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Feminism in schools? A discursive-psychosocial study of teenagers' constitutions of feminist subjectivities

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Declaration I, Hanna Maria Retallack confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I can confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

Abstract

Responding to a popular resurgence in young people's interest in feminism, this thesis explores how teenagers constitute feminist subjectivities in their schools during a time that both enables feminism groups, whilst simultaneously reconstituting postfeminist and anti-feminist ideologies within these same institutions.

The study was conducted over an academic year in six schools; a suburban comprehensive, an inner-city private dance school, an inner-city all-girls' private school, an inner-city private all boys' school, a rural private all-boys' boarding school and an inner-city academy school. Through focus groups and one-to-one interviews, the research investigates teenagers' engagements with different feminisms, how these relate to their school contexts and how they constitute feminist subjectivities.

To explore this, I draw specifically upon psychosocial conceptualisations of relational identifications, defensiveness and melancholia. The research argues that participants from each of the groups form feminisms in relational and occasionally intersubjective ways to the discourses available to them at school and in wider society, as well as to other members of their feminism groups. With an intersectional perspective on gender, race and class, the study also suggests that elite boys' negotiations of feminisms are mediated through defensive anxieties of taking up a subordinated masculine position. The study also proposes that a group of girls express a melancholic longing for a feminism that would empower them everywhere, including in their heterosexual encounters. This research also engages with my own subjectivity to consider the dynamics that my own 'feminist' positionality produces and the ways this intersects with the narratives of the participants.

This thesis deepens understandings of how teenagers engage with and constitute feminisms, and how these open up the potential for affecting gendered and sexualised norms in schools.

Impact Statement

This research responds to a contemporary moment in which there is both a populist resurgence in young people's engagement with feminism, and a backlash in the form of post and anti-feminisms. I build on existing scholarly research in the area of young people's investments in feminism by exploring teenagers' feelings about and engagements with feminisms in relation to their school leaders, peers and feminism groups, as well as to moments created in the research process. By exploring how teenagers constitute feminist subjectivities in six different schools within this context, this study has potential impact in the academic community, for educational policy makers, and for school teachers and leaders.

For the academic community, this thesis identifies the psychosocial processes by which young people constitute feminist subjectivities through relations to multiple discourses within specific school contexts. I contribute conceptual insights through a particular focus on the participants' relational engagements; defensive moves and experiences of loss in relation to various feminisms, as well as through a feminist methodological practise that draws upon my own positioning as researcher. This thesis therefore offers a vocabulary that interprets the subjective underpinnings of young peoples' identifications with particular feminisms that is currently absent in the literature.

For policy makers with the power to make change around issues of gender, sexuality and feminisms in schools, this study shows that schools produce different possibilities in relation to feminism for teenagers. This finding suggests, for instance, that there are differences in the ways that co-educational state schools produce feminisms compared to all boys' and girls' private schools. It is pertinent that different types of schools do this since it suggests that only certain possibilities in relation to feminism are made available depending on the school young people attend. Since the participants in this study navigate feminism in relation to their school's approach, this suggests that different school contexts are crucial in allowing for or restricting the production of feminist subjectivities. Policy makers concerned

about the recent rise in popular misogyny for instance, could use these findings to address school cultures that reproduce gendered hierarchies and inequalities.

For teachers and school leaders interested in responding to the epidemic of sexual harm in UK secondary schools, this research has already had impact in that it has informed activist work that I and colleagues have conducted to introduce and support intersectional feminist practice through conferences and the setting up of feminism clubs in schools. Further impact could be made in response to the thesis' argument that feminism groups in schools have both the potential to raise consciousness around issues of gender, sexuality, race and class, as well to perpetuate inequity within schools. Through highlighting where certain approaches to feminism are more effective at supporting teenagers' understanding of gendered and sexual justice, this research could encourage teachers and school leaders to set up school spaces that transcend white neoliberal cis-heteronormative forms of feminism to support all young people to make meaningful change.

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Chapter 1 Introduction: Engaging with teenagers and feminism in schools

1.1. Introduction

This thesis explores how, through engagement with feminism groups, teenagers constitute feminist subjectivities in and around six different schools in England. Feminism groups are spaces set up for students in schools, either by teachers or the students themselves, where they can discuss, debate or campaign around issues related to feminism. I focus on teenagers already taking part in school-based feminism groups as this suggests a prior interest in issues related to gender and sexuality, and because I am interested in the capacity of these group spaces to disrupt, affect or reproduce normative gendered subjectivities.

The overall research question framing this study asks; how do teenagers constitute feminist subjectivities in their schools? I also question how, as a feminist educator and researcher, I negotiate my position through this study.

I draw on data gathered over the course of a year from the schools under study: a suburban comprehensive, a private inner-city dance school, an inner-city academy school, an inner-city all girls' private school, an inner-city private all boys' school and a rural private all-boys' boarding school. Through focus groups and one-to-one interviews, teenagers already taking part in feminism groups between the ages of 13-18 talked to me about their engagements with, feelings about and constitutions of different feminisms, and how these related to their school contexts. This thesis is centred on my analysis of these discussions.

My analysis of the teenage participants' narratives generates knowledge about wider negotiations of gender, sexuality, race and class, as well as the potential of feminism groups to support young people's emotional and educational experiences around issues of gender and sexuality in their schools.

1.2. The research problem, questions and framework

1.2.1. Research problem

To introduce my research questions, I first turn to the problem that this thesis responds to. This is one that relates to a contemporary moment in which both rape culture and feminisms are increasingly visible in wider culture, and also in school settings. In what follows, I briefly map these contexts. However, since this includes outlining relevant public reports that deal in specific dates, I want to foreground that this is a constantly changing policy context that long precedes these reports, and continues beyond them. As these issues of gender and sexual change are constantly in upheaval, I am only able to provide a snapshot of these happenings here.

- **Mapping the context of rape culture in schools**

The term 'rape culture' is a descriptor for contexts in which aggressive forms of cis-heterosexual men's sexuality become normalised as sexual violence is positioned as inevitable. This manifests in rape and assault as well as other seemingly more minor practices including cat-calling, banter, victim blaming and slut shaming (Mendes and Ringrose, 2016). Multiple publicly available reports undertaken between 2016 and 2022 suggest an epidemic of rape culture in UK secondary schools, both in the practices that are evident in these institutions, but also in the ways that these are normalised through inaction by government.

In 2016, the UK Women and Equalities Committee found that almost a third of girls between the ages of 16-18 had experienced non-consensual sexual contact at school, whilst 71% of all young people in schools heard terms such as slut being used towards girls on a daily basis. The committee also found that that there were total inconsistencies in the ways that schools dealt with these issues including ignoring national equality obligations and a lack of guidance for teachers meaning that sexual violence was accepted as a normal part of school life. The report concluded that the schools' regulator OFSTED and the Department for Education had no plan for dealing with these issues (House of Commons Women and

Equalities Committee, 2016). Perhaps because the government appeared to ignore the evidence, another report was commissioned a year later in 2017 focusing again on the state of sexism in schools. This time the National Education Union and the campaign group UK Feminista commissioned the University of Warwick to survey and undertake interviews with 1508 secondary school students and 1634 teachers across primary and secondary schools in England and Wales. This report found sexual harassment to be prevalent and overwhelmingly to involve boys targeting girls, with over a third of girls at secondary schools stating they'd been sexually harassed at school and one in three teachers in secondary schools stating they'd witnessed sexual harassment on a weekly basis (UK Feminista, 2017).

Two years' later, Plan UK's report into The State of Girls' Rights 2019-2020 (on which I was one of the researchers) aimed to understand how the intersection of sexual and gender identity, race and class impacted on girls' experiences in schools and beyond (Cann et al, 2020). We undertook participatory research with girls from across the UK between the ages of 10 and 25 which included zine making sessions followed by focus groups. This report found that a lack of teacher intervention when girls were sexually harassed, the expectation to stay in the same schools and classes as violent boys, and the pathologizing of girls as mentally unwell when they were being abused all contributed to making girls feel unsafe in schools. Black girls discussed the limits on their ability to express themselves through hair and other styles in schools where they were punished for these. Socio-economic class was also found to affect girls' experiences of school uniform when they couldn't afford updated and long/baggy enough versions of skirts and trousers since their bodies were deemed provocative. The report concluded with a discussion of the girls being left behind within populist discourses of gender empowerment, and the need to pay intersectional attention to issues of equity in schools and beyond.

Despite the wealth of evidence in these reports, the schools' regulator Ofsted conducted their own review in 2021 with a focus on sexual harm across state and private schools. During this, they visited 32 private and state schools speaking to over 900 young people finding that teenagers consider sexual harm to be normal, that being sent unsolicited explicit images happened regularly, that Relationships, Sex and Health Education (RSHE) provision was inadequate and that schools and safeguarding partners were not connected

affecting their capacity to tackle sexual harassment in schools. A year later, the Girl Guiding Survey (2022) which asked over 3000 girls what they think about a range of issues and found results that concurred with those in the preceding reports but also attended to important nuances. These included that, whilst 22% of girls in the North of England blamed anxiety over sexual harassment for holding them back in school and 26% claimed that gender stereotyping affects their schooling, the rate was much higher for LGBTQ+ girls at 37%. There is also evidence that these cultures of sexual harm move from schools into universities (Sundaram and Jackson: 2018). Students' experiences in higher education have been studied by the National Union of Students who in 2014 found that 37% of women and 12% of men students have experienced sexual misconduct (cited in Sundaram and Jackson, 2018), with staff on student sexual misconduct being a problem that Page et al (2018) argue is 'institutionalized, entrenched' and 'invisible' (1310).

Whilst in 2019, the Department for Education made some meaningful updates to the Relationships and Sexuality Education guidance for the first time in 20 years, including a new focus on issues of pornography, menstruation, consent and wide range of sexualities and genders (Ringrose et al, 2019), recent government responses suggest a return to more heteronormative and essentialized conceptions of sexuality and gender (Cates, 2023). In March 2023, Conservative backbench MPs incited backlash against these updates to the Relationships and Sexuality Education guidance by incorrectly stating that children are being taught 'graphic lessons on oral sex, how to choke your partner safely, and 72 genders' (Topping, Guardian Online, Accessed 12 April 2023). The current prime minster Rishi Sunak has since asked the Department for Education to make sure that schools are teaching appropriate content and has asked for a review into RSE curricula. Since then, many organisations, charities and academics have written to the secretary for education urging her to resist this panicked politicisation of sex education but the outcome is, at the time of writing, yet to be decided (Topping, Guardian Online, Accessed 12 April 2023). Schools are also remarking upon the crisis of toxic masculinity exemplified by the social media figure Andrew Tate who, despite being held in custody for rape, organised crime and human trafficking charges, has galvanised enormous interest from men and boys through his highly misogynist online content including messages that women are owned by their boyfriends and that rape survivors should bear responsibility for being assaulted (Fazackerly, Guardian

Online, Accessed 25 May 2023). At the time of writing, the Department for Education has stated that they will be providing guidance on this but, as yet, this is not published.

Whilst the public reports and government responses chart a rather broad assessment that don't always attend to the intersectional nuances of these issues or the ways these manifest differently across schools, the evidence highlights the scale of rape culture in schools as it manifests in routine sexual harassment, the stereotyping and shaming of girls' and LGBTQ+ youth in relation to this, the normalisation of these practices, and the government's misinterpretation and lack of action around these issues. This context suggests a need to understand how young people navigate rape culture in schools in relation to other intersectional factors including sexuality, race and class. To do this, this study is particularly interested in how teenagers already taking part in feminism groups engage with various feminisms. Whilst I could have interviewed teachers or school leaders, I was particularly interested in speaking to teenagers already engaged with these topics since it is young people's direct experiences that I believe should inform action on these issues, and their partaking in feminism groups suggested (but didn't necessarily equate to) an interest tackling gendered and sexual harm. Secondly, this was because my own experiences in schools, as discussed later in this chapter, highlighted that responding to these issues with and through feminism groups meant distinctive things in different schools since contested forms of feminisms were battling for visibility.

To further contextualise this study, the multiplicitous and contradictory feminisms that circulate in and around schools are mapped in the following section.

- **Researching the context of feminism in schools: neoliberalism and postfeminism; popular feminism and anti-feminism**

Despite ongoing cultures of sexual and gendered harm in schools, there is also evidence of a heightened awareness and interest in feminism from young people (Munro, 2013; Rottenberg, 2017; Banet-Weiser, 2018). Since the early 2000s, research from the UK, America and Canada has documented young people's feminist participation and activism

both online and off in relation to the ways that feminism is understood within postfeminist neoliberal contexts, as well as how this intersects with the production and negotiation of feminism in schools.

Neoliberalism can be understood as a doctrine that forms self-determining subjects who 'choose from among different courses of action, thereby, decreasing the need for governance to depend on direct state intervention' (Budgeon, 2015: 304). This points to the ways that the logic of the free market extends into all spheres of society, and it is this that connects neoliberalism's influence to the production of feminisms (Budgeon, 2015). Under this political and economic philosophy, girls and women are encouraged to believe they are entirely self-determined, and therefore position themselves as consumers of, rather than dependent, on, support from education, government or other services (Pomerantz, Raby and Stefanik, 2013). Neoliberalism's construction of individuals as self-regulatory means that they are expected to bear full responsibility for their lives and choices, 'no matter how severe the constraints upon their action' (Gill, 2007: 26), and this approach has been argued to dismiss the need to join collective action around social justice (Scharff, 2011). It is this doctrine that promotes the notion that it is individuals, as opposed to structures of oppression, who need to change (Negra, 2014), and forms what Gill (2007) terms a 'postfeminist sensibility' (5). Postfeminism is understood to combine a simultaneous recognition and refusal of second wave feminism (Stacey 1993) meaning that the gains of feminism through the decades of the 70s and 80s are accepted but simultaneously 'undermined' (McRobbie, 2004: 255) through a belief that the politics of feminism are no longer necessary. Within a neoliberal climate, women and girls are said to be under pressure to perform a 'postfeminist masquerade' in which they continue to operate under patriarchal control but do so under a discourse of compulsory 'choice' (McRobbie, 2001 in Ringrose and Renold, 2012: 461), where equal participation is offered so long as critiques of patriarchy and political activism are given up (Winch, 2015). Neoliberalism and postfeminism have implications for forms of feminism that try to resist systemic structures of oppression. Young people's reluctance to acknowledge constraints related to structural inequalities and their desire to instead embrace of individuated choice and freedom, has suggested a link between wider dis-identification with feminisms (Sharff, 2011), as collective movements have become replaced by what McRobbie calls an 'aggressive individualism' (5).

More recently, however, scholars are raising questions about the relevance of the notion of postfeminism to capture current political dynamics of popular feminisms across the age range and particularly around teenagers' engagements with feminism in their schools (Keller, 2015; Retallack et al, 2016; Ringrose et al, 2018). Media attention to young people's direct engagement with feminism in their schools has garnered attention in the last decade, particularly since Jinan Younis's 2013 editorial, "What Happened when I Started a Feminist Society [in my school]" was shared over 30,000 times (Kim and Ringrose, 2018) and the petitions for feminism to remain in the Music and Politics curriculum were set up by teenagers Jesse McCabe (2015) and June Eric Odurie (2016). The more recent and widely popular schools-focused Everyone's Invited movement set up by university student Soma Sara (2020) has attracted widespread media attention to the issue of sexual violence in schools as teenagers are offered an online space to share experiences of harassment and abuse, and many schools where these incidents took place have been made public.

Wider cultures of popular feminism have also been documented in North America and Europe in particular by Rottenberg (2017) who argues that neoliberal effects have formed a feminism of their own. This is described as a convergence of feminism and neoliberalism which produces 'an individuated feminist subject' (331), someone who is understood to be feminist in the sense that she remains aware of gendered inequalities but is simultaneously neoliberal as she converts 'continued gender inequality from a structural problem into an individual affair' (11). Banet Weiser (2018) theorises the contemporary moment as one in which feminism is increasingly popular in which 'it feels as if everywhere you turn, there is an expression of feminism—on a T-shirt, in a movie, in the lyrics of a pop song, in an inspirational Instagram post, in an awards ceremony speech' (1). Banet Weiser goes on to explore feminism's current manifestation being circulated much more widely than in 'academic enclaves or niche groups' (1) as digital spaces and commercial media situate feminism as something that 'doesn't have to be defended; it is accessible, even admired' (1). However, as Phipps (2019) documents, these cultures of neoliberal and popular feminism also highlight the problematic ways though which grassroots are co-opted for white marketized means. This can be seen, for example, in the global popularity of the #MeToo movement which only achieved its popularity when separated from its Black

feminist origins and taken over by a white Hollywood star, a co-option that centered Western privileged feminisms and situated their struggles as universal (Phipps, 2019).

Whilst there is evidence that feminisms are being used for neoliberal means, there is also a suggestion that the popularity of movements like #MeToo and Everyone's Invited signal 'movement(s) of mass disclosure' (Phipps, 2019: 3) that are meaningful in that they enable a speaking out of previously silenced oppressions. This connects back to a genealogy of feminists calling out injustices and connecting the personal to the political (Hanisch, 1969 in Phipps, 2019). From the consciousness-raising sessions of the Women's Liberation movement in which women discussed culturally taboo experiences and feelings that had been positioned as personal problems rather than structural injustices (Lewis, 2013), these practices have a history in the civil rights' movement slogan 'tell it like it is' (Mitchell 1971 cited in Hogeland, 2016). These herstories of speaking out can also be traced back to Sojourner Truth's speech in 1851 to the Akron Women's Rights Convention and activism centered around testimonies in the US Civil Rights movement (McGuire, 2010 in Phipps, 2019). Whilst the method of consciousness raising in groups has been regarded as a starting point for feminist activist organizing rather than an end in itself (Hogeland, 2016), the practice signals an association between freedom and speech; a process of validating experiences of oppression, as well as a resistance to being pathologized by patriarchy through the sharing of personal stories that can open up collectivity and politicization (Baker, 2007 in Phipps, 2019).

Whilst movements like #MeToo and Everyone's Invited, as well as the evidence around increased interest in feminism in schooling are suggestive of the new possibilities for speaking out about experiences of sexual and gendered injustice, the process of disclosure is complicated by the simultaneous rise in anti-feminism backlash. This is found particularly within online spaces in which these technologies have enabled a rise against feminism and specific feminists (see Citron, 2014; Jane, 2014, 2017; Poland, 2016; Powell and Henry, 2017 cited in Mendes et al, 2018: 31). This form of misogyny is shaped around the notion that patriarchy and traditional masculinity are under threat, and therefore require recuperation from 'greedy feminists' (Banet Weiser, 2018: 31). This results in the existence of Men's Rights Activists (MRA's), gendered trolling online (Jane, 2016) and distinct backlash towards

feminists (Ging, 2018: 646). Banet Weiser (2018) argues that these anti-feminist movements are bolstered partly due to their cultural normalcy; the ways they integrate themselves into legal and political discourses as common sense; the notion that 'boys will be boys' even when committing acts of sexual violence, as well as the accepted anonymity of these misogynistic voices online. When these acts do become visible, Banet Weiser argues, they are positioned and pathologized as the acts of outliers; bad apples or the mentally unwell (2018), which encourages institutions to respond by focusing on individuals rather than taking a structural approach (Sundaram and Jackson, 2018).

This thesis takes into account the contexts outlined above, including young people's increased awareness in many forms of feminism; the rise in neoliberal feminisms; the new possibilities for disclosing sexual and gendered harm, and the complexities caused by anti-feminism backlash, in order to develop several key research questions. These have been formed in response to the contexts above, as I started to query what schools mean when they promote 'feminism'; whether consciousness raising groups of the second wave are being recreated in schools to understand personal issues as political, and how young people constitute feminist subjectivities in their schools during a time that both enables the existence of feminism activisms, whilst simultaneously reconstituting post and anti-feminist ideologies. In what follows, I outline this study's research aims and questions that center upon what teenagers' feminist participation and engagement looks like within these contexts and, in particular, how teenagers constitute feminist subjectivities in relation to these and their in-school feminism groups.

1.2.2. Research aims and questions

I developed two overall research aims and then formed questions from these. The research aims and questions were (re)formulated in the process of analysis and can thus be mapped onto the different analysis chapters.

My first aim was to understand the relationship between teenagers' engagements in school feminism groups, their school's institutional approach to issues of gender and sexuality and their own constitution of feminist subjectivities.

Three questions for this aim are:

- RQ 1: How do teenagers, through engagement with feminism groups, constitute feminist subjectivities in and around six different schools?
- RQ 2: How do boys taking part in feminism societies in two private schools constitute feminisms in relation to expectations of elite masculinity?
- RQ 3: How do a group of girls taking part in a feminism club use a research encounter to constitute feminism in relation to femininities and sexuality?

My second aim was to understand my own subjectivity within the research project and to consider how I navigate this situated position in 'feminist' ways. The question for this aim is:

- RQ 4: How do I, as a self-defined feminist educator and researcher, negotiate my position through this study?

1.2.3. Research framework

I want to situate these questions within the framework in which I ask them, by turning to the ways that I draw upon poststructural, intersectional feminist and psychosocial concepts to inform this study.

- **A contextual way in**

Whilst there is increasing evidence for the ways that young people are moving beyond binary categorizations of girl and boy in schools, schools are sites where essentialist ideas about sex and gender remain salient and problematic (Rasmussen, 2006; Bragg et al, 2018). The notion that there are two sexes that are innately different is one supported by evolutionary psychologists who regard gendered behaviours as reflective of biological differences and these notions contribute to theories that girls' and boys' brains develop

differently (Francis, 2006). These ideas connect to the way gender is dealt with in schools since these promote the idea that, for instance, girls are more capable in the humanities whilst boys perform better in the sciences (Gurian, 2010), and can be argued to contribute to institutional justifications for single sex schools who market themselves through catering for the learning styles and needs of a particular 'sex' (Park et al, 2018). Within the wider global anti-gender movement (Tudor, 2023), there is evidence for the UK government further entrenching this through their recent guidelines enabling single sex schools to reject transgender pupils and ignore preferred pronouns (DeWolfe, 'Single-sex schools to reject transgender pupils and ignore preferred pronouns under new Government guidelines', 18 April 2023). These biologically-based assumptions around sex roles support an understanding of how sexual harm is perpetuated (Sundaram and Jackson, 2018) and leave less room for possibilities of remaking gendered roles and expectations in schools since these become naturalised through these discourses. My study is strongly based in a political and theoretical understanding of gender that rejects these essentialist assumptions to focus on the social construction of gender and an intersectional approach to feminism.

Poststructural feminist approaches understand gender to be a political and social construction and gendered subjectivity to be discursively formed (St Pierre, 2000). This study is informed by Butler's (1990) theory of gender performativity that proposes that gender is not something we are but that we do; 'a repeated stylisation of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being' (33). Butler's (1990) notion of the heterosexual matrix also informs this research; the idea that heterosexuality is normalised to such an extent that anything outside of the heteronormative is positioned as abnormal, and the ways this links inextricably to gender meaning that one cannot perform girl or boy 'properly' without that gendered performance mapping onto heterosexuality. I draw upon these approaches to understand the participants as having learnt to perform gender and sexual norms through the discursive practices in which they engage (Davies and Nielson, 1997), a framework that both recognises the discourses available to them, as well as how they constitute subjectivities in relationship with these.

Intersectional approaches also inform this approach as this understands terms including woman, man, girl and boy not as categories that are undifferentiated but as informed by

many intersecting factors that shape gendered experiences (Christoffersen and Emejulu, 2022; Bragg et al, 2022). This has implications for understanding the construction of masculinities and femininities in this study since this approach perceives these to be made up of intersecting factors that, only when taken together, account for different formations of subjectivity. This lens aims to avoid prioritizing one part of identity over another because, unless the variation of young people's experiences is accounted for, those who are white and middle-class are likely to be centered and situated as the default against which other are measured (Bragg et al, 2022). This un-fixes notions of girl and boyhood to position these as plural, fluid and also relational in that they are constituted in relation to their binary other and the contexts in which they are situated (Bragg et al, 2022).

Whilst I use the terms boy and girl, this doesn't assume that these are biologically determined but are variable, socially constructed and as belonging to any young person who defines as these. However, since the schools where the research was undertaken operated using these binary frames and the participants discussed the ways they were expected to fit into the constraints of femininities and masculinities, two of the analysis chapter titles refer directly to these categories. None of the participants defined as transgender or non-binary, however the participants' experiences of performing girl and boy in their schools are analysed in relation to what they discuss about sexuality, race and class so that these are taken together to account for the participants' different 'constellations' of experience (Youdell, 2005a, 2005b cited in Bragg et al, 2022)

This study also moves beyond only focusing on the ways that young people take up gendered and sexualised discourses to consider the emotional, experiential and unconscious underpinnings of these. I do this by drawing not only on discursive and intersectional feminist theories but also on the psychosocial. This approach destabilizes the lines often drawn between the social and the psychic in order to understand how these relate to one another (Frosh, 2014). This therefore moves the analytic lens from one only concerned with how young people take up feminist discourses, to their felt experiences and emotions about these identifications and investments. I also use this framework to consider my own engagements and subjectivity in relation to this study, which I begin to trace in the section that follows.

1.3. Locating my subjectivity and its relation to the emergence of this study

2008- 2009

I spent my first year of secondary school teaching in a large comprehensive school in South London. At 22 years old, I was a year out of my undergraduate degree and had just graduated from a PGCE course. As a newly qualified teacher of English, I went straight into a full-time role, teaching students between the ages 11 and 16. On entering this 'NQT (Newly Qualified Teacher) year, I felt confident and adventurous in my teaching practices. Part of the year was spent teaching metaphysical poetry to a group of Year 10 students who, known as a class difficult to engage, I attempted to startle into paying attention by playing loud music as they entered the classroom. The songs I played (at what became a series of lessons beginning this way) would be linked to a theme in the poem we'd be studying, and the students appeared to enjoy this sensory introduction to what, they later realised, were the most corporeal of poems. Poems that appeared to be about mundane insects or the rising of the sun but were in fact about death and sex, appeared to both appal and thrill the students. In these lessons, my role as newly qualified teacher felt enlivening; the young people I taught seemed stimulated by their learning and I felt able to direct this. My education and training seemed to be working upon and with the students and it was through these lessons, that my institutional subjectivity as 'teacher' appeared to be produced.

In other lessons, I found that I was not only a teacher within this school; I was also a woman. During a Year 9 class in which I was to read aloud a section of Benjamin Zephaniah's Gangsta Rap, I opened the book to see that an unknown student had written inside the front cover 'miss Retallack I want to fuck you until you bleed' (I pretended not to see this and got on with reading the chapter). Another day, I arrived late to a lesson with my Year 11 class to find two large boys blocking the doorway meaning I had to physically push myself past- and along- them to enter as I moved past them, they laughed and I felt so stupid (why didn't I insist they moved?) On break time duty, during which I had to patrol the outside space where a group of boys were playing football one shouted 'miss do you suck dick?' I reported this but it resulted in the aggressive male deputy head shouting at the boy and sending the

boy home for a day only for the boy to return the next and call me a bitch (should I have reported it?). Teaching another Year 9 class, a male student raised his hand as if to answer my question but, blatantly staring at my breasts, told me I had 'filled out this year' (I felt so ashamed but don't remember what I replied). My sense of myself as a teacher appeared to slip away in these moments as these comments reduced me to what felt like only my woman-ness. Having grown up in the 90s and early 2000s when girl power was everywhere but feminism was nowhere, I had no language through which to speak back to what I didn't even know to call harassment. On completing this NQT year, I left my post at this school.

Between 2008 and early 2019, I taught English Language and Literature in a range of secondary schools. These included a large inner city comprehensive, a suburban academy, a hospital school, a private dance school and an elite all girls' school. Despite the differences in these school contexts, their regulation of gender and sexualities appeared broadly consistent: the uniforms that required girls to wear skirts that fell below the knee; the literary curriculum materials that prioritised white men's experiences; the lack of training or quality resources for Relationships and Sexuality education lessons; the rules demanding boys' hair be cut short; the casual harassment and ridiculing of teachers who weren't obviously heterosexual men.

My experiences across these schools opened up both personal and political questions around the ways that gender, sexuality and feminisms were being (re)produced in schools as I observed and experienced normalised everyday misogyny. In 2014, I became interested in developing a space in schools for teenagers to discuss issues around gender and sexuality. However, whilst this idea came from my first-hand awareness of the lack of spaces in schools for discussion of these issues, I didn't yet have a language for this that connected to feminism. At the same time, I was applying for a part-time PhD in which I aimed to focus on gendered representation in the English Literature curriculum. In 2015, on acceptance to undertake a part-time doctorate, I began taking part in a project called 'Feminism in Schools: Mapping impact in practice' that was led by professors EJ Renold and Jessica Ringrose and included feminism clubs being set up and researched in secondary schools across England and Wales. These were the sort of informal spaces I'd been thinking about,

in which discussion around these issues that appeared entirely missing from official curricula but were highly present in the policies, expectations and silences in these schools could be opened up. My engagement with this project was a significant learning experience in that I began to understand the politics and potential of feminist spaces, both through beginning to read academic literature on this topic, and through my practical facilitation of a feminism group at the school where I worked at the time. The experience of supporting a feminism club in the school where I worked as a teacher was, however, more complex than I'd anticipated. The leadership team were deeply against what they deemed to be 'militant' feminist politics, insisting for instance that the students took down their feminism posters and demanding we remove the word feminism from the club's title. However, despite the institutions' resistance to the group's activities, these young people repeatedly expressed the importance of this space for their understanding and activism of issues around gender and sexuality[1], and I often felt that I was witness to deeply meaningful moments of feminist consciousness raising between the teenage participants.

In 2016, I co-authored a paper theorizing the ways in which we understood the girls in the group to have moved from a personal and pathologized understanding of their hatred of their bodies, into something political, collective and activist (Retallack et al, 2016). It was in the same year that, rather than the formalized curriculum, feminism groups became the focus of this PhD study.

2018-2019

I spent my last year of secondary school teaching in an all girls' private school in London. I applied to a private school because they paid significantly more for a part-time teaching role than my previous job, and I had been struggling to pay PhD fees and rent. On interviewing for the role at this school, I told the head teacher about my interest in doing feminist work with the students and the difficulties I'd had in my previous school with school leaders

[1] This feminism club is discussed in depth in Chapter Seven.

effectively banning any so-called feminist activity and the headteacher proclaimed 'feminism isn't a dirty word here!'. I was offered the job.

My own naivety about the meaning of feminism within an elite all girls' school was maintained initially through the school's hands-off approach to the work I voluntarily did. This work included setting up a 'feminism in culture' elective course for Year 9 (age 13-14) students to engage them with intersectional feminist approaches to films, literature and art, as well as setting up a feminism club for girls of all ages which provided a space for inter-year group discussions of issues they wanted to raise; often including critiques of the school itself and its handling of issues of equity in relation to uniform policies and the curriculum.

A year into this work, I was told by the headteacher to 'apply' for the very role I had created and been doing freely. The creation of this official 'feminist' role was positioned as a privilege and an opportunity; the work would be in addition to my English teaching role but have its own job description, salary and line manager. If I wanted to continue working with the students around issues of feminism, it was made clear I had no choice but to take up this position.

Tensions quickly emerged between the form of feminism that I and my students had been engaging with and the one the school wanted us to perform. Soon after the role became official, some of the students in the feminism club were invited to speak about their 'passion for feminism' in front of the CEO of the school's wider trust. One of the feminist club members, a 17-year-old Black girl called Sandra, talked about by the 'misogynoir' she'd experienced from boys her age. Another member, a South Asian 14-year old student called Mona discussed her frustrations with the emphasis on white men in the History curriculum, whilst a white British 16-year-old girl called Laura talked about her interest in tackling issues of period poverty in the UK. Their stories were personal, political and certainly passionate. However, the feminist groups' comments were met with what looked like a forced smile from the CEO before she left without speaking to the students on any of the topics they'd raised. I was told later by the deputy head that the focus shouldn't have been so negative; we should be focusing on 'progress'.

Feminism's place in the school had at once been authorized and taken under its control. Before the role was officiated, my work was led by and for the students, however, in taking the line-managed paid feminist role, my allegiance was taken up by the institution. In agreeing to this, I realized my disinvestment in the form of feminism that the school wanted me to adhere to and promote, as well as the effect of the work being line-managed by a senior leader whose primary interest appeared to be in publicizing the school to prospective parents. Whilst my students positioned me as a feminist mentor who encouraged their specifically intersectional form of feminism (that often involved taking the school itself to task), the school located me as an ambassador for a particular form of white marketized 'positive' feminism. The tension I experienced around these oppositional subjectivities was one that I ultimately couldn't manage, and I left the job after only a year in the official feminist role.

These two vignettes and the short account in-between, narrate events from my first and last years as a school teacher, as well as the years between these during which I started this doctoral project. The events I document suggest something of what may have catalysed my interest in young people's experiences of issues related to sexism and feminism in schools, my personal relationship with the object of this research and the cultural shifts in relation to feminism and schooling that have taken place.

However, the narrative identity I produce in these accounts also raises questions about how I, as a self-defined feminist educator and researcher, negotiate my subjective position through this study. I understand the identities I produce in these accounts as performed through my recounting of them (Hollway and Jefferson, 2013), meaning that I produce something of a subjectivity through my telling of these events. Therefore, whilst they might sound coherent in their positioning as the conception and development of my interest in the topic of feminism and schooling, these are only versions of how my interest in this thesis has emerged and been sustained. As I try to trace this project's conception, I am also trying to locate where it is that I constituted my own feminist subjectivity. Sara Ahmed (2017) writes that feminism emerges in the places that have historically been classed as outside of politics; in homes and in the street and that, through this, 'patriarchal reasoning goes all the way down to the letter, to the bone' (4). Another way of understanding this might be to say

that my subjectivity has been constituted *through* patriarchal relations, therefore, my tracing of the emergence of this doctorate is to locate a moment in which a new aspect of my subjectivity began, as if, again.

This study is concerned with questions about the constitution of subjectivities through the imbrication of the cultural and psychic[2], and recognises how this complicates the potential to give an account of oneself. I draw from Butler (2005) to conceive of the self as always implicated within sets of social relations and norms, therefore whilst one might begin with a sense of an 'I', this cannot exist outside of regulatory norms that delineate the forms that this 'I' might take (Butler, 2005). As I try to make myself understood and recognisable as a subject, my narrative authority is disrupted by the norms that challenge my story's singularity since I cannot know how all aspects of my story emerged. I therefore don't have a story of how I came to this thesis that is my own, but stories that detail a series of relations to particular sets of events, some that preceded, crossed over and come after the research was undertaken. However, I have chosen to narrate the events detailed above because these experiences provoked curiosities and concerns that made their way into forming the research questions this study poses, as well as the interpretations I make.

My own position towards the teenagers taking part in this research is one I understand as often shifting in that I represented different things to my participants depending on aspects including my previous relationship to them (if any), the presence or lack of by another adult in the room, the ways in which they related to a stranger adult researcher, whether I interviewed them in a group or on their own and their school's institutional response to feminism (amongst others). However, there are also aspects of my position, including my white middle-class educated professional performance of womanhood, that remained stable and afforded me privileges; particularly around being considered by school gatekeepers as a respectable adult. But this position also limited my access to understandings of my participants' experiences since, whilst I found all of their narratives to be compelling and important, I cannot claim that I was able to interpret them with equal levels of empathy and understanding. Whilst white middle class girl experiences and

[2] This is outlined in detail in Chapter Four.

subjectivities are those I can most easily identify with, I aim to question and undercut my claims to knowledge about all the young people in this study. This is not a way to absolve myself of my responsibility towards representing them, but to recognise that my interpretations are situated, partial and in-progress. The ways I do this and how these connect to feminist approaches to research are further detailed in the methodology chapter.

1.4. Organization of thesis

This thesis aims to contribute to understandings about how young people engage with feminisms and form subjectivities in relation to them in their schools. This is in response to the issues identified earlier in this chapter including gendered and sexual inequities in schools, the ways that these are systematically ignored by governing powers, and the evidence suggesting that competing feminisms can be used to serve different interests in schools. This study explores the narratives of teenagers already taking part in school-based feminism groups to understand the ways they constitute feminist subjectivities in relation to their school environments, other feminisms and one another. The teenagers' narratives are analysed using a psychosocial and discursive conceptual frame to interpret their psychic constitutions of feminist subjectivities and how cultural discourses inform their relations to feminisms.

Chapter Two builds on some of the themes identified in this introduction to review literature around what young people's engagement with feminist politics looks like, including the ways that their engagements with politics alters from traditional modes of political participation, the complexities of intergenerational activist movements and the exclusions that can affect young people's access to politics. The second part reviews literature around the meanings that young people invest in feminisms and how this relates to wider cultural expectations around femininities in relation to cultures of postfeminism, neoliberal feminism and antifeminism, whilst the third section discusses the limited literature that exists around young people's direct engagements with feminism in schools.

Chapter Three discusses what a feminist approach to research might mean, particularly in relation to working from situated experiences as a researcher and attempting to bring this into knowledge making. This includes discussion of three feminist aspects I aim to work with in this study; intersectional, reflexive and vulnerable approaches. The sections following from this discusses the methods used including processes of sampling and gaining access to the six research sites; the process of constituting and re-constituting a feminist researcher subjectivity in the interviews, and a discussion of the processes of writing fieldnotes, transcription, my negotiation of various ethical issues, and analysis of the data. Overall, this chapter outlines the methods and complexities of the study to suggest that my own subjective relation as a feminist researcher and practitioner to the participants and institutions involved in the research underpinned what was possible to access and to know through every stage of this research.

Chapter Four offers the interpretive framework for the study. This is an overview of discursive and psychosocial theories, arguing for the productivity of drawing on both as an overall framework. The discussion outlines three specific concepts used in the analysis chapters; the first is focused on intersubjectivity; the second discusses a conceptualisation of defended masculinities, and the third offers a conceptualisation of feminist readings of melancholia. In drawing these together, I discuss the relevance of these psychosocial concepts for interpreting young people's complex constitutions of feminist subjectivities in their schools, as well as how cultural discourses of popular feminisms inform young people's relations towards these across different school contexts.

Subsequent chapters present the analyses of the participants' narratives. Chapter Five proposes that the participants from each of the groups constitute their feminist subjectivities relationally, in that they are always discussed in relation to the discourses available to them at school, whether that is postfeminist, neoliberal, anti-feminist or other forms of feminisms the young people or their schools generate. Chapter Six proposes that elite boys' negotiations of feminisms are mediated through anxieties of taking up a subordinated masculine position which produces modes of distancing from the feminine or queer, and defences of hegemonic masculine subjectivities. Chapter Seven suggests that a group of girls who feel broadly supported by their feminist consciousness raising constitute

a melancholic longing for an idealized feminism that would empower them everywhere, including in their heterosexual encounters. This chapter also engages with the dynamics that my own positionality produces and the ways this intersects with the narratives of the participants. I analyse fieldnotes to propose that the way the participants' feminist subjectivities are constituted are not only through relations to discourses within their school, but also towards myself as part of the context that enabled their articulation of a feminist subjectivity.

The final chapter returns to the research questions by drawing the study's responses to these together to consider their implications as well as the limitations of this study. I then outline the implications of this thesis for possible future research, including making suggestions about the potential of feminism groups to support young people's emotional and educational exploration of issues of gender and sexuality, and for educators interested in supporting young people's intersectional feminist activisms in their schools.

Chapter 2: Literature Review- Young people's engagements with feminisms both around and in schools

2.1. Outlining the chapter

This chapter reviews literature related to the study's focus around how teenagers already taking part in school-based feminism groups constitute their feminist subjectivities. Literature from educational studies as well as the fields of youth studies, digital media cultures and cultural theory is reviewed to show how this research study is situated in relation to existing work in the area of young people's engagements with feminisms.

The first part of this chapter reviews literature around what young people's engagement with feminist politics looks like, including the ways that their engagements with this strand of politics may look different to traditional modes of political participation, the complexities of intergenerational activisms and the exclusions that can affect young people's access to these movements. The second part reviews literature around the meanings that young people invest in feminisms and how this relates to wider cultural expectations around femininities in relation to cultures of postfeminism, neoliberal feminism and antifeminism. The final and third section draws on literature around young people's engagement with feminism, particularly within postfeminist contexts, as well as the limited literature on the topic of this thesis; feminism groups in schools, in order to understand how the literature conceptualizes school contexts that both enable the subjective position of feminist to be taken up and feminism groups to exist, whilst simultaneously reconstituting postfeminist ideologies. The issues outlined in this literature points towards the complexity of navigating activist spaces as a teenager, the exclusionary politics that pervade both off and online feminist platforms, and the contradictory messages facing young people both in and around their schools as to what feminism might mean for their lives; all of which are central to this study.

This literature review takes in to account the shifting context of feminisms outlined in the introductory chapter; one that is at once postfeminist, neoliberal feminist, popular-feminist

and anti-feminist to question what young people's feminist participation looks like in this landscape, how young people invest in various feminisms, and, in particular, how teenagers negotiate feminisms in relation to their in-school feminism groups. In the final section of this chapter I directly consider the implications of these studies for my own research into how teenagers constitute feminist subjectivities within these contexts.

The following section begins by posing the question, what does the literature say about young people's feminist participation outside of their schools?

2.2. What does teenagers' political participation with feminisms look like?

2.2.1: Introduction

The ways in which young people engage with feminism and the wider politics of social justice has been empirically interrogated by scholars who are concerned with the enactment of teenagers' feminist politics as well as the ways they come into a feminist consciousness. This section discusses literature that examines young peoples' engagement with feminist politics, with a specific look at the wide variety of forms that their engagement takes both on and offline. This includes the ways these can be dismissed or even unseen as they take different forms from more traditional modes of political action; the complexities and possibilities of intergenerational activisms, and the problematic privileging of particular voices within these activist engagements.

2.2.2. The variety of forms that teenagers' engagement takes both on and offline

Whilst teenagers' disengagement with politics has been widely documented, this often draws on singular definitions of what this engagement looks like, or on measures of how many participated, both of which don't allow young people to define their engagement with politics on their own terms (Rheingans and Hollands, 2013). Downes (2008) and Guest (2016) argue that a wider definition of political participation needs to be made in relation to

feminist activisms to make sense of the range of engagements made by young people. These scholars call for others to pay attention to less obvious forms of protest and activism, and conceptualize these forms of feminist praxis as dynamic and shifting in relation to the particular contexts they take place within (Downes, 2008).

Attention is paid to the different ways in which teenagers engage with feminisms in the literature, for instance in Taft's (2006) research with teenage girls in which she discusses their disengagement with official U.S governmental politics, which is argued to be form of political engagement in itself. Taft suggests that these girls consciously disavow governmental politics that they see to be disconnected from people like them, in order to mechanise their own forms of political engagements including grassroots and community forms of organising, further highlighting the need to pay attention to the ways young people engage with politics. Harris's work (2010) also studies the diverse range of practices through which teenage girls engage with feminist politics and finds a wide variety of ways this is enacted, with some of these much larger in scale than others, for instance involving actions around disrupting powerful sectors and forming agendas for systemic change, whilst others are more invested in localised communities or even just individuated processes of survival under patriarchy. Harris argues that these engagements can't be reduced to a monolith as they take such diverse forms. An example of a form of this is in Piepmeier's (2009) study of girls' zine-making practices. Whilst feminist zines can refer to many forms of publications, they have historically been a DIY form of communication and community building for feminists to publish outside of mainstream forms of media, and Piepmeier's study understands teenage girls' participation with these to be a form of feminist politics that responds to a neoliberal market agenda, since these zines foreground race, gender and other forms of social identity to consider how these shape experiences. Piepmeier argues that the materiality of the zine also works to detach from mainstream marketplace expectations, offering the girls freedom to creatively communicate their own feminist narratives. Another specific and creative aspect of teenage feminist participation is studied by Keller (2012) who argues that teenage girls' blogging practices reframe what it means to engage in feminist politics. Like Harris, Keller stresses the importance of not reducing these practices or feminist bloggers themselves to a single entity since their range of output and engagements is so diverse. Keller gives the example of the girls' critiques as ranging from

critiques of popular magazines' summer fashion tips, to a discussion of rape jokes, to signal this breadth. Due to the exclusion that teenage girls face around formalised modes of politics and citizenship, Keller conceptualises them as a 'counter-public' (443) who use the internet to draw on and produce new understandings of feminism.

This literature draws attention to the ways that young people's engagements with feminism is specific to the contexts they are in and does not necessarily take the shape of adult political participation. This therefore may look like dis-engagement, or creative zine making or online blogging; all of which can be easily dismissed as not political enough in adult terms. This raises questions around how young people's in-school engagements are conceptualised as political or activist (enough?), whose terms these judgements are made upon, and how young people themselves interpret these for themselves; questions that my study will address.

2.2.3. The complexities and possibilities of feminist intergenerational activisms

The ways that young people's feminist activisms relate to that of older generations of feminists, particularly mothers, school teachers and school leaders, forms a part of this research study. As the introduction outlines, my engagement with this topic came out of my own inter-generational engagement with groups of girls in schools through my capacity as a teacher and then a feminism club facilitator. The third analysis chapter discusses how my involvement with one of the feminism groups in particular raised ethical complications around the lines between my role as their teacher and a club facilitator, as well as my subsequent role as a researcher. However, this study is also concerned with the generative potential of this intergenerational work, particularly for making change within schools. The literature discussed below deals with both the complexities and possibilities of these intergenerational feminist-activist collaborations., and questions what these instances raise about both conceptualizations and enactments of intergenerational feminisms.

The complexities of intergenerational feminist work are explored in Bent's (2016) research, undertaken in a North American context, that pays particular attention to the ethics of empowering girls. This research took place within the context of girl-focused projects at the

UN and asks what the ethical difficulties are for feminist adults involved in these collaborations. Bent foregrounds the tensions inherent in this work by considering the structural relations that pervade encounters between girls and adults, and argues that these partnerships require those who are older to face up to these complexities, particularly to the ways that adults can affect girls' ideas and thoughts for their own gain. Bent urges researchers to move beyond simplistic conceptualizations of girls' empowerment, and to instead own up to the difficulties around power structures and boundaries that manifest in intergenerational work between adults and teenagers. Through the practice of engaging more transparently with these complex power dynamics, a case is made for the potential of these partnerships to form meaningful change.

This potential for inter-generational activisms is also suggested by Edella and Mikel Brown's (2016) research, scholars also working in the U.S. The authors take into account the complexity of these collaborations, including the navigation of power imbalances, the transmission of cultural differences between generations and various other 'tricky negotiations' (693), but through analysis of a specific inter-generational movement called 'SPARK' (of which the authors are a part), their research draws from specific moments and stories in which this form of intergenerational work made social change. However, a key issue the authors found was around the media's conceptualization of their activisms. This was because it was focused only on the girls' supposed singular leadership of the projects, a lens which ignored the collaborative nature of the effort, thus pushing a neoliberal narrative of the girl as the sole overcomer of oppression whilst the adults' work was 'rendered invisible' (699). This media lens only wanted to see a single story of individuated success, rather than to engage with the collaborative and distinctly intergenerational emphasis of the work.

What media spaces can hide from view and their threat to inter-generational collaborations is also raised in Schuster's (2013) research in the context of New Zealand, in which the researcher's interviews with older feminists suggested their complete lack of awareness of younger women's online activisms. The ways the girls formed support networks and organised offline discussion and events through platforms including Facebook, Twitter and various blogs, were deemed to be hidden from view from the older generations therefore

furthering what they termed a 'generational divide among women engaging with feminism' (8), as older and younger women enacted their activisms across different spaces. However, whilst Schuster positions these divisions as problematic, these are understood differently by Saavedra (2020) who researches with feminist activists of different ages in the context of Rio de Janeiro where a 'new feminism' (1) is argued to be taking place both on and offline. In this context, young people communicate their feminisms through artistic means in particular; 'in the streets, on the internet, and in the media' (1); a practice which older generations don't take part in. However, whilst this disengagement between young and old appears to signal complexity and disagreement, Saavedra draws from Simmel (1955) to make a case for the 'constructive potential of conflict' (9) since, she argues, without this there would only be indifference. An argument is made for the connective power of difference and conflict within feminist activisms, and the potential of these to highlight a recognition and understanding of the other.

The potential of feminist generational legacies to divide or connect is also discussed by Robyn Weigman (2000) as she conceives of two forms of feminist temporality; a spontaneous generational feminism which arises from the instant (as opposed to historical roots of feminism), and legacy-based generational feminism which depends on historical memory and knowledge of feminism. Whilst this is a theoretical rather than empirical contribution to this literature, it is relevant to this study in that Weigman suggests that feminist temporality is based on the persistency of melancholic laments of past feminist loss, which continually writes the present as a scene of failure (Weigman, 2000). An example of this can be seen in feminists' approaches to sexuality which is said to be one of the central distinctions between second- and third-wave feminists, as writers of the feminist third-wave understand their second wave predecessors as anti-sex. (Henry, 2004). The 'sex wars' of the 1980s and 1990s were between those feminists who argued that sex work and pornography were harmful (including notable feminists like Andrea Dworkin, Catherine MacKinnon, and Robin Morgan) and feminists who argued for sex as liberatory (Camille Paglia, Gayle Rubin and Germaine Greer amongst others) (Rivers, 2017: 83). Some of these 'sex-positive' feminists, a term coined by Ellen Willis in 1981, insisted on the possibility for sexual freedom under patriarchy, as well as the need for feminists and everyone else to allow women to pursue it, whilst feminists including MacKinnon disparaged these 'pro-sex'

feminists for believing that sexual self-determination for women might be possible under patriarchy. (Srinivasan, 2018). Debates continue between those feminists who defend the agency and 'choice' of those who work in the sex industry for example, and those feminists who analyse the structures surrounding and informing these choices, with some even refuting the notion of 'choice' altogether (Rivers, 2017). However, without any knowledge of these legacies, young people are less able to make a claim to a past time as their own 'feminist' response is understood to be what Wiegman calls spontaneous rather than one connected to previous generations of feminists who engaged in these very debates. This raises questions about whether we avoid linking young people with feminist legacies since they may otherwise lose their sense of authorship over their feminist response in order to keep alive what Lynne Segal terms 'a radical spirit' (2003: 152) since to affiliate with feminist foremothers might remove that enlivening sense of their own spontaneity and rebelliousness. Or whether connecting young people with feminist histories means that a continuity might be affirmed and they are potentially enabled to appreciate and feel connected to, in Wiegman's terms, their feminist fore-mothers? Therefore, a question is raised as to what extent young people need older feminist legacies to address their feminism to in order to construct their own feminist subjectivities; a question that this study will address.

