

GIRLHOODS AND SOCIAL ACTION: AN INTERSECTIONAL APPROACH TO WORKING- CLASS GIRLS' PARTICIPATION

by

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ABSTRACT

In this thesis I explore how working-class, mainly racially-minoritised girls at three schools in London's poorest boroughs participate in social action.

There are multiple discourses about what it means to be a girl in the contemporary global North. These inform how girlhood is thought about, talked about, and practised, and shape expectations about how girls should be. The 'successful girl' is expected to attain academic and extracurricular achievements that destine her for a 'successful' future; the 'good girl' is expected to be docile and to be caring; and girls' lives are shaped by ideas about authenticity or 'being yourself'. Yet girls experience inequalities that can make these ideals difficult to achieve, especially working-class girls. They make important contributions to society despite experiencing significant challenges, but these girls tend to be invisible in the media and in public policy beyond concerns about their sexuality or educational attainment, and are often assumed to be White British.

An important arena in which working-class girls contribute to society is through social action. In recent decades, successive UK governments have promoted youth social action – activities that make a positive difference to others or the environment, like volunteering – through initiatives to address inequalities in access and to boost participation. These usually consider inequalities along class lines, with strategies to address them involving removing practical barriers to involvement. However, inequalities are present in the experiences of social action and its consequences as well as in access to it. They are felt not along single axes such as class or gender or race, but instead by how these categories intersect. Inequalities are also not only experienced on an individual level but are shaped by how power operates across multiple domains (Hill Collins, 2000); discourses of girlhoods are embedded in these domains. This conceptualisation of inequality and power – an intersectional approach – is missing from policy and practice concerns. Moreover, what 'counts' as social action may be excluding important aspects of working-class girls' participation.

I find that working-class girls are expected to become successful by working hard at school and doing certain kinds of social action, but that this cannot guarantee their success; it therefore constitutes 'hope labour'. Expectations to be good lead to the girls having to do as they are told and spending much of their time at home, where they are expected to be caring by doing care work. I argue that this care work should be considered social action. Finally, I show that the girls value authenticity ('being themselves') but find it difficult, and that feeling (in)authentic can both enable and constrain their social action. I identify a discourse of the authentic girl in which social action can be both self-transformation and self-expression. In doing so, I provide insight into how power and inequalities shape working-class girls' lives and their participation in social action, and I show how an intersectional girlhoods approach can enhance our understanding of how social action might truly be more inclusive.

DEDICATION

For Aryel Thomas.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BAME	Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic
DofE	Duke of Edinburgh's Award
FSM	Free School Meals
IB	International Baccalaureate
NCS	National Citizen Service
NEET	Not in Employment, Education, or Training
NYSAS	National Youth Social Action Survey
RCT	Randomised Controlled Trial
RRS	UNICEF Rights Respecting School
UCAS	Universities and Colleges Admissions Service
VFI	Volunteer Functions Inventory
VPM	Volunteer Process Model
VSS	Voluntary Sector Studies

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Rationale

There are multiple discourses about what it means to be a girl in the contemporary global North.¹ These inform how girlhood is thought about, talked about, and practised, and shape expectations about how girls should be. The ‘successful girl’ is expected to attain academic and extracurricular achievements that will destine her for a successful future career (Ringrose, 2007). The ‘good girl’ is expected to do as she is told (Read, Francis and Skelton, 2011) and to care for others (Bell and Golombisky, 2004; Fisher, 2016; Pomerantz, Raby and Stefanik, 2013). Girls’ lives are also shaped by ideas about authenticity in terms of the desire to ‘be yourself’ and feel comfortable in doing so (Currie, Kelly and Pomerantz, 2007). Yet girls experience inequalities that can make these ideals difficult to achieve, related to gender stereotypes, mental health challenges, their ability to participate in political and public life, and pressure to look a certain way (Plan International UK, 2020).

These ideals of girlhood are sharply contrasted with the ‘at-risk’ girl. She engages in ‘risky’ behaviour such as drug and alcohol abuse and sexual activity, and risks failing at school and in future – failure that is blamed on her family and community (Harris, 2004a, p. 25). Working-class girls, generally assumed to be White British, are often positioned as ‘at-risk’. They tend to be invisible in the media and in public policy beyond constructions of them as a problem, fuelled by concerns about sexual

¹ In this thesis I use the term ‘global North’ to refer broadly to countries in Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand, and ‘global South’ to refer to other Oceanian countries, Latin America, Asia, and Africa. These terms are thought to reflect better an emphasis on ‘geopolitical relations of power’ over more problematic concepts of ‘development’ (Dados and Connell, 2012, p. 12).

exploitation (BBC News, 13 March 2018), educational attainment (Halfon, 10 October 2020), or their appearance (Dawson, 30 September 2020). The voices and concerns of girls – especially working-class girls – have also long been marginalised in academic literature (Keller, 2016a, p. 3). These girls make important but often overlooked contributions to society through social action, as this thesis will show.

The term ‘social action’ has various meanings, but in the current policy context ‘youth social action’ refers to ‘activities that young people do to make a positive difference to others or the environment’, such as volunteering (#iwill campaign, 2020b). Like volunteering, youth social action is generally considered to be a ‘good’ thing, not only for the people or cause supported but also for the individual young person themselves: young people are said to benefit in terms of ‘their character and confidence. They experience higher levels of wellbeing that can help improve their mental resilience. They also develop vital skills and networks that can support future employment’ (#iwill campaign, 2020b). Yet inequalities in participation mean young people from working-class backgrounds are considered to ‘miss out’ on these benefits. Data from the National Youth Social Action Survey (NYSAS) finds that 66% of young people from the most affluent backgrounds participate in youth social action compared to 43% of their least affluent peers (DCMS, 2020).²

In recent decades, successive UK governments have sought to address these inequalities by improving access to such activities. Under New Labour this included

² The survey uses the NRS social grade system to classify according to socioeconomic status, based on parents’ occupation. It classes ‘most affluent’ as Higher managerial, administrative and professional (A) and Intermediate managerial, administrative and professional (B). ‘Least affluent’ are Semi-skilled and unskilled manual workers (D) and State pensioners, casual and lowest grade workers, unemployed with state benefits only (E).

establishing Millennium Volunteers (1999), encouraging young people who had not previously been involved or who experienced social exclusion to volunteer with the strapline ‘MV for your CV’ (Davis Smith, Ellis and Howlett, 2002); adding volunteering to the National Curriculum via citizenship education (2001), partly to combat social exclusion; and setting up charity v (later vInspired), which encouraged young people from ‘disadvantaged’ backgrounds to volunteer (Russell, 2005). More recently, the Coalition government established the National Citizen Service (NCS), a youth programme young people pay to go on that has a youth social action element. NCS places particular emphasis on engaging young people they call ‘hard to reach’, ‘overrepresenting’ those from less affluent backgrounds (Select Committee on Citizenship and Civic Engagement, 2018, Chapter 4). The Coalition and Conservative governments have also supported the #iwill campaign – a cross-sector, cross-party, collective impact campaign designed to increase participation in youth social action, especially among the least affluent young people, coordinated by the charity Step Up To Serve from 2013–2020.

Strategies to address inequalities in participation have involved removing practical barriers, such as targeting recruitment in deprived areas – like the Team London Young Ambassadors programme (Dartington Service Design Lab, 2019a) – and reducing participation costs, such as through the bursaries provided to those from low-income families to cover the £50 NCS fee. Schools have also been promoted as key sites of participation and considered capable of reducing this ‘socioeconomic gap’ (Hall, n.d.), since most young people (69%) get involved in social action through school (Cabinet Office and Ipsos MORI, 2016). As well as social action being embedded into the curriculum via citizenship education, schools are judged on how

they promote social action (Ofsted, 2019, p. 11), they are considered the ‘most egalitarian way’ of encouraging participation (Hogg and de Vries, 2019, n.d.), and promotion of social action programmes such as NCS and Duke of Edinburgh’s Award (DofE) mainly takes place through schools.

The perceived employability benefits of youth social action have received particular attention from policy makers and practitioners. This can be traced through the employability focus of Millennium Volunteers to the more recent Coalition’s investment in youth social action: speaking about the findings from randomised controlled trials (RCTs) of youth social action programmes, former Minister for Civil Society Rob Wilson MP said:

That’s an investment of £13.5 million we’ve made in youth social action since 2013. ... I say ‘investment’. Because that’s exactly what it is. Investment means getting a return in the future. ... The results of our 3 randomised control trials are hugely encouraging and provide a solid, quantitative evidence base for the sector to take heart from. They show those taking part in our programmes score higher on a range of measures – the kind of characteristics employers look for. The 6 qualities – problem solving, grit and resilience, empathy, community, co-operation and educational attitude – were chosen because of their links to hard outcomes – employability being a key one. (Wilson, 2 March 2015)

This connection is also evident in the many youth social action providers (often reliant on government funding) that market themselves as helping young people build employability skills. For instance, DofE, which recently received £3.4m in government funding to expand the Award in schools in deprived areas (Department for Education, 13 June 2021), claims to help young people ‘describe the huge variety of skills and experience you’ve gained from doing your DofE that will make you stand out to employers, colleges and universities and that you’ll be able to use in the workplace’ (Duke of Edinburgh’s Award, 2019). NCS, which received over £1.7bn in

government grants between 2013–2020 (Comptroller and Auditor General, 2017, p. 6), invites young people to ‘Change your future: Don’t miss your chance to do NCS this Autumn! In just 10 days, you’ll live away from home, develop skills to boost your CV, and meet great people you’ll never forget’ (NCS, 2017).

However, these approaches to addressing inequalities in participation focus mainly on improving access to social action through organisations or institutions, and promote instrumental benefits, such as employability, above other potential outcomes of participation. They pay little attention to the ways that working-class young people already contribute to society, what that means to them beyond instrumental purposes, or to the inequalities they face in the experiences and outcomes of participating, not just in access. They also obscure the fact that inequalities are felt not along single axes, but that class intersects with categories such as gender and race (Hill Collins and Bilge, 2020). This defines intersectionality, which considers inequalities not only on an individual level but also in relation to how power operates across multiple domains – interpersonal, structural, disciplinary, and cultural (Hill Collins, 2000). This conceptualisation of inequality and how it shapes social action is missing from policy and practice concerns that treat working-class young people as a homogeneous group. This means that the particular needs and experiences of those in this group facing significant inequalities in their daily lives – namely, working-class girls – are overlooked. Paying closer attention to the lives of working-class girls can shed light on the important contributions these girls make to society and help us better understand the inequalities they face in participating in social action.

1.2 Aims and research questions

In this thesis I provide insight into how power and inequalities shape working-class girls' lives and their participation in social action, aiming to enhance our understanding of how social action might truly be more inclusive. I do this through a broadly ethnographic, intersectional approach that engages with girlhoods discourses. My research questions are:

RQ1: How do working-class girls practise social action?

Understanding how inequality shapes working-class girls' participation in social action first requires insight into what their participation looks like. There is little research on working-class girls' social action and definitions of social action are not generally based on these girls' participation. I address this gap by setting out the various ways working-class girls practise social action and exploring what that means for how we should (re)define social action.

RQ2: How can an intersectional girlhoods approach help us understand working-class girls' participation in social action?

Situating working-class girls' social action in the wider contexts of their lives and the expectations of them avoids viewing their participation in isolation from the inequalities they experience on a daily basis. An intersectional girlhoods approach, which considers girls' participation in relation to discourses shaping what it means to be a girl in the contemporary global North – and the inequalities inherent in those discourses – can help us do that. Discourses of particular relevance to girls' social action are the successful girl and the good girl, as well as ideas about authenticity or 'being yourself'.

RQ3: How do power and inequalities shape working-class girls' participation in social action?

Addressing RQ1 and RQ2 through an intersectional girlhoods approach helps us to understand what working-class girls' participation looks like and how that participation is connected to wider expectations of girls. This sheds light on how power and inequalities shape these girls' participation, considering why they engage, how, and to what effect, and what this means for research, policy and practice on inclusion in social action.

1.3 Fields of study and key terms

In this thesis I engage with three fields of study that do not usually coalesce: voluntary sector studies, girlhood studies, and intersectionality.

Voluntary sector studies

Voluntary sector studies (VSS) emerged in the UK in the 1970s as a distinct field encompassing both the voluntary sector and volunteering (Harris, 2016). My interest is in the volunteering aspect of VSS. Volunteering is generally understood to mean 'any activity in which time is given freely to benefit another person, group, or organisation' (Wilson, 2000, p. 215). Volunteering has a similar meaning to the policy and practice definition of 'youth social action', introduced above, but unlike that use of the term, the concept of volunteering has a long history and is well-developed in the VSS literature. Given this, volunteering literature – together with girlhood studies literature – forms the basis of my literature review. Research often explores the antecedents, experiences, and/or consequences of volunteering as set out in the Volunteer Process Model (Omoto and Snyder, 1995), the framework I use to navigate the literature.

There are two main perspectives on volunteering: the ‘non-profit sector paradigm’ and the ‘civil society paradigm’ (Lyons, Wijkstrom and Clary, 1998). In the non-profit sector paradigm, volunteers are coordinated by an organisation, acting for altruistic purposes in the field of social welfare. They are involved in ‘formal’ volunteering – for a group or organisation. The civil society paradigm view of volunteering is more about informal mutual aid or activism extending beyond social welfare, often through grassroots groups (Rochester, Howlett and Ellis Paine, 2010, pp. 10–11). It encompasses informal volunteering, involving ‘activities where aid is provided on a one-to-one basis to members of households other than one’s own’, unless family are helped as well as others (Williams, 2003, p. 12).

The civil society paradigm is closely connected to the social movement field, which is distinct from VSS but developed at a similar time. The social movement field focuses on collective action and resistance, often through protest (Della Porta and Diani, 2015). While social movement literature has some relevance, my research aligns more closely with the VSS and girlhood studies literatures, as Chapter 2.1 explains.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality recognises that inequalities do not operate in isolation but that people’s lives are shaped by multiple, intersecting social divisions along categories such as gender, class, and race (Hill Collins and Bilge, 2016, p. 2). The underlying tenets of intersectionality are not new (Hancock, 2007, 2016; Hill Collins and Bilge, 2016), with ‘intersectionality-like thought’ being traced back over the past 150 years in Black feminist scholarship and activism (Hancock, 2016, p. 23), but the term was

coined in the late 1980s by Crenshaw (1989).³ It has variously been described as a theory (Carbado *et al.*, 2013), an ‘analytic sensibility’ (Cho, Williams Crenshaw and McCall, 2013), a paradigm (Hancock, 2007; Winker and Degele, 2011), and a methodology (McCall, 2005). Intersectionality ‘give[s] voice to the oppressed’ (Choo and Ferree, 2010, p. 131), and intersectionality scholars and activists are often ‘animated by the imperative of social change’ (Carbado *et al.*, 2013, p. 10).

Intersectionality forms part of the conceptual framework through which I explore working-class girls’ participation in social action. I apply Hill Collins’ domains of power framework, which explains how oppression is organised in society according to interpersonal, structural, disciplinary, and cultural domains of power (Hill Collins, 2000; Hill Collins and Bilge, 2016, 2020).

Girldood studies

Girldood is a distinct phase of life for girls from birth to 18. In the past 30 years there has been increasing interest in the study of girldoods (as distinct from studies on girls)⁴ at the same time as the global North has become preoccupied with the idea that girls represent a kind of ‘vanguard’ in dealing with the social, cultural, and political problems of late modernity (Harris, 2004a, p. 1).

Girldood studies are premised on the idea that girldood is worthy of study in its own right, not only in relation to boyhood or to childhood in general, nor only as a precursor to womanhood. Girldood studies are grounded in girls’ experiences and,

³ Although see Hill Collins and Bilge (2016, p. 81) for a critique of this generally-accepted version of intersectionality’s history and an alternative version.

⁴ Driscoll (2008, p. 14) argues that research with girls only becomes ‘girl studies’ when it addresses the social and cultural aspects of girls’ lives.

more recently, in the idea that there is no universal experience of being a girl.

Girlhood studies aim ‘to problematize all the assumptions couched under the term [girl], expose them to scrutiny, and address their politics, all the while maintaining the complexities of identity that the contested label appropriately reflects’ (Brown, 2011, pp. 108–109). I explore the assumptions made of girls in the UK through literature on girlhood discourses, focusing on discourses pertaining especially to girls’ social action, and combine a girlhoods lens with an intersectional approach.

1.4 Thesis structure

This thesis comprises ten chapters.

Chapter 2 defines ‘social action’, exploring the definitions used in current policy and practice and in girlhood studies. Focusing on inequalities, I then explore the literature on why, how, and to what effect young people – girls in particular, where research exists – participate using the antecedents, experiences, and consequences framework developed by Omoto and Snyder (1995). There is limited evidence specifically on girls’ participation or on how gender, class, and race intersect to shape participation. The conceptual frameworks of girlhoods and intersectionality, introduced in Chapter 3, can shed light on these gaps in the research.

Chapter 3 explains the defining features of intersectionality and the domains of power framework. Intersectionality is relevant to girls’ social action because it is grounded in activism and concerned with inequalities. I then introduce the key discourses and concepts in girlhood studies relevant to social action that form the basis of three of my findings chapters: the successful girl, the good girl, and authenticity. Girlhoods are relevant because social action is expected of girls in ways

that are gendered, classed, and racialised. I combine the two in an ‘intersectional girlhoods’ approach to understand the inequalities in working-class girls’ participation. This is underpinned by feminist epistemologies, discussed in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4 explains how my research is informed by the core components of feminist epistemologies – situated knowledges, ethical aims and approach, and lived experience. I then introduce my broadly ethnographic, feminist study involving 17 girls aged 16–18 from three London schools, followed by an outline of the methods used. I explain my ‘ethics in practice’ approach before detailing my data analysis process, informed by the feminist approach taken to my research design.

Chapter 5 is a descriptive findings chapter addressing RQ1 – ‘How do working-class girls practise social action?’. It situates the subsequent three, more analytical findings chapters in the contexts of the girls’ lives insofar as they relate to the girls’ social action. These contexts include the girls’ (religious) beliefs and values, home lives, relationships, sites of participation in social action, schools, and youth social action policy and practice. I weave the contexts together through telling the stories of three girls in my study and how they relate to the other girls involved.

Chapter 6 is the second findings chapter. Together with Chapters 7 and 8 it responds to RQ2: ‘How can an intersectional girlhoods approach help us understand working-class girls’ participation in social action?’ It considers the girls’ social action in relation to the successful girl discourse. This is marked by an expectation that girls are high-achieving and ambitious, and that social action can help lead to success. I find that the girls both expect, and are expected, to become successful by working hard, doing social action, getting into university, and getting a ‘good’ job. I argue that

the social action they do in the service of the successful girl can be considered 'hope labour'.

Chapter 7 explores the girls' social action in relation to themes of docility and caring in the good girl discourse. I show how the girls are expected to perform the good girl, their experiences of doing so, and how they resist some of these expectations. I find that docility is expected of the girls from teachers, parents, and in some youth social action contexts. This expectation contributes to the girls spending most of their time at home, where being caring – often framed as caring for their mums – manifests in doing care work. I argue that this care work should be considered social action.

Chapter 8 discusses the girls' social action in relation to authenticity (defined as 'being yourself'). I show that the girls value authenticity but find it hard to achieve, and that feeling (in)authentic can both enable and constrain their social action. I identify a discourse of the authentic girl shaping how the girls see themselves, connected to the successful girl and the good girl: social action as hope labour is a 'technology of the self'; and resisting expectations of docility by speaking out is a form of self-expression and should be considered social action. The implications of all four findings chapters in relation to power and inequalities are discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 9 addresses my final research question: 'How do power and inequalities shape working-class girls' participation in social action?' In preceding chapters I showed how inequalities operate through girlhoods discourses relevant to girls' social action. Intersectionality encourages us to see these inequalities as reproduced by unequal power relations. This chapter returns to the domains of power framework

introduced in Chapter 3.1 to show how this works and discuss the implications. I discuss the inequalities inherent in working-class girls' access to social action, experiences of participating, and consequences of participation, building on the literature discussed in Chapter 2. I find that power relations reproduce inequalities not along single axes of gender or class or race, but in multiplying, mutually-influencing ways, and that the girls' social action is not separate to but entangled within those power relations.

Chapter 10 concludes the thesis. I consider the limitations of the research, offering avenues for further study, summarise the findings, and revisit the research questions. Finally, I discuss the implications of the thesis for scholarship on volunteering, intersectionality, and girlhood studies, and for policy and practice. In doing so I offer concluding reflections on what my thesis has contributed.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

There are several definitions of social action used in policy and practice and in academia. I introduce these in this chapter and outline the definition adopted in this thesis. Applying this definition, I then discuss what has already been found about young people's participation in social action, reviewing literature from the global North (since this is the context for my fieldwork) on who takes part and why, their experiences, and the consequences of their participation. This provides the grounding for my research, identifying key themes and gaps that this thesis hopes to address.

