997; Summers 2001), whilst considering the cultural and social implications of the garments (Summers 2001) and exploring the ways in which clothing interacts with the bodies of individuals (Tseëlon 1995; Woodward 2007).[3] Although there has been much valuable research published in the area as a whole, studies that have managed to combine an attention to garments as object-based material culture, with the ways in which the wearers of the garments interact with their social and the material worlds through their clothes, have been few (see Taylor 2002, Taylor 2004 and Woodward and Fisher 2014 for critiques of this dearth). Yet, in order to investigate the

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[3] Fashion Theory burgeoned from Berg's first publication of the *Journal of Fashion Theory* in 1997, to the growth of Berg's Fashion Library and the recent publication, by Intellect, of the latest fashion theory journal *Critical Studies in Fashion and Beauty*.

potential sexualising effect of clothing, the link between fashionable clothes, young girls' bodies and their sense of identity must be examined.

One of the few academics who has been particularly successful in evoking the inter-connection between the material and the social is sociologist Sophie Woodward (2007). She researched how women dressed for different occasions and discussed both the physical garment as it was tried on, and how the different items and outfits then enabled the wearer to construct various versions of their gendered selves. Depending on many factors such as social occasion, context, time of year and expected audience, the type of identity that the women in her study wished to constitute through their clothes altered (Woodward 2007). However, little is known about whether, and to what extent, this ability to construct various identities can also be seen in young girls, such as these girls aged 8 to 11 (a rare exception is Pilcher 2009; 2013). Whilst gender and age are structuring factors in how girls might construct identities, other structuring forces such as class and ethnicity also need to be considered, as they also affect the possibilities of what type of self can be created (Woodward 2007); factors that my research considers. Most productively in Woodward's (2007; 2014) work, it is not that clothes themselves carry inherent meaning but it is through a relationship between dress and body that meaning and identity for the wearer is made. This relationship has yet to be explored in relation to young girls and dress and will extend knowledge within the sociology of childhood and fashion.

Instead of the subtle understanding of the entwining of the material, social, embodied and experiential aspects of dress, both academic and popular discussions about fashion and dress frequently focus on fashion as representing cultural ideas that reside in the surface appearance of the clothes (Barthes 1985; Lurie 1992). The materiality of these items is understood simply as an unambiguous carrier of meaning (see Woodward and Fisher 2014 for a critique of this type of discussion). In the newspaper articles and government reviews listed earlier, a padded bra or bikini top has, like the shoe as noted by Sherlock (2014), come to stand for femininity and sex. [4] An attribute of the clothing such as the padding in the bras is seen in the discussion above as a crucial part of sexualisation, as assumptions are made about the meaning of the materiality of the garment, with adults reading off the padding as being 'suggestive' in supposedly offering 'enhancement' (Shipman 2011, *MailOnline*). Journalist Shipman (2011) refers to the new guidelines for the British Retail Consortium in the wake of the Bailey Review, which states that underwiring or moulded cups of bras were inappropriate for young girls and instead, should be for 'comfort, modesty and support, not enhancement' (cited in Shipman, *MailOnline* 2011). Again the belief here is that padding in these bras is for 'enhancement' of breasts. Yet even retailers

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[4] Presumably, most often, the high-heeled shoe, as is also clear in this commercialisation and sexualisation debate - see newspaper articles such as Cochrane (2011) and McCartney (2010).

disagree about what the padding might mean, with fashion retailer Matalan, perhaps aiming to save face when brought to book on the sale of their padded bra, arguing that it had added padding for young girls after consultation with parents, to *ensure modesty* (Cliff, *MailOnline* 2016. My emphasis). Clearly then, the materiality of fashionable dress is read and interpreted to have particular cultural meanings, and yet there is a sense of indeterminacy.

Whilst these garments are discussed and argued over by popular adult commentators and parents, they have a specific material form that is designed for wearing on the actual, physical bodies of girls. How are these clothes worn and understood by the girls for whose bodies they are designed? A crucial part of interpreting fashion, which has often been missing from academic study, is to understand the multi-sensorial aspects of fashion objects – the tactile, visual and material (Woodward and Fisher 2014: 14). How does the cloth of these garments interact with girls' bodies to enable them to think about and experience themselves as particular embodied selves? As Woodward and Fisher (2014) suggest, '"people" and "things" exist in mutual self-construction and dialectical co-dependency' (Woodward and Fisher 2014: 5); our clothing constitutes us but concurrently we construct the meaning of that clothing. Identity is produced through dress and is co-constituted between the interaction between body and dress; therefore in order to increase the sociological understanding of the current construction of pre-teen feminine identities, the ways in which 8 to 9 and 10 to 11-year-old girls dress themselves needs to be researched.

1.3   *Research questions and main arguments of this thesis*
This thesis addresses both the lack of study of materiality of fashion discussed above, and of young girls' experiences of constructing their identities through fashionable dress, in ways that will further the research of both areas. This study explores the importance of clothing in the lives of young girls and my key research questions are:

1. How do white, middle-class girls of 8 to 9 and 10 to 11-years-old understand both the discourses of fashion and the material garments that they choose to put on their bodies, and make sense of these meanings on and through their bodies?
2. What part does fashion play in their understanding of personhood and in particular the interconnection of the cultural categories of gender, age, class, ethnicity and sexuality?
3. What might the study of young girls and fashionable clothes tell us about the creation and negotiation of contemporary young feminine identities?

This thesis has a feminist, social constructionist framework, developed from works such as Renold (2005) and Russell and Tyler (2002), which seeks to acknowledge that identities are something that are constantly done and re-done. Recent childhood sociology, such as Renold (2005), Russell and Tyler (2002), as well as James *et al* (2005), Pilcher (2009) and Pilcher (2013)

amongst others, also recognise the importance of researching with children to consider the ways in which children constitute their own gendered, classed, raced and aged identities. Building on these foundations, the research questions in this study were investigated with a qualitative research design, using focus groups, visual methods and interviews, so as to ask girls to articulate what fashion and dress mean to them. Focus groups were chosen in order to explore collective understanding of fashionable identities (Eckert 1993), as my theoretical stance acknowledges that all social practice is inter-subjective (Bottero 2010); fashion is a shared phenomenon and what is in fashion and what to wear are matters negotiated amongst peers. The role of the materiality of dress in the construction of identity (Sherlock 2014; Woodward and Fisher 2014) is also fundamental to my approach and doing focus groups with the girls wearing their own choice of clothes (as opposed to school uniform), and in asking participants to photograph their clothes and undertaking interviews about the photographs, the research focussed on the dynamic between the girls and their dressed bodies.

By choosing two different age ranges of girls to study, this thesis aimed to investigate the structuring of childhood by age and examines how girls are positioned, and position themselves, in terms of aged expectations. James *et al* (2005) in their discussion of 'social generationing' consider how children's lives are temporally structured with regard to both age grade and age class. 'Age grade' indicates status categories in the social structure such as child, teenager or additionally in this research, tweenager or pre-teen; categories that are fluid, blurred and shift in relation to each other and to adulthood (James *et al* 2005; Renold 2005). 'Age class' is, in Western societies, defined by the school system where groups of children progress through the system together, grouped narrowly by calendar age (James *et al* 2005; Renold 2005). In this research the girls were in Years 4 and 6 of schooling, grouped together as being 8 to 9-years-old and 10 to 11-years-old respectively. Both forms of generationing, age grade and age class, entail the construction of certain norms that inform the ways in which children are treated according to their temporal location, and shape the lives of the children themselves. Renold (2005) goes on to formulate the concept of 'sexual generationing' (Renold 2005: 25), a concept that seeks to encompass the ways in which girls are positioned and position themselves according to aged expectations of girls' sexual and social behaviour and practices. I propose that both social and sexual generationing will be useful tools to examine both how girls' dressing is shaped by aged expectations, and also how girls' clothes and the ways in which they clothe their bodies offer a way of understanding their age.

In analysing these data sets, this thesis interrogates popular concerns about consumerism, sexuality, celebrity culture and mothers' influence on their daughters' appearance. It refutes any simplistic mapping of these discourses and influences onto girls' ways of dressing, demonstrating

the complexities of girls' interactions with popular ideas about what to wear and how these clothes will be understood. Rather, girls' negotiation of sexuality, subject positions and fashion are complex and nuanced. This research determines that clothing their bodies is a complex experience for girls; wearing certain types of clothes cannot simply be read-off as girls becoming more sexual. Girls' understanding of, and interaction with, fashion and dress, involves finely tuned notions of appropriate sexual display and sometimes outright rejection of fashionable dictates. Their dressing goes beyond responding to the most obvious discourses of fashion, popular culture, parents and peers but also takes into account other social aspects, perhaps considered more adult concerns, such as ideas of occasion and practicality. Engagements with socially constituted ideas of aesthetics and taste were detailed and girls negotiated social norms and expectations through the materiality of their clothing. These choices about the look and feel of clothes that girls wear demonstrate both their cultural competencies and individual preferences. All these factors must be attended to if we are to understand the kinds of clothes that young girls wish to wear upon their bodies and their construction of identity through cloth, in order to evaluate whether, and to what extent, they are 'sexualising' themselves through fashionable dress.

1.4   Structure of the thesis

The next chapter of this thesis explores current popular debates about the commercialisation and sexualisation of childhood and seeks to examine what it is about contemporary fashion that is thought by some to be so problematic and what ill effects these clothes are posited to cause. The chapter goes on to propose that using the concept of moral panic as a lens through which to examine this public discussion suggests that the concern is escalating due to an amplifying process, and indicates that the apprehension is not so much about particular children, but the idea that childhood can be understood as a symbolic category thought to be under threat. The concern about the sexualisation of young girls would therefore seem to be part of a wider on-going discussion about the erosion of childhood. The next section explores how it is that childhood is socially constructed as a precious life stage, which is alleged to be under threat. I also examine the ways that children are currently perceived and discursively constituted and how these discourses impact on the lives of children – notions such as children at risk, children as agents, childhood femininity, class and race are all explored. Finally the chapter further critiques the idea of a 'crisis of childhood', suggesting that the crisis arguments are built upon a nostalgic and romanticised view of childhood that makes universalised claims about what is happening to children and denies children any agency or voice. Against this background, Chapter Three argues that missing from the debate are girls' own accounts of their fashion consumption. In order to understand girls' consumption of clothes we need to examine what is already known about fashion consumption and identity. However, much of this literature is based on an adult consumer; therefore we need to

also consider the growing body of literature about the lives and experiences of children. It is at the end of this chapter that I explicitly outline my theoretical framework.

Chapter Four explains the methodology that I use in order to examine my research questions and to capture some of the experiences of girls with regards to fashion. The first section examines methodological issues arising from qualitative research with participants and considers what differences there are, if any, in researching with children. I carried out focus groups, which were filmed in order to record not just the content of the many overlapping discussions but also the complicated nature of group talk and interaction. These discussions also involved girls using gestures and movements in relation to their own and other's bodies and the clothes they were wearing or describing and filming was vital for capturing this dynamic bodily aspect of their interaction. I then asked girls to take photographs of their clothes and subsequently interviewed the girls about their photographs. Therefore the chapter examines in turn each of these forms of data collection as research tools. Next the chapter introduces the schools where the research took place and then considers the method used to interpret data. Finally the ethical considerations relating to researching with children as participants and issues of gaining access, consent and anonymity are discussed.

After the methodology chapter follow three chapters that draw on the empirical data, each exploring different aspects of girls' dress choices. Chapter Five responds to the popular public debate about girls and fashion, exploring the conjectured reasons that supposedly inform girls' clothing choices; in what ways do girls simply follow trends and bow to peer pressure, aim to look like celebrity role models, or merely wear what their parents tell them to wear? This chapter investigates how these various demands are explored and negotiated by girls both on a personal level and through interactions with each other.

Chapter Six examines evidence that demonstrates that young girls are aware of contextual considerations of dress such as occasion and audience; it explores girls' understandings that certain types of fabric, fit and styles are imbued with socially constructed notions of appropriateness for certain places, times of day and year. It discusses the ways in which clothes allow girls to think through themselves as particular types of people. Moreover it points to the ability of girls to construct multiple identities, through which they move fluidly, dependent on their social milieu. Special clothes were worn to special occasions but in the final section of this chapter the discussion turns to dress that was distinctive or important in its ability to act as rich sources of memory and symbolism. Items worn on the body might prove mementoes of time or place and could both enable the creation of biographical narratives and also act as displays of family and friendship connections.

The concept of clothes as a materialised form of biography is extended in Chapter Seven, though here dress and its ability to be understood biographically is addressed with regard to how it informs girls of the position on their life course. This chapter focuses on notions of age and ageing in terms of girls' interaction with, and negotiation of, discourses of childhood and sexual generationing through discussions of fashion, but also material and bodily negotiations of these discourses. The materiality of dress enables the thinking through of past experiences, and projections into the future and conjunction of these two modes, as well as the fit and feel of clothes on the body in the present, enables the wearer to situate themselves temporally on their life course.

This thesis ends by drawing these arguments together in a conclusion that explores the ways in which this study provides evidence for the richness and complexity of girls' relationships with fashionable dress. I argue that girls are able to construct a multiplicity of identities through clothing, which are contingent on a whole range of social and cultural expectations. Adult denial of girls' sexual agency limits the possibility of their critique of the patriarchal demands on their performances of femininity. Yet, girls demonstrate their ability to critique the social construction of gender and their engagements with discourses of childhood and sexual generationing are carefully negotiated through language and the materiality of their clothes, in ways that navigate the good girl/bad girl binary. Giving girls more critical tools with which to explore the hetero-sexualisation of femininity and critique the societal double-bind that they will remain in as the grow up, should be an educational policy goal. Certainly girls are aware that they are growing up and it is through the materiality of their dress they experience those bodily changes and situate themselves on their life course. This research suggests that the sensuous experience of wearing clothes enables people to think through the past, project into the future and thereby know themselves in the present.

Finally, I will identify the exact nature of my original contribution to knowledge and speculate about what might be done to help girls in their navigations of subjectivities via their experiences with, and through, dress.

Chapter Two - Fashioning girls: childhood, clothes and anxiety

2.1 Introduction

> 'This holiday season, protect your kid from consumerism by just saying "no". Never before have children been marketed to more aggressively than they are now' (Somerville, *The Guardian* 2015).

So begins an article, one amongst many newspaper and magazine pieces, and parenting books, expressing apprehension about young children and their increased consumption of mass-produced goods. Much of this media anxiety focuses on pre-teen consumers, specifically young girls and their consumption of fashion (Cliff, *MailOnline* 2016; Cox, *The Sun* 2016; Jamieson, *Telegraph* 2010; Hamilton, *The Sun* 2010; Taylor, *Guardian* 2010), expressed in headlines such as 'Matalan is accused of sexualising children with black "padded" plunge-front bras for girls as young as EIGHT' (Cliff, *MailOnline* 2016). The main concern raised is that fashion for these pre-teen girls inappropriately 'sexualises' the girls, presenting them as sex objects. This 'sexualisation' leads to girls having difficulties with body image and self-worth and suggests that they may even become prematurely sexually active (Womack, *Telegraph* 2007). Additionally, by looking 'sexy' girls may attract the attention of paedophiles and be at risk of abuse (Jamieson and Roberts, *Telegraph* 2010; Hamilton, *The Sun* 2010; Cliff, *MailOnline* 2016).

In response to this widely articulated unease, successive UK governments have commissioned reports to examine these social concerns. *The Sexualisation of Young People* review (Papadopoulos 2010), authorised by the then Labour government, to be followed by the Bailey Review *Letting Children be Children* (2011), commissioned by the Conservative and Liberal Democrat coalition. Other similar recent reports include the Buckingham *et al* (2010) report for the Scottish parliament, the American Psychological Association report (2007) from the US and one that was published in Australia (Rush and La Nauze 2006), suggesting that this consumerism and sexualisation is widely perceived in the advanced world as problematic. The subtitle of the most recent report, the Bailey Review, states that it is a *Review of the Commercialisation and Sexualisation of Childhood* (Bailey 2011), as my earlier comments also suggested, commercialisation and sexualisation are two crucial themes with regard to the public perception of girls' fashion.

These public accounts position girls as unknowing consumers and make assumptions about their relationship with the consumption of fashion. This thesis draws on sociological literature about childhood and youth to unpick these assumptions about young girls. I argue that the anxiety about girls is an adult construction and that we have very little knowledge about what young girls in this age group know, think, feel and do. As the Bailey Review acknowledges, more research with children needs to be carried out (2011: 7). Conversely recent developments in childhood

sociology positions children as actors who make meaning in their own social worlds, meanings and social worlds which may be quite distinct from adult understandings and representations of them. Therefore, I argue that girls' contributions to the debate about fashion are long overdue and it is their opinions and experiences of fashion that will be the focus of this research. To acknowledge the breadth of the perception of this issue, this chapter investigates primary material from a variety of advanced countries. However, my research will then focus specifically on the lives and experiences of particular girls, those located within a British context (the choices made about exact context and participants is addressed in the methodology chapter).

Before being able to consider girls' fashion consumption, it is important to consider the dominant representations of girls and fashion, as these forms of representation shape, and are shaped by, ways of thinking, writing and understanding childhood, femininity, fashion and consumption. These sets of perceptions can be thought of as discursive; therefore this chapter begins by examining what is meant in this thesis by discourse. These discourses structure the lives, experiences and possibilities for young girls' subjectivities and their interaction with fashion. Therefore this chapter goes on to investigate the ways in which media and popular representations of 'childhood in crisis', about children compelled to consume and girls, in particular, growing up 'too soon', mobilise particular discourses about childhood, gender and consumption. These expressions of concern about girls' fashion and its relationship to the supposed erosion of childhood will be investigated through two key themes that are drawn out of the public debate and explored in turn – what is understood by the commercialisation of childhood? And in what ways is there perceived to be a sexualisation of childhood?

The vehemence with which commentators debate these issues of the potential commercialisation and sexualisation of childhood suggests that the public outcry about girls' fashion is determined by strongly held views. In Section 2.3, the chapter goes on to discuss the concept of moral panic (Cohen 1980; 2011) in order to suggest that it enables me to ask – in what ways might the perceived threats to childhood be understood as part of an escalating social reaction with a moral dimension? What does this reaction to girls' fashion tell us of current adult concerns about what many perceive to be a very consumerist and sexualised world, and what, if anything, does it tell us about children's interaction with that world?

The moral debate that girls' fashion provokes shows that people hold very strong views about what children and childhood should be like. So in the next section of the chapter, the myths and ideas that underpin these idealised notions of childhood are examined, in relation to how these discourses are shaped by their historically and culturally specific context. In order to demonstrate the socially constructed nature of these discursive formations, it is first worth considering the

historical framework that enabled the development of what, I argue, are essentialised norms. Next, important contemporary social and cultural shifts which have brought about changes in children's lives are considered, to see how the ideal of childhood is both shaped and challenged today by key antithetical discourses, I identify, of risk and of rights. The rise of the so-called 'risk society' (Beck 1992), in which people are ever more insecure, due to a growing awareness of potential dangers of modern life, leads many to believe that children are vulnerable to increased threats[5]. This sense of increased risk is in juxtaposition to what is also a progressively individualised society, where the state and the market treat children as competent, independent actors. It is in this paradoxical context that girls are asked to perform femininity and class in sophisticated ways. Therefore, the next section asks what conflicting ideas and ideals about childhood innocence, femininity, class and ethnicity exist, that affect girls' relationship with fashion and yet are suppressed in order to uphold the prevailing myths of childhood?

The chapter ends with a critique of the evidence on which the public perception of the 'crisis of childhood' is based, suggesting that commentators are drawing on essentialised norms to present a deterministic view of children's engagement with the world. This critique concludes that rather than accepting these idealised and universalised notions of childhood, there is a need to examine what is actually known about how children themselves are consuming fashion.

2.2   *The 'Crisis of Childhood'*

An emblematic episode of the 'crisis of childhood' debate was in 2010; from the 14th to 18th April 2010 many major British newspapers, broadsheet and tabloid alike, reported and commented on the withdrawal from sale in Primark stores of a bikini with a padded top, aimed at girls as young as 7. The *Times*, *Telegraph*, *Guardian*, *Sun* and *Daily Mail* all ran news stories and comment pieces about the bikini and all contained at least one article that joined with politicians, from all three main political parties at the time, in condemning the sale of such clothing as commercialising and sexualising children (Cochrane, *Guardian* 2010; Daily Mail 2010; Elliott, *TimesOnline* 2010; Hamilton, *Sun* 2010; Jamieson and Roberts, *Telegraph* 2010; Lichtenstein, *MailOnline* 2010; Taylor, *Guardian* 2010). Two of the newspapers also refer to the report that was commissioned by the government about the sexualisation of young people two months previously (Papadopolous 2010 in Cochrane, *Guardian* 2010 and Daily Mail 2010).

The purpose of the following section is to interrogate these contemporary expressions of anxiety about the commercialisation and sexualisation of childhood, as they are tied to concerns about the consumption of fashion by young girls aged 8 to 11-years-old. In these accounts - drawn from

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[5] Such as from paedophiles see Section 2.1 & 2.2.2. Also see Stokes 2009 for a discussion of risk society and 'stranger danger'.

both journalistic sources and popular psychology or parenting texts, texts that are often used as evidence in the newspaper reports and suggest a widespread popular concern with these issues - claims are made that children are in danger and that childhood is at an end.

2.2.1   Commercialisation of childhood

In newspaper articles addressing the commercialisation of childhood, fashion is presented as a significant part of a contemporary world that is breaking down the 'boundary that properly separates a 6 year old girl from an adult woman' (McCartney, *Telegraph* 2010), so that 'the boundaries between adulthood and childhood have become dangerously blurred' (Lichtenstein, *MailOnline* 2010). Here childhood and adulthood are constituted as fixed life stages associated with separate identity positions of child and adult, distinctions that are considered to be under threat from social change. Girls are problematised in particular and discussion suggests that they should be 'dreaming of ponies and pianos' (Carlisle, *The Sun* 2010), interests that are represented as wholesome and unable to co-exist with other desires, such as for fashionable goods. Rather than pressurised to wear padded bikinis, girls should be feeling 'free to wear whatever they like – be it dungarees or a dress' (Cochrane, *Guardian* 2010) or in the more gendered view from the *Telegraph* 'pretty, flowery dresses like the ones in the Boden catalogue' (Delingpole, *Telegraph* 2010) and therefore in appropriately feminised, childish, expensive, middle-class dress, rather than something from the cheaper High Street stores such as Primark. That the Boden catalogue is presenting a commercial appropriation of a romanticised childhood for the benefit of middle-class adults is ignored. These writers share romanticised notions of childhood as a period of time when children should experience happiness, untrammelled by knowledge or concerns that are defined as adult such as appearance or what to wear. This idealised childhood is mobilised in relation to fears about the child who is thought to leave, or has been made to leave, this state of innocence 'too soon'. Children are believed to be rushed through what should be an idyllic childhood.

This growing up 'too soon' is partly, according to all three major political parties, because of the commercialisation of childhood (see for example Taylor, *Guardian* 2010). The danger is from 'companies…pushing our kids into acting like little grown-ups when they should be enjoying being children' (Gordon Brown, Prime Minister at the time, cited in Elliott, *TimesOnline* 2010, Poulter, *Daily Mail* 2010 and Taylor, *Guardian* 2010). Children are seen as increasingly targeted by 'greedy retailers' (Daily Mail 2010) who are part of a 'marketing culture that now targets young girls relentlessly' (McCartney, *Telegraph* 2010). The supposition is that advertisers are manipulative and that children are incapable of negotiating or resisting their marketing ploys. Children are assumed to be more conformist than adults and are 'under pressure to keep up with trends' (Cochrane, *Guardian* 2010) and suffer particularly from 'peer pressure' (Poulter, *Daily*

Mail 2010). The result is children who have become 'more materialistic' (Taylor, *Guardian* 2010) and now have 'false' needs, newly created wants and desires that corrupt their innocence.

These claims that childhood is changing find echoes in popular literature often aimed at parents, from popular psychology to media and educational theory; this literature bemoans the 'loss' or 'hurrying' childhood, its current harmful state or its need to be saved – for example *Childhood Lost* (Olfman 2005), *Toxic Childhood* (Palmer 2007), *In Defense of Childhood* (Mercogliano 2007), or older classics that show the perennial nature of these concerns, for instance *The Hurried Child* (Elkind 1981) and *The Disappearance of Childhood* (Postman 1982).[6] Studies by developmental psychologists and cultural critics that fear the loss or erosion of childhood also blame this commercialisation of children's culture (Olfman 2005; Carlsson-Paige 2008). It is this commercialism and the speeding up of the change or threat to childhood that is the focus of many new books such as *Consuming Kids* (Linn 2005), *Born to Buy: The Commercialized Child and the New Consumer Culture* (Shor 2004) and *Consumer Kids: How Big Business is Grooming our Children for Profit* (Mayo and Nairn 2009).

In this literature childhood is also idealised: it is a time when children have a 'luminescent spark' (Mercogliano 2007). In other words, children have a natural energy that Mercogliano argues the contemporary world threatens to stifle. This idealisation is also sometimes evoked with nostalgic reference to the writer's own childhood, as Palmer describes:

> a happy childhood shouldn't depend on money, and in the past - before the market took over children's lives - it didn't. As one who grew up contentedly playing with cardboard boxes and dressing-up clothes, I can vouch for this. (Palmer 2007: 252; see also Mercoglino 2007: ix).

Adults are assumed to have the right to speak about childhood because they have been through it and imbue it with their own nostalgic, romantic views of a time of simple pleasures, playing with basic materials and cast-off clothes, untainted by adult concerns or desires for branded clothes and products (Palmer 2007: 243).

Palmer (2007) contends that one of the reasons for the erosion of childhood is that social change has meant a rise in both parents working, feeling guilty for their absence from their children's lives, and spending 'guilt money' (Palmer 2007: 240) buying consumer goods. This social change, combined with technological change that has allowed mass communication and entertainment to be more cheaply available, means that children have increased access to televisions, computers, the internet and electronic games. The problem is construed as the mass

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[6] These books remain so popular that a reprint of Postman's book was issued in 1994 and a 3rd edition was published of Elkind's book in 2007.

media supposedly invading children's lives, giving them access to knowledge from the adult world (Palmer 2007). Children are presented as passive viewers of adult information about sex and violence, and as becoming more adult-like because instead of a separate world of child-like play they are being addressed as consumers. The commodification of children's popular culture, their toys, games, programmes and spin-off merchandise, is argued to negatively affect their social, moral and cognitive development, displacing interactive play and eliminating imagination and creativity (see Chapter Eight 'Word on the Street' in Palmer 2007 or Chapter Seven 'Childhood Lost' in Mercogliano 2007). It is assumed that children are more prone to peer pressure and less able to resist marketing ploys than adults and so their desire for fashion mean that girls in particular are increasingly suffering from problems with body image and in turn are becoming more sexualised (Palmer 2007: 235).

2.2.2   Sexualisation of childhood

As demonstrated above, children are presumed to be corrupted by becoming consumers, which gives children 'adult' knowledge. This 'adult' knowledge is largely a metaphor for sexual knowledge. For example, James Delingpole describes his daughter at the age of 9 as still being at that 'golden stage where she isn't yet too bodily conscious' (Delingpole, *Times Online* 2010). Children are assumed to be unselfconscious about their bodies and unaware about sex and sexuality. They may become curious about 'adult' concerns, as McCartney (*Telegraph* 2010) admits:

> the stuff of adult femininity – the mother's lipstick and high heels, the contents of the lingerie drawer and the mysterious whisper of sexual power – will always be interesting to young girls. Children are natural snoops and imitators, and snoop they should, *at their own pace* (emphasis added).

A developmental discourse is called upon here to suggest stages of development which would naturally occur in all children. The writers believe that as children develop they will become more curious about sex and 'imitate' adult behaviour, but their fear is that children are being 'pushed' (Jamieson and Roberts and Roberts, *Telegraph* 2010; Taylor, *Guardian* 2010) into 'grow(ing) up too quickly' (Carlisle, *The Sun* 2010). This 'growing up too soon', is frequently a metaphor for becoming 'sexually precocious' (Delingpole, *Times Online* 2010; Lichenstein, *MailOnline* 2010).

Although at times the debate may appear to refer to all children, the concern for the supposed erosion of sexual innocence is distinctly gendered. Childhood innocence, or the need to protect it, is a gendered and heterosexualized concept and the worry extends largely to girls.[7] News stories

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[7] It should be noted however, that the lowering of the age of homosexual consent from 18 to 16, and the repeal of Section 28 which prohibited the 'promotion' of alternative sexual lifestyles, did prompt much media and Conservative debate about the propositioning of 'children', read 'boys', for gay sex (Dodd 2005).

abound with articles about inappropriate clothes for girls and discussion of items that sexualise girls. The padded Primark bikini tops were discussed as part of this sexualisation. The tops were described as 'grotesquely come-hither little bra(s)' (McCartney, *Telegraph* 2010), 'low cut to expose flesh' (Hamilton, *The Sun* 2010), yet with padding that would give girls 'fake bosoms' (Delingpole, *Times Online* 2010) and as part of a 'sex industry aesthetic' (Cochrane, *Guardian* 2010) sold to an ever-younger audience.

Other fashionable clothes criticised were 'towering heels, tiny skirts and pushup bras' (Cochrane, *Guardian* 2010) and t-shirts that have logos such as 'So many boys, so little time' (McCartney, *Telegraph* 2010). As seen in the earlier comments about girls 'dressing-up' and trying on adult clothes/roles - it is perceived to be acceptable in the home, because that was 'healthy, private behaviour (which) was part of a psychological process of preparing oneself for the future' (Lichtenstein, *MailOnline* 2010). It is the public enactment of adult femininity, particularly a hyper-sexual femininity, that is seen as worrying. The apprehension expressed in all of the press accounts is that this fashionable dress results in the premature 'sexualisation' of girls (Cochrane, *The Guardian* 2010; Daily Mail 2010; Elliott, *Times Online* 2010; Hamilton, *The Sun* 2010; Jamieson and Roberts and Roberts, *Telegraph* 2010; Lichtenstein, *MailOnline* 2010; Taylor, *Guardian* 2010). However, what exactly they mean by this use of 'sexualisation' is not explicitly expressed and this lack of clarity about what 'sexualisation' means has also been levelled at the various government reports (see Smith 2010; Barker and Duschinsky 2012).

One of the concerns described is that it involves dressing for male approval and becoming a sex object (Cochrane, *Guardian* 2010; McCartney, *Telegraph* 2010), as girls will 'look sexy in an adult way' (Jamieson and Roberts and Roberts, *Telegraph* 2010). There is also anxiety that girls will begin to 'act like grown ups' (Elliott, *Times Online* 2010) and therefore become more sexually precocious (Delingpole, *Times Online* 2010). Girls should be naturally asexual and the contention is that if they were to dress differently, such as in Boden flowery dresses, they would not have sexual knowledge or desire to be 'sexy'. This sexual precociousness is problematic because it 'damages well-being' (Taylor, *Guardian* 2010) of girls who increasingly worry about appearance, body image and suffer mental health issues (Hamilton, *The Sun* 2010).

As with the assumption that childhood is changing, the twenty-first century apprehension about the sexualisation of young girls is also reflected in the popular psychology publications about childhood addressing an audience of concerned parents. Titles from the previous decade include: *The Sexualization of Childhood* (Olfman 2008), *So Sexy, So Soon: The New Sexualized Childhood and What Parents Can Do to Protect Their Kids* (Levin and Kilbourne 2009), *The Lolita Effect: The Media Sexualization of Young Girls and What We Can Do About it* (Gigi Durham 2008).

Sharna Olfman (2008) claims that pornographic representations of girls are now part of mainstream culture in which there is a proliferation of sex and sexual information surrounding children. According to Olfman (2008), the media entertainment and fashion industries have encouraged children to behave and dress like adults with adult sexual interest. This supposed 'adultification' of children, as an earlier writer, Postman (1982) described it, purportedly symbolises the decline of childhood and is perceived to have lead to an increase of children having sex, consuming alcohol and drugs, and committing crime (see Chapter Eight 'The Disappearing Child', Postman 1982; also Chapter Eight 'The Word on the Street, Palmer 2007).

An additional concern in relation to 'sexualisation' is that girls wearing fashionable clothes attract sexual attention, as they 'at best, over-excite young boys and, at worst, add fuel to the sick desires of paedophiles' (Lichtenstein, *MailOnline* 2010); again it is the clothes that allegedly puts girls at risk.[8] The fear about girls attracting paedophiles is exemplified by the *Daily Mail* headline 'Primark withdraws padded bikinis for 7-year-olds after being accused of exploiting "paedophile pound"' (Daily Mail 2010). The 'paedophile pound' is an expression used by Shy Keenan, a child protection consultant who works with victims of paedophiles and is quoted in the *Sun*, *Times* and the *Telegraph*. Whilst the expression itself is not explored in any detail, the link being made in the articles is that young girls wearing fashion are 'attractive to sexual predators' (Jamieson and Roberts and Roberts, *Telegraph* 2010). The explanation of why girls wearing these clothes are attractive to paedophiles is considered in a comment piece in the *Daily Mail* which states that 'today's fashion-conscious pre-teen is a paedophile's dream - all the innocence of childhood with the suggestion of womanly attributes' (Lichtenstein, *MailOnline* 2010). These writers suggest that clothes that refer to an adult female body, worn by 'naturally innocent' girls, create a combination of innocent/sexy that attracts paedophiles and leaves girls open to abuse.

Whilst worrying about this pollution of childhood with adult sexuality, at the same time this combination of childlike innocence and adult female sexuality underlies many popular representations of femininity, and in the newspapers there is a concomitant mix of censure and titillation about young women and sex. Tabloids like the *Sun* campaign against the contemporary 'sexy' fashions for young girls whilst they simultaneously used to show topless women dressed as girls, sucking lollipops, hair in plaits or wearing school uniform, and the tabloids frequently praise attractive women as having child-like characteristics, such as pop star Kylie Minogue having the perfect bottom of a 14-year-old (Patrick 2003 cited in Dane 2007: 68). A *Telegraph* article (McCartney 2010) condemning the sexualisation of girls, uses an image of glamour model Jordan/ Katie Price (figure 1) captioned 'Katie Price: few mothers would see her as suitable model for

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[8] The *Guardian* was the only one of the newspapers, discussed so far, that did not maintain that it is paedophiles that pose the greatest risk to girls.

their daughters'. The image shows Price in an extravagant, sparkly tiara such as little girls might dress up in to play princesses, a huge feather boa as associated with hyper-femininity (Russell and Tyler 2002), combined with a silver, padded, plunge, bra top, of the style now being criticised as being sold to young girls, revealing her ample cleavage.

Figure 1: 'Katie Price: few mothers would see her as suitable model for their daughters' from McCartney (2010) *Telegraph*

In the article McCartney recognises that 'it has in fact proved commercially successful to fuse adult sexuality with childish fantasies' (McCartney, *Telegraph* 2010), describing how as well as being a glamour model, Price dressed up as fairytale princess for her first wedding, and successfully sold a range of children's books.

There is apprehension in the middle-class broadsheets that it is young, sexualised, female, working-class glamour models like Price and a whole 'toxic set of celebrity role-models, who are largely defined by sexual self-exposure' (McCartney, *Telegraph* 2010) who are bad role models for young girls. Price is also invoked as a wearer of bikinis similar to the Primark bikini to suggest how inappropriate these bikinis are for young girls to wear (Jamieson and Roberts and Roberts, *Telegraph* 2010; Hamilton, *The Sun* 2010). In addition, Price is discussed as a bad parent because her daughter, called Princess, was photographed in false eyelashes and make up when she was 2-years-old (Lichtenstein, *MailOnline* 2010). As with the earlier suggestion of appropriate floral dresses from the Boden catalogue aimed at the middle class, there is a tacit assumption that it is usually working-class girls wearing sexualised clothing, and their parents automatically judged to be at fault. These classed and value judgements could also be identified in the description of the clothes as 'tat' (McCartney, *Telegraph* 2010), 'lurid' and 'cheap and tacky' (Lichenstein, *MailOnline* 2010).

All this trepidation about girls and the problems entailed with their sexualisation has resulted in task forces and government commissioned reports to be authorised. These reports include for example the *Report of the APA Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls* (American Psychological Association 2007), one produced in the UK for the Home Office, *Sexualisation of Young People Review* (Papadopoulos 2010) followed a year later by the Bailey Review *Let Children be Children* (2011). Newspaper reports and popular parenting books and websites draw on these reviews as evidence of the sexualising of girls. For example, Olfman's *The Sexualization of Childhood* drew on the *Report of the APA Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls* (2007). The task force brought together research about cultural representations of girls and women, and media and products specifically addressing young women, as evidence of the sexualisation of women, and also reviewed studies examining the negative effects of sexualisation on young women. They concluded that sexualisation of women was leading to increased low self-esteem, body image dissatisfaction, and mental and sexual health problems for young women.

In fact this report was based on research focussed on adult or college-aged women, and the authors explain that one reason why they used research about the sexualisation of women is the paucity of research specifically on the sexualisation of girls. Therefore, as the report recommends, research is actually needed into the effects of an objectified body image or viewing objectified body images in the media on young girls themselves (American Psychological Association 2007: 4). Papadopoulos is more confident that there is 'preliminary evidence' (Papadopoulos 2010: 86) about the growing sexualisation of girls, though she is not specific about age, but she also agrees that there is clear need for further research (Papadopoulos 2010: 86). The Bailey Review also adds its assent to the need for more research to be done with children on this side of the Atlantic (Bailey 2011: 7). This gap in our knowledge about the potentially sexualising effects of fashion on young girls is one that my research aims to address.

This section has argued that anxiety about girls consuming fashion is enmeshed in a complex series of concerns about the erosion of childhood, particularly the commercialisation of children's culture, and the supposed resultant threat to girls' sexual innocence. The vigour with which these anxieties are articulated, and the dire repercussions invoked by these writers, suggest that what young girls wear on their bodies is an extremely sensitive issue. Moral judgements are being made about girls' fashion consumption, and these verdicts may then stir up public concern, and worry parents, and are potentially used to judge and regulate girls' behaviour. In the next section these emotive discussions are investigated through the lens of moral panic to consider how and why media reports and public presentations of the issues, relating to fashion and the sexualisation

of girls, might be seen to be presenting a partial, exaggerated and somewhat sensationalising perspective.

2.3   The 'crisis of childhood' as a moral panic

Within contemporary comment and reporting about children it can be seen that there is a particular discourse of childhood that is mobilised to suggest that there is a crisis underway. This discourse, like many that are socially conservative, is hard to maintain in the face of social change and cultural shifts, and this means that the ideal of childhood is perceived as constantly threatened.[9] In order to analyse the 'crisis of childhood' discourse these arguments can be studied as part of a moral panic in response to the difficulties of maintaining an ideal notion of childhood in the face of contemporary life. As the Bailey Review concedes in its introduction, some people believe that the public reaction to the supposed commercialisation and sexualisation of childhood is a moral panic (Bailey 2011: 10) This section will examine what a moral panic is and how the concept helps us understand the current concern about pre-teen girls.

2.3.1   Moral panic

The phrase 'moral panic' was first systematically applied to the association between youth and social concerns, and arose from exploring media response to youth in the 1960s (Cohen 1972/1980). The implication of moral panic is that there is anxiety around issues thought morally fundamental to society. These issues are constructed, named and escalated, leading to intense concern about the degradation of society. Once something or someone has been labelled as a problem the media then play an important role in the 'amplification' of deviance, defining and shaping social problems. Cohen (1980) describes how press coverage exaggerates and distorts stories using highly emotive language; these concerns are then taken up by those in power, such as politicians and editors who staff the 'moral barricades' (Cohen 1980: 9). Socially accredited experts are then called upon to pronounce their verdicts about what can be done about the matter and attempts are made to control and regulate the problem. As Cohen (2011) explains, calling something a moral panic and acknowledging that it is socially constructed, does not imply that there is not an important issue at the heart of the panic, but instead that one of the roles of the sociologist is to examine why a particular topic is thought so important as to receive such extended and dramatic coverage (Cohen 2011: xliii). This is a role I aim to fulfil in this section in relation to pre-teen girls and fashion.

I suggest then that the moral panic model can be applied to current anxiety about pre-teen girls and fashion, which is constructed and named as being part of the 'commercialisation' and

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[9] For example, threats in the last few decades include from violent video games (see Springhall 1998; MacDonald 2003), sexually explicit girls magazines (see McRobbie 1999), child abduction (see Stokes 2009), paedophiles in cyber-space (see Jewkes and Wykes 2012)

'sexualisation' of childhood discussed in Section 2.2. This perceived corruption of childhood, as seen earlier, is thought to result in a wide range of social problems such as mental health issues, problems with body image (Taylor, *Guardian* 2010; Carlisle, *The Sun* 2010), early sexual intercourse (Womack, *Telegraph* 2007) and encouraging paedophilia (Hamilton, *The Sun* 2010; Jamieson and Roberts, *Telegraph* 2010). The concern is presented in a stylized way with much of the press using the same phrase 'commercialisation and sexualisation of childhood', which was also amplified with use of emotive headlines such as 'They are kids not sex pots' (Carlisle, *The Sun,* 2010). These concerns were discussed in all the major British tabloid and broadsheet newspapers, and commented on by politicians from the three main political parties. Various 'socially accredited' experts were called upon in the articles, such as the children's charities NSPCC (Daily Mail 2010) and Children's Society (Elliott, *Times* 2010), 'child protection consultants' (Daily Mail 2010; Elliot, *Times* 2010, Jamieson and Roberts, *Telegraph,* 2010) and online parent groups such as Mumsnet and Parentline Plus (Poulter, *Daily Mail,* 2010). Reports such as that produced for the Home Office, *Sexualisation of Young People Review* (Papadopoulos 2010) were also drawn upon (Cochrane, *Guardian*, 2010). Many of the interested parties put forward suggestions as to what should be done, and as the press reported, retailers were forced to take certain clothes off the shelves in an attempt to control the situation.

2.3.2   Contextualising moral panics about young people

This concern about young people is not new; Lynott and Logue (1993) cite commentators from the nineteenth century to indicate that 'critics of every era seem to have felt that children were not developing the way their elders intended' (Lynott and Logue 1993: 478; see also Springhall 1998 who cites newspaper stories worrying about the corrupting influence of penny theatres and 'penny dreadfuls' of the early 1830s). The twentieth century panics about the immorality of young people as fundamental to societal decline have been examined in key sociological studies (for example: Cohen 1980; Griffin 1993; Hall and Jefferson 1976 and for discussion about contemporary panics about youth see Krinsky 2008). In the press, complaints about the violent behaviour of young, working-class men, the debased popular music they listened to, and the unusual ways they dressed, were deplored as part of degenerate subcultures; these reactions were subsequently critiqued in sociological research (Hall and Jefferson 1976; Hebdige 1979). So whilst mediated panics about young people abound in the modern period, panics specifically making the link between the corruption of youthful minds and consuming popular culture also proliferate (Mitchell and Reid-Walsh 2002).

Anxiety about young men and boys has generally centred on fears about violence but it is female sexuality, and ways of women being 'appropriately' sexual, that has also been a recurrent theme in media discussion (Fahs *et al* 2013). Since the Second World War, the focus of popular debate

about female sexuality has been on adolescent young women and the importance of girls growing up 'correctly'; conservative newspapers and politicians believe that girls not engaging in sexual behaviour is paramount to 'traditional' family life and the moral order (Fahs *et al* 2013; Tincknell *et al* 2003). Cook and Kaiser (2004) note that in the U.S., the media expressed concern about both the sexualised behaviour and appearance of girls as young as nine in the 1960s, and about parents who were either indifferent to or encouraged this rush to act older. They identify terms such as 'pre-teen' and 'sub-teen' used in the fifties and sixties to construct a predominantly feminine, white, middle-class and (burgeoning) heterosexual category. Young girls' potential sexuality and behaviour clearly continues to be a source of social concern.

2.3.3   Moral panics: youth/childhood as symbolic

Life stages and identity categories can be identified as socially constructed and highly symbolic (James *et al* 2005). These constructions or 'idealized (ideological) conceptions' (Thompson 1998: 8) of the social world are the reason why there have been so many moral panics about youth, as in media and political debates young people are discussed as symbolic of the future, the generation in whom hopes and money are invested to take the country forward. To maintain social order young people must take up their appropriate roles in the family and the job market so that gender and class relations can be reproduced (Harris 2004a: 15). Consequently young people must be steered through the life stage of youth or adolescence, a disruptive transitional period between the relatively stable constructions of childhood and adulthood, during which teenagers are expected to behave badly. Developmental psychology supports this notion of a period of crisis, such as the work of Erikson (1968) who in his eight stages of psycho-social development posited that adolescence is the stage when a person must struggle to find their identity and grapple with moral issues. In many societies adolescents are allowed to go through a state of 'moratorium' (Erikson 1968: 129) when they can abstain from responsibilities. Moral panics are about monitoring and controlling young people's behaviour through this stage in pursuit of maintaining the social order.

Yet the moral panic about young girls and fashion is about pre-adolescents being rushed through childhood too soon. If youth or adolescence is conceived as a life stage of rebellion and resistance, as a relational term it implies childhood is a time of 'relative quiescence and passivity' (MacDonald 2003: 110). Childhood is perceived as a stable period when children are passive, innocent and vulnerable and thus, as Durkheim espoused in his functionalist view of childhood, this is a critical time for socialisation (Durkheim 1911). Hence children are frequently presented in the media as particularly in need of protection. It is argued that we are currently living in what can be characterized as a 'risk society' (Giddens 1991; Beck 1992, 1999). The claim is that British society has been profoundly transformed since the 1970s, with economic rationalism, reduced welfare state, de-industrialisation and increased globalism meaning politics and decision-

making are conducted at an international rather than local level; these changes mean that there is sense of insecurity, fragmentation and a breakdown of social networks. Global and technological change is thought to have eroded all that was secure, unchanging and natural. Therefore this new, fast moving, technological age is accompanied with a feeling that there is an 'end of nature' (Giddens 2000: 51) and an 'end of tradition' (Giddens 2000: 46). Yet, the construction of childhood has come to symbolise all that is natural and traditional (Jenks 1996), so the constant concern about childhood being at an end reflects wider fears about change in contemporary life. As Prout (2000b) explains, in a world increasingly seen as shifting and uncertain, children, because they are regarded as unfinished, are considered good target for attempts to control the future. To protect children is to invest in the future (Jenks 1996; Prout 2000b) and the envisaged ills of society should be solved for the sake of children but ultimately for futurity. Consequently there have been panics about children 'at risk' from predatory paedophiles, violent video games and television, and sexually explicit girls' magazines (MacDonald 2003). [10] Invoking the figure of the child can sometimes be considered as part of the 'politics of substitution' (Jenkins cited in Thompson 1998: 21 and Buckingham 2000: 11), whereby using fears about children gains public support, so campaigns against homosexuality have sometimes been redefined as campaigns against paedophiles (Buckingham 2000:11). Not that these are false concerns; in fact the campaigns are so potent because they build on pre-existing fears, for example about the demise of the nuclear family, power of the media, advances in technology or women's active sexuality. Therefore, whilst there is case for concerns about actual children, some of the popular apprehension expressed is implicitly about wider social, cultural and technological change within contemporary society (Prout 2000b).