Whilst highlighting complex aspects of intergenerational feminist work, these scholars all argue for the importance of paying attention to the tensions within intergenerational feminist activisms. An argument is made across these papers not to be dissuaded by these conflicts, since it is though emphasizing these that the possibilities of these collaborations can be understood, and questions can be raised around how to draw on intergenerational legacies to form feminist futures. This study draws from these debates to consider the relations between my participants and the adult facilitators of their feminism groups, as well as to reflexively explore my own relations with one of the feminism groups in particular.

2.2.4. The exclusion and privileging of particular voices within feminist activist engagements

The literature around the politics of inclusion and exclusion within young people's feminist movements, deals directly with the ways in which systems of power influence the ways that certain voices are privileged over others in and around these activisms, with reference to intersectional and queer theories.

Exclusionary politics in creative feminist spaces are discussed by Piepmeier (2009) whose research is discussed in the section above around girls' feminist zine-making. Piepmeier argues for a key contribution of the writers of zines being their highlighting of what she terms the 'unexamined whiteness that shapes many feminist arguments and identities' (131). A critique is made of white girls' promotion of a sisterhood since this is premised upon the white girls' unexamined prejudices and their expectation for Black women to conform to assumed white forms of feminism. Edella and Mikel Brown (2016) also discuss the pervasiveness of default white norms in feminist movements, but in relation to the ways their own whiteness permeates their interactions with girls of colour in the activist groups they facilitate. The authors discuss their misplaced efforts to bring groups of girls into cultures of 'sameness' (704) and how, through discussions with Black girls, they found that this isn't what these girls want since this doesn't allow for discussion of the issues that they care about. These authors state the need to work in a way that takes into account differences, rather than seeking to homogenize all girls' experiences, particularly in ways that assume whiteness.

Exclusions within online feminist activist movements are discussed by Mendes et al (2018) who studies the ways that young self-defining feminists have utilized digital technologies to organize around misogyny. The use of hashtag feminism is one of the most popular forms of feminist activism online, and one that importantly attracts attention when the hashtags produce 'communities of conversation among disparate Twitter users' (237), as #MeToo did, therefore having the potential to transgress the generational divides discussed in the previous section. However, in a similar way to the #MeToo movement, which was dominated by white celebrity voices that took over those of Black women including the

founder Tarana Burke who had started the hashtag (Trott, 2021), these movements are pervaded by power imbalances. Mendes et al's 2018 research finds that whilst it might be straightforward for young people to initially access these hashtags, the engagement in these forms of activism entails many barriers, including mental and emotional ones. The authors suggest that that whilst hashtag campaigns are key sites for young women to take part in feminist discourses, there is a significant mental toll around the politics of this labour in which certain voices are more easily let in than others. Whilst age was cited as a particular aspect through which teenagers were not able to form or sustain a voice in political spaces which Twitter offered respite from, once they were engaging online, aspects of this work remained very complex. One of the ways this manifested was in terms of how difficult it is for these young people to be financially compensated for aspects of labour they perform in online spaces, making the work precarious and unsustainable. The participants of this research also discussed the emotional burden of this work, in which they were regularly exposed to stories of gendered violence, whilst also being exposed to threats of violence themselves for having a voice online.

Trott (2021) draws directly on Crenshaw's (1991) conception of intersectionality, that analyses the ways that systemic modes of gender, class and race converge and how when looked at in isolation these cannot explain patterns of discrimination, to analyse the exclusions enacted in the #MeToo movement in particular. Whilst online spaces can appear to democratically admit everyone, Trott also cites Rich's 2003 notion of compulsory heterosexuality and Serano's (2013) trans analysis to argue for the ways that #MeToo assumes in fact heterosexuality and excludes trans women. Trott suggests the movement ultimately centers the interests of white cis-gendered heterosexual women, and argues for the importance of focusing on intersectionality in popular feminisms so that these oppressive politics of exclusion aren't continually reproduced in online feminist spaces.

2.2.5: Concluding thoughts on teenagers' political participation with feminisms

The literature reviewed in this section points to the complex ways that teenagers and young people engage with and produce feminist politics. Some of this literature focuses on the ways that these don't necessarily look like traditional forms of political participation and

draws attention to the ways that teenage engagements may look different or even be hidden from view. Other studies are concerned with different conceptualizations of these engagements that raise questions around the tensions and possibilities for intergenerational feminist work, whilst the last of the three sections discusses intersectional privileging and exclusions within young people's feminist activist spaces both on and offline. These studies suggest that young people's engagement with feminism and the wider politics of social justice is varied in its methods and the ways it intersects with older generations, but that the access to on and offline activist spaces is bound up in systems of power that coalesce to exclude Black, queer and trans bodies. What is less explored in this literature, however, are the particular ways that young people find meaning in particular forms of feminisms, and how this intersects with their social positioning. The following section will therefore pose questions central to this thesis about the ways that young people invest in and engage with particular forms of feminism.

2.3. How do young people engage with feminisms?

2.3.1. Introduction

The literature discussed below suggests there are three broad ways that scholars understand young people's engagements with feminisms; the first being to identify in shifting ways with particular feminisms; the second is to respond to postfeminist cultures by splitting feminism into binaries in which one type is deemed more acceptable than another; whilst the third is more deeply related to a sense of self, in which the young people feel that their feminist identification engages with an integral part of their being. This section will discuss each one, and how my study builds from these ideas to question young people's investments in feminism within school contexts and in relation to their feminism groups.

2.3.2. Shifting identifications

There are many conceptualizations of the processes and feelings of becoming a feminist. In 1975, Bartky described this as one in which a profound shift in one's understanding of oneself is experienced as 'the scales fall from our eyes' (Bartky: 437 in Marine and Lewis: 12) and the world is understood anew as injustice is seen. Ahmed's (2017) *Living a Feminist Life* is similar in that she explores the process of navigating this subject position as she describes identifying with feminism as a process in which previously understood ideas about gender and sexual relations are put together in new ways forming a 'clicking moment' in which a sense of clarity is gained; this click suggests that once you've become feminist, one cannot easily again become 'unbecome' (32). Bartky's metaphor relates to Ahmed's ideas as the suggestion is that once you see feminism, you cannot un-see, suggesting a process in which one transfers from a state of not 'being' feminist to a state of 'being' feminist, as one eventually 'clicks' or the 'scales' fall and the world is seen, and therefore understood, differently. These ideas contrast with Deleuzian notions of 'becoming' in which conventionally dualistic Western modes of thought, in which subjects are understood to move from one state to another, are replaced with attention towards ongoing processes of movement and transformation. This means that, rather than focusing on a subject's state of not 'being' feminist being replaced by one of 'being' feminist, the attention is instead drawn towards the factors that constitute one's subjective experience of 'becoming' feminist; to "be-between, to pass between […] never ceasing to become" (Deleuze & Guattari 1987, p. 277 in Coleman, 2008: 168). This move away from attention only towards feminists' 'formation of a static social identity' (Griffin, 1994: 189 in Marine and Lewis, 2014) supports a focus on the processes of identification with feminism(s) rather than the final positionality of the 'feminist'. These approaches raise questions around the different positions young people take in relation to feminism, as well as how researchers understand these through various conceptual lenses. This section therefore asks; what do these look like in empirical studies?

In a study consisting of 40 qualitative interviews with a group of German and British participants, Sharff (2011) connects young women's disidentification from feminism to cultural representations of feminism that position it as anti-feminine. This leads Scharff to

suggest that young women's rejection of feminism can be understood as an active assertion of racialized and classed forms of hetero-sexualised femininity. Utilising Butler's performative conceptualisation of sexuality and gender that understands them to be interconnected and sustained through heterosexual norms, Sharff understands femininity to be raced and classed, and therefore to be performed in talk about feminism and to intersect with young women's (dis)identification with the term. This lens therefore re-frames repudiations of feminism as performances of particular forms of femininity that manifest differently in particular contexts depending on the expectations of femininity within that space/time. Marine and Lewis' (2014) research with young self-identifying feminists also explores how girls and young women identify with the term feminist within postfeminist landscapes in particular. The authors' analysis of the participants' talk suggests that their feminist identities were not stable but dynamically shifting as they described their identification with certain feminist discourses as stronger at some times than at others, and, importantly, related this to the frequent undermining of feminism by their peers who positioned feminism as no longer necessary. Keller's (2019) research with feminist-identifying teenage girls also understands identifications with feminism to work in fluid ways, however, this is less in relation to postfeminist discourses and more to managing their particular choice of feminism. For instance, the teenage girls under study felt able to choose the particular online platform that most compliments their strand of feminist politics, with Facebook deemed to be useful for peer education on feminism, whilst Tumblr and Twitter offered space for engagement beyond their immediate community, allowing for discourses around topics such as rape culture, patriarchy, intersectionality and protest. This agentic approach to negotiating their own feminist space and voice is also discussed in Keller and Ringrose's (2015) research with teenage girls about celebrity feminism, a form that is visible and popular due to being promoted by those in the public eye. The teenage participants questioned the capability of celebrities to 'represent the complexities of contemporary feminist issues' (134) that they want to discuss. The girls stated their desire to form their own discussions about feminism as well as make their own forms of media, including blogs, in order to negotiate the complexities of feminism, rather than passively listen to the voices of the celebrities.

This literature suggests that young people's engagement with feminism is premised upon expectations of performances around particular forms of femininity, but that these aren't static since these expectations shift depending on the context, and feelings of identification change depending on the context and time. The research also suggests how adept young people can be at managing their online feminist space to form their own communities in which these identifications can be explored, and their shifting moves between different platforms and spaces to accommodate for their moveable feminist identifications.

2.3.3. Splitting feminism into binaries

In contrast to the literature above that suggests young people's identifications with various forms of feminism are dynamic and shifting, Edley and Wetherell's (2001) research with young men found that the participants discursively split feminism into two clear camps. The authors term this a 'Jekyll and Hyde' (451) binary of the good feminist, who exhibits a seemingly measured approach, and the other a militant feminist who fights for what she believes. The authors argue that this dichotomy contributes to the young men in their study only identifying with the more measured forms of feminism since they are afraid of appearing on the militant side of the binary, and that this empties their engagement of any radical possibilities. This postfeminist derogation of feminism is echoed in Calder-Dawe and Gavey's (2016) study in which they interviewed 18 self-identified feminist teenagers and argue that there are two discourses of feminism at work; one of 'unreasonable feminism' (18) in which feminism is understood to be extreme and no longer necessary, and one of 'fair feminism' (18) in which the demands are understood as reasonable and focused around equal rights. The authors argue that the discursive emphasis of this binary works to undermine feminist activism by constituting it as a result of difficult and non-negotiable feminists' perspectives. The discursive splitting described in these papers in which one form of feminism is denigrated, allows only for particular forms of feminism that emphasise equality and a measured calm outlook to be deemed palatable enough to be accepted.

2.3.4. Feminist identification as an integral part of identity

Rather than splitting feminism into binaries, other scholars found that young people's engagement with feminism was experienced as more connected with identity and uncovering a previously unarticulated sense of self. Guest (2016) interviewed self-identifying feminist young women to understand the relevance of higher education in their process of becoming feminist. Particular attention was given to their engagement with academic feminism since it was here where they which found a language to articulate feminism that they had previously felt as only an instinct. This sense of feminism supporting the articulation of a sense of an integral part of themselves is also discussed in Calder Dawe and Gavey's (2017) analysis of young women's narratives around their feminist identity. The young women in their study discuss their relationship to feminism being an 'authentic' (795) aspect of themselves that access to feminist language was felt to have uncovered. Whilst the researchers discuss clear links between notions of authenticity and neoliberal calls for self-improvement that promote 'personal rather than social transformation' (783), the participants said that this association between authenticity and feminism meant that their feminism was experienced as justified which 'propel[led]' (795) them into engaging with activisms.

2.3.5. Conclusion to young people's engagements in feminisms

The literature discussed in this section outlines some of the ways that young people engage with forms of feminism, particularly in relation to the cultural expectations around them. The three key ways the literature understood this is through young people's shifting identifications with particular feminisms that relate to expectations of femininities or the online spaces available to them (Scharff, 2011; Marine and Lewis, 2014; Keller, 2019); to respond to their postfeminist environments by splitting feminism into good and bad tropes that can empty feminism of its radical potential (Edley and Wetherell, 2011; Calder and Davey, 2016); as well as more deeply related investments with a sense of self, in which the young people feel that their feminist identification engages with an integral part of their being (Calder Dawe and Gavey, 2017; Guest 2016). Taken together, these are suggestive of the contextual nature of feminist identification and how it works in relation to expectations

of femininity for instance, whilst also being dynamic and shifting in nature with the capacity to be split into simple binaries, as well as, for some young people, feeling integral to who they are on an ontological level.

Whilst these studies are focused on young peoples' investments in feminism in wider culture both on and offline, the next section will pose a question more directly connected to my study around how scholars have understood young people's feminist participation and meaning-making in their school settings.

2.4. How do teenagers negotiate feminisms in school?

2.4.1. Introduction

Whilst the last two parts of this review have discussed literature that explores young people's engagement with feminist politics and their investments in particular forms of feminism, the focus is now on literature centering young people's negotiation of feminism in their schools. The first part reviews studies that centre on young people's engagement with feminism in postfeminist school contexts where these can be troubling or risky for those involved. The second specifically considers literature focused on teenagers' engagements with their in-school feminism groups, which suggests that postfeminist cultures can detrimentally affect the work of feminism groups or work to catalyse the existence of feminism groups.

2.4.2. Negotiations of feminisms in postfeminist schools

The ways that young people negotiate feminisms in their schools in the context of postfeminism underpins much of the literature on this topic. Ringrose's (2012) *Postfeminist Education?* draws on McRobbie's 2008 work, in a discussion of the 'postfeminist masquerade' which sets out the ways that girls are expected to make up for the rights they are afforded through performing an emphasized version of femininity. This involves, for

instance, expectations to take part in particular practices which are classed as progressive for young women, but are in fact traditionally feminine. This connects postfeminism directly to the production of girlhood in schools, which has implications for the constitution of feminisms too since these aforementioned boundaries of idealised femininity may restrict the production of feminisms.

The tension experienced by girls who both inhabit this postfeminist landscape *and* who see and wish to discuss their experiences of sexism, is explored by researchers in this area including Pomerantz, Raby & Stefanik (2013) who suggest that since feminism tends to operate as a discourse that gives language to girls' experiences and links with to fights for justice, postfeminism works in antithesis to this through undermining the apparent need for girls and women to do this work. These authors suggest that girls are stuck between two contradictory discourses, and their paper analyses the postfeminist discourses that posit sexism as no longer relevant, citing 'girl power' as an example of one that understands liberation through capitalist ideas of individuality and sexuality, whereas in school it is the discourse of 'successful girls' (Ringrose, 2007) that positions girls as academically superior to boys at school and therefore no longer in need of feminism (as the authors point out, Baker 2010b; Francis and Skelton 2005; Renold and Allan 2006; Ringrose 2007; Skelton 2010 have also written in this area). Pomerantz, Raby & Stefanik (2013) found the experience of this to be confusing for girls who, in interviews 'struggled to articulate their understandings of sexism given their belief that boys and girls are equal' and 'used the language of post feminism to individualize and rationalize gender inequality' (204). This suggests that these girls aren't opened up to language at school that allows them to articulate the contradiction they live between, in which their school suggests sexism no longer exists, and the experiences of sexism that surround them every day.

The difficulty for girls in stating their feminist ideas in postfeminist school contexts is also explored by Ringrose and Renold (2012) who engaged teenage school girls in activism of the international 2011 'Slutwalk' marches in which people across the world responded to comments of a Canadian police officer who told young women to avoid male violence by not dressing 'like sluts' (340). Whilst the teenage girls the researchers engaged on this topic stated their desire to create banners and shout chants about discriminating sexual

regulations, this was considered by them to be 'unthinkable in the context of the school' (340). This school space is therefore understood to be one that doesn't enable these possibilities for clear feminist resistance, positioning it as a postfeminist stronghold where girls' engagement in the masquerade is even further cemented.

The contradictions of postfeminist discourses and their circulation in schools is also explored in Mirza's (2018) research with 17 working-class Muslim school girls, with a focused intersectional lens on the ways in which their experiences are mediated through 'powerful, unrestrained Islamophobic discourses' (227). These are related to the ways their British schools attempt to produce ideal female Muslim students, and the ways that this so-called 'empowerment' (228) is premised upon western and postfeminist ideals. These center girls' freedom and choice, however, Mirza finds this to be at odds with the choices the young Muslim girls made, since these weren't deemed appropriate by the school. The discourses of idealised girlhood are therefore contradictory as these girls are understood both as victims requiring saving from their Islamic culture through empowerment to choose, but incapable of making trustworthy decisions since when they do make choices, these aren't accepted by their school.

Whilst these papers discuss the difficulties experienced by girls in relation to postfeminist cultures in their schools, Renold and Ringose's (2016) research explores more contradictory responses to feminism in these contexts. To explore their questions around how girls occupy the position of feminist in their Welsh secondary school, the authors use Ahmed's (2010) figure of the feminist killjoy and her notion that negative affect gets 'stuck' (105) to girls when they identify with feminism, a word they argue to have affective power in the social space of school. Through this framing, the authors found that associations with feminism brought a range of contradictory affects to these girls because postfeminist ideals of 'sexy' femininity are set up in opposition with feminism. The ways that the girls managed their feelings around these pressures is the focus of the study, particularly in terms of the tensions related to how the girls in their research experienced their engagements with feminism as both a 'radically pleasurable and painful set of experiences' (117). The researchers argue for the importance of engaging with these contradictory experiences

since this opens up the complexity of girls' involvements with postfeminist-feminisms in schools.

Zaslow's (2018) study discusses a more explicitly defiant approach from the young women in a US middle school in New Jersey. Despite teenage girls being argued to be the 'ideal subjects of postfeminist sensibility' (93), and easily taken in by popular and contradictory feminist cultures that position them as sexual objects whilst simultaneously telling them to see themselves as empowered, Zaslow's research with a group of teenage girls finds a more resistant approach. In response to being told by their school teachers not to 'distract the boys and disrupt the learning' (93) with the clothes they were wearing in hot weather, the participants launched a digital feminist campaign around school uniform using the hashtag #iammorethanadistraction. Zaslow argues that these girls' activism disrupted postfeminist scripts that ask the individual girl to be a 'site for improvement' (95) through changing policy and therefore addressing systemic issues rather than their own behavior.

The literature reviewed in this section suggests that girls are situated in postfeminist school landscapes that position them both as successful and as either victims in need of saving in the case of Islamic girls, or as sexual objects capable of distracting boys' learning with their exposed skin. It is evident that the ways in which young women navigate these postfeminist views at school varies across contexts, with some struggling to articulate their position in relation to feminism, and others drawing on hashtag feminism to form their own campaigns against their school's approach. This raises questions as to how young people taking part in in-school feminism groups navigate their postfeminist school contexts, but doesn't address how more explicitly neoliberal feminist or anti-feminist discourses are navigated by young people in schools, which are central question of this thesis.

2.4.3. Negotiating feminisms in relation to in-school feminism groups

The research related more directly to the topic of this thesis, around the ways that young people who are already engaged with feminism groups in their schools constitute their feminist subjectivities, is relatively limited. However, it is dominated by researchers highly influential to this project including Ringrose whose work alongside Renold (2016) myself (2016), Kim (2018) and Keller and Mendes (2019) is discussed below in particular relation to their/our examinations of the ways that feminism collectives in schools form relations and activisms. Postfeminist school environments are clear across all the schools reviewed here as the teenagers' engagements with their feminism groups are dismissed in various ways by their school leaders and teachers. However, in some of the groups under study, this seemed to close down possibilities within the feminism collective, for instance when the young people move their activism away from school and towards online spaces instead (Ringrose et al, 2019), whereas in other school groups, their postfeminist environments became the object of the group's resistance and seemed to galvanise their activisms (Retallack et al, 2016).

In some of the school-based feminism groups under study, the teenagers' engagement with feminisms in school was depicted by participants to be very difficult due to the postfeminist attitudes of individual teachers and the school institution as a whole. For instance, in Kim and Ringrose's (2018) research with girls already taking part in a school-based feminism group at a comprehensive school in London, the participants expressed their disappointment in the active disdain their school displayed towards their engagement with their feminism group. The participants describe their feminist awakening as a 'stumble' (58) because they weren't encouraged to find out about the topic by their school, as well as their enthusiasm for a physical space in which to discuss feminist issues as they experienced online feminist spaces as less meaningful. Once regularly engaging with feminism at school, however, they describe feeling actively 'reviled' (58) by teachers and peers for their association with the group. This disdain towards what is brought up in feminism group spaces is also discussed in Ringrose and Renold's (2016) research with a feminism group they set up in an all girls' Catholic school, in which they explore the ways the school technically allowed for feminism spaces to exist, however, would not support the work

when it was experienced as threatening to male dominance. The researchers give the example of a feminism group meeting they facilitated focused on a discussion of the catcalling the girls were subjected to in the streets when they wear their school uniforms. When a student mentioned putting cream on her legs in front of a male teacher causing him to have a 'boner' (649) the male teacher sitting in the adjoining room burst in and shut the feminism group meeting down. The authors conceptualize this in relation to the masculinist force he imposed that blocked the groups' 'feminist becomings' (649), as it was made clear to the students and researchers what cannot be said in school spaces. This can also be argued to highlight wider tensions between the topics enabled by feminism group spaces, and the fear and defensiveness from schools when topics appear threatening to the school's image or held belief system.

Institutional hostility towards feminism groups was also found in in Ringrose et al's (2019) research with members of a secondary school feminism club in the UK where the girls discussed their school's hostility to their activism and consistent positioning of them as 'naïve' (160), making it difficult to challenge sexism in school. The participants found online feminist spaces more supportive around these issues and retreated from their feminist work in schools in favour of these spaces. In these three research studies the schools' approach to the feminism collective appears to dissuade the participants from continuing to engage, a response reminiscent of Kenway et al's 1997 study in which the young people involved tended to retreat when the feminist work in their school felt unsupported.

In other studies, the participants' activisms are understood to be stoked by their engagement with the feminism collective, despite their schools' lack of support. For instance, in Renold and Ringrose's (2016) research, the authors draw on theories of the posthuman which explore 'the human and non-human agencies at work within relational research encounters' (2) to understand how teenage feminists remain engaged despite institutional disdain. For instance, when interviewing girls in the feminism group about the instances that brought them to engaging with the feminism group, they describe their bodies being surveilled in school and 'herded like cows' (70) by teachers and 'slapped' by boys, suggesting the girls' embodied and affective experiences are related to shame and objectification, and that the assemblage of 'legs-cows-shorts-looks-slaps' (70) that are

mentioned in the girls' talk, links to the ways they are treated like meat. This posthuman lens also supported an exploration of how the girls felt engaged with feminism through their connections with the group. Through centering the non-human aspects of the feminism group including the material elements like the portacabin in the playground where the group took place and the material artefacts used by group such as a 'Feminism is Cool' (13) leaflet produced by the group, they interpret what worked to fuel the girls' engagement with feminism. The posthuman conceptualisation of the feminism group opens up a lens on the spaces and materials that contribute to teenage girls' excitement around feminist activisms in relation to their material and spatial experiences of harassment at school, as well as their feminist engagement with their group.

Another school in which the feminism group thrived despite the institution's approach being one of disregard, is explored in my own chapter co-authored with Ringrose and Lawrence (2016). In this research we explore the ways through which girls negotiate feminisms in their neoliberal postfeminist theatre school through their feminism club, as well as the way this moved their activism into networked online spaces. Theories of networked affect, which combines affect with digital medias to understand how affective articulations of feelings circulate online (Paasonen, Hillis, Petit, 2015) enabled an exploration of how the girls navigated their relationships with their bodies and one another through the networks forged in the feminism group space, and their subsequent WhatsApp and Instagram messaging. We analyse how the participants of this feminism club drew on the consciousness-raising of their feminism group meetings to then use social media to reshape their understanding of their bodies in relation to their school environment where their teenage bodies are made saleable to theatre, film and TV companies. In this school, whilst the institutional approach to the feminism group was to ask the group to take down any posters that displayed the name of the group, and attempt to dis-identify the school's brand from feminism, the participants appeared determined to move their activism into networked spaces including a feminist march and online apps.

This literature around feminism groups in schools suggests that whilst these postfeminist school environments detrimentally affect the work and progression of feminism groups for many of the participants, in others, their activisms appear to be actively fuelled by their

schools' approach. This raises questions around the relational dynamics of postfeminist schools and the feminist teenagers within them that my study will take on. However, the research reviewed here is more focused on the young people's activisms whether in the group or online that come out of their engagement with the feminism collective, than their experience of engaging with the group itself. In my own research, I draw from these studies to explore my participants' feelings in relations to their engagements with their peers and the group space, as well as how this informs their wider negotiations of feminisms. What is less clear across all these studies too is how it feels for the teenagers involved in feminism groups to specifically engage with these feminism group spaces, and how these groups inform their negotiations of feminisms more widely. My study will build from the literature to explore these questions by attending to the psychosocial experiences of students, and the relationship between the specificities of the school site and the young people's constitution of feminist subjectivities.

2.5. Conclusions and implications: Teenagers and their constitutions of feminist subjectivities

The literature reviewed in this chapter highlights the complexity of navigating feminisms as a teenager, due to the exclusionary politics across off and online feminist platforms, and the contradictory messages facing young people in which they are told they aren't in need of feminism whilst experiencing prejudice, both in and out of schools.

This chapter has reviewed literature related to my study in relation to three central questions. The first asked what young peoples' political participation with feminisms look like, dealing with literature specifically around the variety of forms that young peoples' engagement takes both on and offline; the complexities and possibilities of feminist intergenerational activisms, as well as the privileging of certain voices within feminist activist engagements. These relate to my own research which considers my participants' concerns about how their feminist engagements look; the relations between my participants and teachers in relation to their feminism groups, as well as the forms of

inclusion and exclusion that go on within and around feminism collectives in schools, particularly in relation to classed and racialised institutions. The second section asks how young people invest in feminisms, with a focus on young people's shifting identifications with particular feminisms; their splitting of feminism into binaries, as well as studies that discuss feminist identification as an authentic part of participants' identity. This supports my understanding of how young people form their investments and attachments to particular feminisms across various contexts, and raises questions over how teenagers form these within the context of their school, and in relation to their engagement with their feminism group. The third and final section asks how teenagers negotiate feminisms in school, particularly in relation to postfeminist contexts, and their in-school feminism groups. These studies discuss the postfeminist school contexts in which young people set up their feminism groups and the tensions surrounding this.

Whilst these studies offer a rich portrait of the complexities of young people's engagements with feminisms both in and around their schools, it opens up new questions. For example, there is a lack of reflection in the literature reviewed around boys' relationship with feminism in schools which this study will respond to by asking how feminisms are constituted in relation to expectations of masculinities and in cultures in which both popular feminism and anti-feminism intersect in schools. Since this study is interested in questioning what teenagers taking part in feminist politics in their schools say about their investment in various feminisms, how they grapple with the meanings that feminism holds for them, as well as how this relates particularly to the dynamics of their school-based feminism collective within these contradictory school contexts, I will add a psychosocial lens that is missing from these studies. This attends to how young people come into being through psychical investments in elements of discourse and supports an interpretation of young people's constitutions of feminist subjectivities in their schools, as well as how wider discourses of post, neoliberal, popular and anti- feminisms inform their relations towards these across a varied range of school contexts.

Chapter 3: The complexities and possibilities of practising a feminist methodology with feminism groups in schools

3.1: Introduction

In this methodological chapter, I argue that it is my own positionality as a feminist researcher and teacher that formed all relations to the participants and institutions involved in this study. In the introduction to this thesis, I discussed the part-time way this research was conducted and how I moved through different roles during the course of this study. It is, however, the fieldwork in particular that concerns this chapter. This was conducted over a period of around a year when I had recently moved to a new part-time teaching role in an all girls' school. At this time, I was becoming linked to other schools who were doing feminist work, both through the Feminism in Schools project I'd taken part in between 2015-16 and connections being generated through the young people I worked with. My professional role as a teacher was also becoming increasingly imbricated with feminist work in schools, and this was connected to the researcher and university tutor subjectivity I was beginning to develop. Within an average week at the time of collecting the fieldwork I would teach English Literature at the girls' school, facilitate the feminism club there, connect with other schools around feminist activities and events, study for this PhD and teach on a feminism in education BA module at the university. These overlapping engagements generated both a sense of unified and slippery subjectivity, as I experienced a connection between them all and slid between them, unable to entirely separate one out from the other. I foreground these engagements here to introduce the idea that, at every stage of this research process, it is my own subjectivity, as a teacher, feminism group facilitator and researcher, that produced the decisions made and the possibilities that arose for this study. This includes sampling and accessing the teenage participants who agreed to be interviewed for this project, deciding to run both focus groups and follow up one to one interviews, using fieldnotes to note my responses to the research encounters, deciding on psychosocial modes of data analysis, and considering the ethics of my involved position; all of which are discussed in what follows below.

I begin by offering a brief outline of the methods including context about the six school sites. I then move to a discussion of what a feminist approach to research might mean, particularly in relation to working from lived experiences (Barbour, 2011) and attempting to bring this into one's approach to method and knowledge making. This includes three feminist aspects I aim to work with in this research including intersectional, reflexive and vulnerable approaches. The sections following from this then discuss processes of sampling and gaining access to the six research sites including my different relations to each school and its gatekeepers; the process of constituting and re-constituting a feminist researcher subjectivity in the focus group interviews and in the one to one interview, and a discussion of the processes of writing fieldnotes, transcription, my negotiation of ethical issues, and approaches to analysis of the data. Overall, this chapter aims to work through particular tensions and complexities of the study, and to argue that my own subjective relation as a feminist researcher and practitioner to the participants and institutions involved in this study underpinned what was possible to access and to know through every stage of this research.

3.1.1. Brief outline of the method and the six schools:

The main research question underpinning this study asks how young people already taking part in school-based feminism groups constitute feminist subjectivities. My research methods involved conducting focus groups and one to one follow up interviews across six schools where a feminism collective already existed.

In each school I initially conducted a focus group and then a one to one follow up interview. I had hoped to collaborate on feminist projects with the participants, but this aspect of the research was too ambitious. The focus groups always took place during the first research visit and lasted between 40 minutes and one-hour with either some or all members of the feminism group. In all the focus groups, participants were asked about how their feminism groups came to exist, what they do in their feminism group and what it means to them that the group is a feminism group, with all further questions being generated spontaneously from the discussion. On a separate later date, I then conducted a semi-structured interview

with an individual member of the group which lasted between 30 and 40 minutes. The focus group participants had details of the option of a one-to-one interview on the information forms, and they could let their teacher know if they were interested. The teacher would inform me and I would look at the students and, if I had a few options, choose from these interested participants on the basis of whether there were particular points raised in the focus group I wanted to follow up. However, at the two elite all boys' schools Key and Regency, the focus group numbers weren't communicated to me in advance and the one-to-one participants were chosen for me by the teacher facilitating my access; a point I explore further in Chapter 6.

The questions I asked in the one-to-one interviews were similar to those in the focus group and centred on the interviewee's relationship with the feminism collective in their school. Both the focus group meetings and the follow up interviews were audio recorded and later transcribed. I had also planned to conduct observations of the feminism groups having a meeting, however, this was only possible in one group and I have not included analysis of this in this thesis. Some of the complexities of this are explored further below.

The six schools under study are all based in the South of England and are made up of a suburban comprehensive, a private dance school, an inner-city academy school, an inner-city all girls' private school, an inner-city private all boys' school and a rural private all-boys' boarding school. An outline of each school follows here:

Park School is a large and successful mixed (meaning they aren't categorised by being 'single sex') state school in Greater London with an intake of 1500 students between 11-16 years old. The school is situated in a leafy suburb of Greater London between an affluent area and a more deprived area. Students classed as disadvantaged consistently make better progress than the national average and for two of the last three years these students have been in the top 25% of schools nationally for progress. The school seems well-equipped with a lively atmosphere, however, due to building work, many classes take place in pre-fab rooms in the playground which have low ceilings, small windows and fluorescent lights. The feminism club at this school was set up by a teacher and takes place each week in one of these pre-

fab rooms with up to 50 students in attendance and are teacher-led, with lots of group work going on between the members on various feminist projects.

Town Academy is a mixed academy school that is part of a wider academy trust in an urban area. The school has 800 students on roll between the ages of 11-18. The year I visited the school, Ofsted awarded the academy an Outstanding rating, which was partly based upon the examination results at GCSE and A Level that are much higher than the national attainment and progress averages. This is made more relevant by the fact this academy school is situated in one of the most deprived local authorities in London. The school building is a new-build with lots of glass walls that enable a panopticon-like atmosphere in which students and staff can always be watched (even if they aren't, they'll feel they are) enabling a disciplinarian power to operate through modes of constant surveillance (Foucault, 1975). The feminism club in this school takes place in one of these glass fronted classrooms and the sessions operate like a lesson in that the group members take part in structured sessions led by a teacher.

Premier Girls' School is an all-girls private school in an urban area. The school has 900 pupils on roll with 200 of these girls in the sixth form. Entry to the school is by competitive examination and interview. The school prides itself on its high academic results, last year over 80% of the A Level results were at grade A-A*, and the fact that all girls tend go onto higher education. The fees at the school are higher than average at over £7000 per term, and approximately 15 per cent of the students are on scholarships and bursaries. Due to the central location of the school, the school is more ethnically diverse than other private schools in London, however it remains majority white. The feminism group is actively promoted by the head teacher and, at the same term of my research at the school, they were planning for a school-wide feminism conference. The girls run the group themselves, however, with little teacher input in the weekly meetings.

Key Boys' School is located in an urban location and is a private school for boys age 11-18. The school has 1000 boys on roll and fees are higher than average at £7,500 per term. Whilst priding itself on exceptionally high academic results, the school markets itself around its extra-curricular life with over 40 societies set up by the students themselves that include

literary, chess, current affairs, model railway and the feminism society. This group is called a 'society' rather than a club and, whilst these terms could be used interchangeably, it's worth noting that clubs are often defined by their common interest that serves to unify the members, whilst societies are defined by being a group that has fewer unifying connections, as well as societies being student led (*How are academic clubs and societies different?* Retrieved 5 May, 2023, from https://academicmarker.com/careers-advice/getting-experienced/clubs-and-societies/how-are-academic-clubs-and-societies-different/). This definition tracks in this school where the society is not a 'feminist' club defined by its identification with feminism but a 'feminism society' which means a space to discuss and debate issues related to feminism. It is run by students but endorsed by one of the senior leadership team who takes the boys to feminism events around London and encourages them to make comments and ask questions in these spaces. The teacher doesn't attend the feminism society meetings however, leaving the boys to themselves in a room with a large table which they sit around to talk.

Regency Boys' School is a large all boys' boarding school in a suburban location with ultra-elite status. This school conforms to many stereotypes about elite all boys' boarding schools in England in that it is a large imposing building, the uniforms are strict and particular, the results at GCSE and A Level are high, the fees are over £15,000 per term (15% of boys receive sort form of financial aid towards their fees) and the intake is majority white. Like Key Boys', the school markets its numerous societies (over 60 of these) on their website, and the feminism group, being also a society, is one of the more popular. Weekly meetings take place in a large space within their library. Like Key Boys, the feminism society has support from a teacher in the Humanities department, however, the boys run the group themselves.

Dance School is a dance-focused mixed private school in a suburban area for students between the ages of 11-16. This is a smaller school than the others with 400 students on role, and over double the number of girls than boys. To gain a place at the school, students have to under-go a dance audition, but no academic exam. The fees are significantly lower than the other private schools in this study and the school offers a significant number of scholarships. Once a pupil at the school, students are encouraged to audition for dance

shows through the school's own agency service. The students spend half of their day on academic subjects and half the day on their dance training. I worked at this school as a Teacher of English for a few years and, in my second year at the school, supported a small group of students in setting up the feminism club. The school leaders were not supportive of this in that they were told not to use the term 'feminism' in the title of the club and took down the feminism club posters the members placed around the school. I attended the majority of the weekly sessions in a faciliatory role, arriving with an article to all read or a clip to watch, but the sessions tended to then free-flow with around 6 to 10 girls and boys (majority girls) talking through an issue related to feminism. The students also engaged in activism, both online and by taking part in public demonstrations around representations of body image in the media. When I left my job at the school, the group continued on and was run by the older students, however, by the time I ran the focus group at the school the group had disbanded.

These short descriptions of each institution begin to point towards the complexity of these schools and my own differing relationships with each. In what follows, I outline particular feminist approaches that inform this methodological chapter, and how these might support a practice of staying with the mess (Law, 1994) and the trouble (Haraway, 2016) of the research process, particularly in relation to the methodological approach being imbricated, at every stage, with both stable and shifting aspects of my subjectivity.

3.2: Feminist ways of thinking with Methodology: Intersectional, Reflexive and Vulnerable approaches

The second research aim concerns my own role as a feminist researcher and how I negotiate this through the study. The ways I worked to engage with this include the use of fieldnotes which are discussed below, as well as perspectives informed by feminist approaches to social research and knowledge production. But, since there is no distinctive singular feminist method, what does this mean? In what follows, I engage with feminist approaches to methodology and epistemology, and the ways I aim to draw from intersectional, reflexive and vulnerable approaches to research.

3.2.1. Subjective Standpoints and Intersectional inflections

To engage in feminist research requires an in- depth consideration of the ways we engage in interpret, use and form knowledge (Wigginton and Lafrance: 2019). Whilst there are many different feminist approaches to research, it is broadly agreed that there is a shared inquiry around how gender and other sites of intersecting social positioning situate and produce knowing. The way this might look includes asking questions around systems of gendered power and their relation to knowledge, for instance, who can know, what is possible to be known and how and who validates this knowledge (Landman 2006). These feminist approaches to epistemology challenge aspects of 'man-made' science, most notably the notion of a removed and supposedly objective researcher. This detaching of researcher subjectivity is deemed by Law (2004) to be central in positivist forms of social science research in which knowledge is 'supposed to issue from the world Itself examined in the proper way by means of proper methods' (16) and not from the person who undertakes the research. Law points out that, within this paradigm, if the researcher appears too much then this affects the rigour or truth of the work, undermining what are perceived to be proper methods.

An example of a feminist challenge to these ideas is in the work of sociologist Dorothy Smith in the 1990s who gave challenge to the white men of the Global North who claimed to produce this form of position-less knowledge (Wigginton and Lafrance, 2019). Smith called for a constructivist sociology that started with the experiences of women, as Smith states; 'the sociologies and psychologies I had learned were not capable of speaking of what I knew as a matter of my life' (1991: 157). Sandra Harding's feminist standpoint theory draws from this and is known for its claims around what she terms 'strong objectivity', a belief that research should start out from the views of underprivileged groups (Rolin, 2006). Donna Haraway also challenged these supposedly objective scientific claims that she said appeared to be 'seeing everything from nowhere' and argued for more 'situated knowledge' (Haraway, 1988, p. 581) that takes into account the positioning of the one claiming to know.

These feminist ideas suggested that minoritized experiences, including those of women, have been historically represented through the supposedly objective perspectives of white men (Harding, 1992; Hesse-Biber, 2012; Riger, 1992, Wigginton and LaFrance, 2019). These feminists have called for a more standpoint-oriented model of research, in which the subjectivity of the researcher is foregrounded so that they/we would become more accountable for their production of knowledge, or as Haraway puts it, become 'answerable to what we see' (Haraway, in Wigginton and Lafrance, 2019: 11).

Whilst these feminist interpretations that lay emphasis on women's experience may appear to suggest a biologically essentialized and universalized view, there are also interpretations of these theories that emphasize an intersectional iteration. Feminist scholars including Mohanty (1984) and Butler (1990) argue that there are problems in using gender as a singular category since this tends to assume a universal allegiance between women that doesn't account for religion, race, culture, class and other intersections (cited in Page, 2017). Intersectional and de-colonial feminist approaches to knowledge, including Patricia Hill Collins' (1990), bell hooks' (1990) and Kimberle Crenshaw (1999), argue that this positionality or standpoint not only arises from a gendered location but an intersection of these, including sexuality, class, (dis)ability and race. Crenshaw in particular (1999) argues that one form of inequality cannot be more important than another since they always intersect. This therefore takes issue with essentialised ideas of women having particular access to an understanding of the oppression they face since the form this takes depends on which women it is, and how this intersects with their race, sexuality and class (amongst others) (Anderson, 2011). These feminist scholars stress an intersectional epistemological approach that aims to undercut knowledges steeped in notions of a singular unified notion of womanhood since this tends to only unite cis-gendered, heterosexual, middle-class white women (Anderson, 1995) who have, for so long, dominated public feminist discourse.

Bhavnani (1993) considers how this might look in research, and suggests three focused principles which 'any social scientific inquiry could be evaluated for its claim to be feminist' (cited in Handforth and Taylor, 2016: 631). These are that feminist research should center positioning, in that the researcher should foreground their intersectional subjectivity and how this affects the research; that it should be accountable, meaning that it should not

reproduce modes of representation made in dominant areas of society for instance the reinforcement of 'masculine, white and heteronormative ways of knowing' (Kinkaid, 2022); and finally, that it should highlight questions of difference or complexity within the research throughout. I find these interpretations compelling and, in the following sections, I outline my attempts to adhere to these ways of practicing intersectional feminist research through considering how my own positionality is integral to the research, how I practice reflexivity, the ways I aim to remain accountable to my teenage participants, and how I, perhaps vulnerably, try to own up to what can't be known or seen in this study.

3.2.2. Reflexive additions

Within a feminist research paradigm, an emphasis on the situatedness of knowledge can be understood as connected to an awareness of one's positionality, and the complex place of subjectivity has long been a question for feminist research in particular (Walkerdine, Melody and Lucey, 2002). Whilst reflexivity in social research tends to suggest a purposeful attention to one's subjectivity as a researcher and attention to how this entangles with research processes, this also raises questions about one's capacity to attempt to represent another person (Pillow, 2003). Feminist modes of reflexivity are interested in making visible this work of representation, so that the questions and struggles around this are exposed for the reader (Britzman, 1995; Fine, 1994; Lather, 1993,1995; Pillow, 2003). Within a research project there is, as Lapping (2013) notes, always a question over whether 'it is possible to construct a relation to another in such a way that we might interpret in a way that avoids rearticulating our narcissistic attachments to recognized identities' (268), and with this in mind, it is by not only 'confessing' to my attachments and positionings throughout this research, but by continuing to unpack and trouble the content of my own reflexive practice that I might become at least partly accountable for the attachments I bring to research encounters, as well as to the stories I then tell of myself and others.

Skeggs (2002) argues that that reflexivity can be used as a way to further sanction and authorize the knowledge generated through a recognition of one's place in the production of meaning. This places reflexivity in a more positivist realm in which the self is recognized in order to be negated in a search for objectivity. However, Skeggs also argues that

reflexivity can be used as a recognition of the power and privilege of being a researcher, and to practice this may mean paying close attention to the ways these dynamics are enacted through the research process (Skeggs cited in Page, 2017). My own approach to reflexivity is linked to the latter idea; through an awareness that my knowledge is shaped by this positionality (Valentine: 2002). I aim to place an emphasis on my own practice of critical self-reflection in that I try to consistently consider the ways that this positionality affects moments in the research encounters.

Aspects of my subjectivity are relatively unchanging through this research project, for instance, that I am a cis-gendered, middle-class, white woman. I foreground this here to highlight the subjective location that has provided the means to study at this level, both in my admittance to professional roles, to the PhD programme itself, and to academic and school-based feminist networks. I say this partly because of my awareness that, as a result of these intersecting factors of systemic privilege, I am rarely called upon to name these aspects of my subjectivity; for instance, my whiteness and middle-classness are widely assumed and accepted within these spaces, whilst those from more minoritized backgrounds are constantly called upon to speak through and about their identity (Christoffersen and Emejulu, 2022). However, I also make a point of naming these intersecting points of privilege in relation to a methodological aim in this thesis. This is to foreground an intersectionally situated positioning of location that aims to take into account the various 'micro-politics of the research encounter' (Handforth and Taylor, 2016: 628), and link this to the knowledge I make claims to producing.

However, this assertion above of my 'place' within the research shouldn't be regarded as 'enough'; this recognition of subjectivity rescuing me from exploring the complexities of the production of that very subjectivity through the research process, as if, by recognizing the subjective, I am liberated from any 'discomfort' the awareness of one's own position might create (Pillow, 2003: 186). I aim to avoid this by opening up to my position within this research being always slightly shifting, and, as the final analysis chapter explores in particular, this positionality having moving elements since even within one research encounter I could be understood by the participants in multiple and sometimes contradictory ways. Therefore, whilst my position as a teacher and the facilitator of

feminism clubs in schools at the time of research is central to my engagement with all aspects of this study, I also try to stay engaged with the participants and what I claim to know about them. This is to account for my own representations of both stable and shifting elements of subjectivity and the ways that I apply this reflexive lens to interview encounters discussed later in this chapter.

3.2.3. Vulnerable un-knowings

An intersectional and reflexive approach to feminist research opens up questions around how, as a researcher foregrounding and reflecting upon my intersectional positionality, I respond to research participants and what they tell me. As Wilkinson (1999) argues, social constructionist researchers tend to acknowledge the role of the researcher in the production of knowledge, and the ways that neither interviews or focus group methods are an instrument that can be used to extract truth. However, rather than a negative, this uncertainty is a feature of these methods. Tiffany Page (2017) asks how feminist researchers might respond in ways that allow for uncertainty. In interviews, for example, when a participant says something which unsettles your own existing and comfortable modes of knowledge, this acknowledgement of vulnerability can, Page argues, become central to a feminist methodology in which we admit when we do not know how to respond to a particular research moment or encounter and, as she puts it, 'unsettle any move towards closure' (17). As Page goes onto argue, whilst this can be difficult within the context of neo-liberalist universities that place an emphasis on outputs and assured declarations, these requirements for certainty around the research can be, to some extent, undone by not trying to resolve issues that feel discomforting through attempting to make sense of them. Instead, we can keep posing questions about what it is that unsettles us, and how this might relate to the ways we aim to erase certain complexities in research, particularly in relation to subjectivity and the ways this can relate to clear lines of knowledge (Page, 2017). This approach might involve, as John Law (2004) suggests, working against an expectation that we can come to a stable conclusion about the way things really are, as well as any hope that the research brings about a sense of security. Butler argues that this position is ethical in that it accepts that all accounts are only partial and open to other interpretations, therefore resisting the compulsion to wrap the data up into neat conclusions (cited in Elliot, 2011).

The complexities of remaining accountable to the teenagers who took part in this research has been a consistent question through the researching and writing of this study, and remains one. How do I, as a researcher, avoid reducing the young people taking part in my study to research objects and instead understand them to be collaborators in the production of knowledge (Bernard et al: 2018)? How do I avoid representing the participants as they are too commonly represented (Bhavani, 1993)? This applies not only to teenage girls who are widely sidelined as having views that are transient, immature, and dismissible (Taft, 2017), but also, for instance, to the private-school boys in this study, whose views I found myself assuming things about on the basis of their position of privilege and forming a sense of distance to within the research encounters.

These questions center the complexity I experienced around the differences in my relationship with each participant, the resulting slight variations in my methods across each school, and the moments in both focus groups and one-to-one interviews in which I didn't know how to respond. This also relates to the ethics of the project since it connects to representation in terms of the ways in which the words of the participants are understood and interpreted (Kirsch 1999). I aim, somewhat vulnerably it feels, to be transparent about these discrepancies in what follows.

These politics also raise questions around the context within which the research is undertaken (Bell 2014), and through the next sections, this context will be unpacked to display its complexity. It is this mess and uncertainty that is the focus of what follows; generating an openness to what can't be known, or what I can't be sure I know. Through the following sections that outline aspects of the methods, I attempt to show how every stage of the research is imbued by my subjectivity as a researcher, the politics of each individual school and group of teenage participants, and how the intersections between these formed the possibility of carrying out the research at all.

3.3. Sampling and gaining access to the six research sites and student participants as a feminist researcher and teacher: My different relations to each school, and its gatekeepers

In sampling the six schools, there was a marked difference in my relation towards each one, and the schools responded to my requests in very different ways and for their own particular means. This meant that the process of sampling and gaining access to the schools was largely inconsistent as I aimed to respond to schools in ways that accommodated both their interests, for instance around particular timings or what I could offer them, and for my own in terms of accessing the required time and space to conduct the research.

My initial thinking about sampling schools for this study was motivated by an interest in researching how feminist subjectivities are constituted and navigated by young people engaged in feminism clubs in different types of schools. As outlined in the introductory chapter, I had been teaching in a range of different schools as a teacher, including a comprehensive, an academy, a hospital school, a private dance school and a private all girls' school, and I'd had a direct involvement with feminism in two of these schools. My experiences across these different school contexts suggested that the ways that gender, sexuality and feminism were (re)produced in these spaces was connected to their particular gendered, classed and raced constitution. For instance (as explored in further detail in the analysis chapters) the dance school where I worked as a teacher attempted to remove the word feminism from the club's title as the management stated they didn't want politics negatively affecting their sale-able image. However, the all girls' private school where I was working as a teacher were, at the time of sampling, keen to use the term feminism as a marketing tool to show their students were politically engaged and to support the schools' image as a place that 'centred girls'. The connections between these schools as neoliberal institutions concerned with their performative identity, and the ways this affected their management of feminism, prompted my interest in exploring further how feminist subjectivities are experienced by young people in various school contexts. However, whilst this interest was a clear catalyst around which schools to approach, when it came to the

practicalities of sampling schools with active feminism collectives, the process was somewhat messier.