2.1 What is social action?

The way that 'youth social action' has been applied over the past decade in policy and practice in the UK is different to how 'social action' is used in the social movement or girlhoods literatures. I outline these different meanings and identify limitations with how the term is currently used in policy and practice.

Youth social action in policy and practice

The definition of youth social action informing current policy and practice is that established by the #iwill campaign: 'activities that young people do to make a positive difference to others or the environment' (#iwill campaign, 2020b). It has been used by the Coalition and Conservative governments, in funding streams connected to the campaign, and by many youth social action providers for around a decade. A typology of activities included in this definition can be found in the campaign's annual measure of participation that has been running since 2014 – the NYSAS (Ipsos

MORI, 2014). Young people are asked about anything they have done ‘to help other people or the environment’, and prompted with the following showcard⁵ (Table 1):

Table 1: Showcard of youth social action activities used in the NYSAS

Activity	Example
<i>Donated money or goods</i>	Giving money to a charity/cause directly either in person or online Donating clothes/ food to charity
<i>Done any fundraising or a sponsored event</i>	Sponsored activity e.g. silence, walk Organised/ ran raffle, bake sale, car wash Organising a fundraising event online
<i>Helped improve your local area</i>	Organising litter picking/ cleaning graffiti Painting murals Helping to build a farm/park/garden Helping with a road safety campaign Organising community street parties
<i>Campaigned for something you believe in (excluding party-political campaigning)</i>	Organising a petition Raising awareness on an issue in school, community or through social media Creating online campaigns
<i>Tutored, coached or mentored anyone</i>	Helping children in a reading programme Coaching a sports team Leading a local youth group Mentoring online Voluntary academic tutoring
<i>Supported other people who aren't friends or relatives</i>	Helping an elderly neighbour with shopping, housework Visiting elderly people Offering support to others online Befriending someone with special needs and/or older people
<i>Given time to help a charity or cause</i>	Helping organise events Creating posters/leaflets/magazine/website Collecting clothes, food etc. for charity Setting up or supporting a social enterprise

Source: Ipsos MORI (2014)

These activities exclude party-political campaigning and help provided to friends or relatives, but otherwise the list is broad. There is an emphasis on activities led by individual young people, as the many references to ‘organising’ or ‘running’ indicate.

⁵ There have been some changes to the showcard over time, but these have been minor to enable comparisons across different waves of the survey.

They are also activities that would generally be considered volunteering. Ellis Paine, Hill and Rochester (2010) list five types of volunteering, adapted from the UN's International Year of the Volunteer: self-help/mutual aid; expressive behaviours (such as sports/arts volunteering); philanthropy and service to others; involvement in political/decision-making processes; advocacy and campaigning. Ellis Paine, Hill and Rochester (2010) point out that 'philanthropy and service to others' is most commonly associated with volunteering, aligning with the non-profit sector paradigm discussed above (p.8). While campaigning is also included in the #iwill typology, this is dominated by activities that would be considered philanthropy/service to others, highlighting how the #iwill definition of social action is very similar to the standard definition of volunteering (p.7). This was acknowledged in the early days of the #iwill campaign and more recently (Birdwell and Miller, 2013, p. 26; Dartington Service Design Lab, 2019b, p. 7). For instance, half the projects funded by the #iwill Fund⁶ in 2018 provided volunteering opportunities, with volunteering the most dominant form of social action currently funded. Nonetheless, Dartington Service Design Lab offers three ways that volunteering and social action differ (Table 2).

⁶ The #iwill Fund was launched in November 2016 to support the #iwill campaign's goals in England by funding youth social action opportunities for 10–20-year-olds. It is funded by the Community Fund, the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, and foundations providing match funding.

Table 2: Differences between youth social action and volunteering

Volunteering	Youth social action
<i>There is a (net) cost to volunteering in terms of time or other personal resource</i>	In funding and delivery there is often an emphasis on benefits of participation for young people
<i>Voluntary action intends to have a direct impact on community or cause</i>	Youth social action often intends to impact a community or cause indirectly by encouraging young people to become more active, socially-minded citizens in their adult life. This is in addition to the social impact of the youth social action.
<i>Free choice to participate (or at least only 'agreeable obligations')</i>	Can be compulsory (for example, in school settings) as well as voluntary. However, even where compulsory, it should be youth-led to some extent, rather than entirely directed by adults.

Source: Dartington Service Design Lab (2019b, p. 9)

These differences constitute a false binary, since the descriptions of youth social action could also be applied to volunteering. The features of volunteering in Table 2 are also disputed, with Ellis Paine, Hill and Rochester (2010) providing a more nuanced understanding of volunteering in which its 'defining principles' – that it is unpaid, undertaken by choice, and benefits others – should be seen on a spectrum. This means that, for instance, that activity undertaken because of 'institutional coercion', such as that which takes place through schools, would still be considered volunteering. The table also reveals limitations in how youth social action is used by the #iwill campaign.

First, it suggests that the benefits of youth social action to young people are more important than the benefits to others. This focus on improving the individual, emphasised in the approaches discussed above to address inequalities in participation (p.2), is reinforced by the notion of creating active citizens in the future – also reflected in the name of the campaign itself ('I will').

Second, youth social action can be compulsory. This positions it as something young people must do in order to become ‘more active, socially-minded citizens’. It is therefore less about resistance and more about compliance. This conceptualisation has received criticism for ‘carefully gloss[ing] over the term’s roots in often radical and oppositional forms of collective activity’ and instead promoting a ‘conformist vision’ (Davies, 2017a) in which social action is normal, not disruptive. This is reinforced by the language the #iwill campaign uses around encouraging young people to ‘play their part in society’ by getting involved in social action, rather than necessarily challenging society (#iwill campaign, 2020a).

Finally, the #iwill campaign’s term is not commonly used by young people. When the campaign was set up ‘youth social action’ was used instead of ‘volunteering’ because it was thought that not all young people share the same understanding of ‘volunteering’.⁷ In part this is because of stereotypes about volunteering: research with young people when the charity was established found that ‘perceptions that volunteering is boring and “not cool” are held by a minority. A narrow, stereotypical view still prevails among many who do not volunteer’ (Ellis, 2005a, p. 1). This continues to be identified in more recent studies (Bown, Harflett and Gitsham, 2014, p. 12). In the early days of the #iwill campaign it was suggested that negative associations with the term volunteering were more common among young people experiencing marginalisation, and that ‘the term “social action” might suffer less from negative and stereotypical connotations’ (Birdwell and Birnie, 2013, p. 4). However,

⁷ This is also thought to be the case in surveys with adults, many of which avoid the term volunteering in favour of ‘unpaid help’, such as the government’s annual Community Life survey (HM Government, 2017).

as Rochester, Howlett and Ellis Paine (2010, p. 195) caution, alternative terms to volunteering are often also problematic. In designing the NYSAS, focus groups and cognitive testing found that

‘[S]ocial action’ is not recognised by this age group. None of the focus group or cognitive testing respondents were aware of its meaning or could guess what it entailed. Furthermore, the term often confused younger respondents. ‘Social’ implies to them that it involves socialising/free time activities; for the same reason, defining social action as ‘helping society’ was confusing. (Ipsos MORI, 2014, p. 36)

Thus in the NYSAS, the term ‘social action’ is not used, and instead young people are asked about what they do to help others or the environment.

This definition of youth social action is also treated by the #iwill campaign as an ‘emerging’ term (Dartington Service Design Lab, 2019b, p. 2). This disregards the fact that use of the term stretches back far beyond the #iwill campaign’s beginnings. An exploration of the term’s history and how it has been adapted in relation to girls’ participation comprises the next section.

Social action in girlhood studies

Contrary to claims that social action is a new term, it has a long history. In social movement literature, social action (often used interchangeably with terms such as civic action and activism) is broadly considered to be collective, political, sustained resistance performed by activists that aims to effect change, often operating within social movements and outside formal organisations, and involving direct action such as protest (Aiken and Taylor, 2019; Anheier and Scherer, 2015; Della Porta and Diani, 2015; Evers and von Essen, 2019). While some of these activities would be considered volunteering, particularly in the civil society paradigm of volunteering

(see p.8), the fields of VSS and social movements are disconnected, with scholarship on volunteering tending to overlook the social movement field (and vice versa).

There is a significant body of literature on women's social action in this field, though less on their participation outside women's movements (Roth and Saunders, 2019) or on intersectional approaches (Roth, 2021). The social movement concept of social action is also not grounded in the experiences of girls. Girlhood studies scholars have addressed this problem by offering a different conceptualisation of girls' social action, also often using the terms social action and activism interchangeably.

Although they generally view social action as a form of resistance, like the studies cited above, they argue that it does not refer only to visible forms of action such as protest. While there have been calls from feminist social movement scholars against equating activism only with protest and other forms of direct action (Crossley, 2017; Roth, 2016, p. 48), activism is often associated with this kind of radical activity, leading girlhood studies scholars to argue that conventional definitions of social action are based on adult men's experiences. Craddock (2019, p. 140) suggests that 'the activist, whilst imagined to be an abstract and universal character, is actually male, reflecting feminist critiques of the universal citizen'. Keller (2016b, p. 262) notes that this means 'white, middle-class, male adults in particular'. This can make it difficult for girls to assume an activist identity (Earl, Maher and Elliott, 2017) or mean that girls are considered 'extraordinary' when they do engage in more conventional forms of activism (Edell, Mikel Brown and Montano, 2016; Gordon and Taft, 2011). It can also encourage girls to 'separate themselves from the possibility of collective action' because it privileges the individual (see also Bent, 2016; Edell, Mikel Brown and Montano, 2016, p. 697). A recent analysis of European print media found that

reports of girls' activism, on the few occasions it is reported, tend to be highly critical and focus on 'shock-inducing forms of activism' (Smith and Holecz, 2020, p. 644).

It is also argued that the social movement concept of social action 'maintain[s] a public/private divide that equates activism with the public sphere' and public displays of action such as protest, thus marginalising girls' experiences which can be 'harder to locate' (see also Gordon, 2008; Keller, 2016b, pp. 261-262). Girls experience barriers to more public forms of social action because of traditional gendered roles and caring responsibilities that make them more likely than boys to spend time at home (Craddock, 2019). Instead, Harris (2004a, p. 151) argues, girls' social action should be thought about as involving 'new, less visible political techniques in its networks of communication and the everyday negotiation that occurs among interested parties'. She proposes 'less spectacular activities of a personal or local nature' as a form of social action. For instance, the care work that goes on in conventional activist movements, mainly carried out by women, is often positioned in contrast to the "real work" of activism because it is the "natural" feminine behaviour of women who are already frequently positioned as apolitical', despite being an important form of "behind-the-scenes" activism' (Holyoak, 2015, p. 196). Social action is also sometimes considered a form of care, as in Craddock's (2019) study.

Practising feminism through challenging stereotypes of girls and women is also a form of social action in the girlhoods literature (Craddock, 2019; Sowards and Renegar, 2006). This is what Budgeon calls engaging in 'micropolitics', 'a politicized agency at the micro-level of everyday social relations' through the practice of resistant identities (Budgeon, 2001, p. 20). Politics in this sense means the ways

young women construct and enact the self and how that is shaped by categories such as gender and race. Other studies discuss how girls' involvement in politics is less about traditional formal politics, such as associating with political parties, and more about wanting to effect social change (Booth-Tobin and Han, 2010). This has led Taft (2014) to call for a reconceptualization of girls' politics to include 'challenges to power relations outside of formal institutions', such as through Budgeon's micropolitics. School feminist groups are also discussed in the literature as a form of girls' social action, as are feminist groups at universities, which can provide opportunities for students to mobilise around wider inequalities (Crossley, 2017, p. 118). However, as Kim and Ringrose (2018, p. 47) note, educational institutions can be 'complicated spaces in which girls can advocate for feminism'.

Girls' social action can take place at home. There is a significant body of research on girls' digital social action, with arguments that online activity – much of which is carried out by girls – such as challenging a sexist post on social media, signing an online petition, or blogging, should be viewed as activism (Keller, 2012, 2016a; Kim and Ringrose, 2018) rather than 'slacktivism', as it has been termed. Slacktivism refers to 'the ideal type of activism for a lazy generation: why bother with sit-ins and the risk of arrest, police brutality, or torture if one can be as loud campaigning in the virtual space?' (Morozov, 19 May 2019). This emphasises the public nature of conventional forms of social action and the idea that these ought to be physically dangerous and are traditionally masculine behaviours. Furthermore, Crossley (2017, p. 127) argues that because online activity is less visible than offline activity, online activism is often undervalued. Some also argue that online social action should be

considered important in its own right, not only insofar as it translates into more traditional forms of action like protest (Harris, 2008).

These studies attempt to redefine what is meant by social action, positioning girls' experiences at the forefront and viewing social action as resistance that can take a wide range of forms and can happen in the private as well as the public sphere, and take place online as well as offline.

Definition of social action used in this thesis

The concepts of social action discussed in this section are varied, with volunteering central to the policy and practice definition and resistance (though not always in the form of public or 'spectacular' action) central to the girlhoods definition. These are summarised in Table 3.

Table 3: Definitions of volunteering, youth social action, and girls' social action

Term	Definition
<i>Volunteering</i>	'any activity in which time is given freely to benefit another person, group, or organisation' (Wilson, 2000, p. 215). This is the definition generally used in the volunteering literature in VSS.
<i>Youth social action</i>	'activities that young people do to make a positive difference to others or the environment' such as volunteering, fundraising, and campaigning (#iwill campaign, 2020b). This definition was created by the #iwill campaign and has predominantly been used in policy and practice over the past decade; I refer to it as the 'policy and practice' definition throughout the thesis.
<i>Girls' social action</i>	Although it includes traditional forms of activism (e.g. protest), it is more about 'new, less visible political techniques ... less spectacular activities of a personal or local nature' (Harris, 2004a, p. 151) such as 'micropolitics' (Budgeon, 2001, p. 20). This definition arises from the girlhood studies literature.

The girlhoods studies conceptualisation of social action highlights what is missing from common understandings of volunteering and from the policy and practice

definition of youth social action. The kind of action included in the girlhood studies literature is not found in either the #iwill table or in standard lists of volunteering activities (see Rochester, Howlett and Ellis Paine (2010) for a comprehensive list, taken from the UN's International Year of the Volunteer). Such typologies tend to concentrate more on services provided for the purpose of benefiting others, and the emphasis is often on visible, practical activities such as litter picking or blood donation, with the #iwill campaign language focused on 'organising', 'leading', or 'setting up'. In contrast, the girlhood studies conceptualisation includes more private forms of action that place less emphasis on the role of the individual in leading or organising activities.

In this thesis I am interested in how working-class girls contribute to society through the different types of activity outlined in Table 3. I use the term 'social action' as an umbrella term to cover all three concepts, referring specifically to 'volunteering', 'activism', or to 'youth social action' when discussing findings from individual studies that deal with these specific concepts. In later chapters, I explore how we might redefine the policy and practice definition of youth social action to recognise the girlhood studies conceptualisation.

2.2 Why, how, and to what effect do young people participate in social action?

Understanding why, how, and to what effect young people participate in social action is important in framing my study. All three concepts discussed above – volunteering, youth social action, and girls' social action – are relevant: the first two are promoted in current policy and practice (volunteering being included in the #iwill definition of

youth social action) and the latter is informed by girls' experiences. Volunteering literature has a longer history than either the literature on girls' social action or the #iwill campaign's conceptualisation of youth social action. As such this section is dominated by literature on youth volunteering (broadly focused on under-25s), though draws on research specifically on youth social action and girls' social action where available, applying the definitions presented in Table 3.

I organise this literature according to the antecedents, experiences, and consequences of volunteering in the Volunteer Process Model (VPM) (Omoto and Snyder, 1995). Antecedents are factors that prompt involvement in the first place, including individual characteristics, motivations, and circumstances. Experiences are about the activity itself and how individuals feel about it, particularly insofar as this influences whether they continue. Consequences are the outcomes for the individual and those they are benefitting, organisations they support, and society in general.

Antecedents

Understanding why young people participate first involves identifying their characteristics, before exploring their motivations and circumstances.

Who participates?

Most literature on who participates in social action focuses on differences by gender, class, or race. The studies reviewed below are not directly comparable because they each use different definitions, instruments, and samples, but rather illustrate a general picture of participation across different demographics of young people.

There is significant evidence on the link between gender and social action. Studies with young people in the UK find that girls participate in youth social action and

volunteering more than boys (Bennett and Parameshwaran, 2013; Brewis, Russell and Holdsworth, 2010; Cabinet Office and Ipsos MORI, 2016; Muddiman *et al.*, 2019), though there is some variation by type of activity (Hill, Russell and Brewis, 2009; Sarre and Tarling, 2010).

The same studies explore the relationship between social class and participation, using household or breadwinner occupation/income or eligibility for Free School Meals (FSM) as proxies for class, though class is a much more complex phenomenon than this.⁸ They find that middle-class young people are more likely to participate in youth social action and volunteering than those from working-class backgrounds. Further analysis of the NYSAS finds that these class differences exist from age 10 (Hogg and de Vries, 2019).

There is mixed evidence on the relationship between race and participation. Some studies find that White young people in the UK participate in social action more than those who are Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic (BAME)⁹ (Cabinet Office and Ipsos MORI, 2016; Muddiman *et al.*, 2019), while others find that those who are BAME are more likely to volunteer than those who are White (Bennett and Parameshwaran, 2013; Sarre and Tarling, 2010). Within racially-minoritised groups, analysis of the 2008–2009 UK Citizenship Survey found that Asian 16–24 year-olds were significantly less likely to volunteer than their White or Black peers (Hill, Russell and Brewis, 2009, p. 4). This highlights a challenge with many quantitative studies in this field. Race is often not the focus of the study, and because of the low proportion of

⁸ See p.47 for an explanation of how I conceptualise class in this thesis.

⁹ I refer to Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic here because this is the term used in these studies, but I prefer the term 'racially minoritised' for the reasons explained on p.49.

racially-minoritised people in England and Wales – 19.5% of the population (Office for National Statistics, 2012) – surveys using nationally-representative samples often involve too few racially-minoritised young people to draw meaningful conclusions about their participation in social action and their race, and certainly to make distinctions within these groups.

These findings show varying levels of participation in social action between different groups of young people but cannot explain why or how these differences manifest. This is explored below with a focus where possible on how gender, class, and race influence these factors.

Motivations

There is a great deal of literature concerning what motivates young people to participate in social action. Motivations are reasons that drive participation in the first place, rather than what sustains involvement (discussed under ‘Experiences’, below). Motivations are not fixed but can change during an experience (Rochester, Howlett and Ellis Paine, 2010, p. 137). Most studies recognise that young people are driven to volunteer by multiple motivations (Bocsi, Fényes and Markos, 2017; Holdsworth, 2010; Valor-Segura and Rodríguez-Bailón, 2011).

One of the most significant studies on volunteer motivations is by Clary *et al.* (1998), whose Volunteer Functions Inventory (VFI) has been adapted and applied in a variety of contexts, including with young people (Bocsi, Fényes and Markos, 2017; Katz and Sasson, 2019; Kim, Zhang and Connaughton, 2010). Part of the VPM, the VFI takes a

functional approach to motivations, recognising that people volunteer for six sets of reasons:

- 'Values': to express altruistic values.
- 'Understanding': as a learning opportunity.
- 'Social': as a social activity or to gain respect socially.
- 'Career': to gain 'career-related benefits'.
- 'Protective': to 'escape from one's own troubles'.
- 'Enhancement': as a form of personal development.

(Clary et al., 1998, pp. 1517-1518)

Of these, 'values', 'career', and 'enhancement' are most discussed in the literature on young people's participation. Altruism is a common reason given for volunteering among young people (Malin, Tirri and Liauw, 2015; Shannon, 2008; Wuthnow, 1995), but it can be more complicated than a 'pure' desire to help others: Andreoni suggests that people can be motivated by the 'warm glow' feeling they get when they help others (Andreoni, 1990), and Lähteenmaa's concept of 'hedonistic altruism' describes 'positive experiences based not on consumption but on collective work towards a general good' (Lähteenmaa, 1999, pp. 26-27). Dean (2020, p. 6) builds on the warm glow concept with the idea of the 'good glow', whereby 'giving to charity, being charitable or being part of a charity makes people look good, enabling them to bask in a sociological good glow from others'.

