

PHALLIC GIRLS? GIRLS' NEGOTIATION OF PHALLOGOCENTRIC POWER

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Introduction

In opposition to the largely liberal feminist concerns to address issues of self esteem and vulnerability in 'girls' during the 80s and 90s, in the millennium we have been faced with an onslaught of discourses about 'girl power' and the increasingly commonsense 'presumption' of gendered equality in education, work and sexual politics (Foster, 2000; Gonick, 2006; Harris, 2004; McRobbie, 2004; Taft, 2004). Harvard psychologist Dan Kindlon's (2006) recent book *Alpha Girls: Understanding the new American girl and how she is changing the world* suggests the 'Alpha Girl' is poised to change the world, economically, politically and socially, as a new hybrid that embodies the best traits of masculinity and femininity. According the New York Times,

These are the alpha girls, the new breed of American schoolgirl growing up free of gender stereotyping and ideological angst. They are the daughters of the feminist revolution, but they see no need to become feminists themselves because they know they are smarter than boys (Allen Mills, 2006, October 15)

While Kindlon suggests this new hybrid is somehow confident, assertive, competitive, autonomous, future oriented, risk taking, as well as collaborative, relationship oriented AND NOT obsessed with boyfriends or her physical appearance, in this chapter we want to ask questions about how girls are to miraculously balance the masculine with the feminine? What has happened in this manic formulation of successful femininity to issues of embodied sexual difference?

In this chapter, we return to questions and theorizing about phallogocentricism, particularly in the educational contexts of schools where we conduct our empirical research. We explore ongoing fears over the symbolic castration of boys/masculinity and educational anxieties over a free floating phallus which in individualised, neo-liberal discourse can be taken-up by girls, hence the title of our chapter – 'phallic girls'. Rather than girls being able to easily occupy a lived subject position of 'phallic girl', however,

we will argue girls are increasingly demanded to display a whole series of contradictory characteristics – those ascribed to femininity (nice, nurturing, passive, sexually desirable via hyper-feminine embodiment and display) as well as those ascribed to masculinity (rational, competitive, sexually assertive – bearing the phallus). Our empirical data thus underscores the impossibility of the fantastical figure of the ‘phallic girl’ and illustrates the abiding regulative rhythm of phallogocentric power in schooling. We will also, however, map some of the complex ways girls are negotiating phallic-centred sexual regulation in their everyday performances of ‘girl’ at school. But rather than understand girls’ attempts to take up masculinity as mere mimicry of the phallus, as has been promoted in recent feminist theorizing, we suggest, drawing on Butler, Braidotti, and others, that many of their practices indicate radical disruptions and displacements of phallogocentric power.

Postfeminist educational panics: Castration, impotency and fear of the feminine

After God created Adam, who was alone, He said, 'It is not good for man to be alone.' He then created a woman for Adam, from the earth, as He had created Adam himself, and called her Lilith. Adam and Lilith immediately began to fight. She said, 'I will not lie below,' and he said, 'I will not lie beneath you, but only on top. For you are fit only to be in the bottom position, while I am to be the superior one.' Lilith responded, 'We are equal to each other inasmuch as we were both created from the earth.' But they would not listen to one another. When Lilith saw this, she pronounced the Ineffable Name and flew away into the air. (Genesis 2:18. cited in *The Lilith Shrine*ⁱ)

Lilith also vowed “to attack men in their sleep. She would steal their semen to give birth to more demon children”.ⁱⁱ

We have argued elsewhere how the educational discourse around ‘failing boys’ has directly contributed to a reactive, celebratory postfeminist discourse around *over*-successful girls (Ringrose 2007, Renold and Allan 2006). Hammering home what Foster (2000) calls a ‘presumptive equality’, the failing boys discourse produces new common-sense understandings or assumptions that women have achieved equality with or even

surpassed men in society. An international media frenzy feeds these anxiety provoking truth claims with headlines like “Girls top of the class worldwide: women have overtaken men at every level of education in developed countries around the world.” (*BBC News*, 2003); and “Girls beat boys at school, now they get higher pay” (Rozenburg and Bennet, *The Times Online*, 2006). The cover story “The new gender gap: From kindergarten to grad school, boys are becoming the second sex’ in the US *Business Week* (Conlin, 2003) suggesting “girls have built a kind of scholastic Roman Empire alongside boys’ languishing Greece”. Girls’ educational successes are represented as the dawn of a brave new ‘post-feminist’ world in which gender inequality no longer exists (Harris, 2004)ⁱⁱⁱ. In this brave new world, feminism has won the battle for equality, and treats boys and men as victims of the cultural shifts that have established the new ‘gender order’ (Connell, 1987). As Angela McRobbie (2004: 4) argues, postfeminist discourses:

actively draw on and invoke feminism as that which can be taken into account in order to suggest that equality is achieved, in order to install a whole repertoire of meanings which emphasize that it is no longer needed, a spent force (2004: 4).

Recent UK developments in policy documents and guidance suggest that the seductive discourse of ‘successful girls’ and ‘failing boys’ continues to hold. For example, in the recent 134 page UK governmental document, “*Gender and Education: The Evidence on Pupils in England*” there is systematic acknowledgement of the ways gender, class and ethnicity intersect that, one would think, should ultimately explode the myth of gender as the main predictor of differential attainment. The document states clearly that;

the focus is not solely on the ‘gender gap’ and ‘boys’ underachievement’ but also acknowledges that, on the one hand, boys are also high attainers, and on the other hand, that many girls face significant challenges (DFSCF 2007:6).