The way I identified students to be interviewed for this research also varied across each school, depending largely on my relation to the gatekeeping teacher who supported or denied access. In each school, I wanted to interview young people who were engaged with the feminism collective in their school in a focus group in the first instance, and to then open up the opportunity for a follow-up one to one interview with anyone from that group who expressed interested. The option for this follow-up interview was stated on the information sheet and consent forms, therefore the students who took part in the focus group were meant to know that they could offer their interest at the end of the focus group session if they wanted to. Whilst this was the case in the majority of the schools in which the selection of young people for the one-to-one interviews was mostly self-selecting, in a few schools it was the teacher who encouraged their participation.

In the following sub-sections, my different relations to each of the six schools and its gatekeepers are discussed including how the process of sampling and gaining access to each of these was entwined with my subjective position as teacher in a private school, feminist researcher and facilitator of feminism groups.

3.3.1. Feminist Researcher relations: Access is easy

My position, both as a teacher and a research assistant on an Institute of Education associated project around the topic of feminism in schools, appeared to enable access into Park School and Town School with little to no questions or concerns from their gatekeepers.

At the time of sampling schools, I had recently completed work as a research assistant on a Feminism in Schools project with one of my supervisors Professor Jessica Ringrose. My work on this project had involved visiting a number of schools, and through this process I met a teacher who facilitated a feminism club at Park School and was willing for me to conduct research with this feminism club participants. It appeared that, due to my associations with

an IOE associated project around feminism in schools and this teacher's recent experience of being involved with research, he was comfortable with my own research going ahead and granted access quickly. This same teacher was aware I was looking for further schools with active feminism collectives, and he put me in touch with another feminism club facilitator at Town Academy. In both these schools, the Feminism Clubs were large and run by the teacher who granted access. This meant that I contacted that teacher involved with the feminism club with information and consent forms and they then agreed to my running of a focus group interview and the possibility of a follow up one-to-one interview.

The process of sampling participants at Park School was also straightforward as the teacher suggested four girls in Year 9 (14-15 years old) who he thought would be interested in discussing their engagement with the feminism club. These girls agreed to offer their time and I conducted a focus group with them on their lunch break at school. A few months later, a 6th Form student, who had had a leadership role in the Feminism Club the year before, offered her interest in a one-to-one interview, which we conducted over Skype as she had just left the school for a place at university at the time of interview. [3]

At Town Academy, identification of the participants was similar as my initial contact was with the teacher and feminism club facilitator who opened up the opportunity to the entire feminism club. Despite the information sheet stating that around six participants would be the ideal number for a focus group, eight students attended on the day and I experienced this interest as encouraging. The access to a follow up interview was more complex, however, because the teacher who had assured me that he'd grant access again wasn't able to due to pressures around an Ofsted visit. It could be interpreted here that, despite both he and the students being keen to share their experiences of the feminism group in the first instance, performing for Ofsted inspections takes precedence within neoliberal school environments.

In both Park School and Town Academy, there appeared to be an intersection between my subjectivity as someone associated with research at a university and the possibility of

[3] Details of all the focus groups and one to one interviews follow in the next section

carrying out the research, in that I was met with little resistance from the gatekeepers of either of these schools.

3.3.2. Private school relations: A more cautious response

The process of sampling Dance School and Regency School for Boys was similarly connected to my position at the time, however, it was my profession as a teacher and particularly a teacher within a respected all girls' private school that opened up the possibility of these two schools becoming part of the sample. However, in terms of access, these schools differed from Park School and Town Academy as they were much more cautious about their students discussing feminism with a researcher and, in both instances, this appeared to be connected to their schools' reputational brand.

At the time of sampling, I had recently left a Teacher of English role at Dance School where I had facilitated setting up and running the Feminism Club. My connection with this club, as detailed further in the final analysis chapter, was one I experienced as deeply significant to my understanding of the potential of these spaces. It was also through my engagement with setting up this club that I was inspired to research these feminism groups as the focus of this doctoral study. However, my relationship with the group at this school was professionally complex because of the tense relationship between the formation of this collective and my position as a teacher since the school leaders which didn't want to align the school's public identity with feminism. After leaving my teaching role at this school, which was partly due to these tensions, and beginning the process of sampling schools for this study I became interested in interviewing members of this group. Like in other groups, I wanted to know about their experience of engaging with feminism within the club space in their school, however, in this instance, I was also curious about this in relation to my own experiences with this group. With this awareness that the school leaders didn't approve of the feminism club, I was anxious to approach the headteacher in order to re-enter the school in a research capacity. Having been my previous employer, the headteacher was polite but had questions around what I would ask the participants, particularly around the school itself which she said she didn't want discussed in an obviously negative light. With my repeated assurances that the school would remain anonymous, she agreed to my access.

The process of identifying the participants at Dance School was purposeful and less complicated. Since, at the time of sampling, I still knew members of this group relatively well, I requested to speak to members of the 'original' feminism group we'd set up which consisted of seven young women. On the day of the focus group due to exam pressures and unexplained absences, only four of the girls were available. I also conducted a one-to-one follow up interview with one of the participants over Skype a few months later who I asked to do this, and asked one girl in particular was because she had regularly sent me pieces of her writing on her relationship with feminism, and had expressed her interest in talking about this.

Access to Regency Boys' School was also met cautiously. The sampling of Regency Boys' School came out of my work in setting up and facilitating a feminism group in an all girls' private school where I took a job straight after I left Dance School. Through this new teaching role, my colleagues knew of my interest in this area and this led to a colleague connecting me to a teacher she knew from Regency Boys' who worked with the Feminism Society there. This was the first all boys' group I had heard of and I was very interested in speaking with and potentially observing this group. Whilst initial discussions with the teacher who facilitated the group were friendly, this school had a similarly tentative approach to my access in they communicated an anxiety about potential negative press about their brand image. However, the difference with Dance School was that I hadn't visited or met anyone from the school before the scheduled focus group day.

The sampling of the participants at Regency was also done by the feminism club facilitator herself who gave me only scant information in advance of my visit due to fears about a privacy breach. In terms of accessing the group, I visited the school twice overall but, despite having passed on information and consent forms before these visits, it wasn't made clear to me by the teacher facilitating my access to the grounds who or how many students I'd be speaking with. I was also told that my DBS form that gave me legal clearance to be left alone with young people didn't count at this school as they did their own checks, but it wasn't evident what these were. The main decisions were, throughout the process, all with

the gatekeeper to the school and I felt I must adhere to these else I would lose my access altogether.

These two private school environments, Dance School and Regency Boys', were cautious about providing access due to a perceived anxiety around their marketable brand. It appeared, however, to be my professional position both in relation to Dance School as a previous employee, and to Regency Boys as a recognised teacher within a private school, that allowed for my access to research in these schools.

3.3.3. Doctoral- feminist teacher-private school relations: Access because-of and in-exchange-for…

At Key Boys and Premier Girls' School, both single-sex private schools, the sampling was related to connections made through another PhD student I met through a doctoral reading group at the IOE. This easy access appeared to be both because of my position as a PhD student known to the gatekeeper, and in exchange for what I could offer the schools.

Identification of participants at both Key Boys and Premier Girls' School were also similar in that since both these schools constitute their feminism collective as a 'society' that has visitors and speakers and even holds conferences, this dynamic contributed to my access. Sampling of these two schools began with my participation in a reading group for doctoral students at UCL Institute of Education where I met another PhD student who had similar class-based and professional connections to mine. Rob was also a part-time doctoral student and a part-time teacher, who had left the state sector for a private school as the pay was significantly higher and this helped fund the PhD fees, as I had. We had a teacher friend in common which also prompted a sense of familiarity. The school where Rob worked was Key School for Boys' where he told me there was a Feminism Society and offered to set up a visit. In a similar way to gaining access to Park and Town School, my professional subjectivity appeared to enable easy access to this school since it was deemed familiarly comfortable to Rob. On visiting this school, and also bumping into the feminism collective and their associated teacher at two feminism events outside of schools, I also realised that the teacher facilitating this group was actively trying to engage these students with

feminisms beyond the school walls, and, as a feminist researcher, I was positioned as a part of this exposure.

Once I had established a connection to this school, he then introduced me to another teacher who worked at Premier Girls School where they also had a Feminism Society. Again, this appeared to come through the familiarity generated between the academic and class-based social connections between us. Premier Girls' School quickly agreed that I could meet and interview their feminism collective, however, at this school, this was on a condition. The headteacher asked if I me and the feminism society I ran would participate in a feminism conference they were running a month later at their school. I agreed, partly because I was keen to research in this school, but also because this sort of engagement was of interest to me and my students who were keen to take part in feminist events in schools. However, the neoliberal tenor of this (particularly when the event turned out to be paying certain high-profile speakers £3000 although nothing to me) was evident.

In my communication with the teacher contact at Premier School and Key Boys' during which I passed on the information sheets and consent forms, it was somehow, and despite the written information I'd given to them, assumed by the teacher in each that I'd meet the entire feminism society in one meeting. I was aware of this before the meeting at Premier Girls but not informed prior to the meeting at Key Boys. Once I'd met the students in the school environment, I realised that this assumption from the school teacher in charge had come about as a result of my positioning by the school as a visitor for them, much like other speakers they'd had to visit the whole group. At Premier Girls, I conducted a focus group with the entire feminism society comprised of 8 girls in Years 10,11 and 12 (14-17 years old). At a later date, I had a follow up one-to-one interview with one girl in Year 12 who expressed interest. At Key Boys', I also met with the entire feminism group of 15 boys in Years 10-13 (14-18 years old). The participants for the one-to-one follow up interviews were sorted out by the deputy head teacher and I conducted these at separate times on the same day with each of these boys.

In these two private schools, the sampling and access was related to my intersecting positions as a doctoral candidate, a private school teacher and as a self-declared feminist

teacher, which produced connections with another teacher/researcher. Both these schools were also, at the time, keen to promote themselves as feminist and to connect with wider feminist networks, therefore they appeared to grant access partly because of my subjectivity as a feminist researcher and teacher in a private school, particularly in Key Boys', and in exchange for what I could offer to their feminist conference in the case of Premier Girls.

It is notable that these schools' concern with their schools' brand in relation to feminism worked antithetically to the way it had in Regency and Dance School where concern was directly about a publicly negative association with feminism. However, in Key Boys and Premier Girls, where school leaders had decided feminism was marketable, my access was deemed useful in furthering the networked feminist reach of the school. The production of this form of marketized feminism in this school is explored in more depth in the analysis chapters.

Table 1: The six schools under study including age, gender and race for group, one-to-one interview and observation

School name	School type	Location	Age/Year group	Gender and Race for Group interview	Gender and Race for One-to-One interview	Observation
Park School	Mixed state secondary	Greater London	Year 9: Age 13/14 y/o Year 13: Age 18	4 white girls	1 white girl	None undertaken
Town Academy	Co-educational Academy	Inner London	Year 9 and 10 13-15y/o	3 Black girls 1 Black boy 4 white girls	n/a	None undertaken

Premier Girls'	All girls' private	Inner London	Year 10,11,12 15-17 y/o	1 Black girl 2 South Asian girls 1 East Asian girl 4 white girls	1 white girl	None undertaken
Key Boys'	All boys' private	Inner London	Year 10,11,12,13 15-18 y/o	9 white boys 2 Black boys 2 East Asian boys 2 South Asian boys	1 white Boy Year 10 1 white Boy Year 10	None undertaken
Regency Boys'	All boys' private	Greater London	Year 12 17 y/o/ 1 18 y/o who had left the school	2 white boys	1 white boy	One undertaken with large group
Dance School	Co-educational private	Greater London	Year 10, 11 14-16 y/o	4 white girls	1 white girl	None undertaken

Table 2: The student interviewees in focus groups and one-to-one interviews

School name	Number of students in focus group	Participants in focus group	Participants in one-to-one interview
Park School	4	Evie	Amy

		Kay Mel Tiff	
Town Academy	8	Kat Becky Deborah Lorraine James Esther Sirin Ade	n/a
Premier Girls'	8	Lizzie Rochelle Lisa Jane Maggie Lily Tash Kate	Lily
Key Boys'	15	Leo Sole Victor Abel Ovie Jack Simon Jake Liam Donny Seb Kane Oscar Eli Jimmy	Oscar Eli

Regency Boys'	2	Humphrey Percy (this wasn't technically a focus group since there were only 2 participants)	Matt
Dance School	4	Fay Molly Vix Sal	Fay

3.3.4. Subjective Saturation?

During the months of conducting fieldwork, I had further encounters which led to potential openings for further research schools with feminism clubs. My study had ethical approval to collect data in up to ten schools and I so I considered researching in more schools. However, as the study went on and the interview data generated appeared rich, I reached a sense of subjective 'saturation' (Hennink et al, 2017) after researching in these six schools. Whilst the notion of saturation was coined by Glaser and Strauss in the 1960s to refer to a point in research where enough data has been collected to draw the research's desired conclusions (Glaser and Strauss, 2017), my own sense of saturation was more associated with the range of schools I'd researched in already, and my own limitations as a part-time PhD student.

The six schools I'd conducted research in offered most of the diversity I was interested in in terms of their type of school, including state, academy and private schools, single sex and mixed schools, and 'day' and boarding schools, as well as with the form of in-depth rather than broad analysis I was interested in (explained in detail in the 'modes of analysis' section further on in this chapter). However, the emphasis on private schools in this sample meant I would have liked to research further in comprehensive and academy schools to begin to form a claim to the differences in how feminism is negotiated across schools, but my part-time position and work commitments made further sampling very difficult. Sampling and access were entwined with my subjective position as a researcher, a teacher in a school, and

a facilitator of feminist groups and events in schools, as well as with the complexity of forming these connections and trying to reflect on my own relation to each one. Doing all of this whilst also working was very time-consuming and contributed to my being limited in how many schools I could offer time and energy to researching. This isn't to claim that no new dimensions of this research could have emerged if I had widened the pool of schools and participants (Strauss and Corbin, 1998) or that I had saturated the interpretations that could have emerged from the data (Fucsch and Ness, 2015), however, I concluded that these six schools and their participants provided enough data and theoretical interpretations for this qualitative feminist study.

3.4. Constituting and re-constituting a feminist researcher subjectivity in the focus group interviews

Robinson (2019) defines focus groups around collectivity, as well as their focus on interaction between participants. Shifts in subjectivity that might take place within the focus group encounter are also cited as an important aspect of these since, through discussion, the participants' ideas may change. This is in line with a constructionist framework in which the research encounter is understood to include the co-construction and renegotiation of meaning between participants (Wilkinson, 1999). Within this model, the role of the facilitator within the group is to ask questions that open up talk between the participants rather than just between researcher and participant.

Focus groups are frequently used by feminist researchers with young people to explore topics perceived to be sensitive, since they offer a less pressured space (Hoppe et al., 1995; Bragg, Renold, Ringrose, & Jackson, 2018; Ringrose, Gill, Livingstone, & Harvey, 2012). The focus group method aligns with feminist research principles that aim to move power away from the researcher, with this deemed to enable those in the group to feel more supported to speak, since they are engaging with others on a similar topic rather than being directly questioned (Robinson, 2019). I was interested in developing a sense of reciprocity within the encounter so that the participants can speak and listen in a way that flattens hierarchies, and demotes my perceived authority (Pillow, 2003) where possible.

Since the focus of this research is around feminism groups in schools, I chose this method as it connected to the relationality of these collectives, and was one that attended to the networked dynamic of these groups. Since the participants were already a part of their school-based feminism groups, the relationality of members was of particular interest to the study, and therefore my own approach to focus groups was in line with the ideas above; to emphasize the relations between the members of the feminism collective rather than my power as an interviewer, to prompt discussion between participants about their engagement with feminisms in and beyond their school, as well to observe potential shifts in their ideas through the process of interaction with one another. I was also interested in my own sense of subjectivity during the focus group encounters.

However, practicing these methodological aims was messier and more complex than anticipated. Whilst aspects of the focus groups were the same across each school, for instance all of them were asked similar questions and each session was audio-recorded, the dynamics of each focus group were very different depending on my own subjective relation to the group. Some of this complexity began with the disparity between what I had requested in the information forms sent to each school prior to the research visit and what happened on the day itself. For instance, in the information given before the research date, I stated that the focus groups would ideally be around six students, however, ranged very much in size to as high as fifteen and as low in two, which I wouldn't term a focus group at all. I had also stated on the same information form that I expected to be left alone with the students due to my DBS clearance, however, in two of the schools a teacher was at some point present. Whilst I knew all the focus groups would take place on school grounds, I hadn't stipulated anything specific about the space or room I expected to conduct the focus group, but they all happened to take place within the space the feminism group met each week except for one group.

In what follows, I discuss how my own feminist research subjectivity was (re)constituted through these varied and often surprising focus group research encounters, with particular emphasis on the ways that the relational dynamic of the group was experienced depending on particularities of each group that I encountered on the day of the focus group itself.

3.4.1. Relationality in the focus groups: through a feminist researcher subjective lens

- **Established friends at Park School and Dance School:**

Atkinson (1999) states that when members of focus groups already know each other, they are more likely to form interactive discussions as a group. Whilst all of the groups I researched with knew each other to some degree, the focus groups at both Park School and Dance School were the only groups who described themselves as already in a friendship group and this had particular effects on the relationality of the meetings.

At Park School, which was the first school I conducted a focus group in, we were sent off alone and without a teacher, to find an empty classroom where we sat for an hour. I had aimed to incite discussion between the participants by not asking too many questions and opened the focus group with the prompt 'what does it mean to you that the club is a *feminist* club?' as a purposefully open ended question. The participants proceeded to speak with one another for the group session for the following 20 minutes, with my only input being when I purposefully repeated a word one of them had said back to them to encourage some elaboration, for example the word 'personal' and the word 'slutty' which I was interested to hear them say more about. The friendship between the group appeared to support consistent chat between them, and I was able to listen rather than interfere with their discussion.

At Dance School, the focus group session didn't start in the same way as the other groups where I had opened with a question. This was perhaps due to my familiarity with these girls as one of the participants Fay started the group meeting herself by immediately telling the story of how the girls became friends. This stimulated an hour of discussion that moved in directions and posed challenges to me that I hadn't anticipated. Whilst I was aware that my own connection to the club meant that their discussion might include comments about my role in their experience of becoming feminist, my situated association with the group through the part I played in their experience of the feminism club. I was also learning

through the discussion aspects of my experience about the group I hadn't known. For instance, early in the discussion I found out that an associated 'meninist' (anti-feminism and in support of men's rights) group that had been formed in response to the feminism club was created by one of the members of the feminism club. My fieldnotes state:

this is interesting because this 'meninist' group was something I'd thought was created by the boys who were anti the feminist group and I'd even discussed this at conferences, however, they said it was created by Viv – this was funny in the moment but also shocking to me since I'd perhaps taken the existence of this group more seriously at the time than I needed to? Whether that's true or not, I'd really misinterpreted things.

However, there were points at which the girls looked to me as a feminist mentor, which is a position I'd held with them before, which brought me into the discussion in a way I hadn't expected.

In both Park and Dance School, I experienced the focus groups as successful in that lots of the discussion took place without my interruptions and the dynamics of the groups were visible. However, in Dance School, my previous positionality as the feminism group facilitator punctuated the discussion in ways that slipped my subjectivity beyond that of just the researcher, and into one of feminist teacher and mentor, a point I explore in depth in Chapter Seven.

- **Participant numbers and unexpected teacher presence at Key Boys and Regency Boys:**

Typical definitions of focus groups include the ideal participant number as being between six and twelve participants (Robinson, 2019). My interest was in emphasizing relationality between members, which, based on my experience of facilitating feminism groups of varying sizes, I thought might be difficult with very small or large groups, so I aimed for around 6 participants. Despite having asked to have around this number to take part in these focus groups, at Key Boys I was presented with fifteen participants, and at Regency Boys with just two.

The focus group at Key Boys took place in a small classroom with a big round wooden table around which we all sat. This was the space, I was told, that the group met each week. The large table was purposefully there in the 'Harkness' style (Williams: 2010) that was, at the time being used in elite schools and 'inspired by the Oxford tutorial system and the Socratic concept of dialogue' (58) in order to promote more listening and less teacher control. The boys appeared comfortable with talking between themselves in this manner, however, the large number of boys all at once meant that, at times, the discussion involved so much talking over one another that I was concerned about the audio recorder not picking up the discussion. This led me to take on more of a teacher-role with this group and to ask questions in order to bring the discussion back from the loud talking-over it frequently became. However, this dynamic was interesting in itself, since it displayed the debate style they employ in this space, which is explored in the analysis chapters.

At Regency Boys, I was also not told in advance of the day of the focus group how many students I would be meeting with. It is notable that this only happened in the two elite all boys' schools. This encounter was, however, more cryptic than at Key Boys, in that I was taken to a part of the school that looked very modern and separated from the other buildings by the teacher and I met by just two boys there who I was told had taken over leadership of the school's Feminism Society. This meant I couldn't class the research encounter as a 'focus group' despite having aimed to set this up as one.

Teacher presence also affected the experiences of both these research encounters. At Key Boys, around 10 minutes before the end of the focus group session, the teacher contact from my doctoral study who had facilitated my access to the school, entered the room and listened at the door until the end of the meeting. This was a disconcerting experience as, considering he knew this was a research encounter, and as a fellow PhD student, I'd assumed he was aware of ethical issues around student confidentiality and anonymity. Renold and Ringrose (2016) discuss the interruption of male teachers on feminist focus groups, however, whilst the circumstances are different in this paper in that the teacher intervened to protect another male teacher, they have similarities in that both that teacher and this one felt entitled to enter a confidential research space. In this instance, when the

male teacher entered, I didn't know how to terminate the interview suddenly so I continued as if as normal. However, I have since cut the section of data that he listened to so as to not breach the anonymity I promised to the group of boys.

On entering the room at Regency Boys, the teacher who led us there and was about to leave noted that the room had a large one-sided mirror on one side where she said we might be being watched or listened to but 'probably not'. The panopticon effect felt visceral as I conducted this focus group, with my nor the boys not knowing whether the anonymity of their words was being retained. At the end of this focus group as we were walking back to the main building and away from the teacher in charge, I asked the boys again for their consent for me to use their discussion in my study considering they may have been listened to. Both of the boys agreed, however, I was left with a feeling of discomfort about the atmosphere of surveillance that had been a part of our discussion. My analysis of this data aims to account for our awareness of this possible listener.

- **Teacher/student facilitation at Premier Girls and Town School**

At both Premier Girls and Town School there were eight students in the focus group meetings, however, it was the dynamics formed through how the two groups were led, whether by a teacher or the students, that prompted very different responses from me and the participants in each.

At Premier Girls, the classroom we sat in also worked as a bypass through which students went from one room to another, so the atmosphere was busy and loud throughout, despite there being eight girls taking part in the discussion. It was lunchtime and the atmosphere felt informal, partly due to the students using the edge of the room as a walkway, but also because the society members had brought their lunch with them to the meeting. I was presented with a helpful 'host', a 17-year old member of the group called Rochelle who walked me to the classroom to meet the rest of the feminism society. I started with the question 'what makes the society a feminism society?', and this opened up discussion between the girls about feminism's intrinsic place within their school's identity. They spoke

about this between one another in a seemingly comfortable way. On reading the transcriptions back and listening to the audio recordings, my own interventions weren't so much on a word level of repeating a word back to prompt elaboration, but instead I repeated back points I thought they'd made to further engage on that point, for instance when a participant said 'women need to be on par and then the world is going to be a better place', I responded by saying 'so you feel that women need to be united?'. This method worked in terms of encouraging the participants to continue to speak on this point, however, I became aware during the focus group that this could be interpreted as putting words in their mouth, so I reverted back to shorter prompts that referenced a word they'd already said. The girls appeared confident and mature and, despite there being no teacher present, they spoke in such a unified and positive way about their school that it was as if they embodied the institution itself.

At Town Academy, the teacher's presence was much more literal. The feminism club facilitator and teacher who had organised my access to the school decided, without any prior warning, to not only remain in the room throughout the focus group session but to actively ask the participants questions as if on my behalf. Whilst this supported the pace of the discussion and broadly remained on the topic of how the participants understood feminism and experienced their feminism club, he took on a rigid question and answer mode that I hadn't planned for, just as I hadn't planned for his presence in the room throughout the focus group. As in all the schools, I had my DBS clearance that allows me to left alone with young people without a teacher present, therefore the reason for him remaining and running the group discussion was unclear. The questions he asked were not planned with me and often felt leading, including 'what do you get out of being a feminist in this school?', what is the effect of the feminist lessons?' 'how has it helped your life to be a part of this group?'. The teacher also interrupted some of the participant's responses meaning and initiated a quick-fire lesson style pace through which he appeared to want to keep everyone engaged, but resulted in a teacher/student dynamic in which the participants contributed only when asked a question. At around half an hour into the focus group session, I made a deliberate attempt to affect some change in the dynamic and posed a question about whether they saw their school as feminist to the whole group including the teacher. This did some work in placing the teacher as more of a participant than as the

inquirer, and it was notable that once he had answered this question, he didn't interrupt with any more and I became more able to facilitate the focus group. However, the teacher's presence and mode of questioning was compromising for me and the students throughout this focus group particularly since I was unable to get back into this school for a one-to-one interview. This meant that my understanding of the groups' dynamics outside of this heavily teacher-facilitated mode weren't known to me or the participants.

Through this section, I have discussed how the use of focus groups, particularly for researching the interactive process of feminism groups who already meet as collectives, is both generative and messy, as well as how my own feminist research subjectivity was (re)constituted through these varied and sometimes discombobulating focus group research encounters. I placed particular emphasis on the ways that the dynamics of each group was experienced and how I attempted to meet these moments with an ability to shift with that encounter rather than against it. In what follows, I explore how these dynamics played out in relation to my feminist research subjectivity within the one to one interviews, and my pervading sense of failure around these.

3.5.Succeeding/Failing to constitute a feminist subjectivity in individual interviews

The follow-up one-to-one interviews were designed to follow on from the focus groups to further elicit some self-selecting participants' ideas and reflections about their relationship with feminisms in their school. I was interested in the differences between what was said in the feminism group space and what was articulated in one to one setting away from their peers. On reflection, I realise that I was hoping to generate an atmosphere of solidarity that might get me closer to the supposed truth of these young people's experience of negotiating feminism in their school and this meant I experienced these interviews in relation to whether I thought I'd succeeded or failed at this.

Through engaging with psychosocial literature in relation to interviews, and its emphasis on assuming a defended and irrationally driven subject, I aimed to assume that the participants wouldn't be able to articulate all of their ideas and decisions in a full way. Drawing from Gadd's (2000) work in this area, I asked open questions that aimed to avoid placing pressure

on the participants, and used the follow up interviews to go back to contradictions or particular moments where confusion appeared to take over. I was aware that there was a possibility of projecting my own feelings or thoughts onto the participants rather than interpreting something that was there, however, I aim to use reflexive modes of writing to remain open to this and avoid pinning my interpretations down too assuredly (Gadd, 2000; Frosh; 1994). I had also read Wengraf (2001)'s notes on semi-structured interviews and was initially confident with this research method since the idea of both having a plan and being open to what happened felt similar to teaching and therefore within my capabilities. I designed the interviews to include a number of crafted interviewer questions but remained open to subsequent questions that could be improvised. These one-to-one interviews took this on in that they were partly planned with open-ended questions that connected to themes raised in the focus groups around the participants' relationship with feminism, and I was technically prepared to deal easily with defended responses. However, the experience of conducting these interviews was somewhat different.

In two of the schools, Premier School and Regency Boys, where the young people spoke to me in a critical way about their school, I experienced a sense of success as it seemed as if they were opening up about something they couldn't say elsewhere. However, in Key Boys and Park School, I experienced the students' responses as guarded, and found these interviews a struggle, and in both Dance School, where I already knew the participant well, and in Town Academy where I was unable to conduct a one to one interview, I was unsure what to conclude about these experiences. I continue to wonder whether it was my desire for something *different* and more intimate to what I'd heard in the focus groups meant that my subjective sense of these interviews was experienced as full of uncertainty and concern about binary success or failure.

3.5.1. Forming solidarities?

The interview at Premier Girls' School fulfilled my hopes for a more intimate dynamic than the focus group. I noticed that particular areas of discussion appeared to become speak-able that hadn't been in the focus group. In the one to one interview during which I interviewed a white 6th form student for an hour, she spoke about her frustrations with the

feminism group and its emphasis on white women's experiences and what she understood to be a marketable feminism. Lily's critical tone around the institution's negotiation of feminism was very different to that of the focus group in which the group had spoken with enthusiasm about their school, and therefore the space of the interview appeared to offer space for discussion where this student could vent frustrations and uncertainties. A sense of solidarity was felt by me in that I was experiencing some similar frustrations in the girls' private school where I was working at the time.

The one-to-one meeting with Matt from Regency Boys was similar in that this participant, a boy who had recently left the school and was on his gap year, talked critically about his school's management of gender and sexuality-based relations. Matt's humorous way of discussing his school's clumsy or outright misogynistic dealings around feminism enabled a lively discussion which I actively enjoyed. In both these one to one interviews, I experienced the encounter as less guarded, and therefore successful. This was in part due to the students' willingness to critique their school, that many of their observations about gender and sexuality in schools chimed with my own, and that they spoke to me like an equal rather than an authority figure; these aspects all enabling what I felt was a form of solidarity.

3.5.2. Formal failures

At Key Boys and at Park School, I experienced the one to one interviews as much more defended, a theme explored in the second data analysis chapter in relation to the boys' school in particular. At Key Boys, I interviewed two boys, Eli and Oscar who I'd thought would speak in a way that differed from the tenor of the focus group in that they might express some frustration with the competitive debate dynamics for instance. However, both boys largely continued with their line of discussion from the focus group, particularly in my interpretation of their defensiveness around their school and its apparently progressive feminism. At Park School, I reached out to the previous leader of the feminism club Amy for a one-to-one interview since she had been so formative in setting the club up and I was interested in this process, so this one-to-one interview was not a 'follow up' since she didn't take part in the focus group. The interview was therefore the first time I'd spoken to her and I wasn't able to get past what felt like a question and answer round style which, perhaps

partly due to the use of Skype, felt rather formal and brusque. This was challenging since I had planned to use these follow up interviews as spaces to connect into what might not be said in the larger focus group, but this wasn't possible. However, as the second analysis chapter explores, the use of defensiveness is an important interpretation in itself in relation to the complexities of discussing feminism in these school spaces.

3.5.3. Uncertainties

At both Dance School and Town Academy, I was unsure what to feel about the one to one interviews, and whether I had approached these well. At Dance Academy, I interviewed a student I already knew well and who I had had many discussions about feminism due to my involvement in facilitating the feminism group at this school. During the one to one interview, I was concerned that through having prepared for it just like the others, rather than accounting for my closeness to this participant, I placed her in an ethically dubious position since for her to discuss her relationship with feminism, she had to also discuss her relationship to the group I'd set up and therefore to me. At Town Academy, I wasn't able to run a follow up interview since, as mentioned above, the teacher who ran the feminism club told me close to the scheduled interview day that he suddenly couldn't grant access again due to the overwhelming pressures he said he was under as a result of the academy's Ofsted inspection. Whilst I didn't doubt this at the time, I have since wondered whether the dynamic I enforced in the focus group during which I worked to stop him leading the discussion, dissuaded him from inviting me back.

3.6. Fieldnote-taking, transcription, triangulation and analysis of the data

3.6.1. Fieldnotes

Fieldnotes are widely considered to link researchers and their subjects through the writing process in a way that works towards an understanding of the world that is more trustworthy or rigorous (Emerson et al: 2011). Jones et al (2010) suggest that it is fieldnotes' use of the present tense that enables 'a sense of direct transmission between the eye, the action being observed and the written observation of the account' (484) which results in the event appearing to be held in time, as if to be true and unchanging. However, as points made earlier in the chapter outline, this study understands any interpretation as made by, as Rosaldo (1993) writes; 'by positioned subjects who are prepared to know certain things and not others' (9), therefore fieldnotes don't necessarily establish a real or true account (Jones et al, 2010: 3). Maclure (cited in Jones et al, 2010) outlines the illusory nature of fieldnotes in that they perform the role of bringing 'a little piece of the field 'back' in to the final text' (481), whilst Jones et al (2010) argue that fieldnotes are as invested with subjectivity, desire and power as any other written text meaning that researchers' should be attentive to these.

The way I used fieldnotes during the fieldwork was through writing down my observations, feelings and any key themes I noticed that had come up in notes straight after visiting each of the settings. I would then return to these a day or two later to type up and add anything further I'd remembered, which often involved comparing the experience to one I'd had in another school. The notes I wrote for each setting were made up partly of practical detail, including many participants were in the meeting and their choice of pseudonym, as well as more sensorial and affective impressions including, for instance, the jolt of anger I experienced on hearing a misogynistic comment in an all boys' feminism society meeting, or a warmth I felt when hearing a participant discuss the feminism space being one where people seemed to care about her ideas. This is an example of one small section of these notes from my visit to Key Boys' School:

I go to a room where Jack, one of the 'leaders' of the Feminism Society met me, shakes my hand and welcomes me in to a room with a large table in the middle where sit 15 boys. I notice a distinct sense of self-consciousness that I don't have in the same way in a girls' school. It feels strange to be both aware of trying not to over-please (which I can do when I'm intimidated) whilst also worrying that I'll be perceived as too 'testing' or challenging them as a 'feminist' researcher in their school. Rob (the teacher who sorted my access to the school) walks in and casually stands by the door to listen to the last part of the focus group. I think he means well (?) but it feels entitled, disruptive and a little odd since he's aware it's a research visit.

The way I approached fieldnotes when conducting research for this study is informed by the ideas above, and I therefore conceived of the fieldnotes as data. Rather than being taken at face value as a true indication of 'what happened', I understood these as written by my own positioned self and, as Jones (2010) says, entirely imbued with my own subjectivity in relation to the research. In the third analysis chapter, I use the fieldnotes as data to be reflexively analyzed.

3.6.2. Transcription

Like fieldnotes, transcripts can also be assumed to represent the truth of an encounter (Hurst et al: 2010) as raw data. It can also be tempting to consider transcription as a perfunctory task of simply writing down words heard in the research audio-recordings (Brandenburg and Davidson, 2011). However, the product and process of transcription has been argued to by scholars to be under-explored, including by Bucholtz (2007) who states that more reflexive thought should be given to the process of transforming the words of others from spoken into written transcribed form. To do this, Oliver et al. (2005) encourage the transcribing researcher to include reflection in the process (cited in Hurst et al, 2010) in order to consider the experience of listening and re-listening as one of discovery (Duranti, 2006 in Hurst et al: 4).

All focus groups and one-to-one interviews in this study were audio-recorded, and I then transcribed all of these myself. Whilst I didn't use a particularly systematic transcription

method, I listened to each recording and wrote down verbatim what I heard on a word level, and also included partial words (such as mm or yeah or like), as well as pauses, laughs, guffaws and heavy breaths. I also made notes on how particular words or phrases were said, for example I'd note an interpretation that a comment was said in a light-hearted or a sarcastic tone. Transcribing the focus groups was more challenging than the one-to-one interviews since there were many more examples of overlapping speech, indiscernible comments and interruptions. However, on the whole speech was discernible enough for the analysis process, and at points when groups excitedly spoke over each other for example, the affective tenor of the pitch might be the focus of analysis, rather than the individual words being said in that moment, for instance, at this moment half way through the focus group at Dance School when the girls had been talking about sex and a participant thought she'd spoken to loudly and the headteacher might hear her since she was in an office next door. The transcription notes:

Much laughter / banging on the table in excitement / 'aaaaaah haaahhaaaaa sounds / shouts of 'What if Miss Jane came in?!' – hard to hear individual words as all the girls are talking over each other

Rather than the focus being on what exactly is said in this instance, the point of interest here is around the collective excitement and humor generated by the idea of their headteacher hearing them talk openly about sexuality.

Much of the transcribed speech has not been analyzed and written up for this study due to the scope of the chapters. However, having gone through the slow and rigorous process of transcribing every encounter, my knowledge of the entire research context provides an understanding and depth to the analysis that is undertaken.

3.6.3. Combined methods of focus groups, follow up individual interviews and field notes; Triangulation?

This study makes use of methods that combine focus groups, follow up one-to-one interviews and fieldnotes. The use of these multiple methods in educational settings these

could be justified in terms of being triangulated in that the range of methods constitutes a broad methodological scope and 'trustworthiness of findings' (Lambert et al, 2008). However, the conceptual underpinnings of this research unsettle aims to access reality, therefore what comes out of the data isn't consistent with ideas of a clear truth.

I would also not call this study an ethnography since my engagement with the participants was not as consistently sustained across sites as I understand ethnographic methods to demand. However, although issues of validity have been critiqued in qualitative research (Kvale, 1989; Lather, 1986a, 1993; Maxwell, 1992 in Pillow, 2003), this leaves open questions around how we understand our research data and analysis to be legitimate. Pillow (2003) argues the use of reflexivity in research is an important tool here because it enables the researcher to demonstrate a clarity about the complexities of research and can validate the research through this process of posing questions about its own process, 'thus penetrating the representational exercise itself' (Macbeth, 2001 cited in Pillow, 2003: 179).

3.6.4. Modes of Data Analysis

- **Choosing the data**

The ways I chose the data to analyse in this thesis was partly informed by thematic approaches to quantitative data analysis as described by Braun and Clarke (2006; 2013; 2017; 2019; 2022) in that I took steps including familiarising myself with the data through listening to the recordings, transcribing the recordings and re-reading these and note taking to draw out 'patterns of meaning' (2017: 297) which I then reviewed and analysed. In the first two analysis chapters, I chose the data through drawing out thematic patterns on the level of the signifier, for instance, where the term feminazi was used, as well as in relation to patterns of meaning for instance, where a particular form of feminism is discussed. However, the process of choosing the data I analyse in this thesis was not consistently systematic. There is, Maclure (2013) argues, an obsession in research with fixing down the ways that entities relate to one another, that is unable to conceive of what is less stabilized and the ways that things might be contradictory and different within themselves. Within

this paradigm, data is considered to be just 'dumb matter' (Massumi, 2002 in Maclure: 173) that needs to be taken into human consciousness to be given meaning. Maclure suggests that this is limiting since it results in research that is closed to possibilities outside of these codified forms. Rather than this, Maclure suggests that researchers look out for sections of their data that feel fascinating or provoke wonder in that they catalyze thoughts; that 'seems to reach out from the inert corpus (corpse) of the data to grasp us' (2013: 228). This goes some way in confounding more methodical searches for meaning in that it moves beyond conventional forms of coding, and instead picks up on more affective relations between oneself and the data. This approach informed my approach in the third analysis chapter where, rather than only choosing data that connected under a thematic title, I only attend to a small section of data that provoked my curiosity and confusion. It also provoked my discomfort in terms of the ways that I am involved with this particular part of the research and the significance of my own fieldnotes for this encounter. Other aspects of choosing the data were more related to the pattern of meaning I attempted. For instance, I have rich fieldnotes on the observation I conducted at Regency Boys, but I have not included them in this thesis perhaps because I couldn't find a way to incorporate them into the framework of analyses I settled upon, or because they provoked too much discomfort in me that I couldn't find a way to effectively analyse them.

- **Analysing the participants' narratives**

My approach to the data analysis is inextricably linked to the ways I co-constituted the data with the participants. The interpretive frames that I have used inform what I consider to be relevant and interesting data, and the data that is generated informs the theory that I engage with. The data did not simply transpire as accounts that I consider to exist outside of and separate from the research encounter, but were co-constructed with the participants in the interview space. I therefore consider the data to be what Saville Young and Frosh (2016) call 'social and personal realities that are constructed through talk' (1-2). Beginning to form a psychosocial approach to my data analysis also supported my interest in what the young people were doing with their language in the focus groups and interviews, and the ways they performatively constituted themselves through their relations to one another and to me, through the process of speech (Saville Young and Frosh: 2016). As I became more

attuned with particular psychosocial concepts (as outlined in detail in the next chapter), I found that combining these with aspects of discursive analysis enabled interpretations of young people's complex constitutions of feminist subjectivities in their schools, as well as how cultural discourses of popular feminisms inform young people's relations towards these across different school contexts.

It is, however, difficult to fully describe and account for how all aspects of the analytic process, since this went on over many years and took various iterations. For instance, in the early stages of the PhD I presented early forms of analysis on pieces of data at various conferences in order to play with interpretations across different theoretical frameworks; for instance, by applying Lacanian theories of fantasy to a group of girls' negotiations of feminism and femininity. In my upgrade document, in an attempt to play across frameworks and perhaps avoid having to attach to one, I conceptualised feminism groups in schools through several theoretical lenses including postfeminist melancholy, girls' agentic practice and posthuman intra-actions.

What I call 'data' in this project consists of focus group transcriptions; one-to-one interview transcriptions and my own fieldnotes. When working with this data in the later stages of this study, I initially transcribed and highlighted according to themes with the guide of my research questions. The first of these initially asked 'how do the young people under study navigate feminist subjectivities in their schools?', however, as my psychosocial approach developed, this question shifted to asking about the participants' constitution of feminist subjectivities. This was due to a psychosocially informed shift in my thinking from regarding the subject as separate from and able to navigate discourses, to understanding the subject as coming into being through psychical investments in elements of discourse.

On a more methodological level, I have also been led by a question around how I negotiate my position as a feminist researcher through this study. This is in order to pay reflexive attention to the implication of my subjectivity in all aspects of this research process in a conscious undermining of the purportedly objective researcher, as well as to become somewhat accountable for my production of knowledge (Wigginton and Lafrance, 2019). This reflexive focus has been a way of also understanding aspects of the data that feel more

affective or embodied since it accounts for my own experience of how the research feels (Elliott, 2011). For instance, this reflexive focus supports my understanding of discomforting moments in the research such as when conducting the un-analysed observation of the feminism society at Regency Boys' during which I listened to boys' comments about abortion that made me feel angry, and that I responded to in ways I am unsure about now. My fieldnotes document the following:

All of the boys believed that abortion is wrong – it is 'murder and life 'begins at conception'. The smallest boy argued that if a woman is raped then she should be allowed to get an abortion to which all of the other boys vehemently argued against him stating that if it's 'a rule it's a rule', you can't 'make exceptions' as the smaller boy kept saying 'but if it's rape then it isn't her fault, she's pregnant'. I then asked whether, if they were a young man and a partner of theirs became accidentally pregnant whether that might change their opinion (I'm not sure I should have spoken at all….) to which they vehemently responded with 'no! it would be murder! My wife would be murdering my child!). At this point I was having such a mental / physical / affective response to their words that I quietly said 'thanks' and walked away with a desire to run out of the room and away from their entitled ignorance and hatred.

My attempt to engage their compassion through imagining their own partner to be pregnant concedes to the notion that boys can only empathise with women to whom they are intimately or genetically linked (Edwards, 2013), and the affective overwhelm I experienced that led to my leaving their discussion now frustrates me since this was a potentially rich moment of learning about a group of elite boys' understandings of sexual violence.

My act of interpreting the data draws on psychosocial concepts including intersubjectivity, psychical defenses and melancholia, and uses these in relation to the social contexts in which the participants were speaking. I therefore draw on discursive and psychosocial theories to interpret the data, and the particularities of these concepts are explored in depth in the next chapter.

3.7. Ethics of the project

As discussed above, I am wary of taking a stance of certainty in relation to many aspects of this research since I am concerned with what Page (2017) calls 'the ethics involved in modes of telling' (15); the process of making too assured interpretations of my participants' narrative. However, the ethics of this project demand specific responses in terms of how this research might contribute something that avoids harm and is actively responsible towards those taking part (Brannelly and Barnes, 2022). Whilst I cannot be entirely sure that this project managed this, what I can do is share this study's ethical aim, which is one of care. Fisher and Tronto (1993) define this as a way of thinking about our relationship with others that includes all we can do to live in our world 'as well as possible' (Tronto cited in Brannelly and Barnes, 2022: 10). To do this, Brannelly and Barnes (2022) call for research methods that include the voices of those who have often been made invisible in wider society, and for researchers to consider what they term our 'relational interdependence' (10) to those we research with, and to unknown others who will come after the research is over. To do this, I both followed BERA's ethical guidance for research (2017), but also took a more continual, reflexive and situated approach to my ethical practice with teenagers, that I discuss both in what follows but I hope has also been displayed though this chapter more broadly.

- **Feminist ethics**

The ways that risk is defined and negotiated by institutions informs the dominant thinking around ethics in research, in that projects will for instance inquire into how knowledge is produced and how supposed objectivity is claimed (Thomson et al, 2018). However, feminist research is more concerned with the standpoint of the researcher and poses questions around the schisms between those researching and those researched as well as the institutions the research takes place within. These aspects push ethics beyond tick-box issues of consent to a more situated engagement with ethical questions (Thomson et al, 2018). This awareness of the *in-situ* nature of ethical decisions was central to my approach when researching with teenagers in a variety of schools, since the general principles that supposedly apply to all research didn't always address the particular and situated

complexities that confronted my position within this project (Ebrahim, 2010). Since the sections preceding this one discuss the complexities of issues such as sampling and gaining access to six different schools that I had different relations to, in what follows I discuss the ways a feminist-informed ethics guided my approach towards informed consent, avoiding harm power relations and participant confidentiality.

- **Informed Consent**

My aim when informing potential teenage participants about this project was to be as transparent as possible (Vivian-Bryne, 2014). I took a systematic approach to gaining consent from participants through giving information to and seeking informed consent from potential participants from the six schools. As the sections preceding this explore, the sampling was complex, however, once a teacher contact had been identified at each school, they would initially act as a gatekeeper between myself and the young people and let me know that the information sheets could be understood by the young people in terms of language and visuals, and pass these and the consent sheets onto the students. I would also ask this teacher about any particular sensitivities or needs of the participants of which I should be aware.

Understanding consent not as a one off but a continual process (BERA, 2017) meant that, despite the fact that by the time I met the participants they had already signed the consent forms, I took time to explain the research again to ensure the participants were as fully informed as they could be before we began and given the choice to remove their consent at any time. I was, however, aware that I wasn't able to entirely prepare them for every eventuality within the research encounter (Wiles et al, 2007) and therefore emphasised their right to express discomfort during the focus group and to leave at any time if they wish. Whilst this approach aimed at recognising that their consent was ongoing (BERA, 2017), as Sim and Waterfield (2019) point out, withdrawing from a focus group discussion is more complex than a one-to-one meeting since it is a potentially disruptive act. I therefore raised this point with the young people in groups and explained that their own comfort was more important than mine or their peers. The situations in which teachers breached the confidentially of the meetings also meant I asked the participants for their consent again

after the research encounter, however, this had not been an ethical dilemma I had anticipated.

One school provoked more complex questions about my own place in the research encounter since I already knew the feminism club at Dance School where I had facilitated their group when I worked at the school as a teacher. Whilst I went through the process of providing information and seeking consent in the same way I did with other schools, I'm aware that the fact these girls knew me may have influenced their decision to take part in the study since they may have wanted to please me as someone who used to have a degree of authority in their lives. The ethics of my position as someone known to these students also influenced the dynamic of the focus group and the follow up one-to-one meeting as I have written about both in this chapter and in the third analysis chapter. Whilst there are associated risks with this known position in terms of the perceived validity of the research, since there is such familiarity around the language used by participants, I take the position that so long as researchers doing this sort of research acknowledge their place and potential influence over the process, then these strong connections aren't deemed to pose serious ethical breaches (Brannick and Coghlan: 2007). I would also suggest that the emphasis I have placed upon reflexivity displays my efforts at transparency around my own subjective position within this research (Hamilton, 2019).

- **Avoiding harm / Power relations**

The next step taken across the groups was aimed at avoiding any harm, to myself or any of the research participants. This is discussed here with regards to the ways this intersects with issues around the sensitivity of the topics raised and the power dynamics between myself and the researched. I suggest these issues needed to be considered differently depending on whether I was conducting a focus group or a one to one interview, since in the latter the participants were more protected by the relative privacy of it being only the two of us (Ransome, 2013), however, in focus groups the young people were speaking in front of others. However, since I was researching with groups who already met weekly to discuss issues of feminism, this partly mitigated against this risk as they were accustomed to sharing their ideas with these same students.

I aimed to avoid causing harm to all participants during all points of this research. However, due to the topics raised in interviews that were ostensibly around the young people's engagement with feminism in school, but that led into the participants' raising topics like their schools' negotiation of gender relations for instance, or even personal instances of sexual violence, the topics could be understood to have caused upset or discomfort to the participants. Boler's (1999) conceptualisation of a pedagogy of discomfort has been helpful in providing a way into understanding how uncomfortable emotions that come up when discussing issues of gender and sexuality, whilst difficult, also have the potential to disturb narratives that might reproduce oppressive social norms. I am compelled by the idea that discomfort does not necessarily equate to harm, particularly since these emotions seemed impossible to avoid when discussing issues related to feminism. However, Cullen and Whelan (2021) argue that, whilst discomfort can support participants or learners to consider societal norms anew, without adequate care there is also a risk of bolstering existing subjectivities in relation to social injustice. I therefore took care to sit with these moments and allow for the participants' expressions of sadness or confusion, whilst also aiming to avoid pushing them any further into these feeling (Kitzinger and Farquhar, 1999).