Values also include religious duty, with research across 14 countries finding that young people with higher levels of altruism and religious values were more likely to volunteer in most of those countries (Cnaan *et al.*, 2012). This could be because volunteering can be an enactment of young people's religious identity (Grönlund, 2011), or because religious young people can be motivated by 'religious

responsibility' and 'gathering religious capital', as Fewtrell (2019, p. 124) found in his study of young Muslim volunteers in the UK.

Participation for self-interested reasons is considered the opposite of altruism.

'Understanding', 'social', 'career', 'protective', and 'enhancement' all represent self-interest. Hustinx claims that 'wanting something in return' is particular to the 'new volunteer', who is younger and 'fairly choosy and calculated' about their volunteering (Hustinx, 2001, p. 58). The Citizenship Education Longitudinal Study in the UK found that young people were 'more likely to cite personal benefits such as enjoyment or career or educational advancement' than a sense of duty as their motivation for getting involved in 'citizenship activities' such as volunteering (Keating *et al.*, 2010, p. 31). For the deeply religious young Christian evangelists in Hopkins *et al.*'s research (2015), however, faith dominated reasons for volunteering, even when personal benefits such as career development were also significant.

Enhancement and career motivations are found to be particularly important drivers for young people's participation. In the NYSAS, 62% of respondents felt that doing youth social action would help them 'a great deal' or 'a fair amount' to get a job in future (Ipsos MORI, 2016). Multiple studies find that young people cite CV development or experience they can put on university applications (UCAS forms) as reasons for volunteering (Barton, Bates and O'Donovan, 2019; Handy *et al.*, 2010; Morimoto and Friedland, 2013; Williamson *et al.*, 2018), sometimes because they were looking to acquire specific skills, rather than a 'general CV bump up' (Holdsworth, 2010, p. 428). Holdsworth and Brewis (2014) argue that these career motivations are shaped by universities' obligations to create 'employable' graduates,

with volunteering as a way to achieve that. They caution, however, that too much focus on employability in messages about volunteering can negatively impact students' attitudes: students 'resent being told to volunteer, especially, if this compulsion is tied to a specific aim, such as getting a job' (Holdsworth and Brewis, 2014, p. 215). This highlights problems with the compulsory social action included in the policy and practice conceptualisation. Dean (2014a) also looks at how structural factors shape young people's attitudes to volunteering in the UK. He argues that career motivations stem from: youth volunteering policy that promotes volunteering as a means to employment; volunteer programmes that 'reward short-term, instrumentalised commitments'; and volunteer brokers positioning volunteering as 'an experience to be sold to young people in exchange for private benefits to them' (Dean, 2014a, p. 244).

Inequalities associated with class and race also shape career motivations. Eliasoph (2011, p. 19) finds that for the affluent, generally White, university-bound young people in her ethnography of 'empowerment' programmes in the US, 'plumping up their CVs' partly drives their participation. She finds this is not the case for young people from low-income, racially-minoritised backgrounds, who are driven more by wanting to ensure they do not become a 'problem' for society in future. There are echoes of this in the future-oriented nature of the policy and practice concept of social action. I return to literature on whether participation actually leads to increased employability and employment in the final section below on 'Consequences'.

Other motivations beyond those identified in the VFI are at play for different groups. Gender differences are identified in Kennelly's research on girls' social action in

relation to boys', which finds that young women are driven to participate in traditional forms of activism by a sense of responsibility and guilt, whereas young men are driven by more 'rational and abstract motivations' free from 'emotional pain' (Kennelly, 2014). This is similar to those girls in Lau's (forthcoming) ethnography of prefect girls doing DofE. They tried to drop out of the programme when they felt overwhelmed with school work and school duties but felt unable to because their teacher guilted them into continuing and appealed to their sense of compliance. This was a different approach to the one the teacher took with male prefects, which was more about tapping into boys' sense of leadership. Taft (2014, pp. 264-265) also finds that girls' social action is often driven by feelings of responsibility, meaning that their engagement can sometimes become a burden, and 'an extension of the gendered expectation of community care work'.

Anger is another motivation explored in research on girls' social action. Harris (2004a, p. 150) describes how the 1990s social movement 'grrrlpower' was driven by girls' anger about the inequalities girls face; around the same time, Brown (1999) found that White, working-class girls' anger could challenge conventional notions of femininity and should be seen as resistance. More recently, research has identified how girls channel this anger through social media (Ringrose, Keller and Mendes, 2019), the implications of which are discussed below (p.38).

Motivations can also be related to race, with Alfieri, Marzana and Damia (2019) finding that young migrant volunteers in Italy are motivated by social norms (at the recommendation or request of parents or friends), advocacy (to protect the rights, culture, and reputation of their ethnic group), and ethno-cultural reasons (to raise

awareness of other cultures). These examples show how motivations are nuanced and vary both between and within different groups.

Circumstances

The challenge with focusing on motivations as reasons why some get involved and others do not is that it can obscure the wider circumstances shaping social action. I discuss these factors here, which can be considered barriers and enablers.

Class inequalities in participation are often linked to financial resources (Bown, Harflett and Gitsham, 2014; Mason *et al.*, 2011). The costs associated with participation include obvious costs such as travelling to and from an activity, but also displaced costs – time spent volunteering is time not spent in paid work (Gaskin, 1998, p. 37). Donating money or food can be costly, as can other paid-for activities such as the NCS fee. Within these activities are also less visible costs, such as the costs of baking a cake for a fundraiser or raising sponsorship money (Mills and Waite, 2017, p. 15). Activities that can take place at home, including online, may be more accessible for girls whose parents have strict rules about them spending time outside the home (Ringrose, Keller and Mendes, 2019, p. 148), or working-class girls with limited financial resources and access to transportation, though online participation still requires the privileges of leisure time and internet access (Keller, 2016b). Nonetheless, Crossley (2017, p. 123) suggests that online activity – such as campaigning through social media – is much more affordable than, for instance, printing posters or fliers, making online organising particularly appealing to groups reliant on institutional funding, like feminist student organisations.

Lack of time is often cited as one of the main reasons why a young person is not involved in social action (Bown, Harflett and Gitsham, 2014; Cabinet Office and Ipsos MORI, 2016). Lack of time is often considered a socially acceptable response that may mask other reasons (Bekkers and de Wit, 2014, p. 19), but nonetheless, time is not experienced equitably and young people cannot always choose how they spend it. Girls in the UK typically spend more time on domestic duties and homework than boys, for example (Mullan, 2018, p. 1014). Lareau's (2011) ethnographic research in the US suggests that working-class children have greater influence over how they spend their time than middle-class children, but that less of that time is then spent on extra-curricular activities like volunteering. This highlights the role of parents in supporting volunteering, and the class-related inequalities – such as financial constraints and challenges dealing with the welfare system – that can make it more difficult for parents to do so.

The influence of others on young people's participation operates on multiple levels: as role models, in providing support, and in signposting opportunities. Young people whose parents volunteer are more likely to be involved themselves (Andolina *et al.*, 2003; Musick and Wilson, 2008). This may partly explain the gender and class inequalities in participation among different groups of young people, discussed above, which are mirrored in the adult population (Cabinet Office, 2013; Low *et al.*, 2007; Musick and Wilson, 2008). Lack of parental support for volunteering can make it more difficult for their children to participate (Shannon, 2008). In Wales, a young person's positive relationship with their mother is the strongest predictor of their involvement in youth social action (Muddiman *et al.*, 2019). Young people's number of friends (Bennett and Parameshwaran, 2013) and size of their networks (Gil-Lacruz,

Marcuello-Servos and Saz-Gil, 2015), as well as social capital linked to family and school (Mahatmya and Lohman, 2012), also positively correlate with their volunteering.

This may be because these young people are more likely to be asked to participate. 'Being asked' is one of the most significant predictors of young people's volunteering in the UK and internationally (Bekkers and de Wit, 2014; McBride *et al.*, 2007; Musick and Wilson, 2008; Shannon, 2008; Sundeen, Raskoff and Garcia, 2007). Most young people (93%) said they had been encouraged by someone to participate in youth social action in the past 12 months, and not knowing how to get involved or not being asked was the second most common reason given for not participating, cited by 13% of those not involved (Cabinet Office and Ipsos MORI, 2016). Being asked can address problems with not knowing about opportunities, with lack of knowledge about how to volunteer identified as a barrier to involvement for young people in deprived areas of Scotland (Davies, 2018). Research with university students in the UK shows that over a third (33.7%) found out about volunteering through friends and family (Brewis, Russell and Holdsworth, 2010).

This connects to the provision of opportunities available to young people and of which young people are aware. Research suggests this is shaped by classism and that volunteering providers can have negative attitudes towards young people from working-class backgrounds (Mason *et al.*, 2011). Dean (2014b) finds that staff at voluntary organisations perceive class differences in participation, believing students at grammar schools to be more likely to volunteer than those at comprehensive schools; this in turn shapes the way opportunities are (inequitably) offered.

Many opportunities are offered through schools (see p.3), and there is a significant body of research exploring how education institutions promote volunteering (Haski-Leventhal, Meijis and Hustinx, 2010; Hoskins, Janmaat and Villalbar, 2012; Keating *et al.*, 2010; Law, Shek and Ma, 2013) and on the influence of school-based volunteering and citizenship education on participation (Hill and Dulk, 2013; Keating *et al.*, 2010; Mahatmya and Lohman, 2012). Positive school experiences are also linked to increased participation in youth social action (Muddiman *et al.*, 2019), but such experiences are less likely among those from working-class backgrounds (O'Rourke *et al.*, 2017). Keating *et al.* (2010, p. 45) also show that young people were 'more likely to have positive attitudes and intentions towards civic and political participation (both in the present and in the future) if they had high levels of "received citizenship"', which was more likely for those who attended a school where citizenship education is well embedded. Yet youth social action is less likely to be embedded in a school culture when there are more students eligible for FSM (NFER, 2016).

Faith groups and faith-based initiatives can also provide participation opportunities, through international volunteering missions, youth groups such as the Jewish Lads' and Girls' Brigade, youth programmes such as Pathfinders (Christianity), and donations made under Zakat or Sadaqah¹⁰ (Islam). Religion is positively associated with young people's volunteering in terms of sustained involvement (Planty, Bozick and Regnier, 2006), and in opening up volunteering opportunities (Holdsworth,

¹⁰ Zakat is one of the five pillars of Islam, which requires adults to give a proportion of their wealth to charity. Sadaqah is an act of charity or kindness in Islam, but is not obligatory like Zakat. It is often given during Ramadan.

2010). However, although the NYSAS finds that religious young people are more likely to be involved in youth social action than those with no religion (52% and 45% respectively), only 6% of young people who participated got involved through a place of worship (Cabinet Office and Ipsos MORI, 2016).

Experiences

Research tends to neglect the experience of participation in favour of the antecedents and consequences (O'Toole, 2013, p. 32; Wilson, 2012, p. 176). Social action experiences are important because they provide insight into whether young people are likely to participate in future, they can tell us more about what participation means to people, and they reveal inequalities in participation, such as in how different groups are treated when they participate. Like antecedents, experiences vary widely between individuals and settings. In their original model, Omoto and Snyder (1995) consider experiences insofar as these contribute to volunteer retention, concentrating on satisfaction and integration.

Satisfaction can simply mean enjoyment: volunteering and youth social action are often expected to be (here experiences overlap with motivations) and are enjoyable (Bradford, Hills and Johnston, 2016; Cabinet Office and Ipsos MORI, 2016; Holdsworth, 2010) and fun (Shannon, 2008). Other positive experiences contributing to increased satisfaction include young people receiving rewards (Kulik, 2007); feeling a 'sense of freedom' in choosing what activity they do; a 'sense of belonging' to a volunteer community; the 'hope of positive externalities' – expecting benefits from participation, such as career benefits; and a 'sense of fulfilment' from helping others (Yuriev, 2019).

Negative experiences, such as difficult relationships with adults involved, can decrease satisfaction in participation. Research in the Americas found that ageism was present in groups involving young people and adults, meaning that young people's participation was sometimes tokenistic, 'denying them actual political power', especially girls, because ageism 'often works in conjunction with sexism, in particular civic contexts, to exclude girls in particular from political decision-making processes' (Gordon and Taft, 2011, p. 1515). Similarly, difficult relationships with volunteer providers can make volunteering less satisfying (Kulik, 2007). There are also inequalities in these relationships, with Pantea (2013, p. 572) finding young people experiencing disadvantage were at particular risk of negative experiences when there is 'poor sensitivity with regard to their particular situations ... volunteering risks turning into a rather disempowering experience that reproduces their initial vulnerability'.

While satisfaction and integration provide a helpful starting point for exploring experiences, these are generally geared more towards 'formal' volunteering for an organisation, neglecting wider experiences, and take a narrow interest in experience only insofar as it leads to further volunteering. I am interested in a broader range of experiences and see these as worthy of study in their own right, not only in relation to volunteer retention.

Peer relationships forged during participation can be a positive experience (Davies, 2017b; Haski-Leventhal *et al.*, 2008). Wood (2013) finds that for the young people in her study of 'everyday citizenship' in New Zealand, 'participation was not just an individual affair, but something that was thoroughly social, relational and infused with

emotion' (Wood, 2013, p. 56), and that relationships with their peers and with their local area influenced their experiences. Research on girls' social action with young feminist bloggers suggests that the sense of community developed online with others provided the positive support needed to continue blogging (Keller, 2016b); similarly, Ringrose, Keller and Mendes (2019, p. 158) discuss the positive opportunity for community-building provided by digital feminism that isn't necessarily available in offline spaces.

But relationships are not always positive: Mills and Waite, in research on NCS, discuss how some young people experienced tensions because they didn't get along with their group (Mills and Waite, 2018, p. 142). Research on girls' digital social action also finds that online spaces can feel 'safe' for some to express feminist views, but others are subject to trolling that make the experience uncomfortable (Ringrose, Keller and Mendes, 2019, p. 149). The implications of negative experiences are discussed below (p.42). However, opposition is not always negative: in her research among feminist student organisations at universities in the USA, Crossley (2017) argues that collective identity – identity based on a group of individuals' shared interests and experiences – 'is dependent on the boundaries between movements participants and opponents; this provides a sense of cohesion among activists', finding that such opposition at one university helped create a 'small, tight-knit circle of feminists' (Crossley, 2017, pp. 95-96). This highlights some level of opposition can produce positive outcomes, despite the challenges it also brings.

Research also finds inequalities in experiences for different groups. Norms and expectations surrounding what it means to be a volunteer can alienate some and

welcome others. In research with young people in deprived areas of Scotland, Davies (2018, p. 266) finds that volunteering 'was largely viewed as an activity that went against peer norms and expectations ... the kind of activity that would give rise to informal penalties', such as getting 'slagged and bullied' and being seen as 'different'. Dean (2016, p. 103) also finds that peer norms are important, with young people more likely to volunteer if those around them do, and that this is classed: 'this social reproduction negatively impacts on the working-class students and benefits the middle-class students'.

On the other hand, participation can be a means of self-expression and can challenge inequalities. In research with 'ordinary' young Muslims in Australia, Harris and Roose (2014, p. 803) find that talking to others about issues such as Islam or feminism enabled 'expression and assertion' and in the digital realm also offered 'the opportunity for exchange as an equally entitled participant in the public sphere'. They also discuss engagement in fashion cultures, particularly wearing the headscarf, as a form of girls' social action – 'an important way to have a different kind of public voice cutting across heated debates driven by Australian politicians and media about Islamic dress'. Such debates are also common in the UK. Self-expression is also important for other racially-minoritised girls. Wood (2013) found that for those who are young, female, and Maori or Pacific Islanders, 'their ability to feel and understand the experience of being culturally marginalised was in part their inspiration and source of creativity to attempt to do something about the enduring issues of cultural misunderstanding and racism in their schools and communities', which in turn shaped their experiences of participation. This also highlights how antecedents can affect experiences.

Exploring how classism and racism shape experiences, Eliasoph finds that ‘socially neutral meeting places’ do not exist (Eliasoph, 2011, p. 38) – that is, even the venue in which activities take place can alienate some while welcoming others, producing negative experiences and creating barriers to further involvement. In the UK, research finds that young Muslims face challenges in volunteering related to their religious identity. Fewtrell (2019, p. 211) argues that these experiences are both gendered and racialised, with Muslim girls’ experiences of volunteering shaped by the cultural and religious expectations of them. This can create tensions within their own communities when young Muslim women volunteer within public spaces, which can spill over into abusive behaviour.

The type of activity in which young people are engaged can also elicit negative responses from others that make participation uncomfortable. Research on girls’ social action through feminist school groups finds that girls involved in these groups can be subject to sexism. They can experience hostility, such as ‘sniggering’ from peers and even male teachers when they talk about the group in assemblies and being mocked by their families (Walters, 2018, p. 489), or being perceived as ‘men haters’ (Kim and Ringrose, 2018, p. 53).

Consequences

As with antecedents, there is a significant body of research on consequences. This tends more towards the positive than the negative.

One outcome of taking part in social action is sustained participation. Multiple studies with young people explore the connection between taking part in the past and taking part again in future, with those who participate when they are younger being more

likely to participate as teenagers (Taylor-Collins *et al.*, 2019) and as adults (Meer, 2013; Rosen and Sims, 2011). This is often connected to the experiences of participation discussed above.

Skills development has received significant attention as an outcome of participation, though this is mostly self-reported. Young people say volunteering increases their ‘soft’ skills such as confidence (Davies, 2017b; Williamson *et al.*, 2018) and self-esteem, including working-class young people with a disability (Kulik, 2018). Barry *et al.* (2017) find ‘encouraging’ evidence that youth social action programmes can have positive outcomes for young people’s wellbeing, community engagement, and behaviour, but there is a lack of robust research in this area. The youth social action RCTs mentioned above (p.4) find that participants were more likely to develop ‘employability skills’ than those in control groups (Kirkman *et al.*, 2016).

However, despite the prevalence of career motivations, there is limited evidence that volunteering improves employability (Holdsworth and Quinn, 2010; Leonard, Hoskins and Wilde, 2020). Most research involves self-report measures (Barton, Bates and O’Donovan, 2019), with the exception of the RCTs cited above, which included an employability test. Young people who had taken part in social action and in control groups were given mock interviews and judged on the basis of their employability; though young people who had done social action were more likely to be considered employable, the findings were not statistically significant (Kirkman *et al.*, 2016). There is also evidence that too much volunteering – weekly or more frequently – can negatively affect young people’s employment (Kamerade and Ellis Paine, 2014, p. 364).

This points to a problem in the assumed link between ‘employability’ (an individual’s skills) and employment (a job). Employability is a ‘project of the self’ (Kelly, 2017); assuming that ‘the relationship between employability and employment is straightforward [ignores] ... the supply side of the equation’ (Kamerade and Ellis Paine, 2014, p. 357). This also obscures any inequalities in how social action experience can be ‘put to use’. For instance, research with working-class young sports volunteers finds they are less likely to see the benefits of participation as a kind of ‘transferable virtue’ with ‘exchange value across the labour market’: they ‘envisaged any potential future labour market attachments emerging through their volunteering as being specifically in the field of sport’, rather than useful for any other career (Bradford, Hills and Johnston, 2016, p. 241).

There are also negative consequences of participation, such as burnout. Drawing on the idea of the ‘biographical consequences’ of activism (McAdam, 1989) – the effects activism has on the wider lives of activists – Roth (2016) discusses the importance of the ‘activism-work-life’ balance in avoiding burnout. The risks of burnout are found to be gendered, with Kennelly (2014) noting in her research that girls often talked about social action leading to stress or burnout, while boys reported improvements in mental health. Similarly Holyoak (2015) finds that emotional trauma and burnout were common among girls involved in social movements, and that girls tended to assume responsibility for taking care of others’ wellbeing and their own to counter the risk of burnout. Kulik (2007), studying Israeli adolescent volunteers, finds that boys report lower levels of burnout than girls.

Other negative effects relate to how participation can reinforce an acceptance, rather than criticism, of inequalities. Eliasoph (2011, p. 99) is critical of volunteering projects that are disconnected from those being 'helped' and from wider political issues. She gives the example of a food drive where young people collecting donations did not question why people go hungry; it was not that the experience 'crushed the volunteer's political imagination; just that it did not cultivate it'. In a study on White privilege, Kawecka Nenga (2011) found that volunteering could exacerbate inequality if those from privileged backgrounds were not encouraged to think critically about that privilege. In particular, 'when organizations provided [volunteer] training that focused solely on instrumental tasks to be performed, youth were unable to develop a language for talking about class differences, fumbled to explain class inequality, and chose discursive strategies that ultimately reinforced class privilege' (Kawecka Nenga, 2011, p. 283). These examples highlight the problems with volunteering that does not challenge inequalities.