Critics of the emotive language and unsubstantiated claims used in contemporary debates about the commercialisation and sexualisation of childhood, such as Bragg *et al* (2011), Smith and Attwood (2011) and Kehily (2012), indicate that the concern about young girls is linked to wider anxiety about what is considered an increasingly consumerist and sexually explicit Western culture. In their discussion of one of the government reviews (Papadopoulos 2010) for example, Smith and Attwood (2011) explore how the notion of sexualisation is under-theorised in the review, used in a confused way and conflating a range of issues, behaviours and practices. They suggest that the review is actually concerned, in a broad and unfocussed manner, about the rise of sexually explicit texts in popular culture more generally, or what some term 'pornification' (Smith and Attwood 2011: 332). Focusing the debate on children and invoking childhood as the most supposedly natural and innocent of periods suggests that underpinning these concerns are strongly

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[10] A particularly extensive example of predatory paedophiles, that was proven to be based on a great deal of fact, began in 2012 with the Jimmy Savile scandal that started a police investigation into, predominantly child, sexual abuse allegations (Greer and McLaughlin 2013).

held views about the nature of childhood and children. Yet in light of the sociology of childhood, these norms and ideals can be understood to be social constructions, discursive formations that shape how children are viewed and live their lives and therefore may affect the girls in my study. The next section explores what discourses are and how these socially constructed ways of speaking and writing about childhood are formed.

2.4   *Understanding childhood: construction of discourses*

Moral debates, government reviews, judicial policy-making and the regulation of broadcasters and retailers, all discussed above, are powerful voices that shape the discourses within which childhood is framed and understood. As such they govern what is available for children to watch, buy and wear. This section first explores what I mean by discourse and how it is used throughout this thesis. The concept of discourse is used to examine the notion that ways of discussing and representing childhood shape children's culture, the clothes that are accessible, adult's relationships with children and may even inform girls' own ways of talking about their interaction with clothes, their perception of their subjectivity and dress, and their dress practices. This section then goes on to explore the argument that that these socially constructed notions of childhood and children have a long history, wrought by romanticism and nostalgia, rather than being informed by knowledge of actual children (Jenks 1996; Moran 2002; James *et al* 2005). The Bailey Review (2011) even addresses this nostalgia in its report, admitting that people often hark back to a 'Golden Age' of childhood that probably never existed (Bailey 2011: 43). In order to understand what has influenced these beliefs about childhood, which are held by commentators and regulators of girls' lives, it is useful to examine a brief genealogy of childhood.

2.4.1   Discourse

So far this chapter has considered various media discussions, government reviews, parenting manuals and widespread debate as popular and powerful assertions that shape the ways in which, and through which, childhood is understood. The statements constitute claims about the current condition of childhood, and make moral judgements on the impact of contemporary culture on children, namely girls. These statements can be seen to be discursive if they are part of 'a network of statements' (Foucault 2002: 111) and belong to a series of assertions. Statements can be considered a series if they can be grouped together by their sharing particular ideas and beliefs (Davies 2015: 52). Certainly, much of the popular discussion considered above is underpinned by a shared set of norms and notions about childhood and the supposed naivety and incompetence of children (Jenks 1996; James *et al* 2005); children are assumed to be inherently unselfconscious, asexual, and without agency (notions that will be critiqued later in this chapter). This network of ideas purports to be a body of knowledge through which the conception of an innocent childhood is formed, can be seen to constitute a particular discourse of childhood that speaks of the innocent, unknowing child.

Discourses are enmeshed in societal power relations (Foucault 1980), claiming to express a particular truth and to render certain sets of ideas as common sense. This current debate about childhood is informed by, and informs, the discourse of childhood innocence and incompetence that represents an innocent childhood as a taken for granted, common-sense notion. A discourse makes certain claims to authority (Davies 2015: 53) and the 'childhood innocence' discourse speaks its power from its dominant position within current debates. The discourse of childhood innocence is then drawn upon to shore up a further set of discourses examined earlier: the crisis of childhood, the commercialisation of childhood and the sexualisation of childhood. As seen in the previous section about the popular debate as a moral panic, claims are being made about children, particularly girls and their overt sexual dressing. This moral panic can also be seen as part of the discursive formations of notions about childhood as a discourse influences 'how ideas are put into practice and used to regulate the conduct of others' (Hall 1997: 44). The moral panic suggests that actions must be taken in order to change girls' culture and behaviour. Therefore, all of these ways of discussing childhood can be understood as discourses of childhood that position current childhoods and children, by making powerful claims about what clothes should be available, how children should behave and indeed how children think about themselves. The particular discourse of childhood innocence is used to regulate and even to pathologise girls who are sexually knowing or wear clothes deemed 'inappropriate' (Walkerdine 1999; Renold 2005). As Wyness (2006) suggests the 'crisis of childhood' is a 'potent social and moral reference point for the mobilisation of forces that seek to bring children and back into line' (Wyness 2006: 85) and is mobilised in order to curb the behaviour of supposedly deviant children.

Whilst there are dominant discourses there are also ones that are resistant, as discourses do not form in isolation, they can be produced as a grab for power and 'in a struggle for legitimacy they emerge in relation to each other' (Davies 2015: 53). Later this chapter examines the competing, resistant discourse of childhood agency that offers the chance to speak of the child as agentic and knowledgeable, but this less powerful discourse is not one that features highly, if at all, in these media accounts. No discourses arise spontaneously, they are self-sustaining in that they become systemised and institutionalised (Foucault 2002) in ways that this chapter goes on to explore. In the examination of moral panic I explored the development of concerns about childhood as having deep historical foundations; this chapter now goes on to consider in what respects these concerns are shaped by historical constructions and earlier discursive formations of childhood.

2.4.2 Early constructions of childhood
Children are physically and cognitively immature and dependent on adults for some or all of their needs, yet the ways in which children are treated and immaturity is understood is not simply

explained by biological development and dependency (Jenks 1996). Rather than accepting the superficial understandings of children and childhood that the 'crisis of childhood' writers mobilise, it is crucial to explore childhood as a concept, a set of discourses about what a 'natural' childhood is, because it is these norms of childhood and children against which all children are judged and indeed judge themselves.

Contrary to the assumptions made by writers in Section 2.1, the social constructionist view that childhood is culturally and historically constituted, according to changing and contested views about what it should be like, has become widely accepted within sociology (Jenks 1996; James *et al* 2005). To explore how the concept of childhood differs according to cultural and historical context, writers since Phillipe Ariès (1962) have studied representations of children and childhood. Academics trace Puritan discourse of the child as inherently evil as prevalent in Europe particularly from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (though the image of the evil child is seen by some to exist as early as prehistoric and early Christian times, see Sorrin 2005); children contain wild forces that will be released if they are not properly disciplined and educated (Jenks 1996: 120; Scraton 1997). Ariès describes the practice of 'coddling' or binding children's bodies as attempting to control their supposed wilfulness (James *et al* 2005: 12). Examining art, Ariès also noted how children's clothes demonstrate their social status in this period; young children wore long, loose gowns from the age of about 3 until 7, after which children were dressed in small versions of adult clothing and were also portrayed with adult characteristics, just with reduced stature. Ariès' suggestion was that as early as the age of 7 children were considered as having adult status. Certainly, children of peasant families would have been working in the fields or at trades from a very young age (Cunningham 1998), and the Church and the law allowed that girls aged 12 and boys aged 14 were sexually mature enough to marry and reproduce (Kehily and Montgomery 2004: 58).

The emergence of childhood as a more distinct and prolonged stage of life can be located within the Enlightenment. The publication of works such as those by John Locke (1693) and Jean-Jacques Rousseau's later novel *Émile* (1762) expressed a growing interest in childhood as a separate phase (see James *et al* 2005). For Rousseau childhood was a time to be revered, in which the innocent child is naturally good, pure and naïve, an ideal being who has the propensity to love and learn. As they are devoid of knowledge, children must be taught everything by adults and are therefore dependent upon adults, and their purity is in need of adult protection. The concept of the child as evil or as innocent can be seen to resonate in twenty-first century mass media and legal debates about childhood. Ariès outlined a European shift in notions of childhood when adults began to think of themselves as different to children and to create an age-based, institutionalised hierarchy which placed children in the subordinate position from this Enlightenment period

(James *et al* 2005). Children began to be clothed in attire that was markedly dissimilar to that of adults and that emphasised their difference from adults in physical stature and status. These notions of separate social positions, and therefore clothing, was characterised in the nineteenth century by babies and toddlers wearing short dresses and boys and girls up to the age of 6 or 7 wearing dresses over long trousers, unlike adult women who wore long dresses and adult men who wore long trousers (Callahan and Paoletti 2007). Therefore children were dressed in ways that did not emphasise sex difference but demarcated children from adults. All children wore dresses that were modelled on female attire, deemed appropriate because they spent their early years 'within the feminine sphere of the home and hearth and were culturally and legally subordinate to men' (Callahan and Paoletti 2007: 125). Therefore the wearing of short dresses symbolised children's subordinate status and, unlike the earlier period, it was not until the age of 12-14 that boys wore long trousers without a dress like adult males and girls' dresses reached adult length by their mid-teen years thus signalling adulthood. It is this separation of styles of clothing for adults and children that current debates about the 'crisis of childhood' seem anxious to reinstate.

Growing state regulation of family life in the nineteenth century resulted in childhood becoming increasingly characterized as a time of dependence (Cunningham 1998). Middle-class child-centred ideas of family life and the idealising of childhood represented childhood as a time of innocence in need of protection. Legislation such as the Factory Act of 1875, prohibiting children under the age of 10 working in mills, and the 1880 Education Act that made schooling for 5 to 10-year-olds compulsory, ensured that even working-class children no longer worked within industry (Parliament 2010). The proper place, particularly for boys, was deemed to be at school, separated from adults and being taught appropriate middle-class norms of speech, dress and behaviour (see Cunningham 1998: 1201 and Gittins 2004: 35). Children had their own separate system of justice, their access to alcohol and tobacco was banned (Cunningham 1998: 1206) and in 1885 the age of consent, and at which girls could get married, was raised to 16 (Kehily and Montgomery 2004: 62). Childhood was being reinforced as a separate phase of life and in the early twentieth century this understanding of childhood influenced education, legislation and parenting advice and shaped the emergence of developmental psychology (Piaget 1926). Piaget's premise was that children are blank precursors of human beings, and mentally and physically develop according to strict biologically defined, 'natural' and universalised stages. In this developmental model children are inferior to adults as they are incomplete; children's limited infantile intelligence, it is suggested, will gradually mature along a set pathway that will only achieve full cognisance in adulthood (as critiqued in James *et al* 2005: 18). Childhood has gradually become a time when generally children are now thought to be incomplete, in need of guidance and protection, therefore productively useless, but emotionally priceless (Zelizer 1994). Next this chapter examines the

main discourses shaping the perception of children, and the ways in which their lives are lived, today.

2.4.3   Contemporary shifts: children 'at risk'

The idea of different stages of development in childhood still plays a key role in the structuring of the temporality of children's lives today. In nursery and school, children are divided by 'age class', whereby children are grouped narrowly by calendar age and progress through the system together (James *et al* 2005). Children have begun to spend their everyday lives in these care-giving and educational institutions that are part of what many sociologists have called, the institutionalization of childhood (Christensen and Prout 2005: 51), institutions that enable the marking of childhood as a social structure. Education further emphasises the essentialised notions of childhood and its extension as a life period, and in 1973 the school leaving age for all children was raised to 16 in the UK (Cunningham 1998). As of 2015 young people now have to stay in either education or in a training scheme until they are 18 (directgov 2008b). Another form of social generationing is 'age grading' (James *et al* 2005), which includes status categories of child, and throughout the twentieth century the rise of another shifting conceptual category, that of youth, suggesting the positioning of all young people as not adult.

Today the essentialised notions of childhood operate within what, as was mentioned earlier, some have termed a 'risk society' (Beck 1992; Giddens 1991). In this new risk society, the instability of modern life is thought to bring with it increased risks to public and personal safety. Rousseau's (1762) notion, that children are innocent but also devoid of knowledge, is still potent and therefore children are increasingly thought vulnerable, yet worth protecting. Scott and Jackson (2010) argue that whilst Beck (1992) and Giddens (1991) focussed on the consequences of technological change, 'the anxieties specific to childhood are part of a general sense that the social world itself is becoming less stable and predictable' (Scott and Jackson 2010: 106). As Prout (2000b) suggests, to protect and invest in children is now perceived as in investment in the future (Prout 2000b: 305). The need to protect children in the face of this unstable world is reflected in the decision of the Labour government in 2003 to create the post of Children's Minister, deeming it crucial to have a minister solely responsible for the 'well-being, safety and protection of children' (Department for Children, Schools and Families 2008). Children's health, welfare, education and future success are all part of the Minister's remit.

The best place for children is now seen to be controlled spaces such as school, where they are kept under surveillance, a symptom of the institutionalization discussed above (Christensen and Prout 2005). However, the home is also increasingly considered to be one of the safe places where children are contained within the family, consequently the rise of the 'familialization' of

childhood (Christensen and Prout 2005). The family has become a site of monitoring of activities and behaviour, with parents playing an important role in surveillance of children. In the book *Paranoid Parenting* sociologist Frank Furedi (2001) describes how with the current media climate and parenting advice books, parents are increasingly becoming filled with anxiety about the dangers of contemporary life. Risk management, as Scott and Jackson (2010) suggest, is central to understanding the social construction of childhood (Scott and Jackson 2010:106). 'Children at risk' is a phrase that is used without necessarily considering what the risks are. As discussed above, one of the perceived mounting threats that is articulated, is that posed by paedophiles for example. Whilst there is the increasing unease about children being at risk, children can also become a risk themselves, as Sharon Stephens (1995) articulated, 'there is also a growing sense of children themselves as *the risk* – and thus of some children as people out of place' (Stephens 1995: 13). Children who demonstrate competence that does not fit current developmental or educational paradigms, who adopt a different position within the generational hierarchy are deemed a social and moral threat and must be brought back in line through protection or education (Wyness 2006). Walkerdine (1999) explores a similar idea in relation to sexuality and childhood, suggesting that the eroticised child, the proto-sexual girl in her padded bra is a threat, a risk to the natural child, the asexual girl (ideas explored in more detail later). In the light of these changes, media coverage of the pre-teen phenomenon could be seen as the need to protect innocence in the face of this risk society and the many both vague and specific risks perceived, so that girls do not become a risk to the very notion of childhood. As Wyness (2006) argues, the crisis of childhood acts as a powerful social and moral tether and the risks and threats to children are drawn upon to suggest the ways in which children should be brought back into line, controlled and patrolled.

2.4.4 Contemporary shifts: children as agents/ consumers

Paradoxically, today the universalised notion of the child as fragile, at risk and in need of protection is also operating in a society in which children are also seen as individuals with increased autonomy and have more legal rights that they can assert (children have over forty rights, since the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of Children came into force in the UK in 1992 (directgov 2008)). The bestowal of civil rights suggests that children are to some extent legally invoked as citizens (Buckingham 2000). These contemporary changes to childhood are part of the other significant transformation of childhood, that of individualization (Christensen and Prout 2005), which is part of Beck's (1992; 1999) notion that people regardless of their age are coming to think of themselves as unique individuals who are able to shape their own identities. Children are increasingly aware of cultural norms and expectations and are enjoined to speak, make themselves visible, and regulate their own behaviour (James *et al* 2005). This individualization of childhood is driven not only by children gaining rights as citizens, but also

because within marketing, advertising and popular culture children are increasingly being addressed as consumers in their own right (Kenway and Bullen 2001). Seiter (1995) describes how television commercials for toys and food addressing children are fast-paced, musical and feature an exciting childhood where there are groups of children within which peer culture is all important and 'kids rule', outsmarting adults and often referring to the adult characters' incomprehension of what is going on within the advertisement (Seiter 1995: 115-120). These advertisements imply that children are now addressed as consumers in their own right who have their own culture, separate from that of adults and which adults do not understand.

Marketers are increasingly addressing children more directly because with fewer children being born in Britain than in the 'baby boom' of the mid-twentieth century (Office of National Statistics 2008a), children are likely to live in households with fewer siblings and so have a larger share of the family wealth (Gunter and Furnham 1998). Britain is also, on the whole, an increasingly affluent society (Bocock 1993; Ransome 2005: 37); therefore children are an attractive target market. [11] Other alterations in family life have also affected children's access to money and goods; marketing literature suggests that with an increase in households in which both parents work and higher levels of divorce, upheaval for children and less time spent with them by their parents sometimes results in giving children money or gifts (Key Note 2001; Kenway and Bullen 2001). Children today have more 'pester power' than children had in the past and as Boden (2006a) emphasises, all of these changes mean that children's consumption is of growing importance and marketing companies are increasingly targeting them with new consumer goods. One of the commercial areas that has benefitted from this rise in children's consumption of goods is the fashion market - designer labels now do children's ranges and supermarket chains such as Asda and Tesco are offering children's fashion (Boden 2006a). There are also those who argue that adults are sometimes dressing children as trophies, either to show off parental material capital (Boden *et al* 2004: 8) or for mothers to project a particular feminine or fashionable ideal onto their daughters (Skeggs 1997: 103). In the commercial world the pre-teen is recognised as an important consumer and both the children and their parents are faced with an array of targeted goods. Yet, both the negative and also the more agentic discourses of contemporary childhood may be seen to be built on somewhat generalising perspectives considered next.

2.5   *Critiques of the 'Crisis of Childhood' panic*

This chapter has examined discourses about the 'crisis of childhood' as part of a moral panic, and has already suggested that childhood, as a time of innocence, is a historically and culturally-contingent category developing out of a Western context. Unacknowledged by those articulating the moral panic is that the notions of childhood and femininity that are drawn upon to sustain the

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[11] Though the gap between the rich and the poor is growing (ONS 2008b).

panic, are expressly white, Western, middle-class concepts. In order to critique this moral panic further, and to draw together the threads of the argument so far, it is necessary to address the problems inherent in the writers' universalising of childhood. This critique will suggest where there are gaps in the popular arguments and knowledge, which can offer a way forward in studying young girls' fashion consumption. First this section considers how the discourse of childhood in crisis may be understood as a myth. It then goes on to problematize the idealised child who is the centre of the 'crisis' as specifically a gendered, classed and raced notion of the 'innocent' child. Finally, there is a critique of an overly deterministic view of children's relationship to consumer culture, and a suggestion of what questions need to be asked in order to address the experiences that girls have of consuming fashion within contemporary childhood.

2.5.1   Myth of the 'Crisis of Childhood'

If it is clear that childhood is a socially constructed category, so too it is evident that the notion that childhood is in crisis is an adult-made construct. Authors like Palmer (2008), making value judgements about children being rushed to adulthood too quickly, the 'hurried child writers' as Lynott and Logue (1993) call them, are embroiled in a myth of a loss of childhood. This myth depends on an idealisation of some Golden Age of childhood; an idealisation that the Bailey Review (2011) does concede takes place. These writers offer an incomplete historical perspective on the changing nature of childhood, despite the wealth of histories of childhood that explores the complexities of this constructed life period in a less sentimental way (such as Ariès 1962 and Cunningham 1998 referred to earlier). They fail to acknowledge that past representations of childhood were also idealised and often referred only to a privileged minority of children. This inadequate historicisation is also reflected in their lack of acknowledgement that, as noted in Section 2.3.2., people have often worried about childhood (see Lynott and Logue 1993; Springhall 1998).

Not only do these writers have idealised notions of the past, they also express conservatism about the present. As the moral panic literature implies, social or cultural changes, in particular those that appear to threaten right-wing family values, such as the breakdown of the nuclear family, are viewed with suspicion. This conservatism is critiqued by Seiter (1995) who suggests that the abhorrence of the commercialisation of children's culture is frequently expressed from a middle-class, male, protectionist viewpoint, which ignores the consumerist character of middle-class culture as a whole, not just that of children. Here, for example, I could cite the journalist James Delingpole (2010) in his proposal that rather than girls dressing in fashion from the very cheap, high street store Primark, girls should wear expensive, pretty, floral Boden dresses, equally part of consumer culture but aiming at the middle-class market and available only in catalogues which appear in upmarket magazines.

In an increasingly commercialised, technological and globalised world, those who wish to return to an idealised, nostalgic notion of childhood are engaged in wishful thinking and ignoring the changes around them. All too often scholars, particularly male ones, have criticised the consumption of women and children whilst not believing themselves implicated in consumer culture (Seiter 1995); it is children who are more vulnerable and in need of protection and control. Therefore these dismissals and condemnation of children's culture may tell us more about adults and their wish to maintain and exert power over children: 'the politics of culture provides conceptual space where childhood is constructed, experienced & struggled over' (Giroux 2001: 4).

2.5.2 Which children?

As well as presupposing that children are particularly vulnerable to consumerism, the 'crisis in childhood' debate makes universalised claims and the assumption is that all children are affected in the same way. Just as in their references to children of the past, the commentators involved in the debate do not clearly outline differences in age, class, gender, race or ethnicity in the children they are referring to. These differences affect both how children are treated and the types of lives they live (Lynott and Logue 1993).

As identified in Section 2.2.2 there is occasionally a tentative acknowledgement that it is the sexualisation of girls that is of concern but there is no explicit exploration of why this gendering of sexual innocence takes place. Childhood innocence is both feminised and eroticised. Rousseau's notion of the innocent child was re-appropriated by Victorian sentimentalists (Renold 2005) and in the Victorian era ideas about feminine sexual purity and romantic representations of innocent girls abounded (Driscoll 2002; Higonnet 1998; Holland 2004). There is also some suggestion that these images of girls can simultaneously be understood as sexually inviting (Tamarkin Reis 1992; Mavor 1996. Though Bradley 1992 refutes Tamarkin Reis's claim) and feminine emblems such as pose, drapery and flowers are used to connote womanhood (Mavor 1996: 16). The possibility of the double reading of these representations and the simultaneous public concern about child prostitution and children masturbating suggest that child sexuality was both denied and implicitly acknowledged (Kehily and Montgomery 2004:74). The fears about child prostitution were part of the motivation behind a legislative review resulting in the age of consent being raised in 1885 to 16, a change which applied only to girls, as young girls were thought to be in need of protection from sexual abuse by older men. This legislation was part of wide-ranging adult regulation of child sexuality (Foucault 1990).

Victorian views of children demonstrate that child sexuality is a contested concept (Kehily and Montgomery 2004). Earlier it became clear that in current debate the possibility of the sexual child is viewed with great anxiety; yet the ideal of sexual innocence may serve to stigmatise girls who do not conform to the ideal (Giroux 1998; 2001; Renold 2005). Walkerdine asserts that in the contemporary context there is still both the simultaneous denial of child sexuality and also a continued 'erotically-coded and ubiquitous gaze at the little girl' in advertising, newspapers and magazines (Walkerdine 1997: 3). This dichotomy of representation and discussion of young girls highlights a tension between the construction of femininity, that is heterosexualised and infantilised (as seen in Section 2.2.2) and constructions of childhood as asexual, and indicates the complexity of adult fears and desires about the sexual girl (Walkerdine 1997). It is therefore against the background of possible stigmatisation that young girls are asked to perform femininity in sophisticated ways. Negotiating femininity is a difficult undertaking in a culture in which girls' innocence is fetishized, their sexuality denied, yet enshrined in law and public debate as a potential concern that may surface unless carefully managed. Dressing in an appropriate feminine way is bound to be a challenging task for girls.

Whilst overt displays of sexualised femininity are repudiated in young girls, the idea that children's gender and age should be made obvious through clothing is not. Most clothing for children is gendered from birth (Entwistle 2000) in terms of colour, decoration or labelling (Buckley 1996), and gender boundaries even in very young children are closely monitored and maintained so that children know that they will be identified by the gendered characteristics they present (Yelland and Grieshaber 1998). Girls are regulated and policed, particularly within the school arena, in such a way that they are aware that to be successful, good girls they must present themselves as hyper-feminine and also as heterosexually attractive (Hey 1997; Renold 2005; Walkerdine 1997). However, this performance must not be so sexy as to attract the criticism of parents, school teachers, boys or other girls. As Currie *et al* (2009) discovered, appropriate displays of skin were not just about what to wear but also about how to wear it (Currie *et al* 2009: 84). Girls must do constant identity work in order not to become the 'proto-sexual' girl who is the focus of concern in these contemporary debates, the girl who has become sexualised and sexually active 'too soon'(Walkerdine in Renold 2005: 23). Therefore, despite the popular debate suggesting that girls should be simply prevented from wearing fashionable clothes, these academic accounts imply that expectations about girls' dress, and indeed how they choose to clothe themselves, is actually subject to a complex and sometimes conflicting set of ideas.

In the journalistic accounts of pre-teen girls and fashion there is an implicit sense that those expressing concern are overwhelmingly occupied with protecting middle-class children from the mass culture associated with the working class (as critiqued by Buckingham 2000; Lynott and

Logue 1993; Seiter 1995). As well as an unacknowledged tension between ideals of femininity and of childhood that affect how girls are perceived, dressed and perceive and dress themselves, girls are also expected to perform the intersection of femininity and class in complicated ways. As Skeggs (1997) maintains, the ideal of femininity is a 'bourgeois sign' (1997: 105) and therefore classed. From the nineteenth century, British, white, middle-class femininity, which was seen as passive, frail and dependent, developed as the ideal and was always respectable. For working-class women, whether black or white, femininity was not a given, and working-class women were often positioned as sexual and therefore Other to femininity. Walkerdine (1997) suggests that today there is often an association between the hyper-sexualised girls' culture of Barbie, female pop artists, dressing up and working-class girls, hence comments in the media highlighted earlier about young working-class women as being overly sexual, bad role models. There is a tacit acceptance that working-class girls may be overtly sexual and while their sexuality is thought a threat it is also perceived as natural (Hey 1997; Renold 2005: 52).

By being alert to class it can be seen that some of this media anxiety about gender and sexuality is a specifically middle-class concern about girls who may succumb and be tainted by this excessive, over-the-top style of femininity. For these middle-class girls, future success is represented as dependent on delayed motherhood (see Harris 2004a; Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody 2001 and McRobbie 2001) and therefore their sexuality should be carefully regulated by their families (Harris 2004a), a job, that in the earlier discussion of comments by journalists and psychologists, parents are seen to be failing at.

If there are divergences in how girls from different classes are viewed and treated, it follows that childhood and femininity are not experienced the same by all girls. As many academics have explored, at the beginning of the twenty-first century there has been much political and popular discussion espousing the possibilities for all girls and young women in the supposed new meritocracy (Driscoll 2002; Harris 2004a; Harris 2004b; McRobbie 2001; Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody 2001). Girls are thought to be rising to the top in terms of educational achievement and subsequent job prospects (Harris 2004a) and governments have built campaigns around the success of young women in work, and signs of their attainment are thought to be flourishing careers, consumer lifestyles and polished looks (McRobbie 2001; Harris 2004a). However, as all of these academics agree, what is ignored is that the opportunities are not equally accessible to every girl.

Social class as well as gender is one of the powerful factors in the shaping of our lives (Walkerdine *et al.* 2001: 23) as access to economic, social, symbolic and cultural capital, are all limited for working-class girls. Skeggs highlights how working-class young women constantly

struggle to keep up appearances and be respectable in light of the equation of working-class femininity with excess and lack of taste (Skeggs 1997: 100). Working-class women are thought to be unrefined and tasteless, and their appearance and conduct are equated, therefore to demonstrate vulgarity in clothing is to be assumed to be vulgar and unrestrained in behaviour. Defying the code of respectability and dressing or behaving sexually is more likely to lead to pathologisation for working-class girls (Hey 1997: 96; Skeggs 1997). Therefore the complexities of class positioning must be examined in the formation of young girls' gendered subjectivities and their negotiations of fashion.

It can be seen then that Western European ideals of both femininity and childhood have developed out of Victorian middle-class codes. As Skeggs (1997) suggests, femininity is also interconnected with whiteness – it is white middle-class femininity that is defined as ideal; 'a respectable body is White, desexualized, hetero-feminine and usually middle class'(Skeggs 1997: 82). Black women, like working-class women, are frequently characterised as impure, sexual and dangerous. The purity of the white middle-class woman is emphasised and shored up by its juxtaposition with both working-class and black women's sexuality. Just as with the discussion about working-class girls, black girls' behaviour is more likely to be stigmatised than white, middle-class girls (Harris 2004a: 35) and therefore understood to be inherently bad and sexual (hooks 1992). Whilst race is not mentioned in the crisis of childhood debates, this absence is because whiteness is normally unmarked – it is accepted as the norm (Byrne 2006). Despite the apparent invisibility of whiteness, in interrogating this norm it becomes clear that the innocent child to be protected is raced as white (Dyer 2002). Therefore, the fears in the public debate could be argued to be about the pollution of white middle-class girls' innocence with sexuality that is foisted upon them by fashionable clothes.

The popular discussion about childhood is revealed then to present an idealised vision of childhood, built upon white, middle-class notions of asexual, yet hetero-normative, femininity developed from Western European, Victorian codes. These discourses of childhood provide a framework of supposed knowledge about what all girls are like and how should behave. This framework then informs ideas about girls' relationship to the advertising, marketing and fashion retailers' messages that implore girls to consume and to dress in particular ways.

2.6   Conclusion

One of the main results of these discourses of childhood is that many of the writers assume a linear trajectory of child development from less to more knowledgeable, or from unskilled to skilled consumer, a patronising approach that posits children as merely passive recipients of adult manipulated advertising, marketing, media, fashion and toys (Kenway and Bullen 2001; Cook

2003). The negative bias against popular culture and consumption these writers and journalists hold is the result of a deterministic model of children's engagement with the world (see Buckingham 2000; Lynott and Logue 1993; Seiter 1995; Smith 2010 for critiques of this model). The notion of a crisis of childhood allows children little or no independent agency and it offers little chance for positive intervention or change, such as helping children with their understanding, critique and active engagement with popular culture (Buckingham 2000) or ways of exploring their own (a)sexual, gendered, classed and aged identities.[12] Therefore in denying children an active role in creating their own culture, the '"death of childhood" thesis guarantees its own despair' (Buckingham 2000: 39) because if children's relationship with consumer culture is perceived as merely a passive and harmful one then the outcome can only ever be negative.

What I have shown so far then is that the adult conception of childhood is constituted of powerful and sometimes conflicting discourses that try to maintain childhood as a precious and static state. As a result, social change threatens these ideals, and moral panics arise about the changing nature of childhood. These panics often obscure the fact that there are both different childhoods, and differences in how childhood is experienced, and frequently offer little or no evidence from children to demonstrate how these threats to childhood are actually impacting on the children they claim to speak of. Recent childhood sociologists propose that markets and consumers together situate commercial meanings, which suggests that to examine the market alone and not the consumption of it is to miss a crucial part of how meaning is made (Cook 2003). In his study of children's culture Bignell (2000) also suggests that part of the anxiety is because adults seek to fix the meaning of toys to their material features rather to examine children's play with these toys and it could be suggested that adults are fixing the meaning of fashionable clothes to their material features rather than examining how girls consume them and interact with that materiality. Although adults design children's retail spaces and commercial products, nevertheless they offer a space where children can be proprietorial and 'offer children ways of locating – materially and bodily – their position with regard to key social indices like age and gender' (Cook 2003: 165), indices through which we all make sense of our identity. To ignore, to dismiss or downplay girls' interaction with, and negotiation of, fashionable dress is to overlook the ways in which girls may question the hetero-sexualised, fashionable ideals surrounding them and explore their understanding of subjectivity through clothing.

A nostalgic, essentialised and deterministic view of childhood prevents us from identifying the myriad ways in which children may actually respond to their wider culture. We can not claim to know anything about a particular population without researching with them. Instead we should

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[12] '(A)sexual' is used when I want to suggest the presumption of the asexuality of children but allows for the ways in which their asexuality or sexuality may be performed.

seek a nuanced understanding of girls and their engagement with and consumption of fashion, which takes into account the structural factors that may shape girls interactions with dress and the various discourses about childhood. Little research is actually done with children about their interaction and use of cultural objects, an area that childhood sociology is beginning to address (Buckingham 2000; Kline 1993; Mitchell and Reid-Walsh 2002; Seiter 1995) and must be examined in order to understand girls' interaction with fashion. As even many of the large scale reports and reviews discussed at the beginning of this chapter (American Psychological Association 2007; Papadopoulos 2010; Bailey 2011) admit, there is little research about the sexualisation of young girls that has been carried out with girls themselves. This is an area of research that I aim to address in relation to fashion.

Therefore the aim of this thesis is to research with young girls to consider what 'sexualised' fashionable dress means to them. Research was carried out with girls that were segregated by school year: Year 4, 8 to 9-years-old and Year 6, 10 to 11-years-old respectively; by choosing two different age groups two school years apart, similarities and differences could be examined in terms of knowledge and agency. The questions this thesis asks are: how do girls of 8 to 9 and 10 to 11-years-old understand both the material garments that they choose to put on their bodies, as well as discourses of fashion, and make sense of these meanings on and through their bodies? What part does fashion plays in girls' understandings of personhood and in particular the interconnection of the cultural categories of gender, age, class, ethnicity and sexuality? What might the studying of young girls and fashionable clothes add to the investigation of girls' creation and negotiation of contemporary young feminine identities? In order to address these questions it is necessary to know what has already been undertaken academically and to consider what theoretical tools are useful for my research.

Following the shift in consumption literature, fashion theory and cultural studies, from examining objects and texts to studying audiences and their interaction with those objects, and the new sociology of childhood which recognises children as agents in their own right, Chapter Three suggests that in order to understand the relationship between girls and fashion there must be a consideration of how girls themselves interact with, negotiate and take up fashion both discursively and materially. The chapter examines what is known about the link between fashion and identity in general and how fashion is consumed. The chapter goes on to ask what is already known about children's creation of gendered, aged, classed and (a)sexual identities through consumption and then specifically about the relationship between young girls and fashionable clothes.

Chapter Three - Understanding fashion and researching with children

3.1 *Introduction*

At the end of Chapter Two, I indicate that what is missing from debate about the loss of young girls' 'innocence' through fashionable dress, are girls' own accounts of their everyday practices of fashion consumption. As Pilcher suggests the 'existing literature largely fails to illuminate children's experiences and practices in relation to consumption' (Pilcher 2009: 1). This sits in stark contrast with sociological perspectives of fashion, which insist that is an embodied and material practice that needs to be examined within the context of how it is worn and used by the individuals wearing the clothes (Entwistle 2000; Sweetman 2001; Woodward 2007; Woodward and Fisher 2014). In order to address my key research questions about what girls choose to wear on their bodies and how they make sense of the meanings of fashion both discursively and materially, what part fashion plays in their construction of identity and cultural categories, and the negotiation of a feminine identity particularly, it is necessary to examine literature that will enable an analysis of how fashion can be understood and how it might be used to construct identities.

Before examining what is known about the consumption practices of children and girls specifically, the first section of this chapter discusses the relationship between fashion consumption and identity, in order to consider what wearing fashionable clothes may tell us about subjects and subjectivity. This discussion is arranged thematically, developed from types of approaches to understanding fashion, some of which are set out in Sweetman (2001), but also incorporating broader analyses of consumption of popular culture or goods and other social or cultural studies that might be productively brought to bear on the ways fashion is consumed. These thematic sections are each explored chronologically. However, this fashion and consumption literature mostly assumes an adult consumer. The second section of this chapter therefore turns to the sociology of childhood, which addresses children as agents, whose voices should be elicited in order to address their engagement with popular culture, their understanding of the fashionable products marketed to them and, I argue, their everyday experiences of dress. Finally, this chapter then draws on these various approaches in order to develop and clarify my own theoretical approach.

3.2 *Understanding fashion*
3.2.1 **Fashion as linked to sex and class**

The apprehension about girls and dress is at once specifically about their age and yet can also be situated within a long-standing historical concern about women, sexuality and dress. Tseëlon (1995: 34) suggests that early Judeo-Christian theological and social commentary about women's essence and their role in society frequently focussed on women's relationship to dress and viewed

it as a moral problem. There is a complex connection between sex, gender and sexuality, and the female body, femininity and sexuality are frequently conflated; the female body in order to be socially acceptable must be appropriately feminine and the display of femininity involves appropriate sexual display (see Bordo 1993; Tseëlon 1995; Wilson 1985/2005). As Tseëlon describes, women are associated with the body, and fashion is often both linked to feminine vanity in adorning that body, and also to making that body seductive. Moral critiques of fashion are echoed by early fashion theorists such as Veblen (1899/1994), who explained fashion as part of a changing class system in which the new bourgeoisie sought to show off their wealth and status through wasteful fashion consumption, as expensive cloth and decoration were cast off each season. Fashion was also portrayed by Veblen as more particularly a middle-class woman's pursuit and emblematic of their social position as their husband's chattel and his ability to afford for her to wear fashionable dress and do no physical work (Veblen 1899/1994). Simmel (1905/1997) suggested that women are condemned to a weak social position and follow fashion so as to fit in to the prevailing norm, thereby ensuring their security. However, Simmel did allow that fashion is also a form of creativity and individuation, even if restricted in its individualism.

These early debates about fashion intimated that there was limited sense of agency on the part of the consumer; people wore fashion because of the dictates of their class or sex, or if they were lower down the social hierarchy, merely tried to emulate those who could afford to be the most fashionably dressed. Bourdieu's (2010/1985) notion of distinction in relation to fashion also focussed on the upper classes and their pursuit of high fashion to set themselves apart from the lower classes – 'the endless pursuit of new properties through which to assert their rarity' (Bourdieu 2010: 249) (See Rocamora 2002 for a review of Bourdieu's work about fashion). Working-class people in these accounts can only covet the styles of clothes worn by those above them in the social hierarchy and seek to replicate the taste of the dominant group rather than articulate their own preferences (for a critique see Partington 1992). I intend to acknowledge the importance of femininity and class as structuring forces that shape the ways in which girls may experience dress and their understanding of subjectivity. Nevertheless there is much theoretical work, which I turn to next, that suggests that people's relationship with fashion may not be quite so passive and deterministic.

3.2.2   Consumers, agency and creativity

More agentic approaches to cultural practices such as dressing and their relationship to social structures like class can found in the class-based work from the Centre for Contemporary Cultural

Studies (Hall and Jefferson 1976; Hebdige 1979; Willis 1978). [13] In particular, some of this research addressed the consumption of young people within subcultures and investigated how meaningful ways of dressing and styling the body were used to explore and express the subcultural member's differences to the wider population (Clarke 1976; Hebdige 1979). Subcultural dress was read using semiotics and this work proposed young people's subversion and transformation of the meaning of objects. The meaning of objects as not inherently fixed by the producer is explored similarly by Willis (1990). He explains that the process of consumption involves people's symbolic labour and creativity, which can bring alternative meanings to bear on objects and practices. We are all, if only to a small degree, capable of some control over the symbolic meaning of our cultural worlds. In fact, Willis (1990) goes so far as to suggest that symbolic creativity is a necessary part of our everyday lives and our consumption is part of that necessary symbolic work. Even subordinated groups who do not have control over cultural production have control over their consumption; people may have to 'make do' with popular cultural objects but they can 'make over' these objects to their own ends (de Certeau 1984). There are various tactics people adopt in order use products in ways that suit their own interests, so that the original meaning intended by producers, and, in relation to this thesis, fashion designers, is subverted or resisted.

This shift from meaning discussed as fixed in cultural objects or texts, to the potential power of consumers or audiences to negotiate meaning, is paralleled in much of the work around television and magazines. Soap operas, magazines and romance fiction, similarly to fashion, have been considered women's cultural texts and up until the 1980s were often neglected or denigrated in academia (see Entwistle 2000 and Hollows 2000 for critiques of this vilification). Early research subjected magazines to textual analysis, which was used to show that they are transmitters of the ideology of femininity, offering limited ways of being female in an oppressive patriarchal society (Coward 1984; McRobbie 1982; Walkerdine 1984). An opposition was set up in this research between passive, 'ordinary' women who accept and absorb the images presented to them, and intelligent active feminists who supposedly see through the ideological messages (Hollows 2000: 26). Radway's (1984) work about reading romantic novels signalled a shift to focusing on the ways in which readers interacted with the text, produced their own meanings and made sense of their own lives through the text, though her work has also been critiqued for making a clear distinction between feminists and female romance readers (for this critique see Storey 2006). The formal arrangement of the text may privilege a particular reading but this arrangement does not guarantee the audiences' interpretation. Gradually feminists were admitting there could be

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[13] The Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies was founded at the University of Birmingham in 1964 and existed until 2002 when it was amalgamated into the sociology department (University of Birmingham 2016).

pleasures found in the texts, ones which they too enjoyed (Ang 1985; Winship 1987), such as the way in which magazines value skills and competences seen as 'feminine' that are traditionally part of women's lives such as shopping for clothes and dressing fashionably (Winship 1987). So it can be suggested that consuming fashion may also have its pleasures, and if women may attain a sense of achievement in creating a fashionable identity, then so too might girls.

3.2.3   Fashion consumption: post- or reflexive-modernity?

This notion of the pleasures of consumption can be found in postmodern agentic and often celebratory accounts of fashion, which maintain that eclectic and fragmented fashions can be enjoyed by all consumers (McRobbie 1994; Polhemus 1994). For example, McRobbie (1994) stresses the pleasures of the freedom to create hybridized identities and flexible selves through dress. Some writers go as far to suggest that fashion is a 'carnival of signs' (Tseëlon 1995:124) where meaning is totally free-floating, or that we have endless freedom to choose any identity from the 'supermarket of style' (Polhemus 1994: 93). However, this perspective is critiqued by theorists such as Sweetman (2001) who propose that fashion and our clothing choices are still at least partially structured by variables such as gender, class, and age (see also Craik 1993; Kaiser 2001). This is a proposal that my research intends to engage with, so as to acknowledge these structuring factors.

In addition to postmodern accounts are those that adhere to the 'reflexive modernisation thesis' (Beck 1992; Giddens 1991). This thesis involves the concept of the human actor who is less conscious of social constraints, whose dress is one of the cultural practices reflexively engaged with in order to explore and establish a sense of self. Yet, as in the critique of postmodern optimism, Giddens also argues that whilst dress is relatively open to interpretation, it is not 'entirely disassociated from social identity' (Giddens 1991: 99). So although this reflexive modern self can choose a particular lifestyle to consume through dress, not all choices are open to everyone and our socio-economic circumstances shape our lifestyle selections. The sense of the self as a project that we work on continuously and must constantly evaluate also involves anxiety and uncertainty in the contemporary world. My theoretical approach involves taking up the notion that dress is one of the ways in which we can attempt to give material form and a sense of coherence to our self-identity, whilst situating the formation of that subjectivity within a set of gendered, classed and aged expectations.

3.2.4   Contemporary feminist fashion accounts: from critique to ambivalence

Whilst feminist authors have taken up all the preceding perspectives there are also those who adopt a more structural account of the limitations on choice and the anxieties of dressing a

gendered self, (Bartky 1988; Bordo 1993) who describe the fashion system as maintaining a hegemonic ideal of the gendered body to which women are compelled to subscribe in order to be (hetero)sexually attractive, to get jobs or to be successful. These studies address discourses and cultural constructs about the dressed and undressed feminine body. They examine the relationship between discourse and embodiment to consider how those discourses are inscribed upon the feminine body. Bordo (1993) argues that the constructs, associations and images of culture always mediate the body we experience. These constructs of femininity are so bound up with subjectivity they are extremely difficult to question or resist and Bartky (1988: 83) maintains that only a very few radical feminists do so. One example of resistance cited is radical lesbian communities who ignore the fashionable, youthful look and instead celebrate the signs of aging such as wrinkles and grey hair. However, Bartky (1988) does not put forward any specific suggestion as to how the female body should be dressed in order to resist the feminine ideal.

Whilst recognising that social and cultural norms affect codes of dress, and the importance of the body in these norms, other feminists have evaluated fashion in terms of the ability of women to use it creatively (Wilson 1985/2005). Wilson suggests that despite cultural variables such as class, gender and age which restrict our choices, 'we can use and play with fashion' (Wilson 1985/2005: 245) and make complex commentaries on contemporary life in the ways in which we adorn our bodies. Church Gibson (2000) takes up Wilson's point that much of the early feminist critique of fashion seems to be based on the notion that somehow there could be a natural way of presenting the body. Yet the clothed body is a culturally mediated body and no matter what a woman's relationship with fashion, the clothes that she puts on her body have some link to the fashion industry (Church Gibson 2000). Fashion touches all women's lives in some way, therefore feminist research should not neglect fashion, or the material relationship between fashion and the body, an area which is rarely central to research (for discussions of this lack see Church Gibson 2000; Wilson 1985/2005; Woodward and Fisher 2014). Fashion is not only discursive, it is also material, embodied, and an everyday practice that is lived in and acts on individual bodies (Entwistle 2000; Sweetman 2001; Woodward and Fisher 2014). Clothes do not just carry certain cultural and social expectations they also change the ways in which move and experience our bodies. The body/dress is caught up in relations of power and social norms prescribe ways of experiencing the body through dress. Dress creates an affectual and experiential link between actors in a group helping us to concurrently construct individual identities (Sweetman 2001: 73). As a result, I argue that by studying how dress is experienced on the body we can see how people use dress to negotiate between the structured fashion system and the social conditions of their own lives, and to orientate themselves in the social world. In my research I ask whether girls use dress in ways that suggest their negotiation between the fashion system and the social conditions of their own lives. However, what is absent from most of the accounts of fashion discussed so far

is the voice of the consumer potentially carrying out these negotiations, the person who chooses what to wear and dresses their body every morning.

3.2.5 Fashion as material, everyday practice

What is missing from the interpretations of dress discussed so far is accounts of physical interaction between the material, tactility of clothing and actual, corporeal, sensual bodies. In order to address women's interaction with dress and the relationship between women's physical bodies and their actual experiences of being or becoming dressed this section now turns to empirical works which carried out research with women themselves. Researchers focussing on the complex ways in which women take up fashion propose quite ambivalent accounts of the structure/agency debate (Guy *et al* 2001; Tseëlon 1995; Woodward 2007). These studies discuss both the anxiety and also the pleasures involved with wearing fashion and suggest that women do not always dress for an internalised male gaze but have a wide range of motivations for dressing in particular clothes which shift and change according to factors such as occasion, mood and audience. These accounts recognise that fashion is embodied and material and that meaning cannot simply be read off clothes but suggest that in order to understand fashion we must also elicit the meanings that the wearer brings to their clothes, as we have an active, evolving relationship to our clothes and our uses of garments may change (Guy *et al* 2001).