Whilst no participants displayed signs of significant distress in focus groups or one-to-one interviews, I am also aware that this may have been because they didn't want to show this within a group space or in front of me in my position as researcher, since my power within this role can be understood to be always working through the focus groups and interviews (Alldred et al, 2011). The researchers' power operates through many levels at once; in the language and perspectives we use and therefore the subject positions we take up; the more situated relationships we have and form with participants, and also the adult-centrism of all of this when working with young people in particular (Alldred et al, 2011). Navigating the complexities of power is a common theme in the scholarship around feminist methodologies, and scholars have sought ways to shift these dynamics (Acker, Barry and Esseveld, 1983; Rice, Harrison and Friedman, 2019; Hamilton, 2019). Part of this includes a Foucaudian conceptualization that, rather than understanding power as owned by individuals and not others, understands it to 'flow […] from complex relationships between individuals, organizations and institutions' (Conti and O'Neil, 2007: 68 cited in Hamilton,

2019: 2). Since this view conceptualizes power as dynamic rather than static, feminist scholars have advocated for reflexivity as a tool for navigating these shifting power moves in ethical ways since this works towards the researcher being more accountable towards those who we they create knowledge with (Hesse-Biber, 2007; Nencel, 2014; Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002; Guillemin and Gillam, 2004 cited in Hamilton, 2019: 2). Through this chapter, I have aimed to recognize my position within each stage of the research process from sampling to conducting the fieldwork, and further chapters will display ways I write myself into the analysis to further account for my place within this study and the responsibility I have in representing the teenage participants, particularly in academic contexts in which they do not have their own voice (Smith, 1991).

- **Anonymity and confidentiality**

Issues of anonymity and confidentiality are often regarded as the same, however, there are differences between the two that are pertinent to this project. Anonymity is to do with whether individuals are able to be identified from the data, whilst confidentially is focused on what is done with information and data once the researcher has it (Sim and Waterfield: 2019). In what follows I'll discuss the relevance of these in my study.

Through the process of preparing for, conducting the fieldwork and writing up of this research, I was aware of protecting the anonymity of the teenagers taking part. I assured the participants that they were consenting to me sharing their discussion but only through anonymised means so that their comments could not be traced back to them. I did this through asking the participants to choose pseudonyms, and through making pseudonyms for their institution and changing particular details of these so that the schools are difficult to identify. At times, these decisions have been difficult since they can compromise important details about the school that are relevant to the analysis, however, in order to preserve the anonymity of the institution and the participants, I felt obliged to do this.

However, since I researched in focus groups, I couldn't offer this anonymity between students who took part. Tolich (2009) distinguishes between external and internal forms in which the external form concerns possible disclosures by the researcher, whereas internal is to do with information that may be disclosed by other participants. The latter is less in the

researchers' control; however, I was able to assure the participants that disclosure of their identities would not be made at any point. When conducting one-to-one interviews, other students from the feminism group weren't made aware of who was taking part in these, therefore protecting the anonymity of the participants' comments in these interviews. This was important since these follow up interviews provided an opportunity to critique the wider feminism group dynamics if they wished.

When observing groups, which was only possible in one group at Regency School for Boys and hasn't been included in the analysis in this thesis, I was unable to gain consent from every student since the group was so large. However, since I haven't written this up as 'data', the anonymity of any students hasn't been breached.

In terms of preserving the confidentiality of the data, I secured it by keeping all research data and materials on password secured laptop. I discussed the data with my supervisors and presented parts of it at conferences, however, this was always anonymized.

3.8: Methodological reflections on doing feminist research

In this chapter, I have argued that at every stage of this research process, it is my own subjectivity, as a teacher, feminism group facilitator and researcher, that produced the decisions made and the possibilities that arose for this study. This includes sampling and accessing the teenage participants who agreed to be interviewed for this project, deciding to run both focus groups and follow up one to one interviews, using fieldnotes to note my responses to the research encounters, deciding on psychosocial modes of data analysis, and considering the ethics of my position. I draw on theories of intersectionality, reflexivity and vulnerability to consider the micro-dynamics of research encounters and to work against the expectation that we can come to a stable conclusion about the way things are. I centre my subjective position to account for my own representations of both stable and shifting elements of subjectivity and the ways that I apply this reflexive lens to interview encounters. Whilst discussing this reflexivity doesn't resolve the complexity of my position, I hope that it begins to make me more accountable for the knowledge I claim to produce and to provide an orientation for this study. I have also stated this project's ethical aim to avoid

harm to its participants and to do some good in that this project aims to contribute to knowledge about young people's navigation of feminisms in schools to contribute to more informed, caring and inclusive cultures.

In the next chapter, I discuss the psychosocial-feminist interpretive framework I use to interpret the data generated in this research before moving onto the three analysis chapters.

Chapter 4: Relational Feminisms, Defended Masculinities and Hetero-sexualised Melancholia: Introducing a Psychosocial-Feminist Interpretive Framework

4.1. Introduction

In this thesis, I interpret subjectivity as produced through the intersection of the cultural and the psychic, in which concepts of the unconscious are understood to be formative in the construction of the social (Phoenix et al, 2000; Walkerdine et al, 2001; Frosh et al: 2002; Ringrose, 2012). Understanding these spheres to be imbricated with one another in continually shifting ways, this research is concerned with how young people come into being through psychical investments in elements of discourse. This interpretive lens offers a way to combine insights from a discursive analysis of young people's navigation of feminist discourses, with a psychosocial analysis of how they produce feminist subjectivities through these, even if they may be risky or difficult to navigate in their school environment. To explore this, I draw specifically upon psychosocial conceptualisations of relational identifications, defensiveness and melancholia to interpret the ways that the teenage participants construct their feminist subjectivities, and what the emotional aspects of these constructions are (Hollway 1984; Frosh et al 2002, Walkerdine et al, 2001; Cvetkovich; 2012). Since I am using psychoanalytic concepts in a thesis based on empirical data collected in schools, in this chapter I discuss the ways these ideas are used in the analysis chapters with reference to particular examples from the data.

In this initial section of the chapter, I offer an overview of discursive and psychosocial theories, arguing for the productivity of drawing on both as an overall framework. The discussion then moves onto the three specific concepts used in the analysis chapters. The first is focused on intersubjectivity which I have used across the analysis chapters to explore the ways that the teenagers under study constitute their feminist subjectivities in their school in relation to other feminisms and one another. The following section discusses a conceptualisation of defended masculinities, applied particularly in the second analysis

chapter to explore elite boys' negotiations of feminisms and to argue that these are bound up in defences of hegemonic discourses of masculinity in their schools. The final part offers a conceptualisation of feminist readings of melancholia and their relation to productions of white heterosexual femininities, since the third analysis chapter argues that a group of girls taking part in one feminism club, constitute their engagement with femininities and feminism through melancholic experiences of loss under hetero-patriarchy. In drawing together and getting under these, I discuss the relevance of these psychosocial concepts for interpreting young people's complex constitutions of feminist subjectivities in their schools, as well as how cultural discourses of popular feminisms inform young people's relations towards these across different school contexts.

- **Discursive approaches**

Much of the discursively focused literature around gender and sexuality in education is grounded in post structuralism. Aspects of this work are indebted to Butler's development of Foucault's notions of subjectivity, particularly the idea that it is discursively formed through what is termed a 'heterosexual matrix' that constitutes our capacity to perform our intersecting sexual and gendered identities (Ringrose, 2012). These approaches go beyond sex role theory (Davies 1989 c, 1990 c) that positions individuals as the end product of processes of social construction, to a conceptualization of subjects as constantly re-constituted through the discursive practices in which they engage (Wheedon, 1987 in Davies, 1989).This poses a key difference for those working in educational research as it moves beyond the notion that individuals are simply socialized into society, and therefore entirely shaped by others, and instead argues that they 'take up as their own the discourses through which they are shaped.' (Davies and Banks, 1992: 3).

The application of poststructural ideas to the field of gender and education locates ways in which children learn to perform gender as simultaneously socialising and individuating a subjectivity through the discursive practices in which they engage (Davies and Nielson, 1997). Within this body of feminist post structural discursively-focused literature (Renold, 2005; Rasmussen, 2006; Davies, 2006; Nayak and Kehily, 2006; Youdell, 2006; Burke and

Jackson, 2007 in Ringrose, 2012), school classrooms are conceptualized as places where a binary and hierarchical gender order is presented to young people, but where they engage in various negotiations in relation to this. However, there is, according to Foucault (1982), no identity if you refuse discourse, therefore discourse both offers and limits subjectivity. This is an important distinction from the notion that young people exist as a subject and then choose discourses to take up, as it instead poses that they can only be subjects of the classroom (for instance) if they invest in one of the gendered discourses on offer to them. This makes schools and educational institutions crucial sites of research when exploring the production of gendered and sexual identities.

An example of the application of these ideas to a conceptualisation of the production of gender in school environments is Valerie Walkerdine's *Schoolgirl Fictions* (1990), in which a case is made for the non-unitary state of subjectivity. Instead of being bound into a singular subjectivity, Walkerdine argues that we are produced within a 'nexus' (3); a connected series of subjectivities that all exist around relations of power that are unstable and constantly moving. Drawing from Foucault, Walkerdine's understanding of the discursive goes beyond only the linguistic applications of this term to refer to social practices (Hall cited in Rasmussen, 2006: 51). Through an emphasis on the ways that individuals can be 'read within a variety of discourses' (5) Walkerdine argues that it is not the materiality of an individual that causes particular effects, but the discourse through which that materiality is read. Walkerdine gives the example of nursery school boys who, in telling their female teacher Miss Baxter to 'show your bum off' and 'take all your clothes off, your bra off' (4), take up the dominant position of men through their language at the same time as refusing the position of 'powerless objects in her [the teacher's] discourse' and working to reassign her into a 'powerless object of theirs' (5). What is central to Walkerdine's lens is that she does not make a case for the children being either 'simply' powerless when 'oppressed by the control of an oppressive bourgeois educational institution' (5) or 'simply' oppressive when they tell her to 'show your bum off' (4). Walkerdine argues instead that they can be produced as subjects and objects within *both* discourses since within these discursive positionings are different locations of power. This supports my understanding of parts of my data when, for instance, I interpret the boys at Key Boys' School as both taking up a feminist position *and* an anti-feminist one in that both positions are made available to them in their

school; they therefore both identify with feminism through taking part in a feminism group, whilst simultaneously identifying with anti-feminist mockery, as their subjectivities are produced simultaneously across both discourses.

This conception of young people as continually (re)constituted through their participation in different discursive practices is also explored by Deborah Youdell (2006: 2010) who has used Butler's theories of subjectivation and gender performativity to consider how discursive subjectivation works in schools. This draws on Althusser's 1971 theory of interpellation that states that it is discourse that forms what it names, meaning that subjectivities are constituted within the discourse that names them. Youdell's work specifically considers how girls are constituted as sexually deviant 'sluts' in schools, a naming that is outside of the normative constraints for girls and that therefore is socially punished (Youdell, 2010 in Ringrose, 2012: 71). Bronwyn Davies' (1989) earlier work also draws from this notion of discursive practices constituting speakers (and their listeners) in particular ways, as well as being a way through which the same speakers and listeners can renegotiate their positions, thus accounting for the contradictory and discontinuous ways the self is constituted (Davies and Harre, 1990). This fluid and fragmented experience of self in which one can be rendered powerless in one discourse and powerful in another (Francis and Skelton, 2009) is not a comfortable state of being, Davies writes, therefore 'each person struggles, then, to make themselves a unitary rational being, whose existence is separate from others, and yet makes sense to those others' (238). However, despite the discomfort around inhabiting oneself within different discourses, Davies argues that it is an awareness of this incoherence of self that enables other possibilities. In understanding how we are being located, we open up the possibility of refusing particular positionings and the potential take up of what Davies terms 'radically different discourses' (238). Understanding oneself and others, not as stuck within a pre-determined position, but as an assortment of subjectivities enables conceptions of power that reduce it from a monolith to a moving entity (Walkerdine, 1990). Davies suggests the radical potential of realising the social, personal and material implications of how you are positioned in particular discourses as one can then begin to refuse certain positionings and take up alternative discourses. Again, this isn't to suggest that the ways we are signified don't matter; these have material affects that serve to produce particular identities in particular ways and these are difficult to be released from. However, to see

how you are being positioned can, Davies argues, enable the beginning of a re-signification.

These interpretations have implications for the ways in which I understand young people's construction of themselves as feminists since, through this lens, some participants appear able to see the ways that they and their peers are being positioned within a broader feminist discourse, and then begin to re-signify themselves against this. For instance, in the focus group interview at Dance School analysed in the third analysis chapter, the participants discuss their mothers' generation of feminism and what they perceive to be the limits of this as a discourse, particularly around approaches to sexuality. Through understanding their mothers' generation to be positioning them through an encouragement to identify with what they see to be a sex-negative form of feminist discourse, they appear emboldened to resist this and to instead take up what they term a more sex-positive feminism.

In the analysis across this study, I draw on this conceptual framing to understand the feminist discourses available to the young people, as well as how they produce their subjectivities in relation to these. I understand discourses in the data by identifying different existing feminisms discussed by the participants, including postfeminism and neoliberal feminism for instance, as well as by working with the data to identify where the young people form particular feminist discourses in their discussions of, for instance, 'Malala' feminism.The work cited above supports an understanding of the discourses available to the young people both forming what they name (and therefore what is normative or punished) and an incitement to pay attention to how these discursive positions might be refused so that new forms of discourse can be taken up, even in multiplicitous and contradictory ways.

- **Psychosocial approaches**

Whilst discursive analyses focus on the ways that gendered and sexualised discourses are taken up to produce subjectivities, psychosocial concepts can support an understanding of the subjective and emotional underpinnings of how the participants form these identifications at all. Whilst concerned with the discourses taken up by the participants, this study is also interested in the young people's emotional and psychic investments, in order to question what enables identifications with particular feminisms for some of these

teenagers and not for others, as well as how some of these identifications appear secure and sustained whilst others appear contradictory or temporary.

Psychosocial studies draw upon psychoanalytic theories and discourse analysis (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000; Frosh et al., 2001 in Ringrose, 2012: 73). This form of inquiry is interested in taking seriously the ways we are subjectivated whilst also aiming to avoid 'over-socialised' (Frosh, 2014: 166) accounts that only stress how subjects negotiate structural forces, therefore aiming to attend to their psychic identifications and investments. However, Frosh also states that, whilst aiming to avoid this emphasis on socialisation, psychosocial studies is concerned with the 'depth and range of social processes that are in play and help constitute the context or phenomenon in question' (167) highlighting a destabilization of the social and the psychic and an interest in the relation between them. Ringrose (2012) highlights how valuable Henriques et al's (1984) work is to this lens, since they offer a vocabulary that goes beyond discourse analysis in the Foucauldian paradigm, to consider how subjects are more than 'the sum total of all positions in discourses since birth' to consider their 'investments and emotional commitments' in taking up these subject positions (Henriques cited in Ringrose, 2012: 74).

Rather than offering further discussion here about educational and feminist uses of psychosocial theories, I'll set out the specific psychosocial concepts informing the interpretations I make in the data analysis chapters about how the teenage participants come into being through particular feminist discourses. The analysis chapters telescope in on the data in which I analyse all six schools in the first chapter, two in the second analysis chapter and just one in the final analysis chapter, therefore each of the three sections that follow reflect this. In the next section, I specifically discuss the ways that psychoanalytic concepts of relational identifications, defensiveness and loss inform my interpretations.

A note on using psychoanalytic concepts in this research

Using psychoanalytic concepts in educational and sociological research has implications, particularly since psychoanalytic ideas are formed with a context in mind of an analyst and analysand talking in a clinical setting. Therefore, applying these concepts outside of this setting raises questions around what happens to these when transferred from the clinical

setting, in which a patient consents to therapeutic exploration, to the research encounter (Lapping, 2007). Whilst there is scholarly work that directly identifies the contributions of psychoanalytic concepts to understanding the reproduction of social dynamics (Zizek, 1989, Stavrakakis and Chrysoloras, 2006 cited in Lapping, 2007), there are ways of distinguishing a psychoanalytic concept from its origin and moving it into a more sociological sphere. This, according to Lapping (2007) can be to move from an inquiry into an individual biographical psyche into a focus on discursive regulations. Whilst scholars including Hollway and Jefferson (2012) do combine psychoanalytic concepts with biographical research (Lapping, 2007), this study uses psychoanalytic ideas to theorise the emotional investments of the participants in feminist discourses, rather than to discuss the participants in biographical psychoanalytical terms.

4.2. Relational Feminisms: Intersubjectivity and Recognition

Various psychoanalytic schools have formulated theories of the self that focus on their relationality (Eagle 1984, S. Mitchell 1988, Benjamin, 1995), and what links these approaches is a conception of the mind as intersubjective; 'that the psychoanalytic process should be understood as occurring between subjects rather than within the individual' (Benjamin, 1995: 27). In what follows, I discuss key conceptualisations of relational and intersubjective notions of subjectivity to argue for the use of these for interpreting how young people constitute their feminist subjectivities in schools.

To understand psychical notions of relationality, I begin with Melanie Klein's (1964) theory of Object Relations. Klein's theory is relational in that it suggests that the way we experience reality is constituted through interiorised relationships with others (Frosh, 1997). This theory's concern is with the ways that infants constitute their subjectivity as they go from being submerged with their mother to becoming cognisant of their separation and into forming relations with objects they encounter in the world. Klein suggests that throughout life we move between what she terms depressive and paranoid-schizoid states. (O'Loughlin, 2001). The depressive position is one that Klein characterises as a relatively secure form of subjectivity as it enables a capacity for emotions including empathy and guilt. This is set in

juxtaposition to the paranoid-schizoid position; a more difficult form of relational experience that includes the splitting of objects into binary extremes and a tendency to deny and idealize.

This notion of 'splitting' is defined by Klein in two ways; the first being a splitting of the object into good and bad which are conceived of in relation to the infants' response to the mothers' good and bad breast (1975). In this formulation of splitting, an idealized breast is imagined by the infant which, later, forms tendencies to idealize since the good parts of the breast are exaggerated in attempts to shield oneself from the anxiety produced by the bad breast, making ambivalence difficult to navigate. However, splitting can also be understood through processes of projection. Whilst this also works as a defence against anxiety, this operates through ridding the ego of feelings of negativity and threat through projecting these onto the other, whilst perceived good objects are taken up (Klein, 1975).

In Klein's formulation, all infants are in the paranoid schizoid position in their first months but, with secure and loving attachments emphasised in their relation with the mother, particularly in the form of what Bion terms 'containment' in which the caregiver receives the infant's rage in a warm and patient way, they become able to deal with nuance and the complexity of their own and other's emotions (O'Loughlin, 2001). Unlike the Lacanian position which positions language as the central feature in the constitution of subjectivity that structures the subject's relationships and desires, the Kleinian framework positions Object Relations as central to the formation of the subject's relation with others, and suggests this happens prior to the individual's learning of language (Segal, 1988 in Mintchev, 2018).

Klein's theory has been met critically by feminists who have made moves to transform it to make it relevant to specific feminist contexts (Burack, 1992). An important critique of Object Relations is that it invisiblizes issues of class and race, and uses monolithic ideas of the child and the mother (Gilligan, Brown, Jz Rogers, 1990, p. 91 in Barack, 1995) that don't attend to the intersectional differences that exist between families and individuals. Fee (1986) also argues that whilst claiming to be universal, this theory relies on Western heteronormative capitalist families that assume that the mother takes the majority of the childcare duties

(Fee, 1986). Another feminist criticism is levelled at the privileging of separation and individuation. For instance, Gilligan (1987) argues that Object Relations connects the formation of subjectivity to an experience of separation thus conflating identity with this separation which, she argues, makes the notion of a self only experienced in relationship with others impossible (Barack, 1995).

Klein's concepts of splitting are applied in Chapter 5 to understand how some of the participants appear to split feminisms into binaries, as well as in Chapter 6 to understand how they do this splitting as a defense against anxiety. However, I also draw from Jessica Benjamin's (1988) defense of Object Relations' relationship with feminism, and particularly her development of the theory into a concept of intersubjectivity across the analysis chapters. I propose that this provides a theory of relational dynamics that can be used to interpret the relationship between the participants and the feminisms they encounter in schools, as well as the relations built within their in-school feminism groups.

Benjamin situates her concept of intersubjectivity within wider scholarly feminist work concerned with moving past a Freudian conception of the subject that collapses into subject/object binaries. Benjamin discusses the influence of Simone De Beauvoir and her notions of two-person existentialism on her ability to move beyond this structure 'in which one person plays subject and the other must serve as his object' (Benjamin, 1988: 7 in Yeatman, 2015: 7). It is this framework, argues Benjamin, that affects our capacity to see people as 'equal subjects' (1995: 31), an idea she directly connects to feminist movements which she claims make the possibility of becoming subjects that are equal to one another more likely. It is this difference between treating the other as a subject or object that is important for Benjamin's form of relational psychoanalysis, however, rather than denigrating Object Relations as the 'masculinist discourse of separation' (Benjamin cited in Burack, 1992: 502) that other feminists might, Benjamin positions this theory as able to move psychoanalysis into an understanding of the social nature of subjectivity.

Benjamin's theory of intersubjectivity builds on Object Relations but places the relational emphasis on the process 'of appreciating, accepting and relating to others as subjects' (Frosh, 1997: 138) rather than as objects. Benjamin defines intersubjectivity in terms of a

relationship of 'mutual recognition—a relation in which each person experiences the other as a "like subject," another mind who can be "felt with" yet has a distinct, separate center of feeling and perception' (2018: 114). Therefore, whilst Object Relations theory is concerned with how subjects interiorise relationships towards objects, the intersubjective perspective considers subjects' relational dynamics with other subjects, and suggests that we are fundamentally dependent on forming dynamics of recognition with the other in order to successfully develop. This understanding of recognition is intersubjective in that it is a psychic state in which the other's mind is recognized as an equal space of agency. An emphasis is placed here on the recognition of the other as equally agentic, affective and responsive, a notion that challenges the subject/object dualism in Klein's work to conceive of a subject/subject dynamic. Rather than only understanding internal experiences of the Other, relational theory considers the intersubjective space in which two meet. This reconceptualizes the notion of the other as an object needing to be 'controlled or resisted, consumed or pushed away' (Benjamin, 2018: 4) and instead understands another mind as able to be understood and connected with. Benjamin (2018) stresses that this intersubjective theory of recognition doesn't take away from Klein's notion of the paranoid-schizoid position, but does move beyond the notion of the depressive position since it offers the intersubjective alternative of 'the Third' in which the self doesn't hold opposites only in tension but is able to experience a sense of being reached by another subject. This refers not only to the take up of a psychic position, but to dynamic behaviours and processes between people; particular acts of recognition in which one feels seen, understood and to have made an impact on the other, which results in a sense of reciprocity; the sense that if you matter to me, then I matter to you also.

However, Benjamin also questions how one comes to this sense of another as being both connected *and* separate. This is questioned because, Benjamin argues, so much of the way we experience the world is like a 'one-way street—in which we feel as if one person is the doer, the other done to. One person is subject, the other object' (Benjamin, 2018: 23), as Klein's formulation highlights. Therefore, the difficulty lies in managing to form this recognition of another as an 'equivalent center of being' (Benjamin, 2018: 23). To understand this, Benjamin does not take intersubjectivity or the potential for recognition as negating the persistence of experiences formed around Kleinian subject/object relations in

which splitting feels habitual. What Benjamin does add to this, however, is a clear alternative to Klein's formulation of the depressive position with the notion of intersubjective relations and the 'third' through which one's subjectivity is experienced as felt by another (2018). These moments of being reached and reaching the other are argued not to be static but continually in 'oscillation between relating to the outside other and the inner object' (2018: 5) meaning that the attempt to recognize is experienced as an ongoing tension which can easily break down since the two sides can fail to be held up by this 'third'. When this happens, the relational dynamic collapses into a dualism in which the other appears only as an object who one fears will in some way annihilate one's own sense of subjectivity. Klein's notion of splitting is conjured by Benjamin here as a twoness is formed that reduces the doer and done to into polarities 'accuser and accused, helpless and coercive, […] victim and perpetrator' (Benjamin, 2018: 4).

Benjamin's theory of intersubjectivity and recognition has particular implications for considering group identifications as explored in this thesis, since she argues that the notion of identity can be a form of complex recognition when subjects try to use it in order to stabilise their sense of 'self and belonging' (Benjamin, 2018: 5). Benjamin connects this to forms of social solidarity to understand ways that subjects, when engaging in groups, might be able to recognise and appreciate others (including a sense of their other within themselves) meaning that an empathetic form of identification can be found. Klein's theory of Object Relations and Benjamin's development of this to theorize intersubjectivity and recognition support this study's interpretation of how the participants across all six schools constitute their feminist subjectivities in relation to various other feminisms. For instance, the participants in three of the schools appear to constitute their feminism through their relation to their schools' postfeminist discourse which they split off as an 'other' in order to constitute their own feminist subjectivity that is opposed to this. This is also evident in the schools where the young people position their feminist identification in opposition to older generational discourses of feminism, which they dismiss in order to take up their own perceived new and more sexual form of feminism. These instances can be interpreted as the group forming subject/object relations in which another form of feminism needs to be denigrated and other-ed, in order for their own form of feminism to be taken up and a sense of group feminist identification and recognition to be formed. Therefore, despite the

fact that feminists have traditionally celebrated the use of groups as a space in which consciousness can be raised, the personal can be made political and where activisms can be generated (Munro, 2013), the relational dynamic of those researched in this study appear to be formed partly through the other-ing of outsider feminisms.

However, I simultaneously make a case for an intersubjective relation being formed between the group members across some of the groups. Moments of intersubjectivity appear to be experienced between the participants in which they comment on the connection they felt through discussion of issues not otherwise spoken, and relations formed across age groups. I interpret these as intersubjective moments of recognition since the participants appear to experience one another as minds that can be felt with and understood.

4.3. Defended (hegemonic) and Distanced (hybrid) Masculinities

In what follows, psychosocial understandings of defences against anxiety are explored. I set out some key aspects of the psychoanalytic conception of 'defense' as a basis for my analysis of the elite boy participants' constitution of feminisms in relation to hegemonic and hybrid forms of masculinities, as discussed in the second analysis chapter in particular. I begin by discussing psychoanalytic concepts of defense and psychosocial notions of the defended subject to connect this to productions of the idealized masculine subject.

Psychoanalytic readings of defense depict a fragmented subject who, through the process of denying aspects of their internal or external worlds, performs unconscious work in order to keep away a sense of psychical threat (Gadd, 2000). Anna Freud (1936) categorized various mechanisms of defense and outlines their connection by highlighting the ways that unconscious material can be repressed; allowed in but only through their sublimation to the expectations of society, or entirely denied so that the implications of an action are repudiated (Frosh, 2014). In her chapter *The Mechanisms of Defense* (1966), the notion of defense is unpacked with reference to Sigmund Freud's early use of the term (1894) describing 'the ego's struggle against painful or unendurable ideas' (42), and his 1926

distinction between the term 'repression' and 'defense' to understand the former as a particular method of defense, whilst the latter is a broader term describing 'all the techniques which the ego makes use of in conflicts which may lead to a neurosis' (Freud, 1966: 43). In Klein's later account of object relations, the production of psychical defenses is understood similarly in relation to the ways the ego tries to protect itself. However, Klein also develops this to describe splitting actions that blocks an apparent threat that can take both external and internal forms; the internal potentially being a memory or fantasy, the sense being that of a threat to the ego that requires defending against (Klein, 1975). A particularity of these defenses is that they are hard to recognize for the subject because to acknowledge this threat is to accept its entrance into consciousness and, to protect the ego, this needs to remain unconscious (Frosh, 2014).

A question here, however, is what exactly is being defended? Judith Butler's (1997) response to this relates defenses to constructions of gender to argue that gender formation is constructed through experiences of loss. This connects to notions of defense because, Butler argues, the construction of femininities and masculinities are managed through a defense against alternative modes of gender expression which form a sense of loss around the alternatives that one never quite knows. This lost 'other' of gender construction is understood to be denied and despised, as it is then that the socially normative gender role be taken up (Butler in Phoenix et al, 2000). Phoenix et al's (2000) research connects this directly to the formation and performance of teenage masculinities in relation to the ways that boys learn to psychically defend against 'softer' (228) modes of masculinity that might be marked by anxiety, in order to take up harder forms that, for instance, refuse to admit to vulnerability and dependence. Building from this imbrication of theories of defense and gender formation, I propose that the cultural formations of masculinity that require defending against tend to be those that are idealized within a specific context. I therefore draw on RW Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity (1987, 1990, 2005) to explore this further.

In the early formulation of hegemonic masculinity, Connell uses Gramsci's (1971) concept of hegemony, in order to conceptualize a form of masculinity that in certain contexts will 'legitimate unequal gender relations between men and women, between masculinity and

femininity, and among masculinities' (Messerschmidt, 2019: 86). The construction of this is defined by Connell (1995) as being the ideal within a particular context, but one that tends to be associated with heterosexuality, physical strength and authority. This form of masculinity dominates within a context, but is only formed in relation to other marginalized forms of masculinity. These include marginal forms meaning men who can't reach the hegemonic ideal but are not directly persecuted for this; complicit forms which is where men are unable to match the ideal but don't challenge it, and subordinate forms which includes, for instance, gay and trans men (Messerschmidt, 2019). The formation of hegemonic masculinity is socially produced and intersectional in that is entrenched in lines of class and race. It is also actively negotiated and constructed by boys and men, in that they are capable of producing what Phoenix et al (2000) terms 'alternative masculine identities' (34) in relation to hegemonic masculinity. This point emphasizes the plurality and movement of this conception of masculinity depending on the context, as well as the way it is always formed in relation to and in competition with other masculinities and femininities. In attempts to achieve a hegemonic ideal, subjects will perform forms of masculinity that enable access to masculine capital within their context (Messerschmidt, 2004; Lindsay, 2021). In the second analysis chapter, I argue that the demands of hegemonic masculinity within two elite boys' schools function as a defense against threatening modes of femininity or homosexuality, even by those boys actively engaging with feminisms in a school-based society.

However, what is also evident in one of the elite schools Key Boys, are discursive productions of not just hegemonic but hybrid masculinities (Demetriou 2001; Messner 1993; Bridges and Pascoe; 2018). This theory builds on Connell's framework, but also grows out of some of the limitations with hegemonic masculinity (Demetriou 2001). This refers to (mostly) white heterosexual masculinities that take up both parts of other-ed identities; primarily those that are coded gay, feminine or Black, in order to further reproduce their dominance (Demetriou, 2001; Bridges, 2014). Hondagneu- Sotelo and Messner (1994) argue that 'men of colour, working- class men, and immigrant men, among others, are often implicitly cast as the possessors of regressive masculinities' (cited in Bridges and Pascoe, 2018: 263) and so when marginalized men perform hybrid gender identities, the consequences differ from those of white, middle- class men (Bridges and Pascoe, 2018). This

means that hybrid masculinities are more easily accessed by these privileged men and boys since they tend to benefit from these. Bridges and Pascoe (2018) argue that one of the ways in which hybrid masculinity is enacted is through a discursive distance formed between the group of privileged men and the form of hegemonic masculinity in their context, so that they are able to *perform* as if outside of these systems of inequality. An example offered by these authors of what they term this 'discursive distancing' (261) is in the term 'bromance' in which it appears that men are reducing the space between intimacy with other men and hegemonic masculinity, whilst in fact the term 'bro' further preserves heterosexuality as it is deeply associated with heterosexual masculinity. I consider these distancing moves as forms of defensiveness in that, whilst progressive masculinities might appear to be taken up, they are simultaneously defended against through other more preserving moves. In the second analysis chapter, I argue that this discursive distancing is evident at Key Boys' School in which a group of boys produce a hybrid identification with feminism in that they appear to identify with feminism, whilst at the same time maintaining many forms of hegemonic dominance as required in their elite all boys school such as making sure they aren't perceived as feminine or gay; moves that ultimately sustain their dominance within the hegemonic masculine culture of their school.

These conceptualisations of defence and their relation to hegemonic and hybrid forms of masculinity are helpful in making sense of the participants' seemingly contradictory forms of engagement with both feminism and expectations of elite masculinity in two all boys' schools. Their identifications with feminism alongside their defensive moves against anxiety provoking associations with being regarded as feminine or gay can be understood through this lens, which also allows for attention to the different expectations of masculinity in each school.

4.4. Hetero-sexualised Feminist Melancholia; an impasse?

Conceptualizations of melancholia are discussed here, particularly in relation to the production of gender and sexuality. This is to support the analysis developed in the third and final analysis chapter which explores how a group of girls taking part in one feminism club use a research encounter to constitute feminisms, particularly in relation to their navigation of heterosexuality. I form an interpretation through weaving together Freud's conceptualisations of melancholia with feminist re-conceptualisations of his ideas.

Freud's (1917/1957) 'Mourning and Melancholia' was a way of interrogating the effects of loss after the first world war as well as the loss of his own daughter Sophie to the influenza pandemic (Jimenez and Walkerdine, 2011). In this paper Freud conceives of melancholia as comprising of something more complex than mourning, since 'the relation to the object is no simple one; it is complicated by the conflict due to ambivalence' (Freud, 2017: 256). Freud describes this ambivalence being either related to the ego's love relations, or coming from particular experiences that involved the threat of loss. When in this state, Freud depicts feelings of love and hate contending with one another, in which one aims to 'detach the libido from the object', and the other to 'maintain this position of the libido against the assault' (256). The presentation of someone going through this in psychoanalysis is as one who imagines their ego to be reproachable and worthy of debasement (Freud, 2017). Therefore, melancholia's complexity lies in the ambivalence; the co-existing hatred and love of the lost object, which makes the capacity to mourn so hard. This metaphor of the lost object is suggested by Lapping (2019) to support an account of where someone can't see what they've lost, where it is 'ideal rather than actual' (244) so that the patient does not consciously understand what exactly it is they have lost. This is argued to disrupt a clear sense of what is in and outside, and Freud suggests that that in more effective forms of mourning it is the world that loses its allure, whereas with melancholia the loss is that of the ego. Melancholia thus consists of the object being hated and loved at once, and the ambivalence affects the ability to mourn and move on, causing the conflict to be directed inward (Egan, 2013), therefore, the lost object becomes part of the ego and unresolved feelings of melancholia ensue that form attacks on the self.

Feminist scholars have utilized this concept to consider the way melancholia imbues the ways that subjects become gendered in heteronormative cultures, to argue that melancholia structures our relation to society and other people (Egan, 2013). McRobbie (2009) discusses a range of what she terms 'gender disorders' including self-harm, binge drinking, disordered eating and confessions of low self-esteem performed by girls that she conceives of as a cultural normalization of melancholia, suggesting a societal 'institutionalization of melancholia' (McRobbie: 116 in Dobson, 2014: 102) under patriarchy. As discussed in the previous section, Butler (1997) has re-read her notion of gender performativity through Freud's notion of melancholia, to understand heterosexual gender development as a form of melancholy. This is because, she argues, the ways that subjects identify with gender is premised upon the giving up on any same sex object love, and this closes off gender and sexual identifications that might have been possible outside of heteronormativity. This provides a theory of gender as formed through forsaken identifications and a loss of 'what could have been' (Jimenez and Walkerdine, 2011: 188). Egan (2013) contributes a melancholic lens onto post-feminist arguments in particular, since these situate girls as passively experiencing media messages like a hypodermic needle 'injected wholesale in to the viewer/consumer' (266), and deconstructs the post-feminist viewpoint that denies young women of their agency or activism (Ringrose, 2013 in Egan, 2013). Drawing from Freud, Egan conceives of second wave feminists as dealing with a sense of melancholia in relation to the next generation of feminists who they conceive of as not 'taking the movement forward in the manner its foremothers envisioned' (270). The lost object is therefore their 'middle-class liberal feminist fantasy of dutiful daughters' (270) which, Egan argues, forms unresolved ambivalence that can be understood as melancholia.

Both Berlant (2011) and Cvetkovich (2012) are interested in re-thinking psychoanalytic modes of thought, by imbuing them with what Cvetkovich terms 'the cultural politics of everyday life' (3) in order to reconsider negative feelings including those associated with melancholia, as socially informed. This work aims to de-pathologize these experiences, not to reconvert them into something more positive, but to conceptualise them as potential agentic forms of community formation. Berlant's understanding of the experience of impasse, as elaborated on by Cvetkovich, is relevant here as impasse can be understood to be an aspect of melancholia. Berlant writes that an impasse 'is a holding station that doesn't

hold but opens out into anxiety' (37 in Cvetkovich: 21) and has the effect of slowing one which can cause the feeling of depression in that one feels stuck, closed down and without the ability to move (on?). As a concept then, impasse suggests to the subject that things will not change, forming a melancholic condition in which it feels like 'the world is not designed to make it happen' (Cvetkovich, 20-21).

These concepts of melancholia support an understanding of the ways that girls in one research encounter navigate a discussion around sexualities and feminisms, since the teenage participants' narrated experiences of sexuality can be understood to form a conflicted state of melancholy. The girls' engagement with feminism means they are able to question systemic feminist issues around sexual violence and rape culture; however, they appear unable to bring this feminist awareness to their heterosexual encounters. Part of my analysis of this material centres on the participants' discussion of the particular impasse they feel in relation to what they have gained from the imbrication of engaging with feminism and their experience of heterosexual encounters. Their ambivalence is constituted between their knowledge of feminism and attachment to its promise of empowerment, alongside their painful heterosexual encounters. These can be understood to form what I term a hetero-sexualised-feminist melancholia, in which the girls have a melancholic longing for an idealized feminism that would empower them everywhere, including in their heterosexual encounters, but feel at an impasse for how to reach this.

4.5. Concluding thoughts

In this chapter, I have discussed the over-arching frame and central concepts that support my interpretation of the ways that the teenage participants of this project constitute feminist subjectivities in their schools. To do this, I have drawn together discursive and psychosocial theories in order to argue for the productivity of this conceptual framing to interpret the feminist discourses available to the young people, and how they produce their subjectivities in relation to these. The discursive aspects of my analyses focus on the ways that gendered and sexualised discourses are taken up to produce subjectivities, whilst the psychosocial concepts allow for interpretations of what enables participants' identifications

with particular feminisms across different school contexts.

The first section discussed concepts of relationality and intersubjectivity, which concerns the initial analysis chapter since this argues that young people constitute their feminist subjectivities in schools through relational identifications that fall into subject/object or more intersubjective positions. These theories are also used in the second and third analysis chapters to discuss the participants' gendered and sexual relations in relation to feminism. The second part discusses a conceptualisation of defended and distanced masculinities that connects most directly to the second analysis chapter which explores elite boys' negotiations of feminisms and argues that these are bound up in distancing modes of hybrid masculinities and defences of hegemonic forms of masculinity in their schools. The third section offers a conceptualisation of feminist readings of melancholia and their relation to productions of heterosexual femininities that connects to the key argument of the final analysis chapter around girls' engagement with femininities and feminism being formed through melancholic experiences of loss under hetero-patriarchy. Through drawing together these concepts as they slip into and across the three analysis chapters, these concepts are used to construct a vocabulary that both accounts for the discourses available to the participants and the ways these are imbricated with experiences of relationality, defensiveness and loss. I also use these feminist re-workings of psychoanalytic concepts across each analysis chapter to consider how my own subjectivity is imbricated in these dynamics.

Chapter 5: Forming feminisms: Relational feminist identifications across six different schools

5.1. Introduction to forming feminisms

This chapter draws on empirical one-to-one and focus group interview data with students across all six schools that took part in this research to respond to the research question; how do teenagers who take part in feminism groups constitute feminist subjectivities in their schools? In what follows, I analyse how the young people under study constitute their subjectivities through identifications with feminism that are always in relation to other forms of feminism presented to them by their school leaders, generational notions of feminism they encounter and to one another within their feminism group. This analysis chapter draws from Klein's theory of Object Relations and Benjamin's development of intersubjectivity and recognition, as outlined in the interpretive framework, to analyze how the participants across all six schools constitute their feminist subjectivities in relation to various other feminisms, as well as to one another.

The first section of this chapter analyses each of the school-based feminism collectives and argues that they each constitute their feminist subjectivity through a relation towards their schools' postfeminist, anti-feminist or neoliberal discourse, whether that includes splitting postfeminism off as an 'other' in order to constitute a feminist subjectivity that is opposed to this, forming a relation to an anti-feminist discourse or fully identifying with a neoliberal feminist discourse.

The second part of this chapter draws from a group interview with participants from the feminism collective at Dance School, a one-to-one interview with a participant from the feminism club at Premier School for Girls and a group interview with the feminism collective at Town Academy to explore how young people's identification with feminism is constituted in relation to generationally older discourses of feminism including 'sex-negative', white and neoliberal feminisms that they encounter at home or at school, that they split off in order to constitute their own feminist subjectivities. These instances can be interpreted as the group forming subject/object relations in which another form of feminism need to be denigrated

and other-ed, in order for their own form of feminism to be taken up and a sense of group feminist identification and recognition to be formed. Therefore, despite the fact that feminists have traditionally celebrated the use of groups as a space in which consciousness can be raised, the personal can be made political and where activisms can be generated (Munro, 2013), the relational dynamic of those researched in this study appear to be constituted partly through the other-ing of outsider feminisms.

The final part of the chapter argues for an intersubjective relation being formed between the feminism group members in the groups at Park School and Dance School. This pays attention to the relationalities between peers taking part in collective feminist efforts within their schools and argues that these girls' identifications with feminism are constituted through the connections generated within their feminism groups in school. Moments of intersubjectivity appear to be experienced between the participants in which they comment on the connection they felt through discussion of issues not otherwise spoken, and relations formed across age groups. I interpret these as intersubjective moments of recognition since the participants appear to move away from subject/object relations to experience one another as minds that can be felt with and understood.

Through these three parts of this analysis chapter, I argue that the young people's feminist identifications are relational because they are constituted in relation to other forms of feminism and to one another. The forms of feminism the participants discuss are suggestive of which feminist discourses are available to young people across different schools and this is talked about by the participants in relation to the ways that these feminisms are formed in relation to particular others, namely the young people's school staff and peers, generational forms of feminisms and within their school-based feminist collective.

In what follows, I argue that the young people from each of the school-based feminism groups position themselves in relation to their school's approach to feminism with particular attention to discourses of postfeminism, anti-feminism and neoliberal feminism, and split these off into 'other-ed' forms in order to constitute their own feminist subjectivities.

5.2. Young people's identifications with feminisms in relation to postfeminist discourses from staff and peers at Town Academy, Dance School and Park School

Through focus group interviews at Town Academy, Dance School and Park School, the students in each of these schools' feminism clubs appear to constitute their feminism in relation to their school teachers' and peers' postfeminist discourse. At Town Academy, the young people taking part in the feminism collective discuss teachers dismissing feminism as unnecessary and as having gone too far. The staff at Dance School are described by members of the feminism group as actively dis-identifying with feminism through not supporting the existence of the feminism group and not allowing them to call the group 'feminist'; whilst at Park School, feminism is said to be perceived by other students to be 'controversial' and therefore widely dis-identified with. In these three focus group interviews, feminism is depicted as taken into account by teachers and students in their school but simultaneously 'undone' as feminism is positioned as 'relegated to the past' (McRobbie, 2008: 12) and situated as unnecessary by either school staff or their peers. Across these three schools, the young people discuss their relation to their schools' postfeminist discourse which they denigrate as an 'other' in order to constitute their own feminist subjectivity.

In the focus group with nine girl members of the feminism club at the co-educational London-based Town Academy, school-based postfeminist attitudes are a central theme. During this group interview Kat and Becky, both Black girls in Year 10, discuss their impression of their teachers' approach to feminism:

Kat: The teachers… I think I've realised that the teachers don't really agree with feminism… Remember when we were going to make the video? And we went around talking to teachers and asking them to hold a piece of paper saying 'I'm a feminist' or 'this is what a feminist looks like'. They wouldn't agree – they didn't want to do it. And when we were like 'err why?' They'd go on and on about why they wouldn't do it like 'ok like I get it you need feminism but my mum grew up and went through such hard things in life and your life is so much easier now!' it's like there was no need for feminism

Becky: I don't know who it was who said it- but they said that feminism has gone too far now and that's the main thing now like 'feminism has gone too far girls, you need to slow down, you have the world in your hands, you need to calm down' and that's like a big thing now like the teachers we talked to – they're like 'you have too much, you have too many rights and too much freedom' and now we have to go back to what it was like in the 90s…

Here, Becky and Kat discuss their efforts to involve their teachers with their feminist activism and the rebukes they've faced. The approach taken by their teachers appears distinctly postfeminist in that the politics of feminism are deemed no longer relevant. The teachers tell the girls that they have it 'easy' in relation to the 'real' struggles of the past as well as that feminism has gone 'too far' and that girls now have too many rights and things should return to how they were in an earlier time. Becky's comments suggest the sense of excess that feminism evokes in their teachers as she discusses being told that they have 'too much', 'too many rights and too much freedom' as well as that they should 'slow down' and 'calm down'. These teachers are positioned as aiming to dilute the young people's engagement with feminism at school. The message that they have the 'world in their hands' is indicative of a postfeminist argument that issues of feminism are individualised rather than structural, the suggestion being that these particular girls 'have it all' and should therefore stop talking about feminism. This message from their teachers ignores the structural injustices (Mirza, 2015) facing Black women in England, both in schools and in future job prospects, leaning instead on meritocratic myths around everyone having the same chances. The girls' comments suggest that these teachers refute their attempts at feminist activism since they refused to engage with the girls' video to show other students that a range of people can identify with feminism, suggesting that the participants' sense of feminist subjectivity is undermined by the postfeminist views of those in authority in their school.

Teachers' demotion of feminism to the past was also raised in the group interview at Dance School, where I interviewed a group of white middle-class girls in Year 10 and 11. I knew these girls relatively well due to my connection to their feminist collective and, as is explored further in an in-depth analysis of this relationship in the final data analysis chapter, was aware of their struggles with getting feminist issues accepted in their school. In this

extract, three of the girls refer to their school's approach to girls' bodies, the lack of support they received from teachers in running their feminism club and to the name of their feminism group which was not permitted by senior leaders of the school:

Fay: Girls aren't allowed to sunbathe in the yard but boys are. Because apparently, we'll be lying like this (demonstrates) and rolling our tops up!

Molly: It's the over-sexualisation of girls' bodies

Fay: Yeah

Vix: That's exactly what it is

Fay: It's the whole 'protect your daughters' thing

Hanna: Do you ever get the chance to say this to teachers?

Molly: Only to Ms Stone

Hanna: Did she ever run the group?

All: No

Hanna: So, you were running it by yourself then? For a year?

Fay: Well Martha ran it but she was obviously doing all her exams at the same time

Molly: It was officially Equality Club, colloquially Feminist Club

Here, Fay, Molly and Vix discuss their frustration at their school's approach to girls' bodies, as well as the school's lack of support for the feminism group. The double standards applied to girls' and boys' bodies is described as 'sexualisation' and linked by the participants to protectionist discourses, suggesting an educated engagement with the issues they discuss. There is a familiarity suggested by the use of the phrase 'protect your daughters thing' as if we all know what she means, that suggests their access to engagement with feminist approaches they have had access to in their feminism group, but also to other means of middle class feminist capital, both online or at home since these young women have discussions with their parents on these topics as well as access to online spaces that educate them on feminism; both of which are discussed at other points in the interview.

The teachers are invoked as postfeminist in that they acknowledge feminism in a bid to protect their female students from imagined predatory men, however, according to the girls, they don't see the sexism they promote in policing their bodies so differently to the way they negotiate the boys'. The girls connect this lack of support the feminism group received from any teachers to the pressure they were under to call their group 'equality club' rather than aligning themselves with the term 'feminism'. The reference to the official 'equality club' title also suggests the teachers' recognition of feminism and their simultaneous denial of it since the club was banned from calling itself 'feminist'. Like at Town Academy, postfeminist attitudes are suggested by the participants through the teachers' dismissal of the signifier 'feminism' as being too much. It appears that discussion with teachers on these topics rarely happens apart from with one teacher therefore a dialogue on these issues is missing outside of the feminism group space. However, the girls' constitution of their feminist subjectivity appears somewhat independent of their teachers' views and even formed in opposition to it, since the rules set by their school leaders are recognised to be unjust. There is a tone of confidence in the girls' talk that is suggestive of the empathic forms of identification formed in their feminism group space that are formed through, in Kleinian terms, a paranoid schizoid splitting of the feminist object, in which they form these identifications in relation to the split off 'other' of their school leaders' rules. Through this process of splitting off their feminist identifications from their school leaders', these participants appear to strengthen their collective sense of solidarity.

A sense of feminism being deemed an unnecessary excess by those at school was discussed at the co-educational comprehensive Park School where I interviewed four white girls in Year 9 who were members of the feminism club there. Despite this club being set up and run by a very supportive male member of staff, Evie, Kay and Mel (only three out of the four girls speak in this section of the interview) describe feminism in their school to be broadly misunderstood. However, despite the focus being on the views of their peers rather than their teachers, their peers' approach appears to also be a postfeminist one;

Kay: In this school, the word feminist has been kind of alienated and people are kind of are... if you think of the word feminist it's controversial- but I don't think it's that controversial an idea that everyone should be equal… it's not that controversial

Evie: I think everyone would probably be feminist but they haven't really realised

Mel: Which is why the group is like quite nice because you do get Year 7s who I don't think would have ever known… I don't think that any of the Year 7s, if you'd talked to them on the first day, would say 'I'm a feminist' whereas… I think now

Evie: Yeah, I wasn't against it but it wasn't like a normal thing that loads of people could be

Kay: Yeah, I asked a girl in our year before Music and I was like 'Oh do you support feminism?' and she was like 'yeah I like gender equality but I wouldn't say I was a feminist' and I was like...

Mel: It's the same thing…

Kay: yeah, it's the same thing. I think I convinced her but I think people are quite like afraid to admit that they are because...