In schizoid fashion, however, the very next set of guidance issued specifically targets young boys and achievement (3-7 years). The instructions, titled “Confident, capable and creative: supporting boys achievements” are a series of prescriptions (with supporting

case studies) for early years' practitioners to re-masculinise boys and 'unlock', through careful diagnosis, their academic potential by drawing out their innate masculine learning styles. Once more, the fantasy figure of the academically successful super-girl haunts her gendered other, the 'failing boy' (Epstein et al. 1998) robbed of confidence and mastery (Walkerdine, 1988). The two figures continue to rub alongside each other to produce a gendered binary framework of achievement that extends beyond the field of education to fuel the fears about wider contemporary moral panics over the symbolic redistribution of phallic power from boys/masculinity to girls/femininity. To our minds, these anxieties harken back to age old myths of women robbing men of phallic potency. These are writ large in the biblical figure of Lilith who refused to "lie beneath" Adam, then stole men's semen in their sleep. Fears of castration - mythological references, symbolic aspects and fantasies - were explored at length by Freud in his famous treatises on castration anxiety (1900, 1901). The way contemporary fears and anxieties fold back into these cultural motifs and anxieties over feminine power and masculine loss have proven instructive for us in analyzing the contemporary context, and enduring phallogocentric discourses regulating the lives of young girls and women.

Top girls, Phallic girls and the postfeminist masquerade

Responding to the particular anxieties, fears, 'repudiations' and 'repressions' of feminism that orient the contemporary postfeminist terrain of wider popular culture, feminist cultural studies theorist, Angela McRobbie (2004: 6) considers the effects of a new sexual contract for girls and women, which she calls the 'post-feminist masquerade' (2007). This masquerade is a pernicious form of inscription and entrapment, exercised through a discourse of compulsory choice, where young women entering the Symbolic (i.e. traditionally male sphere of power) are required to perform a hyper-femininity and submissiveness in order to negotiate the terrain of hegemonic masculinity without jeopardising their "heterosexual desirability" or being positioned as "aggressive and competitive ... as they come to inhabit positions of authority" (2007:726). The postfeminist masquerade is a "containment strategy adopted on behalf of the (patriarchal) symbolic faced with possible disruption to the stable binaries of sexual difference" (723) and operates as the 'new cultural dominant' in advanced western

democracies regulating the lives and experiences of girls and young women. McRobbie thus insists that there is a 'renewed institutionalisation of gender inequity' and a 'restabilisation of gender hierarchy' which re-orders the heterosexual matrix with a 'double movement':

'Its voluntaristic structure works to conceal that patriarchy is still in place, while the requirements of the fashion and beauty system ensure that women are still fearful subjects, driven by the need for complete perfection (Riviere 1929/1985: 42)' (McRobbie 2007:726)

New research is critically exploring how girls are navigating the neo-liberal 'top-girl' discourses of success (McRobbie 2004, 2007; Renold 2005; Ringrose 2007) which demand both academic excellence and public projections of highly stylised hyper-femininity. This research is beginning to explore the gendered, classed and raced contradictions that make negotiating these subject positions impossible: being the 'nurturer and aggressor', the 'hetero-feminine desirable and successful learner' - 'the sexy, assertive and high achieving 'supergirl' (Archer, 2005; Renold and Allen, 2006; Ringrose, 2006; Ringrose and Walkerdine, 2007; Walkerdine, 2007; Youdell, 2006). Much of this research points not only to McRobbie's 'fearful subject' negotiating the disciplinary gaze and capillary power of phallogocentrism, but a wider fear and anxiety of a displaced phallus.

Pivotal here, and of specific interest to us for this chapter, is McRobbie's (2007:732) reconfiguration of 'the phallic girl', a subject position which "bears the superficial marks of boldness, confidence, aggression and even transgression (in that it refuses the feminine deference of the post-feminist masquerade)". We have found this figuration particularly seductive and productive to make sense of the simultaneous regulative grip of, and resistance to, phallogocentric power and the paradoxical re-figuration of femininity (from 'lack' to 'capaciousness') within the Symbolic. We find the motif of the phallic girl instructive because it reinvigorates an older feminist language of phallogocentrism (Cixous, Irigaray, Kristeva,), which offers important symbolic and metaphorical ways of exploring masculine power. The joining up of such disparate terms

as girl and phallus is also usefully posed as a series of questions: Is a phallic girl possible? How are girls navigating what Lacan called the 'master signifier' of the phallus in contemporary contexts? Drawing on four analytic case studies, we explore girls and young women's resistances to the post-feminist masquerade, as complex negotiations within an enduring phallogocentric heteronormative sexual matrix, and a social and cultural context of what McRobbie has called 'resurgent patriarchy' (2007:736).

Problematising the phallicism of the phallic girl

For McRobbie (2006:10), the 'phallic girl', within the terrain of neo-liberal postfeminist culture, is a politicised subject who "wrestles some power from the almighty symbolic" by joining her male counterparts in hegemonic masculine pursuits (e.g. from educational achievement to violence) and pleasures (e.g. from drinking cultures to sexual agency). However, according to McRobbie, the phallic girl (she offers examples of the career girl and 'laddette') exhibits a "licensed and temporary form of phallicism" (McRobbie 2007:732). Whether the girl takes on either masculine success or violence, the condition of these new found freedoms is the withholding of any critique of the regulatory dynamics which sustain hegemonic masculinity (i.e. "the almighty symbolic"): These re-configurations of normative femininity restabilise sexual identities which might otherwise be disrupted as a result of these new occupational positions, educational achievements and control of fertility available to young women, and of course the spectral presence, or the lingering aftermath of feminist politics (McRobbie 2007:734)

The phallic girl is theorised through discourses of mimicry – a temporary formation which does not actually disturb the hierarchy of the Symbolic (i.e. girls/women as always already Other).