Guy *et al* (2001) bring together a number of empirically based essays that focus on women's on-going relationship with their clothes, whereby identity is seen as an evolving, constructive process. In research with female academics for example (Green 2001), even within the one scenario of work, women were found to use clothes for many purposes. The women explored issues of professional authority and personal identity through dress and dressed depending on context and their audience - for example if giving talks they might dress to make a connection with their audience, such as wearing particularly feminine dress when talking to women or ethnic dress for a black woman addressing a black audience. In meetings with colleagues, female academics frequently dressed to signal power and authority, downplaying sexual display, which might undermine their authority. However others used their sexuality to challenge stereotypical masculinity dominant in academia (Green 2001: 111). Nevertheless, whilst dressing offered the possibility of creativity and pleasure, despite their position of privilege, relatively high status and economic worth, many women also felt a sense of vulnerability when dressing their bodies. This vulnerability derived from being Other (female) in the male-dominated academic world.

This complex negotiation of fashion and of dressing the body was also felt by women from a range of economic backgrounds, occupations, ages and ethnicities who participated in an

ethnographic study examining women, their wardrobes and the act of getting dressed (Woodward 2007). What was thought to be in fashion by the women was always framed in relation to their sense of self, their lives, biography and relationships. Differences of social class and ethnicity were significant to their sense of self and how they dressed but the most important dynamic for all women when they dressed was between the clothes that they regularly wore and the clothes that they rarely wore. The regular, habitual clothing was 'safe' and comfortable whereas the non-habitual clothing was worn more self-consciously. The non-habitual was frequently worn for a special occasion and whilst it often conformed to social expectations of the occasion, it sometimes allowed the wearer to express a different part of their personality than usual and to offer up opportunities of what could be 'me'. Counter-intuitively, whilst the lack of social expectations in the home environment might suggest that the most experimental, individually dressed 'me' would emerge, free from restraint, in this situation the 'me' that emerged was conformist and comfortable. Dressing creatively to demonstrate individuality is commonly regarded as a burden only to be engaged in for social occasions. For women, dressing was about negotiating the 'tension between anxiety and possibility and between safety and creativity' (Woodward 2007: 154). This research will consider whether tensions are found in girls' dressing.

Many of these studies recognise the importance of the relationship between the materiality of the cloth and the embodied experience of wearing that cloth; clothing acquires its significance when worn on the body and through material propensities clothing articulates social categories (Woodward 2007:25). Woodward's work also appears in a volume of essays called *Clothing as Material Culture* (Woodward 2005), one of the rare books that brings together contemporary material culture of dress and social analysis. One of the editors of the book, Daniel Miller, an anthropologist of material culture, stresses the importance of this synthesis arguing 'the sensual and the aesthetic – what cloth feels and looks like – is the source of its capacity to objectify myth, cosmology and also morality, power and values' (Miller 2005: 1). My aim is to attend to the meanings that girls attach to certain types of fabric to ascertain what values they believe that their clothing is imbued with and what fabrics they choose to wear next to their skin, in order to help to answer my research question about how and why girls chose certain clothes to dress their bodies in. How does the cloth, cut and fit of girls' dress affect their interaction with the world and the types of identities that they create, so that we can understand more about the creation and negotiation of contemporary young feminine identities? As Sherlock (2014) explains 'we do not exist in opposition to, or separate from material objects: we exist through them' (Sherlock 2014: 26), there is a 'reciprocal dialogue' between material items that we wear on our bodies and the wearer themselves (Sherlock 2014). Therefore there is a reciprocal dialogue that takes place between girls and their clothes that provides us with an opportunity to move away from the

structure-agency dualism; examining what and how girls wear items of clothing allows me to ask my key question about their experiences of gender, social class, ageing and the everyday.[14]

This link between exploring materiality and ageing is significant to this thesis in that girls' experiences of their clothes change over time and the physical fit of their garments changes as they constantly become too tight. It is through that material interaction between fabric and skin that girls come to know their ever-changing bodies. Studies of materiality and dress have begun to tackle this notion of people's sense of temporality through dress such as work by Hockey *et al* (2014) about people's engagement with footwear. Hockey *et al* (2014) note that past identities could be re-visited and future age-based identities imagined through shoes worn, kept and considered. Nonetheless, like all of the research considered in this chapter so far, it explores fashion and its relationship to adult femininity.

In previous research age, ageing and children's fashion consumption has received less attention than that of adults, just as older people have also been neglected (see Twigg 2007 as a rare exception). Yet as is acknowledged, 'dress and fashion mark out particular kinds of bodies, drawing distinctions in terms of class and status, gender, *age*…that would otherwise not be so visible or significant' (Entwistle and Wilson 2001: 4, my emphasis); fashion and its relationship to age is an important one. The public disquiet critiqued in Chapter Two is about pre-teen girls wearing clothes that the commentators believe should be for an older age girl. The body may be marked as a particular age by dress, in that case as potentially older than its biological age, but as this chapter has so far highlighted, fashion's relationship to the individual physical body, as the wearer of the garments experiences it, is a complex one. Wearers of fashion negotiate meaning and often bring their own meaning to particular outfits. What is not clear from this fashion literature is whether these ideas can be applied to young girls and fashion. The majority of theories of fashion, consumption and popular culture focus on the adult as the object or subject of study with barely a mention of children (see Cook 2008 and Martens *et al* 2004 for critiques of consumption literature). The competent consumer is assumed to be an adult agent; children are usually thought other to this acting subject (Cook 2008). Therefore the next section of this chapter addresses what is known about children's lives, identity work and consumption practices, to consider age and agency.

3.3   *Missing voices: Studying children's lives*
Contemporary sociology of childhood marks a shift to considering children as actors, able to reflect on and express opinions about their own social worlds (James *et al* 2005). I want to take up this idea of children's ability to reflect on their social practices to suggest the value of researching

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[14] Sherlock (2014) asks these questions with regards footwear and adult identity.

girls' experiences of fashion. This section considers notions of children as agents and examines how children can be understood as actively doing childhood. Next, existing research with children is evaluated in order to see what has been written about children as consumers, in particular girls as consumers and then more specifically girls' consumption of fashion.

3.3.1   Researching with children: agents, doing identity

Chapter Two particularly addressed the underlying popular discourse of the child as lacking reasoning ability and as only reaching full competency and agency at adulthood; this perception of childhood means that children's own views have often been thought to be of little value. Claims about the 'crisis of childhood' are made with little, if any, research with children themselves. In contrast, sociologists of childhood more generally are increasingly exploring childhood agency (James *et al* 2005). From this perspective, children are not seen as merely passive recipients imprinted upon by society but as agents constructing and maintaining their social and cultural worlds (Renold 2005). Work is being carried out with, not on, children, who are treated as social actors both shaped by and also active in shaping their circumstances. Indeed Qvortrup (1994) suggests that unlike much previous research, childhood sociology should now treat children in the same way as adults, as already social actors in their own right, recognise children's competences, and deal with them as '"human beings" rather than as "human becomings"'(Qvortrup 1994: 4).

Acknowledging children's competences is important because it suggests their agency, and giving their accounts as much credence as an adult's is crucial to our understanding of how children use fashion. However, Qvortrup's insistence on the concept of human 'being' implies a static identity and does not allow for human identity as an on-going practice. This sits in contrast with dominant conceptualisations of identity in the post-foundational turn, which emphasises the on-going performance and production of identity, yet can be critiqued as neglecting the body (Shilling 1993; Prout 2000a). In this context it would be useful to combine Qvortrup's insistence on recognising children's own skills, with Shilling's (1993) notion that the human body is 'an unfinished biological and social phenomenon' (Shilling 1993: 11). Whilst Shilling does not specifically address childhood or children's bodies, his belief that the body undergoes constant changes that are both biological and social, is productive for research with children as Prout (2000a) suggests. This continuity of change is useful in that it implies both that processes of subjecthood do not end with the achievement of adulthood, and that the unfinished nature of identity does not have negative connotations but rather suggests that all child and adult identities are mutable. This approach allows for parity in the value of adults' and children's testimonies as it suggests we are all continuously in the process of becoming subjects, yet recognises that gendered

identities are something that we all do, not are. There is no human being in this discussion only a human doing. Whilst Shilling's (1993) argument is theoretical, to explore how identity practice is actually understood by subjects themselves and negotiated through material objects, I need to turn to researchers who have examined children's own experiences of consumption and expressions of identity. There is much debate about consumption predicated on an adult subject, however in order to consider how specifically-aged identities are articulated through material objects, it is necessary to consider the rise of studying children as consuming subjects.

3.3.2   Researching with children as consumers

Although the new paradigm in childhood studies researches children as agents, few who take up this paradigm examine children's consumer lives (see Cook 2008 for a critique of this absence). This lack of research may be because within consumption studies the subjects regarded as having the least importance are children and within childhood studies the study of popular culture is deemed to be of similarly low status (Mitchell and Reid-Walsh 2002: 10). Alternatively Cook (2008: 231) proposes it is because the new childhood studies are founded on the politics of child liberation from adult structures by recognising their voice and agency and the consumer culture is all about children's relationship with the adult-dominated world. The few exceptions to this are studies carried out with children in regard to the media, television, the internet and toys which explore the ways in which children's consumption is meaningful to them and how they make meanings through images and objects (Buckingham 1993, 1996 and 2000; Mitchell and Reid-Walsh 2002). As my proposal is that girls' consumption of fashion must be explored in order to elicit their understanding of fashion as part of their creation and negotiation of identity, it is useful to consider what is known about children as consuming subjects and their relationship to their own popular culture, of which fashion is a part.

Some work has been done with children and young people that examines their interactions with the media and reveals a level of media competency that allows children to make critical and complex judgements about what they read and watch (Buckingham 2005). The idea that children have both agency and expertise is also supported by Mitchell and Reid-Walsh (2002), who describe the 'artistic agency of children' demonstrated through children's photographs and films about their own popular culture (Mitchell and Reid-Walsh 2002: 110). Drawing on the work of Ann Higonnet, which questions childhood innocence, Mitchell and Reid-Walsh (2002: 94) adopt the term 'knowing' to describe how children and their creations disrupt ideas of childhood innocence in their representation of the brutal or the carnal. Violence and sexuality are key signifiers positioned as polar opposites to childhood notions of innocence, yet children's play and creative projects suggest that children do have some knowledge of sex and violence. Mitchell and

Reid-Walsh also indicate that perhaps in play with dolls like Barbie, girls are given a way to 'literally and conceptually manipulate the concept of commodified homogenous womanhood' (2002: 202) through dressing, story-making, or destruction. Barbie's hair may be cut off, her body pulled apart or mutilated in some way and she may be constituted as another character entirely.

This research indicates the need to look more specifically at studies carried out with young girls, particularly in relation to gender, beauty products and fashion to see how 'knowing' their negotiation of gender and sexuality through fashion is. Also, girls may use material objects such as fashionable garments and their everyday practices of selecting outfits and getting dressed in ways which are unintended by the producers, or unexpected by adults. There is also a suggestion (Mitchell and Reid-Walsh 2002) that some consumption is an act of resistance to adult, specifically parental, control, such as buying penny sweets where children have control over the buying and eating of, what is, 'metaphoric rubbish' (James cited in Mitchell and Reid-Walsh 2002: 21). Nevertheless, it is also important not to romanticise the notion of the child as rebel. Children, like adults, live within social structures and constraints.

Expectations about both age and gender shape the possibilities and experiences of any consumption; therefore it is necessary to examine research that specifically focuses on the relationship between girls and consumption. Children can be considered as agents in their own right, who may consume in ways which are unexpected by adults but that is not to say that they are unaware of the importance of ideas about gender. So, given the performative nature of gendered identity, what do we know about how girls reiterate or question gender norms through their consumption of girl culture and ideas of girlhood?

3.3.3   Researching with young girls as consumers

In the last twenty years there has been increased academic focus on teenage girls and their interaction with popular culture and consumer goods; for example girls' magazines and their meaning for girls is an area widely discussed (Currie 1999; McRobbie 1991, 1999; Kehily 1999, 2002; Frazer 1987; Tincknell *et al* 2003). In these studies earlier concerns about the ideologically oppressive effects of girls' magazines was replaced with a more nuanced account of the complex and critical strategies of reading that girls adopt.

Despite this increased academic interest in girls' popular culture, research with young girls, or children, in the 8 to 11-year-old age group is still rare; although the girl child as active social agent and their lived experience of consumer culture and gender acquisition is addressed by Rachel Russell and Melissa Tyler (2002). Russell and Tyler acknowledge the continuous nature

of identity work and refer to the active doing of childhood as opposed to the static idea of being a child, which 'recognizes the status of children as active social agents, yet also emphasizes the extent to which children are involved in an ongoing inter-subjective process of "becoming"' (Russell and Tyler 2002: 622). By considering how girls interact with commercial discourse and with consumer goods, Russell and Tyler ask what it means to do feminine childhood against the backdrop of contemporary consumer culture. Femininity is an aesthetic phenomenon bound up with the commodified world, a world in and through which girls become women (Russell and Tyler 2002). Unlike the 'crisis of childhood' writers, Russell and Tyler (2002) recognise that it is not enough to dismiss girls' consumer culture or to simply propose that girls might stay childlike longer by being prevented from consuming, but that we must acknowledge the importance of consumer culture in girls' lives. They (Russell and Tyler 2002) maintain that whilst girls engage in active meaning making the girls also know that society has very clear expectations about their gender performance; in other words, girls have an awareness of what are frequently adult expectations about gender - ideals of heterosexualized femininity that we have seen the crisis of childhood writers prefer to ignore. Russell and Tyler (2002) conclude that whilst girls are active and knowing in their performance of gender through the consumption of make-up and accessories, they do not question the ideal of femininity that exists, thereby suggesting that there is a limit to girls' critical awareness. My intention is to draw on this notion of the complexity of girls' positions as subjects and to explore girls' active engagement with the discourses of femininity through fashion and dress. How can fashion and its significance as part of girls' material and discursive aged, gendered and potentially (hetero)sexualised performance of their identity be interpreted?

3.3.4   Researching young girls consuming fashion

Whilst there has begun to be consideration of the place that consumer goods, such as cosmetics, plays in pre-teen girls' lives and some discussion about the negotiation of gender and age (Russell and Tyler 2002), fashion and the interplay between gender and sexuality in young girls' lives has received less empirical attention. Yet this chapter started by demonstrating that in discussions of adult women, fashion, gender and sexuality are frequently inter-linked, and from the popular and adultist[15] view point, 'it seems impossible in late modernity to represent girls without raising the question of sexual activity' (Driscoll 2002: 144); if only to argue it shouldn't happen. My thesis considers how girls might respond to this adult focus on, yet denial of, their sexuality, in relation to dress.

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[15] Adultist: with adult bias, assuming adult importance and children as less agentic than adults. The term adult-centric is sometimes used instead. See Hendrick (2000) and Holloway & Valentine (2005) for further discussion.

Recent research has turned its' focus on to *teenage* girls' interaction with fashion as its specific interest (Abbott and Sapsford 2003; Klepp and Storm-Mathisen 2005; Raby 2010; Zaslow 2009). These studies explore girls' responses to and experiences of fashion. In Abbott and Sapsford's (2003) work with 16-year-old girls, their main finding was that participants often resisted parental notions of what is suitable to wear but simultaneously conformed to boys', or specifically boyfriends', ideas of sexy when choosing clothing to buy or wear. Abbott and Sapsford's (2003) conclusion is that whilst girls can exhibit some agency in their dress it is within the confines of a patriarchal, capitalist society. Dressing to conform to notions of heterosexual attractiveness was also raised in the work of Klepp and Storm-Mathisen (2005). Their starting point was to argue that age-related codes of dressing have rarely been examined in detail and by examining both young teenage girls (approximately 13-years-old) and women in their thirties and forties. They suggest that age groups have different gendered roles that are reflected in dress. For example, in a mixed sex environment girls' role as attractive, potential girlfriends for boys in their peer group was performed through clothing that had sexual connotations. However, at the same time the girls discussed a balancing act between dressing too childishly/modestly and too adult/sexily. Also there was a tension between the wearing of tight, body-baring fashion, which was considered fashionable yet also uncomfortable or impractical, and baggy clothing, which was seen as unfeminine. This research demonstrates that trying to dress appropriately for your age grade is a fraught activity (see Clarke and Miller 2002 for a discussion of anxiety and dress).

An important distinction to make between this research (Abbott and Sapsford 2003; Klepp and Storm-Mathisen 2005) and my own is that both studies interviewed girls in their teens, and although there was discussion of the problem of dressing too sexily for their age and of mothers' disapproval of sexy dressing, the girls were able to talk about dressing for potential boyfriends. In relation to my work, pre-teen girls are positioned even more definitely as asexual children and so even if they are dressing to become heterosexually attractive, with many/most perhaps not even thinking in these terms, it is more unlikely that pre-teen girls will admit to dressing in this way. Younger girls are subject to different expectations both in terms of interaction with boys, and also power relations with parents. It is vital to attend to the specificity of age because, as the Chapter Two suggested, cultural constructions for every age group within a particular historical moment differ. An even more crucial point to raise here is that if the popular discussion in Chapter Two positions children as non-agents then it is work with the specific age grouping of 8 to 9 and 10 to 11-year-olds that will bring that positioning into question.

Furthermore, as those who have done work on children's fashion assert, there has been little exploration of children or specifically young girls' fashion as material culture (Pilcher 2009, Boden *et al* 2004, Cook and Kaiser 2004). An exception to this is an ethnographic study carried

out by Boden *et al* (2004) with children aged 6 - 11, which examined the ways in which they made use of clothing to construct their identities and focuses on the social and cultural significance of children's fashion consumption.[16] This research acknowledges that children's consumption is affected by social structures and parental concerns; it describes how children use their consumption to demonstrate an increased autonomy from their parents and develop notions about what suits them and signifies their self-image (Boden *et al* 2004: 11). Children also exert considerable power in the family, influencing parental consumption in terms of clothing both for themselves and also for their parents. Yet dressing was cross-cut with pressures to conform to gender appearances and what the gendered requirement consisted of depended on age-related discourses; just as Klepp and Storm-Mathisen (2005) discovered, it was important to the children not to be dressed in ways designated too young for their age and gender. Interestingly, in this study the researchers suggest that girls moved away from overtly feminine clothing, such as the Barbie brand, to 'unisex, teenage sportswear' (Boden *et al* 2004: 13), which seems to belie media fears about sexy dress. This research shows the importance of recognising that children of the age range I am interested in are aware of ideas about gender and age and that these social categories impact on their clothing choices. But what is the relationship between dress and young girls' understanding (or not) of sexuality and do they construct themselves as (a)sexual beings through particular items of dress? Do pre-teen girls perceive the meaning of sexualised clothes and how do they negotiate these meanings, if at all?

The relationship between girls and their ideas of dressing the body in sexualised ways is indirectly referred to in Boden's (2006b) article that addresses the influence that celebrities have on children's perception of identity and ways in which to dress the body. Concerns about fashionable dress and the inappropriate exposure of girls' bodies is referred to in relation to girls discussing the skimpiness of pop stars' clothing and the unsuitability of such clothes for the girls themselves, which suggests that girls do make judgements about their own sexualised performance. However, the ways in which girls negotiate these ideas of suitability, exposure of the body and appropriate expression of aged sexuality for themselves, through their own dress, is not interrogated in this piece. It is in a later article that Jane Pilcher (2009), drawing on the same ethnographic study as Boden *et al* (2004) and Boden (2006b), turns her attention to the sexy dressing of girls. Despite the earlier discussion of unisex dress that girls sometimes adopt at this age (Boden *et al* 2004), Pilcher (2009) does suggest that there is evidence of girls between 5 and 12-years-old wearing clothes such as high-heeled shoes and mini-skirts that are associated with sexualised adult femininity. Different girls wore these clothes as either a form of role-play inside the house or as dressing up to go outside the house. The clothes had a variety of contingent, and sometimes

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[16] There is some discrepancy here as in their introduction ages 6-11 are given (Boden *et al* 2004: 3), but in the text itself 5, 12 and 14 year olds are also mentioned (pp. 20, 11 and 15 respectively)

contradictory, meaning for the girls. Garments were liked because of their styling and embellishments that conveyed fashionability and, although they sometimes revealed skin, were not explicitly discussed as chosen for their revealing qualities. In fact whilst wearing fashionable clothes gave pleasure, it simultaneously made the girls self-conscious and although they did not refer to the sexual character of the clothing, they were wary and critical of showing too much of their bodies. This critical reflection is argued by Pilcher (2009) to be part of an active engagement with, and acting out of, 'the contradictions of femininity in contemporary culture' (Pilcher 2009: 9). Whilst Pilcher (2009) suggests that these clothes related to 'ageing up' (Pilcher 2009: 3) to adulthood, she expresses uncertainty about whether girls understand the specific sexual meaning of certain clothing or of the revealing of the body.

One of the few researchers whose aim is to explore sexual knowledge in childhood, and who studies children's sexuality in their pre-teen years, is sociologist Emma Renold (2005). Renold interrogates the notion of childhood innocence and examines young children at school, their interaction with discourses of gender and sexuality and their identity construction. Despite the popular conception of children as asexual and unconcerned with gender or sexuality, Renold (2005) discusses how children within primary school are engaged in producing, negotiating and contesting sexual identities in complex ways. This concept of children's ability to understand, construct and critique sexualised identities is one that I will take up. Renold notes that the 'heterosexualisation of femininity was a strong and powerful part of girls' school-based peer group cultures…with over two-thirds of the girls…investing and policing each other's bodies as heterosexually desirable commodities' (2005: 169). Her findings demonstrate that there is something to be gained by girls becoming heterosexually attractive and that girls were their own and other girls' harshest critics in respect of their gendered and sexualised performance (Renold 2005; Hey 1997). For example, girls often negotiated age-appropriate discourses to dress in ways that toyed with older sexualities, aiming to be sexy and fashionable, without being tarty. This on-going struggle was raised by my own earlier research with young girls (Blanchard 2006) and in other research with teenage girls (Hey 1997; Klepp and Storm-Mathisen 2005). Perhaps the ability and willingness of the young girls to explicitly express clothing their bodies in sexualised terms in these studies was as a result of their discussions being in peer groups (as in Blanchard 2006; Renold 2005); this is opposed to the initial research discussed in the work of Boden (2006b) and Pilcher (2009) where girls were interviewed with their parents present. This issue of research dynamics is considered in detail within the methodology chapter.

What is evident is both the importance of girls' clothing and make up practices in the commodification of their bodies, but also that girls' interaction with fashion is a complex one. That pre-teen girls are aware of aged, gendered and sexualised norms and negotiate and perform

them in sophisticated ways, clearly points to the need for further research to consider girls
interaction with fashion as part of this complex performance of identity. Hey's (1997) earlier
research in a secondary school addressed the effects of class on how subject positions and dress
codes are taken up by girls; working-class girls are described as positioned as marginal to the
education system hence investment in the heterosexual marketplace is seen as their only route to
what they see as desirable femininity (Hey 1997: 76). Consequently Hey (1997) suggests that
some working-class girls make a cultural investment in glamour or hyper-femininity because their
most substantial asset in accessing the heterosexual economy is their bodies and sense of self as
sexy; being seen as a desirable object of the male gaze gives these girls some power. Whereas
Renold's (2005) work argues that middle-class girls may also gain pleasure from the construction
of 'sexy' identities. Whilst class, academic ability and body shape modulated the way 'girlie' (as
the girls called it in Renold 2005) hyper-femininity was played out, these factors did not prohibit
girls taking up girlie femininity in the first place, nor limit the taking up of counter-discourses of
non-girlie femininity (Renold 2005).

So, in order to understand how girls negotiate aged and classed notions of femininity, it is
essential to examine what investments are being made by young girls in fashion and appearance
and how these investments are experienced. Hey's (1997) study highlights the value of
considering the resources that young girls have available, the subject positions that are accessible
to various classes of girls and the amount of autonomy they are allowed when shopping for
clothes, dressing and going out. Class may affect parental regulation of the girls' dress, how sexy
she is permitted to look, how much money is available to achieve the look she desires and where
she might be allowed to go dressed in certain clothes; therefore in my research the axes of gender,
age and class must be considered.

Whilst all the research above acknowledges that gender, age, class and race determine how people
choose to dress, in many of these studies there is little or no mention of the race or ethnicity of the
participants that they researched with (see Abbott and Sapsford 2003; Boden 2006b; Klepp and
Storm-Mathisen 2005; Pilcher 2009). [17] Abbott and Sapsford (2003) note the ideal body,
presented to young women for them to aspire to, is white (Abbott and Sapsford 2003: 2), but not
how this ideal of whiteness might impact on their research subjects. It could be that much
research is with mainly white participants therefore, because whiteness is accepted as the norm
within Western countries, it usually goes unmarked (as discussed in Chapter Two and critiqued by

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[17] The original data that Boden 2006b and Pilcher 2009 draw upon was collected from families chosen to
illustrate key social variables including 'ethnicity'. However, the ethnicity of each participant is not
mentioned – there is reference to a Muslim girl, a religious identity that maybe hinting at an ethnicity. The
rest of the participants go unmarked, so may be presumed white.

Dyer 2002; Byrne 2006). In Hey's (1997) work, whilst middle-class white girls projected sexuality onto their working-class counterparts, the working-class girls in her study positioned black girls as Other and imbued with overt sexuality (Hey 1997: 69). It is important then to consider the ethnicity of the participants because the ideal of the innocent girl is inherently about whiteness as the unmarked ideal and will affect various ethnicities of girls differently.

Renold's (2005) research gives a significant account of girls' interaction with fashion as a discourse used to construct various identities within the confines of school, and sometimes explores the material aspect of school uniform and its adaptation in order to inflect it with particular meaning. However, girls also spend much of their time out of school uniform - after school, at weekends and holidays, or in contexts that are outside of official school regulation, such as some school trips, school discos and dress-down days. Therefore it is important to also consider the wearing of the material objects of fashionable dress as opposed to school uniform and girls' discussion and negotiation of the meaning of fashion when they are considering these fashionable items. This thesis considers how aged, gendered, sexualised, fashion-conscious identities performed, shaped and understood by girls through their fashion consumption within the context of dress-down days, and time and space outside of school. Girls and their interaction with discourses of age, femininity, class and their negotiation of fashion have been studied within the context of the school, yet there is little work for which girls' fashion consumption and the axes of age, gender, sexuality, class and race have been the main focus, particularly outside of the official school arena. Yet it is in the time outside of school that girls are able to wear their own clothes and negotiate appropriate dress with families and peers without pedagogical constraints. Fashionable dress may be worn outside of school time in a variety of social occasions and contexts, all of which may have different codes of dress that will inflect on girls' wardrobes of clothes and on when and where certain outfits may get worn (as suggested by Boden *et al.* 2004 and Pilcher 2013). By considering how young feminine identities are negotiated on these occasions and contexts through fashion, the complex relationship between girls and fashion will be explored.

All of these studies suggest the many ways in which girls' consumption of fashion is similar to that of adults in their considered taking up of identities shaped by social factors, and they use theories that were originally articulated with adult consumers in mind. I now turn to work by Pilcher (2013) in which she posits that children's consumption is significantly different to adult consumption in that there are specific discourses and cultural determinants of childhood that structure both the production and consumption of children's clothes (Pilcher 2013). These discourses include those discussed in Chapter Two and explored above in Boden *et al* (2004) and Pilcher's (2009) earlier work framing childhood as a time of innocence or as Renold (2005) more

explicitly states - assexuality. As well as these discourses of childhood, there are other frameworks shaping children's consumption of clothing such as the production-market of children's clothing (what is available to be worn) and their 'life world' (Pilcher 2013: 92) involving many social and cultural influences such a gender, age, family and peers. Pilcher (2013) argues that children's consumption is determined, not only by the frameworks and discourses listed here but also by their own determination and sense of self and suggests that this determinativity offers us a way past the structure and agency dialectic. Determinativity is a useful concept for thinking through many of the factors that shape young girls' consumption of fashion and suggests that research with girls must acknowledge social and cultural, family and peers but also girls' own reflexivity and ability in using dress to present the self (Pilcher 2013: 95).

Building on Pilcher's (2013) concept of determinativity and beginning to draw some threads of this literature review together I want to return to ideas I signposted at the end of the (adult) fashion literature section – the importance of age, ageing and materiality in relation to girls' consumption of dress. Pilcher (2013) acknowledges that because of their biological age children are subject to discourses of childhood about their smallness, immaturity and their unfinished status. I would add that in addition to considering girls' engagement with these discourses in relation to dress, the actual bodies of children start small and undergo a process of continual growth. Girls' bodies are of varying sizes and each grows differently but eventually all clothes that girls wear will become too small. Pilcher (2013: 95) notes that children commented on the physical sensations of cloth and clothing on their bodies. I propose that by bringing the study of materiality (Woodward 2007; Woodward and Fisher 2014) to bear on research with girls, it can offer a way to consider children's consumption as uniquely different to that of most fully grown adults, in that their experience of the same clothes dramatically changes over time, in a way that some adults will only experience periodically.[18] However, considering the material relationship girls have with their clothes also offers an opportunity to explore age-based identities and the life course temporality of growing up. This material and temporal aspect might also add to our understanding of how temporality is experienced through the co-constitutive relationship between our bodies and dress for children and adults alike, both at times of considerable bodily transition and potentially throughout the life course.

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[18] Exceptions being significant weight loss or gain (see the work of Banim and Guy 2001 and Bye and McKinney 2007 for discussion about women keeping clothes that they no longer wear due to weight gain), pregnancy (Woodward 2007 has a brief discussion about materiality, dress and pregnancy) and perhaps bodily changes in old age (see Hockey *et al* 2014 in relation to shoes, materiality and age; Twigg 2007 about dress, age and the body).

3.4   *Young girls, fashion, gender & sexuality: Conclusions and questions*

With all of this research in mind, my theoretical approach involves taking up the notion that dress is one of the ways in which we can attempt to give material form and a sense of coherence to our self-identity, whilst situating the formation of that subjectivity within a set of gendered, classed, raced and aged expectations. I acknowledge that fashion is embodied and material and that meaning cannot simply be read off clothes but instead suggest that in order to understand fashion it is necessary to elicit the meanings that the wearer brings to their clothes, as people have an active, evolving relationship to their clothes, and uses of garments may change. There is a reciprocal dialogue that takes place between girls and the materiality of their clothes that provides us with an opportunity to move away from the structure-agency dualism; examining what and how girls' wear items of clothing allows me to ask my key question about their experiences of gender, social class, ageing and the everyday.

That pre-teen girls are aware of aged, gendered, raced and sexualised norms and negotiate and perform them in sophisticated ways, clearly points to the need for further research to consider girls' interaction with fashion as part of this complex performance of identity. I want to take up the notion that wearing fashionable clothes can gave pleasure but simultaneously make girls self-conscious and critical of showing too much of their bodies. This critical reflection is argued by Pilcher (2009) to be part of an active engagement with, and acting out of, the contradictions of femininity that are present in today's culture that the girls in my research are part of. I also propose that by bringing the study of materiality (Woodward 2007; Woodward and Fisher 2014) to bear on research with girls, it can offer a way to consider children's consumption as uniquely different to that of most fully grown adults, in that their experience of the same clothes dramatically changes over time. Considering the material relationship girls have with their clothes also offers an opportunity to explore age-based identities and the life course temporality of growing up.

The journalists and popular writers who claim that young girls are becoming prematurely sexualised through their consumption of fashion position girls as passive consumers who inadvertently become sex objects and sexually active through consuming fashionable clothes. These writers do not recognise that their ideal of the sexually innocent girl is an adult construction that is riddled with contradictions, nor do they consider the complex ways in which girls negotiate aged, gendered, heterosexualized, classed and raced notions of childhood through their fashion consumption in the contemporary context.

My thesis builds upon sociology that considers girls' voices as valuable in eliciting their perspective of their social worlds (Boden *et al* 2004; James *et al* 2005; Pilcher 2009; 2011; 2013).

Drawing on the adult-focussed work of Woodward (2005; 2007; 2014) and Sherlock (2014), I aim to consider the ways in which girls' identities and experiences are mediated by the clothes that they wear on their bodies and the idea that simultaneously their clothes and their understanding of their clothes are shaped by their experiences of the world. In keeping with Pilcher's (2013) suggestion of determinativity I consider how discourses such as those of children's fashion, childhood, gender and interactions with family and peers intertwine with girls' own sense of self to influence the ways in which they dress their bodies. Considering the discursiveness of fashion and childhood, combined with the sense that fashion is also embodied and material, enables the development of a way of examining how young girls interact with the social and cultural world and create identities through their clothed bodies. Researching the materiality of girls' clothes and their sensuous, tactile relationship with garments will add to the sociological knowledge about how the creation of identity is fluid and mutable (as Hockey *et al* 2013 and Sherlock 2014 found in relation to adults). In addition, exploring how girls experience ageing and the passing of time on and through their physical, clothed bodies adds to our understanding of temporality and dress both in specific connection to childhood but also more broadly in relation to people of all ages.

The literature reviewed here offers theoretical tools for thinking through my research questions whereby I seek to investigate the significance of clothing in the lives of young girls, and how girls understand the discourses of fashion and make sense of these meanings on and through their bodies. What part does fashion discursively and materially play in their understanding of personhood and in particular the interconnection of fashion, gender, age, class and sexuality? How does fashion allow them to think through ideas about the self and about the construction of cultural categories? What might the study of young girls and fashionable clothes tell us about the creation and negotiation of contemporary young feminine identities? The next chapter explores how I will go about investigating these questions.

Chapter Four - Methodology

4.1 Introduction

As a feminist researcher I have a long-standing concern with gender issues. In the introduction to this thesis I set out my research background involving a Masters in the History of Dress and Textiles, on which the popular dismissal of an interest in fashion as being a superficial and feminine preoccupation was constantly critiqued. Instead the detailed analysis of clothing and its consumption was positioned to offer a rich account of social, cultural and political concerns of a particular historical moment. Garments, their fabric, construction and embellishment are complex formations imbued with cultural value and the meaning of these garments is further inflected by the body on which they are worn. Expertise in gender issues and the materiality of dress were brought together in my growing interest in young girls' consumption of fashion. This interest was particularly inspired by the rising phenomenon that was termed the 'tweenager' in newspaper articles and marketing reports (Lister, *Independent* 2001; Mattins, *TimesOnline* 2004; Key Note 2001): a pre-teen, 8 to 12-year-old, usually female, consumer of popular cultural goods including fashion. Whilst in the popular press this term is no longer so prevalent, focus on, and concern for, this particular cohort of girls and their consumption of fashionable clothes still exists.

In tandem with the rise of popular and marketing interest in the young girl, there has also been an increase in scholarship that might be called 'Girls' Studies' (Kearney 2009:2), which has addressed the social and political importance of studying girl culture. The suggestion in this area of academia is that the social construction of gender, sexuality and age should be unpacked and that girls must be considered important actors in the world whose popular culture and their interaction with that culture can tell us about creation of young, feminine identities. In addition there has also been a growth in the sociology of childhood, so overall the academic drive to research children's own accounts of their consumption is increasingly acknowledged as important to establish children's understandings of consuming cultural products and to explore their agency.

In order to answer my research questions about what part fashion plays discursively and materially in 8 to 9 and 10 to 11-year-old girls' understanding of personhood, how fashion allows them to think through ideas about the self and about the construction of cultural categories, and what these girls' consumption of dress tell us about the creation and negotiation of contemporary young feminine identities, this thesis has a qualitative research methodology. Qualitative research will enable an in-depth drawing out of girls' experiences and practices in relation to fashion consumption. My methodological discussion first addresses why this particular approach has been taken – it starts by examining the importance of researching with people as participants who have

personal knowledge of their own social worlds (Haraway 1991), before exploring in detail what differences, if any, researching with girls aged 8 to 11-years-old makes to the research design. The chapter then explains how I went about gaining access to participants to enable me to carry out my research and goes on to discuss in detail the chosen participatory methods that are used to address how girls interact with and negotiate fashion. Once I have discussed the methods in detail, the chapter goes on to explain how I went about my data analysis. The final section of the chapter examines ethical considerations; two main themes arise here - the general ethics of researching with children as participants, and issues of informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity.

4.2   Researching with social actors: Embodied knowledges & negotiated identities

This section first addresses the value of researching with people to explore situated knowledges, in order to study the understanding that social actors bring to their own cultural practices. The discussion goes on to examine whether researching with children as participants should change the approach the researcher takes.

In the light of postmodern, poststructuralist and feminist debates about epistemology, which have shaped the theoretical perspective laid out in the previous chapter, a frequent implication is that knowledge is uncertain and that there is no privileged position from which to gain knowledge. As Donna Haraway (1991) asserts, all claims to knowledge are partial; there is no ultimate 'disembodied scientific objectivity' (Haraway 1991:84) to which academics and social scientists should aspire. Instead feminist research should lead the way by aiming for acknowledged and self-critical partiality, whereby the responsible claim is for situated and embodied knowledges. In order to explore these situated knowledges, ethnographic research explores people's understandings of the cultural objects and practices that enable them to make sense of their social worlds. This approach is increasingly being adopted within studies of fashion (Clark & Miller 2002; Guy *et al* 2001) and accounts such as Sophie Woodward's research into women's wardrobes and how women think about themselves and their habitus in the act of getting dressed (2007). As seen in Chapter Three, work with young women and girls is also on the increase, and ethnography, focus groups and interviewing are proving useful techniques to address girls' relationship with their clothing (Boden *et al* 2004; Zaslow 2009).

There are clearly differences between children and adults, for example in terms of wealth and power, which mean that is appropriate to have certain protection processes in place (discussed in detail in the ethics section). However, it is also important not to essentialise childhood as a time of incompetency or to adopt a patronising approach assuming that different research methods must necessarily apply (see Christensen and Prout 2002 and Thomson 2007 for critiques of this type of research). Taking up the proposal of the new sociology of childhood and considering 8 to 11-

year-old girls as fundamental to consult in relation to their consumption of fashion, this research adopts the position of viewing children as social actors in their own right. This notion of children as agents calls in to question some of the adultist research based upon the conception of essentialised difference between children and adults and instead, as seen in my theoretical discussion, my research utilises Shilling's (1993) notion of all bodies as unfinished, therefore subject identities as contingent and unstable. If, as Thomson suggests, we question the concept of the fully-competent adult and accept that adults are also human becomings, who sometimes struggle with attention span, language, social inequalities and power imbalances, then some of the differences that are thought to demarcate children from adults begin to dissolve (Thomson 2007: 213). Therefore my proposal is to use methods that are appropriate for the kinds of questions I want to ask and would be ethically acceptable regardless of the age of the participant (Christensen and Prout 2002 and Thompson 2007).

By emphasising the concept that all identities are constantly made and re-made, in addition to recognising that girls are able to negotiate ideas about class and gender, my aim is to suggest that age should also be acknowledged as a social category that can be negotiated. In choosing to research with girls because of their being a certain age there is a risk of fixing them to their gendered, aged social identities. However, by remaining aware of this potential imposition of an aged identity, the objective was to attend to my own adult assumptions of difference and the ways in which girls reflexively construct all aspects of their identity.

The most salient social disparity between children and adults that impacts on the research encounter is that children have less social power. Consequently, to aim for a more balanced research relationship it is essential to remain mindful of girls' social position as less powerful than myself as adult researcher. Yet the power imbalance between researcher and participant is also cited in reference to research with adults (Oakley 2000); indeed, perhaps the very structure of research negates the possibility of non-hierarchical relations. However, research can be a 'co-production contributed to by both researcher and informant' (Alderson 2000), for which methods can be considered that aim to maximise all respondents' ability to constitute or represent their experiences, which will be addressed in the following three sections. Other factors can also be attended to which help mitigate the power imbalance, such as the appearance of the researcher and their presentation of self, which plays a part in creating rapport (Harden *et al* 2000). As the aim of my research was to instigate discussion about fashion, the way I dressed was particularly relevant and I hoped to reduce the power inequality between adult and child by dressing down in casual clothes; I did not want be identified as a smartly dressed figure of authority or seen as a fashionably dressed, intimidating, fashion expert. The girls in my research talked about how teachers had to dress smartly, and whilst one group thought that one or two of these women were

still fashionable, all groups, bar one, were very tough critics of teachers' dress and laughed at their sartorial attempts. So, in practice rather than being viewed as expert, I was more likely to have my outfit critiqued and in one group (Focus Group 5) I was questioned about my attitude to fashion and whether I liked to be fashionable, which both helped to build rapport and very much suggested the co-production of the research.

In the interpretation of data it is also necessary to take my adult privilege into account. Self-reflexivity is crucial but not to be taken to such an extreme that the researcher becomes more central to the study than the girls. Harris (2004a) and Castañeda (2001) both highlight a problem with much research about girls in which it is the adult researcher's voice that dominates, as she ends up speaking on behalf of girls. Harris (2004a) describes a feminist claim that young girls do not have the power to make their voices heard; this results in research with girls to redress that balance. Yet in the attempt to hear girls' perspectives the focus is often on the adults' skill of listening and on the adult expert interpretation (Harris 2004a:141). Also, as Thorne (cited in Harden *et al* 2000: 3.6) warns, 'there is a form of ethnocentrism in research with children - we think we are closer to children than we really are because we too were once children', which can add to the assumptions that might be made about child participants. Much research into children's culture includes a reference to the researcher's own childhood, at times in nostalgic terms (see Mitchell and Reid-Walsh 2002 as both an example of this phenomenon and an exploration of other writers who do the same).

This sense of being close to and understanding the child's experience through the researchers' own recollections means that researchers sometimes do not use their own adult subjectivity to think through children's subjectivity, but rather make claims about their 'child research subjects by occupying their position with memories of [themselves] as a child' (Castañeda 2001: 37). Thereby, rather than acknowledging their present position of privilege to be able to use adult memories, academics do not clearly express how the particular child participants' experiences of subjectivity may be different from the academics own. Mitchell and Reid-Walsh's (2002) suggestion is that reflexive use of memory work can supplement our understanding of childhood; however this approach is not in keeping with the methodology of this thesis - the emphasis will be on these particular pre-teen girls' experiences of fashion. Hence my intention was to take up Castaneda's proposal that adult privilege must always be acknowledged.

As the discussion so far suggests, young girls can be understood as social actors who are able to negotiate and reflexively constitute their identities. As such they can be involved as research participants in the production of knowledge about their cultural worlds. Just as all good social research should recognise the power hierarchy of the research relationship so too research with

those marked as children, and therefore positioned as particularly powerless, must be extremely sensitive to this disparity. Qualitative research projects that aim to interpret people's own cultural practices should also choose methods that give participants the opportunity to discuss their own priorities and use their own vocabulary to present a nuanced reading of their social world. The methods I chose in order to draw out these readings are detailed next, as the next section first gives an overview of what methods were chosen to examine how pre-teen girls understand and consume fashion. It then addresses how I gained access to the girls and the end of the section goes through each of the methods in detail.

4.3   *How to involve pre-teen female social actors*

Multiple methods were used in order to create breadth, complexity and richness in the data (Brannen 2005; Mason 2006); three methods were chosen to produce a multi-faceted picture of the experience of fashion for pre-teen girls. Firstly focus groups were carried out with girls aged 8 to 9- years-old and 10 to 11-years-old in order to investigate the negotiation of fashionability, and to gain a collective understanding, as fashion is a social phenomenon (Zaslow 2009). Secondly the participants were then asked to take photographs (Pink 2007; Knowles and Sweetman 2004) of their favourite outfits (the clothes, but not the girls wearing them). These photographs allowed girls to make their own choices about which clothes are important to them; they also captured some of the visual and material aspects of fashion that are intrinsic to why certain clothes are worn. Finally, interviews were conducted individually with each of the girls who took photographs, in order to draw out meanings in relation to those photographs (Pink 2007). Girls set the agenda for the interview in their choice of what they photographed and which photographs they showed me. The intention was to access some of the personal relationship that participants have with worn and lived material garments through their narration of the image. These photographs and interviews enabled a personal perspective to be gained on a more focussed level and allowed the studying of material features of the clothing photographed (reasons for all these choices will be discussed in more detail in various sections below). The subject of sexualisation was allowed to arise spontaneously from girls' own discussions, in order that the girls framed it through the language that they were familiar with and their understanding of the issue.

The focus groups were conducted with participants from 8 to 11-years-old as these ages are within the pre-teen age group that the popular concern discussed in Chapter Two is expressed about. At these ages girls are also still within primary school rather than secondary education and therefore subject to a specific set of aged expectations; social and sexual generationing implies that children in primary schooling are particularly innocent and passive (Renold 2005). In Chapter Two it became clear that 8-year-olds are thought to be particularly in need of protection from

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commercialisation and sexualisation. As already seen in this thesis, popular discussion draws on developmental discourses and assumes that children's development, in terms of their understanding of their social and cultural worlds, should follow a straightforward age-based trajectory from less to more knowing. Therefore in order to provide some kind of comparison between age classes, the groups were segregated by school year: Year 4, which is children 8 to 9-years-old and Year 6, which is children 10 to 11-years-old. By choosing age groups that were two school years apart, the aim was to examine similarities and differences in terms of knowledge and agency.

4.3.1 Which girls?

I was interested in pre-teen girls and fashion because of the particular public concern about this age of girls, their positioning as especially vulnerable to sexualisation and commercialisation and yet the lack of research investigating their responses to fashion. In order to research with a large number of young girls, one of the most straightforward ways is to get access through schools, especially as children in schools are grouped according to age. By choosing to research with girls in primary school it is possible to gain access to different age groups in order to be able to compare their interactions with fashion.

I initially sent letters to local primary school head-teachers asking for participants in Year 4 and Year 6 – who would be aged 8 to 9 and 10 to 11-years-old respectively (ethical issues relating to this process are discussed in the Ethics Section). In order not to have to attend to too many variables such as ethnicity and class, in addition to age, and to concentrate instead on the complexities and intricacies of girls' engagement with the discourses of fashion, the materiality of dress and their construction of identity, I chose to focus on white, middle-class girls. I targeted schools accordingly in the predominantly white, middle-class, small city of Bridworth[19] in the South of England. Seeking to avoid further entrenching of colour- and class-blindness, in a debate that is anything but, it is important to acknowledge that white, middle-classness is an embodied construction and to consider how different aged girls constitute it (Francombe-Webb and Silk 2015). In my first round of research I gained access to a group of each age grade at Marebrook Primary School, in a suburb on the outskirts of Bridworth with some social housing, some service family accommodation for the nearby army barracks but with a majority of owner-occupied houses. Subsequent research was carried out at a larger primary school, Darton Primary School, in what used to be a very mixed housing area with private and authority-owned houses, although much of the social housing is increasingly privately owned and the proportion of children eligible for free school meals is below the national average (Ofsted 2007). The area is also now home to a

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[19] All names of people and places are pseudonyms in order to maintain anonymity.