Mel: it's seen as like a ... it's seen in the wrong light

Evie: It's seen as like aggressive

The participants discuss their peers' approach to feminism as constituted primarily through a fundamental misunderstanding, as they describe them as seeing feminism 'in the wrong light', perceiving it to be 'controversial', 'aggressive' and 'big'; all of which result in feminism being 'alienated' from what is considered to be 'normal'. Stark juxtapositions are drawn by the girls throughout this section as these pejorative words about feminism are placed next to those that depict the way that these girls wish feminism was seen by their peers; as something 'that loads of people can be', that is 'everyday' and that is 'normal'. The work that Kay, Mel and Evie do with their language to associate feminism with normality and simplicity appear to try to rid feminism of its weighty postfeminist baggage and to re-signify the term with a lightness and ease. Another way that these girls do this is by directly associating feminism and 'gender equality' as both Kay and Mel discuss the way their peers agree with the idea of gender equality but won't identify as feminist, in contrast to their view that the two are 'the same thing'. This method of equating feminism and gender equality, which appears to aim at diluting the perceived extremity of feminism, could be understood to be a way of constituting what Calder-Dawe and Gavey (2016) call a 'reasonable feminism' (216). Rather than their views working in resistance to their peers', in this instance, the girls aim to 'convince' their peers that the signifier can be re-signified as something straightforward, simple and easy in a bid to encourage other students to engage with feminism. Like at Dance School where the feminism group had to be officially named 'equality club' in order to dilute its affect, these participants depict a context in which the politics of feminism are allowed to be invoked only though a discourse of 'gender equality' since the signifier 'feminism' is deemed excessive. The girls are encouraged to dilute the meaning of feminism to appease their peers, despite wanting to re-signify feminism to change the minds of other students. Through this, the participants' constitution of feminism appears partly secured as it is strengthened by these 'misunderstood' outsider views, however, since they are also are doing work to associate feminism with normality, their own identifications still appear to be shaky as they aim for others to take feminism up only by diluting its troubling associations.

Across these three interviews, feminism appears to be both taken into account by staff and peers in these schools but simultaneously undone as feminism is positioned as 'post' and

therefore unnecessary or too extreme. The ways in which the feminism group participants across the three schools discuss their own group constitution of feminism is suggested to be in opposition to these views, since they constitute their notion of feminism's relevance in response to their school teachers' and peers' postfeminist approaches. Whilst the first group at Town Academy appear deflated by their teachers' postfeminist views as it seems to block their feminist activity in school, the participants at Park and Dance School appear to stabilize their constitution of feminism as a group through their teachers and peers' postfeminist ideas, as they split these off to bolster their groups' constitution of what it believes feminism to mean. These can be interpreted as the groups forming subject/object relations in which another form of feminism, in this case postfeminism, is denigrated meaning that their own form of feminism can be taken up and their sense of a group feminist identification is further secured.

The next section explores how two feminism groups situated within all boys' schools constitute their feminist subjectivities, however in these cases this is in relation to more vehemently anti-feminist approaches from their peers.

5.3. The positioning of feminism groups in relation to anti-feminist discourses from staff and peers at Key Boys and Regency School

In interviews conducted at the two elite fee-paying all boys' schools under study, members of the feminism groups discuss their peer's anti-feminist views. At Regency School for Boys, two participants interviewed together discuss the ways that feminism is scorned by their peers as a 'joke', whilst at Key Boy's School the focus group participants discuss being called 'feminazis' by other students. Whilst this is connected to the postfeminist views discussed in the previous section in that feminism is taken into account but dismissed as irrelevant, in these two boys' schools a specific anti-feminism discourse is made available to them. As explored in the literature review, antifeminism is understood to be connected to networked forms of misogyny (Ging, 2019; Lawrence and Ringrose: 2018; Evans and Riley, 2022) in which a resurgence of sexism, including violence and misogyny results in a distinct backlash

towards feminists. Rather than the feminism group members constituting their feminist subjectivity in opposition to these anti-feminist discourses, the boys in these two schools instead situate these as an inevitable part of an all boys' school culture. In what follows, these positions are argued to be instances of a form of complex recognition, since the boys display aspects of their identification with these anti-feminist discourses, whilst simultaneously disagreeing with them.

The interview at Regency School for Boys was conducted with two white boys in Year 12 (age 17-18) called Percy and Humphrey who were running the feminism group at the time of interview. In this extract they describe their peers' attitude towards feminism as one of active disdain:

Humphrey: feminism is something of a joke – unfortunately…

Hanna: In this school?

Percy: Yeah

Hanna: Or did you mean more generally?

Humphrey: Amongst some people in this school and more generally

Percy: It's not even necessarily a joke – they just think it's people whining…

The description of feminism being positioned by their peers as a 'joke' suggests both other boys' dismissal of the topic and the use of it as a point of ridicule. The discussion of feminism as a 'joke' can be argued to be an anti-feminist discourse in that it creates an image of any women-related struggles being ridiculous. It also relates to banter-based lad cultures in that feminism is sent up as laughable, which Jackson and Sundaram (2020) describe as a behaviour frequently used by 'middle class young men to humiliate those

identified as Other' (48). Percy's statement that rather than a 'joke', feminism is understood to be people 'whining', is also suggestive of an anti-feminist approach from the boys at Regency; the sounds of repetitive, childish and useless complaining are evoked, all of which suggest the redundancy of the topic of this complaint. This rhetoric takes feminism into account but positions it as unnecessary as the problem becomes situated in those complaining rather than the structures enabling the complaint (Ahmed, 2021). Percy's use of the word 'unfortunately' implies that he doesn't want feminism to be seen in this way and would like his peers to take it seriously. However, these comments were communicated through light smiles and shrugs, as if to state the inevitability of their peer's disdain towards feminism and their understanding of this role. Therefore, whilst the two participants run a feminism group in a school where feminism is positioned as a useless complaint or a joke, it is suggested that their own feminist subjectivity is both constituted in opposition to these antifeminist views, and in acceptance of these as it is positioned as an inevitable part of their context. This appears to enable them to both recognise feminism and their anti-feminist context as reasonable positions.

At Key Boys' School, anti-feminist comments from peers are also discussed, and the boys' constitution of feminism also appears to work through positioning themselves in identification with these discourses, despite their taking part in a feminism society. Fifteen participants were interviewed in the focus group and, in this section of the discussion, Leo, Sole, Victor, Abel, Obie and Jack, who are all in Year 12 at the school (age 17-18), describe how their peers at school respond to them taking part in the feminism society. There are many contradictions in this excerpt in which the boys shift between suggesting that they have been mocked for identifying with feminism and an enthusiasm to position their school as 'progressive'. This tension points to the contradictions between antifeminist attitudes from peers, the participants' empathy with antifeminist views and their own interest in pursuing discussion of and learning more about feminism;

Obie: I think we're very progressive for a boys' school. There are 15 people here!

Jack: There were a few people in my year who made fun of Fem Soc

Sole: I don't think it's genuinely felt but it's like joking… people... when they see us outside they come and ask us if we're, what's it called? - the Feminazis... but it's all nice natured

Victor: here's no outright bullying but there's mockery

Jack: I think it's a maturity thing as well. I remember when we were in lower years at the school it was less accepted

Abel: On some level you're always going to get mocked. It's kind of a funny idea. An all-boys feminist society from fairly privileged backgrounds all meeting and saying 'oh the patriarchy!'

Leo: Rather than joking they'll often just say 'why bother? Why are you bothering to meet and discuss and have a society when we're in an all boy's school' etc.? That's what I'd imagine. But it has got better

Jack: I have to say, our school is pretty progressive about gender and sexuality

In this excerpt, there is both a recognition of the taunting the feminism group receive for engaging with feminist issues and a simultaneous eagerness to dilute the effects of this and to represent their school as forward thinking. Their peers' approach to feminism is narrated contrarily by different boys in the group as there is some general acceptance that there is 'mockery' and that they are 'made fun of', as it appears to be understood by the boys to be an acceptable response to the 'funny idea' of privileged boys meeting to discuss 'the patriarchy'. There is also acceptance of the use of the term 'feminazi', a word that has a genealogy in anti-feminist rhetoric that is argued by Ging (2019) and Horan (2019) to have increased not only in MRA forums but in the mainstream media too. Horan cites how frequently the term is used as an insult in the right-wing newspaper *The Daily Mail* in which journalists position women who oppose sexism to be part of a 'feminist lynch mob' (Horan, 2019: 14). As Horan outlines, this creates a divide between women constructed as reasonable feminists and the so-called extreme Feminazis who are constructed to take

feminism too far. However, in this research context, the use of this term appears normalised by the participants through their comments about the wider context of it not being' bullying', there being something inherently absurd about the feminism group and the twice-made point that their school is 'progressive'. This section of the group interview is full of contradictory points since, as soon as the mockery might be painted as extreme, the light-hearted jokiness is emphasised. The boys appear grateful not to be ridiculed *more* for their engagement with feminism since they too see their group to be incongruous within the all boys' school space which is positioned as intrinsically anti-feminist. It is also suggestive of the boys' management of demands of masculinity in this context, since taking things too lightly appears to be rewarded, whilst to be regarded as too earnest is scorned[4].

The approach the boys in both feminism groups take towards other boys' antifeminism differs to the ways the girls in the section above negotiate postfeminisms, in that they partly align themselves with those who make jokes about their own feminism group meetings, since to not be in on this joke would not meet the demands of masculinity within their elite all boys' context. The emphasis on the progressiveness of Key Boys' school around issues of gender and sexuality is also suggestive of their gratitude to the school for enabling or allowing these issues to be discussed since they don't see it as reasonable, which again positions feminism as something that it makes sense to ridicule or dismiss. This indicates that the boys' constitution of feminism is enabled through a simultaneous engagement with feminism *and* an empathy with anti-feminist rhetoric that is normalised within their school context. I propose that the boys' position within an elite school in which feminism is both derided and positioned as an object of interest (a point further explored further in the next chapter) allows them to occupy a position both within and outside of antifeminist discourse in that they can identify with feminism whilst simultaneously identifying with anti-feminist mockery. However, this is not intersubjective in Benjamin's terms. Despite the boys appearing to see both feminist and anti-feminist discourse as understandable and therefore 'felt with' (Benjamin, 2018: 114), since both of these positions require some exertion of restraint by the participants, they objectify these positions and give them the potential to destabilise their sense of feminist subjectivity. This is because being too feminist is risky in

[4] The expectations of elite masculinity within these contexts are explored in depth in the second analysis chapter.

relation to expectations of masculinity in both schools, and being anti-feminist does not fit the progressive ideals they wish to fulfil particularly at Key Boys' School which demands a form of hybrid masculinity as discussed in the next chapter. This means then that the simultaneous identifications the boys make with both feminism and anti-feminism are not examples of recognition in Benjamin's terms, since neither position; feminism or anti-feminism, is really felt with.

5.4. The positioning of a feminism group in relation to neoliberal discourses at Premier Girls' School

In a group interview with the feminism collective at Premier Girls, an inner city all girls' private school, the approach of the feminism group and their discussion of the attitude of the wider school, is suggestive of a shared neoliberal approach to feminism. This focus group included eight 6th Form girls (age 17-18) from a range of ethnic backgrounds all of whom were members of the feminism club. As is explored in what follows, three of the eight young women describe how their school actively linked feminism with individualistic models of success, therefore situating feminism as tool through which to individually lean in to positive and successful 'choices'; ideas that they appear to have learnt from and constituted their feminism in identification with.

Lizzie: We have lots of career talks - women in Science, women in Engineering, women in Law

Lisa: It's not so much like pushing us to become leaders, it's more like to have an equal ground with our male counterparts in those roles

Rochelle: We're quite high achieving and they say don't let your gender inhibit what we're capable of

Lisa: It's awareness about where you want to go in life; the school want to give you awareness of the society we live in- not necessarily what's pinned against us as women but what other people face that we're not necessarily subjected to all the time.

Rochelle: I think that's why it's become so popular, to be a 6th former in Fem Soc. Because in the school we're so lucky to have such a liberal like all-encompassing environment, and as we become older we become more aware of leaving this school and going into other environment- like how we're going to implement everything we've learnt here. It's almost like a bridging…

Lizzie: Yeah it's definitely like when we start getting more and more careers talks we think how is being a woman going to influence my career path, like is it going to be feasible with families? We really have to start thinking about it a lot more

In this excerpt, the three participants offer what reads like a very positive account of the way their school encourages them around issues of feminism as they comment on the career talks, an incitement to be on an equal level with men and how they might manage to maintain a high achieving career with a family. Lizzie's reference to the abundance of career talks indicates her gratitude for the school's emphasis on their achievement, and Rochelle's pleasure in being in a 'liberal' environment is suggested through the references to being prepared for life beyond the school. Lisa's points about the school not 'pushing' them indicates a keenness to indicate that the school discourages them from over-powering men and places the emphasis on becoming men's equal 'counterparts'. Whilst some of what is described here connects to mainstream liberal feminism which insists on 'women's right to enter the public sphere on equal terms with men' (Funk, 2013 in Rottenberg, 2017: 343), what is more striking is the extent to which these comments connect to Rottenberg's theories of neoliberal feminism in which she discusses cultures of neoliberalism that promote individualism, self-regulation and competition forming a feminism of its own. As discussed in the literature review, Rottenberg (1917) conceptualizes this through the figure of a neoliberal feminist subject who is feminist in that she's aware of gendered inequalities but is neoliberal in that she understands these issues to be individualised in the sense that it

is their responsibility to overcome these. The emphasis on these 'high achieving' girls being told not to 'let gender inhibit' them in their career is suggestive of the individualised focus of the neoliberal feminist project in which, rather than oppressive structures being discussed or worked against, it is the individual girl who is encouraged to ensure she leans in and makes the system work for her. Both Rochelle's points about their feminism group serving as a bridge between their school and their future careers and Lizzie's final point about being encouraged to consider how they will balance a career and a family when they leave school, connect to Rottenberg's (2017) argument that neoliberal feminism is based on 'careful sequencing of career and maternity and smart (self) investments in the present to ensure enhanced returns in the future' (331-332). These are also class-based desires and assumptions, since their elite school appears to constitute an imaginary future for these girls to fulfil that contains possibilities of high earning careers; a future that isn't necessarily imagined in all school contexts.

In this focus group, it appears that the girls form their feminism in identification with their school's taught and institutionalised neoliberal feminist discourse. The Premier Girls' discussion suggests that they are members of the feminism group in order that they can transfer their 'high achievement' through learning about how to succeed in their career and in motherhood once they leave school, and fulfilling the positions that appear to be expected of them. In a similar argument to that of Ringrose's *Successful Girls* (2007), this positions feminism as an individual goal in that it positions ego-oriented success, rather than tackling structures of oppression, as the aim. This relates to the way that this all-girls' elite school uses the discourse of feminism to further encourage their students to achieve at a high level and can be understood as distinctly neoliberal in that the school uses feminism to encourage the individual achievement of the school students through their future status in high earning careers, which will in turn benefit the school's reputation and income. The young women in the focus group appear to fully identify with this form of feminist discourse, as a subject/subject relation is evident between the school and these participants. However, the significance of the groups' constitution of feminism as neoliberal is distinct from that of one participant at Premier Girls who, as the following section will explore, narrates more complex negotiations of this institutional neoliberal feminism.

5.5. Feminism constituted in relation to generational feminist discourses in Dance School, Premier School for Girls and Town Academy

The ways that young people position their feminisms in response to forms of generational feminist difference in three schools is explored in this section. This includes the ways in which mothers and adult school leaders constitute forms of feminism that the participants relate to through forms of splitting, in which they entirely reject these, or partly take them up for their own gain. In the first interview at Dance School, a sex positive feminism appears to be constituted in response to their 'mum's generation' of feminism which is deemed sex-negative. At Town Academy, a call for a more representational form of feminism that includes a range of role models is constituted in response to what is deemed 'Malala feminism' at their school, and, in a one-to-one interview at Premier School for Girls', an intersectional feminism is called for but also taken up in response to what is positioned as a white neoliberal approach to feminism.

In a group interview at Dance School, two of the participants discuss a specific form of sex negative feminism that is positioned as the domain of women of age '40+'that constitutes its feminism in relation to success in the workplace. They link this feminist paradigm to their mothers' generation and discuss its disconnection from and apparent fear of teenage sexuality. In this focus group excerpt, the girls appear to form their feminism in opposition to this in the form of a generational distance;

Fay: When talking to a lot of woman who are like 40-plus they're like 'yeah I'm a feminist! Check me out I'm such a feminist! Women in STEM perfect!' And then it's like 'tonight I'm going to stay round my boyfriend's house, I'm 16, I hope that's ok?' and they're like 'no! what do you mean? No sex until you're 18 kind of thing'

Molly: It's really weird

Fay: And then they're like 'I think it's absolutely fantastic that this woman is the global CEO of whatever' and then you'll be like 'Amber Rose should be able to wear whatever she wants – I support her SlutWalk or whatever' and they're like 'no'

Fay: Yeah! Cos I feel that equality in the workplace is the focus of their generation and ours is sort of us making our choices for ourselves more than us gaining status – us being like I can sleep with 25 guys that's fine, I can sleep with 0 that's fine whereas for them that's not even part of the picture

Molly: Yeah, I definitely find that when I'm arguing with people of my mum's generation

Here the girls set their ideas and feelings about sexuality out in response to adult others in their lives. Older women are positioned as performing a feminism in relation to 'women in STEM' and 'global CEO's' but not towards issues of sexuality. Fay pronounces that the 'focus' of this '40+' or 'mum's' generation of women is 'equality in the workplace' and 'gaining status' whereas for their teenage generation it is about 'making choices for ourselves'. Here, the girls offer a 'sex positive' approach to feminism that they position as the product of their generation, in which they have a more accepting and relaxed approach to sexuality. Whilst the sex-positive movement was developed by feminists in the 1970s, the term first appearing in Betty Dodson's 1972 'Liberating Masturbation' (Extra, 2021), these girls aren't given access to feminist history as part of their curriculum and therefore these ideas about sexuality are expressed without knowledge of any previous generation's engagement with these topics. Without being taught about these legacies, these girls constitute their views on sexuality to be spontaneous (Wiegman, 2000) since they are not experienced as connected to previous generations of feminists.

There appears to be two forms of splitting going on for these participants. Their mothers' feminist discourse is split off into an old form of sex-negative feminism to be rejected; one that doesn't hold ambivalence but is simply anti-sex since this then enables them to take up their own which they experience to be fresh and innovative. However, there is also a suggestion that these girls are splitting off their own fears about sex and projecting this onto their mothers in order to maintain their collective 'sex-positive' position.

Whilst the participants at Dance School refer to a form a feminism they encounter not specifically at school but in connection to their mothers and a wider generational set of women, the group interview with the Town Academy feminism group suggests a particular frustration with their school leader's constitution of a singular role-model feminism. These participants discuss this as a lack of recognition and representation of female role models and subsequent over-use of one figure, Malala Youzafzai, as a figurehead for feminism. A direct lack of connection to the feminists of previous and current generations is discussed here as two of the girls, Deborah and Lorraine, discuss their response to their school's use of single feminist figure is repeatedly invoked:

Deborah: I don't know if this is just me and my experience but I came from a girls' school and I went there for Year 7, 8 and 9 and I came here for Year 10 and we had like even in the lesson you learnt about feminism and, I don't know if this is hidden curriculum…I think it is – where they like influence you in ways like we only had a handful of male teachers and they were feminist – they would put Michelle Obama all around the walls. The doors of the main rooms like the Science block was called Marie Curie – the English rooms was called Emily Bronte so they make women seem like really like important so you think oh this woman was really important and successful even in the olden times you can get through it – you can be this!

Lorraine: What Deborah said about female role models, we don't really have any! I think it's kind of the responsibility of the school to teach girls and to teach everyone about role models and it's like – it's always Malala – like over and over again it's their go-to role model and like sure she's great and she's amazing but that's the one thing we have and I remember. And we could name you ten men straight away who are like inspirational and amazing but all I can come up with right now is Malala and that's insane!

Deborah points to the way that the 'hidden curriculum' of Town Academy invisiblizes women in a way that her previous school worked to avoid through the display of significant women from the past and present. Deborah's last school is evoked as feminist through the

description of male teachers working to highlight inspirational women that made her feel that she could 'get through it' and 'be this', suggesting the impact of these representations of women on her sense of feminist subjectivity. This is sharply juxtaposed with their current school where, as Lorraine describes, the school represents lots of 'inspirational' men but repeatedly uses the figure of Malala as the sole feminist figurehead. It is notable that it is Malala that the school makes use of since, as Christina Scharff (2016) outlines, it is the construction of the 'oppressed other woman' who is often used to reproduce the racializing lens western feminism that allows for a narrative to continue that those in the West are 'empowered' and not in need of feminism. At this academy where many of the students are from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds including the participants Deborah and Lorraine who are Black, perhaps Malala is chosen by school leaders as a possible feminist identity who may appear more available to the students there. However, as Mendes et al (2018) discuss, when young women are only encouraged to position their feminism around othered oppressed girls, it can move them away from addressing institutional sexism and violence in their own school and peer cultures. In this extract, both Deborah and Lorraine appear to disagree with this singular and othering mode of feminism and, through their oppositional relation to this, to constitute a discourse of calling for wider feminist visibility in their school that indicates a wide range of possibilities for what they as young women might become.

In a one-to-one interview with Lily, a white 6th form student at Premier Girls, a critique is also made of her school's approach to feminism as she discusses her response to the elite form of white neoliberal feminism exhibited by of the head teacher. In this excerpt, Lily discusses the issues she encounters as she tries to organise a feminism conference alongside her head teacher:

Lily: Well the head teacher was just talking about the speakers and how she was going to have the 'Dads for Daughters' thing which is cool but then I was like 'maybe we could kind of deal with intersectionality in some way – like we could have someone other than very privileged women… Because the 'dads for daughters' thing, I don't really know enough about them- but I don't see the point of it because it just seems a bit like – from what I've heard about it – it's men saying 'I care about feminism' and 'I have a daughter' and it's just a

bit – personally I thought it felt a bit like the feminism conference was a bit of a –it's a very private school thing and everyone's getting involved, it just seemed like a handshaking opportunity to be part of this thing that didn't seem very progressive or very helpful in my opinion. So I suggested intersectionality and she was like 'oh! There's this girl um who happens to be Black' – she's not talking about being Black and the experience of Black women and their experience of feminism – she's just talking about feminism generally and she's not discussing intersectionality, she's just discussing feminism but she happens to be black – and the head was all 'why don't we get her?' And I obviously didn't say anything because I didn't want to be like 'Ms Jones!' (laughs) but it made me really uncomfortable and want to... well not uncomfortable but want to kind of not want to – it made me kind of resigned about organising the conference and now I'm like I'm just gonna put it on my UCAS form (laughs)

Lily's frustration with her head teacher's approach to the school's feminism conference being focused on the work of an organisation that centres men and white women is evident throughout this excerpt. Lily refers to the attitude of this conference being 'a private school thing' and a 'handshaking opportunity', suggesting that those who will speak and be invited to the conference are from a selection of elite schools who will use the event as a way to promote themselves to one another. This is the same neoliberal feminism discussed by the feminism society in the group interview that they all appeared to align with but that, in this one to one interview, Lily critiques. When Lily describes her proposal to the head teacher that the event could 'deal with intersectionality', the response is narrated as one that makes Lily 'uncomfortable' because the head teacher believes that the inclusion of a Black woman as a tokenistic gesture would satisfy this request. Lily appears to see through the performative nature of this gesture and the problems with this approach of focusing on women's supposed white middle class commonality.

Evidencing engagement with Black feminist intersectional theory, Lily appears aware that if this conference centres white women then it ignores intersectionality's investigation into 'the overlapping and conflicting dynamics of race, gender, class, sexuality, nation, and other inequalities' (Cho et al, 2013: 788) in favour of 'one size fits all' (Crenshaw, 2010: 152) feminism. However, rather than Lily continuing in this discussion with her head teacher

around this intersectional approach, she instead describes feeling 'resigned about organising the conference' and decides to move ahead with her role just to 'put it on [her] UCAS form'. Therefore, whilst Lily critiques the white neoliberal feminism she feels is being used in her school and claims an identification with a more intersectional approach that goes beyond the tokenistic platforming of a Black woman, Lily also displays an awareness of how to utilise this form of feminism in order to market herself to a university. Lily's narrative initially suggests the enactment of white neoliberal feminism by the school leader in this private all girls' school as problematic and discusses her own intersectional feminism in response to this. However, Lily's final comments also suggest that elite institutions like Town School for Girls, where white middle class feminisms are enacted for the benefit of their own students, may in fact 'succeed' in teaching their students how to utilize performative feminisms for their own gain, as Lily appears to decide to do. Lily's constitution of feminism appears complexly constituted through her rejection of white neoliberal feminisms, and a simultaneous identification with them when they can be used to further her position.

In the analysis of these three interviews, I suggest that the ways that young people position their feminisms is in relation to forms of generational feminist difference in relation to their mothers and adult school leaders. In the first interview at Dance School, a sex positive feminism is constituted in response to what is deemed their 'mum's generation' of feminism; at Town Academy, their school's 'Malala feminism' is critiqued as a singular feminist tool that they reject, and finally, in a one-to-one interview at Town School for Girls', an intersectional feminism is called for and given up on in response to what is positioned as a white neoliberal 'private school' approach to feminism. This section argues that the ways that older generations forms of feminist discourse, whether positioned as sex-negative, singular in their representation or neoliberal, contribute to the constitution of these young people's identification with feminism, since their own feminist subjectivity is constituted in relation to these, appearing to strengthen the groups' own intersubjective identification with one another in the first two groups, whereas in the last one to one interview, the participant appears to be a solo outlier to the group as she both calls to change the institutional form of feminism, as she simultaneously takes it up.

5.6. Feminism constituted in relation to roles and relationships in feminism groups at Park School and Dance Academy

At Park School and Dance School, intersubjective relationships are argued to be formed between the participants through their engagement in feminism groups. In the following excerpts from two one-to-one interviews, Amy from Park School and Fay from Dance School, discuss the generative bonds they formed in their feminism groups as well as the role they were able to provide as mentors for younger students. In both interviews, these young women discuss their feminism group as a space that offers release from negative relationships with other girls, suggesting the potential for these feminism groups to counter and transgress dominant modes of hetero-sexualised aggression between girls, and examples of intersubjective relations being formed in which they experience the other as a like subject and mind to connect with.

Feminist scholars have argued that girls' friendships are constructed through idealised expectations around girls being 'passive, nurturing and accommodating, in contrast to the normative condition of direct masculine aggression' (Gilligan, 1982; Campbell, 1993 in Ringrose and Renold, 2011: 188). However, Ringrose and Renold (2011) argue that this 'repressive dynamic of what femininity must emulate' means that 'bitchiness and meanness become a demonized yet expected, eventual outcome for girls' (189). Therefore, whilst constructions of girls' goodness are normalized, there is a simultaneous expectation that girls will be covertly aggressive (Ringrose and Renold, 2011). The complexity of girls' hetero-sexualised aggression (Ringrose, 2008) is explored in these two interviews as Amy and Fay discuss the issues they encountered with other girls and the ways that the feminism group supported them in transgressing these and moving into intersubjective relations with others. The role these two girls were able to take up as supportive mentors for other students is discussed here as a very rewarding result of these feminism groups. However, they do not suggest that the feminism groups enabled a return to traditional constructions of girls as only kind and caring, but instead suggests that the groups formed relationships that go beyond modes of subject/ object relations into something more intersubjective which enables them to experience each other's minds as felt with and understood.

In the one-to-one interview with Amy from Park School, she discussed her pride in being part of setting up the feminism group and the ways that it offered her a new role as well as an escape from difficult aspects of her friendships at the time:

Amy: It was really exciting- it's one of the things that I still to this day when I think back to school, it's my proudest thing. Like I'm probably prouder that we had a feminist group that was attended by that many girls than I am about the results that I got because it felt like for me like getting results is a very like personal thing and it's great because it gets me onto the next step but I felt like the legacy of the feminist group was for me anyway, more important because it was something that I knew… I dunno, a lot of those girls they were sharing experiences that they'd never shared with anyone else before and they suddenly felt in that group that they could talk about it which I found really… They'd be saying things like 'oh?! That happened to me as well but I didn't think about it til now'… So I think for me it was exciting as in they now felt as if they could work with those experiences rather than just living with them if you know what I mean…

Amy's pride in setting up the feminism group is directly connected to her facilitation of discussions with younger girls that enabled them to share previously undisclosed experiences. Her role in these groups sounds like that of a counsellor in that she supported them in 'working with' their experiences rather than sitting with them, however, it also reminiscent of feminist pedagogic work in consciousness raising groups in which women are supported to connect the personal with the political; to listen to others and be able to say 'that happened to me to' as Amy says. The 'pride' she describes, whilst not explicitly said, appears connected to a re-signifying of the previous position she held in which she was engaged in combative issues with her peers, as within the feminism group, Amy is able to support younger students as a mentor, not only to speak about complex issues but to work with them to create change.

In the following extract, Amy goes on to discuss not only what she enabled for other students but her own sense of 'safety' in the feminism group;

Amy: Another thing is that in Year 10 and 11 I was going through a very difficult time with my friendship groups so on a personal level the feminist group was really good because I could get out of the playground (laughs) and that even for myself that was one of my safe spaces and I knew I could go there and be with younger girls who are kind of – and I don't mean to blow my own trumpet but they were looking up to me – which I think was a really, really lovely feeling at the time because I knew that if I went there, there was a lot of girls who cared about what I had to say and I cared about what they had to say and I knew that like I could kind of – I was alright there and I was safe there – I didn't have to worry about anything outside of there… we could talk about things, share ideas, share laughs, share biscuits (laughs)

In this extract, the material space of the feminism group is described as a sanctuary from the playground, a space in which it is suggested the complexities of her friendships take place. The way the younger students looked up to her in this role is described as a 'lovely' experience and the care that she felt for the girls in the feminism group constituted it as a 'safe space' at a time when she was having problems with her friends. Amy's role within the feminism group is depicted as supporting her in feeling respected by other girls within a space where she can offer care through the enabling of discussion around previously silenced topics. The feminism group is therefore positioned as a space of safety away from the unsettled relations between her own peer group where she is able to 'share' support with other girls in understanding complex issues, and where the dynamic is one of intersubjective security and trust. The sense of safety also appears connected to an experience of re-signifying her sense of self as she moved from being caught up in difficulties with her friends, to finding that she is capable of forming generative and supportive relationships with younger students.

In the one-to-one interview with Fay from Dance Academy, she identifies similar themes around her role with younger students and what the feminism group offered her capacity to form subject to subject relationships with other girls.

Fay: I think the [feminism] group affected friendships and affected girls who are in this path together and were like I'm not gonna look in the mirror and cry anymore either… it was like a pressure cooker of all this positivity which obviously formed such close bonds which I think we'll always have and I'll always remember but also with other girls particularly who were outside the group, it really does make you so much less judgemental, harsh and all these conditioned responses that you have like 'oh she's being a bitch' 'she's being a slut' or whatever, you just don't have anymore, so it stops the inhibiting of who you're friends with or the depths of your friendships… cos when you're 14 and you think someone's been slutty or something it affects your friendship but when you're removed from that way of thinking about people it does allow you to understand people and have deeper connections with them I think

Hanna: Mm… so it kind of brought out compassion?

Fay: […] you feel like I'm enlightened and I know all this feminist stuff (laughs) and people are struggling then you can think that I'll help you and talk positively if you feel like you hate your body that sort of stuff… which is quite patronising but also quite exciting to be in that role.

Fay's experience of the feminism group is directly connected here to her relationships towards other girls, both within the group and outside of it. Like Amy, the role that the feminism group offers her in supporting other girls to understand previously un-discussed topics is raised. Fay describes feeling 'enlightened' by feminism and therefore in a position to discuss issues that have previously not been discussed. Fay suggests that feminism relieves her from certain modes of 'conditioned' internalised misogyny including competition and rivalry for male attention and the encouragement of girls to judge other girls on their behaviour and sexuality. This is connected to her sense of the space for connection that is formed with other girls when operating outside these limiting frameworks. It therefore appears that rather than projecting judgements onto other girls around their 'slutty' behaviour, her engagement with feminist ideas means she is now able to understand other girls' positionality within a system of sexism and double standards meaning that she can empathise with other girls rather than judging them. The feminist

consciousness she has engaged with has supported a shift in her thinking about misogynistic notions of 'inappropriate' femininity and rather encouraged a constitution of sex positive feminism that refuses to shame girls for their sexual behaviours.

Both of these interviews took place in schools where I have argued for the institutional approach being postfeminist in that the group members report on the dismissal and misunderstandings of feminism in school. Despite this wider approach, moments of intersubjectivity appear to be experienced for both participants when they comment on the connections they felt within their feminism group. I interpret these relations as intersubjective since the participants appear to experience one another as another mind they can connect with, and their sense of feminist subjectivity is strengthened through these connective ties with other girls. Amy and Fay raise points about their feminism group offering them pride in the role they play and a sense of release from their conflicts with other girls. These divides are suggested to be rooted in rivalry for male attention and sexual judgements of one another. The role of the feminism group within the two girls' schools is depicted as enabling new forms of connection that actively transgress binary constructions of female friendships that are either purely supportive or covertly aggressive. The combination of girls from different year groups in the school who wouldn't normally mix, a shared interest in feminism, and the practice of learning about feminist approaches to issues of sexuality in a shared space enables a transgression of hetero-sexualised conflict as intersubjective solidarities appear to be formed as they recognise each another as an 'equivalent center of being' (Benjamin, 2018: 23).

5.7. Conclusion to Forming Feminisms

This study asks how teenagers taking part in feminism groups constitute feminist subjectivities in their schools. This analysis chapter responds by suggesting that young people from each of the six groups do this in relation to particular others; namely their postfeminist school teachers and peers, anti-feminist peers; institutional neoliberal feminisms; generational forms of feminisms as represented by teachers and mothers, and other members of their school-based feminism collective.

The first section of the chapter argues that in one co-educational academy, a private dance school and one co-educational comprehensive, the feminism groups form their feminist subjectivities against their school's postfeminist discourse, whilst in two all boys' elite feminism groups the participants occupy a complex position in which they both claim to dis-identify with anti-feminist discourse, whilst at the same time directly identifying with aspects of this anti-feminist sentiment. Finally, in an all girls' feminism group in an elite school, the participants constitute their feminism in line with the neoliberal approach of the school, situating feminism as a tool through which to lean in to successful 'choices'.

The second section explores how young people in three interviews position themselves in relation to generational forms of feminism that they encounter; their mothers' sex-negative feminist discourse that they reject; a school-based singular 'Malala' feminism, and neoliberal white 'dads for daughters' feminism in school. This section suggests that the ways that older feminisms deeply inform these young people's constitution of feminism, even as this works through young people's resistance of these, or in their simultaneous take up of these as is evidenced in Premier Girls School.

The final section highlights how girls in one-to-one interviews at Park School and Dance School relate to one another in their feminism groups at school. This argues that the role of the feminism group within their schools opens up forms of intersubjective connection with other girls in their school that transgress hetero-sexualised subject/object constructions of teenage girls' friendships as the feminism group's practice of learning about sexist structures enables a moving beyond these relations to ones that connect them as subjects.

Through this chapter, it can be argued that different types of schools enable different modes of feminist discourse to be related to and constituted by young people, but that in all the schools the young people constitute their feminisms in relational ways whether to other feminisms, or one another. The postfeminist attitudes evident in two mixed comprehensives and an academy suggests school leaders don't wish to be associated with feminist values, but inadvertently enable intersubjective solidarities amongst the feminism group as they have a clear other to split off and that supports their own identification with feminism. White neoliberal feminism is emphasised in an elite girls' school where girls are encouraged

to lean in and the only acceptable group response appears to be one of total identification with this, whilst a one to one interview in the same school highlights an individual's quiet rejection and simultaneous take up of this for her own gain. In the elite all boys' schools, the feminism groups participants appear able to simultaneously identify with feminism and anti-feminism which is perhaps suggestive of their sense of entitlement to both positions at once, as a well as a fragility in their constitution of a feminist subjectivity. Overall, this suggests that the participants are exposed to a dominant approach to feminism in their secondary schools, whether postfeminism, neoliberal feminism, antifeminism or generational forms of feminism perceived to be 'sex negative' for instance, that the participants then constitute their feminist subjectivity in relation to.

Chapter 6: Feminist boys? Navigating feminisms and defensive masculinities in two all boys' elite schools

6.1. Introduction

This chapter asks how boys taking part in feminism societies in two all boys' private schools navigate feminisms in relation to the specific expectations of elite masculinity in these similar yet distinctive contexts. Both schools are rooted in the English 19th century public school system when many all boys' schools were set up to 'service the educational requirements of boys and manage their transition from boys to men' (Hickey and Mooney, 2018: 247), and these schools have a reputation for their reproduction of gender hegemony including aspects such as authoritarian punishment and the repression of emotion (Hickey and Mooney, 2018). However, different forms of these schools exist that produce varying aspects of these stereotypes and these relate to the two strands of argument developed through my analysis. The first connects to the distinctive ideals of masculinity constituted in these two settings. I argue that the nuances of difference between them are signifiers of the contrasting cultural and economic contexts in the schools themselves. The second strand of argument relates to the ways the boys in both settings relate to markers of masculinity, femininity and feminism, and I suggest that it is possible to trace similar psychical patterns of defensive masculinity in the accounts of boys in both schools.

Through this chapter, I draw upon Connell and Messerschmidt's (2005) theory of hegemonic masculinity, which suggests that in specific locations there are forms of idealised masculinity that are constructed in relation to more subordinated forms of masculinity, as well as to the feminine. This supports an understanding of constructions of ideal markers of masculinity within these two elite school contexts. I combine this theory with psychosocial notions of defensiveness that conceive of a fragmented subject who, through processes of denying aspects of their psychical and social world, does unconscious work to keep away a sense of internal threat (Gadd, 2000; Phoenix, 2000; Frosh, 2014), including, for instance, the threat of identifying with feminism in an all boys' elite context. However, I also build on this to

discuss the production of hybrid masculinities (Demetriou 2001; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Bridges, 2014) in which a distance is taken from traditionally hegemonic masculinities to perform an apparently more inclusive masculinity. A conceptualization of discursive distancing (Bridges and Pascoe, 2014: 250), in which straight white men or boys construct a distance from hegemonic forms of masculinity but simultaneously align with it (Bridges and Pascoe, 2014), enables a lens on the participants' identifications with feminism as mediated through defences around ideals of masculinity in these schools[5]. Using these theories, I propose that the participants across both settings constitute feminist subjectivities through defensive and distancing moves that, even when appearing most feminist, centre the requirements of masculinity within their elite school context.

Through this chapter, I argue that the boys' positioning in both schools is carried out across four particular dimensions of masculinity which differ across their school contexts. These relate to expectations of masculinity in relation to lad culture, sporting/gym performance and effortless success; negotiations of heteronormativity and its relation to feminism; emphasis on the importance of academic debate and how peers' defences around feminism are managed; and the tension around the signifier feminism and the risks involved with identifying with this term. Through these four sections, I analyse the different constructions of masculinity in both contexts and connect these to the different distance and closeness the boys are able to maintain to feminisms across the two schools, particularly through the ways that defensive and distancing moves are used by the participants. I trace the ways that this manifests in each setting to argue that at Regency Boys' the feminism group members utilize hegemonic ideals of elite masculinity to try to understand and move their peers past their defences around feminist identification, as well as defending against aspects of feminist identifications themselves. The participants appear relatively unified about the demands of elite masculinity in their school, and the complexity of convincing their peers to identify with feminism, however, the only way they know how to do this within this school context is through academic 'hard' modes that centre the demands of hegemonic

[5] Whilst boys and masculinity are discussed through the following sections, I conceptualise gender as fluid but hierarchical since idealised masculine tropes appear to be regarded in both schools as superior to those labelled feminine (Bragg et al, 2022).

masculinity within this context. This differs from Key Boys' School where the focus group participants discursively distance themselves from traditional masculinities and position themselves as encompassing progressive ideas about gender and sexuality that includes identification with feminism. However, the one-to-one interviews suggest that the participants simultaneously identify with more hegemonically elite masculine tropes including being academic, sporty and heterosexual. Therefore, contradictory dialogues are displayed at Key Boys as the boys defend both against appearing 'laddish' or traditionally masculine in other ways, *as well as* against any perceived feminised or queer identification with feminism.

6.1.1. The two school contexts; settings and reflections

The different contexts of Key Boys and Regency School are briefly re-capped and elaborated on here in relation to factual aspects of the two contexts as well as my own expectations, responses and reflections to these two feminism groups.

- **The settings**

Key Boys' is city based selective fee-paying school for boys age 11-18 catering to boys living in commutable distance from the school site. Entry to the school is exam-based and extremely competitive and, of those who gain a place, 95% go on to study at their first or second choice of Russell Group University. The fees are higher than average, and the school has 1000 students on roll. Key Boys' has a popular feminism society run by students and supported by the deputy headteacher. Whilst the deputy head doesn't attend the society meetings, he does take the boys to high profile feminist events in London and speaks with pride about the existence of the feminism society. The focus group discussion involved fifteen boys between the ages of 13-18 of different ethnic backgrounds but majority white. The two one-to-one follow up interviews were with white boys from Year 10 called Oscar and Eli, and these were conducted a few weeks after the focus group.

Regency School is a suburban ultra-elite school catering to both a UK and international market of day and boarding school students. The intake at this school is majority white,

however, an international market of Chinese students has increased in recent years. In the past, entry to the school was based on particular birth and class right, however, these are – technically - no longer relevant requirements and entry to the school is exam-based. The fees are high, even for a boarding school, but the school is aiming to widen access through bursary schemes. Like at Key Boys, the school's feminism society has support from a teacher, however, the boys run the weekly meetings by themselves. Whilst I intended to run a focus group at this school, I was only able to speak with two participants at once, both white boys in Year 12 called Percy and Humphrey. I then conducted a one to one interview with a white boy called Matt who had recently finished Year 13 but was on his gap year and directing a play at the school. I also observed a feminism society meeting, however, haven't had the scope to analyse this in this thesis.

- **Expectations, responses and reflections on meeting with the two feminism groups**

Of the six schools in which I conducted research, these were the schools in which communication before my fieldwork visits was most cryptic and the approach during my research visits, most controlling. It was only at these two schools where I wasn't told the number of students that I'd be meeting for the planned focus group discussions before the research visit, wasn't able to request particular participants for the one-to-one interviews, and where the confidentially of the meetings was disrupted without warning.

At Key Boys, I planned to conduct one focus group with around five to six students, however, despite requesting this, I wasn't told how many participants I'd meet on the day. On arrival at the school, I was presented with the consent forms by the deputy head for fifteen boys and was then greeted by what I realised was the entire feminism society. The boys were all between the ages of 13-18 and sitting round a large table in a classroom where I was told the group met every week. Due to this large number, the discussion involved a lot of the boys talking over one another and I anxiously tried to keep the discussion focused by asking frequent questions. I felt that the discussion took on a performative tenor in which the boys appeared to be enacting debate-style dynamics which I later came to realise were a hallmark of the society's identity. I interpreted a specific

positioning from some of the boys of their school as progressive around issues of gender and sexuality that seemed directed at me as the feminist-visitor-researcher. A similar issue arose at Regency where I was not told the number of students I would be meeting with in advance of the focus group research visit. On the day, I was surprised to be met by only two boys; Percy and Humphrey who were the leaders of the school's Feminism Society at the time and in Year 12. Despite this meaning that I couldn't run a focus group, the boys were keen to talk and we had a lively discussion. The boys told me they were close friends and this was evident in their pre-empting of what the other said, making the discussion flow very differently to at Key Boys in that I felt able to interfere less in their discussion.

Unlike at other schools where I was able to request potential participants for the one-to-one interviews, those who took part in the follow up interviews at Key Boys and Regency School were chosen by teachers. This meant that these interviews weren't 'follow ups' in the sense that I had considered ways to follow up on particular topics. At Key Boys, the two participants that the deputy head chose hadn't individually contributed points in the focus group discussion but had been present, therefore I started the discussion quite anew, whilst also referencing points from the group discussion that other participants had raised. I noted that both Oscar and Eli appeared keen to promote their school as progressive to me, in a similar way to the ways other boys had in the larger group meeting. In the same way at Regency, I wasn't able to choose a one-to-one interviewee since the participant was chosen for me by the teacher facilitating my access. Matt was 18 at the time of interview, had recently finished Year 13 and, despite being on his gap year, was still at the school to direct a play. Despite not being present in the interview with the feminism group leaders, he had expressed interest in talking to me through his teacher since he'd run the feminism society the year before. When we met, Matt created a similar tone to the focus group discussion in that, unlike at Key Boys, he didn't appear to be trying to promote the school to me as an outsider visitor. However, in both the interviews at Regency, the participants would occasionally appear anxious about their critical comments and then aim to normalise the aspect of schooling they discussed.

The confidentially of the focus group was disrupted at Key Boys, and in the interview with Percy and Humphrey at Regency. As discussed in the methodology chapter, the teacher

contact at Key Boys unexpectedly entered the room during the focus group meeting. This was so unexpected that I didn't know how to respond so I continued as if he wasn't there. I have, however, cut this section of the focus group so as to not breach the participants' anonymity. At Regency, the participants' anonymity was also breached since, on entering the room where we were told we could conduct our recorded discussion, we were shown that the room has a large one-sided mirror on one side which the teacher said we 'might' be being watched. This meant I had to ask for the boys' consent after the meeting again, which they gave but left me uncomfortable about whether or not this meeting had in fact been conducted confidentially. The approaches of these two schools, including taking control over the participants who were to take part and breaching the confidentially of the research encounters, appears to reflect these institutions as 'engines of privilege' (Green and Kynaston 2019: 1). Their positions of wealth and advantage felt reflected in their attitude to my research visits, in that they were both welcoming but made efforts to ensure their position and control was protected.

This approach is further explored in the sections that follow in which I argue that the participants constitute their feminist subjectivities through forms of defensiveness and distancing across four particular dimensions of masculinity, whilst also tracing the ways that this manifests differently in each context.

6.2. Lad culture, Effortless Success and Sporting/Gym performance

The ways that hegemonic masculinities are both constructed and negotiated in each school are explored here in relation to lad culture, notions of effortless success and sporting/gym performance. Each of these topics were raised in the focus group at Key Boys and the one-to-one interview at Regency, where the participants signalled their investment or awareness of these aspects of masculinity. I argue that the participants' discussion of lad culture, sporting performance and effortless success suggest how hegemonic forms of masculinity are constructed across these two schools, whilst the dynamics of the research encounters provides insight into the expectations of masculinity in each setting.

- **Lad culture**

The category of lad is discussed by the large group at Key Boys, in which some participants work to dis-identify with laddism, whilst others suggest its presence at their school. Jackson and Sundaram (2020) conceptualize lad culture as a way of doing gender and masculinities in particular. The notion of lad is most closely associated with hegemonic masculinities, however, is found to be particularly dependent on social class (Jackson and Sundaram, 2020). Between the 1970s and 1990s being a lad was almost only associated with working class boys and discourses of underachievement, disrupted classrooms and sports teams (Jackson and Sundaram: 2020; Phipps and Young: 2015) however, middle and upper class boys and men are found to have their own lad cultures that are particular in that they include entitled approaches in that they don't 'expect to be held accountable for their behaviors' (Jackson and Sundaram: 2020: 84). This means that boys in elite schools may appear or feel exempt from the classification of 'lad' despite Phipps' (2017) research arguing that laddism can be 'exemplified' (5) by those in specifically elite institutions, for instance the exclusively male Bullingdon club based at Oxford University where their practices are known to include heavy drinking and vandalism.

Perhaps given the shifting media discourse of laddish masculinity, when the deputy head at Key Boys introduced me to the feminism group he commented, in front of the boys, that there wasn't a lad culture at this school. When I referred back to this during the interview, the participants in the group agreed with his comments in their efforts to distance themselves from this term, suggesting the presentation of a hybrid masculinity (Bridges and Pascoe, 2014) in which attempts are made by the participants to distance themselves from more traditional hegemonic modes of masculinity:

Hanna: Your deputy head was saying he feels that there is less of a laddish culture here [than other schools]. What do you think?

It's not as extreme
It's very progressive here
There aren't many girls

In a heteronormative framework the presence of girls does induce that
Some boys go to the gym regularly but it isn't obsessive. It isn't rowdy in the classrooms.
There are certain individuals who I think embrace it
There are a few arseholes but there isn't like a network [of arseholes]

Whilst this discussion includes the overlapping voices of six members of the feminism society making it difficult to decipher who said what, this cacophony contributes to an atmosphere of collectivity around the points made that is suggestive of an allegiance amongst the boys around the notion that laddism is regressive. The associations these boys have with laddish behaviour include references to the gym, rowdiness and heteronormativity. However, the boys make efforts to distance their school from these behaviours since, whilst there are 'certain individuals who embrace it', this is discussed as the behaviour of the few rather than as embedded into the culture. The participants position the school as less 'extreme' in its laddish-ness than other schools and imply that there is greater freedom to be who you want beyond the confines of 'lad'. The comment about how 'very progressive' their school is, suggests a belief that lad behaviours are behind and perhaps working class, and that the boys in their elite school are more sophisticated than this. The participants distance themselves from an impression of them or their wider school culture as laddish, with the use of sophisticated feminist terms including 'heteronormative' implicitly enforcing the point as well as marking out their sophisticated knowledge base for me as an outsider-researcher. The reference to there not being 'many girls' and the subsequent comment about the 'presence of girls' being a reason for laddish behaviours suggests that this participant considers co-educational schools, or just the mixing of girls and boys, as catalysts for laddish behaviour, which again situates their boys' school as outside of this culture. However, this point also suggests a naturalisation of these gendered behaviours as it assumes their inevitability when girls are present. Overall, this extract suggests the participants' collective distancing of the feminism society against potential assumptions, perhaps of mine as a feminist researcher, of a regressive laddism. It also indicates an eagerness to present their school culture as enlightened around issues of gender and sexuality. The impression here is of the boys' seeing and acknowledging laddish behaviours, but as positioning those who engage in these behaviours as outliers to their and their wider school's overall 'progressive' philosophy. Considering the deputy head himself

distanced the school from lad culture in front of the feminism society and right before the interview, it also appears that this distancing forms part of the school's desired identity.

The participants' distancing from laddism continued as the interview went on. However, this continuing discussion also works to complicate the boys' positioning, as three of the boys pose differing and more emotionally layered arguments about what lad culture means to them as well as how they believe it to operate within their school context:

Liam: I think we're better than most boy schools but we can't say there's no lad culture cos people do still identify with it. But it's not like no one goes to the gym and they all come here [feminism society]

Jake: I think this gym thing is quite distracting. I generally associate it with views towards women, it being great for a man to be promiscuous etc. I think it's too harsh on people who go to the gym.