While the figuration of the 'phallic girl' is productive in pointing to the impossibility of doing/being 'the successful girl', and shores up the anxiety induced by the fantasy that she can rock the patriarchal boat and attain phallic power, the binary logic of sexual difference which constitutes the phallicism of the phallic girl as impossible subject needs problematising. We would like to contest the assumption that girls who perform what Judith Halberstam (1998) has termed, 'female masculinity' are simply rejecting 'femininity' for a slice of male power or that when girls attempt to perform

those practices ascribed to masculinity this somehow only serves to reinforce the gender binary in the Symbolic!.

This problematic of the phallic girl/woman is of course not unique to McRobbie or Halberstam. Rather, this figure lies at the heart of queer/feminist theory and debate and is apparent in Judith Butler (2004) and Rosi Braidotti's (1994, 2003) elaborations of Luce Irigaray's radical deconstructive critique of phallogocentrism (that is, the theory of hierarchical sexual difference where the masculine is the privileged signifier and the feminine is constituted as object, as lack and always enslaved to the phallus). In this binary opposition, 'masculinity' and 'femininity' are each locked into their respective and unequal relationships of power and powerlessness where "the feminine is too narrowly defined as an instrument of phallogocentrism" (Butler 2004:197). Indeed, Butler raises an important question in her critique of the sexual difference which upholds phallogocentrism:

Must the framework for thinking about sexual difference be binary for this feminine multiplicity to emerge? Why can't the framework for sexual difference itself move beyond binarity into multiplicity? (2004:197)

Butler's (2004) description of the pathologisation of 'Butch Desire' as a consequence of defining femininity too narrowly, can be equally applied to the ways in which 'tomboy' in the feminist academic literature is frequently rendered as the ultimate phallic girl, as we will explore below, a girl who takes on masculinity through a misogynistic ditching of femininity and desiring of masculinity (see Reay 2001, Renold 2006, Renold forthcoming 2009). Discursively trapped in its own binary logic, girls' appropriation of 'masculinity' is, in these analyses, seen to be entrenching the social power of gender norms, valorising 'masculinity' (power), devaluing 'femininity' (lack), rather than exploring Butch desire, the tomboy subject position or indeed the girls' negotiation of the phallus as "another permutation of feminine desire", a view, which as Butler argues, "seeks a more open account of femininity, one that goes against the grain of the phallogocentric vision" (2004: 197).

However, as many empirical studies and our own case studies illustrate below, the anxiety produced by a mutating phallus that can move from body parts, to any/Other bodies (see Butler's 1993 chapter, *The Lesbian Phallus*) incites some aggressive reterritorializations as we have illustrated in the powerful educational discourse, public anxieties and truth claims about 'failing boys' as a consequence of its decoupling from the naturalized link to male morphology. In the case studies below, we critically explore the ways in which the phallus is differently taken-up by girls (by feminine morphologies) and explore the extent to which appropriating the phallus (as "disavowed identification" Butler 1993:87) within brutal disciplinary regimes of phallogocentrism effects a "castrating occupation of that central masculine trope, fuelled by the kind of defiance which seeks to overturn that very degradation of the feminine" (1993:87). Quite unlike what we would see as the impotency of McRobbie's phallic girls (who simply take on the phallus temporarily and never disturb the 'almighty symbolic'), we explore empirical moments of girl subjects who have the potential to rupture, displace and ultimately castrate the privileged signifier and reconfigure normative femininity. Or do they? To what extent, as Butler (1993:89) poses, can the plasticity of the phallus (as imaginary effect) open up "a site of proliferative resignifications ... recalling and displacing the masculinism by which it is impelled" and what are the costs and consequences of such resignificatory practices and the shaking up of sexual difference itself in the lives of young tween and teenage girls? Moreover, how do Other differences, which make a difference (e.g. class, ethnicity, religion, age) and which act as markers upon feminine subjectivity feature in this process?

We draw upon three different research projects from our empirical research with diverse groups of tween and teenage girls in England (South East) and Wales (South West), (Renold 1999/2005^{iv}; Renold and Allan 2006^v; Ringrose 2008^{vi}a, b). In the analysis that follows we focus on 5 girls from our respective research, Erica/a, Jo, Nyla, Libby and Faiza. Eric/a and Jo are both white English, middle (Eric/a) and working class (Jo) 10 year old girls who participated in a year long ethnography exploring gender and sexual relations and identities in the primary (elementary) school. Libby (white, welsh, middle-class) and Nyla (Welsh-Pakastani) are two 10 year old girls from different schools (see footnote ii) who participated in a series of group interviews and

ethnographic conversations (including audio-diaries) in a pilot study exploring the relationship between academic achievement and gendered and sexualized bullying. Faiza (13) is Welsh-Iraqi, and participated in a small group and individual interview based study on teen girls, and issues of femininity, masculinity and aggression. Faiza was interviewed 3 times over 6 months to explore her responses to and experiences of gendered and sexualized bullying at school.

Girls and Sexual Regulation: The continuing terrain of phallogentric power

Girls continue to be very aware of the objectification and surveillance of their bodies in everyday contexts of schooling. There have been a number of ethnographic educational research studies powerfully illustrating the ways in which being an 'intelligible girl' (Butler 1993) involves investing in cultural markers that signify dominant notions of heterosexual femininity (Hey 1997; Walkerdine et al. 2000; Aapola et al 2004; Driscoll 2002; Gonick 2003; Harris et al. 2004; Harris 2004; Griffin 2005). More recently this research has begun to identify the compulsory sexualisation of 'older' femininities as a defining feature of young contemporary girlhood (Kehily et al. 2001; Reay 2001; Ali 2003; Epstein et al. 2001; Kehily 2003; Russell and Tyler 2002; Renold 2005; Griffin et al. 2006; Allan 2007; Mellor 2007; Ringrose, 2008b). We have argued elsewhere (Ringrose and Renold forthcoming 2008) how girls continue to be facing fierce heterosexualized competition, and 'real' (e.g. physical heterosexual harassment) and symbolic phallogentric violence (e.g. discourses of young compulsory heterosexuality), within everyday schooling environments and within the dynamics of their relationships with girls and boys. These practices find expression through the highly regulative discourses around sexuality, appearance and behaviour of other girls in the private spaces of their friendship groups as a mode of constructing categories of self and other (Duncan, 2004; Hey 1997). This is particularly evident in comments like these from our previous research with primary and secondary school girls:

Carrie (age 10): I'm not being horrible but have you seen Trudy's skirt, it's her five year old sister's" and its like up here (draws an invisible line well above her knee)... when she bends down you can see her bum... some people say she's a tart. (Renold 2005: 46)

Faiza (age 14): At one stage Katie was dressing up in skirts the length of her knickers dressed like that, with like nothing there and she would be all really weird, in other words,

she made herself small.. It was like, O she walked past a boy and she goes, 'O he fancies me'. ...[And] Amy Turner She's kind of slut if you think of, in my perspective, it's not like she's fat and she's like, she looks horrible, she has got a nice figure but like she shouldn't do it, she shouldn't show it off to everyone.

Elizabeth: She wears skirts about that big.

Faiza: Because having a reputation isn't a good thing, it's a bad thing because (...) will go, Oh don't go out with her, she'll go out for a week and then.

Safa: No but go out with them because she'll do anything with him and stuff like that.

Faiza: In other words the boys are taking advantage because ...the only reason they start going out with her is because they think she'll do stuff with them.

(Ringrose, 2008b: 247)

As we, and others (Hey, 1997; Kehily, 2002) have shown, there is a delicate balance to be negotiated between performing heterosexualized femininity and regulating the self and others, that is, being sexually attractive but not too available, and closely regulating one's sexual identity and reputation (Griffin 2004).

Renold's (see 2000, 2005) early research in the late 1990's highlighted and discussed at length these pressures upon all girls to invest in their bodies as heterosexually desirable commodities and noted a careful balancing act, reported particularly by high-achieving primary school-girls in their negotiation of 'being clever' with 'being feminine' (i.e. heterosexually desirable and desiring). At the turn of the Millennium, in a pilot project specifically conducted to explore the relationship between academic identities and gender/sexual norms in the primary years, Renold and Allan (2006) confirmed earlier findings of the ways in which girls not only continue to struggle with competing notions of 'cleverness' and 'femininity' (Walkerdine 1990) but negotiate the compulsory performance of the 'sexy, assertive, high-achieving super-girl'. While 'having it all' (brains, beauty and confidence) was not a desirable subject position for the majority of girls (middle or working class, white or ethnic minority), there were two girls, Nyla and Libby who openly reported striving to 'be the best' academically: Nyla, to secure a 'better future' and Libby, to maintain and reproduce her own classed academic privilege. Each girl produced their successes through a discourse of 'power' - actively seeking out ways to promote and maintain their academic standing as 'high-achievers' and embrace and take pride in their achievements. However, they did so in strikingly

different ways and with very different effects. For Libby, sexualised hyper-femininity seemed a necessary partner to the pursuit of academic excellence. Nicknamed by her class teacher as leader of the “knickers and bra brigade”, Libby and her friends invested heavily in dominant sexualised ‘girly culture’, “obsessing” (Sally, aged 10) about their underwear and boys. Libby describes their collective femininity as being “just normal girls” - constructing ‘girly’ identities in relation to and against Other femininities (“we don’t like geeky girls”, “tomboys”, “mosher girls” and “smelly” “disgusting girls that fancies another girl ... a lesbian”). Given that Libby and her friends were pushing the boundaries of acceptable ways of performing ‘clever’ (Libby was one of the only girls to be described by teachers as “confident” and “assertive”) perhaps troubling normative femininities was too much of a risky enterprise.

This regulatory twinning of ‘bright and beautiful’ becomes increasingly visible in the de-coupling of ‘clever’ from normative configurations of ‘femininity’ in Nyla’s classed (working-class) and racialised (Muslim) reconfiguration of ‘girl’ and her open contempt and rejection of emphasised hetero-femininity. Unlike her white and south Asian-Welsh peers Nyla constructed her femininity in direct and critical opposition to emphasised ‘girly’ femininities. Nyla’s ambivalent femininity as strong-minded, autonomous, anti-girly, anti-boy, clever, traditional (in her sartorial expression) and moody pushed the normative boundaries of ‘doing girl’ (see Renold and Allan 2006). Although Nyla was supported by her immediate and extended family (particularly her grandmother) in ‘doing femininity’ and ‘cleverness’ in the way that she did, she was increasingly marginalised and subject to verbal bullying and severe social exclusion, as these quotes illustrate below:

AA: What about being picked on or teased for doing hard work or anything? Does anyone ever get that?

Sue: Well, Nyla. A lot.

Shamilla: Nyla yeah she always goes off and she is really moody yeah and she rushes her work and then she gets a sticker. She then goes out to play and says ‘oh no one can do those sums and everything and I can!’ and she always shows off.. We call her Moody’s Point! ...

[...]

Deepak: That's the one I don't like [points to Nyla who has just let us know we need to get back to class] ... look when she walks past, yeah, she is like mad! She acts like a man really!