Waitrose store, an upmarket supermarket chain aiming at the middle class (Morgan *et al* 2008: 184). At Darton Primary I saw a further two sets of girls from each age group of interest; therefore overall I conducted six focus groups (three from both age groups) with thirty-two participants and subsequently carried out twenty-one interviews with photographs. The interviews began with some general questions about where the girls lived, and in order to help identify their class background, I asked them about what their parents did for a living. For those participants who did not attend interviews, the school secretaries knew what many of their parents' occupations were. Then by using class classifications derived from NS-Sec system, used by Office of National Statistics, the class of participants was determined by these parental occupations (Bathmaker *et al* 2016). In the five cases that the secretary did not know parental occupation, I identified a strong regional accent as suggesting working classness (Skeggs 1997: 11), and those with more Received Pronunciation were noted as having the embodied capital of the middle-class (Friedman *et al* 2016). Rampton (2010) argues that indeed, moving beyond occupation (here parental occupation), socio-linguistics can offer a way of exploring bodily expressions of class status (Rampton 2010: 16-17). Despite choosing the schools for being in a predominantly white, middle-class area, out of the thirty-two participants four were working-class, and one middle-class girl, Sara, was British Asian.

The research at Marebrook Primary School was carried out between December 2010 and January 2011 and I visited Darton Primary in June 2013. The gap between the research at the first school and going to the second was because of a suspension in my studies due to the birth of my twin sons. The main variation between the two time periods, in relation to fashion, seems to be that pink was considered fashionable in the earlier research but was not mentioned at any length by the later participants. The difference between the research being carried out in winter at Marebrook Primary and in the summer at Darton Primary meant there was some divergence concerning the types of clothes that were discussed in the focus groups such as tights and jumpers in winter as opposed to vest tops and bikinis. However, in the photographs taken in winter some summer clothes were also chosen as favourites and vice versa. There was also much consistency in clothes that had remained fashionable particularly shorts worn with or without tights or leggings underneath, jeggings[20] and skinny jeans.

4.3.2   Focus groups

In order to investigate the situated and embodied knowledges of young girls and to examine how girls talk about fashion, I started by using focus groups to gather data. Market research frequently uses focus groups as a method, with their popularity rising since the 1980s and now increasingly

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[20] Jeggings: a garment that fits the legs very tightly like leggings, but are made to look like jeans in terms of fabric, sewn on pockets or rivets.

also used in academic research, including with young people (Boden *et al* 2004; Dane 2007; Överlien *et al* 2005; Renold 2005; Zaslow 2009). Focus groups or group interviews are group discussions conducted with typically six to eight participants, focussing on debating a set of questions (Morgan 1998). My groups ranged from as few as three participants, when two girls were ill (it was winter and many pupils of the school had bad colds), to as many as eight girls. The girls were in groups in which they were familiar with everyone, and were friends with some of the participants (in Focus Group 5 they discussed how they had chosen to take part because their friends had), which helped to foster a comfortable and non-threatening atmosphere (Renold 2005) in which they discussed going round to play at each other's houses, parties they had been together, as well as family members the others knew of and other friends that they had common. The group debated the questions amongst themselves with minimal intervention from me, the researcher (Gibbs 1997), for between forty minutes and an hour. Although I provided some direction for the groups, the intention was that in their interaction the girls shaped the discussion and raised topics that were of interest to them. Their familiarity with each other also allowed their shared interests to come to the fore. Focus groups can help to redress the power imbalance between the researcher and participants, as they are 'particularly useful for allowing participants to generate their own questions, frames and concepts and to pursue their own priorities on their own terms and in their own vocabulary' (Barbour and Kitzinger 1999: 5). The intention was that because the researcher's power was also reduced in terms of simply being outnumbered, the girls did not just tell me what they thought I wanted to hear (Punch 2002: 325).

This rebalancing of power meant that in practice the girls often got up from their seats, jostled each other playfully as they tugged at each other's clothing, shouted in order to get their voices heard over the general hubbub and vie for my attention. They argued with each other and their talk went off at tangents discussing parties, friends who were not in the group, shopping trips, teachers, school and holidays. Sometimes someone would call the group to order (Bottero 2010) and remind them that they were meant to be responding to my questions and occasionally I would intervene to get the conversation back on track. The girls sometimes felt I needed some guidance and would explain particular trends or names of clothes to me. The tables were also turned on me and I would be asked directly about my work, what I was doing and why, how and where it might be published. During my explanation of anonymity, a couple of groups of girls suggested names that they could be called in my thesis. Not only did it feel as if the girls were engaged with the subject and enjoying the chance to conduct animated discussions about things that interested them, but without under-emphasising that I was the nominal adult in the room, much of the time I felt far from being in charge, which was exactly the atmosphere I had hoped to foster.

Driscoll (2002) criticises research with girls that investigates girls' cultural practices, questioning why a girl's voice is any more authentic than another person's critical analysis of those practices (Driscoll 2002: 168). The aim in this research was not to unearth some essential 'truth' about girls through a straight forward eliciting of an account of their experience. Nonetheless, conducting focus groups meant that I could investigate the ways in which they interacted in order to construct their experiences of fashion. Hence attention was paid not just to content of the discussion but also to the process of interaction; focus group data is just as constructed as any other data but does offer access to 'patterns of talk and interaction through which the members of any group constitute a shared reality' (Devault cited in Wilkinson 1999: 77). Therefore this method was useful for considering the participants' construction and negotiation of themselves as girls within their peer and friendship group and within discourses about age-appropriate dress.

My interest was in fashion worn outside of the official school context and in girls' interaction with fashion and the materiality of their clothes. Therefore, as the girls usually wore a uniform in school time, I conducted these focus groups on special dress-down days at the schools. Girls' clothing choices were to be the starting point for the discussion, so that the girls' own wardrobes influenced their interaction. The aim was not to suggest that there is any 'neutral' or 'natural' setting or situation (Green and Hart 1999; Barbour and Kitzinger 1999) but that on special days, wearing their own clothes at least freed the girls from some of the usual official school constraints on dress, if not from parental ones. The focus groups that took place on the days when the girls were in their own clothes were, as suggested above, very animated and involved lots of interactions in relation to the clothes that the girls were wearing. However, in the one focus group that took place the day after a dress-down day, the girls were in their school uniform and this group also took place in a rather echoey class room (as opposed to the others in the Special Education Needs room, which was small and cosy, or in the light, airy, computer room/library) and was more restrained; there were still some arguments and loud debate but there was none of the same jumping up and down or pulling of each other's clothes. Both the venue and the type of clothing seemed to change the dynamic of the group.

These focus groups addressed general ideas about fashion and it was important to examine not just what was discussed but how, such as the interaction between the girls themselves, the kind of talk that was produced and their bodily movement and gestures. The conversation was analysed (see Section 4.4) to examine how ideas are negotiated to eventually come to some kind of consensus, in order to understand how the collusive nature of talk provides the basis for a collective understanding that both produces and regulates identities (Eckert 1993). Talk, and indeed all practice, is inter-subjective and the group monitored discussions of identity, conduct,

and as mentioned earlier sometimes there were calls to order by other members of the group (Bottero 2010); these interactions are explored in relation to fashion.

These groups were videoed as it was important to have a visual reminder of the focus groups, as in my previous experience (Blanchard 2006) and others (Dane 2007), groups of girls speak and shout over each other, and end each other's sentences, so that without a video record it would be impossible to know who was speaking, when and sometimes even what they are saying. In their interaction with each other there was also sometimes subtle eye rolling or mouthing things at each other. It is important to have a record of the unspoken gestures and body movements that are a significant part of human interaction, particularly in relation to discussions of appearance, as the girls were very expressive and descriptions of clothing and hair were often accompanied by movements of the hands to show things such as hair styles or particular styles of clothing. As the new multi-modal paradigm suggests, we communicate as much through gaze, gesture and posture as through language (Jewitt 2009: 14). The girls' movement is part of their constitution of themselves as embodied subjects. Without the aid of the video recording some of this interesting and complex visual data would have been missed (see Dane 2007: 91 and Blanchard 2006: 21).

In relation to dress and cloth the girls were particularly demonstrative about the fit of clothes on the body and the feel of types of cloth. They touched each other's clothes whilst they described items they also had, as if by touching cloth it evoked the memory of how their own clothes felt. Also in describing clothes and their material properties in particular, participants would rub fingers and thumbs together to suggest the feel of the cloth or gesticulate to show how that fabric moved on the body. The transmission of knowledge is a social, participatory and embodied process (Pink 2009: 34) and girls are learning about becoming certain types of girl through learning about the materiality of cloth and its relationship to the body. As Pink suggests that when thinking about social interaction there is a 'need to attend to how cultural norms are invested in sensory categories' (Pink 2009: 55) and I would argue in investigating girls and dress, the sensuality and tactility of cloth and its association with the social world must be explored. In order to try and draw out the meanings of certain garments, outfits and the role that they play in particular girls' lives, participants were also invited to take photographs of the clothes that mean something to them.

4.3.3   Informant produced photographs and photo-interviews
Fashion is an aesthetic, material and embodied phenomenon, and fashionable clothes play a central role in contemporary visual and material culture. In order to capture the importance of this visual element of girls' experience and knowledge, they were given a 27 exposure, 35mm, Single Use camera with flash and asked to take photographs of outfits or items of clothing that were

meaningful to them. These photographs also allow some of the material properties of the garments to be recorded such as cut and colour. Then through discussion of the images the aim was to attempt to access the material experience of fashion, in order to consider the relationship between girl's bodies and the clothes they wear. This research is seeking to understand particular garments and the ways in which they are lived (Woodward 2007). This section briefly discusses the rise of photography as a method of research and the opportunities that photography offers. Next I consider some general points about interviewing and then more specifically about interviewing with images.

In social sciences there is a growing recognition of the power of the visual in shaping and constructing our social worlds (Rose 2001), and simultaneously the use of visual methods within social research has been on the increase (Pink 2007; Knowles and Sweetman 2004). The premise is that created images can be records of experience and knowledges that might otherwise be hidden or hard to express in words, to 'capture the particular, the local, the personal and familiar while suggesting the bigger landscape beyond' (Knowles and Sweetman 2004: 8). Photography is one of these visual methods and has a pervasive presence in children's lives; they are used to having their photograph taken at school and with family (Bloustein and Baker 2003: 69). Early twenty-first century studies also identified that there is some photography that is initiated by children (Mitchell and Reid-Walsh 2002: 91) and a rise in children's occasional access to cameras (Bloustein and Baker 2003: 74) which meant that at the time of their research it was rare that girls had much chance to control or record their own lives and worlds. However, rapid changes in available, relatively cheap technology mean that most households have cameras, children may even have a camera of their own, and children are also increasingly likely to have a mobile phone (Buckingham 2007; Banim *et al* 2005) which sometimes have an integral camera. Consequently children are increasingly used to documenting their lives through photographs and video (Schwartz 2009), especially with current interest in 'selfies' and 'snap-chat' (Bushey 2014) in which self-portraits are the mode of expression and communication.

By inviting the use of these skills, in giving each participant a disposable camera to photograph their favourite outfits, the intention was to suggest to girls the value of their competence to report on their own lives. It also allowed the girls' to have an authoritative voice on the micro-context (Prosser and Schwartz 1998: 125) of their lives that would be otherwise hard for the adult researcher to access, such as the personal space of the child's bedroom. The photographs that the girls took of their clothes and outfit assemblages were what was personally meaningful to them, in terms of what they chose to photograph (and *not* photograph) and how they photographed it. However, this is not to suggest that the photographs somehow provide a straightforward reflection of their 'reality' but that the images are interpretations (Knowles and Sweetman 2004: 13) and

there was another layer of understanding and knowledge gained through discussion and negotiation with the girls about the photographs that they take (Bloustein and Baker 2003: 72). Therefore once the focus groups and photography had taken place there were also interviews conducted with the informants with their images.

As highlighted earlier, a key consideration in research with people, particularly with those who are constructed/ construct themselves as children, is the power dynamic that may lead to respondents saying what they think I want to hear (Harden *et al* 2000: 2.17). However, in an attempt to counter this possibility, the girls had already met me at the focus groups and were interviewed in informal and familiar spaces such as the music room (a snug room filled to the brim with musical instruments); this sense of familiarity and safety put the informants at their ease. It has been argued that minimising social distance is important to create rapport between interviewer and interviewee (Mahon *et al* 1996) and certainly my interviewees and I shared gender as an identity marker. Moreover it has been argued that the most appropriate childhood researcher in relation to research about children's fashion and children's bodies is female as 'female bodies are not seen to present the same kind of threat to the bodies of young children as those of men' (Pole 2007: 75). However, whilst being female may have made me less threatening than a male, as also may have our shared class, ethnicity and able-bodiedness, there is still the age/power discrepancy. Besides, even matching interviewer and interviewee by certain criteria of identification does not necessarily guarantee a connection, especially as their gendered experiences may be very different to my own. Rapport may be built on less obvious identity markers such as where one has lived (Harden *et al* 2000: 2.18) and the girls and I lived and shopped for clothes in geographically close areas: I knew the shops, restaurants, streets and other places that they referred to and could confirm that I knew where they meant.

It was also imperative to use interpersonal skills, useful in all social research relationships, to create a relaxed, non-threatening atmosphere as far as possible, in order to make participants feel comfortable. Therefore interviews at the first school started by chatting in general about what they had been doing and what presents they had received for Christmas, and at the second school about the school disco, which was imminent, as well as questions about where they lived and parental occupation, before asking open-ended questions in relation to the research topic. Whilst the girls often stayed much more static in their chairs during interviews than in the focus groups, they still ate break-time snacks, told me stories about friends, birthday parties, holidays and even their underwear. Other children also sometimes passed through the rooms where the interviews took place and whilst this may have helped disrupt any tension felt by some girls from being alone with an adult asking questions, for others these interruptions proved a distraction and made them feel more self-conscious about talking. These intrusions were just one of the many issues

complicating research, arising from researching in a busy, chaotic school context and with human participants. Girls were asked to bring their cameras back within a week, but many forgot to bring them back for the deadline, lost their cameras, broke them or in some cases forgot to wind the camera on. Second reminders were sent out and replacement cameras given to some informants, though many still failed to return them, saying that they had either forgotten them or in some cases, that they had not had time to take any photographs. In these ways girls may have been signalling their desire not to continue with the research, hence despite the thirty-two participants in the focus groups only twenty-one interviews were carried out.

I explained to the girls both in the focus group and before the start of the interview that I did not look at the photographs beforehand, and at the beginning of each interview the girls looked through the photos and chose which photographs they wanted to talk about and those they didn't wish to share with me. As the interviews were based around the photographs that the girls had taken and wanted to show me, the participants themselves were fundamental to shaping the research focus. Therefore they captured the 'particular, local, personal and familiar' and also the ways in which they 'make the social fabric with which their lives are bound up' (Knowles and Sweetman 2004: 8). It was my job to guide the speaker, ask for further clarification of points and to draw stories out (Seale 1998). Interviewing with images is sometimes called 'photo elicitation', though the implication of drawing out the right answer from the person is problematic for Pink (2007: 84). Rather, in interviews with images, people with their use of words and images mutually create new meanings together. Meaning is made and narrated when participants speak about why and how they took the pictures as well as what is depicted in the pictures. As the girls discussed the images they had created, they placed them in new narratives and made them meaningful again (Pink 2007: 91), hence there were multiple meanings evoked by the participants and indeed in my interpretation of their words and images.

4.4   *Data analysis*

4.4.1   **Transcribing girls' talk**

The first stage in the data analysis was to produce transcriptions of the recordings from the focus groups and interviews. The focus group transcriptions were carried out using symbols developed from Conversation Analysis (CA), using the Jefferson system of transcription notation, in order to note who was speaking when and what they said (see Hepburn and Bolden 2013 for a full description of the notation system). CA has frequently been used in the analysis of the type of ordered, turn-taking that is often associated with the construction of masculinity (for discussions of this use see Coates 1996; Stokoe 2000). However, it is possible to develop these symbols to also to take into account the interruptions, interactions and collective sense-making that are consistent with conversations conducted as part of creating a feminine identity (Wilkinson 1999;

Stokoe 2000) and occurring repeatedly within my study (see Appendix 8 for a transcription key). It became clear from my previous research (Blanchard 2006) that discussions about what constituted norms of gender, appropriate dress, current fashionability and so on, were often negotiated amongst the group and attending to this kind of collective sense-making is in line with my social constructionist standpoint of noting how identities are constituted and co-constituted in interaction (Edelsky 1993; Coates 1996). This type of detailed notation is very time-consuming, especially when the girls were often talking over each other and it was very hard to hear who said what. However, it does produce a rich and nuanced account of participants' talk, the ways in which the girls were determined in their own making of self, and the ways in which that self was shaped in interactions with peers (see discussion of Pilcher's 2013 concept of determinativity in the previous chapter). Accordingly notations will be included in the extracts used in the data chapters to emphasise the ways in which speech and meaning was co-constructed.

Using CA symbols is also productive for noting pauses, silences and minimal responses (Myers and McNaughten, 1999: 184); long pauses suggest that the speaker(s) may be embarrassed, confused or unsure about something. Silences sometimes happened in discussions about underwear and sexiness. It was important to note when these pauses happened to analyse what was considered awkward and why, but ethically (discussed in detail in the final section of this chapter) and in keeping with my stance of attending to my privilege as adult researcher, I had to ensure that the participant's discomfort was minimised and that I quickly moved the subject onto less contentious ground.

In addition to noting spoken interactions in detail, the gestures, posture, facial expression and eye contact at key moments were also documented, such as in quiet times mentioned above and when discussion became particularly animated. As discerned earlier, all of these elements of bodily performance are part of the creation of identity (Jewitt 2009: 14). The girls' movement is part of their constitution of themselves as embodied subjects. Non-verbal communication is one of the ways in which identities are constituted in interaction, and disagreement with one another in the group is not always openly voiced; non-verbal gestures are ways of disagreeing with each other whilst avoiding open conflict (Underwood 2004: 2). Girls are brought up to be polite and not to be openly critical of each other, so friendship groups often use what Marion Underwood calls 'non-verbal social aggression' (Underwood 2004: 2), whereby girls pull faces, roll eyes or find other gestural ways in which to show their disagreement with others but still protect their status in a group, as nice girls. Documenting these gestures may subvert the meaning that would be found in analysing the speech alone. Noting gestures is also in keeping with my theoretical perspective of attending to the co-construction of identity between girls' bodies and the materiality of clothes that are worn. Analysing actions that relate to cloth, bodies and the movement in the clothes offer

frameworks for understanding the ways in which movement is enabled by clothes and cloth felt on the skin.

Transcribing is in itself part of the analytical process, as the researcher attends to details and decides what actions to concentrate on (Bezemer 2014). Listening to the recording repeatedly also fosters familiarity with the data and whilst I started out doing deductive analysis, this familiarity enabled many interesting concepts to arise inductively from the data itself, these points of analysis are discussed in more detail below. It is in the data analysis that my adult researcher's power is most clearly seen in the research process, in that although the girls made their own choices about what to wear, photograph and talk about, it is I who have chosen what to analyse and how. Yet, the fact that some concepts arose from the girls' own interactions with their clothes and with each other suggest that it is their own agency which plays an important role in shaping this thesis.

4.4.2   Conceptual analysis

Once the transcriptions were finished the analysis moved on to the next stage, which included revisiting the key concepts and theories addressed in the literature review chapter, particularly focussing on the notion of determinativity (Pilcher 2013) as a way of considering many of the possible determinants that might shape girls' consumption of clothes. The main determining frameworks suggested in Pilcher's (2013) work, mentioned in Chapter Three, are those that she names: the fashion market, discourses of childhood, 'life world' and 'active me-making', each of which formed part of my searches through the data. By 'life world' Pilcher (2013) means everyday interactions with family, peers and adults and wider institutional, economic and cultural structures (Pilcher 2013: 92) and 'active me-making' involves considering children's own meaning and understandings of subjectivity and dress (Pilcher 2013: 94). In searches for the discourses of childhood I included references to notions of innocence and (a)sexuality. Life world involved looking for mentions of the structuring forces of femininity, peers, family and class (which was given more emphasis than Pilcher 2013: 93 had perhaps perceived), and from the popular debates about girls' consumption I also added popular culture as a possible influence to look out for. In the area of me-making Pilcher (2013) refers to personal choice, different contexts and materiality as impacting on children's clothing choices. Given my exploration of the importance of materiality in the previous chapter, it was this concept that was paid particularly close attention and it is from this focus that I was able to make my biggest discovery of the relationship between dress and experiences of growing and ageing.

I extracted data that engaged in some way with each of these concepts and began to code the data accordingly. Additional themes arose inductively from the data, such as dress not only being shaped by family in terms of learnt taste, but also in displaying kinship and friendship

connections, and clothes acting as mementoes that allowed girls to articulate their biography. All of these themes could be seen to relate to participants' categories of appropriate reasons to wear items of clothing. The themes were then grouped together, firstly regarding factors for clothing choices widely reiterated in the popular debate, secondly relating to contextual reasons for wearing particular garments and a detailed discussion of aesthetic choices, and finally materiality – the fit and feel of clothing on the body. These three main areas for discussion constitute the focus for my three data analysis chapters. Within these areas I attended to any differences between the age classes and between the self that girls constituted in the focus groups and that they constructed in the interviews.

In the analysis of the photographs, as my earlier discussion made clear, it was important to attend to the meanings that participants constructed in relation to their images, but in keeping with my focus on material qualities sometimes I also carried out a 'materialising reading' of the photographs (Allen 2011: 762), whereby I recognise that the photographs render something in to being, an idea about something being grown-up or a girls' perception of fashionability that is materialised in the photograph and had physical properties that I describe. That is not to suggest that I wanted to give a naïve empiricist interpretation of the photographs (Piper and Frankham 2007: 385) but that the material objects within the images exist alongside the participants' accounts of those images. These material details are examined not as the 'real' or the 'truth', but the physical details of the clothes were still explored with a mind to the conventions of photography, the task set, the difficulties of using disposable cameras and the stories that the girls wished to tell.

4.5   Ethics

All research with human participants carried out by students from University of Southampton undergoes a rigorous ethics procedure, with ethical approval needing to be sought before research can be carried out. All the documents referred to below were also logged and filed within the Research Governance Office, including letter to schools, information sheets, consent forms, lists of questions to be asked of participants and a Risk Assessment form (copies of these documents can be found in Appendices 2-7). Ethical considerations are fundamental to good research practice and in many respects ethics underpin this research methodology so far, with the aim of fostering the opportunities for young girls to speak and be heard in relation to their own lives. Throughout this methodology chapter it is clear that questions of power frame the research encounter and here I discuss these power relations in ethical terms. A key principle of good ethics in research is that the participant has the power to agree to be part of the research, and the power to opt out, thus the issue of gaining 'informed consent' (British Sociological Association 2002) is addressed next. Once consent has been gained the researcher must aim to guarantee the

individual's right to confidentiality and anonymity and it is to these concerns that this ethical discussion finally turns.

4.5.1   Ethics and researching with children

Seeing children as social actors and participants in research to be researched with rather than on is already grounded within a particular set of ethical decisions. As many researchers who start from this premise discuss, there is a rejection of the developmental model of childhood which often constructs children as innocent and incompetent, and this method instead proposes that differences between adults and children are more as a result of their location in the social hierarchy as opposed to innate capability (see Christensen and Prout 2002; Harden *et al* 2000; Thomson 2007). As seen above, it is essential to examine power relations between adult researcher and children in relation to the possible influencing of the outcomes of research. In recognising children as social actors, the aim is, as much as possible, to create 'ethical symmetry' (Christensen and Prout 2002) in which all participants in research are treated with equal care and regard, regardless of age. However, that is not to go as so far as to suggest the befriending of participants. Whilst James *et al* (2005) suggest that friendship with children might afford interesting insights into children's social worlds, they acknowledge that in our age-segregated society, children are likely to feel unease about being befriended by adults. This unease is particularly likely in the current climate of concern about child abuse, in which children are taught to view adult advances as potentially threatening (Pole 2009: 67). Harden *et al* (2000) question whether friendship is actually ethically desirable given the unevenness of the research relationship. Instead I wished to take into account children's subordination to adults as part of my ethical response.

However, whilst age is assumed to be the key difference between adult researcher and child participant it is not necessarily the only difference or the one that matters most in the research encounter, and factors such as ethnicity or socio-economic background may affect rapport (Harden *et al* 2000: 2.18); indeed the majority of the girls and I also shared positioning as female, white and middle-class. Also, there may be as much diversity between various ages, ethnicities, (dis)abilities and economic backgrounds of children as there are often assumed to be between children and adults. Yet, as discussed above, rapport may be built on less obvious identity markers such as sharing a geographic area (Puwar 1997: 10.1). I also reiterate here the need to use interpersonal skills to create a relaxed, non-threatening atmosphere as far as possible which put the girls at ease, and given the outcomes of the research scenarios described above, would seem to have been successful. Additional important ethical concerns, such as ensuring participants understand the research subject and process, and are able to give their consent to the research taking place, are addressed next.

4.5.2   Gaining Access, Informed Consent and Anonymity

In sociological considerations of ethics the importance of informed consent is central (British Sociological Association 2002; Wiles *et al* 2007) and is much discussed in literature about research with children (James *et al* 2005; Alderson and Morrow 2004; Cocks 2006). Informed consent is about explaining what the research is about, why it is being carried out and how it will be used, so that the participants can make an enlightened decision as to whether to take part. In research with children however, access is often gained to participants through the agreement of adult gate-keepers such as parents and teachers. As such, for ease of gaining access and to ensure appropriate institutional ethical requirements are met, both head teachers and parents were consulted with reference to my research. A letter was sent to the Head-teacher of the primary schools in the first instance, to ask if I could conduct research in their school (see Appendix 2). This letter assured the schools that I had an enhanced disclosure from the Criminal Records Bureau (a CRB check, now known as a DBS check). I then met with the Head-teacher at one school and the Student Research Co-ordinator at the other, to talk through the research and discuss matters such as anonymity, confidentiality and consent, so as to minimise difficulties with issues such as pressure to take part and my ethical duty not to feedback to teachers. The Head-teacher at the first school talked to all of the schools' form groups about my research, at the second school a letter was sent home to all girls in the relevant years; those interested had information sheets and consent forms sent to them and their parents (see Appendices 3 and 4).

Whilst parental consent was sought, in keeping with the methodological perspective of treating children as social actors, I also explained my research to the girls themselves through an information sheet and sought their informed consent. Information sheets are most effective when friendly and attractive (Wiles *et al* 2007: 3.9) and containing enough information to convey the main thrust of the research but not so much as to be off-putting. Many researchers are confident that information can be provided in an appropriate way as to gain good informed consent with children (Wiles *et al* 2007: 3.11). There was also a gap of at least a week between giving the information and the consent forms needing to be returned which enabled the potential informants time to think about what they were being asked to do, before assenting to the research.

A vital part of the consent process is also to make it clear that participants may drop out at any time (Green and Hart 1999). However, children may find it difficult to say to an adult that they do not want to continue hence it is imperative to be vigilant to non-verbal clues such as lack of interest or unwillingness to sit down (Wiles *et al* 2007: 3.22). Yet, as Bloustein and Baker (2003: 72-73) discovered, pre-teen girls were capable of expressing either the wish to have a break from being interviewed or to refuse to share particular things. During my research girls who had originally signed consent forms decided not to take part on the day and there were also

participants who came to the focus group but chose to say very little and were not pressed to do so (see Överlien, Aronsson and Hydén 2005 for a discussion of quiet informants). Also, as discussed above, there were girls who did not bring back their cameras who may not have done so because they had changed their minds about taking part. Similarly, there may be times when as a trusted guest the researcher may gain insight into what is declared 'private' or 'secret' (Christensen and Prout 2002: 487); in this case it is essential that the girls were assured that whilst discussions were recorded and were taking place in areas where teachers had access, the actual recordings would not be viewed by parents or other figures of authority.

Issues of confidentiality and also of anonymity are other aspects of ethical practice as cited by the British Sociological Association (2002) and it was also made clear to the girls that their anonymity would be maintained in my writing by using pseudonyms. As discussed earlier, the girls demonstrated their understanding of this process of anonymity by either discussing names that wished to be referred to in the research, or in one case saying to me after I mentioned pseudonyms, 'like some writers do' (Amy, aged 8, Focus Group 1). In terms of the photographs the girls have taken, I sought both the girls' and their parents' permission to reproduce those images (see Appendix 4). Asking the girls to take photographs of clothing rather than taking pictures of the girls actually wearing the clothing side-steps some of the problem of anonymising pictured children and thereby dehumanising them (Banks 2001; Pole 2007; Prosser *et al* 2008).

4.6 Conclusion
What is missing from the public debate about young girls and fashion is the voice of girls themselves. Children may have less social power than adults, however girls are agents in their own right who have embodied knowledge about what they wear and how. They explore and express identities through dressing and in their talk about those clothes. Groups of mainly white, middle-class girls were recruited to participate in research for this thesis, gaining access through two primary schools in Southern England. In focus group discussions these girls used their own vocabulary and their own clothes in order to talk about and debate fashion, dress and identity. The participants interacted with each other and with the material artefacts in order to negotiate questions of emplaced identity.

Girls went on to take photographs of clothing and accessories from their own wardrobes, which allowed them to set the agenda of the interviews. The aim was for informants to use their competence to report on their own lives and to further examine the aesthetic and material qualities of types of clothes. The analysis of this data has attended not just to what was discussed but interruptions and interactions to examine the collective sense-making. In discussion of the photographs the content of the images, in terms of the physical, material properties of clothing,

ways in which photographs were framed and shot, and crucially, the ways in which girls constructed their dialogue about the images are analysed. Access to the participants was ethically achieved through school gatekeepers, and with informed consent on the part of parents, and crucially in line with my ethical stance – that of the agents themselves – the girls.

The analysis of the data is thematically arranged over the next three chapters. Chapter Five responds to the popular public debate about girls and fashion, exploring the conjectured reasons that supposedly inform girls' clothing choices, examining in what ways girls simply follow trends and bow to peer pressure, want to look like celebrity role models, or wear what their fashion-conscious mothers choose for them. Chapter Six examines evidence that demonstrates that young girls are aware of contextual considerations of dress such as occasion and audience; it explores girls' understandings that certain types of fabric, fit and styles are imbued with socially constructed notions of appropriateness for certain places, times of day and year.

Chapter Seven picks up notions of age and materiality to further explore girls' complex interactions with ideas of taste and the cut and fit of clothes. This chapter examines materiality of girls' favourite clothes and explores the physical relationship between clothes and the body in order to explore how the social, cultural are played out upon girls' bodies and shape their understanding and experience of their own bodies, particularly in relation to the ageing process.

Chapter Five - Girls' dressing: Fashion, celebrities, family and friends

5.1   Introduction

This chapter addresses girls' clothing decisions in relation to the various influences proposed in the commercialisation and sexualisation debates about young girls' dress, as set out in Chapter Two. When analysing my data, using the theoretical concepts set out in Chapter Three, it became clear that girls referred to their motivations for dressing in ways that related to the factors laid out in the popular debate about commercialisation and sexualisation. This chapter seeks to test the validity of these popularised claims by examining the girls' clothing choices and the ways in which they discuss and negotiate ideas about what to wear. Popular discussion expresses anxiety about fashion retailers and the availability of clothes deemed inappropriately sexy for young girls, and also the pressure to keep up with trends, both of which are considered to be instrumental in persuading girls to dress in supposedly sexualised ways. The influential position of celebrity role models, pop and television stars and their dress is also believed to be another factor in the rise of so-called sexy dressing for girls. The role that parents, particularly mothers, play in dressing their daughters in adult-styled clothing is also discussed in newspaper stories as partially responsible for how young girls are clothed.

In response to these popular criticisms, and in light of the sociological research acknowledging the agency of children (James *et al* 2005), the clothing choices of the young girls in my research will be analysed to examine evidence that begins to correlate to the influences laid out in the commercialisation and sexualisation debates, yet simultaneously complicates these simplistic assumptions about girls' fashion consumption. Firstly, girls' dress choices are explored in relation to their discussion and understanding of fashion and their take up or rejection of the heterosexually attractive, fashionable girlie subject position, considering what ways girls respond to the commercial address of fashion and its supposedly sexualising effects that may confirm or deny adult expectations. Secondly there will be an examination of the girls' interaction with popular culture, in what respects celebrities and pop stars impact on the dress choices of young girls, and what limits there might be on their influence. Following this analysis will be a section about parental influence and the role that family plays in the types of clothes the girls are allowed and encouraged to wear.

Each main reason for choosing clothes is initially discussed with reference to how the girls' sartorial decisions are made in ways that support the popular version laid out in Chapter Two. However, woven into each section is evidence that disrupts that representation and in each case points to the key argument of the chapter, which is that the picture described by the girls is a much more complex and agentic one than popular discourse would allow. There is sophistication,

nuance and agency evident in every element of girls' interactions with, and notions of, fashion, sexuality and subjectivity presented here.

5.2   *Fashion: Looking sexy, trend-setting and shopping*

In popular concern about fashion and young girls there is criticism about fashion advertising and retailers aiming at young girls; these businesses are described as offering inappropriately sexualised clothes for young girls, which encourage girls to dress for male approval (Cochrane, *Guardian* 2010 Lichtenstein, *MailOnline* 2010; McCartney, *Telegraph* 2010). The fashion industry is also thought to be partly responsible for increasing pressure upon young girls to keep up with trends and buy even more of this inappropriate clothing and is therefore thought to be helping to commercialise childhood. These points will be addressed in turn through the corresponding data, first examining evidence that suggests that girls are succumbing to the various pressures but then exploring the possibilities for girls' negotiation with, and sometimes rejection of, these discourses of gender, fashion and commerce.

5.2.1   The pleasure of becoming a fashionable 'girlie' girl

The majority of the girls who were part of this study were interested in fashion and understood its relation to becoming heterosexually attractive, just as previous research has shown (Hey 1997; Renold 2005; Blanchard 2006). When asked about why they had chosen to wear what they were wearing to the school dress-down day and hence to the focus group, Focus Group 2 said:

> Focus Group 2 (Aged 10-11)
>
> Georgia: It was fashionable=
> Jessica: Yeah/
> Georgia: =And to look good
> Jessica: It's cool[21]

These girls demonstrated their fashionability in their choice of clothes, which Georgia proposed and Jessica confirmed, co-constituting the idea that being fashionable was cool. Fashion was also important because it made you look good. Looking good was discussed more specifically for a male audience in response to the question 'what do you like about fashion?':

> Focus Group 1 (Aged 8-9)
>
> Emily: Cos it's pretty and you can, boys, and boys will go out with you

> Focus Group 2 (Aged 10-11)
>
> Lauren: It's like pretty
> Jessica: And you might get more girl, boyfriends

---

[21] See Appendix 8 for Transcription Key. Notation is included because, as Chapter 4 discusses, my methodology highlights the importance of emphasising occurrences such as co-construction of speech in relation to ideas such as what is fashion, gesticulations for emphasis and hesitations in order to demonstrate spoken and unspoken communication.

Jessica's slip as she went to say girl friend and then changed it to boyfriends perhaps suggested the importance of fashion for the approval of female peers as much as its role in attracting male attention (as Woodward 2007 suggests for adult women). Jessica further expressed the notion of dressing for the male gaze in her interview, as she explained why she had chosen a particular outfit, 'to make myself look pretty for the boys'. So fashion was not just about making them look good, it actually enhanced prettiness and as such made girls more attractive to boys (as Bartky 1988 and Bordo suggest for adult women). These girls were therefore aware that they could construct hetero-sexualised feminine identities through dress (Renold 2005). However, female peers may also be significant as an audience for these performances.

There was also explicit discussion of, and engagement with, the hyper-feminine subject position of 'girlie' girl (Reay 2001; Renold 2005). When asked how they described themselves, Focus Group 2 responded:

Focus Group 2 (Aged 10-11)

Jessica: Girlie girls
Lauren: [Girlie girls
Georgia: [Girlie girls
JB: So what makes a 'girlie' girl then?
Jessica: Um, like wearing [pink
Lauren: [Pink
Georgia: [Pink
Jessica: Pink
Georgia: Like bright colours
Jessica: Make-up/
Georgia: Make-up. I can't wear that to school anymore cos I got caught
Jessica: I don't care, I wear blush now

Both Lauren and Georgia simultaneously confirmed Jessica's assertion that they were girlie girls and that to be hyper-feminine was to wear the highly gendered colour pink (Koller 2008), which Jessica reiterated confirming their agreement about pink. This sense of agreement around a subject position was an example of the way in which subjectivity was collectively accomplished (Bottero 2010: 14). Focus Group 2 also agreed that to put on cosmetics, even though make-up is expressly banned at school was also an important part of enacting girlie girl femininity; this group were heavily involved in cosmetic culture, with several discussions about various types of make-up. There was also talk of perfume and taking showers; femininity was not just about appearance but also about cleanliness (aged and feminised notions of cleanliness are discussed in Chapter Six and in Klepp 2007) and overtly smelling of fragrance too (see Craik 1993 for a discussion on the relationship between adult femininity and perfume). For the younger girls in Focus Group 1 girlie girl had more to do with playing with girls and girls' toys, though when asked if there was

anything in particular you needed to wear to be a girlie girl, Shannon said 'Pinky, pinky, pinky'. So there was agreement that girlie was about wearing a colour marker that is highly feminised.

As well as wearing pink, fashionable, girlie girl clothes included short skirts, as here in Focus Group 2 there was discussion about the length of skirt that they like:

Focus Group 2 (Aged 10-11)

Georgia: If I wear a skirt I'll have it about up here ((gesticulating mid-thigh)), I won't wear it down there [like knee length
Lauren: Yeah, a skirt that's there ((gesticulating knee)), I'll wear skirts up here ((gesticulating mid-thigh))

Lauren agreed with Georgia that a skirt to the knee was anathema to them but instead mid-thigh was the length that they preferred. When asked why they liked the short skirts, they replied:

Focus Group 2 (Aged 10-11)

Jessica: Er, because=
Lauren: [Because like
Jessica: =Because boys can see your legs
Lauren: Yeah and we like, we all like our legs and just want to [show off
Georgia: [Every night I moisturise my legs even though I always (   )

Here this group of girls co-constructed (Eckert 1993) the enjoyment of their sexualised bodily performance of showing off their legs and clearly found pleasure in their own heterosexual desirability, despite the fact that it involved some working on the body with the aid of moisturiser. The difficulties for girls producing their identities in relation to the male gaze are discussed in Hey (1997) and Renold (2005). Yet, as these writers confirm, there are also girls for whom there is much pleasure and power to be found in enacting these hyper-feminine identities, as is obvious here. There were also incidents of being wolf-whistled at that were recounted with pride and a story told by Lauren of the pleasure of being admired by a boy, 'Well, when I, when I went to my friend Jack's party, when I walked up the stairs he went "wow!"'. When asked how that felt she responded with a grin, 'I was like, oh, okay, so all eyes on me, I was like', demonstrating a look of pleased surprise.

Hey (1997) argues that it is working-class girls who have the most to gain from investments in their bodies as sexy, whereas Renold (2005) contends that middle-class girls may also attain a sense of agency from embodying a hyper-heterosexualised femininity. Focus Group 2 was a mix of middle and working-class girls, but they were all at a similarly low level of academic achievement for many subjects, describing to me in great detail the different low levels they were at for various subjects and entitling themselves 'the dumb ones'. However, as Lauren stated 'we're like "duh", but then we're like fashionable at the same time', clearly whilst their academic

ability limits their position in the education system, being fashionable offers a chance for these girls to achieve some sense of power.

5.2.2   Anxiety around becoming 'girlie' girl: classed, aged and raced excess

However, becoming appropriately heterosexually attractive was a fraught activity. There was a delicate dividing line between being 'girlie' and being 'too girlie' or 'showy', in other words between being fashionably feminine and attractive, and being excessive in terms of sexual display. This line was one that was policed carefully by the girls themselves. As Georgia explained,

> Well with fashion I like things that quite cover, cos some girls wear short tops ((gestures low neckline)) and I don't think it's like, er, normal

When asked why, she replied,

> Because it shows a bit too much, if you know what I mean. It's a bit silly. You can still show off but with stuff like this ((pointing to her t-shirt's neckline))

Georgia wanted to display her body in ways thought appropriately sexy but knew that showing too much flesh was judged negatively. Excessive sexual display of the body was posited by her as not the norm of behaviour and was carried out by 'some girls' thereby located as Other. The responsibility for crossing the line was placed here with the Other against which Georgia positioned herself as acceptable (Raby 2010: 347). There were instances in all bar one of the focus groups of using similar words of excess to describe fashionable, sexualised clothing: 'showy' (Focus Group 5, aged 10-11), 'shows you up' (Focus Group 3, aged 8-9), 'show off' (Focus Group 2, aged 10-11; Focus Group 6 aged 10-11) and 'shows too much' (Focus Group 4, aged 8-9). This language of excess is associated with working-class displays of hyper-femininity (Jackson *et al* 2013; Skeggs 1997; 2004; Walkerdine 1997); therefore girls' understanding of sexualised femininity may be seen to relate to classed attributes.

Not only did girls draw on classed language to critique hyper-feminine sexualised fashionability but also drew on the discourses of age, equating sexualised display to looking older, as Focus Group 5 discussed:

Focus Group 5 (Aged 10-11)

> Erin: Yeah, and I think some children act older than they are when they wear clothes and stuff because they buy stuff and it's like, it looks tacky
> Anya: Yeah
> Erin: Because they're too young to wear it, which makes it look tacky

Here the word 'tacky' was used to discuss clothes which make you look older, later on in the discussion tacky was linked to wearing elements of dress discussed in the popular debate - high heels, sexualised dress and make-up. That this group thought that girls should not wear these

types of sexualised clothes demonstrates their awareness of sexual generationing (Renold 2005), and that cultural expectations are that at a young age, girls should not look sexy. The specific use of tacky in relation to sexy clothes can be found in Wood's (2014) research with adult women about lingerie, in which tacky is used as a distancing technique to describe how the Other dresses. 'Tacky' was used in opposition to 'nice' underwear that was identified as appropriate for creating a respectable classed femininity (Wood 2014: 7). The girls' exploration of tacky, sexualised dress was again similarly applied to the Other – 'some children' - who perform sexualised identities. Skeggs (2004), in her discussion of Bourdieu's examination of taste, identifies that it is the middle class who have the symbolic power to judge and define taste. So the middle-class code objects and styles associated with the working class as 'tacky' or bad taste (Skeggs 2004: 107) and therefore the girls may again be linking sexy dressing with working-class tastelessness from which they distanced themselves.

Madison (aged 11) was one of two girls taking part in the research that was referred to as dressing in ways that were too old. She was discussed by the other focus group of the same age at Darton Primary School (Focus Group 4) and even within her own group (Focus Group 5) as wearing inappropriately sexualised clothing or make-up. She wore a spaghetti-strapped vest top, little shorts and visible bra-strap under her top and make-up to school on the dress-down day. In this extract below Focus Group 4 discuss how Madison dressed:

> Focus Group 4 (Aged 10-11)
>
> Erin: And also there's a girl in school and um she wears mascara but it smudges
> Caitlin: Who's this?
> Erin: And it gets all over her eyelids. It's Madison
> Caitlin: oh yeah
> Freya: [yeah
> Erin: But she wears mascara but then it's all over her eyes [which I don't get how she can do that
> Bea: [I can't do make-up
> Anya: [She's quite, this might be a bit, this is quite awkward and I don't want to say anything but like she stuffs her crop top
> Caitlin: Her bra, [she wears a bra
> Bea: [(   )
> Anya: She doesn't really need to, just to make them ((uses hands to show large breasts growing outwards))

Madison was critiqued for trying on a appearance that was too old for her location on her life course, wearing make-up that she did not yet have expertise in applying or wearing, and both for trying to make her breasts look larger and wearing a piece of clothing that she did not yet have the breasts for. Madison was the only working-class girl in either of the older groups, so it would be easy to assume that it was because of her working-classness that she was seen as threateningly sexual.

However, Abigail (aged 9), who spoke in well-enunciated tones and came from a family with both parents in professional jobs, also came in for some criticism. She was wearing a knee-length, purple, crushed-velvet dress with matching purple shoes with a small heel; it looked like the sort of outfit to be worn to a Christmas party and to an adult's eye was more about creating a pretty, but not sexualised, appearance (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Abigail's shoes and the edge of her purple dress

Abigail wore this outfit with obvious pinky-purple eye shadow and lipstick. Caitlin (Focus Group 4) described Abigail as having 'eyeliner that smudged, like up here and stuff' and after describing the 'bright red high heels' that she was wearing, got up from her chair and demonstrated Abigail tottering along in her heels, swaying precariously. It was partly the wearing of the make-up and heels, heels that in Caitlin's account are escalated to being bright red and therefore even more sexualised, which were seen as signifiers of adult emphasized femininity (Dilley *et al* 2014), and therefore were judged as inappropriate. But it was also the lack of skill or ability to be able to wear the make up or walk in the heels successfully that made the aged-up performance problematic (see Dilley *et al* 2014 for an account of women being disparaging about an inability to walk in heels). Caitlin's embodied performance of hyper-femininity highlighted her understanding of the bodily technique that must be learnt in order to perform adult femininity correctly. Sexualised dressing may be pathologised as working-class, but any girl, whether

working class or middle class may be positioned as the deviant, sexual, Other if she dressed in ways that were deemed hyper-feminine.

The wearing of high heels was associated with this idea of tacky, sexy dressing that was too old for their age, which was not 'cool' and related explicitly to the 'growing up too fast' discourse.

Focus Group 5: Aged 10-11

Caitlin: I just don't think it's right for our age to wear high heels, first thing
Bea: [(   )
Erin: [it's just wrong.
Anya: [People can grow up too fast, like get depressed. And, I mean, like they're obviously trying to seem cool but like most people just think they're tacky and they're too young, they're not cool at all

Wearing sexualised dress, such as high heels, and therefore trying to look too old and was discussed as tacky and 'not cool at all', and therefore the girls are aware of sexual generationing (Renold 2005) and the positioning of children as too young to be sexual. The opposition between tacky and cool was also a classification of taste; cool first developed as term that was used to mark out that which was hip and opposed to mainstream values (see Nancarrow and Nancarrow 2012 for a detailed discussion about cool); today it is widely used as popular terminology to denote something or someone stylish or any other positive attribute (Runyan *et al* 2013). The difficulty for pre-teen girls with trying to look specifically 'cool' but not sexy is discussed in Rysst (2010).