2.3 Chapter conclusions

The way that 'youth social action' has been applied over the past decade in policy and practice in the UK is different to how girls' social action is conceptualised in the girlhoods literature. Recognising the importance of the policy and practice context in which girls' social action takes place, but also the risk that this excludes important aspects of girls' participation, in this thesis I explore girls' social action in terms of both the policy and practice concept, which includes volunteering, and the girlhood studies' concept (see Table 3). I use the umbrella term 'social action' to cover all three concepts.

Just as definitions of social action should take account of girls' experiences, so should an understanding of why, how, and to what effect girls participate. The division between these three areas is false: 'because we cannot talk about all things at once, we are forced to create an artificial separation between factors that are, in real life, interconnected' (Musick and Wilson, 2008, p. 8). Antecedents, experiences, and consequences are often intertwined; motivations influence experiences and may be driven by (perceived) consequences, for instance, and experiences might motivate future involvement. Taking account of all three elements, as I do in this thesis, provides a fuller understanding of participation in social action than a focus on any one alone.

Key themes identified in the literature in this chapter are the role of religion in influencing participation by shaping motivations, opportunities, and experiences; the significance of career motivations, despite a weak link between participation and employment; the importance of enablers such as time, financial resources, support from others, and provision of opportunities in increasing the likelihood of participation; the role of relationships – with peers and adults – in shaping experiences; and the possibility of negative consequences of participation, such as stress and the reproduction of inequalities. I return to these themes in relation to my findings in later chapters.

This literature also identifies some gender, class, and race inequalities across these themes, making it more difficult for certain groups to participate and affecting the experiences and consequences of participation. While there is some research on the intersection of gender, class, and race, this is limited, especially research on how all

three intersect. Similarly, while data suggest that girls participate more than boys and that working-class young people participate less than those who are middle-class, these headline figures do not take account of how gender and class intersect, and there is inconclusive evidence on how race affects participation. This means we have a limited understanding of working-class girls' participation, especially those who are racially minoritised.

This is important, because understanding how race and class intersect with gender to influence which girls do and do not participate, as well as why, how, and to what effect they participate, can help identify how the inequalities working-class girls experience in everyday life also shape their participation. To address this gap, I take an intersectional approach to girls' social action, considering how gender, class, and race intersect to produce particular experiences. I explore how working-class girls' participation fits into their everyday lives, influenced by expectations of them that are related to girlhoods discourses. My next chapter introduces the conceptual framework to help me do that.

CHAPTER 3: INTERSECTIONAL GIRLHOODS

In reviewing the literature in Chapter 2, I identified a gap in research on inequalities in participation that accounts for how categories of gender, class, and race intersect for working-class girls, and how expectations of girlhoods shape their participation. Two fields of study can provide a framework to address this gap: intersectionality and girlhood studies. I combine these in what I call an ‘intersectional girlhoods’ approach.

3.1 Intersectionality

In this thesis I adopt Hill Collins and Bilge’s definition of intersectionality (2016, p. 2):

A way of understanding and analysing the complexity in the world, in people, and in human experiences. The events and conditions of social and political life and the self can seldom be understood as shaped by one factor. They are generally shaped by many factors in diverse and mutually influencing ways. When it comes to social inequality, people’s lives and the organization of power in a given society are better understood as being shaped not by a single axis of social division, be it race or gender or class, but by many axes that work together and influence each other.

They argue that intersectionality’s key contributions are as much about critical inquiry (in a scholarly sense) as they are about critical praxis, and that intersectional research often has ethical aims. Intersectional research usually focuses on one or more of four aspects of social divisions, all of which are important in my thesis:

[T]he identities of an individual or set of individuals or social group that are marked as different (e.g., a Muslim women or black women), the categories of difference (e.g. race and gender), the processes of differentiation (e.g., racialization and gendering), and the systems of domination (e.g., racism, colonialism, sexism, and patriarchy). (Dhamoon, 2011, p. 233)

Though there are various approaches to intersectionality, research in this field tends to focus on the ‘trinity’ of gender, race, and class (Crenshaw, 11 May 2016), views

these categories as socially constructed and as intersecting (rather than additive), and is concerned with power relations. I explore these features below.

Defining the ‘trinity’ of gender, class, and race

Gender, class, and race are the categories most relevant to inequalities in social action participation in existing research (see Chapter 2.2). They are ‘social categories that incorporate relations of power and involve inequitable distribution of resources among groups that are socially constructed as different’ (Phoenix, 2006, p. 25). Though intersectionality treats categories as intersecting rather than separate, it is necessary to define what they mean individually before explaining how they intersect. This is not intended to give a comprehensive overview of gender, class, and race or the systems of oppression built upon them – all contested and complex terms without a single meaning – but rather to offer the short definitions of these concepts informing this thesis. As encouraged by Hill Collins and Bilge (2020), I place these in relation to their accompanying ‘isms’ – sexism, racism, and classism – to ‘make them recognisable as unjust systems of power’, rather than only using the more neutral language of identity categories. Identity categories are important in my thesis, but so are the power relations built around them.

Gender and sexism

Gender is a ‘general term encompassing all social relations that separate people into differentiated gendered statuses’ (Lorber, 1994, p. 3). Gender ‘establishes patterns of expectations for individuals, orders the social processes of everyday life, is built into the major social organizations of society, such as the economy, ideology, the family, and politics, and is also an entity in and of itself’ (Ibid., p. 1). Whilst queer

theory has destabilised the idea that gender is binary, arguing that such a distinction ‘tends to stand in for and obscure the complex negotiations genders represent’ (Roof, 2016, p. 1), societies are nonetheless generally composed of only two genders – woman and man (Lorber, 1994, p. 17).

Unlike sex, which refers to biological differences, ‘gender exists beyond the body and is therefore discursively produced ... [It] is inscribed by people in relation to “the masculine” and “the feminine”’ (Cann, 2018, p. 3). Norms and expectations about what constitutes ‘the feminine’ and ‘the masculine’ relate to roles, behaviours, gestures, language, emotions, physicality, dress, tastes, and innumerable other cues signalling gender. Gender is performed through repetition and ritual, a ‘sustained set of acts’ (Butler, 2008, p. xv) that reproduce these norms and expectations. The idea that gender follows sex has been termed ‘gender fatalism’: the assumption that ‘boys will be boys’ and ‘girls will be girls’ ‘acquires the force of a prediction. A prediction becomes a command ... when you have fulfilled that command, you are agreeable; you have lived up to an expectation’ (Ahmed, 2017, p. 25).

When gender differences and gender fatalism are used to justify inequalities and discrimination, this is sexism. Gender, race, and many other categories are ‘protected characteristics’ in the UK under the Equality Act 2010, making it against the law to discriminate against someone because of these characteristics. Yet sexism can operate on an individual and a systemic level, both explicitly and subtly. More subtle examples have been termed ‘everyday sexism’ – seemingly ordinary, small acts of harassment, discrimination and abuse that make up the ‘reams and reams of tiny pinpricks ... so niggling and normalised’ in women’s everyday lives (Bates, 2014,

p. 12). Sexism can function in both ‘hostile’ ways (such as explicit antipathy towards women) and ‘benevolent’ ways (such as ‘chivalry’) to reinforce a hierarchy among genders with men at the top (Glick and Rudman, 2010, p. 329).

Class and classism

Class is ‘a multilayered and diverse signifier of social rank’ (Anthias, 2001, p. 369).

While class can be reproduced from generation to generation (Crompton, 2008, p. 22) such that children are considered born into a particular class, it does not necessarily follow that class is fixed.

Most recent sociological studies of class are influenced by a Bourdieusian approach that recognises the social and cultural aspects of class as well as the economic. All are important in this thesis. The economic aspects of class are about ‘how people earn their money, how much money they have, or what they do with their money’ (Hout, 2008, p. 26). Occupational status (for adults) or eligibility for FSM (for young people) are often used as proxies for class, in part because these are easier to measure than the social, cultural, and symbolic aspects of class. These include values, language, accent, consumption, taste, and interests. The working-class women in Skeggs’s (2002) ethnography, for example, are conscious that their clothes, music taste, and how they decorate their houses are all markers of class and that they will be classed by others on the basis of such markers. These markers do not operate in isolation, but as Walkerdine (2020, p. 2) more recently found among working-class university students, it can be particular combinations of these markers – such as ‘tattoos, the physique of a rugby player, and a specific accent’ – that prompt negative responses and discrimination from others.

Discrimination on the basis of class is known as classism, which 'denotes negative attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors directed toward those with less power, who are socially devalued' (Lott, 2012, p. 654). It means that

the practices of the dominant [middle classes] are generally presented as exclusive or 'distinguished' whereas those of the dominated [working classes] are perceived as common and 'vulgar'. This is not because they are inherently superior or inferior, but because the dominant possess the power, through the media, schools and politics, to impose their way of life as the legitimate one. (Atkinson, 2015, p. 54)

Unlike gender and race, class is not a protected characteristic in the UK, though classism is considered endemic (Walkerdine, 2020, p. 4).

Race and racism

Race is 'one of those major or master concepts (the masculine form is deliberate) that organize the great classificatory systems of difference that operate in human societies ... [It is] a cultural and historical, not biological, fact' (Hall, 2017, p. 32) that operates through social relationships and practices (Warmington, 2009, p. 288).

Race is nonetheless imbued with a 'biological trace', based on differences in physical traits, which can be identified in 'everyday action and commonsense language and thought – as well as the larger structural systems of power that organize the distribution of wealth, resources, and knowledge differentially across societies and between groups' (Hall, 2017, p. 43). This means that 'biology cannot be wholly dismissed as a factor in the formation and reproduction of "race". It is better to confine phenotypes to a relatively autonomous realm of biological determinations which can ascribe a variety of social effects' (Gilroy, 2002, p. 36). These effects are worthy of study.

Ethnicity, also a construct, is connected to race. It is 'the shared languages, traditions, religious beliefs, cultural ideas, customs, and rituals that bind together particular groups' (Hall, 2017, p. 83). The conflation of ethnicity and race is widely disputed but, as Knowles (2010) argues, since they often operate in tandem it is acceptable to use 'race' to mean both race and ethnicity, as I do in this thesis.

Racism is 'an ideology of racial domination based on beliefs that a designated racial group is either biologically or culturally inferior and the use of such beliefs to rationalise or prescribe the racial group's treatment in society' (Hill Collins and Solomos, 2010, p. 3). It is a 'system of meaning, a way of organizing and meaningfully classifying the world' (Hall, 2017, p. 33). It is not, therefore, only an 'aberration' or associated only with explicit acts. Viewing it as such can contribute to the "“elsewhereing” of race and racism, which has a tendency to conceal the contours of racism as they mark the wider social and political structure' (Warmington, 2009, p. 287). Rather, society is 'sinewed by raced practices, both material and imaginative or ideological' (Warmington, 2009, p. 291), meaning racism can be identified in everyday behaviours – it is 'violence [that] weaves through the daily tissues of our living' (Lorde, 1980). Everyday acts of racism are 'microaggressions ... one of those many sudden, stunning, or dispiriting transactions that mar the days of women and folks of color' (Delgado, Stefancic and Harris, 2017, p. 2).

The terms used to describe racial categories are contested. The acronym BAME is often used, but this elides differences between groups and reinforces the idea that White is the 'norm' (Gabriel, 2020). Instead, Gunaratnum (2011a, pp. 13-14)

proposes the term ‘minoritised’ to ‘give some sense of the active processes of racialization that are at work in designating certain attributes of groups in particular contexts as being in a “minority”.’ I use the term ‘racially minoritised’ to describe those who are not White. There is also a debate about whether categories of Black and White should be capitalised (Appiah, 18 June 2020; Wong, 3 September 2020). Recognising that these are politicised and constructed, I capitalise both.

Categories as social constructs

Gender, class, and race are understood as forms of social difference and as constructs. There is no ‘interior essence’ of identity; it is neither fixed nor inherent (Butler, 2008, p. x). According to Butler, iterative performativity is the process through which identities and the norms with which they are associated are (re)produced (Chadderton, 2018, p. 109). With gender – like race and class – ‘there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very “expressions” that are said to be its results’ (Butler, 2008, p. 34).

Intersectionality counters identity politics that ‘tend to maintain group boundaries uncritically in order to revalue them’ (McCall, 2005, p. 1780). It has long been argued that feminist movements promoting the universalisation of ‘woman’ erase the racial (and other) differences between women by representing only some (White) women’s interests (Crenshaw, 1991; hooks, 2014; Phoenix, 2006). Thus identity politics can contribute to the essentialisation of categories (Hancock, 2007, p. 65) by treating categories as if they have a basis in reality rather than being socially constructed.

Two intersectional approaches that view categories as social constructs are relevant to my thesis: the intracategorical and the intercategorical (McCall, 2005). The intracategorical approach accepts that categories are imbued with meaning, and therefore require attention to unpick the inequalities they are used to create and justify (McCall, 2005). This approach tends to focus on particular groups to ‘fill out the Venn diagrams at points of overlap where convergence has been neglected’ (MacKinnon, 2013, p. 1020), with the aim of ‘reveal[ing] the complexity of lived experience within such groups’ (McCall, 2005, p. 1774). However, this approach has been criticised for its neglect of the structures influencing this lived experience (Walby, Armstrong and Strid, 2012, p. 227). The intercategorical approach (adopted by McCall, 2005, p. 1773) documents the inequalities between multiple groups and ‘engag[es] with the larger structures that generate inequalities’ (Walby, Armstrong and Strid, 2012, p. 227). The relational aspect is important, as is a focus on power: categories ‘necessarily acquire meaning and power (or a lack thereof) in relationship to other social positions’ (Hill Collins and Chepp, 2013, p. 8). My approach falls between the intracategorical and the intercategorical because I focus on a particular group – working-class, mainly racially-minoritised girls – and pay attention to how power reproduces inequalities.

Intersecting, not additive

Intersectional approaches generally view categories in a ‘nonadditive’, interactional way (Anthias, 2005; Hancock, 2016; MacKinnon, 2013; McCall, 2005; Walby, 2007). This is on the basis that since individuals do not experience the various components of their identities separately, research should not treat these as separate, either. As Walby (2007, p. 451) explains, ‘at the point of intersection it is insufficient to treat

[categories] merely as if they are to be added up'. Rather, 'each system is changed as a result of its interaction with other systems, but ... it is not [necessarily] destroyed or turned into something totally new' (Walby, Armstrong and Strid, 2012, p. 235).

This approach emerged from the idea that experiences of sexism and racism could not simply be added together to understand the experiences of, for example, Black women, because 'the former focused on white women and the latter on black men' (McCall, 2005, p. 1780). In practice, this involves exploring 'accounts of the multiple, shifting, and sometimes simultaneous ways that self and other are represented, the way that individuals identify and disidentify with other groups, how one category is used to differentiate another in specific contexts, and how particular identities become salient or foregrounded at particular moments' (Valentine, 2007, p. 15).

I avoid an additive approach partly by centring the lives of the individual girls involved in my research in my fieldwork and analysis. This means not focusing on how race or class or gender shapes their participation, but rather how, for each of the girls, these categories intersect to produce their particular experiences. This is especially evident in Chapter 5, where I tell the stories of three girls involved. It is also why I take a multi-sited ethnographic approach (see Chapter 4, p.86), aiming to explore the shifting identities to which Valentine refers.

Power relations

Intersectionality is 'inextricably linked to an analysis of power' (Cho, Williams Crenshaw and McCall, 2013, p. 797). Power is understood in a Foucauldian sense: it is everywhere, not only present in certain situations, and it is exercised, not 'owned'

by a particular group or institution (Foucault, 1990). Power is

a relationship rather than a static entity. Power is not a thing to be gained or lost as in the zero-sum conceptions of winners and losers on the football playing field. Rather, power is exercised via the relationships that created the very categories of winners and losers. (Hill Collins and Bilge, 2020, p. 226)

Hill Collins refers to ‘oppressions’ of race, gender, and class (Hill Collins, 2000; Hill Collins and Bilge, 2016, 2020). She outlines a matrix encompassing four domains of power – interpersonal, structural, disciplinary, and cultural – to explain how these oppressions are organised in society. These are ‘the playing fields upon which race, gender, class, and other categories or traditions of difference interact to produce society’ (Hancock, 2007, p. 74). The domains cover the three types of intersectionality originally proposed by Crenshaw (1991): structural, political, and representational. Structural intersectionality involves understanding how individual experiences differ based on the intersection of their gender, race, and class. Political intersectionality looks at how organised groups – for example, feminist and antiracist movements – take account (or not) of this intersection in their work. Representational intersectionality explores the cultural construction of certain groups and what this means for their (dis)empowerment. The domains of power framework invites analysis of these different types of intersectionality through the lens of power.

The interpersonal domain of power ‘refers to how individuals experience the convergence of structural, cultural, and disciplinary power’ shaping their identities and, in turn, how others respond to them (Hill Collins and Bilge, 2020, p. 15). This means ‘how people relate to one another, and who is advantaged or disadvantaged within social interactions’ (Hill Collins and Bilge, 2016, p. 7) and includes the

‘routinized, day-to-day practices of how people treat one another’ (Hill Collins, 2000, p. 287). As Hill Collins (2000, p. 301) argues, ‘unlike bias and prejudice, which are characteristics of individuals, the structural domain of power operates through the laws and policies of social institutions’. In particular, ‘large-scale, interlocking institutions’ such as the legal system, schools, housing, and the health system, and how these work together to discriminate against particular groups (Hill Collins, 2000, p. 276). Where ‘the structural domain organises oppression ... the disciplinary domain manages it’ (Hill Collins, 2000, p. 276). The disciplinary domain is about how institutions are run, the rules governing them, and how individuals’ time is organised by them. It is also about how ‘different people find themselves encountering different treatment regarding which rules apply to them and how those rules will be implemented’ (Hill Collins and Bilge, 2016, p. 9). Finally, the cultural or hegemonic domain, which is about ideology and consciousness, is linked to the other three domains by ‘justify[ing] practices in these domains of power’ (Hill Collins, 2000, p. 283). Cultural ideas can be shaped by various forces, from mass media’s propagation of particular ideas and reinforcement of ‘myths’ (Hill Collins and Bilge, 2016, p. 11) to ‘school curricula, religious teachings, community cultures, and family histories’ (Hill Collins, 2000, p. 283).

Within these domains there is also space for resistance – our ‘capability for exercising agency’ (Elder-Vass, 2010, p. 87). In Hill Collins’ framework, agency means both collective resistance of domination through group solidarity and individual resistance through the construction of identities (Hill Collins, 2000, p. 275). Resistance can be expressed through making choices – not that choices are ever wholly unconstrained, but ‘human action may be affected by social causes without

being fully determined by them' (Elder-Vass, 2010, p. 87). Agency and resistance are relevant to any study of power, since power is always accompanied by resistance (Foucault, 1990, p. 95). Exploring girls' agency is therefore a key part of my analysis.

The domains of power framework can also help identify how inequalities are reproduced by power relations. This is because power relations are 'not in a position of exteriority with respect to other types of relationships (economic processes, knowledge relationships, sexual relations) but are immanent in the latter; they are the immediate effects of the divisions, inequalities, and disequilibriums which occur in the latter' (Foucault, 1990, p. 94). This encourages us to think about how inequality affects working-class girls not only in terms of their individual characteristics but also as embedded in their relationships with others, the institutions with which they come into contact, and the norms and ideas shaping expectations of who they are and how they should behave – the girlhoods discourses introduced above (p.1). These discourses are important in a discussion of power because discourse can be

both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling-block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it. (Foucault, 1990, p. 101)

These themes will be drawn out throughout my findings chapters (5–8), but I will return to the domains of power framework in Chapter 9 to discuss explicitly how this operates for the girls in my study.

Critiques of intersectionality and intersectional critiques

Intersectionality has been criticised in academic scholarship outside the field for: being incomprehensible, too theoretical and not grounded in practice; reincarnating

identity politics; and splitting the feminist movement (Hill Collins and Bilge, 2016, p. 107). Such criticism generally stems from a limited understanding of intersectionality. The more constructive criticisms come from within the field rather than outside it, offering helpful pointers for doing intersectional work well.

The recent 'mainstreaming' of intersectionality is reflected in its use as a 'buzzword' in feminist work (Davis, 2008) and policy debates (Puah, 2012). This can mean that 'the language of intersectionality, its very invocation, it seems, largely substitutes for intersectional analysis itself' (Puah, 2012, p. 53). Bilge (2013, p. 411) suggests that grounding intersectional studies in empirical research – as I do in this thesis – rather than providing 'speculative or normative musings', can avoid such 'ornamental' uses.