Simon: I think our age is when people aren't quite mature enough but they're still not young and naïve. Like there was this night after a big party when loads of people went out – there was a guy boasting about how he got with 6 different girls, but he also talked about the girl who got with 6 different guys as a 'slut' which seems sort of fine if you want to be promiscuous but don't start making a difference between boys and girls

This discussion between Liam, Jake and Simon offers insights into the ways that the meaning of the signifier 'lad' is interpreted amongst this group of boys and its connection with gym culture and heterosexuality, as well as how lad culture is positioned in direct opposition to identification with feminism.

Liam suggests that lad culture is negative in his comment that their school is 'better' than most whilst also suggesting that it is linked with going to the gym rather than going to feminism society which situates him, as a member of the society, as outside of laddism as well as positioning the feminism society as antithetical to lad culture. Jake's point that Liam's distinction between the boys who attend the feminism society and those who go to

the gym is 'harsh' further adds to the idea that to be positioned as a lad is negative in that he is defending gym attenders from being tarnished by the term lad. Instead, he offers an alternative definition for laddism as he aims to separate it from attending the gym and relates it to views of women in relation to the controls over women's sexuality. Simon draws from Jake's point about promiscuity and laddism to position boys like himself, of his age, as at a liminal point in their development in which it is implied that they are sexual, 'got with 6 different girls', but not yet emotionally 'mature'. The double standards applied to male and female sexuality are discussed by Simon as he describes a boy from their school who boasted about the number of girls he was with whilst undermining a girl as a 'slut' for doing the same thing. Simon appears to be providing a developmental justification for laddish behaviours in which boys are understood as not being able to emotionally cope with the behaviours they are engaging with, whilst also providing a clear retort to the boy who did this by stating that he shouldn't be 'making a difference between boys' and girls' suggesting that he considers himself to be more mature than these other boys.

The category of lad is continually contested through this dialogue, suggesting a shared aim to avoid their and their school's association with the term as it's positioned as regressive and even working class, but disagreement over whether it is characterised by gym attendance, slut shaming, underlying sexist beliefs or adolescent immaturity. Their attempts to distance themselves from hegemonic masculinity by dis-identifying with laddism, whilst simultaneously aligning with it is suggestive of a hybrid masculinity (Bridges and Pascoe, 2014) as they perform a middle-class knowledge base and identification with feminism to me as researcher that highlights their privileged position.

- **Effortless Success**

The construction of masculinities in relation to presentations of 'effortless achievement' has been explored in the work of feminist scholars (Epstein, 1998; Frosh et al.,2002; Younger and Warrington, 2005; Jackson 2006; Jackson and Dempster,2009), and these expectations have been linked to white middle-class boys' productions of masculinity in particular (Jackson and Dvempster 2009; Mac an Ghaill 1994 in Skelton and Francis, 2012). These are understood to be a form of presenting oneself as the ''pinnacle of success' because

achievement without hard work signals an idealized 'natural' ability, therefore 'for the achievement to be most impressive the effort expended must appear to be minimal' (Jackson and Dempster, 2009: 342). This concept was directly referenced in my interview with Percy and Humphrey at Regency School as they talked about effortlessness and suppression of emotion as an issue, but at the same time defended these requirements as an inevitable aspect of this school context;

Percy: Well there's an issue here at Regency that people are very much expected not to care about things… There's an expectation that things come naturally to you… There's a competition for who can succeed in their exams whilst doing the minimum work possible

Humphrey: Yeah- the idea that you're struggling with your sexuality or something…

Percy: The idea that you're struggling with anything- you're not encouraged to talk about it. It might be subordinate to a larger problem about the ways we talk about mental health

Hanna: So to be seen to be in any way to be struggling or vulnerable is not necessarily so easy in this context?

Percy: it's just that people aren't very prone to being open about their emotions

Humphrey: And it's very rare that someone would say that I'm really struggling with my school and my life and my identity…

The discussion suggests a critical stance from Percy and Humphrey on both the expectation to academically succeed without trying and the ways this links to cultures of silence around issues of mental health and sexuality. These links are made when Percy states that 'people aren't very prone to talking about their emotions', however, since it is unclear who these 'people' are, this may indicate his own sense of enmeshment within this culture, or a defence of the school through this naturalization of the boys' lack of emotional expression. The expectation that 'things come naturally to you' initially appears to refer to the academic

but then appears to include a social expectation that the boys should not question their identity since there is an assumption that you are heterosexual and consequently in a positive mental state. The connections between these two aspects suggest the boys' understanding of their school as a place in which any form of struggle is understood as weakness, whether through an admittance that school work or an aspect of one's personal sense of identity is challenging. It is notable that achievement in the context of Percy and Humphrey's discussion is connected with the 'achievement' of not admitting to any personal confusion or difficulty. Through this part of the discussion, I was also aware that Percy and Humphrey were not talking about any particularly personal difficulties and therefore their comments operated as a critical perspective rather than as an admittance of any of their own difficulties, perhaps further highlighting the complexity of discussing the personal in this school setting.

This discussion of Regency school's emphasis on the boys' effortlessness in relation to their academic work, sexuality and mental health suggests the idealised and therefore hegemonic forms of masculinity as constructed within this environment. A stoic, heterosexual and academically-able boy appears to be expected at this school and any deviation from this is implied by both participants to be difficult within this school context.

- **Sporting/Gym performance**

Research into boys in high achieving elite schools has found sporting ability and physical capacity to work as a key signifier of idealised masculinity (Connolly 1998; Martino 1999; Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli 2003; Renold 2000; Skelton 2001; Swain 2000 cited in Skelton and Francis, 2012). Skelton and Francis (2012) propose that where boys in elite schools might be anxious about aspects of their subjectivity being read as feminine, for instance, in relation to their keen engagement with learning, excelling at sports provided them with a reading of their gender as suitably masculine.

The one-to-one interview with Matt at Regency School provides a critical narrative around the construction of hegemonic masculinity in his school in relation to the Sports curriculum,

whilst the group interview at Key Boys suggests more conflicting ideas amongst the group about whether or not gym culture is a dominant feature of their institution, suggesting both a tension around idealised forms of masculinity in their school and what they are willing to convey to me as a researcher. Both research encounters are suggestive of sport and gym culture as an important marker of appropriate masculinity.

In this extract, Matt describes a school culture in which success in sport is the key signifier of masculinity and male PE teachers are the regulators of this:

Matt: I think the area in which machismo is maintained and sustained is in sport… So you didn't have female coaches and you wouldn't have – the PE teachers were all like boys – sorry men – who would still say 'sissy' the classic style of insulting boys…

Hanna: And if you're a boy who didn't like Sport…

Matt: I didn't. Err… Yeah it's interesting you do have to – Sport is a necessary extra-curricular – Music isn't, Drama isn't but Sport is – so at the start I was in low teams and I played for my house and actually the house spirit is hugely based around sports. So I was trying to do house spirit in house concerts or whatever but no one really cared. The thing that bonds the house is the sport and the thing that when you arrive your value in the house through all years is how sporty you are. But that's quite a male thing and not necessarily specific to my school - it's like for young men the most valued quality is athleticism – I think.

Matt's experience as a boy who didn't like sport is suggested to be one that meant he wasn't considered masculine enough since teachers would use gender regulating and homophobic language such as 'sissy'. Matt also describes not being able to evidence the 'house spirit' despite wanting to, since to do this through activities such as playing music wasn't valued in the same way as sport. The experience sounds painful as Matt describes a sense that 'no one really cared' about the activities he took part in, perhaps because these didn't hold the same markers of successful masculinity. Matt's narrative of the maintenance of 'machismo' through compulsory competitive sporting activities points to the way that sporting ability is valued for both the presentation of powerful masculinity and the sustenance of group identities that are further entrenched by the school's 'house' system.

These provide an arena where 'masculinities are hierarchised' (Jackson and Dempster, 2009: 450) as it enables heightened competition between groups of students and links to the use of homophobic slurs aimed at those whose performance is deemed weak. The enforced nature of sport as a means of setting the boys against each other (as opposed to Drama or Music) seems to be recognised by Matt as suggestive of a hierarchy where athletic competition is valued above artistic activities that are associated with the feminine. It is relevant that the word 'machismo' is used by Matt since this word has connotations with male dominance that presents through traditional notions of women's subordination to men, aggressive sexuality and a lack of emotion (Nuñez et al; 2016). Whilst these are all aspects that are associated with laddish behaviours, the term machismo is more commonly applied in academic environments, for instance in literary or Latin studies to analyse gender roles in texts. It is notable that Matt chose this word rather than the term 'lad' like the boys from Key School, did since it suggests that boys at Regency are too upper class to imagine associating themselves or their peers with the word 'lad' to the point that this term isn't even referenced.

Whilst sports are also discussed at Key Boys, the emphasis is more on gym culture than engagement with house focused sports teams. During the focus group interview, the discussion was noticeably conflicted as some of the participants wanted to talk about the pressures they encountered in this area, whilst other boys aimed to distance their school from these hegemonic expectations of masculinity.

Simon: So, I think masculinity is really important here. I'm the smallest and possibly the youngest in my class and year and that adds a big thing to it. There's a whole thing of competition and trying to be the best which comes with male bravado

Hanna: So, being the 'best' here- what does that consist of?

Donny: body image – there's a gym culture so lots of boys spend breaks in the gym. Our ideas about masculinity…

Jake: (interrupting) I actually think it would be a lot worse at a mixed school. The presence of the girls would probably induce more competition – at this school we are...

Liam: I feel like as a year group we've definitely progressed and become a bit less masculine…

Donny: (interrupting) In my year I think that because a lot of them don't have many encounters with the female gender, they have a twisted perception of what they need to be to attract the opposite sex… like I need to have a six pack etc.

Liam: True, but wouldn't that exist in lots of schools – mixed schools?

Donny: I would say that it's because they interact a lot less with the opposite gender

Ovie: I don't know; I think we're very progressive for a boys' school. There are 15 people here [at the feminism society meeting]

This focus group discussion suggests contestation between the participants around the expectations of masculinity at school as well as disagreement over their willingness to communicate these to me as a researcher. There is an eagerness from Simon and Donny to discuss the pressures experienced around their bodies and to critique the single sex school culture in terms of how it affects their understanding of their own bodies (as small or unmuscular) in relation to assumed expectations of their peers at school. This discussion isn't able to develop, however, since Jake, Liam and Ovie appear eager to defend the school as better than mixed-gender schools in terms of pressures on male bodies and to present the school as 'progressive' in ways that echo the previous interview extracts. Simon's attempts to discuss the pressures of masculinity describing it as a 'male bravado' culture in which you have to have a strong and athletic body, are contradicted by Jake, Liam and Ovie who present their school as less pressured than others since it is single sex. The comments made by Jake and Donny in particular suggest a focus on the body as constituted in relation to heterosexual encounters with girls. The ideas around this are not unified, however, as Donny believes the presence of girls creates issues for boys whilst Jake suggests that the

absence of girls does this. Jake's point that girls would 'induce' competition between boys suggests that single sex environments protect boys from gender-based pressures whilst Donny disagrees with this in his assertion that boys at their school focus on developing muscular bodies because of skewed understandings of what girls want that are believed to be actively produced by their all boys' environment. The notion that 'progress' is linked to being 'less masculine' is suggested by both Liam and Ovie who both use the term, conveying a belief that to conform to stereotypically masculine behaviours is negative and something they want to distance themselves from, much like the previous rejection of laddism. It is notable that Liam discusses this in a tense that suggests a recent shift in his year group around these attitudes, whilst Ovie situates the school as 'progressive' suggesting a more secure and reliable state that is justified by the number of boys in attendance at the feminism society meeting.

Therefore, whilst some of the participants in this group are keen to discuss the pressures to have muscular bodies and connect this with assumed expectations of girls that they don't encounter everyday due to their single sex school, others present a more defended approach to masculinity both in relation to themselves and their positioning of their all boys' school as progressive. The points made here are suggestive of two forms of masculine subjectivity; one that Simon and Donny produce which is open to discussing the challenges of expectations of masculinity in their school, and the other which signifies a more discursively distanced approach, constituted by Jake, Liam and Ovie who aim to separate their school culture from those that promote idealised masculine bodies. What this does, however, is close down the opportunity for their peers to discuss the personal pressures they experience around these issues.

Across these three sub-sections, resonances and divergences in idealised masculinity across the two elite schools are evident. The use of sport and athletic bodies as key markers or ways of hierarchising masculinity are clear in both schools, however, the research encounters differ in terms of the participants' willingness to critique this, since at Regency this was flagged as a central way through which idealised masculinity is demarcated, whilst at Key School some participants made efforts to underplay the pressures of gym culture and

idealised body image. This distancing from appearing hegemonically masculine was also evident in the Key Boys' School discussion of lad culture in which the participants suggested themselves to be beyond what they saw to be these regressive ideals of boyhood. However, at Regency School, even when issues of machismo were discussed, the term lad wasn't used which I argue is suggestive of the ultra-elite status of this school. At Regency, the pressures to be effortlessly successful and to avoid emotions were directly critiqued in a one-to-one interview whilst this wasn't raised at Key Boys perhaps due to the defensiveness noted in aspects of these sections of interview. Both these resonances and divergences between the two elite boys' schools highlight the forms of hegemonic masculinity as constructed in each school culture which, as I'll go onto argue, the participants appear to constitute their feminist subjectivities in relation to.

6.3. Heteronormativity and (impossible) LGBTQ identifications in the academic and social curriculum

Heteronormativity assumes a 'natural heterosexual attraction between opposite categories of masculine and feminine' (Butler, 1990 cited in Ringrose et al, 2021: 4) and all boys' schools have been argued to be spaces where these cultures are encouraged as a nostalgia is maintained around the distinctiveness of boys (Hickey and Mooney, 2018). In the Regency interview with the two feminism society leaders and in the one-to one interview with Eli from Key Boys, the participants suggest that hegemonic ideals of masculinity are focused around heterosexuality. In the interview with Percy and Humphrey at Regency School, homophobia is both situated as a problem and simultaneously defended against as normal within all boys' cultures like theirs, whereas in a one-to-one interview at Key Boys, Eli's positioning of the feminism society in relation to the LGBT society defends against feminism being positioned as feminine or queer as he claims the feminism group space as heterosexually masculine.

Percy discusses single sex schooling and its connection to heteronormativity at Regency in his critique of their gendered academic and social curriculum;

Percy: From my point of view it did feel a lot like an oversight that in History we don't do gender theory, in English we don't do gender theory… I think more to the point; we don't really do things with girls' schools. I don't know if this is true of all mixed schools but if you're with girls all day in a classroom you think of them as people who have normal lives and normal issues and are normal and do the same things as you- whereas here, we don't play sport against girls for practical reasons, so the only interaction we have with girls is at socials

In this extract, Percy positions a deficit in their academic curriculum around any analysis around gender in subjects like English and History. He terms this an 'oversight' which suggests that he thinks his school should be teaching them to think with a critical gendered lens. It is, however, the absence of girls in this single sex school that Percy states as the 'point'. Percy repeats the word 'normal' three times to emphasise how he imagines boys would perceive of girls in a mixed school where they would be considered to be the same in that they would 'do the same things as you'. These comments are suggestive of a feminist consciousness in relation to how their curriculum naturalises gender relations, as well as how all boys' contexts works to other girls as they see them so rarely. However, despite commenting on the ways in which viewing girls is dependent on context, Percy then states that they don't play sport against girls for 'practical reasons', a point that inadvertently essentialises differences between girls and boys rather than problematizing them. However, this comment can be interpreted as both a result of the highly gendered environment that Percy is attempting to challenge whilst pointing to the complex positioning of these boys as they are deeply set within this context.

Since it is 'socials' that are referenced at the end of Percy's comment as the place where interactions between the Regency boys and girls from other schools takes place, I asked about these events:

Hanna: what is a social?

Percy: It's kind of like a… it's not an inherently evil thing… it's predominantly for boys from younger years to meet up with a girls' school so you sign up for it and then the girls come on a bus and then you have a meal or you go there

Hanna: And is it formal?

Humphrey: It depends- there are reeling meetings – Scottish reeling… you have a partner school and you have more normal conversations... but it's like a stereotype of your awkward school disco pretty much and certainly for some people it's a 'how many people can you get with' competition and so it's just a really weird environment to interact with girls where you're not really seeing them as people.

When these seemingly contrived heteronormative meetings with girls from another elite boarding school through Scottish reeling 'socials' are described by Percy as 'not an inherently evil thing', it is not clear whether the use of the word 'evil' is used to emphasise the harmlessness of these events or is a word that hints at a deeper sense that these socials have negative consequences for the young people involved. What is made evident, however, is that Percy understands the meetings to be for boys to meet up with girls and that Humphrey considers these to be uncomfortable settings since there is an emphasis on homosocial practices (Mclean, 2006) in which boys prove to other boys how many girls they've been with. Humphrey's suggestion that these meetings are uncomfortable for him through the use of the adjectives 'awkward' and 'weird' implies that these enforce an objectification of girls since within this context they appear positioned for boys to 'get with' rather than as an opportunity for the boys to see 'them as people'. This is reminiscent of the points made by Simon at Key Boys in which he criticises his peers' double standards as girls are deemed sluts whilst boys are celebrated for sexual activity, as Percy and Humphrey connect these reeling meetings to problematic social relations between boys and girls through both enforced separation and contrived meetings.

In the following extract, Percy and Humphrey further highlight ways that they perceive their school to constitute heteronormative masculinities. However, whilst the previous section saw Percy and Humphrey's direct critique of their school's negotiation of particular

constitutions of academic and social masculinities, here we see a more complex positioning in relation to heteronormative masculinities as the two boys slip between direct critiques of homophobia and justifications for this within their school:

Percy: A very low number of people in our year are openly gay… I'm not entirely sure of the national statistics but I think it's significantly lower than the expected value and indeed I know a few Regency boys who came out after they left school…Erm, I suspect it might have something to do with boarding school? And I think that might add pressures for you not to be particularly open about your sexuality…Not that people would assume predatory intentions but I think people might worry it might make things uncomfortable. I guess I can't really say…

Humphrey: And I guess, like everywhere, there is a degree of homophobia and… probably more pronounced here than in wider society…

(Percy guffaws)

Humphrey: No?

Percy: Again, it's not our place to generalise

Humphrey: Yeah… I can't comment but I would say there are the normal levels of homophobia and the normal pressures not to come out I think exist.

At the beginning of this extract, Percy tries to make sense of the lack of 'openly gay' boys at their school by comparing the number of boys who are out to the 'national statistics' and then referencing his knowledge of boys are come out once they've left the school. The statements that he delivers as questions about the possible association between boys not coming out and boarding school culture suggest an ongoing attempt to work this out. This points to the difficulty in finding answers in an environment where, as the previous section suggested, the vulnerability inherent in these questions is not welcomed. Percy suggests that boarding school creates a pressure to be heterosexual but follows this by stating that

this is not because people would assume 'predatory intentions'; a point that intimates that people might assume this about boys who are gay, indicating an internalisation of homophobic ideas even whilst he aims to avoid directly saying this. Whilst Percy seems keen not to commit to a statement about the school's homophobia, Humphrey appears more comfortable with calling the school more homophobic than 'wider society', a statement that Percy rejects as 'not their place to generalise' and Humphrey then adheres to, diluting his previous statement and undermining his own capacity to know or comment before then repeating the word 'normal' twice in an apparent insistence to present the school as equal to everywhere else in its 'levels of homophobia'. Whilst this appears to be a defence of the school and an avoidance of making an explicitly negative claim against it, there is also a hint of a more emotionally layered defence against homophobia that they may have experienced themselves.

Percy and Humphrey's comments suggests that they recognise heteronormative practices around masculinity operating at their school and that these dynamics form deeply set ideas of appropriate masculinity in this all boys' school. There are, however, differences in the way this is articulated by the two boys in terms of how explicitly critical they are willing to be about their school's practices. This is evident in the later stage of the interview between beginning to critique their school's management of discussions of sexuality, and then articulate repeated defences of the school's normalcy around these issues. Like at Key School, this signals the difficulty of the boys' positioning as simultaneously engaged in feminist analysis of their school context and enmeshed within expectations to defend their school when in the presence of a researcher/outsider. This impulse that the boys in both schools have to normalise what they have just criticised can be interpreted as directly linked to their schools' elite status since they may have been told to present it positively to outsiders to attract interest in the school, meaning the discussion of homophobia needs to be smoothed over by the participants in a bid to normalise their school's handling of these issues.

Heteronormativity was also discussed in the one to one interview with Eli at Key Boys, however, in much more indirect terms. In which he outlines the difference between the feminism society and the LGBT society at the school. Eli signals the construction of queer

identities as opposed to hegemonically masculine ones within this school, despite the focus groups' claims about the school's progressive nature;

Eli: Here they're quite separate because feminism is discussion group and is about politics and society and LGBT society is just LGBT people coming together and sort of enjoying a space. The first one was quite lovey-dovey, it was sort of coming out stories and then they changed it after that and it's now just a friendly space for people to chat

Eli describes the LGBT Society as 'friendly' and un-political in nature, set up in opposition to the more political space of the Feminism Society. This opposition implies that the LGBT Society is where personal accounts take precedence; the use of the words 'friendly', 'lovey-dovey', 'stories' and 'chat' situating this group in a feminised realm in which experience and emotion matter. Eli situates the LGBT society in opposition to the feminism society which is positioned in the worldlier and masculinised space of 'politics and society' where emotion is supposedly absent and debate takes precedence.

The words 'friendly' and 'chat' were also used by Oscar at Key Boys' to describe ways the feminism group differs to the school's LGBT society:

Oscar: So here the feminism group is different to the LGBT group in terms of sessions – at Fem Soc there's more debate but not formal debate but there is a debate to be had whereas at LGBT it's more about the creation of a community who supports and there's friendly chat I guess rather than it being about political issues

Despite the boys being interviewed separately there are notable echoes between Eli's account and the way Oscar juxtaposes the two groups through a positioning of the Feminism Society as 'debate' focused. The use of the term 'political issues' in relation to feminism is also relevant since it implies that the LGBT space is not regarded in this way. This might suggest that feminism is open to questioning from both sides whereas issues raised in LGBT society are not. Both Oscar and Eli compare this debate-oriented space of the feminism society to the 'friendly' and 'community'-oriented dynamics of the LGBT group that is

suggested to be about support and informality; aspects associated with the feminine rather than the masculinized combative politics of the feminism society.

The efforts made by both Eli and Oscar to associate the feminism society with masculinized tropes including combative debate signals a defence against feminism's feminine connotations. This also suggests a distancing from the LGBT society as it is positioned as de-politicized and community oriented, feminized and queer aspects which don't hold the same value as hard intellectual debate in this school context. This suggests that despite the focus groups' discursive distancing from traditional masculinities as they promote themselves as progressive, heteronormative masculinities are still defended by boys engaging with the feminism society.

There are clear resonances across Regency School and Key Boys' around discussion of heteronormativity, particularly in relation to the participants' suggestions that hegemonic ideas of masculinity are centred around heterosexuality. However, these diverge across the two schools as Percy and Humphrey clearly situate homophobia as an issue before appearing anxious to defend its normalcy, whilst Eli and Oscar at Key Boys contrast their feminism society to the school's LGBT society in an apparent defence against feminism being linked to homosexuality. At Regency School, heteronormativity appears constitutive of the participants' feminist subjectivity in that it forms a part of their feminist critique of their single sex school where girls are positioned as other, forming strained and estranged relations. In previous extracts, the same boys comment on the silences around boys possibly 'struggling with [their] sexuality', further highlighting their awareness of the damaging aspects of this culture. However, their subsequent defence of their school as they rush to normalise homophobia is indicative of their anxiety to portray their school as no worse than others. This diverges from the one-to-one interviews at Key Boys where Eli and Oscar constitute their feminist subjectivities through less direct discussions of heteronormativity but by instead aligning their feminism society with heterosexual tropes to avoid associations with the queer or feminine. This is suggestive of the tension these participants manage between engaging with feminism in a school context which, despite having a LGBT society, appears to promote heteronormativity.

6.4. Academic hard debate and dealing with peers' defenses

The ways in which the participants at both schools attempt to present feminism as acceptably masculine within the hegemonic forms as set by their schools is further explored across both contexts here. Particular attention is given to the ways that the participants do this through aligning feminism with high academic theory, centering competitive debate style dynamics, and using hard statistics to convince other students to identify with feminism. These methods center hegemonic forms of masculinity in that they enable them to avoid being positioned as struggling through 'construct[ing] themselves as in control and powerful' (Durfee, 2011 cited in Sundaram, 2014: 66). I interpret defense as a commonality between the two contexts, as the participants at Key Boys further defend against the notion that feminism is soft by stressing their feminism society's academic and conflictual tone, whilst Matt at Regency makes use of hard statistics in attempts to move his peers past their defenses about feminism.

At Key Boys, both Oscar and Eli at Key Boys discuss the dynamics of the feminism society as negotiated through competitive debate and an emphasis on academic feminism. This positioning is suggestive of hegemonic expectations of intellectual, heterosexual and combative forms of masculinity within their school, and the participants' defenses of these are evident as they attempt to re-form the potentially non-hegemonically masculine attributes of their feminism society as truly masculine (Frosh, Phoenix and Pattman, 2002). Here, Oscar makes an effort to ensure that the feminism society is represented as a conflictual discussion space for high level academic and political debate;

Oscar: [The feminism society] is very discussion based and this year we've had a topic a week and we read an article at the start of the session and then discuss it. It's all quite civilised like you put up your hand to speak…making contributions – there's always some conflict but it's not personal

Hanna: What sort of conflict would there be?

Oscar: So there's two types of conflict because there's people who come who aren't really feminists who have come to… well not critique but to have a debate about feminist issues in themselves. But there's also the debates between different feminists about the best solution to a problem or particular issues… So I guess there are two different levels of conflict.

I interpret Oscar's discussion here as a defence against the idea that the feminism society is associated with soft femininity through his assertion that it is conflict based and impersonal. This defence appears to be an assertion of the society as in line with the academic expectations of masculinity within the school space. Despite the reference to conflict in Oscar's first comment, the emphasis is on the measured nature of these meetings with the word 'civilised' suggesting a respectful but impersonal atmosphere. Oscar points to the arrangement of choosing a topic and an article a week that the meeting revolves around, which differs from feminism groups who organise around personal experience and stories. Oscar's point about the two levels of conflict highlights a particular aspect of this feminism society, in that it is not only for those who identify with feminism but those who don't. Heasley and Crane (2012) argue that boys are taught to find safety in objects which 'distances them from the risk of emotion-laden social situations wherein boys might express feelings that seem un-masculine' (102). There is a suggestion of this here as the dynamic described by Oscar is one in which feminism objectified into a topic of impersonal debate and references to emotion are absent from this feminism society space in which discussion and debate is focused on 'solving problems'. The irony here is that this mode of organising is entirely at odds with the ways that feminism collectives have oriented themselves as spaces where the personal is made political for instance (Munro, 2013).

This objectification of feminism links to the next point Oscar makes about what he understands to be the academic focus of the feminism society;

Oscar: Well it was the same last year as well – the boys running it were all doing philosophy degrees which I'm going to do in 2-years-time as well but it was very much a lot of economics and philosophy at a very high level

Hanna: Were they 6th form?

Oscar: Yeah, they were senior 6th at the time and it was just something I couldn't access at that age

Hanna: Yeah so maybe you felt like why am I here?

Oscar: Yeah I didn't feel like I was really doing anything and I didn't really find it that interesting but then last year I started going more regularly to the meeting and it got increasingly interesting in terms of the kind of theory and debates we had

Oscar connects the feminism society with 'very high level' discussions about 'economics and philosophy' which give the society's content a status that Oscar himself depicts as initially difficult to reach. He situates himself as initially unable to engage in these debates but, with continual attendance, eventually managing to. This gives the content of the meetings an elite status that must be intellectually worked for and the terms 'theory' and 'debates' serve to further bolster this impression of the group as engaged with topics of academic rigour. This can be understood to be produced by the elite all boys' school in which it takes place within since, as Proctor (2011) states, combative rhetorical skills are highly valued in these elite all boys' contexts, therefore we see Oscar recasting the feminism society in line with the hegemonic masculine expectations. Following from this, Oscar goes on to relate the academic focus of the group to the conflictual dynamic described earlier in the interview, as he discusses debates between feminists and non-feminists in the group meetings:

Oscar: Non-feminists turning up happens quite often – I mean today we're going to do the pay gap and I'm sure that will prove to be quite lively

Hanna: Oh really, why?

Oscar: Well there are a few boys who are quite into economics and read quite a lot of academic studies and who get quite vocal about it

Hanna: In terms of they're frustrated that the pay gap exists?

Oscar: No as in they don't believe it exists

The conflict between the two designated camps of either feminists or non-feminists being called 'lively' suggests the positive value placed on having different perspectives in the room. The ability of boys to be 'vocal', and presumably conflictual, about their views is linked to the academic work they've put into their research of 'academic studies'. It is notable that the reference to economics and academic studies is linked to those boys who 'don't believe' in the gender pay gap; the implication being that either viewpoint is as robust as the other with apparent evidence behind it. Despite having identified as a feminist previously in the interview, Oscar appears not to align himself with one side of these debates as all ideas are suggested to be equally relevant. This connects to Men's Rights' Activists' discourses (MRA) in which a proliferation of disinformation abounds online presenting false statistics, often in relation to a denial of sexual violence (Ging, 2017; Lawrence and Ringrose, 2018). Without a teacher or otherwise informed group facilitator, it appears that disinformation is accepted as a part of the competitive debate culture valued in this context. Throughout this interview, Oscar ensures that the feminism society is represented as a conflictual discussion space for high level academic and political debate. This approach defends against a perception of the group as a like the friendly LGBT space, or as based around personal experience as this appears to be coded feminine, and instead asserts the society as in line with expectations of academic masculinity within his school.

These defences of the feminism society as an academic space were also evident in the one-to-one follow-up interview with Eli, with an emphasis on debate. Eli refers to specific definitions around the form of feminism he aligns himself with in relation to his peers as well as the society's relationship with 'far-right' students:

Eli: Recently it's changed a bit because when the new head teacher came in they decided they'd get a little more publicity so they made one session about feminism and the far right and so invited a few far right people in and they had an interesting debate

Hanna: Far right people at this school?

Eli: Yeah. Not that far right… they are quite conservative… I think one of them was a… can't remember but they have views on tax and maybe on gay marriage, trans bathrooms and things and they had interesting views on that… one of them thought that transsexualism was just attention-seeking. It's interesting – one of them is a self-hating bisexual. So we had a discussion about the pay-gap and another guy was firing statistics at us trying to tell us why it's not real and why it's a myth which was interesting. So generally it's… he's made comments about marriage and how he's going to save himself for a woman but the woman he wants to find would cook and clean and would be a housewife… or how… I can't remember

Eli discusses the emphasis on oppositional debate within the feminism society group meetings being central to the meetings in that anti-feminists attend in order to spar with the self-identified feminists. Eli's reference to the publicizing of the feminism group in relation to 'far right' views appears to have been done to actively encourage boys to attend. This isn't problematized by Eli but described as promoting an 'interesting debate', the emphasis on these views being represented given precedence over the ethics of platforming far right ideas. This is connected to wider discourses about 'no-platforming', the practice of stopping someone from speaking at a school or university because of their views (Simpson and Srinivasan, 2018) in that this appears to be actively resisted in this elite all boys' schools since it is 'free speech' debate cultures[6] that are regarded as important. The fact that the topic of the far right is used by the head teacher to publicize the group suggests that that this culture of everything being up for debate comes from the school's leadership.

When I query Eli about whether he means 'far right people at this school?; he is keen to dilute the extremism of this to these boys being merely 'conservative'. However, this is somewhat contradicted by the subsequent list depicting the homophobic, transphobic, classist and misogynistic beliefs of these boys in relation to key markers of inequality including tax, LGBTQ rights and misogyny. What Eli describes here can be linked to notions of 'popular misogyny' as outlined by Banet-Weiser (2018) who conceptualizes it as a mass defense against feminism and the gains it's made. The popularity of it is evident here as the

[6] This culture is also seen in elite universities such as the 'Oxford Union' which in May 2023 insisted on platforming the anti-trans speaker Kathleen Stock despite protests from the student union.

popularization of misogyny is used by school leaders to encourage others to attend the feminism society, as the anti-feminist platform it offers provides a marketing opportunity for the group.

When Eli describes the methods used by the far-right students, these include the use of 'firing statistics' in order to, presumably, win the competitive debate through convincing others that the pay gap isn't real. These methods of using 'hard' data have been explored by feminist researchers including Archer et al, 2012 and Francis et al, 2017 to argue that science is constructed as middle class and masculine and therefore as having an important status. Whilst these 'statistics' aren't necessarily scientific, the construction of science as masculine and its association with objective data connects the two, suggesting that this method of using statistics is regarded as reliable within this context. Despite Oscar and Eli taking part in the feminism society, they appear to believe that stats and academic debate are superior to personal experience for instance, and use examples of this to justify their engagement with the feminism group, and to suggest that, since these are traditionally masculinized tropes, they are valuable.

The use of these masculinized methods are also raised in the one to one interview at Regency School, however, in this discussion these are focused around Matt's efforts to convince his peers to move past their defences around feminism. The challenges of publicly identifying with feminism at Regency School was a central aspect of the interview with Matt in relation to his position as a known feminist at the school and he discussed his confusion about how to convince other boys to identify as feminists.

In response to a comment I made in our interview encounter about how I was known in a derogatory way as 'the feminist' within a school I taught, Matt responded by enthusiastically recognising this position:

Matt: Yeah! I've been that! I became that person in my last year the whole time! Everyone was like 'I'm not gonna listen of course he'd say that!' they got annoyed. And that's my big thing… I don't know how to get it across. I don't know how to communicate it – I don't know what the best way is… Do you get Caitlin Moran in cos she's really funny? Do you talk just

with each other so you can confess things and let things out? Do you structure it? Do you change what you see and what you hear? Do you get loads of education on it? I still don't know what the best way is.

Matt describes how in his last year at the school he felt stuck in that he was known to identify with feminism meaning that his peers wouldn't listen as they defended against any association with it. He references the sense of not knowing how to discuss feminism with other boys as the 'big thing' indicating that this remains an ongoing dilemma for him. Matt emphasises the complexity of this with a series of rhetorical questions about how to 'get it across', the suggestion being that he wants to transfer feminism from himself to these boys; to encourage them to see what he sees. The questions include getting the popular feminist journalist Caitlin Moran into the school to speak to convince the boys with humour or to create a safe space for boys to talk about how they feel about feminism, but there is no conclusion to this as he states that he still doesn't know what the 'best' way is. The difficulties of taking up the position of the feminist in his year group and not being listened to by his peers whose minds he would like to change is evident here and is presented as an ongoing issue, despite Matt having left the school by this point.

One of the ways that Matt attempted to enable other boys' agreement with feminism is referenced in the next section of the interview when Matt discusses an article he wrote for the school magazine in which he tried to convince boys to become feminist. Here, Matt reflects on the methods he used:

Matt: A few months ago I read it again and I'm not proud of it because it's very… I was doing a like mixture of Caitlin Moran 'guys it's all cool!" and then also appealing to guys which she doesn't do… so I ended up... I actually regret it because I almost treated them like idiots – I was like 'guys! It's so obvious!' but this is the thing I didn't know how to communicate it…

Hanna: And you feel that wasn't the best approach now?

Matt: At the time I was like pleased with it but in hindsight I'm not sure… and regardless, it wasn't going to make much of a difference but if I could've gone really intelligent with it and

treated them like intelligent people and gone like STAT STAT STAT, not personal but really solid big big things erm… that may have been more effective. I did it a bit

Hanna: But with that particular audience at your school it sounds like they like hard data – they respond to that kind of thing

Matt: But again, as soon as they see feminism they'll shut off.

Matt narrates the difficulty of his position in finding the right way to affect their thinking in that he chose to use the methods that had personally convinced him including the casual humour of Caitlin Moran, however, he now feels that this didn't work because it patronised them when he could have instead made use of statistics. Soon after these rational and masculinist forms of persuasion are considered, however, the impossible loop is referred to again as Matt refers to the boys' shutting off 'as soon as they see feminism'; a seeming hopelessness apparent as Matt appears to remember that these boys are hold deeply set defences around identification with feminism.

Matt's desire to change the minds of other boys in his school meant that he focused his attention on convincing younger boys:

Matt: My big thing was to tackle Year 8s because they are the impressionable ones and if Laura Bates comes make her come when they're 13! Like that was my thing cos once they're 17 you have this brain and you kind of might be stuck in a way of thinking and be done, It's kind of the end of the road. Because the boys got the consent lawyers in in their last year and they are like 'they're annoying or 'meh Laura Bates I've had enough feminism for today'… yeah cos their brains are like 'I'll take it!' and they haven't formed these big opinions yet. But my thing was to get as many people to do compulsory lectures. I almost wanted to get away from feminist society because the problem with feminism society is you have people coming knowing that it's going to be about feminism so they'll already think they don't want to and then you have smaller numbers and then those who are there – you're just feeding the already fed and preaching to the converted

Here, Matt creates a juxtaposition between older students who he positions as 'stuck' in their ways of defensive thinking in comparison to 'impressionable' Year 8 boys whose mind he feels more likely to change. He references Laura Bates, the popular feminist writer and founder of the Everyday Sexism Project (2012) who he had previously told me had visited their school to talk to boys about feminism but who, it is implied, came too late since older boys respond dismissively. The 'consent lawyers' he references is the Schools Consent Project, an organisation made up of lawyers who speak to school students about the legal aspects of consent, who are described as having been rejected by the boys as 'annoying', as if a product the boys have become bored with. Matt uses these examples as justification to 'tackle' the younger students on these issues, the verb indicating the struggle that talking to them about feminism is assumed to still entail even with younger boys. The casual mentions of 'getting' Laura Bates and The Schools' Consent Project into the school and the boys' reported boredom and dismissal of these talks is indicative of the privileged environment of Regency School where they can afford to buy in high profile speakers who the boys feel they can take or leave.

Matt sets out a problem with the feminism society itself in that he believes the members to be 'already converted' and his mission appears to be to change people's minds outside of this setting. The use of the metaphor 'feeding to the fed' and 'preaching to the converted' have biblical connotations suggesting Matt's desire to spread the metaphorical feminist word around his school and Matt's self-positioning as someone with a role of responsibility to share what he believes about feminism. In a school which Percy and Humphrey report being difficult for boys to earnestly care about issues, Matt's commitment to changing the minds of his peers can be understood as risky. The encouragement for boys not to appear to care too much may, however, go some way in explaining Matt's approach to changing the minds of other students through inviting outside speakers in (rather than speaking himself) and of adopting the humorous and more carefree tone of the journalist Caitlin Moran to get boys on side. Matt's capacity to discuss these issues may, however, have been liberated by having left the school at the time of the interview. Like for Percy and Humphrey, Matt identifies with feminism and, in his aim to convert other boys and overcome their defences against feminism, has to ensure that his marketing of it to his peers aligns with ideals of masculinity in the school so that they might consider 'feminist' as a position to take up.

Through this section, I have argued that Oscar and Eli work to defend against ideas of feminism as feminine or queer in order to recast feminism as academic and combative and therefore acceptably masculine within their elite school. The discussions at Key Boys suggest that feminism is negotiated through competitive debate in feminism society meetings, a denial of any feminized or queer associations as well as the previous separation of it from the LGBT society, and that these ideas are consolidated through 'academic' debates with hard right students and the use of statistics to convince other students. At Regency Boys, Matt's peers sound equally defended around their identification with feminism but, even as a self-identifying feminist, Matt feels the only way to convince them is with these same hegemonically masculine methods. In both settings, the hegemonic forms of masculinity as set by their schools including an emphasis on high academic theory, competitive debate, and the use of hard statistics are constitutive of the participants' feminist subjectivities as these are endlessly negotiated.

6.5. Feminism or Equal-ism?

Edley and Wetherell (2001) discuss a public construction of feminists that they term the 'Jekyll and Hyde' trait in which feminists are constructed within a binary in which they are either 'just want equality' or are regarded as 'extremist' (447). To identify with notions of 'equality' is deemed less threatening since equality implies 'sameness' linking to liberal feminist arguments of the 1960s and 1970s that, rather than challenging patriarchal relations, encourages women to meet a 'gold standard' (452) set by men. To advocate for this version of feminism is argued by these authors to allow for a malleability in which one can be in support of feminism *so long* as it hinges on this vague notion of equality. More recent imaginaries of the extreme feminist come from Men's' Rights Activist (MRA) groups (Ging: 2017) as well as the rise of popular misogyny (Banet Weiser: 2018), both of which point towards the figure of an aggressive feminist who threatens hegemonic forms of masculinity, which as a result, must be reclaimed.

In the one-to-one interviews with Oscar and Eli at Key Boys, this extreme figure of the imaginary feminist is evoked and defended against through an emphasis on their identification with diluted notions of 'equality'. The tension between the term feminism and notions of gender equality were also raised in the interview with Percy and Humphrey at Regency, however, here it is their peers' defences about using the term feminist that are discussed, rather than their own. Whilst Edley and Wetherell (2001) consider alignment with these equality focused forms of feminism as 'emptied of any political potential (453), when considering the context of both Key Boys and Regency School where the term feminism is deemed threatening, I interpret the boys' and their peers' use of this as a defence against the anxiety arising from this risky identification.

During our one-to-one interview, Eli used the term 'equalist' so I asked him whether it is a term commonly used at the school;

Eli: I sort of made it up but I think it's used quite a lot in terms of 'I'm not a feminist, I'm an equalist' kind of thing which is the whole thing that feminists take it too far

Hanna: Yeah tell me about that

Eli: So I think it's as a result of positive discrimination that people say females are a lot better... so like Wonder Woman came under a lot of bad rap for that… And I think that happens here because it's sort of joking with a slight element of truth to it which is that it's about 'smash the patriarchy' and 'women should lead the world'

Hanna: Do you mean that the boys talk about that as a stereotype?

Eli: Yeah exactly and talking about Tumblr too it gets a bad name because they think the stereotypical Tumblr user is like dyed hair lesbian avid feminist. That's the stereotype that I think they talk about when they talk about feminism

Eli distinguishes between a version of feminism that he and other members of the society seem eager to distance themselves from, as well as a form of feminism that appears less threatening called 'equalism'. It is notable that Eli claims to 'have sort of made it up' since the term 'equalist' is well-known and argued to come from a belief that feminism is 'at odds with equality' since it focuses primarily on the rights of women, in name at least (Crofts and Coffey, 2017: 509). In this extract, Eli initially appears to align himself with the term 'equalist' through his ownership of the term, however, there is some slippage as he appears to comment on others' use of it rather than his own, making it unclear as to whether he is identifying with this idea or attributing this perspective to others. Either way, there is a suggestion that the term 'equalist' is perceived as a more palatable version of feminism both at his school. Eli's discussion of the number of ways that feminism can go 'too far', his references to positive discrimination, the film *Wonder Woman* and popular feminist phrases including verbs including 'smash' and 'lead' seeming to promote 'females being better' suggest that a feminism that promotes ideas of women's superiority and dominance is perceived as negative '(getting a bad name'). This is linked to the popular social media site Tumblr and the imagined figure of the 'Tumblr user' who embodies these aspects of feminism, suggesting how much of these associations with feminism are learnt in online spaces. Whilst anti-feminism or online misogyny aren't mentioned by Eli, these comments echo Vickery and Everbach's (2018) research into 'mediated misogyny' which is 'centered around […] resentment of feminism specifically' (Wilkinson 2016 in Ringrose, 2018: 653) as Eli references a specific disdain for a certain type of feminist on online platforms. However, rather than a straight-forward resistance to feminism, Eli goes onto polarize feminism into two camps;

Hanna: You mentioned that sometimes people outside the group say Feminazi

Eli: Yeah again that's like the whole positive discrimination thing with taking feminism too far

Hanna: And do they think that you guys are doing that in the feminism group?

Eli: They don't think that but they joke about it

Hanna: Right… ok

Eli: And I think it's not just us but feminism in general that does that

Hanna: And what do you think about that?

Eli: I think there are people who take it too far and that can perpetuate the stereotype but at the same time the majority of feminists do want everything to be equal – equalist (laughs)

Here, Eli positions both the stereotypical feminist who takes it 'too far' against those who just want everything to be 'equal'. Echoes of Edley and Wetherell (2001) 'Jekyll and Hyde' trait are evident here, as well as strains of anti-feminism through the rejection of the feminist who does not conform to the gendered or sexual expectations of a patriarchal and heteronormative society and the particular use of the pejorative portmanteau 'feminazi'. This particular term has been linked to online Men's' Rights Activist (MRA) groups (Ging: 2017) as well as Banet Weiser's (2018) research into the rise of popular misogyny and points towards the imaginary figure of a fascist-feminist. However, Eli's position towards this word is less clear as he initially emphases the 'joke' elements of this but then states that his peers do think that feminists are taking it too far. This form of jokiness has been explored by scholars to be a form of group socialisation technique that is connecting but also excludes those who don't adhere to the same form of masculinity (Kehily and Nayak, 1997; Ringrose and Renold, 2010; Jackson, 2006; Bragg et al, 2022). As Hearn (2012) and Bragg et al (2022) argue, these include men and boys performing misogyny and homophobia for one another in so called jokey terms. The moves Eli makes between claims of coming up with the term 'equalist', stating that some feminists go 'too far', arguing that these are only jokes, as well as more seriously suggesting that most feminists just want equality, suggests that feminism remains a risky identification in this context. The 'rhetorical flexibility' (Edley and Wetherwell: 452) the term equalism enables allows one to be critical of feminism and simultaneously in support of it, which is echoed in Eli's comments here.

The two feminism society leaders at Regency also position themselves in relation to the signifier feminism in ways that suggest the complexity of negotiating this term in this hegemonically masculine environment, however, in this setting they discuss their peers' discomfort with the term rather than their own;

Percy: I think for me, the word in itself means very little. It's not like I came across the word feminist and thought that describes me. It's the word we use to describe the movement and in as much as I agree with the movement, it's the word I want to use. If it had a different name, then I would call myself that name. It irritates me that… it just genuinely is the case that the people who say I support equal rights and that feminism is not about gender equality are the same people who are not doing very much – it just seems to be the correlation. It's just not really – it might sound trite – but it's not really something I worry about.

Percy's comments about the boys in his school who distinguish between equal rights and feminism echo the points made by Eli at Key Boys' about what happens in relation to a perceived split between 'equalism' and 'feminism'. However, Percy expresses frustration at the way that this differentiation between feminism and equal rights is made by the boys who appear least invested in advancing gender equality. His claim that the word feminism means 'very little' and isn't 'something I worry about' is complicated by the apparent care he exhibits about the emphasis that his peers place on the word. It might be that Percy's points about 'not caring' work in resistance to the seemingly frustrating emphasis placed on the word by other boys, as well as being an example of Percy submitting to the pressure not to appear to care 'too much'.

The particular use of the word 'equalist' was also discussed by Humphrey when he brought up his irritation with some of the boys' replacement of the word feminist:

Humphrey: I mean I think there's a silly conversation that goes on a lot which goes something along the lines of 'I'm an equalist but I'm not a feminist' and we say 'well they're the same' and they say 'no it's not it's in the name that it prefers women' and we say 'well

do you think that maybe the problems facing women are greater than the problems facing men?'

Humphrey's frustration with the ongoing argument he claims to repeatedly have around the differences between feminism and equality is evident here and he sounds rehearsed in his counter argument to these boys as he references phrases and questions he uses in response. The way that Humphrey reels off the list of responses he uses suggests a familiarity with this argument, perhaps not only at school but also in online spaces, as well as frustration with the repetition of it and, what can be assumed to be, a lack of progression around his peers' defences against feminism. The contentiousness of the word feminism is also related by Percy to being anti-equality, a point that was elaborated on when Percy began discussing the name of the society:

Percy: We could call it the Gender Equality Society but we'd do the same thing. And at the moment, to some extent, the term 'gender equality' is almost as toxic as the word feminist – because if you say feminist what you're saying is that you want women to rule over men but if you say gender equality then you're saying that all those people who say feminist aren't really feminist so… you know...

These comments again echo Eli from Key School in their invocation of the idea that the word feminism has associations with threatening ideas of female power whereas 'gender equality' dilutes this. Here, however, Percy takes this further as he describes even the term 'gender equality' as 'toxic' since the debates around the word feminism not referring to equality set them in a bind in which to use the term 'gender equality' indicates a belief that this isn't what feminism refers to. The use of the word 'toxic' is notable in its twist on the term's association with masculinity; toxic masculinity being understood to be associated with, amongst other aspects such as violence, the 'devaluation of women' (Elliot, 2018: 19). This links to the issues caused for the boys at Regency because of the word feminism's connotations with the feminine, rather than equality's association with everyone. A sense of how trapped they are in these conversations in which feminism has to be defended is emphasised further when Percy alludes to the difficulty of these discussions:

Percy: It's a sticky point

Humphrey: It's a silly sticking point – and so in the society we had a conversation… I don't think we even considered calling it the Gender Equality Society because it's the name of the set of beliefs we adhere to so… it's just one of those things- yes women are equal to men

The use of the word ''sticky' in relation to these arguments accentuates further the ways that the conversations around this issue get 'stuck' in a loop and are unable to move forward, much as Matt describes in his one-to-one interview. Whilst Humphrey's reference to a discussion in the feminism society around the name of the society suggests an attempt to conclusively end this debate, the frustration that is indicated in this section of data suggests that these discussions are not entirely finalised for these two boys as they appear to be continually questioned over the use of the word feminist.

The discussions with Percy and Humphrey at Regency School for Boys indicate that, whilst boys align themselves with feminism, they have to defend its meaning to ensure it doesn't take them too far away from hegemonic ideas of masculinity in their school. Whilst these participants run a well-attended feminism society, they appear trapped in repeated defences of their use of the term feminist. The discussions they describe between boys at their school around issues of feminism and equality are suggestive of a privileged environment in which there is space for interrogations into what feminism means, however, Percy and Humphrey spend much of their time defending their identification with feminism to their peers and emphasising their interest in a diluted equality-focused movement.