Every focus group discussed age-appropriate ideas of what to wear or how to behave at different ages, and in all bar one group (Focus Group 1, aged 8-9) there was outright criticism of those who dress in ways thought too old for their age. In fact girls actively engaged with the discourses of childhood (Pilcher 2013) as they referred to the popular belief that children were currently 'growing up too fast' or were 'missing childhood'. In Focus Group 6 (aged 10-11) for example, the girls were talking about shopping trips they had undertaken without their parents, and subsequently being told that they would have to take back unsuitable items of dress:

Focus Group 6: Aged 10-11

JB: Why would they say it wasn't suitable?
Abbie: Like sort of, really weird
Emma: Too expensive
Anna: No, like, really, really, short skirts, like crop tops that are way, way, too small. I think Becky actually buys the crop tops [two sizes smaller than she used to, so now they're actually higher. Because hers are like [here ((gesticulates very high on her chest))
Emma: [too small
Abbie: [Sometimes, sometimes
JB: What's wrong with her wearing these kinds of things?
Katie: (   )
Madison: It's wrong

Anna: Nothing's wrong, but it's just=
Abbie: =it's just showing off
Anna: it's not ladylike. I'm sounding like an adult!
Abbie: [She look's horrible in them
Anna: It's not for children, or like=
Emma: =We're growing up too fast, that's it. We're growing up too fast

Abbie suggested that clothing that was thought inappropriate, was that which was 'weird', a word implying an opposition to a presupposed norm. Weird here could potentially mean apparel with sexualised connotations, in opposition to the norm of non-sexual, particularly as the rest of the discussion revolved around clothes that were 'too small' and were about 'showing off'. Again it was always the Other, here 'Becky', who wore tops too small and too high. One of the important findings from this exchange was that whilst some girls might use coded language such as 'weird' dressing, that makes someone look 'horrible', to address sexualised dress, here there was more direct engagement with popular discourse, in Emma's comment about 'growing up too fast'. It was not that girls were vaguely aware about the notion of dressing in ways thought 'grown up' but that they offered overt acknowledgment of a phrase used in the popular debate. Not only was there a direct reference to the discourse but also Emma did not distance herself from it, by referring to Others who were doing this 'growing up too fast', but instead said that '*we*' were involved. This 'we' may be a tacit acceptance of the condoned sartorial behaviour or perhaps an internalisation of the critique.

Anna acknowledged that these discourses about childhood were derived from adult expectations and constructions of appropriate age-grade behaviour with her comment 'I'm sounding like an adult'. This comment came after her approbation of Becky's dress as 'not ladylike'. The phrase 'not ladylike' was again key to demonstrating that girls' own understandings of the feminine ideal can be understood as classed (Skeggs 1997; Allan 2009) – Anna has been taught that dressing in a sexualised way was not appropriately middle class. So these judgements about dress, expressed by drawing on the popular sexualisation discourse, were understood not just to be about age and becoming inappropriately sexual, but also about class and whether it was acceptable to wear overtly sexualised dress at any age.

Anna's snobbery and class-based cultural knowledge was reiterated and expanded in further discussion with the group in an extract below. Focus Group 6 (aged 10-11) were discussing clothes they didn't like when this exchange took place:

Focus Group 6: Aged 10-11

Emma: The other thing that's really, really, doesn't look good, is parents making their babies look really fashionable
Madison: Oh, yeah
Cleo: And they put like these little Ugg boots on them

Anna: Honey Boo Boo, that fat American person
Madison: Yeah, that is so annoying and Toddlers in Tiaras. They make/
Anna: It's unfair on the child because they're missing their childhood to be pampered in, like, almost every day to, with their, like, everything being taken away just for them, for their parents to win

In this extract, children younger than the girls themselves were being talked about: babies and toddlers from a reality television show, and 'Honey Boo Boo', a reality television star who was 6-years-old. The discussion started with a reference to babies in general and then links were made to examples from popular culture that clearly most of the girls were aware of, as loud laughter and over-talking erupted once these examples were cited. Blame for something that 'really, really, doesn't look good', was 'unfair' or that meant that these children were 'missing their childhood' was laid squarely on parents who dressed their children in fashionable clothes and made them go through pampering rituals. There was even a veiled reference to the idea of 'stolen innocence', a key trope in the popular discourse, as Anna referred to 'everything being taken away' from the children. *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo* and *Toddlers in Tiaras* were both reality television shows based in America that were about very young girls who enter children's beauty pageants. Giroux (1998) in his work about these pageants suggests that parents of a particular contestant were culpable for 'positioned her within a child beauty pageant culture that stripped her of her innocence by blurring the boundary between child and adult'(Giroux 1998: 37), a critique which is echoed by contemporary popular debates, as seen in Chapter Two, and in this discussion above, by the girls themselves.

That these programmes come from America was relevant, as was made clear by Anna's comment that Honey Boo Boo was 'that fat American person'. May Friedman (2014) has written about the programme, exploring the idea that in documenting the lives of a Southern US family, representing them as stereotypical 'white trash', the family were shown to be 'transgressing prevailing body norms, class performances, race identities' (Friedman 2014: 79). Honey Boo Boo is an obese, working-class girl and is part of an obese family who seemingly embraces their fatness and believes that they are attractive. Yet Friedman (2014) suggests that the programme derides the family, presenting them as self-deluded, Other, with leaky, grotesque bodies which threaten the white middle-class 'norm'. This Othering of working-class femininity is a central trope of much of reality television (Skeggs and Wood 2011). And just as in the popular discourse, critiqued in Chapter Two, the ideal of femininity that sexualised fashion was thought to threaten, was that of a white, middle-class ideal of girlhood. This ideal was one that the girls were clearly aware of, and as white, middle-class girls, situated themselves within.

Whilst some of the discussions above point to the intersection of sexuality, class and indeed race (in the *Honey Boo Boo* extract) in girls' engagement with ideas about identity, it also suggested the many difficulties of creating, what was considered to be, an age-appropriate (a)sexual identity. In many respects, in their explorations and interactions with notions of sexuality, girls' understanding was clearly regulated by their lack of language with which to discuss sexiness. In their use of words such as 'tacky', 'not cool', 'weird', in the language of excess – 'showy', 'show you off', 'show off a bit', and their use of phrases like 'not ladylike', girls' show some understanding of sexual display. However, it was perhaps not so much about making class-based judgements but about having constrained language and meaning, gained through interactions with their mothers, with which to engage with the concept of sexuality. Positioned by adults as asexual, yet heterosexual-in-the-making, girls' sense of agency was partial and negotiated through their relationship with the adults around them, as Anna points to in her comment, 'I'm sounding like an adult'. Girls' agency was restricted and negotiated in terms of their access to sexual knowledge and language with which to explore their own dressed, bodily performance and that of others. Most of the language that they are given access to, with which to constitute themselves, was limited to the judgemental. As Jackson *et al* argue that there is a 'lack of explicitly feminist or politicised registers in discursive resources available to girls that would enable them to critique postfeminist sexualities without begin trapped into using repressive classed, regulatory discourses' (Jackson *et al* 2013). Yet, unlike in the work of Jackson *et al* (2013), as seen, there were girls who enjoy a sense of themselves as heterosexually attractive.

As well as this difficulty of being able to ensure that their bodies were appropriately displayed and were not transgressing the fragile boundary between acceptable and unacceptable female sexuality, the girls also experienced the pressure of trying to maintain appearances (Skeggs 1997; Renold 2005; Woodward 2007). There was discussion about how they might have to repeatedly change their outfits if they didn't feel right or if they got the slightest bit dirty (Klepp 2007; cultural construction of dirtiness is examined further in Chapter Six).

> Focus Group 2 (Aged 10-11)
> Georgia: My mum always gets annoyed with me because before I leave the house I get changed about 7 times but not for school because I don't have 7 different uniforms
> JB: No
> Georgia: In the weekend and that I'll get changed about 5 times
> Lauren: I get changed about 3 or 4 times a day
> Georgia: Yeah if I get mud, a tiny bit of mud/ I get changed
> Lauren: Yeah I go 'mum I'm going in and getting changed'

Clearly any pleasure and sense of power at achieving a fashionable 'girlie' self was countered with difficulties around not becoming 'too girlie' and about keeping up a presentable appearance.

5.2.3 'Girlie' girl or tomboy: constructed subjectivities

The awareness of the pleasures and pains of becoming 'girlie' was also accompanied with a recognition that there was some sense of artificiality around the 'girlie' girl subject position, as it required acting out of particular behaviour. For example, one of the necessary parts of performing 'girlie' femininity discussed was the need to laugh at boys' jokes, particularly as part of flirting, even if the jokes weren't funny.

> Focus Group 2 (Aged 10-11)
>
> Georgia: You laugh at everything
> Lauren: Yeah you just laugh at it even if it's not funny
> Georgia: Yeah
> Lauren: And if like you really fancy a boy and they're telling you a joke you're like, yeah ((mimes laughing))
> G: Yeah I know it's funny

Yet, whilst they were aware that this was clearly part of a performance to shore up masculine egos, (see Baxter 2002 for work about the use of humour by boys to negotiate dominant positions) there was no suggestion that girls should be other than be a flirty, supportive audience. However, this group also talked about getting their own way with boys in the classroom, as Georgia stated, 'if I get a boy to work with, I'll stand up for myself, that's what I did yesterday'. So although the girls often dressed to be heterosexually attractive and recognised that at certain times it was thought appropriate to go along with the boys, there were also times when it was worthwhile asserting yourself.

The constructed nature of subject positions was also highlighted in the discussion of another gendered subjectivity that was available to perform, that of tomboy. In Focus Group 1 Shannon declared 'I'm a tomboy' and in response to being asked what that meant, she said,

> I like to play with boys, you hardly play with girls, you are hardly friends with girls but I am actually friends with some girls but um that, I always do stuff that boys do and I'm bonkers!

When asked what being a tomboy meant you wore, the reply was, 'Wear boys' clothes, boy type of clothes, like these, but these aren't actually'. In both responses Shannon demonstrates that she was aware that whilst being a tomboy should mean that she should not have friends who were girls and that she should wear boys' clothes, these supposed rules were not necessarily reflective of reality. Just as another self-identified tomboy Mia (aged 8) in Focus Group 3 noted that, just because she had long hair people might think that she was a girlie girl, 'but just because I have long hair doesn't mean I'm a girlie girl'. Subjectivities were not constructed from a fixed set of attributes; identities were not necessarily discreet entities (Hauge 2009).

Focus Group 1 also recognised that the enactment of 'girlie' behaviour and ways of dressing were socially constructed and, for example, there was not an automatic correlation between wanting to become girlie and liking pink:

<u>Focus Group 1 (Aged 8-9)</u>

Amy: I don't wear pink
Emily: ((getting up and pointing at Shannon the tomboy)) And you have to wear blue! ha ha!
Shannon: No you don't, [I like brown
Amy: [She's wearing pink
Emily: ((in sing song voice)) You're wearing pink
Shannon: I don't really like it but/
Amy: My favourite colour's blue
Emily: My favourite colour's pinky
Shannon: My favourite colour's brown as poo!

Amy, a self-identified 'girlie' girl explained that just because she was 'girlie' doesn't mean that she wears pink and her favourite colour was blue, which is identified with boys (Entwistle 2000; Martin 2010). In this case it was also inferred to be the supposed colour that a 'tomboy' would wear, however Shannon, the tomboy, was wearing pink and her favourite colour was brown. The girls demonstrated that your personal choices may be in direct opposition to the prescribed aesthetic for the identity you were enacting.

The tomboy subject position was also identified in Focus Group 2 and the girls identified other girls in their class that were tomboys. So I asked them what being a tomboy meant -

<u>Focus Group 2 (Aged 10-11)</u>

Jessica: It's like when you wanna be a boy
Georgia: And you wear like combat [trousers, boyish ones
Lauren: [It's like a girl who wants to be a boy, acts like a boy and you wear like boyish clothes and they have their sleeves up like that ((pushes sleeves up to elbows)) and they're like 'eee' ((aggressive movement of arms)). Like Charlotte Turner
Georgia: Charlotte Turner, we could just drag her in here and give her an example

Becoming a tomboy involved the wearing of 'boyish' clothes and also an aggressive attitude. In a later discussion about other tomboys, the same ideas were reiterated in relation to 'boyish' dress, and 'boyish' actions, which included violence (see Renold 2005 for a discussion of the frequent link found in research between hegemonic masculinity and violence). A couple of the girlie girls had been previously mistaken by members of their family as tomboys; they understood that this was because they weren't wearing fashionable clothing at the time, as Lauren described 'everyone in my family thinks I'm a tomboy but because they haven't seen me wear fashionable stuff'. The norm of the fashionable, feminine girl was so hegemonic that adults associated any dress practice that did not involve fashionable clothes with something Other to the norm, that of the tomboy identity. These girls acknowledged that identities created were always unstable and must be

constantly reiterated (Butler 1990) or the 'wrong' identity may be attached to you. Adults could be seen to be part of the structuring forces that shaped girls understanding that in order to be considered appropriately feminine girls, they must keep up their fashionable identity at all times or risk misinterpretation of their identity construction (the part played by parents is further explored later in the chapter).

In summary, many girls do wish to become heterosexually attractive through fashion; this 'girlie' girl identity was a source of pleasure and power in its sexiness, and simultaneously a source of stress both in balancing apposite sexual display and in maintaining appearances. This hyper-feminine subjectivity was knowingly entered into, with girls aware of its artificiality; or it was openly rejected in the construction of the alternative tomboy identity. Yet both of these subject positions are not natural, nor fixed in their opposition to each other and one may wish to enact one identity whilst bearing an attribute of associated with another subjectivity. If the girls chose to constitute themselves as 'girlie' girls then it was clearly important to know what was in fashion, and to keep reiterating that fashionability otherwise you may be mistakenly identified as enacting a tomboy identity. This notion of the importance of fashionability to reiterations of hyper-femininity is explored next.

5.3   *Keeping up with fashion*

As the media suggests, sometimes the need to keep up with fashion was felt as a pressure by girls and trying to wear the most up to date clothes could backfire when one gets it wrong. Georgia demonstrated this sense of being out of step with fashion in these extracts below, in relation to a hat that she initially loved wearing.

> Well, that was all the fashion a little while ago and then everything just changed so...I just like that outfit with the hat. But when I wear it everyone makes fun of the hat so I don't wear it that much.

Later in the same interview:

> JB: Yeah, but you say people laugh at it?
> Georgia: Yeah because the hat, people like, don't think it's stylish to wear that type of hat but I think it was all the style a little while ago
> JB: Yeah?
> Georgia: Yeah some people have different taste and stuff like that

Whilst being laughed at for wearing something that other people thought had gone out of fashion was problematic for Georgia, she justified the wearing of something no longer fashionable by arguing that it was legitimate to have differences in taste. The fact that she still wanted to photograph this hat as part of her favourite outfit demonstrates a willingness to choose an item of dress, which may not be considered fashionable by others.

Despite the difficulties of liking things that may be unfashionable or out of fashion Georgia still took great pleasure in feeling that she was also sometimes a trend-setter. She discussed her choice to buy some 'Hi Top' trainers:

> But I thought they were really nice because they are like not the usual thing you would see someone wearing. I was one of the first people to like buy Hi Tops and everyone just got into fashion with them.

Here the wearing of something others were not, was experienced as pleasure, especially when other people appear to then be following suit (McRobbie 1994). This satisfaction in being a trend-setter was also expressed when talking about what she had worn to previous discos and what she might wear to the next school disco, yet might also be seen to be mixed with pressure.

> Georgia: I've worn that top to the disco with them hi-tops and my jeggings, that I wore last time, and like then um that's what I wore and now everyone's thinking 'oh my God she's going to turn up amazing' and I was just wearing my normal clothes, and they were like 'what! She' s never done that before'
> JB: So people expect you to wear something different?
> Georgia: Yeah, like stylish
> JB: Yeah?
> Georgia: Everyone looks up to me and Lauren sometimes

This extract revealed Georgia's enjoyment of thinking that people consider that the fashionable way you dress was 'amazing' and 'stylish' and that they want to emulate her way of dressing. However, this joy might seem to be tempered here with the pressure of knowing that when she then dressed in 'normal' clothes people potentially criticised her.

Sometimes girls do not want to try and take up the 'girlie' girl fashionably dressed identity at all. Instead the alternative 'tomboy' subject position involved an outright rejection of fashion. As Shannon, the self-identified tomboy explained when Focus Group 1 was asked about what they wear out of school.

> Shannon: Er, non-fashion
> Emily: [I will, some kind of
> Shannon: I never wear fashion, boring!

Shannon perceived fashion as being boring and in her interview she explained further when asked if any of her clothes were fashionable:

> Shannon: No, they're tomboy stuff because I haven't put any skirts in these ((referring to the photographs she took)), because I don't wear skirts.
> JB: So what's tomboy stuff like then?
> Shannon: Trousers, t-shirts, ripped things.

The rejection of fashion here could be seen to be a refusal of skirts and therefore feminised dress and ultimately of femininity itself. Instead a tomboy should embrace masculinised trousers and as quoted earlier, Shannon, as a tomboy, would 'always do stuff that boys do'. In her interview Shannon went on to describe how skirts and dresses did not allow her to move around freely,

whereas tomboy clothes gave her complete freedom of movement. As Reay (2001) discusses, tomboys could be seen to be transgressive in their rejection of traditional notions of femininity and in this example the limited bodily movement that girls were allowed. However, tomboys' rejection was usually through the denigration of femininity and the assertion of the superiority of masculine behaviour (Reay 2001:163) and here, dress too.

Yet, whilst Shannon could be seen as an example of this positing of masculinity as superior, her ways of dressing suggest a rather more subtle integration of masculinity and femininity, as cited earlier when asked about what she wore, she said 'boys' clothes, boy type of clothes, like these, but these aren't actually'. So although boys' clothes were the ideal to wear, Shannon realised that what she was wearing was not actually male clothing; her leggings allowed her the movement she described wanting but were not actually something that boys wear. Therefore, whilst rejecting feminine fashionable garments and espousing the embracing of masculine dress, the actual practice of dressing was played out as a negotiation between these two subject positions. The leggings represented a garment that allowed a masculine sense of movement yet rejected a hyper-feminine, sexualised dress code.

Even fashionable 'girlie' girls did not always automatically embrace all fashion trends and items as Georgia described in Focus Group 2:

> But at the moment there are pirate boots ((gestures down the bottom of her leg)) that are in fashion but I don't really like them

Fashionability may appear to be dictated by the fashion system (Bartky 1988; Bordo 1993); however girls expressed some agency in their rejection and dismissal of certain fashion items. Pirate boots might have been in fashion and indeed Jessica in the same group said she had a pair, but Georgia did not and defended this decision by going on to say 'I have my opinion'. Just as Georgia's justification of wearing her hat, when it was thought to have gone out of fashion, was cited as a matter of personal taste, the same idea of individual rights was drawn upon here (Raby 2010: 340).

Whilst fashion was described as being what everyone was wearing, there was also some discussion about dressing as individuals and not being part of a crowd.

> Focus Group 2 (Aged 10-11)
>
> Lauren: Well, like, you see everyone wearing the same stuff, so you wear something different
> Georgia: You want to be like one of a kind, your own person
> JB: Yeah
> Georgia: It's just different
> JB: So, but you want to wear fashion because other people are wearing yet at the same time you want to look different to other people?

Georgia: You want to change the fashion yourself ((Lauren nods))
JB: I see
Georgia: Tweak it
Lauren: Mix it up a bit

The language of individuality and self-expression was used again here by Georgia to assert the idea of being your own person. Lauren and Georgia debated how sometimes you might dress to look different to the prevailing fashion or how you might play with fashion to make it more your own (Wilson 1985).

Indeed all ideas about what was fashionable were a matter of negotiation and sometimes of disagreement. After all the girls in Focus Group 2 telling me that pink was fashionable I asked what else was 'in':

Focus Group 2 (Aged 10-11)

Jessica: Black
Georgia: Fluorescent colours
Lauren: Yeah mostly bright colours
Georgia: Hi Tops are in (.1) sometimes ((says tentatively looking at Lauren))
Lauren: Yeah sometimes
Georgia: Some girls wear/
Lauren: Boob tubes are in
Georgia: Yeah but I wouldn't want to wear them in winter, even though I am personally
Jessica: Jumpers because like everyone else wears them like boys and stuff
JB: Hmm
Georgia: Mm ((wrinkles up her nose))
Lauren: Mm kind of
Georgia: But I don't really care about boys' fashion
Jessica: Shirts, like girl shirts
((Georgia and Lauren look at each other, Lauren pulls face))
Georgia: yeah/
Jessica: I've got a couple of them

Here we see different suggestions being made and either confirmed, qualified or covertly denied or ignored by the other participants. Lauren confirmed that it was bright colours and not black that was in, Georgia paused after her proposal of Hi Tops and looked to Lauren to corroborate, a confirmation she only receives when qualified with a 'sometimes'. Lauren and Georgia sought to endorse each other's ideas of fashionability at every turn. Yet they were at odds with Jessica, whose suggestions remain unsupported or were skirted round with replies such as 'But I don't really care about boys' fashion'. At one point Jessica's suggestion was verbally endorsed with a 'yeah' from Georgia, but this assent was undermined by the look exchanged between Georgia and Lauren and by Lauren's face-pulling; thus girls were disagreeing whilst avoiding open conflict (Underwood 2004: 2). What was in fashion was clearly not defined just by what was available in retail outlets or about straightforward following of prevailing styles but instead was a matter of debate and negotiation between girls themselves. The negotiation demonstrates the inter-

subjectivity (Bottero 2010) of determining fashionability, and suggests some sense of agency on the part of the girls to sometimes take up only the fashion trends that they either individually or collectively, in friendship groups, agree upon or decide to pick up (as Woodward 2007 suggests happens with adults).

5.4   *Fashion retailer awareness and commercialisation*

All of the girls that took part in this study were aware of the names of many fashion retailers and in their interviews knew where the majority of their clothes came from. In Focus Group 1 there was a discussion about what was the best shop for fashion, in response to a question about why a particular top was considered fashionable:

> <u>Focus Group 1 (Aged 8-9)</u>
>
> Emily: because I got it from the very best shop in the world
> JB: ahh, and what's the very best shop in the world?
> Emily: Next, I think
> Amy: no
> Shannon: it's not! George's is
> Emily: [no
> Amy: [it's Primark
> Shannon: Primark
> Emily: it's H & (.1) R
> Shannon: H N Choo
> Amy: HMV
> JB: H & M?
> Emily: H & M, that's the one I love. ((Jumps up and down))

There was some confusion over one shop's name, with Emily pausing to think what the other part of the retailer's title was, getting it wrong and with the others also making incorrect suggestions. However, there was some knowledge of a few of the main fashion retailers of girls' clothes shown here, ranging from the cheapest such as Primark and supermarket brands like George at Asda, to the more expensive High Street store Next. Focus Group 3, also of the younger age range, knew a similar range of brands whereas the other younger group, Focus Group 4, had a much broader and more sophisticated knowledge of clothing brands from High Street, at all price points, right up to designers such as Jimmy Choo.

In Focus Group 2 there was lots of discussion about the shops that the girls bought their clothes in and some evaluation of what the shops were like.

> <u>Focus Group 2 (Aged 10-11)</u>
>
> Lauren: New Look, /Primark
> Jessica: Primark, Primark, I get everything from/ Primark
> Georgia: I hadn't been to Primark until it first came to Bridworth
> Lauren: Yeah like the first day it opened I quickly got on the bus
> Georgia: I would never go in to a cheap shop but then my mum started going in the charity shops in Bridworth
> JB: Yeah

Georgia: Cos she likes it in there cos she got this really nice like vase cos she got these 2 candles and it was exactly the same as them so ever since then she keeps going in the charity shops so it got me into going into places like Primark

JB: Hmm

Jessica: Primark um/

Georgia: These are from Primark ((pointing at boots)), New Look ((pointing at leggings)) /New Look ((pointing at boob tube skirt))

Jessica: I used to/

Georgia: Tesco ((pulling at t-shirt))

Lauren: Tesco?

Georgia: My God I'm wearing Tesco!

Lauren: I got this from Primark ((pulling at sweatshirt)), no, no Debenhams, I got this one from Debenhams, I quite like Debenhams it's quite fashionable

Georgia: Yeah

Lauren: I got these from Primark ((pulling at jeans)) and my plimsolls from New Look. I'm wearing a bit of a mixture

Georgia: Debenhams can be a bit babyish/ (   ) dresses

The girls were aware of where each item of clothing they were wearing was purchased from, so they clearly played an active role in choosing the clothes or paid attention to the labels that were in their clothes, as Boden (2006) also found. Much of what the girls were wearing was from cheap but up-to-date fashion chains on the High Street such as New Look and Primark. Georgia described how originally she was disdainful of shopping in cheap shops like Primark, however she said that once her mum began to think that shopping in charity shops was acceptable then going to Primark was alright. She also expressed some mock horror that her t-shirt came from Tesco, so even within a group of friends who shop in stores such as Primark, the wearing of very cheap clothes from a supermarket chain was a matter of some unease. Whilst there was understanding about the differences in prices of clothes in the younger groups, this kind of evaluation that suggests the cultural capital to differentiate between store types was not evident (Bourdieu 2010). This extract also raised the problem, acknowledged in all bar Focus Group 1, of ensuring that you were dressed appropriately for your age and the concern that clothes might be too young for your age (addressed further in Chapter Seven).

Evidence for the commercial pressure on girls to consume could also be found; with girls competing about how much they were able to spend on clothes and about how many clothes they have, as the following extract demonstrates.

Focus Group 2 (Aged 10-11)

Jessica: my mum says I can go shopping in Primark soon with 20 pound

Lauren: I spent with my old friend Nicky, I spent about £60 on clothes

Georgia: I get £20 a week on clothes cos I keep moaning 'I've got no clothes' but I've got 7 drawers full and a whole wardrobe/ and 2 drawers under that. So I've got 9 drawers and I'm still asking for more, so I get £20 a week for it

Jessica: I've got ((counts under breath with fingers)) I've got 16 drawers full of stuff

JB: Wow!

Jessica: Plus a whole cupboard full, it's about from there to there

Lauren: I've got a chest of drawers full of stuff, a wardrobe and boxes that go under the bed

Not only did the girls enjoy shopping and spending money on clothes, they were also boasting here about how many drawers, cupboards and wardrobes they had that were full of clothes. Whilst Georgia was aware that actually she had lots of clothes, she still asked for more and complained that she did not have any. Thereby demonstrating that, although the girls were conscious that this was unnecessary over-consumption, they still feel compelled to keep on consuming.

However, when I asked Georgia about whether she was allowed to just go out and spend the £20 clothes allowance:

Focus Group 2 (Aged 10-11)

Georgia: Yup
JB: And choose whatever you like?
Georgia: Yes, I'm getting £62 because I sold one of those biscuit dogs I've got that does all those commands
Lauren: Oh no
Georgia: I sold him on eBay. My step-dad bought it for me and he didn't know and he was pretty upset. So I was a bit annoyed and then, well, he was annoyed anyway. So I had £62 and £20 so I had £82
JB: And so you are just allowed to go and buy whatever you like with that?
Jessica: [Yeah
Lauren: [Yeah
Georgia: No. My mum won't give me £62 because I'll go out and spend it on rubbish
Lauren: Basically I/
Jessica: That's what my mum said
Lauren: Basically I save up all year and then at the end of the year I do a big shop of clothes
Georgia: I save up, but even when I say I'm going out, my mum says 'no you're not'

In this extract several things came to light – despite their engagement with, and seeming embracement of consumerism, there was recognition that money for shopping trips may not be unlimited or automatically forthcoming. Therefore, whilst there was no suggestion that you might not want to spend at all, there was awareness that in order to have more money to spend you might have to sell some of your own goods or save up. And though at first there was the intimation that the girls could spend money on whatever clothes they like, there was then a shift to acknowledge that mothers have final control over how the money was spent; the role of family will be looked at further in the final section of this chapter. There was also knowledge in the younger groups of prices of clothes, in particular the cheapness of clothes being one of the main reasons why much of their wardrobe came from the lower-end stores. Clearly these girls were commercially aware, however they also understood that economics played a part in their family's ability to spend. The next area of influence on girls' consumption of fashion to be examined is popular culture.

5.5 *Popular culture and celebrity influence*

In the popular debate about the increasing pressure on girls to dress in inappropriate sexy clothes, the increase of mass media such as television was criticised for giving girls' greater access to both contemporary, commodified, popular culture and a range of negative celebrity role models. Certainly, even in Focus Group 1 the younger girls made a few mentions of popular culture. In general terms there was discussion about becoming a singer.

> Focus Group 1 (Aged 8-9)
>
> Shannon: I don't want to be a fashioner but I really want to be a singer, I'm really good at singing
> Emily: You'll need to wear fashion clothes on there. What/ about if people throw tomatoes at you?
> Shannon: You can just do what you want ((pulling funny faces))
> Emily: What about if people throw tomatoes at you?

Emily was aware of the social importance of fashionable codes of dress for successful feminine display (Blanchard 2006). She acknowledged that opting out of fashionable codes of dress, and thereby perhaps sexualised femininity, was not socially acceptable for appropriate feminine performances. Emily repeated her comment in opposition to Shannon's hopeful assertion that becoming a singer would mean she could do what she wanted.

More specifically in relation to popular culture, the girls had a discussion about haircuts and fringes and Emily had recently had a fringe cut in which prompted the following comments:

> Focus Group 1 (Aged 8-9)
>
> Emily: And now I look like Cleo
> Amy: Let's see ((Emily turns toward her))
> Shannon: Who's Cleo?
> Emily: She's from J2O!
> Shannon: Never heard of it

Emily was referring to a character that is in an Australian television programme, about 3 teenage girls, which is actually called *H₂0* (ZDF enterprises 2009), which she refers to instead as 'J2O' a well-known brand of fruit drinks. Unlike Shannon, Emily was aware of characters from a popular television programme, however she was not quite so *au fait* with popular culture that she got all of the details correct. Focus Group 4 (also aged 8-9) were more general in their discussion about celebrities, with half of them discussing how they consulted magazines about fashion and were interested in what celebrities wore.

Other references to popular culture related to what might be deemed more appropriate for their age, for example there was an argument over whether the design on Shannon's leggings was of Mickey or Minnie Mouse. The fashion doll Barbie was also a subject of debate about being a 'girlie' girl. 'Girlie' girls were described as having girls' stuff, so I asked:

Focus Group 1 (Aged 8-9)

JB: So what girls' stuff have you got?
Emily: Barbies.
Shannon: Barbie dolls? ((shouting))
Emily: Barbie dolls
Shannon: Eugh!
Amy: Eugh, they're for babies ((laughing))

So whilst for Emily, at 8-years-old, Barbie was still acceptable to play with, for the others Barbies were something that at this age should be rejected, as dolls were babyish. Engagement with or rejection of certain goods from popular culture can be used to express ideas about age grade, life course and growing up (Boden 2006a; Pilcher 2013).

The older Focus Group 2 made many references to popular culture and wore t-shirts that had text like 'rock star' printed on or featured images of pop stars. Lauren's favourite top that she took a photo of had an illustration of pop-star Britney Spears on the front, Georgia's most-loved t-shirt has the text 'Party Like a Rock Star' on it (Figure 3) and for the focus group she wore a t-shirt with an image of pop singer Justin Bieber's face on it. When Georgia explained her choice of t-shirt to wear to the school dress-down day, and therefore to the focus group, she said:

Focus Group 2 (Aged 10-11)

Georgia: and I wore my Justin Bieber top, just because I like Justin Bieber, erm
((Lauren laughs))
JB: Of course, who doesn't!
Georgia: Most people at this school!

Therefore, although the image of the pop star was Georgia's sole reason for her wearing the t-shirt, her choice was made despite it potentially being an unpopular one at her school. Yet, partying and aspiring to be a rock star were important parts of becoming a fashionable girl, particularly given the twelve photographs that Georgia took of the various elements and combinations of the garments that made her favourite outfit. The outfit included the 'Party Like a Rock Star' t-shirt and a trilby hat (Figure 3), which she described as: 'The hat, it's like a party, a rock starry top, so I thought the hat would be rock star-ish'. This electric blue, cap-sleeved, long t-shirt with bold, capitalised text in black, silver and bright pink, which has some scribbled over-writing on a couple of the letters and sparkly bits stuck on a few of the other letters and has splatters of pink, black and silver in the background was partly chosen because of the text but also because of its aesthetics. As Georgia describes:

Georgia: It's kind of, it's got kind of graffiti style writing on it. Also Jessica's got that top, the other person that's coming
JB: ah ok
Georgia: And I just liked it cos it kind of stood out with the graffiti writing and everything, it's seemed pretty cool to buy. And it wasn't too expensive anyway

Figure 3: Georgia's 'Party Like a Rock Star' t-shirt with sparkly, woollen trilby

Here then there were various motivations for choosing this top: the idea of partying, being a like a Rock Star, because a friend has it, its 'cool' aesthetic and its relative cheapness; suggesting a detailed and multi-faceted engagement with dress.

One of Lauren's favourite outfits also included a top that mentions partying, which seemed even more salient to her than the picture of a pop star on it, as she did not immediately refer to the illustration of Britney Spears on the front of her favourite top (see Figure 4). Whilst the quality of the photograph is poor, it is also a line drawing of the pop star rather than a photograph, so the connection to Spears is not instantly obvious. Instead Lauren described it was to be worn to 'discos and stuff' and when asked why it was particularly good for discos she replied, 'Because, like, it's quite, it looks quite partyish. And, on the back of that t-shirt, it says, "let's party"'. It was only when asked to describe the top further that she explained that it had a picture of one of her favourite artists, Britney Spears, on it. Both Georgia's and Lauren's choices suggest that the idea of partying and the cool aesthetic was just as, if not more, significant to their choices, as any link to pop or rock stars.

Figure 4: Lauren's outfit including one of her favourite t-shirts, with an illustration of Britney Spears

There was a very animated discussion in Focus Group 2 that started about what a contestant wore on the popular television programme, X-Factor, where members of the public compete in the hope of becoming pop stars. A programme that the girls themselves suggested they might want to audition for.

Focus Group 2 (Aged 10-11)

Georgia: When Cher Lloyd had her audition on X-Factor I liked her type of jeans/
Lauren: Yeah
Georgia: With the like military jacket
Lauren: It had like rips in ((running hand down leg)) and/I like shrugs[22] I quite like them
Jessica: That's like what I've got, I've got these jeans at home they're like Cher Lloyd's they were so I just cut some holes in them
Georgia: I'm going to do that I'm going to cut holes ((laughing))
JB: Everyone's cutting holes in everything!
Lauren: Yeah high fashion. I wouldn't dare cut holes in these ((pulling at jeans)) cos they're my favourite
Georgia: But some fashions are like tight round the back and it makes you look like you've got a huge bum
Lauren: I'd cut holes in my jeggings[23] because ((Georgia looks at her quizzically)) well people are wearing them ((says with emphasis and a smile))
Georgia: These with holes in? ((pulling at her leggings))
Lauren: On the knees
Georgia: What!
Lauren: You know like when you buy jeggings they have holes at the knee?
Jessica: ((pulls at Georgia's leggings around her knee)) Like that

---

[22] Shrug: a cropped cardigan that has sleeves that cover the shoulders and may have little or no back.
[23] Jeggings: leggings made of fabric that looks like denim jeans.

Georgia: Why would I wear it with a hole in it at just the knee?
Lauren: On both knees like little slim holes
Georgia: You'd look like you fell over!

The girls admired the outfit that Cher Lloyd wore for her first television performance, of ripped jeans and a military jacket and Jessica explained that she had jeans like the performer, so she copied them by cutting holes in the knee. Lauren went on to say that whilst she would not risk ruining her favourite jeans, she would try it with her jeggings, as ripped jeggings were also fashionable. Georgia, however, was incredulous and exclaimed that copying the performer and this particular fashion would only make you look ridiculous, as if you had fallen over and ripped your jeggings or leggings accidentally. Georgia showed recognition that certain fashion items might be acceptable to wear to perform on television but would be inappropriate for the girls to wear (Blanchard 2006; Boden 2006b). Young girls did invest in cultural icons and were skilled at cultivating certain looks, but there was also some critical engagement with cultural images and interpretation of modes of fashion, which meant that girls were complex consumers (Boden 2006b: 296). Georgia may have appreciated Cher Lloyd's look, yet her critical engagement with and interpretation of the dress code Lloyd adopts means that Georgia did not wish to try and recreate this look herself.

In response to the commercialisation and sexualisation debates' proposal that popular culture holds great sway over girls fashion consumption, the girls' interactions with popular culture have been examined here and do suggest that these participants were aware of various pop artists and television programmes, and imagine themselves becoming singers. However, in the younger cohort not all participants were completely au fait with popular culture, and there was a wish to perform but not to be involved in fashion. And in the older cohort the realisation that cultural expectations of spectacular dress on television were not necessarily appropriate for young girls themselves meant that, whilst some girls had t-shirts that depicted or referred to the idea of pop/rock stars this engagement with popular culture was not the only determining factor in their choices. The final area of influence on girls' dressing discussed in this chapter is that of family.

5.6 *Family*
In the popular media accounts of girls and fashion, family and in particular, mothers, are sometimes blamed for the ways in which young girls are dressed. Certainly, during the course of this empirical work various family members were frequently discussed in relation to clothes, both in terms of what the family member wore and in reference to having some bearing upon what the girls themselves dressed in. Mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, step-parents and step-siblings were all referred to in focus groups and interviews. Firstly, this section will address the relationship between parents and dress for these girls.

In the younger age group discussions there were overt references of mother's buying the girls' clothes for them and choosing what they were going to wear. When asked about what they were wearing to the focus group, Focus Group 1 said:

Focus Group 1 (Aged 8-9)

Amy: [I got this yesterday ((pulling at bottom of dress and smiling))
Emily: [Well I
Shannon: ((shakes head))
Emily: ((pulling at her t-shirt)) I just, just put a blank t-shirt on, it had a bit of chocolate on and my mum, when I went down stairs my dad says 'go change it'. I was like 'ohhh'
Shannon: I just wanted to throw on what I wanted but then I ((gesticulates quote marks)) had to clothes, had to change my clothes with my sister
JB: Oh, why was that?
Shannon: I had a lovely flowery t-shirt on but mummy said it wouldn't go

Emily and Shannon described how parents made them change what they had chosen to wear to something that was clean or that they thought matched the girl's outfit better. In this instance parents were taking charge of what the girls were allowed to wear.

When asked about going shopping the girls sometimes went shopping with their mums but when I asked if that meant their mum's had chosen their clothes for them Emily and Amy replied:

Focus Group 1 (Aged 8-9)

Emily: No I chose them
Amy: No I chose them and she then says they're too expensive

The implication was that the girls had some power over clothes buying decisions. However, mothers may not always buy the things that the girls have chosen; with Amy's mother, for example, citing price as a reason not to buy the things Amy has chosen. However, when I followed this up with another question about whether their mothers told them what to wear, there were the following responses:

Focus Group 1 (Aged 8-9)

Emily: No
Shannon: Wear that now! Now! ((raised voice and wagging finger))
Emily: Is that what your mum does?
Amy: She says I need to wear the trousers what my/
Shannon: Mum tells me what to wear all the/ time ((groans and flops over her knees))
Amy: So does mine
Emily: She told you to wear that? ((pointing at fake fur stole))
Amy: Yup

What started as a humorous parody of a strict mother became a serious discussion about Shannon and Amy's mothers telling them what to wear. This notion of mothers being in control of dress was also reiterated in Shannon and Amy's interviews. Tomboy Shannon showed me a photograph

of one of her favourite outfits, which included a t-shirt and when I asked what the t-shirt felt like on, she responded:

> Shannon: Baggy, very baggy. It's big round here
> JB: And do you like baggy clothes?
> Shannon: Mum tells me to wear tight jeans and tight t-shirts and tight hairstyles
> JB: Why do you think she wants you to wear tight things?
> Shannon: She wants me to look sensible

Instead of a baggy, shapeless, androgynous or child-like t-shirt, Shannon's mum wanted her to wear tight, figure-hugging clothes, which might be thought to be hyper-feminine so as to look 'sensible' or 'normal' and therefore normatively feminine. Here we can see one girl's sense that her mother refuses to let her dress in a way that rejects normative femininity.

In the case of Amy, the first set of photographs she took with the disposable camera did not come out. She was given another camera and chose outfits for her mother to photograph on her behalf whilst Amy was at school. The resultant photographs were of a mix of Amy's own clothes and her mother's.

> JB: Oh really. Ahh. What about the first time round when you took the photographs, what did you take pictures of then?
> Amy: I took pictures of one of my dresses and then lots of my skirts.
> JB: Yes. So why did you think that this time you wouldn't take those?
> Amy: Because my mum changed them and I didn't know she had changed them.
> JB: Oh, I see. So, what, you did pick the skirts out again for her to take photos of?
> Amy: Yes.
> JB: But she didn't take them.
> Amy: No.
> JB: Why do you think she didn't take pictures of them?
> Amy: I didn't think she would like them.

Here Amy explained that despite having chosen certain items of clothing of her own that she wanted her mother to photograph, her mum decided to photograph other clothes instead. Amy thought this was because her mum did not like the things that Amy picked. In fact, Amy explained that most of the photographs were of Amy's mum's clothes, 'there's lots of my mum's there she put in and then there's barely any of mine in there'. So it was not that Amy opted for outfits that were her mother's, her mother had taken over and selected her own clothes to photograph. Not only do mother's take control over their daughter's dressing but also sometimes go as far as to dismiss their daughter's choices completely.

 In the older age class the girls implied that although their mothers do try to select for them, they do not always wear what they were told:

Lauren: because this morning my mum picked me a blue jumper to wear and I went 'no I'm wearing my pink jumper'. I was like, I'm not leaving this house until I get my pink jumper

Lauren refused to put on the jumper that her mother had chosen and asserted that she would not go to school until she was allowed to wear that one that she herself preferred. When asked whether their parents had any say in how they dress the girls became very animated:

Focus Group 2 (Aged 10-11)

Jessica: No!
Lauren: No
Georgia: No
Jessica: My mum like wears all black
Lauren: They'd just dress us in like, like horrible stuff

Parents, if given the chance, were assumed to select clothes for the girls to wear that the girls themselves would not like.

Yet, in interviews these girls discussed shopping trips that they went on with their mothers and occasions when their tastes were similar. When I asked Lauren about whether she had chosen a particular t-shirt herself she responded,

Lauren: Yes. Because we went to New Look and my mum was looking round, just looking at her stuff, and I went to look round for some of my stuff, and I found that, mm, t-shirt, I was like, mum, can I buy this please?
JB: Yeah, and she let you?
Lauren: Yes.

This account of a shopping trip revealed both a feeling of independence for Lauren, in that initially she found the t-shirt herself before her mum confirmed that she could have it, but there was also a recognition of a shared experience of visiting and experiencing the same shop together. There was also a sense of the collaboration and negotiation in decisions that were made about what these young girls wear, which was made clear in Jessica's interview. When asked about whether she chose something herself, the reply was:

Jessica: My mum
JB: And what do you think about your mum's taste? Is she usually ok?
Jessica: Yeah sometimes
JB: And were you actually with her when she picked it out?
Jessica: Yeah, I help my mum choose my clothes

So whilst initially the response was that Jessica's mum had chosen the item of dress and that sometimes what she picks was acceptable but Jessica also clarified that she helps her mum with these decisions about Jessica's clothes. This clarification suggested perhaps that sometimes there was negotiation needed when her mum's selections were not so acceptable.

There were even times when mother and daughters taste overlapped; on Lauren's shopping trip discussed above she explained that her and her mum got the same top in New Look but in different colours. In Jessica's interview she mentioned borrowing rings from her mum to wear. As well as buying similar clothes and borrowing jewellery, Lauren also discussed how she sought out her mother's help with make-up. There were also times at which it was clear that the girls relied on their mothers' opinions about appearances and wanted their approval of outfits. For example when asked about what footwear she wore with a particular outfit Lauren explained, 'Well, black plimsolls, because sometimes they're quite comfy and my mum says they go with the outfit and all that'. Part of the justification for a sartorial decision was that her mum said it looked acceptable. In discussion about why she had put other items of clothing together Lauren responded, 'Because I think that a cardi and that t-shirt goes quite well. And even my mum and my sister say it goes quite well'. So in fact her mother was seen as a hard audience to please and if even she thinks it matches then it must be acceptable.

Certainly mothers do not automatically give their approval to every outfit and every clothing decision. As cited earlier when discussing keeping up appearances, as Georgia commented:

> My mum always gets annoyed with me because before I leave the house I get changed about seven times but not for school because I don't have seven different uniforms

And both Georgia and Jessica talked about how their parents would suggest that they just put 'trackie bottoms' on for wearing somewhere unimportant, but they would both have to spend time choosing what to wear and getting ready. Therefore parents sometimes wished that their daughters did not care so much about appearance and that they wouldn't dress only in fashionable clothes but sometimes dressed down. There were also instances of mothers and fathers policing or criticising clothes that could be located at the fragile and hazardous borderline, which the girls were also sensitive to, between sexy and too sexy dressing. For example, in Focus Group 2 when Georgia was wearing her pink mini skirt and leggings, she made the comment:

> if my mum sees me dressed like this she'll say, 'Georgia that looks, you look too girlie, normally you look like a boy', no I don't!

Concerns about the transgression of the divide between legitimate and illegitimate sexual display could be seen here to be also perhaps dependent on girls' own histories (Renold 2005: 52). Hence, Georgia's mum might be particularly worried because she believed that Georgia has not been part of the 'girlie' girl fashion culture previously, which was why her look was seen as 'too girlie' in comparison to her usual appearance.

For Jessica it was her father who policed what he thought of as too revealing. When I asked about whether she wore short skirts, she replied:

> no, my dad don't let me. I was gonna buy some like, um, shorts that are girls, but then dad says you can buy them but you gonna have to wear tights underneath them

Jessica's dad was regulating his daughter's sexual display, in that he allowed her to wear shorts, but not without tights to cover her legs. On the other hand Jessica's mother allowed her to wear something without leggings because it was deemed as not too short:

> and the top goes down to there ((gesticulates just above knee)), so my mum said you can wear it without leggings

However, perhaps this acceptable display of legs was about context, as the tunic dress was worn without leggings to the school disco. As Renold (2005) discusses, 'flirty fashion' is sanctioned in the context of the school disco. Therefore, parents' regulation of sexualised dressing could be seen to be contingent both on a girls' history and also the context in which the clothing is worn (Renold 2005: 52). What could be seen overall was that in the case of the older girls it was not a straightforward case of parents, particularly mothers, encouraging or dressing their daughters in sexualised clothing. Rather, parents and children engaged in a complex negotiation about what the girls could and should wear.

5.7   Conclusion

These young girls do not experience fashion in a straightforward way, it was considered a pressure, as popular commentators suggest, but it was also an expression of individual creativity. What was in fashion was negotiated amongst the girls, sometimes disliked and rejected, and often played with to make it their own; being in fashion or a trend-setter was also a means for girls of gaining social approval from friends and peers. Fashion was considered an integral part of the creation of hyper-feminine, girlie identity that could give the wearer a sense of pleasure. The fashionable, hyper-feminine subjectivity involved a sexualised element of bodily display, which also provided pleasure and a sense of achievement when the performance was well received by a male audience. Yet this sexual display was also fraught and girls constructed a hyper-feminine identity with reflexivity, carefully negotiating the good girl/bad girl binary though covering, yet revealing the body, in a finely balanced construction of 'appropriate' sexual identity. Girls also interacted, in their discussion of dress, with the growing up too soon discourse that was an important part of popular debate about childhood today, and judged others and their own bodily, fashion practices with recourse to this discourse. These findings may reassure government policy makers and popular campaigners that girls are aware of their concerns.