What Bilge (2013) calls the 'whitening' of intersectionality is another way intersectionality can be 'undone'. This is evident in the under-emphasis some intersectional research places on the scholarship of Black women, which Alexander-Floyd (2012, p. 16) argues 'serves to silence these scholars, presenting a limited view of the breadth of intersectionality in political science and encouraging others to sidestep their work'. In attempting to address this I have drawn heavily on the work of Black women in explaining intersectionality and in designing and analysing my research.

The whitening of intersectionality has also been identified in claims that intersectionality is a feminist theory (Davis, 2008), centralising gender rather than race (Salem, 2018). This 'disappears' Black women (Alexander-Floyd, 2012), but does not mean Black women should always be the focus. An exclusive focus on 'giving voice to the oppressed' can neglect the study of what Crenshaw and others

call 'unmarked categories' (Crenshaw, 11 May 2016) – particularly in the intracategorical approach, as Winker and Degele (2011, p. 57) observe – and reinforce the idea of racially-minoritised women as the 'Other ... who must invariably be shown to be resistant, subversive, or articulating a grievance' (Puah, 2012, p. 53). In focusing only on categories subject to unequal treatment – such as woman, Blackness, and working-classness – it is implicitly accepted that man, Whiteness, and middle-classness are normative and not in need of critical interrogation (Choo and Ferree, 2010). Exploring categories associated with privilege and oppression can avoid this. While I do not explore the unmarked categories of gender and class (boys or those from middle-class backgrounds), girls who are White and those who are racially minoritised participate in my research.

Some argue that individuals should be studied in different contexts to understand how categories can be both 'asset' and 'albatross' (Manuel, 2006, p. 193; Nash, 2008; Walby, Armstrong and Strid, 2012). A critical treatment of categories, which does not assume that certain categories and their intersections always privilege or always marginalise, can address this. This also recognises how categories are dynamic and contextualised: they change over time (Hancock, 2007) and are not inherent – though we must 'temporarily stabiliz[e] the categories for analysis at any one point in time' (Walby, Armstrong and Strid, 2012, p. 231). An intersectional study cannot isolate the individual from the context in which they live: 'we cannot assume the same effect or constellation each time and, hence, the investigation of the specific social, political and economic processes' (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 200). This highlights the importance of examining power relations but also the value of understanding the wider contexts of girls' lives, as I aim to do.

Recognising the importance of not separating the individual from the context in which they live or the power relations in which their lives are embedded, in the next section I introduce girlhoods, explain their relationship to intersectionality, and discuss how girlhoods discourses shape the contemporary lives of working-class girls in the global North.

3.2 Girlhoods

Young people are particularly important subjects in intersectional studies:

Because they are young and experience social inequalities that are associated with age as a system of power firsthand, children, teenagers and young adults have a special vantage point on intersecting social inequalities of ethnicity, religion, gender, sexuality, and race. ... [B]ecause age straddles all of these categories, young people's experiences of social problems are more intensified. (Hill Collins and Bilge, 2016, p. 117)

If young people's experiences of social problems are intensified, girls are especially worthy of study because of the inequalities they experience (see p.1). Girlhood studies recognise that there are heterogeneous *girlhoods*, not a universal girlhood (just as there is no universal girl), and therefore that 'there are many ways to be a girl, and these forms depend on not only the material bodies performing girlhood, but also the specific social and historical contexts in which those bodies are located' (Kearney, 2009, p. 19).

Girlhood studies are rooted in intersectional concerns, with Harris (2004b, p. xviii) claiming that the field 'was borne out of the commonplace disregard for issues of gender within youth studies and age within women's studies'. But girlhood studies

have since become less about a 'cohort approach' than a recognition that

the differences between young women need as much attention as the features that are shared ... The category of "girl" ... has been shaped by norms about race, class, and ability that have prioritized the white, middle class, and non-disabled, and pathologized and/or criminalised the majority outside this category of privilege. (Harris, 2004b, p. xx)

There are multiple discourses of girlhoods in the contemporary global North (see p.1). Discourses refer to 'historically, socially, and institutionally specific structure[s] of statements, terms, categories, and beliefs' (Scott, 1988, p. 35) that are constructed; certain ideas and practices establish what is accepted as given. In the context of girlhoods, discourses refer to how girlhood is thought about, talked about, and practised in a particular society. These discourses shape expectations about how girls are supposed to be, creating the 'multiple (but limited) subject positions that have been made available to girls today' (Currie, Kelly and Pomerantz, 2007, p. 388).

Two discourses – the successful girl and the good girl – are especially pertinent to girls' social action. A third set of relevant ideas relates to authenticity. Although not referred to in the literature as a discourse, I argue that it is worth exploring the role of authenticity in girls' lives.

Successful girl

The 'successful girl' discourse begins at primary school (Renold and Allan, 2006) and can be traced into early adulthood (Cossens and Jackson, 2018). The successful girl achieves high academic attainment and extra-curricular accomplishments at school, attends and graduates from university, and enters traditionally male-dominated

careers (Pomerantz and Raby, 2018, p. 3). This is one dimension of what Harris (2004a) identifies as the discourse of ‘can do’ girls (see p.1), ‘identifiable by their commitment to exceptional careers and career planning, their belief in their capacity to invent themselves and succeed, and their display of a consumer lifestyle. They are also distinguished by a desire to put off childbearing until “later”’ (Harris, 2004a, p. 13). The ‘can do’ girl is told she can ‘be whatever you want’, which, as Baumgardner and Richards (2004, p. 59) argue, means ‘integrating themselves into a male world and proving they could do masculine things’. The successful girl follows a White, middle-class trajectory and meaning of success (Baker, 2010; Harris, 2004a). Although the idea that this kind of success should be available to all girls may not in itself be a ‘bad’ thing, there are several problems with this discourse, outlined below.

Attainment and extra-curricular accomplishment

Until recently girls’ attainment at A Level in England had been consistently higher than boys’ for two decades (Robertson, 2018). This was reversed in 2017 when boys’ attainment began to outstrip girls’.¹¹ In 2018 more boys than girls at state schools achieved high grades at A Level, though this was not the case for BTEC or International Baccalaureate (IB) qualifications.¹² Girls’ historic success at A Level (and GCSE) has meant that girls are considered “not a problem” and hence as not deserving of particular attention or resources’ (Ringrose, 2007, p. 481). In one study, Rollock (2007, p. 199) finds that the prevalence of this discourse means girls are

¹¹ This date is relevant because most of the girls in my study took their A Levels, BTECs or International Baccalaureate in 2018/2019.

¹² BTECs are vocational qualifications increasingly accepted by universities as an alternative to A Levels. The IB is a qualification equivalent to A Levels.

‘subject to less stringent targeting and monitoring than boys [and that] is likely to contribute ultimately to girls occupying a less visible position’ at school.

In the successful girl discourse, girls are pitted against boys. Girls are framed ‘as potentially able to “save” boys from underachievement, by exerting a “civilizing” influence in the classroom’ (Archer, Halsall and Hollingworth, 2007, p. 550). Girls’ academic success is argued to be at the expense of boys’ (Gerodetti and McNaught-Davis, 2017), with feminism to blame (Ringrose, 2012, p. 2). This discourse stems from post-feminist narratives in which feminism’s successes are taken to mean that feminism is no longer needed because gender equality has been achieved. This obscures the inequalities that continue to shape girls’ and women’s lives, including in terms of careers and pay (Pomerantz and Raby, 2018). Moreover, the fact that girls are no longer achieving higher grades than boys at A Level highlights the repercussions of the lack of attention paid to girls’ academic achievement.

In addition, in 2018 there were both class and race differences in attainment, with A Level and BTEC students who had previously been eligible for FSM achieving lower grades than those not FSM-eligible. Black students and mixed ethnicity students achieved the lowest attainment of all ethnic groups at A Level and BTEC (Department for Education, 2019b), despite recent political debates about White British working-class boys being ‘left behind’ and the ‘myth’ of White privilege (Education Committee, 2021) – arguments which have been heavily criticised (see for example Runnymede Trust, 2021). Research finds that initiatives to increase attainment among Black GCSE students have tended to focus on Black male students, marginalising the needs of Black female students; the successful girls

discourse has therefore served both to reduce Black girls' 'opportunities for high status academic success and render them invisible in the debates on Black attainment' (Rollock, 2007, p. 197).

After school, although White state school students are less likely to get a place at university than any other ethnic group (UCAS, 2020), racially-minoritised young people are less likely to be accepted at highly-selective universities (Boliver, 2015) or to achieve a First compared to their White peers, especially Black girls (Advance HE, 2020, Table 3.15). Research on personal statements also shows that 'not every applicant is equally equipped to "stand out from the crowd"', given class differences in the work experience available to young people and in their ability to 'play the admissions game' (Jones, 2013, p. 418). In addition, working-class girls' attitudes towards university can be limited by financial concerns, worries about moving away from family, and wanting (or needing) to continue helping at home (Evans, 2009), which in turn affects where they apply.

While involvement in extra-curricular activities like social action is considered important for all young people who want to be 'successful', it is particularly pronounced for girls. Raby and Pomerantz (2013) describe the 'super girls' of their study in Canada who not only achieved good grades but were also involved in extra-curricular activities such as volunteering. They find that girls were more likely to be involved in these activities than boys, and that they expected to need more examples of these on their CVs than boys to get into university, even with the same grades; involvement in these activities was just 'part of the package – their smart girl "portfolio"' (Pomerantz and Raby, 2017, pp. 87, 104, 141). The authors argue that

achieving ‘super girl’ status is difficult enough for White, middle-class girls, let alone for their working-class and racially-minoritised peers.

The transition to successful futures

According to the successful girl discourse, academic and extra-curricular achievements lead to future university and career success. For working-class and racially-minoritised girls, aspiration is considered key to this. As Allen (2014) argues, ‘raising aspirations’ has been framed by successive UK governments as the means by which the working classes become middle class, with girls positioned as ideal subjects for cultivating aspiration. Underpinning this is the idea that ‘becoming middle class should be an aspiration because being working class is “bad”, something from which individuals must escape’ (Allen, 2014, p. 761; see also Lucey, Melody and Walkerdine, 2003). Debates about aspirations are also imbued with racism, with Black pupils often considered ““naturally” unambitious and unacademic due to their location within “unacademic” families and cultures’, and research finding that Black girls encounter low expectations of career and academic success from teachers (Archer, 2008, pp. 97-98).

As such, interventions designed to prepare the racially-minoritised, working-class girl for a ‘successful’ future reflect a deficit model approach in which this girl is considered in need of improvement (Lucey, Melody and Walkerdine, 2003). For example, Mirza and Meeto (2018, p. 234) find that the London schools in their study of Muslim girls ‘nurture the young women so they could attain the “right” white middle-class cultural capital to behave in ways that are recognised in the wider world

of higher education, and subsequently the world of work', such as through Model UN, work experience at banks and law firms, and theatre and university trips.

Yet structural inequalities outside school can prevent women from entering high-paid, high-status jobs in future (Pomerantz and Raby, 2017, p. xiv). The idea that a degree and hard work would 'open doors' has been found to be a false promise for working-class young women (Allen, 2016, p. 812). This is especially the case for those who are racially minoritised, with the ideal of success 'not often personally sustainable beyond the "safe haven" of the school gates' (Mirza and Meeto, 2018, p. 235). Racially-minoritised young people are less likely to be in full-time employment after graduating university (Advance HE, 2020, Table 3.18) or in high-paying, high-status jobs (Mirza and Meeto, 2018). Discrimination has been identified in recruitment processes and in the workplace against Black, Pakistani and Bangladeshi women and against Muslim women who wear the hijab (Butler, 2013). Knowledge of these inequalities can produce anxiety for working-class, racially-minoritised girls who are underrepresented in fields such as banking or law, given 'the raced and classed dimensions of [these] masculinised professional domains' (Baker, 2010, p. 11). Moreover, the careers to which girls aspire tend to be the kind of caring roles that women have traditionally been socialised to want (Baker, 2010; Cossens and Jackson, 2018).

The successful girl discourse is also problematic because of the emphasis it places on individual responsibility for success. Linked to ideas of Girl Power originating in the 1990s, in which girls were considered to be 'assertive, dynamic, and unbound from the constraints of passive femininity' (Gonick, 2006, p. 2), the successful girl

discourse persisted into the late 2010s where ‘independence, self-regulation and self-striving are not so much possibilities as requirements that girls must meet in order to become successful subjects’ (Cossens and Jackson, 2018, p. 2). This reflects the neoliberal notion that success is the result of individual hard work and ‘good’ choices, and therefore that girls are responsible for their own successes and by extension ‘failure’ (Bradford and Hey, 2007; Gerodetti and McNaught-Davis, 2017; Harris, 2004a; Lesko, Chacko and Khoja-Moolji, 2015; Pomerantz, Raby and Stefanik, 2013).

Good girl

The good girl discourse predates the successful girl discourse, encompassing more traditional, ‘old-fashioned’ ideas about femininity (Jackson, 2006). The good girl is expected to spend time either at school or at home, where she can be supervised by adults (Harris, 2004a, p. 97). She is expected to be vulnerable (Gonick, 2006; Projansky, 2014); sexually innocent (Pichler, 2000); docile (Gordon, 2008; Harris, 2004a; Read, Francis and Skelton, 2011), which includes being passive (Jackson, 2006) and being quiet (Fordham, 1993, 2008; Morris, 2007); and to care for others (Bell and Golombisky, 2004; Fisher, 2016; Pomerantz, Raby and Stefanik, 2013).

These last two, docility and care, are especially relevant to girls’ social action.

Docile

Docility means compliance: following rules and doing as you are told. It is connected to being passive and being quiet. This is a Foucauldian understanding of docility that is bound up in power relations. He writes that ‘a body is docile that may be subjected, used, transformed and improved’ (Foucault, 1995, p. 136). It is connected

to the disciplinary domain of the domains of power framework introduced above (p.55), which is focused on how institutions produce 'quiet, orderly, docile, and disciplined populations' (Alinia, 2015, p. 2334). Docility is relevant to social action because it is about where, how, and with whom girls can spend time. Since the good girl is either expected to be at home or at school, these are the two contexts explored below.

Although home can be a place of belonging for girls, away from the 'public gaze', it can also be a site of control, where 'gender, class, or race are regulated, surveyed, and enforced' (Azzarito and Hill, 2013, p. 355). This regulation can happen through the rules that girls are expected to follow. There is limited research on girls' docility at home, but Peled and Muzicant (2008, p. 436) argue that 'in the process of socialization young girls are commonly steered towards their adult role as home-making women and tend to receive signals that subject them to considerable parental control and to restrictions in the social and sexual arenas'. Gordon (2008, pp. 34-35) notes gendered differences in parents' expectations of their children, with White parents expecting 'a measure of independence and even defiance from their sons that they do not expect from their daughters', though she cites Hill Collins (2000) in contrast who finds that Black women in her research promote cultures of resistance in their families.

Docility is also expected at schools, where more research is concentrated. The good girl is expected to be 'docile and supportive to teachers' at school (Read, Francis and Skelton, 2011, p. 176). Studies have also found that teachers expect girls to be compliant, quiet, and sensible and boys to be disruptive and 'troublesome' (Jones

and Myhill, 2004). The anger that girls sometimes channel through social action (discussed above, p.31) can work in tension with these expectations. Similarly, in research with White British working-class girls, Fisher (2016) identifies ‘good girl’ behaviours as following school rules, being polite, and being compliant, but finds that practising these behaviours can lead to teasing from other children and not ‘fitting in’. In the US, Fordham (2008, p. 241) describes how girls’ assertiveness is valued in African American communities, which conflicts with Whiteness expectations of girls at school to be compliant, ‘earning Black girls a reputation as “loud” and “out of place”’. Similar expectations have been found in London schools, where ““loud”, active and visible femininities can be understood as challenging the forms of submissive, passive and quiet femininity that are usually rewarded within schools’, and conflict resulting from deviation from these norms is especially felt by racially-minoritised girls (Archer, Halsall and Hollingworth, 2007, p. 555).

School dress codes are an example of rules set by schools that encourage ‘good girl’ behaviour. Rules about dress codes and ‘modesty’ can define ‘acceptable’ girlhoods and normalise expectations of how girls and boys should look, sexualising girls and reinforcing rape culture and existing gender inequalities (Aghasaleh, 2018; Raby, 2009; Ringrose, Keller and Mendes, 2019). These relate to the gendered nature of ‘docile bodies’ whereby ‘the bodies of girls are regulated by the “micropractices” of schooling that either control or dismiss their sexuality and femininity’ (Bettis and Adams, 2012, p. 12). Being a good girl means not resisting such expectations, either through expressing contrary opinions or by breaking rules: the opposite of the good girl ‘protests, whines, and asks for special treatment rather than dealing with their own problems’ (Pomerantz, Raby and Stefanik, 2013, p. 203) and rebels against

expectations (Jackson, 2006, p. 46). This resistance is one aspect of the girlhood studies' conceptualisation of girls' social action, discussed below under 'Authenticity'.

Even docility is considered to have limits, however, and it is possible to be 'too docile': in Australia young Asian women are subject to troubling stereotypes related to docility, often positioned as 'compliant, passive, and eager to please' (Harris, 2004a, p. 168). In the UK, research finds that teachers consider British Chinese girls 'too quiet, too passive, and too repressed' (Archer, 2008, p. 99), and consider Muslim girls as 'victims of culture' in need of saving from patriarchal 'cultural practices' such as FGM, forced marriage, honour-related violence and the perceived denigration of their education (Rashid, 2016). This highlights the particular challenges faced by racially-minoritised girls in meeting ideals of girlhoods.

Caring

Exploring what girls are told to do is also important. The good girl is expected to be helpful to others, 'pitch[ing] in where she is needed' (Pomerantz, Raby and Stefanik, 2013, p. 203). This discourse can be identified in the 'caring, almost maternal' behaviour of primary school-aged girls (Fisher, 2016, p. 918) and the 'nurturing urges to serve and protect' in female university students (Bell and Golombisky, 2004, p. 298). These are all acts of care, a concept denoting both the 'activity of catering directly to another person's needs, both physical and emotional' and the 'desire for the other's well-being that motivates the activity' (Himmelweit, 1999, p. 29). This speaks to what Skeggs (2002, p. 56) sees as the 'dialogic production' between care and being caring: 'the caring subject is constructed by the conflation of caring *for*

with caring *about*, in which the practices of caring become inseparable from the personal dispositions ... a caring self cannot be produced without caring for others.'

Caring for others often manifests as care work. It is considered natural to women (Himmelweit, 1999, p. 28) and has long been valorised in ideals of working-class femininity (Skeggs, 2002). Care work covers what Glenn (1992, p. 1) calls 'reproductive labour' – 'activities such as purchasing household goods, preparing and serving food, laundering and repairing clothing, maintaining furnishings and appliances, socializing children, providing care and emotional support for adults, and maintaining kin and community ties'. I group these activities together as care work because they all revolve around looking after others.

In the UK, mothers provide 74% of childcare and women and girls spend significantly more time on care work than men and boys (Mullan, 2018, p. 1014; Office for National Statistics, 2016). The care work girls carry out is also unevenly distributed in terms of class and race. Working-class girls' care work can be part of their families' strategies to manage both paid work and family care, but this can mean an 'opportunity cost' for girls' development that reinforces the transmission of an 'intergenerational cycle of poverty and near poverty, largely from mother to daughter' (Dodson and Dickert, 2004, p. 318). In families where mothers work outside the home, it is more likely that such labour is 'downloaded' to the eldest daughter (Lee and Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2011, p. 117). There are also differences in the kind of care work in which these daughters are engaged, with immigrant girls in the global North found to provide 'important cultural transmission/translation work

through shaping younger siblings' transnational citizen identities' (Lee and Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2011, p. 106).

Related to this kind of care work is the language brokering undertaken by the children of migrant families whose first language is not English. Language brokering involves 'mediat[ing] between two different language speakers or writers/readers, and ... [being] actively involved in conveying meanings from one language to another' (Hall and Sham, 2007, p. 17). Young people describe language brokering using terms such as 'caring', 'looking after', 'contributing', 'helping out' and 'support' (Bauer, 2016, p. 26), positioning language brokering as care. For those from working-class, immigrant families, race and class shape their experiences because parents have less access to social capital, making it more likely that their children engage in language brokering (Kwon, 2014). There is evidence in the US to suggest that daughters are more likely than sons to be language brokers, though no similar evidence from the UK (Cline and Crafter, 2014).