Consequently, representing the gendered and a/sexualised Other Nyla seemed to confuse her classmates and was multiply positioned (in their struggle for classification?) as: 'a boy', 'man-like', 'a nightmare', 'a bully', 'weird' and 'mad'. Renold and Allan (2006) have struggled in their theorising of Nyla's academic success in radically reconfiguring emphasised heteronormative femininity - against the odds (given the high social and emotional costs of sustaining her position) opting for a conceptual language of 'different', 'liminal' and 'ambivalent' femininities (see Gonick, 2004; McLeod, 2002). Nyla's positioning by her classmates as 'man', however, illustrates the abiding impossibility (Youdell, 2006) for some subjects to embody phallic power, without simultaneously embodying an intelligible and recognizably sexualized embodied femininity. It reminds us of the stark gendered and sexualized norms operationalized through daily practice at school, and the consequences of usurping the 'postfeminist masquerade' demanded of girls and women. We want to move on from this illustration of harsh, regulative gendered and sexualized power, upon which McRobbie's thesis pivots, to further examples where we found greater ambivalence and strategies for navigating and possibly disrupting the binary gender symbolic and the phallogocentric power that underpins it, through an exploration of alternative figurations.

Disrupting phallogocentric power: empirical episodes as 'alternative figurations'

Alternative figurations consequently are figural modes of expressing affirmative ideas, thus displacing the vision of consciousness away from the phallogocentric mode (Braidotti 1994:113).

What is needed is not a new body part, as it were, but a displacement of the hegemonic symbolic (of heterosexist) sexual difference and the critical release of alternative imaginary schemas for constituting sites of erotogenic pleasure (Butler1993: 91)

There are an increasing number of queer and feminist appropriations of Deleuzian philosophy within the empirical social sciences (Hickey-Moody and Malins, 2006;

Tamboukou, 2004) and a growing critical educational literature on girls' subversive and resistant practices to hegemonic gendered and sexual discourses in which normative masculinities and femininities are queered (e.g. Jiwani et al. 2006; Rasmussen and Hickey-Moody forthcoming). We take our own inspiration from Rosi Braidotti's philosophical writings and specifically her notion of 'nomadic consciousness' as "a form of political resistance to hegemonic and exclusionary views of subjectivity" (1994:23). Of particular interest in terms of applying often abstract theorisations of subjectivity, power and desire is what she calls the philosophy and practice of "as if" which operates as a strategy to rescue ideas from the past to trace paths of transformation in the contemporary moment. Our own practice of 'as if', is returning to and reworking the theoretical tools of Irigaray, Kristeva, to explore, or make maps not simply tracings (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 13) of our empirical data of girls' micro-negotiations of the 'scattered hegemonies' (Kaplan 1987) of phallogocentrism. The 'as if' mode allows us to speculate upon what we identify through our ethnographic conversations, observations and narrative interviews with girls, practices which can "open up in-between spaces where new forms of political subjectivity can be explored" (Braidotti 1994:7). The data episodes that we draw upon below, are a purposeful selection of empirical moments that we feel offer up a range of potential 'alternative figurations' and allow us to excavate and revitalise old schemes of thought and critically explore girls social and cultural negotiations (that is their, identifications, attachments and detachments) to the everyday normative violences within the phallogocentric symbolic.

Girlfriend: Beating back the phallus?

This first alternative figuration revisits an episode which Renold (2002) has previously briefly outlined and theorised as a form of sexual harassment and a gender reversal of girls' appropriating male power. This episode is revisited not just to highlight the ways in which girls are actively subverting McRobbie's post-feminist masquerade in ways that are not neatly subsumed through the subject position of the masculinised 'phallic girl', but as a potential powerful rupture of the normative 'girlfriend' discourse in school-based tween culture. To contextualise, such norms pivoted around practices of physical intimacy ('girlfriends' pushing for sexual intimacy through kissing or holding

hands) to physical distance ('girlfriends' in name only) and wider discourses of performing 'girlfriend' and emphasised femininities (i.e. the ways in which 'young femininity' is frequently inscribed in discourses of submission and subordination to the heterosexual matrix/male gaze). While 'heterosexual harassment' may describe the behaviour of the episode to follow, Jo's playful violence towards her 'boyfriend' and thus radical departure from acceptable modes of courtship and ways of being and doing 'girlfriend', takes on an interesting twist when it is not pathologized as Jo performing aggressive violent masculinity (Ringrose 2006), but as potential rupture to a phallogocentric system and a heterosexual matrix through which femininity is only ever positioned as servicing 'masculinity'/'the phallus. What begins as straightforward resistance to male violence, unravels into a more complex relationship to and performance of the pleasures and pains of female violence and aggression:

(Note: Jo is at least one foot taller than William)

ER: So Jo, how are things with you and William?

Jo: All right (smiling).

Amanda: She whacked him the other day and he had a red mark like a hand shape/

Jo: That's because he comes round my house and he does this thing with a pipe cleaner ... he takes these little bits off and goes like that (strokes her hand across her cheek) and I got these cuts straight down here (laughing)

Jane: Eeer/

ER: He did that/ to your face?

Hayley: You always hit him, all, all the time

Jo: Yeah (giggles).

ER: So you slapped him?

Jo: Yeah I slapped him/

ER: Coz he made a mark on your face?

Jo: Yeah, coz/

Hayley: He had a hand mark on his back/ (almost defending William)

Amanda: She slaps him all the time/

Jo: He hits me (defensive tone, but weakly executed)

ER: So if he hits you, you hit him back/ or do you hit him and he hits you back?

Jo: Yeah, ... no he hits me and I hit him/ back

Amanda: If he thumps you though you don't think you'd want normally to keep hitting him do

you?

Jo: (Laughs and nods)

ER: You like that do you?

Jo: He doesn't but I do/I do (laughs)

ER: You like hitting him?

Jo: Yeah/ (wide grin on face)

Jo's playful violence (scratching, slapping, hitting and kicking) are episodes performed within not outside of 'femininity' and 'girlhood' and involve a range of complex interplays of psycho-social power relations that this article hasn't space to explore further. What we found particularly interesting are the ways in which 'unpopular' (within gender and sexual hierarchical peer group relations) middle-class and working-class^{vii} girls rupture their 'good girl' pupil identities (in classroom contexts, Jo was quiet, conscientious, academically able) to 'bad girl' identities in playful and pleasurable ways with a radical, if temporary and transitional subversion of normative romance-relations with boys made available by an ambivalent tweenage 'boyfriend/girlfriend' discourse and physical size (taller and stronger than romantic partners).