However, the girls' dialogue used the classed, raced terminology of the patriarchal order, suggesting that the discourses through which they can explore femininity, sexuality and critique patriarchal expectations of sexy, but not too sexy, are lacking. This observation confirms the feminist concern (Jackson *et al* 2013) that girls are still in need of the critical tools by which to appraise societal norms. There was no sense of critiquing the notion that there was an ideal feminine performance that should be performed, and even the tomboy subject position re-affirmed the gender binary through an enactment of masculinity. Though whilst their critique was limited by discourses available to them, girls were aware that the 'girlie' girl, gendered, hetero-sexualised identity and behaviour was socially constructed, as was its alternative a tomboy identity. Both subjectivities were understood not to be fixed or totally discreet; one might perform one identity but still have or like attributes associated with the other. This awareness of the social constructedness of societal norms suggests that the girls possess criticality and reflexivity (Giddens 1991).

Girls had detailed knowledge of fashion retailers, but with some of the younger girls this knowledge was less assured. Many girls also wished to consume fashion and had an interest in clothing worn by women in popular culture. Yet the older girls both articulated the need to be careful with money and also critiqued the idea that their dressing should not emulate celebrities wholesale. Shopping for clothes and choosing what to wear was also a matter of compromise with parents, and although younger girls' dressing was under the most parental control, the older girls were also subject to direct intervention from parents. These older girls did have slightly more autonomy in their dressing and their mediations with their parents might be more vociferous, but even older girls sometimes actively wished to gain parental approval of their sartorial choices.

Dressing fashionably was experienced by turns as a fraught and yet pleasurable activity for girls. Fashion designers and retailers, popular culture, parents, peers including boys and friends all do play a role in shaping the ways in which girls are dressed, whilst linked to these sources of influence are wider gendered, hetero-sexualised, societal norms that are rarely acknowledged within popular debate about young girls' clothes. Young girls' own determination was part of a complex set of interwoven frameworks shaping their dressing and through which they determinatively become girls (Pilcher 2013). The key argument of this chapter is that pre-teen girls interact with all of these social, cultural and familial factors through negotiation and reflexive consideration, as they seek to fashion their identities in individualised ways.

Chapter Six - Girls' dressing: Seasons, spaces and special occasions

6.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter the choices that girls make about what to wear were explored in relation to the popular commercialisation and sexualisation debates, examining the pressure to be in fashion and peers' coercion, the influence of popular culture and also parental guidance. Whilst it was clear that girls' decisions are swayed by these factors it was demonstrated that their interaction with these influences was complex, with questioning and negotiation of norms and expectations constantly in play. During the focus groups and interviews it also became clear that young girls are aware of contextual considerations of dress such as weather, season, occasion, activity and audience. This chapter builds on these arguments to explore girls' understandings that certain types of fabric, fit and styles are imbued with socially constructed notions of appropriateness for certain places, and times of day and year. The research reveals how the designation of the appropriateness of garment styles, shapes, levels of cleanliness, make-up and shoe heel heights for different activities and events is a social phenomenon. Culturally-constructed categories such as formality and informality have become attached to various types of clothing, categories, I will argue, that the girls recognise. Not only do girls recognise these codes, they use them to explore types of identity. The research demonstrates that clothes and accessories worn on the body are used in all sorts of ways to construct and explore subjectivity, in terms of biography, family and memory.

In order to explore these ideas, first, this chapter further counterpoints the public debate about girls blindly following the dictates of fashion and reveals that instead, despite their young age, girls' identity constructions frequently involved pragmatic decisions about their material choices of dress. Given the opportunity to show off the 'coolest' items in their wardrobe, functionality rather than fashionability informed many of the participants' judgments about which garments to select and photograph for this study. The chapter explores girls' understanding of how the weather and seasons affect how they dress, such as wearing warm, cosy clothes in winter and light, floaty garments in summer, but also a consideration of how the seasons involve cultural expectations of colours and fabrics. The chapter goes on to examine girls' knowledge of social expectations of what they should wear to do certain activities, or go to particular places: it becomes clear that, like adults, the act of 'getting dressed' is a complex weighing up of practical, social and also personal considerations as girls also judge what identity to construct for each particular occasion (Pilcher 2013). Many participants are also aware that using practical language was a socially accepted justification for wearing clothes that are deemed by adults to be problematic, and avoid associations of immorality (Wilson 2005).

In this chapter I explore the notion that clothes allow girls to think about themselves as different types of person just as adults do (see Miller 2009; Woodward 2007 for discussion about adults). 'Normal' clothes for everyday wear are, as for adult women, habitually worn (Woodward 2007) and fit with girls' senses of self. Yet special outfits worn for celebrations and other unusual events enabled girls to experiment with another type of identity - a more feminised, hyper-sexualised one. This hyper-feminine identity is not only socially acceptable at these occasions, it is expected (Renolds 2005). Finally this chapter draws upon literature about older people (Twigg 2007; Twigg and Buse 2013) and objects in the home (Money 2007) to interrogate the idea that young girls discuss special wearable items as gifts and mementos of cherished memories and people. Girls use clothes to construct biographical narratives, as adults do in the work of Woodward (2007), and I employ Finch's (2007) notion of 'displaying family' to explore how girls also use wearable items to exhibit their connection to family members and friends, further demonstrating the thoughtful, reflexive relationship that girls have to the things they wear on their bodies.

6.2   'It matters what the weather's like': weather and seasonal dress

In the popular concern about girls and fashion, the assumption is that girls follow the dictates of fashion, popular culture and their peers, presumably without any thought to everyday practical considerations such as whether it is hot or cold. Indeed, Rouse (1989), in her exploration of fashion, cites examples of when people might choose to wear little clothing despite the cold. Yet, in all of the focus groups and in 15 of the 20 interviews, weather conditions such as heat, cold, rain or snow, or whether clothes were deemed to keep you warm, cool or dry were cited as reasons for wearing particular garments. Craik argues that sometimes clothes are worn for 'pragmatic criteria and situations' (Craik 1993: pp.9-10). As Alice (aged 8) pointed out in her interview in relation to her decisions about what to wear, 'it matters what the weather's like'.

Certain clothes such as shorts, dresses and short skirts were discussed as being chosen to be worn when it was hot (Abbie, aged 11; Abigail, aged 9; Chloe, aged 8; Focus Group 3, aged 8-9) or jumpers, fleeces, coats when it was cold (Sara, aged 8; Focus Group 3, aged 8-9). It was not simply a matter of wearing short skirts all year round because they are considered to be sexy, fashionable dress but the girls suggested that they were aware that they are thought to be best worn when it was hot. Equally the girls indicated that they are happy to cover up their bodies in loose fitting, non-sexualised garments if the weather was cold. Garments were described more specifically as being worn in relation to the temperature at a time of year so, on 'hot summery days' (Abigail, aged 9) and 'when it's summery, not when it's freezing cold outside' (Sara, aged 8), in winter (Abbie, aged 11) or 'Christmas or when it's cold' (Abigail, aged 9). Lucie (aged 9) qualified how she would wear a particular outfit:

if it was raining I would wear like a white shirt underneath it or if it's not I'll just wear it on its own

On the other hand there was a jumpsuit[24] that she explained she 'wouldn't wear it when it's raining' (Lucie, aged 9). So consideration may sometimes be taken of whether it's inclement or not.

There was even talk about garments that were for subtleties of temperature and weather that might be beyond the sort of discernment expected at their age, as Abbie (aged 11) discussed how knee high leggings were right for 'when it's not *really* hot' and how an outfit was good to wear 'on a hot day and stuff, *so long as it's not windy*'. Emma (aged 10) described in detail the seasonal scenario a particular jumper was useful for:

I like that jumper because it just goes with it; it's not adding any warmth in the summer, but it's just if your arms get a bit cold, you can just put it on and tie it up

Some garments were recognised as being able to keep you warm or cool and many interviewees described clothes that kept you warm - 'jeans are quite warm' (Bethany, aged 11), for Abigail (aged 9) a particular coat and her Uggs are warm, Alice (aged 8) described a 'warm jumper' and for Focus Group 5 onesies were considered often too hot to wear.[25] Many participants chose sweatshirts and dressing gowns amongst their favourite items of dress citing their warmth as one of the factors that appealed to them. Therefore girls did not simply choose sexualised dress as their preferred items to photograph and wear but instead some of their most beloved garments were those that were loose-fitting, made of thick fabric, covered the body extensively and were used to reduce heat loss. Even gradations of warmth were identified by Bethany (aged 11), who explained that she had chosen a particular t-shirt to buy because it was 'slightly warmer' than another. This careful consideration and attention to the minutiae of differences between which fabrics or styles of clothing might keep you warm, slightly warm, too hot or cool belie the fears of an automatic wearing of skimpy clothes.

Whilst the weather was considered with regards to what to wear on any particular day, this reason was often qualified with reference to an activity or place that the item was to be worn, suggesting that girls took into account multiple factors when choosing what to wear and could give a detailed explanation of their choices. In her description of the jumpsuit she would not wear if it was raining, Lucie (aged 9) also suggested a scenario when she might be out in the rain,

if I'm going to go on a walk when it's raining. Because I've got a dog so we have to walk her quite a lot

In order to discuss their clothes the girls were sometimes drawing upon their personal experience

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[24] Jumpsuit: garment that is a top and shorts all-in-one.
[25] Uggs: brand of sheepskin-lined boots. Onesies: all-in-ones with sleeves and legs and that are usually made of furry or fluffy fleece fabric.

and thinking about actual occasions that they had worn certain clothing before. Poppy (aged 10) explained what it was she liked about her Crocs[26] that she photographed, 'I like having it because it means it's hot because then I can be playing with water' (Figure 5). Here Poppy was referring not just to the weather but also to a past experience of having fun playing whilst wearing the Crocs in hot weather.

Figure 5: Poppy's Crocs that 'mean it's hot because then I can be playing with water'

Young girls were aware not only of the ability for particular fabrics or materials to keep you warm or cool or that some are easy to dry off but that different clothing was linked to and expected for various activities (Entwistle 2000; Pilcher 2013). Here clothing also had the capacity to bring back memories of particular events (Woodward 2007: 55) as clothes were significant in personal biography, preserving and materialising memories through their relationship with embodied practices (Hallam and Hockey 2001; Twigg and Buse 2013) such as dog-walking and splashing in water. Clothes also allowed the girls to think of themselves as being certain sorts of people (Miller 2009), the kind who have pets and go walking, or those who have fun with water.

Whilst some of these choices might be affected by pragmatic decisions such as about warmth or dryness, in addition the knowledge of social expectations for these assorted events or places was made clear by Millie (aged 8) in her discussion of when she would wear a strappy top[27]:

> Millie: In the summer and hot – I wear that on a really hot day. And I would also wear it in the garden a lot. I wouldn't wear it down to town
> JB: Right. Why wouldn't you wear it to town?
> Millie: Well, because it's quite (0.1) I don't really know why I wouldn't wear it into town, I just wouldn't wear it to town

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[26] Crocs: plastic slip on shoes.
[27] Strappy top: a vest or camisole top with thin straps over the shoulders

So a strappy top was worn on a hot day, but only in the garden, a private outdoor space close to the home where the audience would only be close family or friends. A vest top is a piece of clothing that reveals a lot of skin, therefore it could be understood as presenting sexualised display of the body, hence Millie's reluctance to discuss the subject explicitly. As a potentially fraught garment, the top was not thought suitable for a public place such as town, and demonstrates that Millie's sartorial judgments were clearly reflexive (Giddens 1991) and took into account ideas of social appropriateness for when and where she could show clothes that revealed skin (Pilcher 2009). This idea of locations and audiences shaping clothing decisions is further addressed in Section 6.3.

The strappy top was an item of dress that came up in two other interviews as being justified in terms of its usefulness in relation to keeping you cool as can be seen in the two extracts below:

<u>Chloe's interview (Aged 8)</u>

Chloë: And it's a strap top so it doesn't have any sleeves
JB: Hmm mm. And what do you like about not having any sleeves?
Chloë: Erm. I don't really know, it's just, I don't get hot and it's just like, yeah

<u>Lauren's interview (Aged 10)</u>

JB: Yeah, so, the, it's a bow on the back and you said it's, what did you say, it's quite strappy did you say?
Lauren: Yeah, strap, strap top
JB: Yeah, yeah. And why is that good?
Lauren: Because sometimes I get a bit too warm with tops that have long sleeves on them, and a strap top just keeps me just about right

As Wilson explains 'dress is almost always in danger of being denounced as immoral' (Wilson 2005: 246), therefore it was perhaps better to give a practical justification for choosing an item of dress rather than risk your intention of wearing it as being understood as immoral and related to illegitimate sexual display. Again Chloë could also be demonstrating the difficulties of talking about a sexualised piece of clothing, in her 'I don't really know' and 'it's just like, yeah'. There were many more instances of the difficulties of knowing, remembering or articulating why certain choices were made in relation to less controversial items of dress, such as Abigail (aged 9) and her selection of a Halloween fancy dress costume to photograph:

JB: Okay. Erm, so why, why would you wear something like that?
Abigail: I don't know, I think. I'm not sure, I think it's quite comfortable

And when I asked Jessica (aged 10) about the first outfit she had photographed, a loose fitting dress that came below the knee:

JB: so why did you choose that one as the first one to show me?
Jessica: um (0.2) I don't know

Sometimes it was just hard to remember or explain choices that had been made, either about the wearing of the clothes or perhaps the reasons for photographing them.

Returning to sartorial decisions explained in terms of functionality, many garments then were described as being worn for particular temperatures and other pragmatic reasons and occasionally items of clothing were discussed as being worn primarily because of these practical factors. In Focus Group 3 Chloë said that she had chosen to wear shorts that day simply because it was warm, Bethany (aged 11) defined other clothes as 'useful' or 'practical' and Shannon explained that specific clothes enable her to 'actually party in them'. As Wilson argues 'we expect a garment to justify its shape and style in terms of moral or intellectual criteria we do not normally apply to other artistic forms' (Wilson 2005: 49). Frequently the term 'good' also being used to praise particular designs, such as Ella (aged 9) saying that one of her tops was 'good', Millie's (aged 8) favourite cardigan was 'really good' and Lucie (aged 9) has 'good pants'. Abbie (aged 11) described Next as having 'quite good clothes, they last a long time', so here their utility was phrased in terms of their longevity and quality. Much discussion about fashion, Wilson argues, is coloured by puritanical moralism that means that the only socially acceptable justification for clothing should be about its functionality. The girls' discussion of their clothes was clearly imbued with this moralistic thinking, yet 'dress in never primarily functional' (Wilson 2005: 244) and the social factors that determine choices of clothing are also clearly in evidence as Millie would not wear the top that keeps her cool to town.

Also whilst girls discussed the weather it became obvious that talk of seasons was not just about temperature but also about a particular socially-understood seasonal aesthetic. Dresses might specifically be 'summer dresses' (Alice, aged 8; Ella, aged 9 in Focus Group 4; Leah, aged 9) but summery was also used as an adjective to describe dresses, skirts and tops (Abigail, aged 9; Bethany, aged 11; Chloë, aged 8; Emma, aged 10; Mia, aged 8 in Focus Group 3), as in the discussion of a favourite t-shirt (Figure 6):

> JB: So what do you like about this t-shirt?
> Emma: Erm, I like it because it is like a summery, a really summery top, because it's like a pastel pink. And it's got, and then it's, so it's like in the middle, it's not too long and it's not too short

Figure 6: Emma's 'really summery top'

Emma recognised that it was the pastel pink colour of a top that makes it 'summery'. Woodward's research about women's wardrobes found that such colour distinctions in Britain are prevalent and that 'in tandem with the practicalities pertaining to the weather…is an overwhelming sense of social appropriateness' (Woodward 2007: 74), with the shifts in colours and fabrics of women's wardrobes and retail outlets creating the seasons sartorially. It was clear that young girls were aware of these normative expectations of seasonal dress.

6.3   *Places, activities and everyday dress*

As seen above, whilst weather and seasons are taken into account in clothing selections, these are not just functional choices. Girls were conscious of social norms of dressing for a time of year and also in relation to the location they are going to and what type of activity they will be undertaking. As Entwistle argues,

> dress forms part of the micro-social order of most social spaces, and when we
> dress we have to orientate ourselves to the implicit norms of these spaces: is there
> a code of dress we have to abide by? who (sic) are we likely to meet? what (sic)
> activities are we likely to perform? (Entwistle 2000: 34).

These questions are ones that it became clear girls asked themselves when getting dressed. Participants from both age groups suggested a range of situations for which they would wear certain clothes, such as the park (Sara, aged 8; Jessica, aged 10), the garden (Lauren, aged 10; Millie, aged 8), town (Abigail, aged 9; Anna, aged 11; Georgia, aged 11; Millie, aged 8), grandparent's houses (Lauren, aged 10; Lucie, aged 9), restaurants (Jessica, aged 10; Sara, aged 8) or the cinema (Ella, aged 9). There was also acknowledgement that various activities would

require specific dress such as attending a barbecue (Anna, aged 11), to play tennis (Ella, aged 9), play with friends (Lauren, aged 10), and going shopping (Ella, aged 9; Georgia, aged 11). However, sometimes these outfits might be worn for several of these different locations, as Abbie (aged 11) described, 'Like in town and stuff. Around home'. Or as Caitlin (aged 10) explained:

> I'd probably wear it if I was going shopping or if I was going swimming or something like that, but I wouldn't wear it out. I might wear it to the disco, but I wouldn't wear it if I was going out for dinner, that kind of thing or something like that

So there were subtle distinctions made about in what circumstances you might wear certain clothes, perhaps related to the formality or informality of an occasion. Indeed this informality was addressed directly as Abbie; Bethany, Emma, Lauren and Focus Group 5 all referred to 'casual' clothes; these casual clothes were used for playing with friends and for wearing on a 'lazy day' (Millie, aged 8) or a 'normal day' (Emma, aged 10). In response to my asking if a particular skirt was for special occasion, Lauren (aged 10) replied:

> Lauren: Just an any, any day skirt, that one is
> JB: Yeah, so where, where have you actually worn that outfit to then?
> Lauren: Well, I wear it when I play out in the garden, play out with my friends, and I, like, wear it out when I go, like, to my nan's

Here was an 'any day' skirt, which was worn for playing in the garden with friends, or going to her grandmother's house. This everyday wear was defined in opposition to the special occasion clothes that I alluded to in my question to Lauren. In her description of the first outfit that she photographed (Figure 7) Emma (aged 10) said:

> Emma: Erm well, sometimes I can be like quite outdoorsy, so like when we go on a walk or stuff, I'll normally wear like those trousers because like they're quite raggedy
> JB: Yeah?
> Emma: and they've already got a few holes on, so I don't really mind getting them mucky and stuff. And then I just wear like either like just a normal t-shirt that I don't really mind getting grubby and stuff

Figure 7: Emma's 'raggedy' trousers and normal t-shirt

One of Emma's favourite outfits was one that she was describing as 'normal', everyday clothing which was fine to get dirty, was already well-worn and even torn, a far cry from sexy, fashionable dress. Emma was also referring to herself as a particular kind of person, an 'outdoorsy' type who especially enjoys going walking and both Lauren and Emma described going out on bikes. Here there was a direct reference to identity-making as Emma actively constructed her identity in particular ways depending on the circumstances she was in (Tseëlon 1995). When there was the opportunity to be out and about, she can become the 'outdoorsy' person she enjoys being, through adopting a certain type of clothing (Guy and Banim 2000).

Whilst Lauren might wear an 'any day' skirt for playing, just as in the discussion of tomboys in the previous chapter, the wearing of trousers or jeans was described by both bike riders as practical for riding and movement. When I asked Emma about why she didn't wear dresses more often she replied:

> Well like I'm quite outdoorsy and I like riding my bike, because I live in quite a quiet place, so and it's not really appropriate for riding a bike because it all gets in the way and like I won't plan it, but I'll just know kind of that day that I'll probably do something outside. And it will stop me doing what I want to do if I wear it.

Dresses were deemed impractical because they got in the way and everyday trousers were worn for doing things outside, specifically riding bikes, because they enabled the wearer to ride with ease. Yet, as seen above in relation to practical justifications for dress, this idea of appropriateness might also be to do with social expectations about what was considered to look practical or

appropriate for a situation (Entwistle 2000). With regards to identity-making, in Emma's everyday sartorial preferences there was also an aesthetic fit between looking like a particular kind of person and becoming the person one wants to be; wearing utilitarian-looking clothes corresponds with wanting to be thought of as practical, active person (Woodward 2007: 74). This 'outdoorsy' identity contests the dominant identity offered in popular culture and the fashion world yet, as will be seen in the next section, does not preclude the possibility of creating multiple identities and exploring a more overtly feminine role within a different scenario.

In terms of the actual functionality of these clothes, one of the main problems might be that wearing something with a skirt to it on a bike could potentially risk showing underwear, a problem acknowledged by several of the girls in relation to other activities. The possible embarrassment could also be resolved by wearing shorts, leggings or jeans under the dresses, by wearing 'skorts'[28] or dresses or skirts with integral shorts underneath (Abigail, aged 9; Lauren, aged 10; Lucie, aged 9; Leah, aged 9; Focus Group 3, aged 8-9). For example in Focus Group 3, Ellen (aged 8) said 'I started to wear summer dresses and shorts underneath like so when I do handstands and cartwheels you don't see knickers'. In everyday situations such as playing, girls were very aware of their responsibility to remain covered enough so as not to receive rebuke from parents, teachers or other girls (Renolds 2005: 51; Jackson *et al* 2013), as was also seen in the previous chapter.

The casualness and practicality of bifurcated garments was also addressed in Lauren's discussion of what she wears on her bike (Figure 8):

> Lauren: This one's my casual clothes that I wear out when I go out on my bike and out with my friends. Because they all wear jeans too, and like
> JB: Yeah, so why are jeans good?
> Lauren: Well, I don't wear, like, I only wear, like, skinny jeans, I don't wear, like, jeans that aren't skinny. Because jeans that aren't skinny don't go, they, I just don't like them, because, like, sometimes they get stuck in chains

Here again there was the same mix, of social expectations, as friends also wear their jeans to ride too, and the pragmatic defence about skinny jeans not getting caught in the chains of a bike. However, as discussed in all of the focus groups, skinny jeans are also considered a highly fashionable garment and Lauren was expressing her choice to wear fashionable jeans to cycle rather than unfashionable baggy ones.

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[28] Shorts with a wrap over panel at the front that looks like a skirt

Figure 8: Lauren's 'casual clothes'

Whilst there was some acknowledgement of peer expectations and wider social assumptions in the wearing of these everyday clothes, the casualness and even shabby state of the clothes suggests that these are clothes that are habitually worn and that the girls feel comfortable in (the notion of comfortable as both a material and aesthetic fit with a sense of identity was further explored in Chapter Seven). Clothing that fits both this mix of the social expectation and which is regularly worn 'externalizes a routinized, safe and comfortable self' (Woodward 2007: 145). Woodward explains that it is one of the defining features of habitual clothing is that women are comfortable wearing it and the items have been lived in to such an extent that they soften to the body. Clearly there are garments that girls also have this embodied and material relationship with, in particular, Emma's worn, torn, 'raggedy' trousers.

Here was a girl who enjoys the kind of outdoor activity that the journalists and popular psychologists discussed in Chapter Two would approve of, wearing practical clothes that she believes were acceptable to get dirty. Yet it is very much the case that the populist wish to see this type of dressing for girls is not something that would be universally accepted as a way for girls to dress; dressing in dirty or ripped clothing is socially and culturally bound by activity and place, an idea explored in Klepp's (2007) work looking at the cultural construction of ideas about dirtiness and cleanliness in clothes. She argues that although age impacts on the expected norm of cleanliness and that children are anticipated to be more dirty than adults, gender also affects this norm so that girls are required to dress in cleaner clothes than boys, especially within contexts such as school where standards of hygiene are monitored (Klepp 2007: 263). Emma herself showed tacit understanding of this bounded nature of expectation about the cleanliness of her

clothes both in her description of wearing her worn clothes outside on her bike but also in her knowledge of other social event dress codes, as will be seen in the next section.

6.4   *Special clothes and special occasions*

As well as being habitual items of clothing that were described variously as casual, everyday or play wear, these garments were posited in direct contrast to 'smart' clothes (Anna, aged 10; Bethany, aged 11; Emma, aged 10), which you would wear for going out to 'posh places' (Sara); these clothes were also described as 'best' (Bethany, aged 11) or 'special' (Emma, aged 10; Leah, aged 9; Millie, aged 8). As Emma explained, she would normally put on casual clothes 'unless it's a party or something that needs special clothes'. These special clothes are ones that the girls would not want to get dirty (Emma, aged 10; Lucie, aged 9) and are 'too good to wear playing' (Lauren, aged 10); for these circumstances it was understood that the social expectation was for a high standard of cleanliness of clothing (Klepp 2007). Sara (aged 8) described how she did not wear her favourite dress very often 'unless it's really, really special' an occasion. These best or special clothes are preserved in order not to spoil these outfits, which are worn to events such as birthday parties (Alice, aged 8; Anna, aged 11; Ella, aged 9; Emma, aged 10; Lauren, aged 10; Sara, aged 8) and discos (Millie, aged 8; Sara, aged 8), or family celebrations such as weddings (Alice, aged 8; Leah, aged 9; Millie, aged 8) or Christmas (Abigail, aged 9; Lauren, aged 10). Meals in restaurants were also deemed special occasions (Jessica, aged 10; Lucie, aged 9; Poppy, aged 10; Sara, aged 8), as were times of day such as evenings out (Bethany, aged 11). All of these events are ones which have very particular expectations of what should be worn as Craik argues, 'dressing for a…dinner party, for a wedding…entail specific calculations about clothing behaviour and milieu' and 'fashion relates to particular codes of behaviour and rules of ceremony and place' (Craik 1993: 10). Clearly then the girls were aware that there are these codes and rules governing dress in these circumstances.

As these special occasion clothes were saved only for the most unusual of events and were rarely worn, these are what Woodward describes as being non-habitual clothes (Woodward 2007: 140). Even though outdoorsy Emma doesn't like wearing dresses, she commented, 'I won't like try to get my way out of wearing one. When I think I need to wear one, I'll wear one, and I'll make that decision myself normally'. Therefore, the awareness of social codes or perhaps parental disapproval for not following these codes, the 'need' to wear a dress, was stronger than her personal dislike. In Woodward's (2007) study non-habitual clothes provide a direct contrast to women's ordinary selves that they create through clothing and allow them to try out a new identity through dress. Through conforming to the expectations of an event, Emma, rather than presenting the usual outdoorsy, safe habitual persona, was able to create a different type of identity, an aspect of the self that was not present normally (Woodward 2007: 141).

Particular items of clothing were discussed as being appropriate to wear for these special events, such as skirts (Lauren), dresses (Anna; Alice; Bethany; Emma; Lucie; Sara) and high heels (Amy; Anna; Lauren; Lucie; Melissa; Millie) and wearing make-up was also acceptable for these occasions (Ella; Lauren; Melissa; Focus Group 3; Focus Group 4). All of these ways of presenting the body for these distinctive, celebratory circumstances involved highly feminised, heterosexualised forms of adornment, as Entwistle states 'in such formal situations one also finds conventional codes of gender more rigidly enforced than in informal settings' (Entwistle 2000: 15). Social codes and expectations for girls at these events were that they must present themselves in ways usually associated with adult femininity but also challenged popular preconceptions about sexualised body presentation; in that the girls were aware that it was only at these events that they are allowed to perform this type of femininity. It was these dress codes and conventions that allow the girls to try out a more explicit form of feminine identity (Woodward 2007: 140).

Focus Group 4: Aged 8-9

Lucie: I only put make up on for discos/
Ella: me too
Lucie: or parties
Sara: I wear make-up for special occasions
Ella: I wear it for special occasions. I went to a wedding and had to wear loads of make-up
Sara: same, I went to a wedding like ((demonstrates throwing a big handful of make up on her face))

The wearing of make-up was acceptable at these special events, in fact it was expected, as Ella explains by saying she 'had' to wear lots of make-up.

In Focus Group 3 for example, the participants were talking about wearing make-up to the school disco, so I asked why that was the case:

Focus Group 3: Aged 8-9

Mia: I think, I think because normally they try and impress boys. By looking very pretty
Abigail: It's the time where like you're with everyone in school, where teachers don't care what happens
Ellen: It's time you got to wear whatever you wanted=
Mia:=and you could kiss if you wanted
Ellen: and my mum wouldn't really care what I wore then, but she would say like, like, I'm going to say like, 'You're allowed to wear this, you're allowed to wear this, but you're not allowed to wear this, on days like this'. But on the school disco you're allowed to wear what you want, even if it's like inappropriate, too grown up for you, like/
Abigail: What about a strapless dress?
Ellen: Yeah, I'm allowed to wear that on a school disco but I don't because it's a bit weird. And like because there's normally like a slow song at the end of the school disco/
Chloë: I know
Ellen: the boys try and dance with you, that's like/

This detailed exchange about the social codes of dress and behaviour at the school disco was then cut off as Mia spotted a fashion-related book on the library shelf near her and ran off to get it to give to me. Perhaps Mia felt the need to curtail the talk of sexualised behaviour, though given her enthusiastic participation throughout the discussion it may just have been an impulsive move. This extract demonstrates that at the school disco highly hetero-sexualised behaviour and dress are accepted; the girls could wear clothes perceived as normally too old for them such as short strapless dresses and high-heels, and wear make-up, aiming to attract boys and even kiss them. The girls recognise that this type of dressing and performance of hetero-sexualised femininity was only condoned in such a specific situation, in the regulated school environment of the disco, outside of usual school time and at which, as cited in the previous chapter, 'cosmetic culture, flirty-fashion and dirty-dancing were implicitly sanctioned (and almost expected) by staff' (Renold 2005: 48).

There was an element of Bakhtin's (1984) concept of the carnival here, a time of celebration outside of the usual daily life and the everyday expectations of behaviour and dress, as he describes 'during carnival time life is subject only to its laws, that is, the laws of its own freedom' (Bakhtin 1984: 7). During carnival exaggerated fancy dress costume was part of an experimentation with identities outside of people's usual experience and the thronging of the crowd allowed for sensual physical contact – at the school disco girls can put on visible make-up, wear sexualised clothing, dance with and kiss boys, allowed in this circumstance to experiment and try on an 'older' sexual identity that was not usually condoned. This mixing of the official and unofficial school, an intermingling at the boundaries, was 'a rather licensed affair, a permissible rupture of hegemony. Such a form of a contained release may just be a form of social control' (Tseëlon 2001: 28) in which the school staff allow pupils to act and dress in certain ways outside of formal school time in the hope of discouraging this sartorial and overtly sexualised behaviour during the official school day.

Whilst the uniqueness of this type of event and its attendant dress code was recognised by the girls, many of whom enjoy participating in the sanctioned way, in many interviews there was excited description of groups of friends deciding what to wear and about putting on make-up on before the disco. However, in Focus Group 3's exchange it was also 'they' who try and look pretty, so just as discussed in the previous chapter, that it was the Other who are wanting to make themselves sexually attractive (Renold 2005; Raby 2009). Also there was a reproduction of the sexual double standard in that active sexuality was posited as an accepted masculine behaviour; girls suggest that it was the boys who will try and dance with the girls. In this discussion tomboy Ellen said that whilst she would be allowed to wear a strapless dress for a school disco, she would not because she thought wearing such dresses was 'weird'. It was unclear whether this remark

was because the construction of her identity as tomboy means that she would not wear such a feminine item of clothing and so she was again dismissing as Other those who show off their bodies. Or, given her comments about slow dancing with boys, asserting that to choose a dress which will be difficult to keep up whilst dancing with a partner as peculiar, Ellen again draws upon the language of practicality (Wilson 2005) to avoid overtly talking about sexual display, behaviour and dress (Pilcher 2009). Though, as seen in the previous chapter not all girls are reluctant to express their engagement with sexuality.

Sometimes these types of clothes might be worn more because of the social expectation rather because the girls like them, as Emma expressed with her grudging wearing of dresses for important events. Anna also articulated this sense of wearing items primarily because of social codes, as she explained what she wore on her feet to a couple of 'cocktail' parties:

> JB: High heels, flat shoes?
> Anna: I wore blocks
> JB: Right, okay. How high are we talking? ((Anna demonstrates 5cm)) Oh, okay. So do you often wear high heels?
> Anna: No. I just steal them from my sister's cupboard.
> JB: Oh, okay, so they're your sister's blocks? Um, what colour?
> Anna: Black
> JB: Uh huh. Okay. So do you like wearing heels?
> Anna: Not particularly
> JB: No, but/
> Anna: As it's, like, a special event, I decided to

In this discussion Anna showed awareness that at a special event such as a party was synonymous with specific types of dress, such as high heels, which meant that she felt that she must don them even though she did not particularly enjoy wearing them. Heels were non-habitual for Anna and perhaps the sense of self-consciousness implicit in the non-habitual was not experienced as pleasurable for her, as Woodward (2007) found with some adult women. On the other hand Lucie, when asked what she liked about wearing her high heels said, 'just because they're fun to wear'. Here there was a sense of enjoyment in wearing the heels and perhaps as Pilcher discusses, a sense of empowerment through 'the precocious skill in being able to walk in high-heeled shoes' (Pilcher 2009: 9) and feeling more 'grown up'. Though Lucie did clarify that she didn't wear high heels every day and when asked why responded:

> Because, one thing, they're bad for your feet because like they're like that (holds her hand at an angle) but your normal feet are like that (holds hand flat) and they can make your feet quite sore, and because I don't need to wear them all the time, I can wear them when it's special occasions.

The pleasure of wearing heels was tempered by the physical pain of wearing them and the idea that they are 'bad' for your feet (see Hockey *et al* 2013 for adult women discussing this negative association of high heels). Yet at the same time Lucie understood that it was only for these

exceptional events that she was expected to wear the high heels, she did not 'need' to wear them ordinarily.

Figure 9: Emma's 'going out for dinner' shirt

There was also some appreciation that certain special occasions did not always require such overtly feminine apparel, Emma talked about a shirt that she wore with jeans (Figure 9):

> Sometimes I wear it to parties because it's not too smart but it's also a bit (0.1) or like when I'm going out for dinner, because it's not too smart; it's not like a jacket and a waistcoat, but it's still showing that you've kind of put some effort into

So a shirt, with its more structured shape, stiff collar and cuffs was formal enough to demonstrate that you have 'put some effort into' dressing for the occasion, without being 'too smart'. There was also knowledge shown here of the formality of a jacket and waistcoat, interestingly choosing items of dress associated with masculinity. Whilst Emma did not identify herself as a tomboy, masculine clothing fitted with her notion of herself as an 'outdoorsy' practical person, who only wore dresses for a very important event. Since the nineteenth century, middle-class, Western, masculine codes of dress have emphasised notions of restraint and practicality, men's dress has 'required a suitably serious and practical outlook and appearance' (Craik 1993: 186). The three-piece suit with its jacket, waistcoat and trousers suggested in its serviceable fabric and structured

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tailoring the association of masculinity with ideas of seriousness and functionality (Craik 1993), worn with the smart, starched and tailored shirt. As Entwistle (2000) has argued, this gendering of a type of dressing has been picked up by women in the professional and business workplace so that in order to be taken seriously women have adopted the suit and smart shirt as part of their professional dress. Yet, as described earlier, on formal occasions women are expected to reveal more of their body, but men's dress codes prescribe the wearing of tailored clothes that cover the body (Entwistle 2000: 15; Eicher 2001); for a less formal event Emma understood that the dress code was not so immobile and gender boundaries were not so rigidly enforced therefore it was acceptable to wear less feminine dress.

Clearly girls adjusted their performances of femininity depending on context, and moved between different types of identity, sometimes exploring everyday, routine selves and at others, special, non-habitual versions of themselves. This spatially-located movement between multiple subjectivities could be seen as form of code-switching (Gonzalez 2014: 518); Gonzalez's work identified code-switching in adult women, suggesting localized femininities. Code-switching is a concept developed from socio-linguistics referring to changes in use of language in bi-lingual speakers or in changes of dialect or idiom, which were in response to audience and context in relation to gendered and raced performances (Holland 2012; Rex 2006), but can also be applied to use of other forms of cultural capital besides language, such as clothing styles (Holland 2012; Carter 2010). In my research girls could be seen to switch their gendered, raced and, in the next chapter, aged performances of self through dress, in relation to the audience and context in which they found themselves signifying localized cultural constructions of subjectivity.

6.4.1   Special clothes and playing at dressing up

Although clothing described for playing in was the mundane or specifically bifurcated, there was also a link made between wearing special event dress and 'dressing up' as part of playing, like donning a costume. Sara (aged 8) discussed a long, smart, chiffon dress with sequins as being worn to:

> Discos, parties, posh restaurants and, well, I like putting on plays at home, when friends are around, so I'll dress up and play like a princess or something.

This dress was not only good for dressing up to go out for an important occasion but also for dressing up as a form of role-play. Whilst Pilcher (2009: 3) discusses examples that are either for one type of dressing up or the other, here there was an example of a crossover, a dress which Sara was allowed to wear out but also plays at home in. Sara refers to playing the ultimate fairy tale heroine in this dress, the princess, who represents a powerful symbol of femininity as beautiful and waif-like (Holland, S. 2004: 53). For Sara this dress enables her to enact out particular kinds of femininity both at home and when permitted on occasions out.

In Pilcher's (2009) study role-play involved wearing clothes associated with adult hyper-femininity, of the kind discussed in the section above such as high heels and mini-skirts, to try on an older persona at home. Leah (aged 9) certainly referred to having her grandmother's high-heeled boots, which she was not allowed to wear out, to wear inside. The boots were even a size too big for Leah but she really liked them so when her grandma was going to give them to charity Leah asked if she could have them. When asked why she liked the high heels Leah replied:

> Leah: Oh because it makes me look really grown-up and not many of my friends
> have them
> JB: Hmm. So why do you like the idea of looking grown-up?
> Leah: Because it makes people treat me a little bit more grown-up

The heels are important to Leah in their ability to allow her to rehearse adult femininity within the confines of the home. She had once worn them out of the house but had tripped over and when asked why her mum would not usually allow her to wear them out, Leah explained that her mum thought that she might trip over and that she was not old enough wear heels (Pilcher 2009: 4). On the other hand, as seen earlier, there are girls who are allowed to wear heels and other hyper-feminine apparel out but only to particular events; as Ellen stated above these clothes are thought inappropriate or too grown up for everyday, demonstrating knowledge of dressing suitably being contingent upon context (Pilcher 2009: 8). High heels then are part of ageing up, a transitional object enabling a movement from childhood to adulthood (Hockey *et al* 2013) (Clothes, age and size are further explored in the next chapter). Heels are worn with negotiation between mothers and daughters but they can also be symbolic as a gift, signifying this mother-daughter relationship or as a memento of a memorable occasion; ideas explored next in this thesis.

6.5   *Special gifts and memories, family and friends*

In the discussion about what made an item of dress special, there was sometimes a cross over between what was worn for a special occasion, and items that might be worn at celebrations but were also bought as presents, thereby making them additionally valued. Sometimes it was hard to determine whether it was their status as a gift, the relationship to the gift-giver or the potential occasion to which they might be worn that made them valued objects. In attempting to classify objects as 'memento', 'souvenir', 'gift' or 'enjoyed', Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1999: 57) explain that as 'possessions actually exist in a context for a person and have multiple meanings, any one may appear in more than one of these categories' (1999: 57. See also Money 2007). For example, Lucie only wears her high heels for exceptional events but when she first talked about them she described:

> Lucie: Well these are my high heels I got for my birthday and they're quite special and I
> like them
> JB:Yeah. So what makes them special?
> Lucie: Because my mum knew when I was size 11 that I loved high heels but because
> they were quite expensive she didn't want me to grow out of them really quickly so they
> still fit me

So there are a number of factors that made these shoes distinct, they were a cherished gift from her mother, especially because they were expensive, but knowing how much Lucie loved them her mum purchased them anyway. In Corrigan's (1995) study of the family clothing economy, women were extremely active in the economy, providing all family members with clothes. Most of a young girl's clothing would be given to her by her mother and this 'gift exchange establishes a relationship between the subjects' (Corrigan 1995: 127). The giving of gifts within families as part of family celebrated rituals such as anniversaries of birth and Christmas is demonstrated by Cheal (1987) to very often be gendered kinship work, with women buying a large majority of presents. These familial presents are seen as expressive of emotional attachment. Also gifts can be seen as a tool in the 'display' of family (Finch 2007), both for the actors involved – the giver of the gift and the recipient who wears the gift and also to audiences who see the clothes displayed. The importance of the mother-daughter relationship can be displayed through these clothes, as it was perhaps only the mother who can grant the possibility of her daughter to wear 'grown up' items such as high heels. Expensive articles of clothing and footwear are especially valued by young girls (Lucie aged 9; Abigail aged 9) because it is known that at this age garments can only be appreciated for such a transitory period before they are outgrown; age and how clothes feel when they are nearly outgrown is explored further in the next chapter.

The next photograph that Lucie took was of an outfit that she wore with the prized shoes, a fur bolero and a chiffon covered dress (Figure 10).

Figure 10: Lucie's special occasion outfit to wear with high heels

> Lucie: This is one of the outfits I wear with the high heels
> JB: Oh okay, yeah. So describe this to me
> Lucie: That's quite furry short-sleeved and that's like a bridesmaid dress, even though I've never been to a wedding
> JB: Oh okay. So how?
> Lucie: My mum just buys them for me for my birthday and for Christmas
> JB: Hmm hmm. And so do you just wear it round the house then or do you get to wear it out?
> Lucie: I wear it on special occasions

For Lucie, the shoes, bolero and dress were all favourites, liked together as an outfit, again received as a present from her mum and then worn for special occasions.

For Alice it was especially because items had been given to wear at a special occasion that helped to make them distinct. She took a photograph of the dress she had worn as a bridesmaid and went on to describe jewellery she also received:

> Alice: And we got like a present; like a – um, because I was bridesmaid, I got like a jewellery box with lots of jewellery in there
> JB: Mm. Ok. So, how did it feel to be wearing a dress like that?
> Alice: Because I, I've had, I've never weared a dress like that
> JB: No
> Alice: I mean, I wear like necklaces and like – like, er, a little thing that goes in your hair
> JB: Mm hm
> Alice: It's really nice and a bracelet
> JB: Yeah
> Alice: That's really special to me because in the middle there is like a tiny diamond

Whilst Alice finished by saying that the bracelet was cherished because it has a 'diamond' in it, it was clear that all of the gifts combined – a dress not like anything she had worn before, the jewellery box and all of its contents, which were worn to the wedding, these items collectively were important to her. Alice also told a long story beforehand about the family member who had got married and explained that because the wedding was at Easter they were also given lots of chocolate. Therefore it was the mixture of celebrations with her family and the presents, which coalesced to make the whole experience, and the mementoes of that experience, significant to Alice. Material objects, such as clothing, can allow us to articulate our biography (Woodward 2007; Money 2007; Twigg and Buse 2013) and it was through the photograph of these objects that Alice created a narrative about her life and her family (Pink 2007) that explored multiple family celebrations, the pleasures of dressing up and the importance of these objects to wear and keep as mementoes of these relationships. As Finch (2007) explores, both narratives and objects are ways in which people 'do kinship' and explore and display what it means to be part of a family.

Items like bridesmaid dresses were often kept as mementoes of these major events. As Emma explained:

> Erm this is my bridesmaid – when I was a bridesmaid once, I wore it. I don't really wear it again, but only for one reason normally when I need to wear a dress. I'm quite afraid of like getting it mucky and staining it and I don't want to do that, so I kind of just keep it as like a memory

Again, there was reference to special dress as being something that she would not want to get dirty, and because it was only worn for that one particular wedding it serves as a reminder of that noteworthy day. Emma demonstrated knowledge of socially acceptable standards of cleanliness, as she was aware that for her bridesmaid dress to remain effective as a special event wear, it must be preserved in its pristine state. This state also allows the dress to act as a relic, a catalyst to the memory, as 'to maintain its power, the object as relic or fetish, must be preserved' (Smith-Windsor 2010; see also Stewart 1993). The dress remains preserved as a reminder of the personal experience of the occasion and her relationship with it as a relic was an intimately personal one. 'Clothes are particularly powerful "memory objects" because they are not just owned by people but worn by them' (Twigg and Buse 2013: 329); the biographical narrative they facilitated caused by the fact that they were both intimately personal memories but also embodied memories too (Lerpiniere 2009).

Clothes or accessories were also sometimes special because of who gifted them, as in the shoes from Lucie's mum above, and as Leah explained about a cherished bag that she has (Figure 11):

Figure 11: Leah's special bag

Leah: Oh my uncle bought it for me from India and I don't wear it that much, only like when I'm going to a wedding or something or a really special occasion. I really like the patterns and everything
JB: Yeah. So why is this bag only for special occasions?
Leah: Because it's really, really special and it's from a different country
JB: Yeah, okay. So why do you think that this is a special bag?
Leah: Well because my uncle gave it me when I was little and it was like one of my first presents

This bag was precious and kept for rare events, again for a range of reasons - it was a present from a family member, it was a nostalgic link to being younger and one of her first presents that she remembers, its appearance was attractive and it comes from a far off place. As with the above discussions of special clothing and objects, there was a tangled set of associations, memories and meanings attributed to this material object (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1999). The idea of worn artefact as a memento was even more linked here with nostalgia (Stewart 1993). Stewart explores how souvenirs become metaphors for nostalgic narratives, a longing for the past (Stewart 1993: 39). Young girls sometimes felt a sense of nostalgia for an earlier time and Emma also talked about thinking back to an earlier time as she enjoyed wearing a rather more mundane item – a sweatshirt – because it reminded her of the time she had spent at primary school. Whilst Leah's bag was only used for special occasions, it was used, and Emma's sweatshirt was frequently worn, so unlike Stewart's (1993) souvenir or Smith-Windsor's (2010) relic, material objects do not have to be preserved in order to act as a link to memories. However, the sweatshirt does fit with Stewart's notion that in order to become a souvenir an item must at least represent an unrepeatable experience (Stewart 1993: 135) and in anticipation of the future in secondary school, Emma's sweatshirt served to represent her time as a primary school pupil, a place and age which she knew she could not experience again. Age and clothes as transitional objects is further explored in the next chapter.

Figure 12: Alice's special slipper socks

In Figure 12 there is another everyday item, a pair of slipper socks, that was also photographed as a cherished item, this time by Alice (aged 8). For Alice, it was explicitly the family connection in relation to a sartorial gift that helped to make them special. So when I asked Alice why she had taken a photograph of her slipper socks she explained:

Alice: Oh, they're just really sp– I've had them a really long time
JB: Yeah?
Alice: And I just, my other ones, they, one of the sheep came off
JB: Right. Ok
Alice: Yeah?
JB: Yeah
Alice: And they're really special to have and really, cos my grandma gave them to me
JB: Oh, ok
Alice: She, she's near, she, um, she's still alive but she's very old

These slipper socks are loved because they are a reminder of her elderly grandmother. The time passing was again important, as these slippers are something Alice has worn over a long period, a rarity when so much of what the girls wore was highly ephemeral because they grow out of clothes so quickly. Alice seems to have been about to say that her grandma was near death so temporality was relevant in more than one sense, in that thinking about the giver of the gift also serves as a reminder that her grandmother will not always be around. Clothes can be viewed not just as souvenirs or mementoes of occasions or times but also as memorials of cherished social relationships and may come signify that relationship when the person has died (Money 2007).