There is a considerable body of feminist literature on revaluing care as a form of work, and thus highlighting its value. Glucksmann's Total Social Organisation of Labour (Glucksmann, 1995) defines work not only in terms of paid activity but in terms of what it contributes to society, to demonstrate the importance of activities such as volunteering and care, traditionally carried out by women and girls, alongside more formal, paid employment (Baldock, 1998; Beechey, 1987). As Taylor (2004, p. 38) explains, 'work' ought to be characterised by the service provided to others, not by the money earned. Scholarship in this field has generally concentrated on care work provided by women or has grouped women's and girls' care work

together. Care work has not explicitly been explored as a form of social action in the girlhood studies literature, despite being an example of activities of a personal nature in the private sphere (see p.21). In addition, because this care work is often provided for family members, it is not considered youth social action according to the policy and practice definition, which discounts help provided to family or friends (see p.14), nor as informal volunteering, which discounts help provided to family (p.7). However, the activities involved in care work would be 'counted' were they carried out for those other than friends or family. Herd and Harrington Meyer (2002) have argued that adult care work for family should be considered civic engagement for the same reasons. In this thesis, I explore working-class girls' participation in care work and whether care work should be considered a form of social action.

It can also be argued that social action is a form of care. Previous work has framed volunteering as an expression of care (Hardill and Baines, 2011), focusing on mainly formal volunteering by individuals helping those outside the family. But care can also be considered in relation to caring about an *issue* rather than about an individual(s). This is different to the kind of care expected of the good girl, because it is not about the care work girls do to look after the family but rather about how girls can express themselves and their views on issues they care about. It runs counter to the docility also expected of the good girl because it is about speaking out, not about being passive and quiet. This is discussed further in the next section of this chapter.

Authenticity

While concepts of the successful girl and the good girl are well established in girlhoods literature, no similar literature relates to the idea of an 'authentic girl'. Yet

authenticity is arguably closely connected to social action, and there is a body of research exploring girls' perspectives on authenticity.

Broadly speaking, being authentic means 'being yourself', feeling comfortable in doing so, and being seen by others to do so (Currie, Kelly and Pomerantz, 2007). Guignon (2004, p. 77) argues that being authentic means being an 'independent, self-directed individual whose actions clearly manifest what he or she really is ... worrying about fitting in and being a well-adapted member of society is the definition of inauthenticity'. In relation to social action, Dean (2020, pp. 61-70) finds that authenticity is key to young people's views about charity on social media, with young people feeling uncomfortable about 'perform[ing] goodness' online, such as through charity fundraising, for fear that others will think them inauthentic, and judging their peers in this way.

The authentic self is considered a construct (Allen and Mendick, 2012); there is no such thing as a 'true' or authentic self (Chadderton, 2018; Erikson, 1995; Gonick, 2006). Read, Francis and Skelton (2011, pp. 178, 181) describe how authenticity means 'present[ing] a fictively stable self to others', and that girls' concerns with 'issues of in/authenticity spring at least in part from an unconscious projection of girls' fears, ambivalences and tensions surrounding the presentation of a single authentic self – the difficulties of which are arguably made more acute by the contradictory impossibilities of contemporary dominant discourses of femininity.' These impossibilities are also present in the tensions between being good, successful, and authentic, highlighted below.

But regardless of whether the authentic self is attainable, research finds that girls feel the need to be authentic and worry about achieving it. As Currie, Kelly and Pomerantz (2007, p. 337) find, ‘while it indeed may be true, theoretically speaking, that coherent selfhood is a discursive fiction, we cannot avoid its presence when we talk with girls’. This makes authenticity worthy of study even if achieving it may be an impossible endeavour.

Being yourself

‘Being yourself’ is a powerful idea among young people (Francis, 2009; Mendick, Allen and Harvey, 2015), especially girls (Crann, 2017; Duits, 2008). The ability to be yourself is a standard by which girls judge themselves and others and is part of an idealised girlhood (Crann, 2017, p. 125; see also Duits, 2008). Imitation, or conceding to peer pressure, is considered the opposite of authenticity (Duits, 2008, p. 213).

Girls’ perspectives on being themselves are often found in studies of their engagement with media and celebrity culture, and what that says about their concepts of self (Allen and Mendick, 2012; Duits and van Romondt Vis, 2009; Mendick, Allen and Harvey, 2015), but authenticity is also important in relation to social action. Harris argues that there are pressures on girls to make their ‘private selves’ and ‘authentic voices’ visible and to ‘speak one’s true self through highly managed forms of participation’ (Harris, 2004a, p. 119). She argues that when such forms of participation are highly managed, opportunities for critique and resistance are suppressed. However, being yourself, when not ‘managed’, can offer an opportunity for girls to express their opinions and challenge expectations.

Authenticity may therefore be seen more positively as asserting ‘self-definition’ (Budgeon, 2001, p. 20), feeling able to express oneself through voicing opinions

about issues you care about, or taking action on those issues (Guignon, 2004, p. 84). As highlighted above, this is another way of thinking about care, and it runs counter to expectations that the good girl is passive and quiet.

The challenges of being yourself

Multiple studies show that girls find it hard to be themselves. Girls in Crann's study in Canada find it difficult to be themselves at school because of their school's social environment and broader expectations of girlhood, meaning that they instead feel they have to be 'followers' and conformists in order to fit in (Crann, 2017, p. 125). Being yourself can also be difficult because of norms and expectations about 'right', or accepted, ways of being – like expectations to be 'good' and 'successful' – and girls struggle with this (Currie, Kelly and Pomerantz, 2007). In research with Dutch teenage girls, Duits (2008, p. 132) finds that alongside the desire to be themselves is pressure to present a stable self that is coherent over time; this can then 'limit the possibility of naming radical changes ... authenticity promotes continuity rather than change as a norm.' This can be especially difficult given that adolescence is a period of identity formation (Erikson, 1968). It is also argued that those experiencing marginalisation 'are more likely to confront the "problem" of authenticity than those who inhabit the world of power and privilege' because they more often need to choose between being themselves and being who 'powerful others' want them to be (Erikson, 1995, pp. 137-138). Added to this difficulty is that the pressure to be yourself disregards how speaking out – and being heard – is risky in a patriarchal, racist, and classist society, and harder for some than for others (Harris, 2004a, p. 119).

The idea that the authentic self is stable and fixed is also problematic because it is in tension with the successful girl discourse that is, for girls who are working class and racially minoritised, premised on the idea of upward mobility and in the service of a different life to that of their parents. Working towards this future can therefore be conflicting and create feelings of inauthenticity (Hanley, 2016b; Reay, 2002). Social mobility means moving from working class to middle class, with education a mechanism for the transition. Yet there are 'hidden injuries' of social mobility, such as psychological disruption and anxieties (Sennett and Cobb, 1972). Hanley (2008, 2016a, 2016b) has written extensively about the uncomfortable feeling of being working class in a middle-class environment and 'becoming' middle class. These hidden injuries are often missing from wider rhetoric about social mobility that positions it as 'unequivocally a Good Thing for individuals and for society as a whole' (Hanley, 2016b, p. x). This can create tension in families because of

the losses that are fundamental to and unavoidable in this kind of change, even when those changes are desired; of the enormous amount of psychological work involved in transformation; and of the costs of that work ... wanting something different, something more than your parents, not only implies that there is something wrong with your parents' life, but that there is something wrong with them. This kind of dis-identification with one's parents and family can engender a deep sense of shame. (Lucey, Melody and Walkerdine, 2003, pp. 286-297)

For working-class girls, this can mean a loss of identity. Authenticity thus involves balancing the desire for the promises offered through social mobility with the need to maintain loyalty to their working-class backgrounds (Allen and Mendick, 2012; Reay, 2002).

3.3 Chapter conclusions

Intersectionality is relevant to girls' social action because it is grounded in activism and concerned with addressing inequalities. Girlhoods discourses and ideas about authenticity are relevant because different kinds of social action, for different purposes, are expected of girls. I combine the conceptual frameworks of intersectionality and girlhoods in this thesis in an 'intersectional girlhoods' approach. This means I consider the girls' gender, class, and race as socially constructed and intersecting and that I situate the girls' social action in the wider context of dominant discourses about girlhoods, themselves shaped by the power relations of Hill Collins' domains of power framework. This link between intersectionality, girlhoods discourses, and social action has not previously been explored.

Girlhoods discourses influence girls' lives and are relevant to their social action. The successful girl means girls are expected to get good grades and do social action at school in order to get into university and get a 'good' job; the good girl is centred around expectations of girls to be docile and caring; girls feel they need to be authentic but doing so is difficult. It is challenging for girls to meet the expectations of all three discourses because they compete in some ways: being successful can be difficult to balance with expectations of doing care work at home; authenticity can clash with both docility, in terms of girls not feeling able to express themselves, and with the successful girl, because social mobility can mean girls feel disconnected from their families and their identities. It is also difficult for girls to meet these expectations because they are gendered, classed, and racialised, and girls experience inequalities in the way they encounter and take up these discourses.

An intersectional girlhoods approach has its basis in feminist epistemologies. In the next chapter, I introduce these epistemologies and explain how they informed my research design.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH DESIGN

The case for feminist epistemologies is that traditional ideas about knowledge and what counts as 'truth' have been created by and serve the interests of elite White men, and therefore that they offer inadequate tools for exploring the experiences of women, especially those who are racially minoritised. In this chapter I outline the feminist epistemologies underpinning my research and provide details of my broadly ethnographic, feminist approach to designing and conducting the research and analysing my data, before introducing the participants.

4.1 Research design frame: feminist epistemologies

My research is informed by feminist epistemologies, particularly the Black feminist epistemology developed by Hill Collins (2000). Feminist epistemologies critique positivist approaches that 'create scientific descriptions of reality by producing objective generalizations' and remove the researcher from their research in aiming for objectivity (Hill Collins, 2000, p. 255). While they may be grounded in women's experiences, feminist epistemologies do not only or always centre gender. Rather, they focus on how power relations affect knowledge production and reconsider knowledge from the perspective of oppressed groups (Grasswick, 2011, p. xv; Hill Collins, 2000, p. 269). This thesis recognises that there are feminist *epistemologies*, rather than a universal feminist *epistemology*. Black feminist epistemology, for example, is grounded in the experience of US Black women, recognising that their experiences will be different from others'. Nonetheless, these epistemologies have transferability across different groups, and it is possible to identify common

components informing what counts as knowledge and how that knowledge is produced.

Situated knowledges

Underpinning feminist epistemologies is the idea of 'situated knowledges', which 'insist[s] on the embodied nature of all vision', refuting traditional views about the neutrality of knowledge and objectivity that present a 'gaze from nowhere ... [they] allow us to become answerable for what we learn how to see ... [and counter] various forms of unlocatable, and so irresponsible, knowledge claims' (Haraway, 1988, pp. 581-583). In Black feminist epistemology, individuals are personally accountable for their knowledge claims, known as 'the ethic of personal accountability' (Hill Collins, 2000, p. 265).

This emphasises the researcher's centrality to their research. For Hill Collins (2000, p. 263) this means ideas cannot be separated from the people who create them – the 'ethic of caring', where 'personal expressiveness, emotions, and empathy are central to the knowledge validation process'. While she identifies these as part of the African American woman's experience, she also highlights their link to 'connected knowing' in feminist epistemologies, which recognise how an individual's personality is connected to their ideas (Hill Collins, 2000, p. 264).

McHugh (2011, p. 283) argues that research aiming to improve lives should 'focus on communities in their complex environment ... [this] requires that these communities are understood in their materiality through bodies that are aged, gendered, abled/disabled, raced, classed, colonized, bordered, materially advantaged and disadvantaged, engaged in particular daily practices'. Building on the concept of

‘situated knowledges’, McHugh refers to this approach as ‘situated communities’. It highlights the value of exploring an issue – in my case, social action – in the context of individuals’ lives, rather than separately. McHugh argues that situated communities lead us to particular methodologies; it informs my broadly ethnographic approach and explains why I situate the girls’ participation in the wider context of their lives (the rationale for Chapter 5).

Ethical aims and approach

Research informed by feminist epistemologies is often driven by ethical aims (Kelly, Burton and Regan, 2013). In Black feminist epistemology, this means ‘values lie at the heart of the knowledge validation process such that inquiry always has an ethical aim’, reflected in the activist aims of intersectional research (Hill Collins, 2000, p. 266). In aiming to understand the inequalities shaping participation in social action, I also identify possible ways to address them.

An ethical approach also means what Grasswick (2011, p. xix) calls ‘responsible knowing’, which is about ‘producing ethically sound knowledge, and we must therefore concern ourselves with our choices of knowledge production and who we take ourselves to be accountable to through those choices’. This is partly concerned with the methods of knowledge production. It means treating participants respectfully and paying attention to power relations inherent in the researcher-researched relationship (discussed later in this chapter), while acknowledging that the power imbalance makes it impossible to avoid hierarchy (Skeggs, 2013). This accountability is also related to how others’ work informs what counts as knowledge and how it is

produced – such as being careful not to contribute to the ‘Whitening’ of intersectionality by centring the work of Black feminists in this thesis (see p.58).

Lived experience

In determining what counts as knowledge and how it is produced, feminist epistemologies centre lived experience. This is the basis of standpoint theory, ‘one of the landmarks of feminist epistemology’ (Grasswick, 2011, p. xv), which takes the experience of marginalised groups as an ‘epistemologically advantaged’ starting point, compared to research grounded in the experiences of dominant groups (Harding, 1992, p. 445). I adopt this starting point, centring the experiences of the girls involved in my research design and analysis.

It can also mean that the researcher’s lived experience gives credibility to the research – that ‘those individuals who have lived through the experiences about which they claim to be experts are more believable and credible than those who have merely read or thought about such experiences’ (Hill Collins, 2000, p. 257). But this does not need to be the case. McHugh (2011, p. 193) writes that through an ‘epistemology of intimacy’ between researchers and participants – where researchers take time to learn from participants through ‘prolonged conversation, careful listening, and recognition of members of the community as epistemic agents’ – those without lived experience of a particular issue can hope to understand it. An ethnographic approach lends itself to this kind of research, as discussed below.

Recent post-truth appropriations of lived experience, however, have simultaneously diminished women’s experiences and asserted men’s perceived victimhood and disadvantage (Budgeon, 2021). In response, Budgeon (2021, p. 250) argues that

lived experience should continue to ‘provide an important point of departure for the generation of knowledge, but not because it offers unmediated access to truth’. Rather, Budgeon suggests it is the researcher’s responsibility to interpret this experience through feminist theory. Thus while lived experience may be the starting point, it is not the end point (Maynard and Purvis, 2013). I ‘mediate’ my data through the conceptual framework of intersectional girlhoods discussed in Chapter 3.

4.2 Methodology: A broadly ethnographic, feminist approach

Our epistemologies lead us to particular methodologies (McHugh, 2011). Feminist research involves ‘designing research *for* rather than merely about women’ (Longino, 2013, p. 101). The methodology I adopted was a broadly ethnographic, feminist approach.

Ethnography often draws on multiple sources and takes an exploratory, flexible approach, usually involving a small number of individuals, to ‘investigate some aspect of the lives of the people who are being studied ... finding out how these people view the situations they face, how they regard one another, and also how they see themselves’ (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p. 1). It ‘emphasises the experiential. Its approach to knowledge is contextual and interpersonal, attentive ... to the concrete realm of everyday reality and human agency’ (Stacey, 1988, p. 22). Ethnography usually involves the researcher participating in people’s lives over a year or more (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p. 1). The length of time in the field no longer defines ethnography, but time is still important. It can mean brief encounters in the field carried out over time ‘so that the brevity of the periods is mollified by the effect of long-term acquaintance’ (Wolcott, 1995, p. 77). In my study I

adopted a 'selected intermittent time mode' (Jeffrey and Troman, 2004), with fieldwork taking place from February 2017 – May 2018 (mostly in 2017). I visited each school 12-16 times during this period, usually for a couple of hours each visit, and saw the girls in between these visits when doing observations or interviews outside school.

Ethnographic research can be conducted in a fixed setting or multiple settings. My approach was informed by multi-sited ethnography, which is 'designed around chains, paths, threads, conjunctions, or juxtapositions of locations in which the ethnographer establishes some form of literal, physical presence, with an explicit, posited logic of association or connection among sites that in fact defines the argument of the ethnography' (Marcus, 1995, p. 105). My fieldwork was based in schools, but I aimed to take a 'follow the people' approach (Marcus, 1995, p. 106), 'following' the girls into the different contexts of their lives to understand their participation in social action.

Stacey (1988, p. 22) argues that although ethnography appears well-suited to feminist research, truly feminist ethnography is a misnomer because the process and product of ethnography gives 'the appearance of greater respect for and equality with research subjects ... [but] masks a deeper, more dangerous form of exploitation' owing to the unequal power relations between researcher and participant. However, she concedes that there can be 'partially feminist' ethnographies, provided that researchers are 'rigorously self-aware and therefore humble about the partiality of [the] ethnographic vision and its capacity to represent self and other' (Stacey, 1988, p. 26). This is the approach I have tried to adopt.

Ethnography is well-suited to intersectional research because it allows researchers to ‘uncover the social processes that generate complex inequalities while pointing to the contingent and unstable nature of inequality categories’ (Misra, Curington and Green, 2021, p. 15). Multi-sited ethnography is especially appropriate because ‘what is important is to analyse how specific positionings and (not necessarily corresponding) identities and political values are constructed and interrelate and affect each other in particular locations and contexts ... [we] cannot assume the same effect or constellation each time’ (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 200). I chose this approach to situate girls’ participation in the wider context of their lives and understand what shapes their experiences in the different spaces they spend time.

4.3 Sampling strategy

As Holland, Thomson and Henderson (2006, p. 33) note, ‘sampling in qualitative research follows a theoretical, rather than a statistical logic and so is characteristically purposively and conceptually driven’. I took a purposive sampling approach informed by my conceptual framework. Purposive sampling means the researcher ‘establishes criteria concerning the kinds of cases needed to address the research questions, identifies appropriate cases, and then samples from those cases that have been identified’ (Bryman, 2016, p. 413). When research is undertaken over an extended period, as in my study, it is more difficult to employ a fixed sampling process because of the potential for attrition. Below I explain my original sampling strategy and how this changed as the fieldwork progressed.

My study focuses on 16–18-year-old working-class girls. Over half (56%) of 16–20-year-old girls participate in social action (Cabinet Office and Ipsos MORI, 2016). This

may be because this is the age at which young people are planning for their futures – UCAS recommends citing voluntary experience on UCAS forms (UCAS, 2014), submitted from the September of Year 13 onwards, and careers are an important motivation for and expected outcome of participation (see Chapter 2.2). Focusing on this group therefore made it more likely that the girls had taken part in social action, and I expected to find social action activities at the schools targeted at this age. In addition, I hoped that because of their age these girls would be involved in a wider variety of social action activities than younger girls, especially outside school, because they might have fewer parental constraints on where and how they spent time. I recruited the girls through schools because schools are important sites of and influences on social action (see p.3). Schools also ‘provid[e] access to a fairly representative sample of children in a particular locality’ (David, Edwards and Allred, 2001, p. 350).

Selecting the schools

When designing my study, I consulted research identifying 667 secondary schools in England with high proportions of students (23.6% or above) eligible for FSM (AIMIA, unpublished). Eligibility for FSM in the past six years is ‘an indicator of a pupil living in a family with an income deemed to be below the poverty line’ (Gorard, 2012, p. 1005). FSM is sometimes used interchangeably with working-class status (Reay, 2006; Strand, 2014). As well as FSM eligibility, there are various other ways of measuring young people’s working-class status, including parents’ level of education and occupation (Reay, 2006), parents’ capitals, assets and resources (Connelly, Gayle and Playford, 2021) – for instance, whether parents own their home, parents’ cultural engagement, and parents’ social networks – and asking young people to self-

define (Rubin *et al.*, 2014). I used FSM in recruiting for my study, as others have (Stahl and Habib, 2017), because despite being a 'crude' measure, it is information that is both easily accessible and already collected by schools (Gillborn, 2009), and is still considered the most suitable measure of young people's socioeconomic status (Gorard, 2012, p. 1014). Sampling through schools on the basis of the proportion of pupils eligible for FSM is also a practice previously used in social research (for example, David, Edwards and Alldred, 2001).

However, because FSM eligibility is an imperfect measure, in my interviews with the girls I asked various questions to ascertain more details about their class background. Most of the girls' parents did not go to university; they generally lived in rented and/or social housing; if their parents were in paid employment they were mostly in manual occupations; and those girls able or willing to articulate their class backgrounds were most likely to talk about either being working-class or not having much money. FSM eligibility thus proved a useful indicator of working-class status in my study.