Faiza, an Iraqi Welsh girl from Jessica's recent research on girls and aggression (Ringrose, 2008a) also managed her desire in ways that involved episodes of physical (slapping, hitting, kicking) violence towards boys in part through her embodiment of being 'sporty' (Renold, 2005). This mode of embodiment and practice seemed to enable Faiza to physically engage (Paechter, 2003) with and enact physical violence back upon boys.

Faiza: Boys in my school go around smacking girls' arses... A girl got smacked on the arse, she turned around and said ha, ha and laughed. If a boy done that to me I would turn around and slap him one, kick him and slap him again.

JR: Why would that girl just be like oh ha, ha, ha?

Faiza: Because she'll probably be like um... oh he fancies me, I'm not going to do anything to that. There's a boy in my sister's year, he was walking past me and saying my name and coughing and saying things like that, it just gets on my nerves. So one day I slapped him, so then he went, ran and went behind his friend

and said it again. So I went up to his friend and goes move out of the way and he goes 'No'. So then his friend started saying my name. And ever since like that day which was about November, that boy comes up to me, says my name, hits me and expects me to run after him. He just, hits me, because the first couple of times, I started running after him, smacking him one and then running back and now he expects me to run after him again. I just can't be bothered anymore.

JR: So it's like a form of flirtation then, this hitting?

Faiza: If they call it that, yeah.

JR: Do you think?

Faiza: I don't know. I wouldn't think he fancies me.

JR: You don't?

Faiza: Because me and the boy done football together and I wouldn't think he fancied me.

Like Jo, Faiza attempts to constitute her own desires somewhat differently than those of the sexually-aggressive to other girls yet ultimately compliant to males, version of the feminine, embodied by girls like Libby, above. Faiza attempts to mark herself as actively desiring agent (in control), as well as recipient agent of male desire, capable of enacting desire and violence back upon the male aggressor, in ways that disrupt dominant heterosexualized scripts. Indeed, our respective ethnographic and narrative data with girls in schools, suggests, rather than normative femininity (in the latter case, 'girlfriend' subject position) is being radically disrupted in the name of and through aggressions and violences (hence our sub-title, 'beating up the phallus') that rupture the normative stasis of femininity as it is configured through the hegemonic heterosexual presumption of phallogocentrism. This is not, however, any simple taking on or mimicry of the phallus on the part of girls, rather a highly complex negotiation as we explore below.

Tomboy: taking on or displacing the phallus?

Recent research has drawn our attention to the diversity of tomboyism. 'Tomboy' can be something that girls can exclusively invest in or can be a more fluid and mobile enterprise where girls might talk about being a 'bit tomboy'. It is the latter that appears

most common in the latest empirical research (see Paechter and Clark 2007). However, the case study of Erica we illustrate below (and is elaborated further in Renold forthcoming 2009 and Renold and Ringrose forthcoming 2008) is an exploration of the ‘tomboy’ subject position as girls’ negotiation of and resistance to the everyday modalities of hyper-sexualised gender performativity, embedded within a phallogocentric heterosexual matrix as it operates within the local pre-teen school-based environment.

Erica strongly identified with the subject position ‘tomboy’ (see Renold forthcoming 2009 for a full discussion of Erica) and spent much of her lower junior years accessing the boy-dominated footballing culture. She also became an honorary boy and used to be known as ‘Eric’ – a seemingly unproblematic and thus intelligible identity in her white, middle-class school. From age 9 Eric returns to former Erica, but in no simple reversing of gendered subject positions. Indeed rather than conceive of Erica’s deployment of tomboy where girls devalue and ditch femininity and girlhood (see Paechter and Clarke 2007 and Reay, 2001) Erica stressed the ways in which she was a ‘girl’ doing ‘tomboy’ (e.g. “I’m still a girl” or “it doesn’t make you a boy”, “I’m a girl without all the make-up”). What Erica refused was engaging with and performing the dominant heterosexualised hyper-femininity much like her ‘top-girl’ peers (see Renold 2005). Erica’s deployment of the tomboy discourse seemed to queer and rupture the heterosexual matrix, which allowed her to carve out distance from heteronormative practices. She was not only overtly critical not just of the routinised boyfriend/girlfriend culture (“I hate all that boyfriend talk”) but of the seemingly innocent games of kiss chase and other sexualised games prevalent throughout the school :

Near the pond, I notice Sam, a Year 3, chasing Trudy and Tina (year 6). He then starts to pinch their bottoms and pokes his fingers up and in between the cheeks. Two of his friends join in and Sally and Hannah who are standing nearby are also chased and get their bums pinched. They are all laughing and screaming and others begin to watch, particularly some of the Year 6 boys. The shrieking and screaming continues and the boys seem to be almost grabbing their girls now, rather than just pinching and poking them. Erica watches with a look of distaste on her face. She glances over and sees me watching too. She eventually walks over to me and says, eyes still fixed on the boys: “Look at them ... it’s disgusting, the little pervs”.