Similarly for Anna (aged 11) a necklace that was given to her by her 'great-step-granny' was special enough to take a photograph of, as she described:

Anna: when she went on this cruise and, um, I can't remember what stone it's made
out of but the two, they're, like, white, cream colour and when it goes on it's very
heavy, but it's pretty
JB: Yeah. Ahhh, lovely
Anna: So I wear them when I see her, because she's quite old
JB: So, do you only wear it when you see her or do you wear it other times as well?
Anna: Only when I see her
JB: Okay. Em, so why did you want to take a photograph of that one?
Anna: It's because it's something, like, because everybody, like, takes pictures of stuff
they like, but not stuff that they're, like, made to, like, like. So, yeah

In this explanation Anna defined the necklace as pretty but it was not something she would wear ordinarily, she wore it only when visiting the elderly relative who gave her the necklace. Anna wore it to please her great-step-grandmother, again partly because of the age of the gift-giver; she had come to appreciate the gift because of a sense of duty to please an older family member. This sense of obligation about gifts that do not coincide with personal taste suggests a wish to signify the continuity of the relationship (Guy and Banim 2000) and an acceptance of familial obligation (Money 2007).

As well as clothing and jewellery being a material manifestation of family relationships, they are also used as friendship gifts too (Woodward 2007; Money 2007). A group of friends Ella, Mia, Ellen and Melissa (aged 8-9) all discussed various important pieces of jewellery that were symbolic of their friendship. So Mia described:

I've got a locket and me and my friend Ella, she's my best friend as well, and we have
BFF, sometimes it's BFF, BFF, Big Fat Friend, but we call it Best Friend Forever. So
there's a love heart and we wear necklaces and they clip together

Here friends had chosen necklaces that they could both wear that materialised their friendship quite literally in the clipping together of pieces of the overt symbol of love, the heart, and initials that can represent the whole idea of friendship ever-lasting or a personal joke about calling each other their fat friend (both girls are very slim). Using Finch's (2007) concept of the use of worn objects to 'display family', here was an example of girls using jewellery to display friendship to themselves and to a wider audience. Friendship bracelets were mentioned in two of the interviews; Millie described how she kept her friendship bracelet from her best friend on all the time, even to go to bed.

Melissa explained about friendship bracelets that one of her best friends Ella got for her:

Because she went to Africa and I went to Greece so we got them for all of our best
friends and, so I have one, oh no, it came off, this one from Ella came off because I
undid the knot so I could go in the shower because otherwise it kind of changes. And
then this one, it broke. Because all of them broke because it wasn't very, like it wasn't

like strong enough, so we've attached them to our pencil cases because they've like
broken so we just attached them to our pencil cases

Although these bracelets did not survive very long being worn, they still acted as a reminder of a friendship by being tied onto pencil cases that the girls used every day at school, thereby prolonging the possibility of 'displaying' (Finch 2007) friendship. Additionally these bracelets symbolised that they were thinking of one another whilst they were in different countries. Just as above it was seen that Leah's bag was partly special because her uncle bought it, but also it was purchased in another country, lending the aura of the exotic (Craik 1993). Clothes could also be mementoes of holidays (Money 2007), and for Anna a t-shirt from a family holiday abroad was bought specifically as a reminder, partially perhaps of the place, but also the memory of an important family time spent together.

6.6   Conclusion

This chapter has explored how through getting dressed, participants were able to experience their social and cultural positioning and orientate themselves to the world, both in terms of wider social, cultural expectations and also in relation to their family and friends. By examining the ways in which they talk about the interaction between clothes and their social sphere, much can be understood about the complexity and agency of childhood. Clothes and accessories are worn and kept for a plethora of reasons, including responding to social codes of dress for types of events, places and activities (Pilcher 2009), but also other factors normally associated with adult concerns such as pragmatics or culturally-ascribed notions of seasonal colours. Girls' dress both allows the experiencing and thinking through what it means to be particular kinds of person, but also the ability to activate diverse aspects of their identity; they were able to 'code-switch' between various localized identities (Gonzalez 2014). Therefore, depending on the context and the self that they wanted to create, the girls could be hyper-feminine for one occasion and wear habitual dress for another. Childhood identity was experienced as mutable and multiple through dress.

Sartorial items were also used to display relationships and allowed girls to explore who they were in relation to their family and friends. In studies focussing on object and adults, embodied artefacts are discussed as powerful repositories of memories (Stewart 1993; Smith-Windsor 2010) and symbols of life course transitions (Hockey *et al* 2013); young girls' relationship with their clothes was equally rich, expressive and symbolic. The key argument of this chapter was that dress provides a valuable lens through which to examine childhood, and indeed personhood and the relationship between social expectation and agency, and the biographical potential of our relationship with dress. The correlation between clothes, the body, age, temporal concerns and the evocative abilities of the materiality of cloth are explored further in the next chapter.

Chapter Seven - Girls' dressing: Feeling your age

7.1   Introduction

According to the discourses of commercialisation and sexualisation of childhood, growing up is now a fraught process for girls, and wearing certain fashionable clothes is particular problematic, potentially resulting in dire repercussions for the girls. As Chapter Five demonstrates, girls engage directly with these discourses of childhood, and are conscious of seeming to grow up too soon through their clothes, carefully negotiating the sexual/asexual boundary in their dressing. In Chapter Six it became clear that some items of dress, such as high heels, are worn only with consideration to context and are also seen as transitional objects marking the passage through childhood to adult femininity. This chapter examines the notion that ageing is a temporal and physical process that the girls go through, meaning that their relationship with their clothing is continuously changing.

Whilst Pilcher (2009) acknowledges that the relationship between children and dress is an embodied, material one, what my research considers is that because girls are continuously growing out of their clothes and shoes, this material aspect of items – feeling too tight and small – provides a constant sensual reminder to girls of the temporality of their bodies. Girls are constantly thinking of their age, bodily size and development because of their embodied experience of wearing clothing; the physical sensation of wearing clothes allows girls to explore what it is to be gendered and aged, in the past, present and in the future. This finding about materiality and embodied notions of the temporal is one my key original contributions to knowledge about girls' consumption of dress.

The chapter first explores girls' understanding of themselves as growing away from the past and distancing themselves from 'babyish' clothes that they used to wear. It then addresses the ways in which, the physical sensation of clothes that have become too tight, is expressed by girls in terms of regret and a loss of earlier identity. Next the chapter investigates some of the complexities around tightness that sometimes related to bodily changes, but was also understood in conjunction with perceptions of a gendered fit of cloth to body. The cultural construction of ideal age-specific cuts of clothes and fits of fabric in relation to the body is also addressed. Finally the chapter considers how girls project forward into the future through their clothing, yet simultaneously their clothes also act as material reminders of their current physical immaturity and smallness and therefore of their present temporal position.

7.2   'Now, in fashion, I'm more mature with it': growing up away from the past

Whilst there was much engagement with the 'growing up too soon' discourse, the girls did not always wish to seem critical of creating an older appearance; and as seen in the previous chapter,

there were girls who were happy to dress more grown up when the occasion allowed, such as Leah (aged 9) with her high-heeled shoes for dressing up at home. Leah particularly liked her pants that were unlike her friends' 'babyish' ones, she explained:

> Leah: Well I like showing them to my friends at school
> JB: So why do you like that so much?
> Leah: Oh because I like showing off what kind of pants to my friends because all of my other friends have like babyish ones, they say they have, like with flowers on
> …
> JB: So you're allowed to wear grown-up pants?
> Leah: Yeah
> JB: Yeah. So what makes them not babyish?
> Leah: Because like they've got quite nice patterns and with the white writing it says 'Love' on it

Here it was not the styling of the pants that made them babyish or grown-up, it was the patterning – the use of flowers was associated with young femininity. However, a print that includes geometric patterns of stripes of small squares in black, white and bright pink, and black hearts with the word 'love' super-imposed over the top was considered grown-up (Figure 13).

Figure 13: Leah's 'nice patterned' pants with 'Love' written on them

In Russell and Tyler's (2002) work consumer products that used flowers and hearts as part of their packaging were all deemed desirable by pre-teen girls, although the products they examined were cosmetics: this means that they were perhaps already related to an older femininity, and so floral designs were acceptable for that reason. In relation specifically to clothes, there is research that does discuss the rejection of flowery clothes by girls, as they get older (Gleeson and Frith 2004;

Blanchard 2006). However, Gleeson and Frith (2004) found that the dismissal of floral patterns was also accompanied by the repudiation of pink garments, because of pink's association with childish femininity, in favour of colours like black to create an alternative to normative, asexual femininity (Gleeson and Frith 2004: 105). In Chapter Five it became clear that girls in my study did associate pink with being a girlie girl but did not exclude the possibility of constructing a sexy, more mature identity whilst being girlie. In Focus Group 2 in particular, the wearing of bright pink and black together was seen as a fashionable hetero-sexualised combination of colour to wear (with all three in this combination of colours), just as seen in Leah's pants. There has been a recent shift in how pink has been used in popular culture (Koller 2008; Lazar 2009) where it has become a marker for postfeminist femininity and qualities such as 'fun, independence and confidence' (Lazar 2009: 3), and this reading is particularly enforced when the pink is combined with the use of black, to connote non-conformity.

Pilcher (2013) explains how girls may use clothing to 'age up', 'not necessarily to teenagehood or adulthood, but away from children younger than themselves' (Pilcher 2013: 93) and certainly Leah articulated the wish to distance herself from looking babyish. Similarly to Pilcher (2013), I found that when asking about being a girlie girl and mentioning Barbie dolls, Amy (aged 8) laughed 'eugh, they're for babies!'. Also in Focus Group 2 (aged 10-11) Debenhams was rejected as a clothing retailer because it 'can be a bit babyish dresses (sic)', which led me to wonder why they were not wearing dresses to the dress-down day. They responded to this with great gusto:

> Focus Group 2 (Aged 10-11)
>
> Lauren: No we don't, we don't.
> Georgia: No, the infants are dressed up.
> Lauren: Yeah like dressing up clothes, I wouldn't wear like down here ((points to knee length))
> Jessica: ((pointing out the window at a younger girl playing outside)) like this one over there
> Lauren: [I wouldn't wear dresses like this ((tugging at G's skirt to pull it down further)) that go down to your knees
> Georgia: [(   )
> JB: so why wouldn't you wear those kind of clothes?
> Jessica: because it wouldn't/
> Georgia: babyish and a bit cold
> Jessica: yeah bit babyish

All of these comments suggested that these pre-teen girls wanted to ensure that they were not associated with babies or infants and wished to distance themselves from dressing in ways considered babyish. This infantile femininity was associated with playing with dolls and wearing pretty floral patterns or long dresses that cover the body too much. Yet, unlike Pilcher's (2013) work, there was the odd moment when girls did explicitly state that it was to adulthood that they were aiming to age up. As mentioned in Chapter Six, Leah did articulate that she 'liked looking

grown up' (Focus Group 4). Also in Focus Group 3 Abigail (aged 8) said make-up was good because it 'makes you look more grown up'. However, as seen in the previous chapter with dressing up, looking grown up was contingent on context; Leah only dressed up at home or wore pants that couldn't generally be seen and, as Alice pointed out following Abigail's comment, they were wearing make-up because it was a school dress-down day.

Not only did girls wish to 'age up' away from others who dressed in younger styles, there was also a wish to also distance themselves from their younger selves. In Focus Group 2 when asked about whether they wore different clothes when they were younger there was the following exchange:

> Focus Group 2 (Aged 10-11)
>
> Lauren: yeah, yes very much I wore like/
> Georgia: I was very unfashionable when I was younger
> Lauren: yeah, I wore like baby stuff with ducks on
> Georgia: I used to look like a cowboy/ when I was younger
> Lauren: even when I was 3 years old
> Jessica: I didn't, I used to, my mum used to put me in dresses/with tights
> Lauren: I was really chubby
> Georgia: I have a very embarrassing picture of me on Facebook, I was wearing these cowboy boots, these really baggy huge jeans and this like grey jean jacket and I was sat there going like ((puts hands in the air and makes silly face with big open-mouth grin))/I look like a real cowboy

To be young was to be unfashionable and wear embarrassing or babyish clothes; for Georgia in particular that meant to be dressed in masculine, big, baggy jeans that made her look like a cowboy. These clothes, such as baggy jeans, were a reminder of past selves that they had left behind. In this thinking through the relationship between the materiality of clothes and their embodied selves, either through photographs or their memories of wearing particular clothes, they were able to understand the temporal flow of their life course (Hockey and James 2003: 206). It was through their constructed narrative of comparisons with the past that these girls came to know, and experience, that they were ageing.

Whilst Lauren, Georgia and Jessica distanced themselves from their earlier dressed identities and Leah from her friend's babyish clothes, Alice (aged 8) wished that her parents allowed her to have more freedom in her dress decisions. She showed me several photographs of odd socks, explaining that she loved wearing odd socks, but when I asked if her parents were odd sock people too she replied:

> Alice: To, my mum and dad don't really like, they always choose my clothes because if, I always, when I choose my clothes, they think it's all wrong
> JB: Mm hm. Right
> Alice: And it's really annoying

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JB: Really?
Alice: They have, they have, and it's like I'm a baby

Alice felt that through her parents' dislike of her clothing choices and insistence of choosing for her instead, they were treating her as too young for her age; Alice wanted to distance herself from an earlier age category, that of being a baby (Gleeson and Frith 2004; Konig 2008; Pilcher 2013). Alice's belief was that girls her age should be allowed to make their own decisions about what to wear and to create their own identity through dress; to not be able to do that was a source of annoyance. She wished to move away from the position of dependent child towards greater autonomy (Wærdahl 2005: 217). Her parents' objections did not relate to her choosing inappropriate age-grade clothing but that Alice's choices did not meet their notions of taste (Bourdieu 2010).

When talking in her interview about her mum not minding her wearing high heels, one of the oft-cited garments associated with older dressing, Millie (aged 8) said that:

> Well, sometimes she comments on my clothes, like 'that might not go together', so she's quite fussy with clothes (laughs). But, now, in fashion, I'm more mature with it and I normally put together stuff, which goes together, so it doesn't clash.

Millie was describing how her sartorial choices are now more 'mature'; she had gained the appropriate level of cultural capital (Bourdieu 2010) to be able to satisfy her mother's notion of tasteful combinations of clothing. Millie welcomed the fact that she had acquired a new set of skills and a physical competence that allowed her to experience ageing as a positive bodily memory (Hockey and James 2003: 214).

7.3   'Then it got too small for me': growing out as growing up

Clothes acted as frequent prompts to the girls about their age; the fit, feel and size of clothes upon the body served as regular reminders of their ever-growing bodies. As seen above, the present and their current age were often understood in relation to the past (Hockey and James 2003), but growing up and leaving the past behind was sometimes experienced negatively, with feelings of regret expressed. It was in the interviews particularly, which were focussed on the participants' own clothes, that six of the participants referred to garments or shoes that had become too small (Abigail, aged 9; Alice, aged 8; Emma, aged 10; Georgia, aged 11; Lauren, aged 10; Leah aged 9), as did Mia (aged 8) in Focus Group 3. It was a source of disappointment that favourite items became too small to wear, and items were referred to and described that could no longer be worn. For example, in response to a question about what she would wear with a special occasion dress she had photographed, Emma (aged 10) replied:

> erm, well I would wear some, I used to have some small little sparkly pumps, but, so I would wear them, but they're a bit too small now

Clearly the sparkly pumps were the ideal footwear to wear with the dress and had been worn together previously as a successful outfit. However, these shoes were no longer big enough for her growing feet and so there was a constant need to re-think outfits because of frequently changing body size, a constant re-making of identity. Craik (1993) explains that 'the body is constantly re-clothed and re-fashioned in accordance with changing arrangements of the self' (Craik 1993: 225) and children, because of their ever-growing bodies, physically feel that change on a continuous basis. I would argue that young girls experience this ongoing flexibility of identity even more concertedly than adults, because even clothes that have been relied on previously on a regular basis will eventually become too small. Therefore their choice of clothes with which to create their identity has to change frequently. As Cwerner (2001) suggests, the wardrobe, as a physical selection of clothes, is a resource bank from which people can create a variety of possible identities. Yet for girls that resource bank alters so regularly that their sense of identity was potentially even more mutable than for adults. Girls' position on their life course was always in question and temporality continuously felt through this growing out of clothes, the sensuous, material aspect of that growing out is discussed further below. For now I want to explore the emotional aspect of constantly changing body shape and therefore continually losing garments from your repertoire and having to leave past clothes behind.

Regret for the loss of a particular option to wear was sometimes quite keenly felt and the regret about growing out of certain clothes expressed very explicitly. Leah (aged 9) discussed a photograph of a close up of a favourite dress (Figure 14), which she said she loved because of the pattern of roses on it, she explained sadly, 'but it's unfortunately getting a bit too small now'.

Figure 14: Leah's rather blurred close-up image of her favourite dress

Banim and Guy (2001) and Bye and McKinney (2007) have addressed the changing of body size and clothes becoming too tight in relation to adult women who keep garments that no longer fit them. In Bye and McKinney's (2007) study some women kept the garments simply because they were so aesthetically pleasing that the women could continue to enjoy admiring their beauty (Bye and McKinney 2007: 495). That Leah only took a close up of the fabric of the dress suggests that it was the beauty of the patterned fabric that was one of the reasons why she likes it so much, and why it was still part of her favourite clothing despite becoming too small. However, in the cases of the adult women, many kept these garments in case they ever lost weight and could return to being the self that they had been through those clothes (Banim and Guy 2001). A return to that identity was something that was not possible for girls, as they will never be able to wear these clothes again. Instead, for girls, it was perhaps about holding on to the sense of the person that they have been. Leah described how 'I really like the patterns on it because I quite like the smell of roses, because I've got roses all over my wall, and look it's actually the same as that' (she pointed to a floral shape and tiny flowers on her duvet cover pictured underneath a swimming costume in Figure 15).

Figure 15: Leah's photograph with her duvet in, helping to materialise 'Leah, the rose lover'

The rose-patterned dress and her photographs of the dress and the duvet helped to materialise (Allen 2011) her notion of herself as a 'rose lover', whose room and clothes reflect that love. The dress was a reminder of a sense of self that she was reluctant to leave behind (Banim and Guy 2001). As seen in Chapter Six, clothes can act as a physical, sartorial biography, a material manifestation through which particular selves are or were created (Woodward 2007). Memory is crucial to knowing who we are (Hockey *et al* 2014) and memories and mementos, such as garments and footwear, are how we come to understand the temporal flow of the life course. Girls are building up a sense of who they have been and therefore who they may be now.

With clothes that were not or could not be part of the current wearable collection there was a period of transition from particular garments being active in identity making, to being moved out of the active bank of possible selections and then removed from the physical wardrobe space. Banim and Guy (2001) build on McCracken's (1986) concept of the divestment ritual to suggest this process is one that women have to go through in order to distance themselves from the clothes, before they can be disposed of. For young girls it might be more a pragmatic case of mothers (usually it was mothers discussed by the girls as being involved in clothing matters) having to find the time to go through the clothing collections with their daughters, working out periodically which garments no longer fit. Until then, as many of the girls discussed, they were in possession of favoured items that they had already grown out of or were in the process of becoming too tight.

Georgia's (aged 11) favourite outfit was so important to her that it was the only set of garments that she photographed, sometimes taking a picture of one of the elements, a couple of elements (Figure 16), or photographing all of the clothes and accessories together (Figure 17) but from different angles. Georgia also changed the location in which she photographs the clothes, sometimes in her own and room and sometimes in her sister's room. In Figure 16, she has deliberately taken the photograph in her sister's bedroom, where she positioned the t-shirt and hat next to a playboy bunny rug, so that the playboy bunny can easily be seen. When asked about the rug, she replied 'I only like the bunny (0.2), I don't like the meaning' and when I asked what the meaning was she responded that it was 'quite a rude meaning', and reiterated that she did not like the meaning and paused, at which point her obvious discomfort led me to change the subject. The exchange shows that Georgia clearly recognises that the playboy bunny symbol has some relation to sexuality but critiques the sexualised element; this sexual awareness yet need to express disapproval fits with the arguments about the negotiation of the good girl/bad girl binary explored in the Chapter Five.

Figure 16: Georgia's 'Party Like a Rock Star' T-shirt with sparkly, woollen trilby. Taken in her sister's bedroom.

Figure 17: Georgia's favourite outfit, photographed in her room

She was very animated in her discussion of this favourite outfit yet the skinny jeans and the hi-top shoes were on the cusp of being too small to be worn any more. As Georgia explained:

> the shoes are a bit small, they're really too small for me at the moment, but I still sometimes wear them cos they're cool but they're really small for me and the jeans are really short in the ankles and tight round the waist and I can't do them up.

The shoes are so 'cool' that Georgia was not yet ready to give them up, however she did recognise that they were too small and that the jeans were too short and tight. When I asked how she felt when wearing this outfit Georgia responded:

> well at the moment it feels really uncomfortable cos they're really short and tight but when I used to wear it I used to think I was like all cool and that and I'd walk around really proud of my outfit, just like 'look at me'!

This outfit used to fit on Georgia's body in a way that made her feel really good about herself, and she felt 'cool' and proud of her clothing choices; through these clothes, she created a fashionable identity that gave her an embodied sense of confidence and a desire to be noticed by others. In Guy and Banim's work (2000) they refer to adult women's favourite clothing as successfully bridging the gap between the self they wanted to be and the image they achieved (Guy and Banim 2000: 318); clearly Georgia's outfit achieved this successful projection of self and also the belief that it would be favourably received by others. It can also be argued that this relationship between the wearer and the meaning of the tactile, visual, material object of dress is part of reciprocal dialogue between wearer and garments (Sherlock 2014). We do not exist separately from the

material object of dress; we exist through them. This relationship was already shifting due to the growth of Georgia's body and the associated tightness of the clothes and footwear, the feedback from the clothes has changed and instead of confidence they create discomfort. As Hockey and James (2003) assert, time is an abstract concept, which is not easily grasped, yet we still feel 'its passage and pressure on a daily basis' (2003: 45). Girls were able to feel the passing of time on and through their bodies as the relationship between their clothes and bodies changed.

The 'interrelated temporal dimensions of the *past, present* and future' (Hockey *et al* 2014: 259. My emphasis) help us to think through who we are, and Hockey *et al* (2014) discuss how adults can do that thinking through wearing shoes. Here Georgia, and earlier Emma and Leah, described how thinking about and trying on shoes, and other clothes that have become too small, enabled the wearer to try to understand who they were in the present by orienting themselves in relation to who they had been in the past. Later on this chapter considers the future projections that girls make through their clothes, but for now I want to continue examining the idea that ageing is a relationship between body, self and society and that the process is a material and embodied one, experienced through the physical sensation of growing out of clothes.

In Focus Group 3 (aged 8-9 years) growing out of favourite pieces of clothing was discussed and a bodily performance of their tightness was demonstrated. When I asked what the girls would wear to the school disco, the following interaction between the girls and between the girls and their clothing took place:

> Focus Group 3 (Aged 8-9)
>
> Mia: I wear these ((lifts up her top to show off the whole of her shorts)), these are my favourite shorts ever
> Melissa: Mia your tummy is showing ((both laugh and Mia pulls her top down)).
> Mia: ((stands up to show off the shorts, tugging them down from her bottom as she stands up)) They're nearly too small for me and I was like, I'm not giving them away to any of my friends/ I'm giving them to charity
> Ellen: these are my best shorts ever ((also stands up to pull her shorts out from her bottom))

The shorts that Mia and Ellen were wearing were short, tight shorts in denim. Materially, the problem of little, fitted shorts in denim fabric, particularly ones that are becoming too small, was that they sit uncomfortably up around the crotch and ride up between the buttocks in a way which required the wearer to pull them down to be physically comfortable. Both Mia and Ellen performed this pulling down during this excerpt, but Mia especially pulled at her shorts a number of times throughout the focus group; in fact all girls wearing short denim shorts that stood up during the focus group also performed the same pulling motion. Fashionable short shorts provided a frequent unpleasant material sensation that reminded the wearers of their presence on the body and growing out of this item increased the tightness.

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For Mia these shorts are so beloved that she calls them her most favourite 'ever'; they have become such an integral part of her construction of her embodied identity that she can not conceive of handing them down to anyone she knows. Mia says that she can only bear to part with them if they are removed entirely from her social sphere. Despite the embodied performance of tightness, for Mia and Ellen these shorts have become habitual clothing, a style of clothing that was part of their everyday appearance, and have been worn so many times that they are not worn self-consciously (Woodward 2007). Even the physical motion of pulling the shorts out of the buttock cleft seemed to be performed without any self-consciousness. Woodward (2007: 137) argues that habitual clothes that are worn in a routine way allow people to feel secure and therefore to 'fit in' on particular social occasions. Despite the seeming physical irritation involved in wearing these shorts, there may be many reasons why they were still favoured. Denim shorts have a number of meanings that involve sets of contradictions: denim fabric has become associated with characteristics such as commonplace but fashionable, practical yet potentially sexual (Miller and Woodward 2012; Sassatelli 2011); these contradictions can be seen in girls' discussions and experiences of their shorts explored below.

7.4   *Fit and feel: materialising gender*

The particular styling of the denim shorts worn by many of the girls at Darton Primary, which were fitted, mid-thigh length shorts, were considered currently very fashionable (as discussed in Focus Group 6). Yet denim has become naturalised as being mundane and garments made out of denim have become ubiquitous (Candy 2005; Miller and Woodward 2012), as Elana (aged 8) said about her denim shorts, 'I like them because lots of people have them'. The notion of denim shorts as practical was outlined by Ella (aged 8) in her interview; when asked about why she was going to wear her denim shorts to the disco, she responded:

> Because I really like shorts, because I think, for discos, if you wear a skirt, if they're all really loose and stuff, if you jump up and down, they always do that (demonstrates an imaginary skirt rising up above the waist)) and stuff, so I don't like wearing skirts to discos. But I just like wearing shorts because they're nice and easy and you don't get too hot, you don't get too cold

Ella described the practicality of the shorts, in that they could be worn in any weather and their comfort, in terms of being 'nice and easy' to wear. Others referred to shorts as practical, especially compared to skirts or dresses, because as demonstrated by Ella herself here, the girls could play or dance without danger of their underwear being seen, a problem mentioned in several interviews and focus groups. Shorts, particularly denim ones, were often positioned as the opposite of sexualised; they cover the underwear, which conceals the genitals, with thick, protective fabric offering a sense of safety (a notion expressed by adults in relation to jeans in Sassatelli 2011).

Ella and Elana also explained how, whilst they knew that they would wear their denim shorts to the disco, they still needed to decide between several different tops. 'Easy' then could also be understood in another sense, indigo denim has become so ubiquitous that is has been naturalised as a fabric that can be worn with any other type or colour of fabric, or indeed by anyone regardless of their structural position (Miller and Woodward 2012). The choice of what to wear to the disco became easier as the shorts were thought to go with anything, it was only the top that needs to be determined. Cultural understandings shape the ways in which we experience cloth, so that a fabric's perceived properties varies between people and countries (Hebrok and Klepp 2014: 68). This cultural interpretation can be seen in the girls' assertion that the indigo colour of denim shorts means that they made an aesthetic match with every other colour or pattern. Differing personal perceptions become clear when jeans are discussed within Focus Group 3; Celia describes them as being worn on a hot day, whereas Ellen discusses wearing jeans only if it was cold (for differences of personal understanding discussed in relation to adults wearing denim see Miller and Woodward 2012).

At once mundane and easy to wear, little shorts could also be potentially sexualised, as this extract from Focus Group 6 shows:

Focus Group 6 (Aged 10-11)

Madison: Most of the girls, they just wear these stupid, tiny, little shorts and (   )
Katie: I wore shorts yesterday
Madison: Yeah I know, but the really, really short ones. Your ones come to about there. But I, I don't, they just want to show off to the boys, it's really frustrating
Katie: No, they don't
Cleo: They don't always
Madison: I think most of the time
Abbie: I don't necess- I don't, I like wearing shorts but not really, really, short ones, but I think it's. I don't know, I think it's sort of okay for other people (   )
Katie: Madison, can I just say something? At residential you had short shorts
Abbie: Yeah, you had short shorts
Anna: Yeah, they were really, really short things
Madison: Maybe they're too small for me. I don't/
Katie: No, no, no, we weren't (   )
Madison: I don't, my mum packed my things in, I didn't know, I just chucked them on

This exchange highlighted the complexity of reading off meaning from clothes, here in relation to short garments. Firstly Madison started by criticising girls who wear 'stupid tiny shorts' for 'showing off to the boys', suggesting that really short shorts are used by many girls for a hyper hetero-sexualised performance (Renold 2005).

Yet both Katie and Abbie then defended the wearing of shorts, by saying that they themselves wore them, and clearly resisted the idea that their motivation for wearing them could be

understood as sexual display (as Gleeson and Frith 2014 also found with older girls). Cleo, recognising that short shorts could be read in various ways, qualified the exchange by suggesting that whilst shorts may sometimes be interpreted as sexualised, they 'don't always' get worn with that intent. Cleo's comments intimated that, just as adult women do not always dress for an internalised male gaze and have a wide variety of reasons for wearing certain garments (Green 2001; Tseëlon 1995; Woodward 2007), girls may also recognise this flexibility of impetus in their dressing.

The tables were then turned on Madison who was accused by Katie, backed by Abbie and Anna, of wearing inappropriately sexualised clothing, 'really, really short things'. As can also be seen in Abbie's earlier explanation of her own shorts wearing, there was a supposed norm of a length of shorts against which these pairs are seen to be especially short (Wright 1992). Shorts, in their very name, already exist in opposition to the long trousers that they are seen to be a shortened form of; really short shorts expose more of the body underneath, accentuating the legs and thereby marking them for display (Wright 1992). However, Madison suggested that the reason her shorts were brief was because they were too small, in that she had begun to outgrow them, and then blames her mum for having packed her bag. Clearly there was yet again resistance to the idea of her own motivation for her sartorial choices being understood as sexual (Gleeson and Frith 2014), instead she 'just chucked them on' without a thought to their potential meaning. Nevertheless, this exchange also highlighted that, as seen above, out-growing garments was a continuous part of children's on-going relationship with their clothes. Decisions must be constantly made about which items still fit, as with Mia earlier, wishing that her favourite shorts were not getting too small for her.

Just as shorts are named as a clothing item in opposition to long trousers, fashion as a system has 'systematised our perceptions of the fit of clothing; what is the "right size" and the "correct fit"' (Wright 1992: 51) and so there now also exists a norm of a length of shorts against which short shorts are defined. The short shorts that so many of the girls wore are mass-produced to operate as a fashion garment defined by their very shortness. Although Abbie (aged 11) declared herself not to be 'very bothered with fashion too much', when asked about an outfit that she photographed which included shorts that she described as 'quite short', in response to whether it was a fashionable outfit replied 'yeah I think so'. Whereas when asked about whether any of her clothes were fashionable Emma responded that she didn't think they were as 'like, none of them are like, tiny, tiny shorts or anything that you see all the time'. Here Emma sees her clothes in contrast to ubiquitous, fashionable, 'tiny, tiny shorts'. Clearly then the fashionability of little shorts was understood in terms of their smallness. Moreover as their shortness can also be understood as

enabling sexual display of the body at the same time increased smallness and tightness happens as the girls' bodies grow.

The importance of the ways in which clothes fit on the body is recognised in relation to children in Pilcher's work (2013). She acknowledges children's allusions to their physical experiences of wearing clothing, and the sensations of texture and fit, in particular discussing one boy referring to the comfortableness of his trainers and another boy's reference to wearing fashionable clothing despite its being uncomfortable (Pilcher 2013). However, these are passing mentions in an article that seeks to cover a diverse range of motivations and understandings that children have about their clothes and clothing decisions, and therefore is necessarily brief. It is only in work examining adults and dress that a detailed analysis of people's discussion of the physical fit of their clothing and the sensation of fabric on the body can be found (Miller and Woodward 2012; Sherlock 2014; Woodward 2007). As seen above, in the ways in which people talk about dress there is a relationship between the tactile and the social, and there are a number of reasons to pay attention to the materiality of clothes and their interactions with the bodies of those wearing them. For example, 'material qualities of garments impact upon how the garments are able to externalize particular cultural categories of identities' (Woodward and Fisher 2014: 4), so a garment's fabric, fit and embellishments are part of what message about gender or sexuality it is thought to transmit (Woodward and Fisher 2014). In this thesis, the cultural category of age is also examined in relation to the physical, material presence of clothing.

Pilcher's (2013) work gives examples of children's discussion of their physical experiences of the relationship between material and the body, in their use of the words comfortable and uncomfortable, but does not examine these concepts further. In my research I also found many references to clothes being described as comfy or comfortable (Abigail, Alice, Bethany, Caitlin, Ella, Emma, Lauren, Leah, Poppy, Sara, Shannon, Focus Group 3, Focus Group 4) or uncomfortable (Abbie, Alice, Georgia, Lucie, Shannon) as many of the extracts above show. These references to comfort and discomfort need to be examined because, in the work of researchers addressing adults and dress, comfort/discomfort were seen to have a social constituent (Holliday 2001; Woodward 2007; Miller and Woodward 2012). For adults comfort/discomfort has multiple meanings: referring to the immediate physical sensation of clothes on the body, a fit between the imagined self and the externally visible body, and the relationship between the self and the social realm, or that of fitting into a particular situation (Holliday 2001; Woodward 2007; Miller and Woodward 2012). Furthermore, even when comfort was discussed in terms of the physical properties of the textile, there was still a social and cultural element (Miller and Woodward 2012), for example, the comfort or rightness of the feel of the fabric on the body was

not about the intrinsic qualities of the fabric, but the cultural associations and designations similar to those discussed in relation to denim above (Miller and Woodward 2012: 75).

The girls' use of 'comfortable' was similarly diverse – Emma took a photo of her 'onesie' made of fluffy, thick fabric that she described as wearing 'more in the winter or when I'm just like really cold, because it covers everything, so sometimes I'll just wear it when I'm really cold, even over my normal clothes or my pyjamas'. She went on to describe how she liked wearing it and 'it's just really comfy'. When I suggested that onesies were fashionable, she responded, 'Well I don't really take it into account that they're fashionable at the time, it's just they look quite comfy and cosy'. Comfort and cosiness can be seen as partly about a physical sensation of warmth, and these properties are seen as the antithesis of being fashionable, yet it was also something about the appearance of the garment's fluffy fabric and all-in-one construction that made it associated with comfort and cosiness. The notion of comfort can be seen to traverse both the feel and the look of clothing; materiality is bound up with social and cultural expectations of cloth (Miller and Woodward 2012).

Whilst in Georgia's discussion of her jeans and shoes that she was growing out of, these items were deemed uncomfortable in their tightness, at the same time she described the top that went with them as perfect in its fit:

> JB: yeah, so what is perfect fit?
> Georgia: like, it's tight but comfortable

So although uncomfortable and tight might be sensations or associations attached to certain garments, the seemingly oppositional pairing of comfort with tightness was also made. That tightness shifts from being a negative attribute of clothing to a positive one suggests that, like comfort, it was not about a fixed meaning of the physical fit of clothes or a fixed relationship between body and cloth. Instead tightness also has a socially and culturally constructed meaning that arises through the dynamic between fabric and wearer (Sherlock 2014), dependent on social milieu and, I will go on to argue, fashionability, gender and age.

During the time of my study skinny jeans were fashionable for girls (just as in Sassatelli 2011's study with adults); skinny jeans are form-fitting from the waist all the way down to the ankle. In addition to the usual cotton, the synthetic fibre elastane is added to the weave of modern skinny jeans, which gives stretch, allowing them to be pulled on more easily and meaning they remain snug to the body whilst being worn. Figure-hugging garments that reveal the shape of the body are distinctly gendered; clothes designed to fit the body closely are associated with femininity (Entwistle 2000; Wilson 2005; Klepp and Storm-Mathieson 2005). This gendering of tightness

was understood by girls, as shown in the extended exchange below from Shannon's (aged 8) interview. When asked about the fit of one of her favourite t-shirts she replied:

> Shannon: Baggy, very baggy. It's big round here
> JB: And do you like baggy clothes?
> Shannon: Mum tells me to wear tight jeans and tight t-shirts and tight hairstyles!
> JB: Why do you think she wants you to wear tight things?
> Shannon: She wants me to look sensible
> JB: Right, but you don't want to look sensible?
> Shannon: No
> JB: So what do you want to look like?
> Shannon: Like usually cool girls
> JB: You want to look like a usually cool girl?
> Shannon: Yeah!
> JB: And what does a usually cool girl look like?
> Shannon: Like boys. But not actually face, hands, legs, I'm not going to have a hairy chest. But not all that stuff, only the clothes like boys
> JB: So why do you think wearing boys' clothes is cool?
> Shannon: Because you can actually do stuff, they're flexible, they stretch, and you know those trousers? When I go to gym in them you can actually do everything, you can do the splits – but I can't do the splits. I can put my legs around my neck
> JB: But if you could do the splits you would be able to do them in those?
> Shannon: Yes
> JB: Okay, so what is it about girls' clothes that means you can't do those sorts of things?
> Shannon: You have to wear skirts, tight stuff

In Chapter Five it was noted that Shannon referred to herself as a tomboy, here she was describing how she likes to wear baggy clothes, which made her look like a 'usually cool girl'. These baggy, flexible, stretchy clothes were equated to wearing boys' clothes that allowed freedom of movement. Shannon positions the tight, 'sensible', girls' clothes that her mother wanted her to wear directly in opposition to these baggy, boys' clothes; thereby distancing herself from femininity. Femininity was clearly understood as involving wearing tight clothing that felt restrictive on the body. The materiality of clothing and the fit to the body is therefore socially and culturally constructed (Miller and Woodward 2012; Wright 1992).

Melissa also read fit and fabric as gendered as, when asked why she liked her skinny jeans, she responded:

> I think it's just got like trend (sic) or something. And then my brother wears chinos which I think all the boys think have trend but I think all the girls think skinny jeans have trend

Again there was the link between masculinity and baggy, chino trousers and the feminisation of tight-fitting jeans, but also the recognition that they are highly fashionable for girls. Notions of the fit of clothes are both socially and culturally constructed and, as also seen in Shannon's comments, work in terms of oppositions, here between masculinity and femininity (Craik 1993; Entwistle 2000; Wilson 2005). A 'feminine' fit was only understood in relation to a 'masculine' one: an idea that girls are clearly attentive to.

7.5   Orienting yourself temporally to age through fit: 'now' as a dialectic between past and present

However, tight, figure-hugging clothes were not just associated with femininity in opposition to masculinity; they were also associated with a particular aged notion of femininity. As Hockey and James (2003) argue, discourses of sex and gender intersect with age in different ways and it is through these restrictions about choice and activities that children come to know that they are ageing (Hockey and James 2003: 45). As seen in the previous chapter, there are various types of clothes, footwear and beauty practices that are associated with older, hyper-feminine, sexualised femininities such as high-heels, short skirts, strapless dresses and make-up. Both clothes that show of lots of skin and/or tight, form-fitting clothes are associated with teenage fashionability and sexy dressing (Abbott and Sapsford 2003; Klepp and Storm-Mathieson 2005; Gleeson and Frith 2004, Rysst 2010). However, for pre-teen girls, most of these clothes were worn only for special occasions, when hyper-femininity was encouraged (as shown in Chapter Six and in Jackson *et al* 2013; Pilcher 2013; Renold 2005;). Skinny jeans were certainly described by Emma (aged 10) to be part of this special occasion dressing, as in her interview when she showed me a photograph of her skinny jeans she said:

> The jeans, erm, I kind of like them, but I will normally only wear them on occasions. So like when you're going out for a meal or something because they're quite posh almost, because of the way that they're really tight and like really patterned in that way. I kind of find them for occasions.

As shown in the previous chapter, girls understood that for special events they were expected to dress in highly gendered ways and here Emma was expressing the notion that dressing up in a hyper-feminine way can be done through tight, patterned jeans. When Emma goes on to describe these jeans as 'comfy because they are quite tight' there was a connection being made, not necessarily with comfy as simply a sensation of the clothing, but with appropriateness of tight clothing on such occasions. To construct a sexualised identity for particular events was to feel emotionally and physically comfortable in that particular social context; therefore there was a fit between the dressed self and the social milieu (Woodward 2007).

Yet, despite the association of skinny jeans with older sexualities, skinny jeans were photographed and discussed, individually or in the Focus Groups, by many girls of all ages (Abbie, aged 11; Caitlin, aged 11; Ella, 9; Georgia, aged 11; Jessica, aged 11; Lauren, aged 10; Lucie, 9; Melissa, aged 8; Focus Group 2, aged 8-9; and Focus Group 4, aged 8-9). Skinny jeans were worn much more widely than on special occasions, such as for 'casual' occasions (Abbie, aged 11) or to ride a bike (Lauren, aged 10) and were owned in various colours (Melissa, aged 8; Ella, 9; Lucie, 9). Skinny jeans were understood, again in terms of oppositions, as Lucie explained when I asked why she liked skinny jeans, 'They're not baggy and I don't like baggy jeans'. In this example skinny jeans were simply appreciated in terms of what they are not; skinny jeans were

not baggy ones. Interpretation of the physical form and the experience of fit on the body are shaped by the garment's positioning in relation to another form (Wright 1992). As seen earlier in this chapter, girls recognised that there was also a relationship between gender and age with regard to the wearing of baggy clothes. For girls there was an association between being a 'baby' or infant and wearing clothes that were not form-fitting. Once again baggy was understood in opposition to tight, and as a differentiating feature between the past and the present; these oppositions are made explicitly clear in the discussion below:

<u>Focus Group 4 (Aged 8-9 years)</u>

Lucie: I've changed, my fashions quite changed cos when I was little I used to like love jeans that weren't tight
JB: Yeah?
Lucie: I used to hate jeans that were tight and now I do
JB: So why do you all like tight jeans?
Ella: because I/
Leah: do you mean skinny jeans?
Millie: yeah
Sara: [yeah
Ella: because with baggy jeans they're just baggy ((shaking hands)) and just make your legs look massive
Sara: yeah ((also shaking hands out))
Leah: (   )
Ella: they just make me feel [they make me feel comfy
Millie: [they make me feel pretty
Sara: they make me feel slim cos my thighs are really fat
Ella: yeah when I sit down they are ((Lucie and Leah look down at their thighs and feel them))
Sara: and if they're baggy they make me look even fatter than when I wear skinny jeans

Baggy clothing was associated with being younger, as Lucie describes how when she was little she loved baggy jeans. Loose jeans were worn when they were too young to care about their 'fat' thighs and narrow-leg jeans were hated at that earlier age. However, figure-hugging jeans were worn now they are older and care about looking slim and pretty. Skinny jeans were thought to make the girls look more trim, as opposed to the baggy jeans, which made them look 'massive'. These girls are exploring how, at their age, it was important to look heterosexually attractive, via exposure of their bodies through form-fitting clothes. Once again 'comfy' was not about the intrinsic qualities of the cloth or the material sensation on the body but about fitting with aged cultural norms of fashionability, femininity and sexuality (Miller and Woodward 2012). With regard to age, what becomes clear was that it was not just through memories of the past that girls come to understand their ageing but an on-going relationship between past and present; we know ourselves because of our ability to compare ourselves with the past. We are a conjunction of our past, present and future identities (Cody 2012: 51). Girls' dressing expressed, 'simultaneity of temporality' (Cody 2012: 51) of their past and present selves.

Girls' understanding of themselves then was informed by continuous juxtapositions of past and present, younger and older, often via social, cultural and material constructions of baggy and tight. But also there was also discussion of the similar oppositions of flowy and tight. Ella (aged 9) described why she liked a particular top,

> I like that it's, it's just all about me, really, because I like pink, I like bows, and it's a t-shirt, it's not a vest, and it's just nice and (.) It's flowy. It's not all tight and stuff.

Here flowy was seen as a positive material fit and works in contrast to what it was not, it was not tight. When asked why she liked flowy t-shirts, Ella's response was:

> Well, they're really pretty, because (.) And I like it when you wear them with shorts because then (.) I don't really like wearing them with skirts that much because then skirts are flowy and tops are flowy, or flowy tops are, and then they just look a bit weird sometimes. But I like flowy tops because they're just quite different to normal straight tops.

Again a flowy top was understood in terms of difference from 'normal, straight tops'. However, flowy as a type of materiality was itself worn, not with something similar such as another flowy skirt but in conjunction with shorts. As Ella described later, these shorts are tight, denim, short shorts as discussed in the previous section. Tight, figure-hugging fabric was worn with loose, flowing fabric, suggesting careful balancing back and forth between revealing and concealing the body, which feels appropriate on girls' bodies. As Jackson *et al* (2013) argue, the careful negotiation of body-exposing clothing, such as the earlier examples of leggings or shorts under short skirts, or here the wearing of something loose with something tight, was a way of managing the good girl/bad girl binary.

These examples of girls' dressing also suggested that they were balancing on the boundaries, moving from child to teen not in a straightforward trajectory but in a way that oscillated between past and present (Cody 2012). Cody (2012) uses the concept of the liminal to examine the idea that girls of this age, 'tweens', are in a process of mid-transition in a rite of passage from child to teenager (Cody 2012: 46). How dress might assist people through a liminal stage is addressed in Friese (2001), in which the wedding dress is examined as a ritual artefact. This ritual artefact helped women to think, and to bodily explore, their way through various stages of the transition process from single woman to married woman, particularly the liminal stage of 'bride-to-be'. Similarly, the ways in which girls are creating identities through dress, covering yet revealing their bodies, was part of negotiating bodily and materially the liminal space between childhood and teenhood.

7.6 *'When you get older, that looks good': future possibilities, present realities*
It was clear then that girls explored who they were through a continued dynamic between past and present, which was felt and understood through the material and embodied relationship between

their clothes and their bodies. However, as cited earlier it is the 'interrelated temporal dimensions of the past, present and *future* (my emphasis)' (Hockey *et al* 2014: 259) that helps us to think through who we are. This section examines how girls projected forward into the future through their clothing, whilst simultaneously their clothes acted as bodily reminders of their current immaturity or smallness and therefore of their present temporal position.