I planned to recruit from three state schools. I wanted to work with more than one school, ideally different types, to compare social action approaches across schools and provide a wider sample of students than one school could offer. If a school withdrew from the study, or I couldn't recruit any or enough girls at a school, it also meant I could still collect sufficient data. I chose schools in inner London because it has the highest proportion of secondary school students on FSM than anywhere else in the country: when designing my research, the national average was 13.2% of students on FSM; in inner London the average was 27.2% (Department for

Education, 2016, Table 8b). I lived and worked in London when conducting the fieldwork, so it was also a practical decision.

Table 4: Data taken from Table 8b, State-funded secondary schools (1)(2): Number of pupils eligible for and claiming Free School Meals

Borough	Pupils known to be eligible for and claiming FSM (%)
<i>Tower Hamlets</i>	41.6
<i>Islington</i>	33.6
<i>Hackney</i>	33.2
<i>Southwark</i>	28.8
<i>Westminster</i>	28.7

Source: Department for Education (2016)

Five boroughs had an average or above-average proportion of students on FSM, compared to the rest of inner London (Table 4). In these boroughs, I identified state secondary schools from the AIMIA (unpublished) list with sixth forms, either mixed or girls' schools, where the percentage of students on FSM was the same as or above the borough average. This resulted in 43 schools. I began by contacting the sixteen closest to my home or workplace for practical reasons, since I was a part-time PhD student in full-time employment. Contact was made by emailing the headteacher or a social action 'lead' staff member, or via introductions made by contacts at the charity Step Up To Serve (where I worked) and its partner organisations. Three schools agreed to participate: Park School for Boys, Eburne School, and Brownswood Academy. These are pseudonyms to protect the identities of the schools and the girls. For this reason I do not report the borough in which each school is located, nor the percentage of FSM-eligible students at each school.

The schools are in three different boroughs. Park School is the most central, in a Victorian building just off a busy interchange, surrounded by expensive flats, offices,

and coffee shops. Eburne is a new building in a residential area, next to tower blocks and some small shops, near a financial district. Brownswood is in a residential area with some small shops nearby. It's also a relatively new building, on the site of a school that was there for decades previously. Further details about the schools are in Table 5.

Questionnaire

To inform my sampling, I conducted a short questionnaire at each school (see Appendix A).¹³ This was designed to establish the girls' previous eligibility for FSM; age; subjects they study; borough they live in; race¹⁴; and current or previous involvement in social action according to the policy and practice definition. This enabled the girls to self-identify, rather than be identified by me or their school, as having been eligible for FSM or involved in social action. It also allowed the girls to choose whether to participate in further research. I asked where the girls lived because I initially intended to recruit only girls living in the same borough as the school for the practical reasons discussed above. However, after administering the questionnaire I decided this would be too restrictive and chose to disregard it in recruiting.

I originally planned to administer the questionnaire to all 16–18-year-old girls at each school, but my approach varied depending on the preferences of my gatekeeper (see Table 5). Some girls completed a paper copy and others completed an online version I created on Survey Gizmo: 51 girls across the three schools. All had

¹³ I intended for girls to be able to self-identify on the basis of gender, but this depended on the school's preferred approach to recruitment, discussed below.

¹⁴ Described as 'ethnicity' in the questionnaire because I was using the same measure as the NYSAS for consistency.

participated in social action when they were younger; almost all (n=49) had participated in the past 12 months; and almost half (n=21) were currently involved. I invited those eligible for FSM in the past six years (n=32) to take part in the full study, of whom 17 agreed. Ethnographies generally involve small samples because the focus is on depth rather than quantity, and previous research in this area has involved a similar number (for example, Lareau, 2011).

Table 5: Schools involved in study and recruitment approach

	Park School for Boys	Eburne School	Brownswood Academy
<i>Type</i>	Local authority-maintained, boys' school with girls in sixth-form	Local authority-maintained, mixed	Academy (part of Overstone ¹⁵ academy chain), mixed
<i>Ofsted rating</i>	Outstanding	Good	Good
<i>Pupils speaking English as second language</i>	46%	75%	48%
<i>Qualifications offered</i>	A Levels	A Levels, IB	A Levels, BTECs
<i>Gatekeeper</i>	Mr Hutley, Head of Sixth Form	Ms Walsh, Volunteering Manager	Mr Field, Head of Year 12 and Head of Aspirations
<i>Recruitment approach</i>	Online questionnaire sent to all sixth-form girls (January 2017). At a feminist group session (February 2017) I invited those who completed the questionnaire and had been eligible for FSM to participate in my research. September 2017: I administered the paper questionnaire at session for new Year 12 girls.	I administered the paper questionnaire at two sixth-form assemblies (March and October 2017).	I administered the paper questionnaire at two lunchtime sessions for sixth-form girls eligible for FSM (April and September 2017).
<i>No. girls recruited</i>	5	6	7

4.4 Research methods

I used interviews and observations. Interviews were conducted with the girls, some of their parents, one or two teachers/staff members per school, and representatives from some social action providers running activities in which the girls had been involved. Collecting data in various contexts 'can enhance the strength and validity of the research findings' (Biesta, 2012, p. 147). Interviews and observations mostly took place at the schools, but where possible some took place in a small number of other

¹⁵ All names of individuals, schools, and the academy chain are pseudonyms.

social action-related settings. I adopted a flexible approach in not specifying which contexts to explore in advance. Instead, I used the first interviews with the girls to identify potential settings for further fieldwork through a mapping technique, discussed below.

Interviews

Interviews are, at a basic level, ‘a way of finding out about people’ (Oakley, 1981, p. 32). In keeping with feminist epistemologies, the interview is a process where the ‘exchanges lead to the creation of a collaborative effort’ (Fontana and Frey, 2008, p. 115). This is particularly true of semi-structured interviews, like mine, where the direction of the interview is partly shaped by the responses given.

I conducted 45 interviews in total. Most were audio-recorded (all with participants’ consent) and transcribed afterwards by me; where participants did not want me to record, they allowed me to take notes instead, which I wrote up immediately afterwards. Oakley (1981, p. 31) writes that in traditional (masculine) conventions of research reporting, these kinds of details are considered ‘legitimate’ information, while details such as the experience of the interview and the relationship between interviewer and interviewee are ‘illegitimate’. She argues that the former are grounded in ideas about objectivity, detachment, hierarchy, and ‘science’, but that in feminist research, these practices are ‘morally indefensible’ (Oakley, 1981, pp. 38-41); instead, she recommends answering interviewees’ questions, building a relationship with them, and attempting to redress the interviewer/interviewee hierarchy. Below I aim to strike a balance between these different types of detail, important in both providing transparency and maintaining a feminist approach.

Interviews with the girls

I intended to conduct two one-to-one, hour-long interviews with each girl. This was the case for most interviews, and although I always gave the girls the opportunity to stop after an hour, some took longer or were happy to continue another time. This was usually those girls with lots to say in response to the questions, whose responses prompted questions I hadn't planned to ask, or who asked me questions during and after the interview. The girls chose the location and time of the interviews, which I hoped would enable them to exercise some control. I envisaged interviewing in public locations that were convenient and comfortable for them, as previous research has done (Secor-Turner *et al.*, 2010). In most cases, however, the girls opted to be interviewed at school, though some chose cafes.

All interviews with the girls were semi-structured and face-to-face. The first was designed to build rapport and gain an insight into their lives. I asked them to describe themselves, prompting with questions about their families, friends, interests, faith, views on the school, and what they planned to do when they finished school. In addition, I used their responses to the questionnaire to tailor questions about their social action.

I also conducted a participatory mapping exercise to facilitate a conversation about spaces within which they participate, influences on their participation, and identify potential fieldwork sites. This involved asking the girls to describe what they did the previous day. As they talked, either I or they (their choice) wrote the places and people mentioned on a mind map. Next, I asked them to add any other places they usually spent time, and with whom. As the interview continued, I asked questions

about these places, continuing to add to the maps, so that by the end of the interview the girls felt the maps captured how they spent their time. This approach worked well in prompting the girls to think about their social action. I then requested the girls' permission to spend time with them in social action contexts, informing the location of some observations.

In the second interviews, the first half was tailored depending on discussions in the first interview or what had emerged during observations. I also asked questions about their identities, issues such as class and feminism, issues they felt girls like them face, and their views on volunteering.

Interviews with the girls' parents

I intended to interview at least one of each of the girls' parents, but gaining access proved challenging. Many parents did not want to be interviewed, so I could only interview seven girls' parents. Correspondence with parents was arranged through the girls, and several said their parents did not feel comfortable speaking to me. Some did not provide an explanation, but others said it was because English wasn't their first language. Some of these girls offered to act as language brokers during the interviews, and in one case I arranged for an interpreter to attend the interview with me.

Interviews generally took place between the girls' first and second interviews. This meant I could ask questions concerning what I had already gathered and use the interviews to inform the girls' second interviews. Parents chose where and when interviews took place: over the phone, at their home, or in one case in a pub, and ranged from 20–55 minutes. As well as the tailored questions, I also asked their

views on and experience of their social action and their daughters', the girls' responsibilities at home, impressions of the school, and views about their daughters' future.

Interviews with teachers/school staff

I interviewed at least one staff member per school:

- Eburne: Interview with Ms Walsh (gatekeeper). Given her role at the school, the richness of the interview, and her relationships with the girls involved in my research, I didn't feel interviews with other staff were necessary.
- Brownswood: Interviews with Mr Field (gatekeeper), Ms Jones (teacher), and Charlotte Cook at the school's academy chain, Overstone. Ms Jones offered to be interviewed after overhearing some of my interview with one of the girls. I spoke to Charlotte Cook to understand how far Brownswood's approach reflected Overstone's priorities, and the implications this had for social action.
- Park School: Interviews with Mr Hutley (gatekeeper) and Ms Heint (teacher leading the feminist group and form tutor to two girls).

These interviews lasted 20–90 minutes and took place in classrooms or offices. They were designed to provide insight into the school's approach to social action and views on inequalities in participation.

Interviews with social action providers

Where it felt useful and was possible, I also interviewed key stakeholders related to the girls' social action: at a charity delivering NCS, since most of the girls did NCS; at Headstart, an NCS-related careers programme in which one of the girls participated; and at a primary school near Brownswood, where several girls had volunteered.

These interviews aimed to understand more about the girls' (limited) social action participation outside schools and supplement the understanding I already had of social action providers through my role at Step Up To Serve. I intended to arrange more interviews through the observations I hoped to conduct with the girls, but was unable to because in many cases either the girls or the providers did not consent to observations, discussed further below.

Observations

Alongside interviews, observations are common in ethnographies, since 'the data from each can be used to illuminate the other' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p. 102). It is not necessarily easy for individuals to articulate their views about issues such as inequalities, whereas in an observation, 'you do not ask people about their views, feelings or attitudes; you watch what they do and listen to what they say' (Robson, 2002, p. 310). It is not that the asking is unimportant, but it produces a different kind of data, which is why I triangulate these different data in my analysis.

According to Gobo (2011, p. 13), 'ethnography is a methodology based on direct observation ... watching, seeing, looking at, gazing at and scrutinizing'. This can take multiple forms, from participant, to structured, to unobtrusive (Robson, 2002, p. 310). I took a 'minimally participating observer' role (Bryman, 2016, p. 436) allowing me to observe whilst also interacting with the girls. Unstructured observations generally involve taking fieldnotes to record events – what happens, location, people involved, and the researcher's initial reflections (Bryman, 2016, p. 440). My observations were unstructured and I took handwritten fieldnotes during the observation where possible – writing being a 'normal' activity in a school environment (Hammersley and

Atkinson, 2007, p. 143) – but otherwise on my laptop immediately afterwards. Where note-taking was limited, I took ‘scratch notes’ – words or phrases designed to remind me of a particular point when writing more detailed notes afterwards (Fisher, 2016, p. 4).

In a flexible design like mine, and as with ethnographies generally, the ‘what’, ‘how’ and ‘when’ of research can change during fieldwork. Initially, I wrote fieldnotes with my research topic in mind, while being careful to remain open-minded (Bryman, 2016, p. 440). However, as Hammersley and Atkinson (2007, p. 146) note, ‘as analytical ideas develop and change, what is “significant” and what must be included in the fieldnotes change’. This was the case in my research: my interest in girlhoods discourses developed as the fieldwork progressed (discussed below).

Observations took different forms in each school, depending on where I was invited or allowed to spend time. These included assemblies (Eburne), UCAS/careers sessions (a careers’ day at Park School; a UCAS session at Brownswood), social action-related events (the launch of a heritage project at Eburne; a tutoring session at Brownswood; and the feminist group at Park School) and in the sixth-form areas before and after interviews. Most girls also agreed to give me a tour of their school. These were inspired by the ethnographic technique of ‘go-alongs’, where ‘fieldworkers accompany individual informants on their “natural” outings, and – through asking questions, listening and observing – actively explore their subjects’ stream of experiences and practices as they move through, and interact with, their physical and social environment’ (Kusenbach, 2003, p. 463). I observed the girls’ interactions with others and the physical environment to gain insight into the school

environment, the girls' feelings about school, and the schools' influence over their social action.

I also hoped to undertake observations outside school, in settings identified by the girls in their first interviews. This proved possible in some cases, but most girls were keen that our interactions were confined to school, with requests to accompany them at social action-related activities declined. Rather than continue to ask and risk pressuring the girls into saying yes, I respectfully accepted their decision and focused on spending time with them at school instead. In some cases, the girls agreed I could observe them during a social action activity outside school, but the organisation running the activity did not. Other times, the girls had been involved in social action prior to my fieldwork but it had finished by the time we met.

In two cases, however, I did spend time with the girls outside school (journeying to work with one of the girls and attending church with another). These observations were along the lines of 'hanging out' (in the style of Lareau, 2011) in an attempt to understand the girls' lives. They were hugely helpful in building my relationships with the girls and in identifying participation that might otherwise have gone unexplored.

4.5 Ethics and reflexivity

I received ethical approval for my research from the University of Birmingham's ethics committee. I created information sheets explaining the study and consent forms for each participant – all who completed the questionnaire, the girls involved in the main study, their parents (for their involvement and to give permission for their daughter's involvement), and others interviewed. The information sheets summarised my study and informed them that: participants' names and school names would be

anonymised in any presentations or publications of my research, including this thesis; they could withdraw from the study at any time until my thesis was complete; and their data have been stored in password-protected files and/or locked filing cabinets since collection, where they will be kept until 10 years after they were collected. I also created an information sheet for all sixth formers and staff at the schools (via gatekeepers), enabling individuals to 'opt out' of any observations where they might be present, like assemblies. Nobody opted out.

These issues are known as 'procedural ethics' considerations, which many find insufficient for conducting ethical research (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004). In keeping with feminist epistemologies, I adopted an 'ethics in practice' approach which recognises the 'everyday ethical issues that arise in the doing of research' (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004, p. 262). Reflexivity is central to an ethics in practice approach (Renold *et al.*, 2008; Warin, 2011). It means researchers 'recogniz[ing] and acknowledg[ing] their role in the creation of knowledge, through their power relations, their own biographies, their interpretations and the various influences on these' (O'Reilly, 2012, p. 521). Below I outline how reflexivity shaped my research. While I took an ethical approach to all the fieldwork, here I focus on the approach to research with the girls as the main participants.

Positionality

As discussed above, in feminist epistemologies the researcher is not separate but inherent to the research. This is why I write in the first person. It reminds the reader of my role in constructing knowledge and avoids what is described as the 'God trick': 'it is a delusion ... to think that human thought could completely erase the

fingerprints that reveal its production process' (Harding, 1992, p. 446). This also means explaining who I am and how that informed my interest in and approach to the study, helping locate me in my research.

When I began the PhD I was a full-time researcher on youth social action for the University of Birmingham, seconded to Step Up To Serve (the charity running the #iwill campaign). After my History undergraduate degree at Warwick, I had always hoped to do a Master's and perhaps eventually a PhD. Following roles in the charity sector, I gained a place on a Master's course at Oxford just before applying for the job with Step Up To Serve, but had to turn the place down because I couldn't afford it (at that time, Oxford required proof that potential students had £17,000 in their bank account and wouldn't allow students to work part-time while studying). As a staff member at Birmingham, however, I discovered in the interview that I could do a PhD for a modest fee; it was one of the reasons I took the job. I spent the first year in the role developing my research proposal and became interested in one of the campaign's priority areas around inequality. Working at Step Up To Serve gave me a good grounding into how social action programmes operate, how young people feel about their participation (I helped establish the campaign's #iwill Ambassadors programme¹⁶, bringing me into contact with hundreds of young people involved in social action), and the political environment surrounding social action. While my views on social action changed over time as I developed a more critical approach to understanding participation and the surrounding policy and practice context, being

¹⁶ Since 2014, 50 young people each year have been granted the title '#iwill Ambassador'. The programme aims to recognise young people for their social action by publishing their social action 'story' online. #iwill Ambassadors have been invited to speak at events, join governance boards and committees, and inform the #iwill campaign's strategy.

embedded in the campaign gave me access to interviewees and schools as well as valuable advice from staff, partner organisations and young people that helped shape the research.

Some aspects of my identity also encouraged me to pursue the focus on inequalities, especially class-related inequalities. I wasn't much older than the girls in my study and had done social action programmes such as DofE at school. I also grew up in a working-class, single-parent (for a while) household, getting into the local girls' grammar school where I found myself surrounded by girls whose families were far wealthier than mine (see p.77 for literature on the experience of being working-class in a middle-class environment). The grammar school experience set me on a course of upward social mobility that took me to the University of Warwick and to a life that can only be described as middle-class. Nonetheless, my working-class childhood prompted me to try to understand – and if I could, do something about – the experiences of the girls in my study.

I also hoped that my experiences could help me relate to the girls' lives – for example, like many of the girls, my mum also used to be a cleaner – but in the end decided not to disclose information about my background unless the girls asked, because I didn't want to presume that the girls were interested. I also did not want to give the impression that our shared experiences gave me a superior knowledge about their lives. This meant I probably came across as from a very different background to them, not least because of my accent. For instance, one girl seemed surprised to discover I was the first in my family to go to university, and her mum

commented in our interview ‘don’t know where you’re from, you sound well-spoken to me’.

I did not initially set out to recruit participants from different racial backgrounds, but most of the girls involved were racially minoritised (only two were White British). As a White woman, I felt uncomfortable with this at first, feeling somehow voyeuristic or lacking understanding of these girls’ lives. This is a common issue in qualitative research and raises questions about how far we ought to research only what we know and have experienced ourselves. However, this would make it impossible for anyone to research beyond our experiences and can privilege race over other categories of difference, as well as assume a homogeneous understanding of racial groups (Gunaratnum, 2011b, pp. 3-4). It can also ‘perpetuate the microaggression that only scholars of color must carry the weight of studying racism and working to disrupt it’ (Powell and Kelly, 2017, p. 49) and (wrongly) suggest it is possible to flatten differential power relations between researcher and participant (Chadderton, 2012, p. 367).

However, I was aware of the risk that in initially feeling uncomfortable about being a White researcher working with racially-minoritised girls, I would avoid ‘seeing’ race rather than attempt to uncover the (often hidden) racialised practices shaping the girls’ lives. I attempted to ‘look for race’ in places where it was not immediately obvious or named, and see race as relevant both to White and racially-minoritised participants. I explored issues of racial inequality with the girls and the teachers and asked about the girls’ experiences of racism. This also partially explains why my

approach is informed by Hill Collins' domains of power framework and Black feminist epistemology.

Relationship between researcher and participant

As discussed above, Stacey (1988, pp. 23-24) argues that the close relationships often developed between researcher and participant in an ethnography place participants 'at grave risk of manipulation and betrayal by the ethnographer', because 'the lives, loves and tragedies that fieldwork informants share with a researcher are ultimately data, grist for the ethnographic mill, a mill that has truly grinding power'. These relationships must therefore be handled sensitively and cognisant of the power imbalance between researcher and participant that cannot ever be entirely overcome.

The use of pseudonyms is common practice in qualitative research. Asking participants to choose their own pseudonyms can not only help remind them that they are involved in research (Renold *et al.*, 2008, pp. 435-436) but can also be a respectful, positive and meaningful experience. I invited the girls to choose their own pseudonyms and planned to invite all interviewees to do so. However, when I asked the girls if they wanted to choose a name, only one did. The others seemed uncomfortable and embarrassed, preferring me to choose for them. I therefore decided to select pseudonyms for all participants myself. Given the significance of identity categories in my research, I chose names that I felt reflected participants' racial backgrounds.