Whilst the boys from the feminism societies at both Key Boys' and Regency School discuss the term equalism and gender equality, they have differing investments in this term. At Key Boys', efforts are made to dilute feminism's impact through identifications with 'equalism' and a binary positioning is formed between so called extreme and moderate feminists, whilst at Regency it is the persistent questioning of the term feminism for their peers that forms a decisive action from the society leaders to stick to the term 'feminism' rather than 'gender equality'. However, the version of feminism that they must subscribe to within their school is a classically liberal feminist one in which a loose notion of equality is the eventual

goal. Whilst there are discontinuities between the two settings, identification with feminism appears to pose risks across both Key and Regency schols and I therefore interpret the boys' feminist subjectivities as constituted through their defences against the anxiety of full feminist identification.

6.6. Conclusion to Feminist Boys

Through this chapter, I have interpreted how boys from Key and Regency schools who take part in feminism societies navigate feminisms in relation to expectations of elite masculinity. Four specific aspects of this were drawn from the data to explore how the participants in each school experienced expectations of hegemonic masculinity within their school, and these were drawn upon to explore how they constituted the participants' navigation and constitutions of feminism.

Discussions of lad culture, sporting/gym performance and effortless success in the two schools highlight the forms of idealised masculinity as constructed in each school culture which I argue the participants constitute their feminist subjectivities in relation to, suggesting that in Key Boys a form of hybrid masculinity is presented as the feminism group aims to distance itself from hegemonic masculinities, whilst at Regency more direct critiques of their schools' production of sporting ability and effortlessness are made. Heteronormativity appears constitutive of the participants' feminist subjectivities in both school contexts in that it forms a part of the Regency boys' feminist critique of their single sex school where girls are positioned as other, whereas at Key Boys their feminist subjectivities are constituted through aligning their feminism society with heterosexual tropes to avoid associations with the queer or feminine. Across both Key and Regency schools, hegemonic forms of masculinity emphasise academic theory, competitive debate, and the use of hard statistics, and these are constitutive of the participants' feminist subjectivities as, at Key Boys, feminism is constituted as academic and combative and therefore acceptably masculine within their elite school, whilst At Regency Boys, Matt makes use of these same hegemonically masculine methods to convince other boys to identify with feminism. The signifier feminism and the risks involved with identifying with this term is discussed in both schools in relation to the terms equalism and gender equality.

Identifications with ‘equalism’ are made at Key Boys to dilute the risk of identifications with feminism, whilst at Regency the participants are frustrated by their peers’ issue with the word whilst simultaneously subscribing to a more palatable form of liberal feminism.

I have analysed the constructions of elite masculinity across each school, and connected this to the participants’ positioning towards feminism and their feminism society. These interpretations suggest that, despite their efforts, the boys in both schools find it difficult to take up both a feminist *and* appropriately masculine position within these contexts, even at Key School which aims to present itself as progressive. I argue that the participants constitute their feminist subjectivities through defensive and distancing moves that continually centre the hegemonic form of masculinity within each school.

Chapter 7: Feminist girls – and me: Constituting feminisms – and anxieties- in relation to femininities and sexuality

7.1. Introduction

This chapter explores how a group of girls taking part in a feminism club use a research encounter to constitute feminism in relation to femininities and sexuality, as well as my reflexive responses to this group discussion. In what follows, I work with two perspectives on the same short section of data. Through this, I hope to account for the participants' and my own responses to topics of sexuality and feminism as raised in a section of the focus group.

The focus is on an excerpt from a longer group interview I conducted with five teenage girls from Dance School, a selective inner-city fee-paying school that emphasises the students' dance education as a part of their curriculum. These girls are (pseudo)named Molly, Fay, Vix, Becky and Sal, are white, cis-gendered and middle class, and were in Year 10 and 11 at the time of interview (15-16 years old). They had taken part in a Feminism Club that I had set up with them the year before the interview took place when I was a teacher at the school and all of the girls had been regular attendees of the group.

In this first approach to this section of data, I draw on Butler's reading of melancholia, as well as other feminist scholar's readings including McRobbie (2008) and Egan (2013), to argue that the participants' discussion suggests a heterosexualised-feminist melancholia in which the girls experience a sense of loss around the promise of feminism. The intersection of the participants' feminist consciousness and its positive effects on their lives, alongside a continued sense of disempowerment around their heterosexual encounters appears to form feelings of loss. I argue that this lost object of their feminism is two-fold in that it is the loss of an idealized image of feminism as an omnipotent tool to make things better, as well as a loss of the possibility of a pleasurable feminist sexual experience since they can see the promise of feminism's gains on their lives, but are unable to bring this to their sexual encounters.

The second approach explores the complexities of my own role in this particular research encounter as an ex-teacher in the school the participants attend, a previous feminist mentor to them in the feminism club, and a current researcher. I explore this through reflexively engaging with my own fieldnotes taken soon after the focus group which attend to my own shifting subjective experience, with particular attention placed on my experience of anxiety in this exchange. Rather than getting caught up the somewhat reductionist binary of insider/outsider debates (Miles and Crush, 1993), I instead understand my position as a fluid construction within this research since it is experienced as multifaceted by the research participants and myself. Dyck (1997) states, 'the researcher may represent, for instance, relations of oppression, the 'expert' knowledge of an academic institution, a woman with children with some common interests, or a person with whom concerns can be talked about in a safe environment' (198 in Damaris Rose, 2001: 26), and I aim to recognize that I held many positions in this one focus group meeting which shifted slightly depending on the focus of the discussion. This approach draws on literature into the use of reflexivity in qualitative research through attending to the researchers' feelings and experience providing a way of, as Elliot, Ryan and Holway (2012) put it, 'listening to oneself, of not closing down, of staying engaged with feelings in relation to self and other' (442), as well as Page's (2017) conceptualisation of vulnerability as feminist methodological practice to be receptive to what I am unable to know about these participants, myself and the research encounter. I use my fieldnotes and more recent memories of the research encounter to pay attention not only to the participants, but also to what I experienced in terms of anxious experiences of discomfort (and their occasional release) as a way to understand these contradictory positions within the co-construction of this data.

Across both interpretive approaches, I draw on some key terms as set out in the interpretive framework. The notion of melancholia is central as discussed by Freud (2017) who used this to distinguish between forms of grief through mourning in which the attachment of the ego to the lost object of its desire is effectively severed, and forms of grief in which the subject is unable to take on further objects of desire because the loss becomes connected to self-hatred (Hey, 2006: 302). In Butler's re-reading of this theory in *The Psychic Life of Power* (1997), she argues that heterosexual gendered identifications are produced through this melancholy, since they rest upon the heteronormative disavowal of same-gender sexual

desire producing a sense of 'the loss that could have been' (Jimenez and Walkerdine, 2011: 188) that is often denied in wider culture. Butler argues that this heteronormative sexuality forms the distinction between masculinity and femininity in terms of the expectation of what one can be and what one can have; i.e: a girl ought to be the feminine and be desired by the masculine whilst a boy is meant to be the masculine and desire the feminine (Jimenez and Walkerdine, 2011). The ways in which the participants in the focus group articulate feelings of loss are traced in relation to feminism and connected to expectations of acceptable feminine sexuality in particular. I also continue to draw from Benjamin's (1998; 2004) concepts of intersubjectivity and 'do-er and done to'(2004, 10), as discussed in the interpretive framework to consider the participants' articulations of what hurts and confuses them about their responses during heterosexual encounters, as well as what brings them to a sense of a feminist impasse. I also use this theory to reflexively interpret the ways that I lapse into and feel challenged by the mode of the 'do-er' in the various roles I take up in this research encounter as researcher, feminist mentor and ex-teacher.

A methodological note on the choice of data in this chapter

Instead of using a coding scheme to choose which section of data to analyse here, I draw from Maclure (2013) who argues for a methodological approach that encourages consideration of what in the data creates a sense of 'fascination or exhilaration . . . incipience, suspense or intensity' (Maclure, 2013: 169, 173 in Ringrose and Renold, 2014: 773). I chose the particular section of data that this chapter analyzes because of the relation I have with it, as well as the complexity of interpretations it provokes. I presented this section of data at a conference partly because it both fascinated and concerned me, and I didn't know where it 'fit' with the other aspects of feminism group data this research study explores, which are outlined in the first analysis chapter. This fragment of the focus group discussion is partly discomforting to me because it can be interpreted as an example of how hopeless aspects of patriarchal culture in relation to sexuality and agency feel for young women, even those in privileged positions in that these girls are all white, middle-class, and technically 'empowered' by feminism (Banet-Weiser, 2018). My discomfort is also provoked by the ways that I am involved with this particular part of the research and the significance

of my own fieldnotes for this encounter, as this raises questions for what counts as data and how we might interpret data that involves us in different ways[7]. I aim to emphasize the importance of working with the more discomforting accounts from this research, those incidents that 'have troubled us and in which we remain implicated' (Youdell and Armstrong, 2011: 145). I therefore aim, in Haraway's (2016) words, to 'stay with the trouble' in this final analysis chapter, not only in relation to what the participants express but also to my own position as explored in the fieldnotes taken soon after the focus group interviews.

7.2. Section of Data from Dance Academy focus group interview:

Whilst my experiences of the potentiality and complexities of running this group when working as a teacher in the school are explored in the second section of this chapter, in what follows I briefly outline the context of this section of the focus group.

This feminism club was set up during the time I worked as a Teacher of English at the Dance School. This was initially as part of the 2014-15 Feminism in Schools project as discussed in the introductory chapter, but the group developed and lasted beyond that becoming an important part of my and the participants' school week. The feminism club would run during either a lunchtime or after school when we would meet in the school's very small library where there was a single round table that we would all cram around, and discuss either a topic one of the students raised or begin with a prompt I would bring to the session; for instance, an article or video clip related to a recent event related to feminism. I took an active role in the group, attending each meeting and providing elements of focus and structure to the group when needed. After facilitating this feminism group for a year, I left my role at the Dance School to take a new job, remaining in intermittent touch with the feminist club members. A colleague of mine from the Dance School's English department offered to support the group where she could but also made clear that the club would have to continue without a teacher's weekly input. I visited the group in an informal capacity a few months after leaving the school, as well as meeting them at a few 'feminism in schools' events, however, the challenges faced by the club were only articulated to me when I

[7] These questions are further explored in the methodology chapter.

returned to meet the group for this research meeting just over a year after having left for my new role. At the beginning of the focus group, the girls discussed the challenges of maintaining the groups' momentum without a teachers' support, particularly when exams were taking over much of their time.

The section of data this chapter focuses on came out of a wider discussion about the pressures the participants had felt to send nudes to boys and their understandings of how this linked to Mulvey's (1975) notion of the 'male gaze', a topic we'd discussed the year before in a feminism club meeting. Fay's first comment in the section below was made in response to one about there being little discussion of girl and women's pleasure and so much emphasis on boys' and men's desire:

(Note: whilst there were five participants in the focus group, only three participants speak in this section)

Fay: Friends will always ask 'did he come?". It's never 'did you?'. You talk to so many girls of 16 or 17 and they'll always say 'he wasn't doing it right' but they'll never really say because they wouldn't want to like make it awkward and they don't feel like they have the right to say…

Hanna: Right, well we're also doing a disservice to boys by not teaching them about girls' bodies. They're learning from porn

Fay: Yeah and they are rubbish! They're always like 0 to 100 – that's from porn, whereas a girl will be like 'take it slow, do this and this' and they're just straight to the end of the spectrum of everything.

Hanna: And we have to counteract this because it is quite new that young people are learning about sex from these really hard-core videos which aren't real at all.

Fay: But you can see… girls say 'oh he was really rough'. Older girls or girls your age are the only ones who have done it and they say it hurts loads.

Hanna: You do all know now it's not meant to hurt?

Vix: It's not meant to? Why does everyone say it does?

Hanna: Are you talking about the first time you have sex?

Vix: Yeah

Hanna: Ah ok well that might hurt a little bit but after that it shouldn't hurt

Vix: Everyone's like 'oh it hurts'

Fay: Yeah and getting fingered

Vix: Yeah!

Molly: That hurts so much

Hanna: That is not meant to hurt

Vix: If the guy knows what he's doing then it shouldn't hurt

Fay: But because of porn they do it badly

Molly: It's really sad that some of the girls I know – there's one, she's 17 – and she's had a couple of boyfriends and the first one, he was really rough with her and he made her bleed and she cried and he took it as a good sign!

Fay: They weren't even having sex

Molly: That was him fingering her. She cried.

Fay: the first time they did anything he was like smacking her and pulling her hair and didn't ask her anything- just told her to take her clothes off

Molly: I saw her recently and she was like 'in retrospect he was an absolute shit' but it's sad that she has to get onto the new one to realise that it wasn't normal. She thought that was what was meant to happen

Fay: He's had three girlfriends and none of them had thought 'I should tell him I don't want to be smacked'

Vix: I'd tell him

Fay: But I find this, it's like the body positive thing – chill, you can get over that. But the next thing is bleeeeeeeugh! I can't say anything or critique what a boy is doing. I find it harder than the body stuff – I cracked that – but now I feel like being in a sexual environment with boys, much less empowered than I do about my body. In a weird way I know that if I was advising someone else I'd be like 'tell him this and this and this and this' but then I never put it into practice.

7.3. Melancholic negotiations of sexuality and feminism in a feminism club research encounter

The analysis that follows centres on the participants' discussion of the tensions they feel around what they have gained from engaging with feminism and their experience of heterosexual encounters. I argue that the dissonance between their feminist consciousness and their simultaneous sense of sexual disempowerment produces what I term a heterosexualised-feminist melancholia.

As explored in the interpretive framework chapter, according to Freud's conception of melancholia, it comprises of an ambivalence coming from a conflicted state in which

feelings of, for instance 'love and hate, attraction and repulsion, or compassion and repugnance toward the other (Freud, 1917 in Egan, 2013: 270). Melancholia's particular complexity lies in the fact that the lost object is both hated and loved at the same time, and this ambivalence makes the capacity to mourn and move on much more difficult, 'until what is left is melancholic longing as a defence against the undercurrents of anger and rage' (Egan, 2013: 270). This is difficult to acknowledge meaning that the lost object becomes internalized but unresolved, and is therefore associated with a sense of frustration and even revulsion with the self (Lapping, 2019). The participants' experiences of sexuality as narrated in this extract can be understood to form this conflicted state. The girls' engagement with feminism means they are able to question systemic feminist issues around sexual violence and rape culture; however, they appear unable to bring this feminist awareness to their heterosexual encounters. An ambivalence is constituted between their attachment to feminism's promise of empowerment and its failure to protect them in their painful heterosexual encounters, arguably forming a melancholic longing for an idealized feminism that would empower them everywhere, including in their heterosexual encounters. Here the lost object appears to be feminism itself, however, as other aspects of the analysis suggest, other lost objects can be traced including that of a feminist sexual subjectivity. These are two distinct forms of loss, however, as I'll discuss, these also intersect. The analysis will also discuss how theories of intersubjectivity can support an interpretation of the ways in which the participants' frustration, lack of clarity and longing is brought into the research space in which the girls question and make statements about their understanding of sexual encounters.

In the early comments made by Fay, an expectation for girls to talk about boys' sexual pleasure rather than their own is described, as well as girls' silence around boys' lack of physical sensitivity to their pleasure;

Fay: Friends will always ask 'did he come?". It's never 'did you?'. You talk to so many girls of 16 or 17 and they'll always say 'he wasn't doing it right' but they'll never really say because they wouldn't want to like make it awkward and they don't feel like they have the right to say.

Fay's comments are suggestive of sexual norms in which not only is boys' pleasure prioritized but girls' experience of pain goes unspoken. Tolman (2005) writes that adolescent girls are 'socialized' to 'take up these norms- not being disruptive, not inciting or engaging in conflict, meeting the needs of others at the expense of their own' (54), and it appears to be this that Fay refers to here; a repeated script in which girls are compelled to remain quiet, even when in pain, in order to protect boys' feelings and ensure the encounter isn't 'awkward' because they don't feel it is their 'right' to voice their own desires. The question itself 'did he come?' felt surprising since it's supposedly women's orgasm that is harder to achieve, however, Fay's recounting of the question draws attention to her point about the collective concern for boys' satisfaction, and a disregard for girls' pleasure. The loss depicted here appears to be that of a sense of agentic or feminist sexual subjectivity, that can be argued to have an intensified inflection due to their engagement with feminism at school since it is this that has highlighted this impossibility. This links to the loss of an idealized feminism in that there is a suggestion that feminism held promise to offer this too, but that this is where it reaches its limit. However, rather than state she has experienced this herself, Fay references 'friends' and 'girls' who have spoken to her, separating the issue of her own experience out whilst simultaneously stressing its commonality. Fay's juxtaposition between 'always' and 'never' suggests a permanence about both boys' entitlement to pleasure and girls' denial of theirs. Whilst this is attributed to her friends, it can be understood as a displacement of her own sense of loss, as well as suggesting a sense of ambivalence about understanding these sexual double standards and not knowing how to change them.

Perhaps as a way of dealing with some of my own discomfort around the comments Fay makes about her friends' sexuality, I draw the topic outwards to wider issues of curriculum and pornography by commenting on the lack of adequate sexuality education, and the ways I perceive pornography to fill these gaps in formal education. Fay's response, rather than continuing to move the topic outside of her own experience, more directly states that boys are 'rubbish' in sexual encounters, attributing their speed and ignoring of any directions from the girl they're with to what they see in porn. Whilst I then continue with the same point around filling in the curriculum so it counteracts pornography, Fay again references

what friends have said to her, this time discussing a more explicit violence in relation to boys causing pain; the girls' silence within these encounters having been suggested in Fay's earlier comments. Again, the language suggests a permanence in the word 'always' that indicates her sense of an inability to affect change around this, suggesting what appears to be a painful sense of incapacity for someone for whom feminism has otherwise offered so much.

Whilst Fay doesn't mention her school in these comments, other moments of the longer focus group interview implicate the school in the production of these pleasing forms of forms of femininity. The institution aims to protect the girls' imagined innocence to maintain a form of demure femininity. Dobson (2014) argues that these sexualization panics split girls into binaries in which white middle class girls require preserving from being 'corrupted' (100), and in this case the school is depicted to be concerned with protecting the girls from forces. The school can therefore be argued to be a part of the girls' constitution of their sexuality, but also as providing no formal means through which to discuss this; something I was keenly aware of having previously worked at the school as a teacher. This made me concerned that the ideas expressed here might produce a melancholic sense that there is no alternative to a culture of girls' silence in sexual encounters, particularly since the feminism club had disbanded so even the informal space for these discussions was closed. In an attempt to puncture this seemingly accepted truth, I comment that it 'it's not meant to hurt'. There is some suggestion that this may have provided a brief lifting from these beliefs about the inevitability of pain during sex when Vix remarks 'It's not meant to? Why does everyone say it does?' as she appears to be questioning what has so far been a single narrative around what has been presented as an inevitability. However, it seems that there is no easy freeing from these ideas which seem to become further entrenched as Fay, Vix and Molly all agree on a seemingly accepted fact that particular sexual practices involve pain since 'everyone' says it.

The discussion moves between Vix and I at a quick rate in which we work out what might and should not hurt within a sexual encounter, as both the expectation and experience of pain is expressed by Molly, Vix and Fay. The second time I say 'that is not meant to hurt', both Vix and Fay make small steps to de-normalize these expectations of pain as Vix says 'If

the guy knows what he's doing then it shouldn't hurt' and Fay says that 'because of porn they do it badly'. This appears to signal a small disruption to the melancholic narratives of expected pain here as Vix directly says that it shouldn't be painful and Fay begins to deconstruct the reasons why boys might be causing this pain, and this catalyses a narrative around an unknown girl unable to speak up against the violence being done to her. The words used to depict the violence this unknown oppressed girl underwent, as well as her response to it, depict her bleeding, crying, being smacked, having her hair pulled, being forcibly told what to do and thinking that all of this was normal, before a final disclosure from Fay that this has also happened to the other girlfriends of this boy who also didn't feel able to speak up and resist him. This is mirrored by this figure's silence in the focus group space since she is not there to speak and is only spoken for. Tolman writes of the 'appropriately 'silent' body (Tolman, 2005: 60) of middle-class femininity and it is this that the participants clearly conjure in this figure, as well as in the silent figures of the other 'girlfriends', however, what this narrative does to the research space is more complex. This story appears melancholic in that the girls who are referenced didn't know how to speak up against the violence they underwent and the possibility of recuperation seems so impossible, making the lost object that of a feminist sexual subjectivity. However, what is also suggested here is a sense of an impasse; that this girl appears only, in Benjamin's terms, to be 'done to' (2004: 9). However, as Vix engages with this story she imagines herself speaking up against these acts, 'I'd tell him'; perhaps a fleeting lifting from this melancholy as she imagines her own feminist agentic capability to resist. This imagining, in which an 'other' girl is suddenly related to Vix herself, appears to open the possibility for Fay to speak from a more personal perspective as she then states;

Fay: But I find this, it's like the body positive thing – chill, you can get over that. But the next thing is bleeeeeeeugh! I can't say anything or critique what a boy is doing. I find it harder than the body stuff – I cracked that – but now I feel like being in a sexual environment with boys, much less empowered than I do about my body. In a weird way I know that if I was advising someone else I'd be like 'tell him this and this and this and this' but then I never put it into practice.

Both Berlant (2011) and Cvetkovich (2012) are interested in re-thinking psychoanalytic modes of thought, by imbuing them with what Cvetkovich terms 'the cultural politics of everyday life' (3) in order to reconsider negative feelings including those associated with melancholia, as socially informed. This work aims to de-pathologize these experiences, not to reconvert them into something more positive, but to conceptualise them as potential agentic forms of community formation. Berlant's understanding of the experience of impasse, as elaborated on by Cvetkovich, is relevant here as impasse can be understood to be an aspect of melancholia. Berlant writes that an impasse 'is a holding station that doesn't hold but opens out into anxiety' (37 in Cvetkovich: 21) and has the effect of slowing one which can cause the feeling of depression in that one feels stuck, closed down and without the ability to move (on?). As a concept then, impasse suggests to the subject that things will not change, forming a melancholic condition in which it feels like 'the world is not designed to make it happen' (Cvetkovich, 20-21). In her lines above, Fay appears to accept that, whilst she feels powerful in relation to many feminist issues including her confidence about her body, to directly 'critique what a boy is doing' during a sexual encounter is 'too hard'. The the lost object of empowered feminist sexuality is articulated here through this sense of impasse. An impossibility is suggested here as Fay seems stuck in what sounds like a hopeless position; having managed to change aspects of her life through feminism but feeling that this important hurdle cannot be overcome. The story just told of the 'silent girl' who is only 'done to' (Benjamin, 2004: 9) is conjured as a possible present or future, as this other-ed experience suddenly appears embodied in Fay herself. Bernardez (1988) comments on how society's 'prohibitions on powerful embodied feelings in women' work to 'prevent rebellious acts' resulting in them feeling 'complicit in their own misery' (in Tolman, 2005: 115), a point that supports this reading of melancholia as Fay suggests that her inability to speak up to boys and engage her agency in heterosexual encounters leaves her feeling lacking as a feminist resulting in, perhaps, some sense of self-reviling.

However, it can also be argued that Fay's capacity to articulate the ambivalence and complexity of this also this points to the potential of the feminist focus group space in acting as a container for this melancholia to be spoken and worked with. The political effects of the group space intersect with the melancholic currents of the group as the dynamic of the familiar feminism club/research encounter makes room for Fay's meander into territories in

which she feels able to admit feelings of hopelessness, and to talk these through. In these moments, the feminist focus group space appears to enable intersubjective connections in which the participants relate to one another and are recognized as 'like subjects' (Benjamin, 2004: 5).

Throughout this section I have proposed that the participants' simultaneous engagement with feminism and sense of a loss around its failed promise of an agentic sexual subjectivity appears to form a painful ambivalence and longing. I argue that this is constituted in the space between their engagement with feminism and their and their peers' confusing and painful experiences with boys, forming a melancholic longing for a feminism that could be utilized in these aspects of their life and, perhaps within this, for an agentic sense of sexual subjectivity. The lost object can therefore be traced to both the idealized notion of feminism they held, as well as the possibility of a feminist sexual experience. Their experiences of hetero-sexualised violence leave the participants at an impasse about how to feel empowered in these sexual encounters. However, whilst the focus group doesn't resolve their questions, I propose that the space of the feminism club encounter offers a significant container for the participants to vocalize feelings of confusion, ask questions and find moments of intersubjective connection in a space with their peers and a facilitating adult.

7.4. Reflexive Anxieties: navigating my contradictory positions as teacher- facilitator-confidante-researcher

This second perspective on this extract of data responds to the question of how, as a self-defining feminist researcher who also holds various conflicting positions within this research encounter, I negotiate my relation with the participants, and my experience of anxiety in particular through this focus group discussion.

Elliot, Ryan and Hollway (2011) discuss the ways that it is widely accepted in qualitative research that one attempts to avoid causing their interviewees anxiety, and make a case for staying with one's own anxieties as a researcher and exploring these. However, telling stories about what can feel like messy and problematic aspects of research practice is

uncomfortable since it exposes feelings of failure and the aspects of research which may appear 'petty, unprofessional and self-interested' (435). Despite this discomfort, I aim to trace my subjective sense of anxiety in the interchange between myself and the participants of this interview to give an account of myself within this research encounter. This is partly as a way to remain, as Elliot et al (2011) state 'engaged with feelings in relation to self and other' (442), as well as to remain receptive to what I am unable to know or understand about a research encounter (Page, 2017). Since my account is 'partial, provisional and open to question' (Butler, 2005 in Elliot et al, 2011: 434), I aim to go beyond only confessing to my anxieties and positionings, but to question and trouble my own reflexive practices.

I focus here on recollections and fieldnotes as a way in to recorded subjective feelings and responses to the interview which may have otherwise been disregarded (Eliot, Ryan and Hollway, 2011), particularly those that I would rather have edited out, including my experience of discomfort in relation to what I did and didn't say or do within the focus group interview. These acts of reflexivity also involve attending to my embodied responses to particular moments in the interview in which, for example, I experienced a simultaneous hope that participants would speak in a free-flowing way, as well as a palpable anxiety around what the participants might disclose. Attention to the affective tenor of my field notes also points towards the sense of release I experienced at the end of this section of the interview when a comment by a participant marks a shift in my sense of comfort. I also attend to moments of slippage which, in Benjamin's (1998; 2004) terms of 'do-er and done-to', I notice myself enacting modes of mastery and knowing (do-er) that position the participants as 'done to'. l also draw on Benjamin's notion of intersubjectivity to discuss when I understand moments of intersubjective recognition between the participants to be found.

As the methodology discusses, fieldnotes can hold an illusory nature of offering up the truth of an account, however, scholars have questioned this and argued that they are full of subjectivity and the desires of the researcher (Jones et al, 2010; Emerson et al, 2011). I therefore don't analyse these fieldnotes as a way to further access truth, but to explore my shifting positions and responses within this particular research encounter. This enables me to attend to the feminist epistemological position in which I situate myself in which I can

admit to moments in which I didn't know how to respond, and stay with what unsettles me (Page, 2017).

Overall, this section aims to consider the complex experience of conflating my role as an ex-feminist club facilitator and a current PhD researcher through exploring the anxieties and un-knowings I experienced through analysis of the data, my memories of the interview and the field notes.

- **Some (further) context**

The experience of running a feminism group whilst a teacher at the Dance School was complex. On the one hand, the work of facilitating a space for teenagers interested in feminism was immensely gratifying. The attendees looked to me and their peers for education and advice on issues missing from their biologically and risk-focused sex and relationships education, and I observed the space being used to discuss issues related to gender and sexuality that might otherwise have not been spoken. It also appeared that, in the footsteps of second wave consciousness raising groups, the attendees of the feminism club began to understand 'personal' issues through the lens of the political. There was an enlivening sense that the group members were eager to attend, to learn about feminism from one another, and to enact various modes of on and offline activism (Retallack et al, 2016).

On the other hand, however, my informal role as facilitator for this group directly compromised my position as a teacher at the school. The head teacher openly disapproved of the feminism club; taking down posters made by the girls promoting their feminist ideas stating that feminism did 'not have a place within Dance Academy'. After much rumination, the head teacher decided that the group would be allowed to continue operating on the agreement that we called it 'equality club' and remained quiet about our meetings and activism. The group continued in this way for a year, meeting once a week and sneaking through bits of in-school activism, for instance, in the form of a feminist assembly that the girls framed around 'bullying' but was really organised to tackle issues of slut-shaming at the

school. As much as I and the feminist club members were passionate about this work, it placed us all in a difficult position in which the more we spoke out, the more we felt the disapproval of those at the top of the school and the more the club was supressed.

This recorded group interview began with a discussion of how the group has almost completely disbanded over the course of the year. This was the final year at the school for those taking part in the focus group, meaning they had faced exam revision schedules that overtook many other activities. One of the girls, Molly (15) described this as being a key obstacle since they 'couldn't find the time' to meet anymore, however, Fay (16) put the group's lack of contact down to the fact that the teachers 'took our posters down' and that that they weren't able to have the meetings at lunchtime because they weren't granted a pass to 'to go the front of the lunch queue'. Molly further explained that the head of the catering staff, who was in charge of who was given their school-lunch first, told her that they don't 'need feminism' 'because women already have equality' and that she was able to block their ability to have feminism club meetings because if they couldn't get an early lunch then they lost out on the time to meet. The combination of exams as well as a lack of teacher and school-staff support had clearly affected the group's capacity to keep going. However, the girls also discussed the two teachers who were in support of feminism and showed this through bringing texts into the curriculum such as the short non-fiction book *We Should All Be Feminists* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adiche. This had not been easy though as Fay also described the subsequent backlash from the boys in these English lessons who believed texts like these to signal an attack on them.

7.4.1. Safeguarding anxieties

During this visit, I attempted to take up my role as researcher by going through the same formalities around informed consent for instance that I had with other groups taking part in this research, and taking out my audio recorder. However, as I conducted this focus group, it became increasingly clear that my previous role as the girls' feminism club facilitator had lasted beyond my official role meaning that my researcher role could not be fully established for the participants or for me. Throughout the meeting, the girls taking part in

the discussion would directly ask me questions on topics around intimacy, relationships, sexuality and gender, just as they had when we ran the club together meaning that this focus group felt more intimate and familiar than any of my other feminism group interviews. Another aspect that may have contributed to this sense of familiarity is that we held the discussion in the same small library space as we had previously run the feminist club each week, therefore the atmosphere and material space of the club almost exactly replicated within the focus group, despite it taking place over a year since I left the school and the fact that I was technically in a researcher capacity during this visit. However, whilst the choice to conduct the focus group in this space with the girls who were the core founders of the club wasn't considered by me at the time as a conscious attempt to imitate the dynamics of the group, the benefits of this are evident in that a fluid dialogue was encouraged that meant that the participants spoke with each other about topics, rather than waiting for my questions, as well as involving themselves in discussions about sensitive issues that could not have been broached in other focus groups. Therefore, when looking back at this 'accident', it appears that I had some awareness of the affordances of facilitating the interview in almost the same way I would a feminist club meeting and may have known what I was doing in arranging it this way.

The fact that the session was being recorded appeared to be quickly forgotten by the girls, whose comments, jokes and questions imitated dynamics of behaviour from the feminist club meetings. Due to the less formal atmosphere formed by this previous relationship to the girls, I interpreted the group as comfortable to move between topics outside of my direction as the facilitator of the group, therefore, issues were raised without my prompting and, when they were, these tended to be of a more personal nature than those discussed in interviews where I hadn't previously met the participants. In those interviews, I had asked questions without giving my opinion on the issues I raised (or being asked for it), however, in this focus group, I was an active part of the discussion throughout, brought on both by the understanding I had with these girls and because, when I facilitated the club, they regularly asked for my thoughts on the topics discussed. The use of the focus group enabled this similarity to the space of the feminist group we used to share since, as Goss and Leinbach (1996) argue, focus groups tend to offer participants the chance to speak personally from their own experiences and hear those of others. However, this discussion

of their interpretations of particular events, both with each other and with me, was both what I had hoped for but also came with more complexity than I had anticipated.

When I'd been the feminism club facilitator, potential disclosures made by the participants of the feminist club had posed dilemmas. The space was set up as one that would allow for the discussion of otherwise silenced topics around gender and sexuality, however this came with its 'topic threats', issues that are discomforting to discuss (Lee, 1993 in Hollway and Elliott, 2014: 63) and, as the term suggests, experienced as directly threatening, since these issues could threaten to breach what felt like the safe space of the feminist focus group. However, these also posed a sense of threat to the double role I held in the group at that time, both as a feminism club facilitator and as a teacher at the school. Any adult working within an education setting has a duty of care to protect the children and teenagers who attend, therefore, one 'threat' of certain topics existed in the possibility of a student disclosing something that I would be duty bound to pass on to a colleague as a 'safeguarding issue'. However, as sex education scholars have explored (Jackson et al, 2013; Duits and Van Zoonan, 2011; Egan and Hawkes, 2008; Kehily, 2012; Dobson, 2014), boundaries around what is understood to be appropriate for discussion and moral panics around white middle class girls' sexuality often result in cultures of protectionism that, through enshrinement in discourses of care, protection and duty for teachers, are difficult to dissect or challenge within school spaces.

In the time that I facilitated the feminism group, topics related to sexuality would be raised that were occasionally concerning from a safeguarding perspective since, for example, a girl might want to question and interrogate how she felt about a troubling or difficult situation around consent. However, on carefully weighing these moments up after the club meetings, the benefits of a space in which to better understand issues related to sexual agency seemed to outweigh the potential issues of me passing these issues onto the safeguarding officer who, in this school particularly, seemed likely to approach the situation with a heavy-handed approach that may have caused more distress than support for the girl involved. This could also have broken the space of the feminist club in which the girls felt they could consider these issues in an explorative and safe environment, a rare thing since, as Michelle Fine notes 'too few safe spaces exist for adolescent women's exploration of sexual subjectivities' (Fine in Tolman, 2005: 80). In my position, I did, however, have to inform the

girls from an early point that if there was a disclosure that made me concerned for their safety or welfare, I would have to refer this on. This appeared to form a sense of fragility to the moments when certain issues were raised as the girls would appear aware of avoiding anything that might be interpreted as a 'safeguarding' issues and I would listen to their experiences with some anxiety that they may say something that I would absolutely have to refer on. Whilst the research space is different, the ethics of harm are similar in that researchers have a duty of care to the participants and are expected to consider any potential risks in order to minimize these (BERA Ethical Guidelines 2018). This anxiety was replicated for me in the focus group exchange, in which issues of issues of sexuality and violence were raised by the participants and I felt tensed against the possibility of a testimony I would need to refer on as a safeguarding issue, potentially against the participants' will.

7.4.2. (Field) notes on anxiety

Here I centre on a section of the focus group in which my field notes signal particular concerns about the ethical implications of what I say, into wider questions about what the subsequent release of this anxiety might suggest about the challenges and potentialities of feminism group spaces and focus groups.

Early in this section of the data, Fay states the problem with her girlfriends asking whether boys climaxed but not asking whether girls did, as well as girls not feeling able to tell boys when they aren't pleasing them sexually as they don't feel they have the 'right' to say. Whilst Fay appears to be speaking from a personal perspective that includes herself and her friends, I, somewhat conversely, appear to be speaking from the perspective of a teacher/researcher who wants to consider these aspects more structurally:

Hanna: And we have to counteract this because it is quite new that young people are learning about sex from these really hard-core videos which aren't real at all.

My field notes comment on my discomfort on listening back to the transcript in that I refer to an abstract 'we' who are doing a disservice to boys and who must 'counter act this':

Field notes: *It sounds like I'm speaking to other teachers or to policy makers who might have the capacity to work on these issues at an educational level but I am speaking to a group of teenage girls! It seems off-key in tone as it's not within these girls' capacity to change this issue at that broad level. I wonder if I did this because when I was facilitating the feminism club last year, I'd make big points partly so that the girls bounce off them by being stimulated by that idea or opinion. I am also now wondering if it was a way of avoiding saying too much about myself or asking too many questions.*

These notes suggest that I was disturbed by the tone I took with the girls at the time, the process of listening back to the recording prompting me to feel awkward about the way I related to the girls as both adults, in that I address them as if they can change the issue at hand on a structural level, and as malleable in that I am purposelessly trying to keep the discussion generalized so that I don't have to talk about myself and prompt them to continue talking. This indicates the conflicted-ness of my position with these participants who I want to speak to as equals, support as teenage girls and simultaneously research as subjects. This seems to intersect with other circulating comments of the participants who may have been both wanting to say outraged feminist points as we used to in the club, and look to me for guidance. Reading these fieldnotes back, I am struck by an absence in both what I say to the girls and my reflections afterwards around my assumptions that boys most certainly 'learn' from pornography in a simplistic cause and effect form. Whilst I remain aware that much mainstream porn is misogynist, racist and highly abusive towards women in particular, the debate remains open as to whether this results in the consumers acting out on this violence (Johanssen, 2021), yet I speak to the participants as if entirely sure of the pedagogical nature of porn.

In the next moments of the interview, Fay comments on boys being 'really rough' and it 'hurting loads' and I replied *You do all know now it's not meant to hurt?* My field notes recall:

I felt this rush to tell the girls know that they shouldn't expect pain in sexual encounters with boys. Listening to the recording is strange because I sound assertive in the tone I took in the hope that would convince them, but in the moment I really wasn't sure at all whether this was the right thing to do since this felt like a moment of shift from me prompting discussion and furthering it in small ways to me steering their thinking in a particular way through what felt like a small piece of unplanned sex ed.

These notes emphasise this as a shift in the dynamic of the focus group as certain roles come together in a discomforting way: a conflation of my role as their previous feminist group facilitator, former teacher in their school and this new role as a researcher. The lack of preparation I had made for a discussion like this and my uncertainty that I was saying the right thing contributed to my uncertainty here. My question 'you do all know it isn't meant to hurt?' appears to catalyse a move from the previous mode of discussion in which longer and less direct statements were made into a shorter, sharper and much more direct mode of conversation:

Vix: It's not meant to? Why does everyone say it does?

Hanna: Are you talking about the first time you have sex?

Vix: Yeah

Hanna: Ah ok well that might hurt a little bit but after that it shouldn't hurt

The short and abrupt sentences here indicate a sense of assurance in my responses here, and some closing and directing of the conversation by me rather than opening up an exploring Vix's statement. However, I recall the statement about the 'first time' feeling difficult to say since I wasn't sure if I was normalising a painful first experience and this worry meant that I then didn't elaborate on this point at all. In retrospect, I am also frustrated by myself because I refer heteronormatively to 'hav[ing] sex' to mean 'penis in vagina', which as someone who, in my feminist facilitator capacity, was aiming to deconstruct assumptions around heteronormativity and constructs of virginity, seems lazy

and unaware. In this moment, I appeared to slip into a 'doer-done-to' (Benjamin, 2004: 10) mode here in which I involuntarily stated something that I felt could harm to these girls who, in that moment, I experienced as vulnerable 'done to' victims of my potentially significant words. However, once I had said that 'it shouldn't hurt', the pace seemed to ramp up as Vix, Fay and Molly all began to share even quicker and shorter sentences to describe what I believed to be deeply troubling points:

Vix: Everyone's like 'oh it hurts'

Fay: Yeah and getting fingered

Vix: Yeah!

Molly: That hurts so much

Hanna: That is not meant to hurt

Vix, Fay and Molly shift here between referring to others and themselves in a way that makes it unclear if they are discussing what they have personally experienced or what they've heard. This could be because they're aware that any clear disclosures might place them or me in unclear waters regarding safeguarding procedures, or because their knowledge is made up of a combination of aspects of what they've been told and what they've experienced. My statement that 'it is not meant to hurt' is said in a very firm voice, since I had already told them that sexual intercourse is not meant to hurt. I recall feeling more confident to say this due to the shock I felt that Molly wasn't attributing the experience of pain to a friend here but said that it hurt *her* so much and that this admission of having experienced pain prompted me to make a more assured declaration, perhaps in the vain hope of saving them from some imagined future pain. Britzman and Pitt (1996) might refer to my response as an instance of 'self-mastery' (123) as I attempted to resolve the girls' confusion, rather than for Molly, Vix and Fay's comments to be explored. It is also notable that the generalised points from early in the interview about how 'we' as presumed educators should disrupt the expectation of boys' pleasure and disregarding of girls', is

played out by me in the very minutes after saying this as I attempt to disrupt the girls' expectation and normalisation of pain within sexual encounters. My hope of achieving this disruption is allowed to be partly played out by Vix and Fay who move from talking about the pain they expect into responding to my point by echoing my comments from earlier in the interview:

Vix: If the guy knows what he's doing then it shouldn't hurt

Fay: But because of porn they do it badly

I recall noticing the ways the girls appeared to move between enactments of knowing and not-knowing. This meant that I would either relax into a sense that my role was one of listening, or anxiously feel that my role was one of the educator who had to tell them what was and wasn't right due to a sudden sense of urgency that if I didn't then no one else would.

The discussion moves into one about their friends and their expectations of pain in relation to sexual encounters with boys, complicating their shifts between knowing and not-knowing, as well as between what is experienced by them personally and other girls that they know. My field notes recollect a sense that the dynamic had shifted again at this point in the interview into wilder and less predictable territory in which the girls were willing to speak about more taboo subjects.

I felt anxious when Molly and Fay talked about a girl she 'knows' being assaulted by a boyfriend and her seeming belief that this was normal. I felt increasingly unsure of which role I should play within this. This part of the discussion escalated in intensity and I felt that my place in this was a bit lost. I definitely felt keen not to contribute to any confusion- I only wanted to say something if it was going to be really clear.

My field notes suggest that I didn't want to intervene as I previously had since the girls were now speaking from a place in which these behaviours were not considered normal or acceptable and I was concerned about increasing their confusion or anxiety, as well as mine.

However, I aim to stay with the anxieties and therefore want to use the field notes below to explore this;

When Fay, Molly and Vix's talked about the girl they knew who was made to bleed by a boy who fingered her, even taking it as a 'good sign', it was difficult to know how to deal with the sadness and violence of what they were relating, but also what my place in their discussion should be. Through referencing this 'other' girl, it seemed like they were deflecting away from talking about themselves whilst also completely talking about themselves since it allowed them to take a clear position (when it hadn't been clear before) that they knew it shouldn't hurt or be violent when in a sexual situation with a boy. I did wonder though whether the extremity of what they referred to in terms of this girl being 'smacked' was different to them to a smaller-scale level of pain that they did in fact expect when, for instance, being 'fingered' by a boy. I kept finding myself wanting to intervene, particularly when Vix said that she would say something to a boy that did that- but the conversation moved really fast and it seemed better to let them work it through before I spoke. Still not sure if this was the right thing or not- but it felt like they were testing out something, with me and with each other.

Whilst I experience some shame in reading my field notes and my lack of awareness about what was the best thing to do, as Knowles (2006) argues, 'paying attention to what we would rather edit out' is important since 'the feelings I saw as problematic and tried to repress in fact turned out to be a guide to deeper insight' (Knowles, 2006, p. 402 in Eliot, Ryan and Hollway, 2011: 441). These notes suggest that the girls and I move into the 'do-er' (Benjamin, 2004: 10) position in which we claim to know what the girl who is not present does not; that this sort of assault is wrong, and through this knowing, we position the silenced girl as the 'done to'. However, modes of our not-knowing appear to also be enacted. These notes suggest my own need to have the answer as to the ethical course of action in this moment, but do not. However, it is this very not-knowing that the girls appear reluctant to show to me too and perhaps is the reason why they move so swiftly from referring to themselves as unsure into a narrative about another girl who is the one who doesn't know. Making space for not-knowing is considered by feminist pedagogues one of the central tenets of a feminist classroom; for example, bell hooks discusses those who lead

these spaces to 'alter the way one's "power" as teacher is experienced in the classroom' through a refusal to elect […] the posture of all-knowing professors' (hooks, 1989: 51). Allowing for a space of not knowing and of working-out is key in undoing the normalized power dynamics particularly between those supposedly in authority and those under it, however, as feminist-facilitator-teacher-researcher, I initially felt uneasy about holding the space for this during the interview in my eagerness to let them know the right answer, which in turn may have encouraged the girls to enact modes of knowing themselves.

This is, however, somewhat disrupted by the final comment in this section of interview. As my field notes suggested at the time, another shift in my experience of the interview is signaled here as Fay herself appears to make way for enactments of un-knowing. Here, Fay speaks without the self-assurance that the rest of us have been trying to perform:

Fay: But I find this, it's like the body positive thing – chill, you can get over that. But the next thing is bleeeeeeeugh! I can't say anything or critique what a boy is doing. I find it harder than the body stuff – I cracked that – but now I feel like being in a sexual environment with boys, much less empowered than I do about my body. In a weird way I know that if I was advising someone else I'd be like 'tell him this and this and this and this' but then I never put it into practice.

In my (brief) field notes I note my responses to Fay's words here and the shift they signalled in the atmosphere:

It felt troubling when Fay mentioned how something she can't 'get over' in her feminism is being able to tell boys what they're doing wrong sexually but it also felt like a release because she was speaking about how she personally felt about this, rather than talking about it as someone else's problem.

This suggests that I felt freed by Fay's admittance of not-knowing the answer and of personalizing her response rather than attributing the problem to anyone else. I thought that this might enable other girls to speak from this place, rather than mimicking the 'knowing' tone that I had inadvertently modelled. In this moment, intersubjective

recognition felt possible in that the vulnerability she displayed brought the girls and myself back into a place of connection to one another's inquiry. The conditions of being a girl in a systemically violent heterosexual culture are aired so directly through this section of the discussion that, in my role as feminist group facilitator/ ex-teacher/researcher, I was encouraged that Fay could speak from a place that connects the personal and the political in a way that doesn't attempt to close down answers.

7.5. (not so?) Concluding thoughts

Through this chapter, I have taken two perspectives on the same short section of data to account for both the participants' and my own responses to a discussion of sexuality and feminism.

The first section attended to the girls' discussion about feminism in relation to sexuality and their perceived lack of agency during heterosexual encounters. This included their sense of disempowerment around asking for what they do or don't want, the links they make between this and the absence of sex and relationships education, their peers' use of porn as pedagogy, and the normalisation of rape culture in and around their school. Whilst the participants say they have benefited from feminism in their feelings about their bodily appearance, issues of sexuality are described as more complex to navigate. Despite these girls' privilege in terms of their class, whiteness, access to a private school and a feminism club, they describe their sense of voiceless-ness during sexual encounters, and connect this to wider cultures of sexual violence between their teenage peers. I draw on Butler's reading of melancholia, as well as other feminist scholar's readings including McRobbie (2008) and Egan (2013), to argue that the participants' discussion suggests a hetero-sexualised-feminist melancholia in which the form of femininity apparently promised by feminism is punctured by its lack of effectivity in heterosexual encounters. The participants describe a double sense of loss, both that of the idealized notion of feminism they previously held and the possibility of a feminist sexual subjectivity.

Through this second part of this chapter, I have discussed how, as a self-defining feminist researcher who holds various conflicting positions within this research encounter, I try to

negotiate my relation with the participants through the focus group discussion. Since I already knew this group from my role as a teacher and feminism group facilitator in their school, I refer to fieldnotes and memories to explore the anxiety and discomfort I experienced in my attempts to become researcher, and the ways in which I felt I failed at this as my previous 'feminism club facilitator' subjectivity repeatedly surfaced. This manifested in my responses to the questions posed by the five participants around issues of sexual violence meaning that the encounter felt very different to others undertaken for this study. Whilst these experiences are specific to this research encounter, they point to the difficulty of attempting to take up a new role with those you have already established a specific position with, as well as attempting a feminist praxis in a school space that doesn't discuss sexuality and gender in any formalized way. During the focus group when the participants began to discuss topics I hadn't anticipated, I experienced particular anxieties around the ethics of harm in relation to safeguarding policies in that I might be duty bound to pass on something against the participant's will. This section also explores the ways in which I felt compelled to be the do-er in terms of giving certain answers to the girls' questions which perhaps didn't allow for the participants to also not know, and the pedagogical potential of making space for this not-knowing. I also note the fleeting moments of intersubjective connection when it appeared that the feminism focus group offered a participant the space to speak from a position of vulnerability and to find connection through that. Whilst I want to avoid performing any secure sense of the knowledge drawn from this reflexive exercise and the wider interpretations I draw from this short section of data, I use the two approaches to both account for the feelings of loss that my participants articulate around feminism and the demands of heterosexual encounters, as well as to stay with my own experiences of anxiety and vulnerability as a feminist researcher. I propose that the way the participants' feminist subjectivities are constituted are not only through relations to discourses within their school, but also to the ongoing constitution and loss of feminist ideals, the experience of the body, and relations to myself as a trusted feminist other. I therefore suggest that I am a part of the context that enabled their articulation of feminist subjectivity that takes place in this research encounter.

Chapter 8

Conclusion: Responses, contributions, limits and possibilities

8.1. Introduction

In this thesis, I have interpreted how teenagers from feminism groups constitute their feminist subjectivities in school contexts. Responding to evidence of an epidemic of sexual harm in secondary schools, as well as the complex relations between a resurgence in popular interest in feminism and a backlash in the form of post and anti-feminisms, my methodologies involved talking with teenagers from six secondary school feminism groups about how they understand, engage with and form feminisms in their schools. Whilst the existing literature on young people's engagement with feminism in schools has argued that schools' postfeminist approaches can either negatively affect teenagers' interest in feminisms (Ringrose et al: 2019), or actively encourage young people's feminist activisms (Retallack et al: 2016; Ringrose and Renold: 2016, Kim and Ringrose: 2018), this is focused on what emerges from teenagers' engagements with a feminism group, rather than teenagers' subjective experiences of engaging with feminism in their schools. Using a discursive and psychosocial conceptual frame, I have interpreted how contemporary feminist discourses both inform and psychically constitute participant's engagements with in-school feminism groups and the feminist subjectivities that emerge from these.