Lucie (aged 9) referred to the past, present and future as she discussed a crop top that was one of her favourite pieces of clothing (Figure 18):

> Lucie: That's my pretend crop, well it's a crop top for next year and they're my pants.
> JB: Right. So?
> Lucie: They're from Primark and they're from Primark
> ….
> JB: Yeah. And so the crop top you said is?
> Lucie: It's quite comfortable and I wear it at night sometimes when I, yeah
> JB: But you said it's for next year?
> Lucie: Yeah, I wear it to bed. I used to wear it to school but I don't anymore but it's for next year if I start needing to wear them

Figure 18: Lucie's 'pretend' crop top and pants

Lucie was explaining that the top was a 'pretend' crop top: by pretend she means that the crop top was not meant to be for her current age but for playing with an older identity and 'ageing up' at home (Pilcher 2009 discusses this home play in relation to high heels). Lucie used to wear her crop top to school but now only wears this item of clothing, associated with older girls, to bed, yet

still wanted to take a photograph of it. She acknowledged that it was something that she might only 'need' next year, as she anticipated needing clothing to cover and support the breasts she does not yet have. Here there was a projecting into and an anticipating of the future through wearing clothing, yet simultaneously the crop top also reminded Lucie of her current bodily state. As Hockey and James (2003) argue, it is a 'conjoining of our past and our projected selves which produces our current, age-based identity' (Hockey and James 2003: 203). That sense of identity was constructed here through the relationship between the clothing and the body, which enables a thinking through of the past, present and future.

Developing Friese's (2001) notion of the wedding dress as ritual artefact, the crop top can be interpreted, as is a ritual artefact or sacred object, allowing girls to experiment with their future role as teens. Vincent's (2003) work on dress discusses the idea of clothing providing a way of thinking about and undergoing the process of maturation, and refers to the AA cup 'training' bra as not for support of breasts but as one of the ways in which femaleness is created. Bras are a way of marking bodily transition and facilitating the body moving from one state to another (Vincent 2003), from child to teen, from asexual to potentially sexual. The significance of the crop top was also discussed in Focus Group 3:

Focus Group 3 (Aged 8-9)

Ellen: It's like a bra, but [like, for children
Abigail: [it's for kids. And it's flat
Melissa: It's just basically half of the shirt and then it's around
JB: Right, okay
Mia: But it's like tighter than a vest
JB: So most, do most of you wear crop tops?
Ellen: We're starting to wear them in Year 5. Not yet
Mia: Because I have=
Melissa: [I have
Mia: =I've got loads but I'm going to wear them in Year 5 because that's/
Alice: Because will they be too big for you?
Mia: No
Chloe: [Because.
Ellen: [Because I do.
JB: Why are you too young to wear them now, do you think?
Mia: Because we're (   )
Abigail: Because we're not allowed
Mia: No, it's not that we're not allowed. I don't think we really need them
Ellen: [I don't think we really need them
Mia: I don't need them now. I don't like, um (0.1) when you start ((all laughing)) growing then you need them ((laughing))
JB: Ah, to hold bits in?
Mia: yeah ((laughing))
Ellen: yeah ((laughing))
((all laughing))

Ellen and Abigail explained that the crop top was a version of a bra that was both made for children, and yet simultaneously associated with an older childhood identity. The girls suggested that in the future, such as the next age class, the crop top would be appropriate for them to wear. Girls were socially constructing notions of chronological age, bodily development and age-appropriate dress. Their construction of the ideal, older age at which their breasts will have developed enough to warrant a crop top was again a reminder of their current physical lack, a body that doesn't yet 'need' to wear this garment. Girls were projecting an aged trajectory, whilst this future imagined identity informed their current perception of their embodied selves.

Wærdahl (2005) refers to the concept of 'anticipatory socialization' to explore the ways in which children's activities and consumption as social practices allows them to orient themselves to the future. One of the ways in which the future is anticipated, identified in Wærdahl's (2005) research, is through alienation from your current age group. This alienation was seen in an early section of this chapter, with girls not wanting to wear childish clothes any more and desiring to be treated in a more adult way. Another way to prepare for an older age trajectory is to have knowledge about physical changes that will happen and also about what goods might offer symbolic and social capital (Wærdahl 2005: 218), such as the development of breasts and the wearing of a crop top. The concept of anticipatory socialization can be critiqued in terms of the developmentalist implications inherent in the term socialization, against which Cook and Kaiser (2004) propose the alternative theorisation of anticipatory enculturation to suggest a more dynamic relationship between girls, the fashion market and popular culture. I would add, in line with Hockey *et al* (2014), that the temporal dimension to the embodied and material relationship girls have with dress demonstrates that the life course trajectory was also not simply experienced as a one way journey, but oscillates between past, present and future. Knowing about crop tops or having a crop top to wear in their home facilitates girls anticipating the future, whilst simultaneously gaining awareness of their present embodied state, and recognising that their current self will soon be in the past.

7.7   Conclusion

Girls' engagements through dress with biological, social, and cultural notions of age and ageing are manifold, and traverse the discursive, temporal, material, embodied and experiential. Firstly, this chapter discussed how girls distanced themselves from the past through their disassociation with clothes deemed babyish in their fit. Girls used clothes to age up away from others younger or less mature than themselves but also to distance themselves from their own pasts. Secondly, the chapter explored how the fit and feel of clothing acted as material prompts that their bodies were undergoing physical changes. Growing out of clothes was sometimes experienced negatively, so that what was once integral to the constitution of the self is then felt as a loss of self-identity.

However, the tightness of clothing might also be experienced and constructed by turns as reassuring in its covering of the body, habitual through constant wear and fashionability, yet potentially sexual.

This chapter considered the ways in which materiality and fit of clothes have socially and culturally constructed meanings that arise through the dynamic between fabric and wearer (Sherlock 2014), dependent on social milieu, fashionability, gender and age. Even the physical sensations involved in wearing clothes are not static and the feel of fabric on the body is understood in terms of a dialectical relationship between tight and baggy/flowy, femininity and masculinity, sexual and asexual. Materiality enables girls to understand the temporal flow of their life course and next the chapter examined the ways in which the present was always understood in relation to dress in the past. In compromises between covering yet revealing their bodies, girls create identities through dress that are part of negotiating bodily and materially the liminal space between childhood and teenhood. Clothes are also a way for girls to think through and explore future possibilities of bodily change and ageing.

The key finding of this chapter is that through clothing girls both explored aged expectations but also experienced their own ageing. Clothes may act as transitional objects to a future identity, or may serve as mementoes of a past self. It is both through future projections and reminders of the past that girls come to know their present, embodied, dressed selves. This finding leads to the possibility of considering how we might all come to know ourselves located in time and on our life course, through our embodied, material relationship with dress.

Chapter Eight - Conclusion

8.1 Introduction

During the twenty-first century numerous government reviews, popular media articles, and parenting advice books and websites have expressed apprehension about young girls, particularly those of pre-teen or tween-age and a suggested a loss of childhood innocence through dress. This thesis has shown that the anxiety expressed is explicitly about pre-teen or tween-age girls and implicitly about middle-class, white girls. The assumptions made by the concerned parties is that the wearing of fashionable clothes has direct effects upon girls, of sexualisation and negative body image, possibly resulting in early sexual activity and making them vulnerable to paedophilic abuse. The younger the girls, the more heinous the marketing of adult fashion to them is judged, and the more likely they are thought both to be unable to resist the call to consume and also to suffer the resultant consequences. The outcome of these expressions of concern about girls' fashion consumption has been that recommendations have been made to clothing retailers to consider more carefully the clothes that they target at this age market and suggestions to designers of children's clothes to alter their designs. Through these measures there has been an attempt to allay adult anxiety about young girls' clothes.

This thesis took as its starting point that we have almost no knowledge about girls' own understandings of these clothes and what the relationship is between fashionable dress and girls' embodied behaviour (Pilcher 2013). In order to understand whether, and in what ways, interventions should be made to ensure girls' well being, we need to know what the correlation is between certain designs of garments and the ways in which those items are worn and understood. As a result, this research studied the clothing consumption of girls at two different age classes, as defined by primary schooling, 8 to 9 and 10 to 11-years-old, to examine the uses girls put fashionable clothes to. The key research questions were - how do white, middle-class girls of 8 to 9 and 10 to 11-years-old understand both the material garments that they choose to put on their bodies, as well as discourses of fashion, and make sense of these meanings on and through their bodies? What part does fashion play in their understanding of personhood and in particular the interconnection of the cultural categories of fashion, gender, age, class, race and sexuality? What might the study of young girls and fashionable clothes tell us about the creation and negotiation of contemporary young feminine identities?

In order to research these questions this study draws on original work conducted with young female participants, exploring both their interactions and negotiations with each other about fashion and dressed behaviour, and also their own individual responses to dressing and choosing clothes.

First this chapter responds to each of the research questions in turn, demonstrating that fashionable dress proves a really fruitful lens through which to investigate girls' experiences of childhood and suggests the complex ways in which girls create themselves as aged, gendered, raced persons through their clothed bodies. The chapter then lays out the key contribution to knowledge that this thesis makes in exploring the temporal and embodied relationship between the materiality of dress and girls' constructions of identity. I highlight the importance of this study more widely in moving on how we think about ageing, temporality and dress.

The chapter then considers some of the limitations of the study and suggests various further avenues for research. Finally this chapter goes on to propose how the research here moves the debate about girls' fashion consumption forward and what questions it poses in relation to what can be done to help girls critique the expectations of their gendered, aged performance. I end by speculating about what could be done to assist girls with the difficult task of growing up and constructing subjectivities in and through dress.

8.2 *How do white, middle-class girls of 8 to 9 and 10 to 11-years-old, understand both the material garments that they choose to put on their bodies, as well as discourses of fashion, and make sense of these meanings on and through their bodies?*

Popular concern about young girls and fashion suggests that fashion is a discourse that seeks to impose a sexualised look upon girls, pressuring them to keep with trends, and that girls seek to emulate celebrity role models' fashionable dress. My research points to the ways in which girls engage with fashion, brand consumption and popular culture but highlights that their responses also complicate any straightforward reading of their fashion consumption. The girls who participated in this study were, for the most part, interested in fashion and were aware of a range of fashion retailers and brands (Boden 2004), although for some of the younger girls that knowledge was more patchy (see Chapter Five). Many girls enjoyed shopping trips and the buying of new clothes, yet what has been insufficiently explored in other research was that there was acknowledgement that consuming could not be unfettered and that financial concerns might prove a restriction in what clothes could be bought. This grasp of monetary matters, even by the younger cohort, demonstrates an awareness of what might be considered 'adult' issues that goes beyond the expectations of the media commentators.

In relation to the influence of popular culture, girls were interested in television programmes and popular music, and were aware of what pop singers were wearing (Boden 2006). However, only the older girls discussed these clothes in any detail and recognised that they were not necessarily appropriate for them to wear and critiqued the idea that celebrities' clothes could be worn in the girls' own daily lives. Many girls of all ages did feel the need to keep up with fashion, and as Bartky (1989) and Bordo (1993) suggest in relation to adult women, this compulsion was

sometimes experienced negatively. However, these girls did not just accept fashionable dictates unknowingly and were reflexive in their fashion consumption (in ways normally associated with adults such as in Giddens 1991). Indeed, the older girls in particular, negotiated what was in fashion between them (as seen in relation to adults in Woodward 2007) and fashion trends were sometimes a matter of disagreement. Girls also sought to play with fashion (Wilson 2005) and both age classes drew on the language of self-expression to address the idea that they might create a personalised look.

Concurrently though, girls also felt the pressure to maintain appearances in terms of gendered, classed, hetero-sexualised, aged expectations about how to look as a feminine child (Hey 1997; Renold 2005; Walkerdine 1997). Whilst popular concern focuses on the commercialised demands of fashion, there is little, if any, acknowledgment of the societal norms that insist on a certain performance of femininity from young girls. Yet girls of both age classes are aware of these norms and construct their identity accordingly, but as Boden *et al* (2004) and Pilcher (2013) posit, context is important, and as noted in Chapter Six, this hyper-femininity is reserved for special occasions such as weddings and school discos. At these adult-driven events, adults expected and even encouraged feminine displays, and families bought special dresses and high heels for girls, helped with the application of make-up and the styling of hair.

Girls learnt that hetero-sexualised performances of femininity are socially encouraged within certain scenarios; becoming fashionable often gained the approval of friends, peers and family members, and was sometimes explicitly for the male gaze. Nevertheless, my work confirms that girls were extremely conscious of the importance of negotiating their hyper-feminine, sexualised performance in reflexive and vigilant ways; 'showing' the body but not 'showing too much', carefully traversing the bad girl/good girl binary (Renold 2005; Jackson *et al* 2013). However, not all fashionability was about a male gaze; many girls enjoyed the creation of a fashionable, feminine self that was also seen as trend-setting and creative, an idea only previously acknowledged in discussion about women or older girls (McRobbie 1994; Wilson 2005). Clothing and its relationship with identity is not fixed, and in work with adult women, Woodward (2007) describes how women brought themselves into being through certain garments that constructed the perfect fit between outer appearance and inner subjectivity. My research is amongst the first to demonstrate how that perfect relationship, between the embodied experience and the materiality of a particular outfit, sometimes enabled the constitution of the ideal self for girls too (Chapter Seven).

Not all girls wanted to construct a feminine identity and there were those who performed the alternative subjectivity of tomboy. These girls spurned many of the attributes associated with

hyper-femininity and instead enacted masculine behaviour and dressed in non-feminine ways. Yet, as Reay (2001) has also shown, whilst this transgressive subject position offers an alternative identity construction, it simultaneously reinforces the gender binary by denigrating femininity and suggesting that masculinity is superior. However, an important finding that my thesis reveals is that in the actual practice of dressing, tomboy is played out as a negotiation between masculine and feminine elements. Crucially my research also shows that both girlie girls and tomboys of both age classes recognised that gender was a construct, one that might be taken up at will, in different forms for different occasions. One could be a bit tomboy or sometimes tomboy, or be a girlie girl but not always perform hyper-femininity for every occasion. However, as Russell and Tyler (2002) also show, girls lacked the critical tools with which to critique patriarchal gendered expectations and there was an acceptance that there was an ideal way in which to perform femininity through dress.

8.3   *What part does fashion play in their understanding of personhood and in particular the interconnection of the cultural categories of fashion, gender, age, class, race and sexuality?*

In answer to my first research question I have explored how girls understand fashion and the ways in which they navigate notions of gender and sexuality through fashion. In response to the second question, this section addresses how the girls' productions of self, highlighted how gender and sexuality are crosscut with their negotiations of age, class and race.

Whilst Pilcher (2013) has discussed how girls are conscious of discourses of childhood, such as the 'growing up too soon' discourse. My research examined the ways in which girls explicitly engaged with this discourse, taking up notions of disapproval of sexualised dress and exploring both the supposed causes and negative effects of such sexualisation, as expressed in popular debate. Both age classes of girls understood the concept of sexual generationing (Renold 2005) and postulated that it was either in the next age class or in the next age grade, that it might be considered more appropriate for them to dress in more hyper-feminine ways.

Chapters Five, Six and Seven build on the research of others (Jackson *et al* 2013; Hey 1997; Renold 2005) in arguing that girls undertake a process of Othering, whereby overly sexual display is located as Other, the bad girl, who shows 'too much'. The language and examples that they drew upon to discuss hyper-feminine, sexual display were classed and raced, as they drew on middle-class notions of good taste (Skeggs 1997: 2004). In their engagement with popular culture and their use of classed language, the Other was pathologised as white and working class (Francombe-Webb and Silk 2015; Jackson *et al* 2013; Renold 2005). However, in application to real life examples, what has been under-explored previously is the way in which Othering was

applied to any girl whose dressing was believed to transgress age grade boundaries of hyper-feminine display.

In addition to being classed and raced, their language with which to discuss sexuality and sexiness was limited. Whilst at one school there was overt discussion of dressing for a heterosexual male gaze, and one explicit use of the word 'tart' and one of 'tarty', the majority of debate around dressing for sexual display used coded language. Again, many of these coded terms are rooted in middle-class sensibilities and drew on the language of excess and showiness, linked to working-class femininity, from which the girls distanced themselves. Other language used was limited to pejorative terms such as 'weird' or 'not cool', to express the ways in which emphasised femininity is in opposition to the norm. Girls' sense of agency is partial and negotiated through language, as adults seek to protect them from 'adult knowledge' about sexuality, thereby limiting girls' ability to critique their own gendered, hetero-sexualised, aged positioning. This confirms a feminist concern (Jackson *et al* 2013) that girls lack the tools with which to critique the double bind that they are in, the need to police their own and other's dressed performances, so that they conform to appropriate, hetero-sexualised, femininity, but simultaneously are not excessively sexual. However, girls were aware of the need to navigate the boundary between good girl/bad girl carefully through their own dress practices. The girls in this study also knew that hyper-feminine appearance is condoned and positively encouraged in certain adult-constructed social scenarios. This knowledge about social and culturally created norms of dress for particular events and seasonal expectations of materiality shaped the types of clothes the girls wore in various milieux (Pilcher 2009; 2013).

8.4 *What might the study of young girls and fashionable clothes tell us about the creation and negotiation of contemporary young feminine identities?*

As seen above, girls negotiate gender, sexuality, race and class through their clothing. Building on Pilcher's (2013) work and that about code-switching (Gonzalez 2014; Holland 2012), this thesis explored the fact that girls were able to constitute multiple identities through clothing. They moved through various identities depending on normative expectations for that scenario and their own sense of self, so that whilst a particular event with a specific dress code might result in the creation of a hyper-feminine self, that did not preclude the formation of an every-day self through habitually worn clothing.

What has been little captured in previous research with children is the fluidity with which girls are able to create multiple identities. However, in my thesis I establish that this fluidity of subjectivity has great significance in girls' lives; the wearing of different clothes in various social scenarios enabled girls to think through themselves as certain types of people, to try on various sorts of

identities (as adults do in Hockey *et al* 2013 and Sherlock 2014). All of this identity work demonstrates both the complexity and agency of girls in childhood; girls were able to negotiate an individualised self within socially and culturally bound constraints. Sartorial choices enable ways of exploring identity, through clothes that allow you to do certain activities or to be a certain type of person.

Materiality is a significant area in which this thesis offers new insights into the gendering, hetero-sexualising process. The girls understood that clothes had various cuts and constructions that changed their fit and physical relationship to the body and that this inter-connection between the material and sensuous, and the corporeal, had various socially-constructed meanings (as could be found in research with adults such as Miller and Woodward 2012 and Sherlock 2014). For example, they were conscious that tight, figure-hugging clothes were associated with older, emphasised femininity and that baggy clothing was related to masculinity and with a younger age grade, the infant or baby (explored further below). Whilst girls explored femininity through the tightness of certain garments on their bodies, they tempered their hetero-sexualised performance in play-offs between tight and loose. Again this careful navigation of revealing/concealing the body through material means demonstrated girls' considered negotiation of hyper-femininity and their understanding of gendered, aged subjectivity through the materiality of their dress.

Whilst the techniques of dress, through which identity is gendered, heterosexualised, yet contextually-dependent, are key to this research, these are not the only factors in shaping girls' engagements with selfhood and childhood. Little has hitherto been discussed about the ways in which girls position themselves within their family and friendship networks through dress. Previous research has considered the ways girls might engage with mothers through rejecting their clothing purchases (Corrigan 1995), which counters the simplistic media accounts that suggest a straightforward pressure from peers and parents to conform to fashionability. The manner in which children connect with families or friends through dress has been neglected; however, this thesis shows that young girls navigate, perform and display their kinship and friendship through dress. Wearing clothes with relationship ties allowed girls to explore their identity within a network of support, but were also significant as a social practice that demonstrated the importance of these relationships.

8.4.1   Key contribution to knowledge: Feeling your age

The key contribution that this thesis makes, to both the sociologies of childhood and fashion, is in the areas of temporality, age and materiality, and in particular the inter-twining of the three. Ageing and materiality of dress has been explored in relation to elderly women (Twigg 2007; Twigg and Buse 2013) and links between temporality and materiality of footwear, worn by adults,

has been addressed in work suggesting that what we wear serve as ways of situating ourselves on our life course (Hockey *et al* 2013). However, my study is one of the first to examine how these concepts might be usefully applied to young girls and fashion, particularly given their positioning within childhood, an area of research that is still limited. This thesis extends our understanding of the way that the fit and feel of clothes on young girls' bodies informs them of their location on their life course and acts as a constant reminder of the ageing process; girls experience themselves both as gendered, as discussed earlier, but also as aged through their embodied relationship with dress. Materiality was an integral part of this sense-making experience and the ways in which girls understood their ageing. There was also a dynamic between the past, present and future that was understood through their garments.

Clothes and accessories acted as mementoes of memories for girls to remember past events but also allowed girls to tell narratives of their past lives, enabling them to make sense of who they were in the present. The relationship between sartorial items and the past was two-fold, as girls both did not want to let go of past selves achieved with certain garments, yet sometimes wished to distance themselves from their younger selves through rejecting earlier bodily fits of clothing. In addition to this situating themselves with regard to past clothing, the girls often wore clothes that they were growing out of, thus materiality in the present was continuously a reminder that it would soon be in the past. Therefore, the tightness of these garments acted as sensory prompts of the ageing process.

However, it is a 'conjoining of our past and our *projected selves* (my emphasis) which produces our current, age-based identity' (Hockey and James 2003: 203); and girls actively engaged in projecting into the future through their clothing. They wore clothes that enabled them materialise an older identity, and therefore to have a sensory experience that allowed them to consider physical changes that their body would go through. Yet, simultaneously these garments also served as reminders of the current bodily lack, of breasts or of height for example. As young girls are pre-teen they exist in what is constructed as a liminal space, between the age grades of childhood and teenhood, and dress is part of negotiating bodily and materially that life course positioning. Whilst for girls it is a very specific liminal space that is experienced through dress, a key strength of this research is to suggest that all liminal spaces socially constructed during the life course could be navigated with and through dress.

 Also, more widely this thesis proposes the significance of clothes as material and embodied objects, their connection to personhood and our understanding of temporality. This concept could be applied to examine the notion that it is through our physical, sensual relationship with dress

that we all come to experience the ageing process and develop our understanding of the temporal dimension of our life course.

8.5 *Limitations and future directions of research*

This thesis concentrated on white, middle-class girls, however choosing to research in two state schools, even in predominately middle-class areas, resulted in a few white, working-class girls taking part in the study. It has been noted that the working-class girls drew on discourses of sexual generationing and used class-based terms in their critique of others' clothing styles. However, given the limited numbers of working-class participants it is not possible to elicit any other conclusions about their constructions of identity through dress. Additionally, with only one middle-class girl in the study being of Indian descent, it is also impossible to assess the use to which girls of various ethnicities respond to fashion and in what ways girls, other than those who are white, constitute themselves with and through dress.

Further research with girls of various class backgrounds and ethnicities would highlight the ways gender, age, class and ethnicity intersect in girls' performances of selfhood, and examine how these are negotiated and navigated through dress. This thesis also pointed to how a particular group of girls who called themselves 'the dumb ones', use fashion as a form of capital, future research might consider how academic attainment may also impact on the ways in which girls take up fashion; other aspects of mental and physical ability could also be investigated. Given that the public concern only addresses the potential sexualisation of girls, the assumption is that boys' sexuality is unproblematic. The area that seems to require most research is that of boys' relationship to fashion and how their identity construction through dress negotiates questions of gender and sexuality, age, class and ethnicity.

Outside of this concentration on children, the key finding of my study in demonstrating the sensual relationship girls have with their clothing, and how that relationship operates as a means through which girls locate themselves temporally on their life course, could be extended to examine adults and their understanding of temporality through dress.

8.6 *Concluding comments*

Those of us living within contemporary Western capitalist society have to make sense of our lives in and through our interactions with consumer culture. No matter what our personal relationship with that consumer culture, commercial messages surround us in our everyday lives and shape our engagements with people, places and things. Both consumer and popular culture are full of images and objects that many believe are sexualised in some form, even if there is no agreement as to what exactly is meant by sexualisation. Music videos, television programmes, films, advertising, shops, magazines, billboards, predominantly depict young, slim, toned, white women

who are represented, through fashionable dress, or lack of it, and the ways in which they are styled, as hyper-feminine, sex objects (even if simultaneously as sexual subjects). Girls are growing up within this context. These infantilised and eroticised women are presented as the pinnacle of womanhood, and to refute that women who constitute themselves similarly receive cultural praise, is to be disingenuous. As my research shows, girls are aware, even at the age of 8, that this hyper-feminine ideal is current currency, but crucially also that it is socially constructed. As well as these role models, girls also interact with a wide network of friends, peers, siblings, older children, parents, other family members, teachers and other adults, from whom they gain knowledge about femininity and sexuality. What I am arguing is that we cannot and should not shut girls away from the world, nor can we perpetually postpone their growing up. We must therefore help them make sense of growing up within the commercialised, sexualised world that we live in; thereby my main arguments are as follows:

1) It is not a simple case of blaming certain mothers for dressing girls in sexualised clothing but all parents, educators and cultural commentators alike need to acknowledge their role in emphasising the importance of hyper-feminine, heterosexualised display as successfully performing girlhood. There is also a contradiction inherent in discussions of girls' dress that whilst girls must perform hyper-femininity for certain occasions, they must do so with great care and only when adults say it is permissible. As Jackson *et al* (2010) also suggest, it is one of feminism's significant challenges to find ways to use our research to offer new discourses that will enable girls to push beyond the binaries and contradictions involved in becoming girls. The emphasis should be in highlighting that the problem is not about girls' own individual hyper-feminine, sexualised performances but that these are societal norms that are both contradictory and discriminatory in their treatment of girls' sexuality and their dress practices.

2) Families, teachers and policy makers should also question their own essentialised, romanticised, normative views of childhood, that seek to position girls as unknowing and incapable. As my thesis demonstrates, girls are capable of critical and reflexive thought, and not only understand that the hyper-feminine, heterosexualised ideal is a socially constructed one but that their own engagement with this ideal can be a fluid and negotiated one.

3) It is not sexualised, fashionable dress that we need to be wary of, but assumptions about what these clothes might do to girls, that papers over girls' own interactions with and negotiations of contemporary girlhood subjectivities, in which the relationship between dress and sexuality is key. In contemporary understanding, sexuality is thought integral to proper personhood (Renold 2005); to deny children their sexual knowledge, or their ability to

negotiate their burgeoning sexuality through dress, is to deny a fundamental element of their subjectivity and dress practices. In order for girls to be able to investigate and question their wider culture, and their responses to it, they need to be offered resources that do not shut down their explorations of sexual identity or reject their emerging sexuality. The potential damage done to girls, I would argue, is more likely to occur around closing down their discussions and experimentations with sexual identities through dress, and limiting their access to language and clothing that enables them to think through the kinds of person they might want to be. The discourses that girls currently have available to them to discuss and critique hyper-feminine, sexualised dress and performance are hetero-sexed, classed and raced; we need to consider tools that could help girls also critique the partiality of these discourses. Girls will eventually cross the liminal space into teenage-hood and it would be better to ease that temporal journey by offering them more tools to enable ways to think, talk, enact and critique various roles, rather than to blindly panic that they may derail.

8.7   *In practice*

In terms of putting any of the points above in to practice, overall societal change is of course the most difficult to secure. The most productive place to start in terms of relative ease of implementation and widest potential gain would be within the education system. Sex and Relationships Education (SRE) in schools is only an obligation for Local Authority maintained schools in England, and even then only from the age of 11. However, there is a recommendation that 'all primary schools should have a sex and relationship education programme tailored to the age and the physical and emotional maturity of the children' (Parliament. House of Commons 2016: 5). Personal, Social, Health and Economic education (PSHE) under which younger children might learn about matters such as relationships, bullying, self-esteem and body image (Ofsted 2013) is not a legal requirement. As of February 2016, the UK government (Parliament. House of Commons 2016), despite numerous inquiries and reviews (including those cited in the Chapter Two and subsequent inquiries about sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools, see Long 2016), has not made any of this emotional and personal education statutory. Yet, Ofsted's (2013) critique of the failings of current provision of PSHE education throughout primary and secondary schooling found that 'lack of age-appropriate sex and relationships education may leave young people vulnerable to inappropriate sexual behaviours and sexual exploitation, *particularly if they are not taught the appropriate language'* (Ofsted 2013: 10. Emphasis added) – the importance of language that my research noted above.

The policy and implementation suggestions put forward here, include first and foremost the need for PSHE education to be statutory throughout primary school. But most of all, in line with the Ofsted (2013) report, the depth, breadth and quality of the provision of personal and social

education is a matter for urgent attention. There was good practice noted in some schools, such as with lessons that explored ideas about idealised and air-brushed images in the media, in relation to physical and mental health issues. However, this practice was not the norm and was only seen in secondary schooling (Ofsted 2013). Primary Schools should also be engaging children in discussions and debates about the wider world, media, popular and consumer culture, dress and questions of representation, identity and sexuality. Teachers need to undergo specific training that allows them to tackle sensitive issues around sexuality, bodily and emotional development. Training should also emphasise feminist, post-structuralist frameworks to enable teachers to explore with pupils the ways in which norms are gendered, classed, raced and aged, and to question taken-for-granted patriarchal and hetero-normative standpoints.

However, even without urgent government intervention there is scope for Primary Schools to make these subjects a key focus in the curriculum. As cited above, the guidelines from the government say that education around relationships and sexuality should be tailored to the emotional maturity of the children – as my thesis has demonstrated, even at the age of 8 girls are knowledgeable and reflexive in their engagements with discourses of gender and sexuality expressed through their dress practices, suggesting considerable maturity. These dress practices could provide the spring-board for productive discussions around gender, sexuality, personal well-being but also societal norms and discourses of childhood, femininity, class and race, as this research has shown. By listening more closely to the sensory experiences that all girls have, through and with their clothes, of growing and ageing, we may find better ways to help them articulate the experience of what it means to create and negotiate contemporary, young, feminine identities.

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Appendix 1 - Class Backgrounds

Alphabetical List of Participants stating social class

Name	Age	Focus Group	Mother's occupation	Father's occupation	Social Class
Abbie	11	6	Teacher	Finance manager	Middle
Abigail	9	3	Architect	Journalist	Middle
Alice	8	3	Teacher	Software engineer	Middle
Amy	8	1	No data	Unemployed	Working
Anna	11	6	Nurse	Pilot	Middle
Anya	10	5	Doctor	Solicitor	Middle
Bea	10	5	School secretary	IT Technician	Middle
Bethany	11	6	Teacher	Civil servant	Middle
Caitlin	11	5	Occupational therapist	Sports coach	Middle
Cleo	11	6	No data	No data	Middle
Chloë	8	3	Finance manager	Property developer	Middle
Ella	9	4	Nurse	Doctor	Middle
Ellen	8	3	Stay-at-home mum	University lecturer	Middle
Emma	10	6	Scientist	Gardener	Middle
Emily	8	1	No data	Army officer	Middle
Erin	11	5	Administrator	Teacher	Middle
Freya	10	5	No data	No data	Middle
Georgia	11	2	No data	Taxi driver	Working
Hannah	9	3	No data	No data	Middle
Jasmine	9	3	Stay-at-home mum	Civil servant	Middle
Jessica	11	2	Classroom assistant	Soldier	Middle
Katie	11	6	No data	No data	Middle
Lauren	10	2	No data	Business manager	Middle
Leah	9	4	Catering business manager	Accountant	Middle
Lucie	9	4	Gardener	Architect	Middle
Madison	11	6	No data	No data	Working
Melissa	8	3	Only data: full-time job	Civil servant	Middle
Mia	8	3	No data	IT developer	Middle
Millie	8	4	HR consultant	Accountant	Middle
Poppy	10	5	Occupational therapist	Engineer	Middle
Sara	8	4	Pharmacist	Air traffic controller	Middle
Shannon	8	1	Shop assistant	Van driver	Working

Class classifications derived from NS-Sec system, used by Office of National Statistics, to determine class by occupation. A brief example of job titles and resultant classifications follows from Bathmaker *et al* (2016).

Examples of occupations from different NS-SEC categories

(taken from Bathmaker *et al* 2016)

		NS-SEC categorisation	Examples of occupations
Middle class	1	Higher managerial and professional occupations, including large employers	Accountant, ICT Analyst, University Lecturer, Chartered Building Surveyor, Army Officer, Lawyer, General Practitioner,
	2	Lower managerial and professional occupations	Teacher, Personnel Manager, Midwife, Lettings Agent, Head Teacher, Occupational therapist
	3	Intermediate occupations	School secretary, Accounts clerk, Nursing auxiliary, Clerical worker, Soldier
Working class	4	Small employers and own account workers	Taxi driver, Window cleaner, Restaurant owner, Painter/decorator, Chauffeur
	5	Lower supervisory and technical occupations	Printer, Landscape gardener, Heating engineer
	6	Semi-routine occupations	Care assistant, Sales assistant, Special needs carer, receptionist
	7	Routine occupations	Van driver, storeman, cleaning supervisor, lunch-time supervisor
	8	Never worked and long- term unemployed	

Appendix 2 - Letter to Primary School Head-teachers

<Date>

<Dear>

I am a PhD student at Southampton University carrying out a research project entitled *Tweenagers: 8 to 12 year old girls' consumption of fashion*. Newspaper articles portray fashion for young girls as potentially harmful to their body image and detrimental to the growing up process; you are probably already aware of some of the impact that fashion and ideals of beauty have on the girls in your school. But little research has actually been done with girls themselves in order to assess their understanding of fashionable dress; how problematic do they find fashion? What are girls' attitudes to style and clothing in relation to identity, friendship, authority and independence? By giving girls the opportunity to talk about appearance, dress and popular culture as part of a social science research project it is hoped that they will appreciate the chance to have their views heard. The resulting findings may help us to know how we might enable girls to critically engage with consumer culture and gender ideals.

If possible, I would very much like to do some research with girls in your school. I wish to undertake small group discussions about fashion with 2 groups of 8 year old girls and 2 groups of 10 year olds; preferably friendship groups so that they are comfortable with each other. The groups would be video-recorded as a visual reminder of the discussion, interaction and gestures for me; these videos would not be viewed by anyone else and would be kept secure. I would also like to give the girls disposable cameras and ask them to take some photos of their favourite outfits, to allow them to be interviewed about why they like the clothes they chose to photograph. These interviews would be tape-recorded. The aim is to ensure that girls get to make their own voices heard about what fashion means to them personally.

I would provide parental and child information sheets and consent forms to be signed by parents and children. The video and audio-tapes will be kept in a safe and will only be seen by me and by the project supervisors, Professor Susan Halford and Dr Pauline Leonard. The tapes will kept until completion of the thesis and for 2 years after, allowing for publication of articles about the research, and then these tapes will be destroyed. The transcripts of these tapes will be kept on a password-protected computer. The girls' real names will not be used on the transcripts of the conversations or in my final PhD thesis or any reports, papers or publications that result from the thesis. I would be happy to also provide you with some general and anonymised feedback at the end of the research.

I have an enhanced CRB disclosure (no. 0012717723133), and also have ethics approval from the School of Social Sciences Ethics Board at the University of Southampton (no. SOC200919-33). I have also previously carried out several focus groups with some Year 7 girls at a secondary school in Essex for my Masters of Research from the University of London. I have worked as a lecturer and tutor for over 10 years at the University for the Creative Arts, where I frequently tutor young people both individually and in-group discussions.

I hope you don't mind if I take the liberty of telephoning you in about a week to see if you would happy for me to come and talk to you more about research project and for girls at your school to take part.

If you have any questions about the project before then please contact me Julie Blanchard: Julie.Blanchard@soton.ac.uk,or my PhD supervisors Professor Susan Halford: Susan.halford@soton.ac.uk or Dr Pauline Leonard: pauline.leonard@soton.ac.uk.

Many thanks for your time.
Yours sincerely, Julie Blanchard

UNIVERSITY OF
Southampton

School of Social Sciences

TWEENAGERS: 8-12 YEAR OLD GIRLS AND FASHION

My name is Julie Blanchard, and I am a student at the University of Southampton. I would like to talk with groups of girls of around the same age to find out what you want to wear, how you feel about clothes and what you think of fashion for girls. I will then write about this for my degree and possibly in some other essays too.

If you decide to take part you and your friends will be videoed answering some questions and talking to each other about clothes. Afterwards I will give you a throwaway camera and ask you to take some photographs of your favourite outfits (just the clothes, not you wearing them). I will then get the photos developed (but won't look at them), and meet you again to ask you about any of the photographs that you want to show me. I will record this on a tape-recorder.

I won't show or play anyone else, but my 2 tutors, the videos or tapes of our talks. When I write about what you have said and talk about your photographs I won't use your real name – so that you can say what you like and no one will know who you are.

You are free to drop out at anytime if you decide you no longer want to take part.

If you are worried at any point during the research you should talk to a parent or teacher.

If you want to know any more about this fashion project, please email me: Julie Blanchard: julieblanchard@soton.ac.uk

UNIVERSITY OF Southampton

School of Social Sciences

TWEENAGERS: 8-12 YEAR OLD GIRLS AND FASHION

Researcher: Julie Blanchard

Ethics Number: SOC200919-33

I'm a PhD research student at the University of Southampton who is interested in girls' fashion. As a parent you may already have strong views on the subject - but very little is known about what girls aged 8 to 12 years old think and feel about fashion. Head teacher (name) has agreed that I may carry out some research at (name of school) and I have an enhanced CRB disclosure (no. 0012717723133) to allow me to do so.

The aim of my research is to conduct focus groups with groups of girls to find out what clothes they like and why. These will take place at (time, date). I will video the discussions to remind myself of all the conversations that were had and to encapsulate the complex movement and gestures that are often made when talking about dress and appearance - in my previous research girls were very excited about the discussion and often demonstrated things like hairstyles. I also want to give the girls disposable cameras and ask them to take photographs of their favourite outfits (just the clothes, not with the girls wearing them), I will have the photographs developed and then give them back without looking at them, and then interview the girls individually talking about the photographs that they choose to show me. These interviews will be recorded, on audio tape only in this instance, so that I can accurately report what is said.

The video and audio tapes will be kept in a safe and will only be seen by me and by the project supervisors, Professor Susan Halford and Dr Pauline Leonard. The tapes will kept until completion of the thesis and for 2 years after, allowing for publication of articles about the research, and then these tapes will be destroyed. The transcripts of these tapes will be kept on a password-protected computer. The girls' real names will not be used on the transcripts of the conversations or in my final PhD thesis or any reports, papers or publications that result from the thesis.

As a guardian of a child interested in being part in this study your consent is essential for them to take part. I have also provided information sheets and consent forms for the girls themselves, as I think it is equally important that they have the ability to agree to be part of the research or not.

The girls are free to drop out any time they wish if they do not want to continue.

If you have any concerns or queries about this research at any point you are welcome to contact me or my PhD supervisors - Professor Susan Halford: susan.halford@soton.ac.uk or Dr Pauline Leonard: pauline.leonard@soton.ac.uk.

Equally, if you would like to know any more about this research, please email me, Julie Blanchard at: julieblanchard@soton.ac.uk

Appendix 4 - Consent Forms

UNIVERSITY OF
Southampton
School of Social Sciences

Group Discussion Consent Form for Parents

TWEENAGERS: 8-12 YEAR OLD GIRLS AND FASHION

Researcher's name: Julie Blanchard

Please initial the box(es) if you agree with the statement(s):

I have read and understood the information sheet (9/5/13: Version P5)
and have had the opportunity to ask questions about the project

I agree that my daughter can take part in a group discussion
as part of this research project

I agree that my daughter's group discussion can be filmed
and the video data can be written about anonymously in the thesis,
publications or conference papers relating to this project

I understand that taking part is voluntary and my daughter may drop out
at any time

Name of daughter/ participant (print name)………………………………………….

Name of parent or guardian (print name) …………………………………………

Signature of parent or guardian………………………………………………………….

Name of researcher (print name) …………………………………………………

Signature of researcher…………………………………………………………..

Date………………………………………………………………………………

<u>Photograph Consent Form for Parents</u>

TWEENAGERS: 8-12 YEAR OLD GIRLS AND FASHION

Researcher's name: Julie Blanchard

Please initial the box(es) if you agree with the statement(s):

I have read and understood the information sheet (9/5/13: Version P5)
and have had the opportunity to ask questions about the project

I agree that my daughter's photographs of her favourite outfit
(not being worn) can be reproduced in the thesis, publications
or conference papers relating to this research project

I understand that taking part is voluntary and my daughter may drop out
at any time

Name of daughter/ participant (print name)…………………………………….

Name of parent or guardian (print name) …………………………………….

Signature of parent or guardian……………………………………………………..

Name of researcher (print name) …………………………………………………

Signature of researcher…………………………………………………………..

Date……………………………………………………………………………………

Interview Consent Form for Parents

TWEENAGERS: 8-12 YEAR OLD GIRLS AND FASHION

Researcher's name: Julie Blanchard

Please initial the box(es) if you agree with the statement(s):

I have read and understood the information sheet (9/5/13: Version P5) and have had the opportunity to ask questions about the project

I agree that my daughter can be interviewed about the photographs of her favourite outfit that she has taken as part of this research project

I agree that my daughter's interview can be tape recorded and the taped data to be written about anonymously in the thesis, publications or conference papers relating to this project

I understand that taking part is voluntary and my daughter may drop out at any time

Name of daughter/ participant (print name)…………………………………………

Name of parent or guardian (print name) …………………………………………

Signature of parent or guardian……………………………………………………………..

Name of researcher (print name) ……………………………………………………

Signature of researcher………………………………………………………..

Date…………………………………………………………………………………

UNIVERSITY OF
Southampton
School of Social Sciences

Group Chat Consent Form for Girls

TWEENAGERS: 8-12 YEAR OLD GIRLS AND FASHION

Researcher's name: Julie Blanchard

Please initial the box(es) if you agree with the point(s):

I have read and understood the information sheet (9/5/13: Version G5) and have had the chance to ask questions about the project

I agree to take part in a group chat as part of this project

I agree to the group chat being filmed and to be written about in reports and essays relating to this project

I understand that taking part is my choice and I may drop out at any time

Name of girl (print name)……………………………………………………

Signature of girl…………………………………………………………..

Name of researcher (print name) ……………………………………………….

Signature of researcher…………………………………………………………..

Date………………………………………………………………………

Photo Consent Form for Girls

TWEENAGERS: 8-12 YEAR OLD GIRLS AND FASHION

Researcher's name: Julie Blanchard

Please initial the box(es) if you agree with the point(s):

I have read and understood the information sheet (9/5/13: Version G5) and have had the chance to ask questions about the project

I agree that the photos I take of my favourite outfit and then show to Julie can be printed in reports and essays relating to this project

I understand that taking part is my choice and I may drop out at any time

Name of girl (print name)…………………………………………………

Signature of girl……………………………………………………………..

Name of researcher (print name) ……………………………………………

Signature of researcher………………………………………………………..

Date…………………………………………………………………………

<u>Interview Consent Form for Girls</u>

TWEENAGERS: 8-12 YEAR OLD GIRLS AND FASHION

Researcher's name: Julie Blanchard

Please initial the box(es) if you agree with the point(s):

I have read and understood the information sheet (9/5/13: Version G5) and have had the chance to ask questions about the project

I agree to take part in an interview about the photos of my favourite outfit that I have taken as part of this project

I agree to the interview being tape recorded and to be written about in reports and essays relating to this project

I understand that taking part is my choice and I may drop out at any time

Name of girl (print name)…………………………………………………

Signature of girl…………………………………………………………..

Name of researcher (print name) …………………………………………

Signature of researcher……………………………………………………..

Date…………………………………………………………………………

Appendix 5 – Questions for Focus Groups

<u>Introduce myself</u>

<u>Explain research</u> – why interested. Anonymous. No one will see – not parents/teachers. Leave at any time.

<u>Ask Names</u>: Already know each other?
Do things together outside school?
How decide to be part?

1. What sort of clothes do you like to wear when you're not at school?

2. Why do you like those clothes?

3. Do you like fashion?

4. Do you enjoy wearing fashionable clothes?

5. How do you feel when you're wearing them?

6. How do you know what is in fashion?

7. Do you talk to each other about what to wear?

8. What sort of clothes don't you wear?

9. Why don't you wear them?

10. What clothes don't you like?

11. Who buys your clothes?

12. Who chooses what you wear?

13. How do you decide what to wear at the weekend?

14. Do you have clothes for different occasions?

Appendix 6 – Questions for Interviews with Photographs

Interviewing with photographs

1. Tell me about the outfit that you've photographed, what is it like?

2. Why did you choose this outfit?

3. Do you like wearing it?

4. How do you feel when you're wearing it?

5. What does the material feel like?

6. When do you wear it?

7. Where do you wear it?

8. What do you wear it with? (shoes, jewellery, make up?)

9. Where did you get it from?

10. Do other people like it?

11. Where did you take this photograph?

Appendix 7 – Risk Assessment Form

University **of Southampton**	**School of** <mark>Social Sciences</mark>	**RISK ASSESSMENT FORM**

To be completed in accordance with the attached guidelines

Activity:
Conducting focus groups and interviews with schoolgirls about fashion.

Locations:
Primary and secondary schools in the *********** area.

Significant Hazards:

1) Potential embarrassment of participants about body image and fit of clothes
2) Researcher alone with interviewee (could leave open to suggestions of improper conduct)
3) Lone female researcher in unfamiliar environment

Who might be exposed/affected?

1) Participants with larger bodies
2) Researcher
3) Researcher

Existing control measures:

1) researcher will be sensitive to participants responses and change topic accordingly
2) interviews take place in school and will be recorded
3) fieldwork will take place in home county, in schools and only during office hours 8am-6pm. Partner will always know where researcher is going and what time to expect a return. Researcher will also familiarise herself with Health and Safety procedures and fire exits at the schools.

Risk evaluation: **Low / ~~Medium / High~~**

Can the risk be further reduced?   ~~Yes~~ / No

Further controls required: n/a

Date by which further controls will be implemented:

Are the controls satisfactory: Yes / No

Date for reassessment:

Completed by:	**Julie Blanchard**		
	name	Signature	date
Supervisor/manager: If applicable			
	name	Signature	date
Reviewed by:			
	name	Signature	date

Appendix 8 – Transcription Key

Developed from Jefferson system of transcription notation (Hepburn and Bolden 2013).

((comment))	additional information e.g. gesture or movement
/	when a speaker is interrupted by another speaker
( )	inaudible
[	speakers speaking at the same time
=	latched speech, a continuation of talk
(.)	denotes a notable pause but of no significant length.
(0.2)	number inside brackets denotes a timed pause, long enough to time to the nearest tenth of a second.

Appendix 9 – List of Participants, Group Numbers, Ages and Class Backgrounds

Focus Group	Name	Age	Social Class
1	Amy	8	Working
1	Emily	8	Middle
1	Shannon	8	Working
2	Georgia	11	Working
2	Jessica	11	Middle
2	Lauren	10	Middle
3	Abigail	9	Middle
3	Alice	8	Middle
3	Chloë	8	Middle
3	Ellen	8	Middle
3	Hannah	9	Middle
3	Jasmine	9	Middle
3	Melissa	8	Middle
3	Mia	8	Middle
4	Ella	9	Middle
4	Leah	9	Middle
4	Lucie	9	Middle
4	Millie	8	Middle
4	Sara	8	Middle
5	Anya	10	Middle
5	Bea	10	Middle
5	Caitlin	11	Middle
5	Erin	11	Middle
5	Freya	10	Middle
5	Poppy	10	Middle
6	Abbie	11	Middle
6	Anna	11	Middle
6	Bethany	11	Middle
6	Cleo	11	Middle
6	Emma	10	Middle
6	Katie	11	Middle
6	Madison	11	Working