Erica's distancing in this moment and others constitutes a significant challenge to the normative discourses of 'heterosexualised play' (Blaise 2005). Resisting the penetrative, phallogocentric performances in operation, Erica mobilizes a powerful discourse of moral degeneracy to pathologize the boys as 'disgusting little pervs'. Indeed, of particular significance, for this chapter, is the ways in which Erica's body through time, her longitudinal performative investment in 'tomboyism' and queering of gender, age and sexual norms from tomboy Eric to tomboy Erica seemed to shield her from a number of heterosexualising processes within her local school-based peer culture. Such practices ranged from sexual harassment and innuendo to coercive romantic positionings within an increasingly compulsory boyfriend/girlfriend culture (see Renold 2006, Renold forthcoming 2009). The distance she achieved was in stark contrast to other girls in the study, located as she was at a nexus of temporal and spatial discourses which disrupted the coherence of sex, gender, sexuality and desire. Erica seemed to be making 'alternative figurations' possible and, as Butler (2004:217) states, a mode of becoming Otherwise.

Eric/a's story of how some girls are doing 'tomboy' is a phenomenon far removed from any simple imitation of 'masculinity'. Erica's investment in tomboyism does indeed undermine and mutate the heterosexual male gaze in ways that, in her tweenage years, re-work and reconfigure normative femininity as it operates within girls' local primary school-based cultures and in ways that linger and endure, providing her with a critical vocabulary and insight into (and thus refusal to be positioned by) the everyday violences of sexualised name-calling and harassment within and beyond the school gates. A similar dynamic of critique was evident from Faiza, who turned her critical awareness onto the performance of hypersexualized femininity throughout her interviews:

Faiza: Cleavage. There is a girl in my class, every time she bends over she pulls up her thong.

JR: Really?

Faiza: When she is walking past a boy, she'll suddenly start talking about how her thong is bugging her.

JR: Really? What do you think of that?

Faiza: It's disgusting, I wouldn't walk past a boy and say, 'ah, my thong is giving me a

wedgey'

Crucially, like Erica, Faiza's resistance is both regulatory of the 'girl' and critical of the 'postfeminist' hypersexualized masquerade, evident in her "disgust" signified by the sleazy femininity of the thong which holds condensed sexualized and performative meanings in contemporary culture (McRobbie, 2006; Gill, 2006). This led Faiza to some very important disruptions of phallogocentric power, including her ability to critique masculine surveillance of her and her constitution as 'boy':

Faiza: Ever since I have started playing football, because my dad has always said that it's boys' sport and my brother has always called me, 'oh you boy, you play football', ...but... really, girls aren't becoming like boys. Football isn't a boy's game anyway. It shouldn't be called a men's game... I don't know, girls aren't becoming boys...in the Victorian times you wouldn't, you'd never see a girl playing football or anything like that, you would always see girls in dresses and if they were in trousers that would just look wrong and everyone would start staring at them. But now, girls wear trousers, girls play football, are they becoming like boys? Not really, wearing trousers and playing football doesn't make you a boy. Like the pizza adverts, drinking beer and watching football on TV doesn't make you a man.

Faiza's critical insights - her criticism of her dad's pronouncements about football as a boy's sport, her brother's calling her a boy and her questioning of the gender order that is so threatened by girls' entrance into phallic power are apparent. This critique culminated in a more radical disruption of phallic centred desire below:

Faiza: I don't want to get married to a man, I don't want to get married. But I want children, but I don't want to get married.

J: Why is that?

Faiza: I don't know, I always see marriages with problems, you break up, money problems, something problem. I want it to stay to myself.

J: Okay, so that's why you want to have your career and...

Faiza: Because if I get married...I'd be like not worried about my career but worried about what he wants to worry about and things he'd want to do. He wouldn't worry about my career exactly would he?

J: So how do you think you would do that then? Have children but not be married?

Faiza: I wouldn't mind adopting a child.

J: So tell me your whole scenario then that you have worked out, like ideally, it doesn't have to really happen but...

Faiza: When I grow up, first of all I want to live in a house with Lucy. We want to live in a house together. We both want to be doctors. I don't know and then I don't want to get married, I might adopt.

In interpreting this passage we have struggled with the questions: Is the phallus displaced or is it claimed by Faiza in this passage? Is she a phallic girl who will get the means to produce a child by other means? Or is a separate space of desire opened up? A compulsory heterosexual identity, which will lead to marriage, is usurped in Faiza's aspiration to have children without a phallus. The bonds of friendship are not severed through primary commitment to heterosexual desirability and ultimately conjugal bonds of marriage. Phallic-bound service is thoroughly disrupted, as Faiza also goes against her constitution as racialized and economically dependent Muslim 'minority' girl, to imagine herself as economically powerful and independent doctor. We would like to suggest, therefore, that Faiza's narratives operate with the dual momentum described by Butler (1991:91) above, as "displacing the hegemonic symbolic" (the phallus) and offering a "critical release of alternative imaginary schemas" which in turn offer Faiza moments of "pleasure".

Conclusions

This chapter illustrates the continuing relevance of Lacan's (1977: 321) deliberations upon the phallic 'deprived' woman, and his pronouncement (and worry?!) that "in order to be the phallus...a woman will reject an essential part of femininity, namely all her attributes in the masquerade." Part of our project is to continue to challenge the constitution of girls as either inherently lacking *or* as able to unproblematically take on the mantle of phallic power. Our goal has also been to find spaces in everyday practice where girls' narratives disturb and unsettle "the ostensibly originating and controlling power of the Lacanian phallus, *indeed its installation as the privileged signifier of the symbolic order*" (Butler, 1993: 73, emphasis added).