This chapter provides a conclusion, however, there is a tension in my attempts at concluding a thesis that has, through attention to feminist methodology and reflexivity, tried to disturb moves towards assured closure. I am attached to the notion that conclusions are spaces for stability and final answers, where interpretations are neatly wrapped up and mastery is performed, but these don't align with my efforts to remain open to the subjective production of this knowledge (Wigginton and Lafrance, 2019) and modes of un-knowing (Page, 2017). This conclusion therefore aims to sit with this tension by discussing the interpretations I've drawn about the participants' constitutions of feminisms in their schools

while using my own shifting subjectivity in this research to remain receptive to what cannot be known.

In what follows, I firstly return to the research aims and questions I set out in the first chapter and draw the study's responses to these together to consider their implications. I then discuss how this thesis contributes to knowledge in the area of feminism and education. Finally, I discuss the limitations of this study, suggestions for possible future research and offer some reflections on my own research practice.

8.2. Responses to the study's research questions

The overarching aim of this thesis was to understand the relationship between teenagers' engagements in school feminism groups, their school's institutional approach to feminism and their own constitution of feminist subjectivities. This was a response both to the evidence of rape culture in UK schools (Women and Equalities report, 2016; UK Feminista, 2017; Plan UK, 2020; OFSTED, 2021; GirlGuiding Survey, 2022) and to the evidence of teenagers' increased interest in and engagement with feminisms, both in wider public life (Rottenberg, 2017; Banet-Weiser, 2018) and in schools (Keller, 2015; Retallack et al, 2016; Ringrose et al, 2018). This context, and my own subjective experiences as a teacher and feminism club facilitator, encouraged me to question how teenagers engage with and form feminisms in school contexts that are post/ anti/neoliberal feminist, but that simultaneously enable the existence of feminism groups.

The first question of my research asked how teenagers constitute feminist subjectivities in six different schools in relation to their feminism group. To approach this, I initially mapped the dynamic context of contemporary feminisms through a review of the literature which emphasises how young people's engagement with feminist politics looks different to other forms of political participation, potentially appearing in creative and online forms (Piepmeier, 2009; Harris, 2010; Keller, 2012) or seeming like disengagement and so disregarded by adults (Taft, 2006). This literature also suggests how complex but potentially generative intergenerational activist work can be (Bent, 2016), even when conflict and difference appear to divide feminisms (Wiegman, 2000; Edella and Mickel Brown, 2016;

Saavedra: 2020). The exclusionary and racialized politics that can pervade feminist spaces (Piepmeier, 2009; Edella and Mikel Brown: 2016; Mendes et al: 2018; Trott: 2021) were also reviewed, stressing the need for inclusive intersectional feminisms to avoid these politics of exclusion. I also evaluated literature around the meanings that young people invest in feminisms and how this relates to cultures of postfeminism, neoliberal feminism and antifeminism suggesting three particular ways these are understood: that varying identifications with particular feminisms are related to the expectations of femininities within available online spaces (Scharff, 2011; Marine and Lewis, 2014; Keller, 2019); that responses to postfeminist spaces split feminism into binary tropes of good and bad (Edley and Wetherell, 2011; Calder and Davey, 2016); and more closely ontological senses of self (Calder Dawe and Gavey, 2017; Guest 2016). These all suggest how contextual feminist identification is in that it works in relation to gendered expectations within specific settings. This understanding of context is key to my exploration of the constitution of feminist subjectivities in contrasting school settings, and through the analysis chapters I gradually shift the focus to different and more fine-grained aspects of the contexts. I moved from a mapping of different feminist discourses constituted in each school, to a detailed and contrastive analysis of elite masculinities across two schools, and finally to an analysis of participants' engagement with the limits of their own feminism in a section of a focus group in just one school.

In Chapter 5, I focused on the first research question by centering on the contextual nature and subjective experiences of teenagers' feminist engagements as they come into being through relational investments in elements of feminist discourse both in and around their schools. Drawing from psychosocial theories of intersubjectivity and recognition, I argue that the participants across all six schools constitute their feminisms in relational ways whether to other feminisms, or one another. The contrasting schools where the feminism groups took place appear to enable different feminist discourses and combinations of elements of postfeminism, neoliberal feminism, antifeminism or generational forms of feminism perceived to be white and 'sex negative' for instance. I argue that participants constitute their feminist subjectivities in relation to the discourses available in their setting. The postfeminist attitudes evident in the three co-educational schools, Park School, Town Academy and Dance School, suggests that school leaders want to disassociate from feminist

values, but inadvertently enable intersubjective solidarities amongst the feminism group members since the schools' postfeminism works as a clear 'other' to split off from in a way that supports the young people's own identifications with feminism. In Premier Girls School, white neoliberal feminism is emphasised by the institution and the group response is one of total identification, however, a one to one interview suggests Lily's complex understanding, rejection and use of this form of feminism. In Key Boys School and Regency Boys, the feminism group participants appear able to both identify with feminism and anti-feminism, which I propose is indicative of their elite school contexts in which feminism is both ridiculed and positioned as an object of interest, which enables their position both within and outside of antifeminist discourse. In two of the schools where I have argued for the institutional approach being postfeminist, Dance School and Park School, moments of intersubjectivity appear to be experienced by the participants who comment on their connections with others in their group. I suggest the feminism collectives within these two schools support forms of intersubjective solidarities as participants describe other group members, often girls they wouldn't normally speak to, as connected to them on equal terms, or in relation to some shared experience of femininity. These are significant interpretations because they suggest that different school contexts enable the constitution of different modes of feminism.

In Chapter Six, I responded to the second research question; how do boys taking part in feminism societies constitute feminisms in relation to expectations of elite masculinity? To do this, I telescoped into the two elite all boys' feminism societies at Key Boys and Regency School and drew upon theories of hegemonic masculinity (Connell and Messerschmidt: 2005) and hybrid masculinities (Demetriou 2001; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Bridges, 2014). I then combined these with psychosocial notions of defensiveness (Gadd, 2000; Phoenix, 2000; Frosh, 2014) and discursive distancing (Bridges and Pascoe, 2020) to develop two strands of analysis. The first relates to the nuances of different ideals of masculinity in these two schools, particularly in relation to lad culture, sporting/gym performance and effortless success, and the ways the participants relate to feminism in each school through negotiations of heteronormativity; an emphasis on academic debate and their management of tensions around the signifier feminism. Through these sections, I argue that the participants at Key Boys' School discursively distance themselves from hegemonic

masculinities in order to position themselves as progressive around issues of gender and sexuality including identifications with feminism. However, the one-to-one interviews indicate that the participants also identify with hegemonically elite masculinity including with hard academic debate, gym cultures and heteronormativity. The narratives of the Key Boys are therefore interpreted as contradictory as they distance themselves from appearing traditionally masculine, as well as defending against any queer or feminised identifications with feminism. This contrasts with the participants at Regency School who are more directly critical of hegemonic ideals of elite masculinity in their school, however, similarities lie in their contradictory approaches towards these expectations. Whilst the feminism society leaders run a popular society, they seem stuck in repeated defences of their use of the term feminist to ensure it aligns with the hegemonic ideals of masculinity in their school, however all three boys know how to make use of these to disrupt their peers' defences around feminist identifications. Despite the differences between the two all boys' contexts, similar psychical patterns of defensive masculinity can be traced in the accounts in both schools. These support the second strand of interpretation of the boys' engagements with feminism as mediated through their own and their peers' anxieties about identifying with feminism which result in defensive and distancing moves that, even when claiming feminism, centre their school's expectations of elite masculinity. These two strands of analysis are important in contributing to understandings of the constitutions of masculinities and their relationship with feminism in different elite schools, particularly with regard to the slippery way that these boys are able to identify with feminism, while still holding onto positions of privilege.

In Chapter Seven, I responded to the third and fourth research questions that asked how a group of girls taking part in a feminism club at Dance School used the focus group itself to constitute their feminist subjectivities in relation to their own embodied femininities and sexuality, as well as how I negotiated my position through this encounter. In this chapter, I discuss the intersecting forms of systemic privilege these girls inhabit, alongside their descriptions of the violence and a lack of agency during hetero-sexual encounters. Whilst the participants claim to have overcome aspects of the issues they encountered in relation to feminism, including their sense of body confidence, within the focus group they began to discuss the difficulties they have in naming discomfort or desire during sexual encounters.

Drawing from Butler's (1997) and Egan's (2013) re-reading of Freud, I propose that the participants' response to this can be interpreted as a hetero-sexualised feminist melancholia in which the empowered feminist subjectivity they experience in other aspects of their lives disappears during heterosexual encounters, forming a sense of loss for an idealized feminism. I argue for a complex imbrication of both a melancholia expressed in relation to the lost object of empowered feminist sexuality, as well as the generative way the feminism club/ research space seems to open up a way of speaking of these issues. The significance of these interpretations can be traced in several ways; firstly, in what the participants' experiences suggest about normalized hetero-sexualized violence between teenagers and the complexity of speaking up within the confines of palatable femininity. Secondly, and perhaps more relevant to the aims of this thesis, is the potential of a feminism club to offer a space for questioning and talking through issues like these with a facilitating- and feminist-adult. This analysis suggests the way feminist subjectivities are constituted are not only through relations to specific discourses within particular schools, but also to the ongoing constitution and loss of feminist ideals, the experience of the body, and relations to particular feminist others.

I reflexively attend to my engagement with the research encounter at this school where I already knew the group, by referring to fieldnotes and memories to explore the anxiety I experienced in my new role as researcher with this group. I analyze these as data to point towards the difficulty of attempting a feminist praxis in a school space that doesn't discuss sexuality and gender in any formalized way; the potential ethics of harm in relation to discussing issues of sexual violence with teenagers, my own compulsion to give certain answers to the girls' questions which didn't allow for the participants to remain uncertain, and the pedagogical potential of making space for this not-knowing. As a trusted feminist other within the focus group, I argue that I am a part of the context that enabled the opening up and re-articulation of feminist subjectivity that takes place. My own subjectivity was, in Page's (2017) terms, 'affected within the production of research' (115) in terms of the anxieties I experienced in relation to moments of uncertainty and unknowing during this focus group, and I propose that the ways I dealt with these, whether effectively or not, formed the context in relation to which the girls constituted their subjectivities.

8.3. Contributions to knowledge

In this thesis, I build on existing scholarly research in the area of young people's investments in feminism by specifically exploring teenagers' feelings about, engagements with and constitutions of feminisms in relation to their school leaders, peers and in-school feminism groups, as well as in relation to moments created in the research process and myself as an adult feminist other. I contribute conceptual insights through a particular focus on the participants' relational engagements; defensive moves and experiences of loss in relation to various feminisms, as well as through attempting a feminist methodological practise that draws upon my own subjectivity and positioning as researcher.

A significant contribution of this study is in understanding how schools produce different possibilities in relation to feminism for young people. This builds upon literature in the area of teenagers' negotiations of feminisms in schools which suggests that postfeminist school landscapes position different types of girls as either successful (Ringrose and Renold, 2012), in need of saving (Mirza, 2018); or as sexual objects (Renold and Ringrose, 2016; Zaslow, 2018) often limiting their feminist expression. However, this literature doesn't address how more explicitly neoliberal feminist or anti-feminist discourses are navigated by young people in schools or how different types of schools form particular feminisms for the students. I therefore contribute to this field of literature to interpret the differences in the ways that co-educational comprehensive schools and academies produce different feminist discourses compared to all boys' and girls' private schools. I suggest that the co-ed comprehensive schools Town School and Park School, as well as Dance School which is fee-paying but much less elite than the other private schools in this study, promote postfeminist approaches in which feminism is taken into account but disregarded as no longer important. This is in contrast to the two all boys' schools, Regency and Key Boys', where direct anti-feminism is evident and promoted by school leaders who invite 'far right' students to feminism group meetings, and the private all girls' school Premier Girls that supports a neoliberal feminism in which the students are encouraged to lean into personal success. Whilst these are only examples of the forms of feminism produced by these specific schools, it is pertinent that different types of schools appear to produce particular feminisms or approaches against

feminism since it suggests that only certain possibilities are made available depending on the type of secondary school young people attend. Since the participants from across the six schools appear to constitute their feminism in relation to their school's approach to feminism, this suggests that different school contexts are crucial in allowing for or restricting the production of feminist subjectivities.

Importantly, this contribution is not just around schools' productions of feminisms, but also young peoples' active responses to these. This research suggests that teenagers' engagements with feminism groups in schools don't necessarily only work to disrupt gendered norms and expectations in schools, but can take part in actively reproducing these, for example; the ways that hegemonic expectations of masculinity including hard debate style dynamics that separate themselves from the perceived feminine are constituted through the feminism groups at the two elite boys' schools, whilst neoliberal expectations of girls 'having it all' in relation to career and domestic 'success' are formed by the participants at Premier Girls' School. As discussed in Chapter 2, the empirical research in this area suggests that schools are postfeminist in their outlook, an approach that Ringrose et al (2019) argue can detrimentally affect these groups, but can also work to fuel young people's feminist activisms in their schools (Retallack et al: 2016; Ringrose and Renold: 2016, Kim and Ringrose: 2018). However, this study interprets young peoples' constitutions of a wider range of feminist discourses than just postfeminism, including established forms such as neoliberal feminism and anti-feminism as well as those that the young people constitute for themselves including sex-negative and 'Malala' feminism.

However, it is not just that I have identified more discourses as this research has also contributed to understandings of the relational processes by which participants take on or resist different discursive elements of feminism. I have explored the psychosocial processes by which young people constitute feminist subjectivities through relations to multiple discourses within specific contexts including through intersubjective relations; distancing and defence, and melancholic experiences of loss. Therefore, whilst the existing studies offer meaningful analyses of the complexities of young people's engagements with feminisms, they don't focus on the young people's subjective experiences of a range of

feminisms within their schools or what they psychically and relationally create through these experiences.

This thesis therefore takes forward the field of research around feminism and schooling by offering a distinctive contribution in conceptualising how young people navigate and form their own versions of particular feminisms by focusing on subjectivity as produced through both the cultural and the psychic. This study responds to research in the area of young people's engagements with feminism in schools that have tended to conceptualise these through theories of affect that focus on the feminism group's use of social media to form networks (Retallack et al, 2016; Renold and Ringrose, 2016), and posthuman analyses that centre the non-human agencies at work in these groups (Renold and Ringrose, 2016) to instead emphasise aspects of the unconscious as part of the formation of the social. This approach draws on psychosocial understandings (Phoenix et al, 2000; Walkerdine et al, 2001; Frosh et al: 2002; Ringrose, 2012) to conceptualise the participants as coming into their feminist subjectivities through psychical investments in discourse, including attention to the relational and emotional aspects of these. These conceptualisations have enabled a mapping of the ways the participants across the six schools form their feminist subjectivities through processes of stabilising their sense of self through rejecting 'other' feminisms, ways that moments of intersubjective recognition are formed between members of the feminism groups, the methods used by boys in elite schools to defend against threatening modes of masculinity connected to feminism, as well as the ways a group of girls experience melancholia in relation to their hetero-sexualised encounters. These conceptualisations offer a vocabulary that interprets the subjective and emotional underpinnings of young peoples' identifications with particular feminisms that is currently absent in the literature.

This conceptual contribution also concerns this study's engagement with my own shifting subjectivity, the participants' dealings with my role as research and the feminist-epistemological implications of this. I have aimed to work with three feminist aspects of research; reflexive, intersectional and vulnerable approaches. Though the writing of this thesis, I have realised how bound up these three aspects are as I have argued that it is my own positionality as a feminist researcher, ex-teacher and feminism club facilitator that formed all relations to the institutions and participants in this study. Whilst parts of my

subjectivity remained unchanged through this research project including my womanhood and whiteness, my position within this research was always slightly shifting from the perspectives of some of the participants, as well as myself, and, as the final analysis chapter explores in particular, this positionality was dynamic even within one research encounter since I was understood by the young people and myself in multiple ways through the focus group. This conceptual contribution relates to the production of knowledge that this thesis attempts, as I draw from feminist epistemological approaches (Haraway, 1988; Bhavani, 1993; Rolin, 2006; Wigginton and LaFrance, 2019) to foreground my and the participants' situated intersectional subjectivities that interconnect with vulnerable attempts to 'unsettle move[s] towards closure' (Page, 2017: 17). This is in the hope to make transparent the ways that I have subjectively formed the research contexts through which the participants constitute their feminist subjectivities, as well as to remain receptive to what I cannot see.

A last, but not final, contribution of this study is to suggest the significance of spaces in schools where young people can begin to contravene gendered or sexualised expectations. Since girl friendships have been argued to be constructed through hetero-sexualised modes of aggression (Ringrose, 2008; Ringrose and Renold, 2011), the participants' transgressions of these in the feminism groups at Park School and Dance School, in which modes of internalised misogyny are disrupted and ways of performing femininity are considered anew, suggests the potential of feminism groups as spaces for intersubjective connections to be made between young people outside of restrictive gendered and sexualised patterns. Similar transgressions are also occasionally evident in the insights from participants at Regency Boys and Key Boys in which their engagement with feminist ideas has enabled them to see and consider the production of masculinity within their elite school environment. My interpretations of some of the participants' capacities to use these feminism groups and the consciousness gained through these to form connections between one another and to see gender and sexuality differently suggests the potential of these spaces to enable changes to established ways of doing and seeing gender and sexuality in schools. This is meaningful because, as the research demonstrates, notions of gender hegemony that position boys as entitled to more control and power can underpin the normalisation and reproduction of rape culture (Sundaram and Jackson, 2018). If teenagers

can question the ways these patterns manifest in their schools this could be what Sundaram and Jackson (2018) term ‘a starting point for prevention’ (4).

8.4. Reflections on the limitations of the study and possibilities for future research

While any study is bounded, I interpret three specific aspects of my study which I experienced as limited and where I wished to have been able to do more or think outside some restraints. First, my inability to capture how quickly the landscape of feminism has moved during the (part) time I’ve researched and written this thesis; secondly, the binary aspects of the structure and interpretations, and thirdly the lack of scope I was able to give to detailing the context of each school and its particular structural and cultural constraints.

At the time of conducting the research for this study, the public battleground around conceptualisations of sex and gender and its implications for definitions of feminism were not as visible as they are in 2023. Since 2015, right-wing discourse has risen across the globe targeting feminism, LGBT rights and gender studies as a field (Tudor, 2021), whilst the notion that gender can change but biological sex is immutable position has become the hill that many self-defined feminists wish to die on. This trans-exclusionary stance, which maintains that the category of woman is centred on biological organs, ignores the feminist argument that our access to understandings of biology only becomes significant through a biological discourse which is structured through existing political structures and social values (Zanghellini, 2020) and is premised on the notion that our sexed bodies can exist outside of the social meanings attributed to them (Faye, 2021). This argument conflates trans women with sexually predatory men (Westbrook & Schilt, 2014 in Pearce et al, 2020), and rests upon gendered conceptualizations of cis-white women in need of protection from biologically male violence (Pearce et al, 2020) positioning trans women as posing a threat to toilets, refuges and feminism groups. With this in mind, I wonder whether the signifier feminism is now losing it salience for young people who see these ideas promoted under its name. Work has been done around how these gender wars are being navigated amongst adults (Pearce et al, 2020; Tudor, 2023) but there is further research to be done around how this is understood and engaged within school settings. Further research could question how

young people navigate these gender wars within feminism, as well as considering whether those who remain committed to gender and sexual liberation, wish to do this under the banner of feminism.

Another, perhaps related, limitation of this study concerns the binary focus on boys and girls. Whilst this partly came out of the distinctly binary nature of the three 'single sex' schools and the gendered features of the feminism groups, this study can be said to lapse into binary frames that it also, and conversely, argues schools should be working against. I partly place this limitation on aspects of my own lack of queer feminist understandings when undertaking the fieldwork for the thesis, that have developed since and I wish I could change so that slightly different questions were asked that that may have resulted in a less binary framing of the young people's negotiations of feminisms. Another study might queer its methodology to provoke further analysis of the connections between heteronormative schooling and the formation of feminism in schools. As discussed in the literature review, intersectional feminist scholars have argued that systems of power influence the ways that certain voices are privileged over others in and around feminist activisms (Edella and Mikel Brown, 2016; Mendes, 2018; Trott, 2021), that particularly center white cis-gendered heterosexual girls and women. These are rightfully situated as problematic in that they exclude particular experiences and voices, particularly those of Black, queer and trans youth. This thesis has inadvertently centered on the experiences of white teenagers, particularly in the follow-up one-to-one interviews, and has not included the voices of trans or non-binary young people. This is a limitation in two ways; firstly, in that this thesis re-enacts modes of power that exclude particular bodies, and that the knowledge this thesis produces is limited to predominantly white and all cis-gendered teenagers.

My previous suggestion about how different types of schools might produce different forms of feminisms also suggests a limitation. I have not given myself the scope to give a detailed contextual background to each type of school, and more detail on comprehensive schools, academies, independent dance schools, elite single sex schools and boarding schools may have enabled a more nuanced drawing out of the ways that particular feminisms intersect with particular institutional environments. This study could have focused on teenagers' constitutions of feminisms within one 'type' of school, which would have enabled a more

detailed exploration of the history and complexity of that type of institution and its links with particular productions of feminism. Further research could study one school in depth to produce a more in-depth and ethnographic account of the entanglements between school policies, practices, curricula and teenagers' engagements with feminisms.

8.5. A summary and reflection

This thesis has explored how, through engagement with feminism groups, teenagers constitute feminist subjectivities in and around six different schools in England. I have drawn on observational focus group and one-to-one interview data with young people between the ages of 13-18 from a suburban comprehensive, an inner-city private dance school, an inner-city academy school, an inner-city all girls' private school, an inner-city private all boys' school and a rural private all-boys' boarding school, who discussed their engagements with feminisms in school. I have also explored and questioned what it means to do this research in feminist ways as I navigate my subjectivity as an ex-teacher, ex- feminism club facilitator and researcher to explore the complexities I experienced around the differences in my relationship with each research site, as well as the moments in the focus groups and interviews when I didn't know how to respond.

As I try to draw this thesis to a close, I am aware of the many ways through which I came to and have lived through this thesis; as a newly qualified teacher feeling empowered by the role of teacher and undermined as I was sexually harassed in a new role; as a teacher and feminism club facilitator struggling to retain a sense of my feminist integrity in schools that rejected my and the students' form of feminism; as a researcher confused about my right to position schools and students as objects of study; as a lecturer learning about feminist politics in the university classroom; and as a new mum being pulled away from and back towards this project. As I say in the introductory chapter, I cannot know how this thesis emerged since there is no single story and, as I work to tie this up, I am aware of the impossibility of the single conclusion I'd like to form. My subjectivity has been shifting through the process of producing this research in relation to my understandings of feminisms, my experience of myself as researcher and my participants' experiences of this

project. Whilst I worry that this is reflected in the interpretations I have drawn, I also wish to make clear how I am still emerging through and out of this with new accounts of feminism, schooling and subjectivity that will continue to emerge and to form new interpretations.

Where this thesis can hold onto some certainty, it is in suggesting that feminism groups in schools have the potential to raise consciousness around issues of gender, sexuality, race and class as well as to form connections between young people that may resist or avoid politics of exclusion. Through also highlighting where feminism groups can perpetuate gendered, classed or racialized norms within schools, this study has suggested that certain approaches to feminism do not do the work of deeply supporting young people's exploration and understanding of gendered and sexual justice. I therefore hope that this thesis might offer educational practitioners and researchers interested in supporting feminisms in schools, a rationale for transcending more restrictive modes of feminism, particularly those that reproduce white neoliberal cis-heteronormative forms. I also hope that this study gestures towards the complexities and possibilities of feminist research, generating an openness towards how imbued our research is with our own subjectivities, and an acceptance of what cannot be mastered and known.

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Institute of Education

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Appendix 1: Ethics Form

Ethics Application Form: Student Research

All research activity conducted under the auspices of the Institute by staff, students or visitors, where the research involves human participants or the use of data collected from human participants are required to gain ethical approval before starting. *This includes preliminary and pilot studies.* Please answer all relevant questions responses in terms that can be understood by a lay person and note your form may be returned if incomplete.

For further support and guidance please see accompanying guidelines and the Ethics Review Procedures for Student Research http://www.ioe.ac.uk/studentethics/ or contact your supervisor or researchethics@ioe.ac.uk.

Before completing this form, you will need to discuss your proposal fully with your supervisor(s).
Please attach all supporting documents and letters.

For all Psychology students, this form should be completed with reference to the British Psychological Society (BPS) Code of Human Research Ethics and Code of Ethics and Conduct.

Section 1 Project details		
a.	Project title	Practising Fourth Wave Feminism in schools: A study of feminist entanglements,

			pedagogies and activism in secondary schools
b.	Student name and ID number (e.g. ABC12345678)		[redacted]
c.	Supervisor/Personal Tutor		Professor Jessica Ringrose and Dr Claudia Lapping
d.	Department		Education, Practice and Society
e.	Course category (Tick one)	PhD/MPhil ☒	EdD ☐
		MRes ☐	DEdPsy ☐
		MTeach ☐	MA/MSc ☐
		ITE ☐	
		Diploma (state which) ☐	
		Other (state which) ☐	
f.	Course/module title		PhD
g.	**If applicable,** state who the funder is and if funding has been confirmed.		Self-funded
h.	Intended research start date		15 November 2016
i.	Intended research end date		16 December 2017
j.	Country fieldwork will be conducted in *If research to be conducted abroad please check www.fco.gov.uk and submit a completed travel insurance form to Serena Ezra (s.ezra@ucl.ac.uk) in UCL Finance (see guidelines). This form can be found here (you will need your UCL login details available):* https://www.ucl.ac.uk/finance/secure/fin_acc/insurance.htm		England and USA

k.	Has this project been considered by another (external) Research Ethics Committee?	
	Yes ☐	External Committee Name:
	No ☒ ⇨ *go to Section 2*	Date of Approval:

If yes:

- Submit a copy of the approval letter with this application.
- Proceed to Section 10 Attachments**.**

Note: Ensure that you check the guidelines carefully as research with some participants will require ethical approval from a different ethics committee such as the National Research Ethics Service (NRES) or Social Care Research Ethics Committee (SCREC). In

addition, if your research is based in another institution then you may be required to apply to their research ethics committee.

Section 2 Project summary

Research methods (tick all that apply)

Please attach questionnaires, visual methods and schedules for interviews (even in draft form).

- ☒ Interviews
- ☒ Focus groups
- ☐ Questionnaires
- ☒ Action research
- ☒ Observation
- ☐ Literature review
- ☐ Controlled trial/other intervention study
- ☐ Use of personal records
- ☐ Systematic review ⇨ ***if only method used go to Section 5.***
- ☐ Secondary data analysis ⇨ ***if secondary analysis used go to Section 6.***
- ☐ Advisory/consultation/collaborative groups
- ☐ Other, give details:

Please provide an overview of your research:

Purpose of the research

This study is conducted in the light of theories that we are witnessing a 'fourth wave' of feminism (Munro, 2013) in which there is a resurgence in young peoples' engagement with issues related to gender and sexuality. This is manifesting itself partly in the emergence of feminist groups in secondary school spaces in which teenagers can be seen to be actively transgressing neo-liberal and postfeminist narratives of 'girl power' (Gonick, 2006) and 'successful girls' (Ringrose, 2007); in the emergence of organisations working with schools around issues of gender and sexuality; the proliferation of teachers interested in bringing feminism into their practice (Mikel Brown, 2016); as well as in the take up of feminist discourses by school leaders to market their schools as engaged in extra-curricular issues (Zeisler, 2008; Rottenberg, 2013).

As both a PhD researcher and a part-time teacher at a London school, I am interested in what it means for school students and teachers to engage with feminism in schools. What this project will examine are the qualitative dimensions of feminism groups in schools through a study of the ways in which school students, teachers and myself entangle in feminist pedagogies and activisms.

This will take the form of qualitative site- based research using a range of methods. This assemblage approach will include interviews, focus groups and observations with students and teachers, as well as documentary analysis of policies and curriculum, online social media communications and writing/drawing produced by the students. There is the possibility for different levels and modes of participation with different groups; for

example, it may only be possible to visit some groups once for an observation and a focus group, whereas, in others there may be the opportunity to collaborate with students and their teacher over the course of a week on designing a feminist curriculum or a series of workshops. This research will take place in up to 10 school sites with up to 50 young people (age 11-18) who are currently participating in feminism groups in their schools.

The particularities of my role as not only a researcher but also a feminist teacher in a London secondary school and an activist involved in bringing the teaching of feminism and spaces for feminism into schools, requires methodologies and analysis attuned to the complexities of my own action-oriented position. I am currently undertaking feminist work in the school in which I teach, in the form of delivering a feminist curriculum to Year 8 students, setting up and facilitating a feminism society, challenging sexist uniform codes and working with school departments including Personal, Social and Health Education teachers to ensure that schemes of work are inclusive. Out of school, I am involved in working alongside organisations and feminist teachers who bring discourses of social justice into school spaces. My particular role within this project is therefore foregrounded and will be consistently reflected upon within each stage of the research process.

Research questions

- What does it mean to engage with feminism in schools as a school student / a teacher / a researcher?
- What happens when a feminist teacher / researcher / activist engages in a variety of feminist pedagogies and activisms?
- What are the possibilities for intergenerational feminist-activist research within school spaces?

Research design:

The settings that will be researched include both comprehensive and independent secondary schools across London and Greater London. I will observe and audio record examples of feminist practice in the school and copy school-based materials used by the teachers and students; audio-record a focus group with students on their of their experience of engaging with the feminism group in their school; interview both students and teachers about their experience with feminism in their school and possibly collaborate on a small-scale feminist project with the students and their teacher in their school that may include working on the formation of feminist materials and curricula for other school students; facilitating consciousness raising feminist group spaces or supporting the teacher and students in school-centred and wider activism.

The modes of data collection will include:

- audio-recorded focus groups and one-to-one interviews with members of the feminism group
- audio-recorded observations of feminist activities within the school
- feminist curricula and materials generated by or alongside students (originals or copies)

- photographs of school-based feminist stimuli (for instance pieces of uniform, policy codes)
- Use of pieces of writing or drawings the participants create

All recorded data will be recorded, transcribed and analysed by the researcher.

I may also return for a few follow-up observations / interviews later in the year that participants can choose to take part in if they wish.

Section 3 Participants

Please answer the following questions giving full details where necessary. Text boxes will expand for your responses.

a.	Will your research involve human participants?	Yes ☒	No ☐ ⇨ *go to Section 4*

b. Who are the participants (i.e. what sorts of people will be involved)? Tick all that apply.

☐ Early years/pre-school	☐ Unknown – specify below
☐ Ages 5-11	☒ Adults *please specify below*
☒ Ages 12-16	☐ Other – specify below
☒ Young people aged 17-18	

NB: Ensure that you check the **guidelines** (Section 1) carefully as research with some participants will require ethical approval from a different ethics committee such as the National Research Ethics Service (NRES).

c. If participants are under the responsibility of others (such as parents, teachers or medical staff) how do you intend to obtain permission to approach the participants to take part in the study?

(Please attach approach letters or details of permission procedures – see Section 9 Attachments.) ATTACHED (1. Information Leaflet and 2. Consent Letter)

In most cases, a leaflet and consent letters will be sent in advance to the teacher(s), the parents and students involved in feminism in which the project will be clearly described. During the visit, there will time for the project to be discussed with the participants and I will go through the details of this with the students and teachers to make clear that there is no obligation for them to take part in the study. If the head teacher has not given consent for me to work with their school, I will not make a visit or if any students or teachers have not given their consent, then they will not be expected to take part.

In some cases, obtaining prior consent will not be possible since I will may draw on visits, observations and field notes from settings that will not be formally included as research sites within the project. This is due to the range of access I currently have to school settings in which feminist work is taking place. In cases such as these, I will

	request consent retrospectively with a clear letter, information and outline of the study.
d.	How will participants be recruited (identified and approached)? In order to conduct this research, I have already made contact with five schools across London (including the school where I work as a teacher). In all of these schools, an individual teacher has granted me access and requested advice on their on-going feminist work. In the first instance I made contact with a teacher who I know to facilitate feminist work within the school and sent information about the nature of this PhD study and my interest in speaking to and working with the teenage feminists in their care. In all instances there has been much interest in the practice-based nature of my work and an interest in my collaboration with the young people involved. Once granted access, I will inform participants about the research using the process described below. In making contact with any future participants in schools, I will use the same process of contacting the school and main teacher involved with feminist work within the school and send them information about the study and my interest in coming in to their school.
e.	Describe the process you will use to inform participants about what you are doing. Separate consent forms for teachers, students and the parents of participants under the age of 16, as well as a clear leaflet describing the study will be sent in advance of the study. The teacher will be informed of the types of questions that might be asked of themselves and the students. For example: *The students' focus group and/or interviews may include questions such as:* • *What feminism means to them* • *What it means to be part of a feminism group at school* • *What the young people want from taking part in or setting up a feminist group* • *How their out-of-school and online feminisms work* • *What they perceive the feminism group's relationship to the school structure to be* • *What activisms they are interested in setting up in their school and beyond* *The teacher(s)' interview may involve questions such as:* • *What feminism means to them* • *What prompted their feminist work with young people in their school* • *How their position as a 'feminist teacher' is negotiated in their school* When meeting the students and teachers I will always explain my particular position as a teacher, an activist and a researcher. This is partly so that they recognise the specificity of my position as someone eager to support feminist work in schools, and also opens up opportunities for collaborative work with the students. The design is

	purposefully left relatively open at this stage to allow for generative collaborations to form between researcher and the teachers and young people involved in the project.
f.	How will you obtain the consent of participants? Will this be written? How will it be made clear to participants that they may withdraw consent to participate at any time? *See the guidelines for information on opt-in and opt-out procedures. Please note that the method of consent should be appropriate to the research and fully explained.* Teachers, young people and the parents/guardians of under 16s will be provided with full information about the project and details explaining that they can withdraw their involvement at any time. I will use an opt-in consent form for parents/guardians; young people under the age of 16 and any teachers involved. After each group interview and each individual interview participants will be asked again if they are still happy for their comments and participation to be transcribed. I will also discuss the process with them and answer any questions they may have during a visit. The attached leaflet and letters will be sent in advance of any visit to a school to ensure that the young people and teachers involved in the study are aware of the nature of the research project, the types of questions they will be asked, the types of activities or discussions that make take place, the time it will take and their confidentiality ensured through the use of pseudonyms both for the young people, the teachers and the school they attend. In certain circumstances, their consent made need to be requested retrospectively if, for example, a research opportunity arose that could not have been anticipated or if it is necessary for me to draw on field-notes or observations I made before explicit consent had been obtained. The data gathered will be stored on my own password-protected laptop and not on an institutional computer nor via a shared drive. All data generated throughout will be anonymised. The Data Protection Act will be fully adhered to.
g.	**Studies involving questionnaires:** Will participants be given the option of omitting questions they do not wish to answer? N/A (no questionnaire) Yes ☐ No ☐ **N/A**
	If **NO** please explain why below and ensure that you cover any ethical issues arising from this in section 8.
h.	**Studies involving observation:** Confirm whether participants will be asked for their informed consent to be observed. Yes ☒ No ☐
	If **NO** read the guidelines (Ethical Issues section) and explain why below and ensure that you cover any ethical issues arising from this in section 8.
i.	Might participants experience anxiety, discomfort or embarrassment as a result of your study?

	Yes ☒ No ☐
	If **yes** what steps will you take to explain and minimise this? Throughout this research, I will be attentive to moments when sensitive or potentially sensitive issues are being discussed and be ready to pause or suggest a change of topic. I have experience of running a feminism group, teaching a feminist course and of supporting young people through emotional distressing times. I have also had experience of collaborating with young people of the age group being researched on activist projects, and I am therefore able to respond appropriately and in compliance with safe guarding regulations. If a child protection issue was raised then, as explained below, I would follow the school's procedure in full. If **not**, explain how you can be sure that no discomfort or embarrassment will arise?
j.	Will your project involve deliberately misleading participants (deception) in any way? Yes ☐ No ☒
	If **YES** please provide further details below and ensure that you cover any ethical issues arising from this in section 8.
k.	Will you debrief participants at the end of their participation (i.e. give them a brief explanation of the study)? Yes ☒ No ☐
	If **NO** please explain why below and ensure that you cover any ethical issues arising from this in section 8.
l.	Will participants be given information about the findings of your study? (This could be a brief summary of your findings in general; it is not the same as an individual debriefing.) Yes ☒ No ☐
	If **no**, why not?

Section 4 Security-sensitive material
Only complete if applicable

Security sensitive research includes: commissioned by the military; commissioned under an EU security call; involves the acquisition of security clearances; concerns terrorist or extreme groups.

a.	Will your project consider or encounter security-sensitive material?	Yes ☐ *	No ☒
b.	Will you be visiting websites associated with extreme or terrorist organizations?	Yes ☐	No ☒

		*	
c.	Will you be storing or transmitting any materials that could be interpreted as promoting or endorsing terrorist acts?	Yes ☐ *	No ☒

* *Give further details in* ***Section 8 Ethical Issues***

Section 5 Systematic review of research
Only complete if applicable

a.	Will you be collecting any new data from participants?	Yes ☐ *	No ☐
b.	Will you be analysing any secondary data?	Yes ☐ *	No ☐

* *Give further details in* ***Section 8 Ethical Issues***

If your methods do not involve engagement with participants (e.g. systematic review, literature review) ***and*** *if you have answered* ***No*** *to both questions, please go to* ***Section 10 Attachments.***

Section 6 Secondary data analysis Complete for all secondary analysis

a.	Name of dataset/s		
b.	Owner of dataset/s		
c.	Are the data in the public domain?	Yes ☐	No ☐
		If no, *do you have the owner's permission/license?* Yes ☐ No* ☐	
d.	Are the data anonymised?	Yes ☐	No ☐
		Do you plan to anonymise the data? Yes ☐	No* ☐
		Do you plan to use individual level data? Yes* ☐	No ☐
		Will you be linking data to individuals? Yes* ☐	No ☐
e.	Are the data sensitive (DPA 1998 definition)?	Yes* ☐	No ☐
f.	Will you be conducting analysis within the remit it was originally collected for?	Yes ☐	No* ☐
g.	**If no,** was consent gained from participants for subsequent/future analysis?	Yes ☐	No* ☐
h.	**If no,** was data collected prior to ethics approval process?	Yes ☐	No* ☐

* *Give further details in* ***Section 8 Ethical Issues***

If secondary analysis is only method used ***and*** *no answers with asterisks are ticked, go to* ***Section 9 Attachments.***

Section 7 Data Storage and Security

Please ensure that you include all hard and electronic data when completing this section.

a.	Confirm that all personal data will be stored and processed in compliance with the Data Protection Act 1998 (DPA 1998). *(See the Guidelines and the Institute's Data Protection & Records Management Policy for more detail.)*	Yes ☒
b.	Will personal data be processed or be sent outside the European Economic Area?	Yes ☐ * No ☒

*** If yes,** please confirm that there are adequate levels of protections in compliance with the DPA 1998 and state what these arrangements are below.

c.	Who will have access to the data and personal information, including advisory/consultation groups and during transcription? I will be the only person with access to this data

During the research

d.	Where will the data be stored? On a voice recording device and a mobile phone
e.	Will mobile devices such as USB storage and laptops be used? Yes ☒* No ☐ *** If yes,** state what mobile devices: Personal iPhone 6 / MacBook Air *** If yes,** will they be encrypted?: Yes

After the research

f.	Where will the data be stored? On an encrypted MacBook Air laptop
g.	How long will the data and records by kept for and in what format? The audio recording will be transcribed and the recording then deleted. Any photographs of materials created or workshop resour will be also stored on a personal laptop.
h.	Will data be archived for use by other researchers? Yes ☐ * No ☒ *** If yes,** please provide details.

Section 8 Ethical issues

Are there particular features of the proposed work which may raise ethical concerns or add to the complexity of ethical decision making? If so, please outline how you will deal with these.

It is important that you demonstrate your awareness of potential risks or harm that may arise as a result of your research. You should then demonstrate that you have considered ways to minimise the likelihood and impact of each potential harm that you have identified. Please be as specific as possible in describing the ethical issues you will have to address. Please consider / address ALL issues that may apply.

Ethical concerns may include, but not be limited to, the following areas:

- Methods
- Sampling
- Recruitment
- International research
- Risks to participants and/or researchers
- Confidentiality/Anonymity

– Gatekeepers – Informed consent – Potentially vulnerable participants – Safeguarding/child protection – Sensitive topics	– Disclosures/limits to confidentiality – Data storage and security both during and after the research (including transfer, sharing, encryption, protection) – Reporting – Dissemination and use of findings

It is hoped that involvement in this research project will provide the young people and teachers who choose to participate with the opportunity to reflect and act upon areas that they identify need to be addressed by schools and wider society. However, like all research on potentially sensitive topics (such as gender-based discrimination) it should be recognised that some topics raised or reflected upon may cause distress (e.g. experiences of gender/ sexuality / racist bullying for example).

The proposed study will include:

- observations of feminist practice in the school (for example, by audio-recording a feminism club meeting)
- audio-recordings of a focus group with students on their experience of feminism in their school
- audio-recordings of one-to-one follow up interviews with individual students
- audio-recordings of interviews with the teacher(s) involved with feminism in their school
- possible collaboration on a small-scale feminist project with the students and their teacher in their school that may include working on the formation of feminist materials and curricula for other school students; facilitating consciousness raising feminist group spaces or supporting the teacher and students in school-centred and wider activism

Since 'informed consent' cannot be entirely given since it would be impossible to meaningfully inform participants in advance about what their experience of the observation, focus groups and collaborative activism will be, what can be assured is that of a setting in which honesty, sympathy and respect are central and, as has been argued in texts dealing with the complexity of ethics, it can be reassuring to discuss an upsetting event in a context that feels safe (Hollway and Jefferson, 2013). If, however, a participant was to become distressed in the research context, I would draw on my experience with adolescents in these sensitive environments to reassure them of their safety to express emotion within this context as well as the choice they have to leave if they so wish.

Since the young people and teachers involved will already be involved in feminist activities and / or discussions with their peers within their school, the dynamics of a focus group or interview should not feel particularly difficult, however, I will ensure that I am aware of any vulnerable students by speaking with their teacher in advance of the study to ensure that I am aware of any sensitivities or individual needs. When collaborating with teachers and students on feminist activism or discussions, power dynamics between researcher and researched need to be continually considered to ensure that the young

people's ideas and voices are centred and only supported and facilitated by myself and the teacher(s) involved. The collaborative aspect of this research and introduction of feminist theory may mean that some young people experience moments of a break with a previous identification to certain ideas that they may find painful to part with and, as an experienced teacher and a researcher with knowledge of aspects of psychoanalytic theory, I will be sensitive to the pervasiveness of resistance, attachments and fantasy within the research process (Healy, 2010). When conducting the focus groups and collaborative activist work, during which I may be alone with the group of students, I will let the assigned teacher know where I am, and at what time the fieldwork begins and ends. When interviewing teachers about the feminist work they are undertaking in their schools, I will draw on my familiarity with the complexities and challenges of this role within schools.

When analysing and writing about the data, I would only draw on a potentially painful or difficult moment with the prior consent of the participant having been given. Due to the nature of a focus group and collaborative work alongside young people, complete confidentiality of the comments of participants cannot be entirely ensured, however, the consent letter will explain the confidential nature of the group and request that they respect this by not sharing information outside of the group. Since aspects of the research may involve the creation and / or collection of writing and artefacts related to feminist activities within the school, I will photograph or copy these so that students retain all originals. Anything created by students will be anonymised and I will discuss my use of these with the students that created them in advance of any analysis.

All research will adhere with the school's own child protection procedures. This will include a clear understanding of procedures to follow when a child protection issue comes to light and a discussion with the appropriate staff member of any safeguarding issues that I need to be aware of before conducting the research. I have an up-to-date DBS check and I am fully cognisant of the protocols to follow in relation to possible harm and danger. If there are any safeguarding issues that I need to seek additional advice for, I will contact the University's Designated Officer.

Section 9 Further information

Outline any other information you feel relevant to this submission, using a separate sheet or attachments if necessary.

Section 10 Attachments Please attach the following items to this form, or explain if not attached			
a.	Information sheets and other materials to be used to inform potential participants about the research, including approach letters	Yes ☒	No ☐
b.	Consent form	Yes ☒	No ☐
	If applicable:		
c.	The proposal for the project	Yes ☐	No ☐
d.	Approval letter from external Research Ethics Committee	Yes ☐	No ☐
e.	Full risk assessment	Yes ☐	No ☐

Section 11 Declaration

	Yes	**No**
I have read, understood and will abide by the following set of guidelines.	☒	☐

BPS ☐	BERA ☒	BSA ☐	Other (please state) ☐

I have discussed the ethical issues relating to my research with my supervisor.	☒	☐
I have attended the appropriate ethics training provided by my course.	☐	☐

I confirm that to the best of my knowledge:

The above information is correct and that this is a full description of the ethics issues that may arise in the course of this project.

Name	Hanna M Retallack
Date	10 November 2016

Appendix 2: Consent form for school gatekeepers

Practising Fourth Wave Feminism in schools: A study of feminist entanglements, pedagogies and activism in secondary schools

Dear Head Teacher,

This letter is an invitation for students and teachers in your school to participate in a study I am conducting for a PhD research at the UCL Institute of Education. I would like to provide you with more information about this project and what your involvement would involve if your school decides to take part.

I am a part-time teacher and a part-time PhD candidate, looking at the emergence of feminist spaces and activisms in schools and the students and teachers who are involved with them. Since there are teachers and students in your school who are involved with feminism, I would like to observe their participation with feminism in your school and to then speak to them in an interview or focus group about their views and understanding of this work. Depending on the availability of teachers and students, I may also work with them on a collaborative feminist project in your school, however there is no expectation of this. (Please see further information on this in the attached leaflet).

Participation in this study is voluntary. I will not enter the school without voluntary consent from you, the teacher(s) or the students and parents of students involved with feminism. The study would involve audio recordings of discussions and activities related to feminism that would take place during the school day. Even after initial consent, teachers and students may decline to discuss a topic and can withdraw from the discussion entirely at any time. Discussions and activities will be audio recorded to facilitate collection of information, and later transcribed so that I can analyze the results. If possible, I may also return to the school a few more times in the year for follow up observations, discussion and collaborations.

All information provided by students and teachers is considered completely confidential; your students, your teachers and the school will remain completely anonymous. Any names or other personal identifying information will not appear in the course project paper resulting from this study; however, with your permission anonymous quotations may be used.

If you have any questions regarding this study, or would like additional information to assist you in reaching a decision about participation, please contact me by e-mail at hanna.retallack.14@ucl.ac.uk.

Thank you very much for considering your school's participation in this study.
Yours Sincerely,

Hanna Retallack
PhD Candidate UCL Institute of Education

Information Consent Letter for Audio Recording
PhD Research into Feminism in School Spaces

CONSENT FORM

I have read the information presented in the information letter about a study being conducted by Hanna Retallack for a PhD course project at UCL Institute of Education. I have had the opportunity to ask any questions related to this study, to receive satisfactory answers to my questions, and any additional details I wanted.

With full knowledge of all foregoing, I agree to this school's participation in this study.

☐ YES ☐ NO

I agree to the feminist group discussion being audio recorded.

☐ YES ☐ NO

I agree for students and teachers to be involved in a further interview that will be audio recorded.

☐ YES ☐ NO

I agree for students and teachers to be involved in possible collaborative feminist activities that will be audio recorded.

☐ YES ☐ NO

I agree to the use of anonymous quotations by students and teachers in any writing produced about this research.

☐ YES ☐ NO

My name **(please print)** _____

Date _____

Appendix 3: Consent form for students to take part in one-to-one interviews

Practising Fourth Wave Feminism: A study of feminist groups, pedagogies and activism in secondary schools

Dear student,

Thank you for letting me sit-in on your Feminism Club meeting and interview you in a group setting. It was very interesting to meet with you and has been extremely useful for my PhD research project into feminism in schools.

This letter is an invitation to participate further in the study I am conducting. I would like to provide you with more information about these follow-up interviews and what your involvement would involve if you decide to take part.

I am looking at the emergence of feminist spaces and activisms in schools and the students who are involved with them. Since I have now observed your involvement with feminism in your school in a group setting, I would now like to interview you on a one-to-one basis to ask follow up questions about your participation with feminism in and out of school.

Participation in a one-to-one interview is voluntary. It would involve a 40-50 minute interview that is audio recorded. The questions asked would be related to feminism and your involvement with feminism activity in your school. You may decline to discuss a topic and can withdraw from the discussion entirely at any time. With your parent / carer's permission, the recorded data would transcribed so that I can analyze the results.

All information provided by you is considered completely confidential; both students and the school will remain completely anonymous. Your name or any other personal identifying information will not appear in the course project paper resulting from this study; however, with your permission anonymous quotations may be used. If you have any questions

regarding this study, or would like additional information to assist you in reaching a decision about participation, please contact me by e-mail at hanna.retallack.14@ucl.ac.uk.

Thank you very much for considering your participation in this study.

Yours Sincerely,

Hanna Retallack
PhD Candidate UCL Institute of Education

Information Consent Letter for Audio Recording
PhD Research into Feminism in School Spaces

CONSENT FORM

I have read the information presented in the information letter about a study being conducted by Hanna Retallack for a PhD course project at UCL Institute of Education. I have had the opportunity to ask any questions related to this study, to receive satisfactory answers to my questions, and any additional details I wanted.

With full knowledge of all foregoing, I agree to participate in this study.

☐ YES ☐ NO

I agree to have the feminist group discussion audio recorded.

☐ YES ☐ NO

I agree to be involved in a further focus group discussion that will be audio recorded.

☐ YES ☐ NO

I agree to be involved in possible collaborative feminist activities that will be audio recorded.

☐ YES ☐ NO

I agree to the use of anonymous quotations in any writing produced about this research.

☐ YES ☐ NO

My name **(please print)** _____Date _____