Luce Irigaray (1997) gave feminists an alternative vocabulary of sexual desire, which re-orient the feminine toward active and multiplicitous desire in challenge to unitary, phallogocentric, one-penis-organ-bound desire that grounds the binary oppositions that constitute the feminine as lacking against the masculine. Helene Cixous

(2000) has offered the image of Medusa to express this non-phallic multiplicity and to also counter Freud and Lacan's reduction of women to lack, this metaphor also capturing the horror we experience at the opening up of the repressed feminine the "free[ing] of all suppressed desires, all sexual impulses".¹ Kristeva (1982) in turn offers us the notion of jouissance (something connected to the 'revolt' against norms) to try and articulate the multiplicity and complexity of erotic and psychic pleasure and abjection in the feminine, that we need to find and cultivate. We find these articulations of multiplicity important to return to in challenging any simple notion of a 'phallic girl'. It helps in deconstructing the mythological object of fear - the top, alpha super-girl - who is presumed to be taking up and wreaking havoc with the masculine appendage, reversing the natural order of male supremacy in the worlds of school and work (see Baker forthcoming). It also offers a way to complicate the too simple notion that girls who are taking up masculinized practices are simply mimicking boys.

Integral to this more capacious theorisation of femininity, is envisioning the ways in which 'masculinity' is spoken by and emerges from girls' bodies but NOT as any simple or straightforward 'copy' or mimicry (such is the frequent conceptualisation of how being a tomboy involves ditching 'femininity', or how physical violence in girls is masculinised as analogous to 'femininity'). As Deleuze and Guattari (1987: 12) have insisted:

Mimicry is a very bad concept, since it relies on binary logic to describe phenomena of an entirely different order. The crocodile does not reproduce a tree trunk, any more than the chameleon reproduces the colours of its surroundings.

Interpreting the ways in which girls' engagement with and take-up of 'masculinity' or phallogocentric discourses as either mimesis or simply a renewed sexism, misses the ways in which girls manipulate norms, exceed them and re-work them "and expose the realities to which we thought we were confined as open to transformation" (Butler 2004:217). It also misses how "these norms can be significantly deterritorialized through

¹ <http://www.arts.cornell.edu/english/mode/documents/alexander.doc>

the citation” (Butler 2004:218), and the complexity of the process of negotiating power. Drawing in Irigaray, Butler argues for a critical mimesis to suggest that the working and re-working of norms, the performing of norms by different bodies may well appear to “echo the master discourse” (particularly when other girls are referring to each other as being or behaving ‘like boys’). However, as Butler suggests, “something is persisting and surviving, and the words of the master sound different when they are spoken by one who is, in the speaking, in the recitation, undermining the obliterating effects of his claim” (Butler 2004:201).

In the examples of alternative figurations we have explored how girls like Jo, Erica and Faiza are taking up aspects of violent or sporty masculinity, but this is not a simple temporary seizure or copy, rather offers new formulations and also possibilities for rupture and critique. We find these moments provide evidence of alternative figurations, and are important insofar as they illuminate how reconfigurations of normative femininity can destabilise rather than restabilize what McRobbie calls the postfeminist masquerade (sexual identities – hegemonic masculinity, femininity and heterosexuality –) and thus disrupt what might remain undisrupted in light of new achievements (McRobbie 2007:734). Braidotti (1994:197) argues that the future symbolic is one in which femininity has multiple possibilities, “released from the demand to be one thing, or to comply with a singular norm, the norm devised for it by phallogocentric means”. This chapter and our ‘alternative figurations’ is, we hope, a contribution to continue these debates, drawing on our empirical research with girls (and boys) about the status and effects of the past, present and future symbolic.

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ⁱⁱⁱ For a more extensive media analysis of international panic over 'overly-successful girls' see: Ringrose, forthcoming.

^{iv} This project was a year long ethnographic study exploring the construction of children's gender and sexual identities in their final year (Year 6) of primary school. This research was conducted during the academic year 1995/6 in two contrasting primary schools situated in a small semi-rural town in the East of England. Jo went to Tipton Primary (white, working and middle class catchment) and Erica to Hirstwood Primary (white, predominantly middle-class catchment). Alongside on-going participant observation, one of the main methods employed to 'get close' to children's social worlds was through unstructured exploratory group interviews. These interviews often took off in some quite unexpected directions, including discussions and disclosures on more sensitive areas such as bullying, homophobia, sexual harassment, boyfriends and girlfriends, as well as talk about schoolwork, play, friendships, music, popular culture, fashion and appearance.

^v This project explored girls' and boys' perceptions and experiences of how they feel about and perform 'academic success' in Year 5 (9 and 10 year olds). This research was carried out over a 6 week period in June/July 2002, in three Year 5 classes by Sandy Allan and myself in three schools in a city in South Wales, UK. Nyla went to Riverbank Primary (multi-ethnic, working-class catchment) and Libby went to Allbright Primary (predominantly white, middle-class catchment). We adopted a multi-method approach integrating friendship group interviews, participant observations and pupil diaries. While the interviews predominantly explored children's views about school and school-work and specifically the gendering of children's relationship to school/school-work, a significant part of the interview involved encouraging children to talk about gender relations and gender identity-work more widely.

^{vi} Jessica's data draws upon narrative interview research with girls friendship groups from a recently completed Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada funded pilot study, 'Girls and the subject of aggression and bullying'. The data for this paper draws on three successive interviews with a friendship group of girls (5 girls, aged 12-14) attending Herbert Secondary, an inner city school in South Wales, with high proportions of ethnically and economically marginalized students, and with student performance well below national averages. Jessica's research, however, was not based at/in school. She drew on work in cultural and youth studies, which have developed strategies for working with girls outside of the regulative institutional context of schools (Hall, 2000; McRobbie and Garber, 1976). After meeting

the mother of one of the girls during research in the local community centre, she conducted two successive focus group interviews with this group and then in-depth individual interviews with each of the girls at this mother's home. The interviews focused on a range of issues related to friendship and conflict at school and beyond.

^{vii} The terms 'middle-class' and 'working-class' are not adopted unproblematically. Sensitive to the ways in which cultural, social, material and discursive resources all play a part in the production of privilege (Skeggs 2004), they are used here primarily as a heuristic device to identify contrasting cultural/socio-economic backgrounds.