Pseudonyms can help ensure participants remain anonymous. However, in an ethnographic approach it is difficult for participants to remain anonymous and still

produce ‘adequately nuanced “thick” description of a given phenomenon’ (Allen and Wiles, 2016, p. 151), since they may be recognisable to people they know. In addition, all the girls’ parents and teachers, as well as some of their peers, knew of their participation in the research. While I ensured that the data remained confidential, this highlights the challenges of assuring anonymity in ethnography. For these reasons, I also chose pseudonyms for the schools, and have been careful not to provide unnecessary information in the thesis that would make it easy for schools or participants to be identified (such as specific details about where the schools are, or which countries the girls’ families are from). I also hope that, since my fieldwork took place almost four years ago, the schools and participants are now less recognisable than had I only recently conducted it.

Since school staff were my gatekeepers, it was important to position myself as separate to schools and teachers (David, Edwards and Alldred, 2001). On the information sheets I stated that I was not a teacher, nor connected to the school, emphasising this in interactions with the girls. Lareau (2000) regularly had to remind the parents in her study of this, mainly to ensure they felt able to criticise the school, but this was also important for my study in reminding the girls that their participation was optional. However, while I borrowed from elements of the ‘least adult’ role (Mandell, 1988) – certainly not taking an authoritative, disciplinary position akin to a teacher – I also made my position as a researcher clear, ensuring that girls were aware of their participation throughout the fieldwork. In their research with children, Renold *et al.* (2008) suggest that ensuring recording equipment is always on show can help, as can reminding participants that the research is going on, especially

during observations or conversations rather than more formal interviews. I followed this approach.

Reciprocity

Reciprocity is key to a reflexive approach. As Guillemin and Gillam (2004, p. 271) note, 'research involving human participants starts from a position of ethical tension', because people are asked to participate in 'procedures that they have not actively sought out or requested, and that are not intended solely or even primarily for their direct benefit'. The idea that the girls in my study would not gain anything in return for their involvement did not sit comfortably with me.

Reciprocity can mean several things. First, it can mean offering participants incentives or rewards. Not paying young people for their participation can 'reflect children's marginal status as social citizens ... the fact that children's time is not valued financially by the hour is because of their developmental status in capitalist culture as non-workers' (David, Edwards and Alldred, 2001, p. 351). However, payment can make people feel coerced (Head, 2009, p. 339) and make it difficult for participants to withdraw. For these and financial reasons, I offered non-financial rewards to the girls. Following advice from each gatekeeper about what would be most valuable, I offered one of the following:

- A one-to-one mentoring session
- Support on UCAS personal statement
- A CV workshop
- A mock interview for a job, apprenticeship or university
- Research training

Five girls accepted a reward: one chose research training, three chose support on their personal statement, and one chose the CV workshop. I also asked the other girls if they would prefer something different. One of the girls wanted to be a teacher and asked if I could put her in touch with anyone (I introduced her to a teacher friend), but the others declined.

Second, I wanted my research to be reciprocal insofar as the girls could enjoy or benefit from it – as Head (2009, p. 339) suggests, research involvement can give participants ‘a sense of achievement, as well as ...[the chance to] make sense of their experiences or to tell their story’. For the young women in Skeggs’ study, being invited to participate in research, to be ‘heard’, was valuable because it enhanced feelings of self-worth (Skeggs, 2013). For some girls in my study, ‘being heard’ was the reason they said they participated, though more common was the desire to help me. This may reflect the girls’ interest in social action, though it could also be indicative of the docility of the ‘good girl’ (see p.67). Similarly, some of the girls said they wanted to get involved because they thought it might be useful for their CVs or UCAS applications, possibly because of the sessions I offered them. This connects to the ‘successful girl’ discourse (see p.61). While I feel uncomfortable about my study playing into the discourses I am critiquing, it does highlight the pervasive nature of these discourses in the girls’ lives.

Finally, I wanted my research to be reciprocal in social justice terms, highlighting the experiences of those not often researched and aiming to help practitioners make their programmes more accessible – a point to which I return in Chapter 10. This reflects the ethical aims of feminist research.

Continually negotiating consent

Related to reciprocity is the idea of free and informed consent. This helps ensure that 'negotiating access to youth research settings does not become a process of methodological grooming' (Bengry-Howell and Griffin, 2012, p. 413). Free and informed consent means ensuring participants do not feel obligated to participate and that they understand what the research involves, including parents (Warin, 2011, p. 812) and teachers (David, Edwards and Alldred, 2001). It is not obtained only at the beginning of a research project but negotiated throughout – a 'state of becoming' rather than something ever 'fully realised' (Renold *et al.*, 2008, p. 442).

Negotiating consent also means providing young people with appropriate information to help them make informed decisions, reflected in recruitment materials and information sheets (David, Edwards and Alldred, 2001, p. 349). The language in these materials should be carefully selected, with due consideration given to the tone used. For all participants, not just the girls, I chose concise, plain language and a question-and-answer format to make information sheets clear. In ethnographic approaches it is not always possible to tell participants exactly what your research is and what it is for, because the research problem and requests of those involved might change (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p. 57). I kept the description of the study deliberately broad for these reasons, making participants aware that my research was about understanding volunteering among girls who had been eligible for FSM.

Finally, being able to respond to 'ethically important moments' (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004) is key to reflexivity. In research with young people these moments may also be

subject to legal requirements: if young people disclose that they are in danger, the researcher is obligated to protect them by referring them to a relevant safeguarding officer. This issue did not arise in my fieldwork, but it was important to be prepared for it, and I had recently attended a safeguarding course through work for this reason.

4.6 Data analysis

Participatory approaches to data analysis and writing up are often a feature of feminist research (Skeggs, 2013). However, as Chadderton (2012, p. 374) acknowledges, this is not always practical or possible. As a part-time student, my fieldwork and data analysis were spread over four years, longer than in an average PhD. This meant that some analysis took place long after the fieldwork had concluded and therefore long after my last contact with the girls. Requesting the girls' involvement in data analysis felt like an extra burden on them, especially because of the time they had already given to the research. My analysis coincided with a period of significant pressure and transition for the girls, who were finishing school and (mostly) heading to university. Asking for more of their time during the data analysis, spread over several years, felt unreasonable. Moreover, the implication of involving participants in analysis is that it can lead to more 'accurate' representations of their views. Chadderton (2012, p. 374) challenges this, arguing that 'this still does not make voices more "authentic", nor does it liberate the researcher from the exploitative nature of research ... Indeed, this would assume there is a single reality which the researcher can access if she uses the "right" methods'. As such, I did not involve any participants in my analysis.

My analysis was nonetheless informed by other common practices in qualitative research and by intersectionality. I began by printing transcripts and fieldnotes, making notes in the margins as I read. Ideas that emerged from these notes became my initial codes. At this point, I used data analysis software NVivo 11. Software is a helpful tool in analysis, particularly with large quantities of data (as in my research), but it cannot ‘do’ the analysis for you. As Welsh (2002) argues, ‘it is useful to think of the qualitative research project as a rich tapestry. The software is the loom that facilitates the knitting together of the tapestry, but the loom cannot determine the final picture on the tapestry.’

Rather, the ‘doing’ of qualitative analysis requires a methodical approach. I chose thematic analysis (TA) informed by features of discourse analysis, specifically Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA). Where discourse analysis tends to be concerned with linguistics and discourse as a ‘mass noun’, that is, as ‘actual instances of communicative action in the medium of language’, in FDA discourse is treated as a ‘count noun’, meaning ‘patterns of belief and habitual action as well as patterns of language’ (Johnstone, 2018, p. xvii). While there is not a definitive approach to FDA, Arribas-Ayllon and Walkerdine (2017, p. 118) identify its key components: the ‘problematization’ of objects and practices; a focus on technologies of power or technologies of the self; and identifying subject positions in relation to broader discourses. These components can be traced through my analysis in my problematization of girlhoods discourses and discussion of their relationship to how the girls see themselves and the work they do on themselves.

TA is ‘a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organizes and describes your data set in (rich) detail’ (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 79). I selected TA because it is flexible, helpful in large datasets, and provides detailed and complex analysis (Nowell *et al.*, 2017). Braun and Clarke recently advanced their original concept of TA, describing it as ‘reflexive thematic analysis’ where the research is underpinned by a qualitative paradigm, rather than qualitative methods being used in a positivist way, and in which there is no definitive or ‘correct’ analysis of data but rather an interpretation, because the researcher’s subjective role in knowledge production is central to the analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2019; Braun *et al.*, 2019). My reflexive approach, described above, aligns it with reflexive TA rather than the kinds of TA closer to quantitative research that Braun *et al.* (2019) identify.

I took both an inductive and deductive approach to analysis, often used in qualitative, intersectional research (Bilge, 2009; Winker and Degele, 2011). This meant applying existing knowledge to the data (a ‘top down’, deductive approach) and generating codes from the data – a ‘bottom up’, inductive approach (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 83). As Winker and Degele (2011, p. 55) argue, in intersectional research, theory-led deductive analyses can help identify taken-for-granted and therefore ‘unnamed’ categories and power relations, while inductive analyses ensure the research remains ‘open to surprises, as any category could be relevant or not’. My inductive approach was informed by what Eliasoph (2011) calls looking for ‘patterns in the rug’. These are themes in the data that aren’t necessarily noticeable the first few times you hear them, developing only when heard again and again. In addition to the initial immersion in my data – what Braun *et al.* (2019, p. 852) describe as ‘familiarization’ –

my analysis involved constant reading and rereading of transcripts and observation notes.

The dual inductive/deductive approach helped determine how previous research and theory related to my data and identify power relations that might otherwise have remained hidden, but also encouraged me to be open-minded about what the data showed. I initially applied existing knowledge from the literature review (Chapter 2) and intersectionality (Chapter 3.1) – particularly Hill Collins’s domains of power framework – to generate codes in a deductive approach. Codes that I would later relate to girlhoods discourses were generated through an inductive approach where I identified themes connected to employability, care, docility, and girls’ desire to be themselves in the data. I then returned to the literature on girlhoods, and through an iterative process of reviewing the data and the literature generated numerous codes, subsequently reduced to themes on the successful girl, the good girl, and authenticity. At each stage of analysis I returned to the transcripts and notes to help me retain the contexts of the data. This is important in intersectional research where context is central and where it is important to hold on to multiple categories and power relations at once: context is built into both the research design and analysis to highlight ‘the contingent nature of intersecting dimensions of difference and how intersectional inequality gains meaning within specific social contexts ... [to] challenge the notion that independent variables can be analyzed in isolation’ (Misra, Curington and Green, 2021, p. 24). The wider contexts of the girls’ lives are central to my analysis, as Chapter 5 illustrates.

4.7 Introducing the participants

In reporting my findings in Chapters 5–8, I focus mainly on those I call the ‘lead participants’ – the 13 girls most prominent in the overall findings and analysis. This corresponds to the amount of data I collected related to these girls; fewer data were collected on the other four girls, who were only interviewed once. The stories of three lead participants are reported in Chapter 5.

An overview of all the girls, their demographic data, and details of the fieldwork conducted with them is presented in Table 6. Lead participants are marked with an asterisk. Names of parents, teachers, and youth social action providers interviewed, and their role, organisation or relationship(s) to the girls, are in Table 7. Demographic details of these participants are not provided because they are not the focus of my study, unlike the girls. All individuals’ and school names are pseudonyms, but I have given the names of the youth social action providers because these are relevant to my analysis.

Table 6: All girls involved in the study

Name	Age	Race	Religion	Studies	Post-school plans	Fieldwork
Park School for Boys						
<i>Alesha*</i>	18	Black	Muslim	A Levels	University (medicine)	Interview x 2; school tour; observations: school careers session, school feminist group
<i>Sasha</i>	16	Mixed	None	A Levels	Apprenticeship (graphics)	Interview x 1 (dropped out of school after); observation: school feminist group
<i>Amira</i>	17	Asian	Muslim	A Levels	Apprenticeship	Interview x 1 (withdrew after)
<i>Karen*</i>	16	Asian	Christian	A Levels	University (medicine)	Interview x 2
<i>Gabriela*</i>	17	Latina	None	A Levels	University	Interview x 2
Brownswood Academy						
<i>Olivia*</i>	18	Asian	None	A Levels	University (law)	Interview x 2; school tour; interview with mum (Claudia); observation: school UCAS session
<i>Esther*</i>	17	Black	Christian	A Levels & BTEC	University (nursing)	Interview x 2; school tour; interview with dad (Peter); observation: church
<i>Ayo*</i>	17	Black	Christian	A Levels	University (sociology)	Interview x 2; school tour; observation: school UCAS session
<i>Idrissa*</i>	17	Black	Muslim	A Levels	Apprenticeship	Interview x 2; school tour; interview with mum (Sita)
<i>Catherine*</i>	17	Mixed	None	A Levels	University (psychology)	Interview x 2; school tour; interview with mum (Sabine); observations: tutoring a Year 12 student, assembly
<i>Alexa*</i>	17	White	Christian	A Levels	University (English)	Interview x 2; school tour; interview with mum (Lynette); observations: assembly, school UCAS session
<i>Shannon*</i>	17	White	None	BTEC	University (primary education)	Interview x 2; school tour; interview with mum (Angela); observation: school UCAS session
Eburne School						
<i>Nazreen</i>	16	Asian	Muslim	IB	University (business/science)	Interview x 1 (withdrew after); observation: school heritage event
<i>Ali*</i>	17	Asian	Muslim	IB	University (nursing)	Interview x 2; school tour
<i>Maryam*</i>	17	Black	Muslim	IB	University (geography)	Interview x 2; school tour
<i>Sophie*</i>	18	White	None	IB	University (English)	Interview x 2; interview with mum (Anne-Marie); observations: visiting homeless man, school heritage event
<i>Helah</i>	17	Black	Muslim	IB	University (science)	Interview x 1 (withdrew after); observation: school heritage event

Table 7: Other participants and their connection to participants

Name	Relation to participants, role, organisation
Parents	
<i>Claudia</i>	Olivia's mum
<i>Peter</i>	Esther's dad
<i>Sabine</i>	Catherine's mum
<i>Lynette</i>	Alexa's mum
<i>Angela</i>	Shannon's mum
<i>Sita</i>	Idrissa's mum
<i>Anne-Marie</i>	Sophie's mum
Teachers/school staff	
<i>Mr Hutley</i>	Deputy Head and Head of Sixth Form, Park School for Boys
<i>Ms Heinl</i>	Form tutor, Park School for Boys
<i>Mr Field</i>	Head of Aspirations and Deputy Head of Sixth Form, Brownswood Academy
<i>Ms Jones</i>	Head of Key Stage 5, Brownswood Academy
<i>Ms Walsh</i>	Volunteering Manager, Eburne School
Staff at youth social action providers/related organisations	
<i>Claire Hill</i>	Headstart (social action programme Maryam participated in)
<i>Alan James</i>	The Challenge (charity delivering NCS)
<i>Charlotte Cook</i>	Overstone academy chain (Brownswood is an Overstone school)
<i>Eileen Archer</i>	Mount Pleasant Primary School (where some girls from Brownswood volunteered)

4.8 Chapter conclusions

My research design frame is informed by feminist epistemologies that aim to disrupt what 'counts' as knowledge and how that knowledge is produced from the perspectives of those whose views have traditionally been marginalised.

Some would argue that the length and intensity of time I spent in the field would not 'count' as ethnography (Skeggs, 2013). Following Chadderton (2012), I therefore describe my approach as 'broadly ethnographic'. She proposes this term because of the 'messiness' of her study and the difficulties she encountered in her research in schools. As this chapter has shown, the challenges I faced and the changes to my approach in the course of my fieldwork make my study 'messy', too, but this is a

common experience in qualitative research; “‘messiness’ inevitably lies behind any (apparently ordered) methodology’ (Ellis, 2005b, p. 31). This is why transparency is important; this chapter aims to provide that.

The feminist approach has also informed how I present my findings (Chapters 5–8). In keeping with the idea that lived experience should be the starting point of feminist research, I centre the experiences of the girls in the findings chapters. This means starting my analysis from the girls’ perspectives, relating findings from fieldwork with the schools, their parents, and social action providers to the girls’ experiences.

Chapter 5 provides biographies of three of the girls themselves, their relationships with friends and family, and of the school, policy and practice contexts surrounding them. It provides important contextual information in which to ground the subsequent findings chapters so that these can be understood in relation to the girls’ lives rather than in abstract terms. But it is also in keeping with an intersectional approach that does not lose sight of the individual – the girls themselves – in understanding their lives.

CHAPTER 5: SITUATING WORKING-CLASS GIRLS' PARTICIPATION IN SOCIAL ACTION

Understanding the girls' participation in social action first requires an understanding of their lives. This is a descriptive findings chapter that aims to situate the more analytical findings chapters (6–8) in the context of the girls' lives, as an ethnographic, intersectional approach encourages. It takes the idea of situated knowledges (see p. 81) and applies this to the girls themselves. Just as for the researcher 'there is always a place from which we speak' (Bettie, 2014, p. 23), so too is there a place from which the girls speak. Situating the girls in these 'places' is important because the subsequent findings chapters, which group the girls' experiences into themes, risk fragmenting the individual lives that are central to my research.

The contexts I explore in this chapter are the girls' (religious) beliefs and values, home lives, relationships, sites of participation in social action, schools, and wider policy and practice on youth social action. In doing so, this chapter addresses the first research question: How do working-class girls practise social action? I weave the contexts together through telling the stories of three lead participants (see p.113) in my study – Olivia (Brownswood), Karen (Park School), and Sophie (Eburne). I focus on these three because their experiences relate to the other girls in my study, connect to some of the major policy and practice developments introduced in Chapter 1, and illustrate key aspects of their school environments. I signal connections to the literature from Chapters 2 and 3, returned to in more detail in later chapters.

5.1 Olivia's story

Olivia (18) is East Asian, born in London. She lives with her brother and her mum Claudia, to whom she's close. Like around half the girls' mums, Claudia is a single parent. Claudia works long hours at a beauty salon (where Olivia sometimes helps at weekends) and at home Olivia does most of the cooking, washing up, vacuuming, and mopping – like most of the girls and as UK-wide data suggest is common among women and girls (see p.71). She also spends time with her Grandma, who had a stroke recently, helping her cook, chatting, and helping her with physio.

Claudia describes Olivia as “headstrong” – someone who “just *really* knows what she wants and she has more or less her life plan written out”. She also says Olivia is

not into makeup, she's not into dressing up, she calls it very inappropriate, she doesn't like short skirts and belly tops, she just thinks that you know you're portraying a very bad image of yourself and misleading men to behave a certain way with you so she doesn't believe in all of that ... she likes to present herself in a, sort of very sophisticated way.

Claudia experienced domestic abuse when Olivia was younger and Claudia thinks this prompted Olivia's involvement in social action. For example, Olivia wants to get involved with children's charities in future because “I hate the fact that there's domestic abuse and children are involved ... there's so much things behind closed doors people don't know about.” This shows how social action can be a means of self-expression, particularly in challenging inequalities (see literature, p.39). Olivia already donates money to youth charities via Claudia, highlighting the importance of relationships in influencing participation (see literature, p.33), as well as to charities addressing homelessness and crime.

Claudia is proud of Olivia, who wants to go to university and become a barrister.

Claudia says Olivia thinks social action can help her achieve that because it gives her experience to boost her CV, giving her “a good career, good life” that is different from Claudia’s. This reflects the career motivations for doing social action found among many young people (see p.29). Like several of the girls, Olivia hopes to study at a Russell Group university, and like almost all the girls would be the first in her family to go. Claudia is currently job-hunting and jokes that “[Olivia’s] CV is better than mine. I’m really jealous!” Olivia describes herself as “driven, I just wanna succeed in life cos I know how competitive it is”. This meant Olivia stopped socialising and doing kickboxing part-way through Year 12 to focus on studying.

Claudia also thinks Olivia’s ambitions are related to where they used to live:

[W]e grew up on a rough council estate where people were like, all walks of life you see druggies, alcoholics, and I think for her it was like I don’t want to be like this I don’t want to live my life like this – not in the sense of saying that council tenants are bad, it’s just that they have this image, this stereotype that they carry for themselves and I think for her it’s just like, I don’t want to be that person ... she says they got no mannerisms – it’s like why do people have to be that way, if you can change yourself ... what’s that word she use, she goes you can ‘upgrade’ yourself.

Olivia’s views align with Brownswood Academy’s values. Brownswood has a “no excuses” culture where students are taught they can be anything they want and that their background shouldn’t determine their future. This is reflected in the school values: Commitment, Aspirations, Resilience, Excellence, and Self-management. Posters on the school walls list them and feature statements such as ‘We aim to fulfil our highest potential’, ‘We work together to improve ourselves’, and ‘We will be accountable for our actions’. There are also quotations on the walls, such as ‘Strength and growth come only through continuous effort and struggle’; ‘Replace

excuses with effort, replace laziness with determination'; 'The future depends on what you do today'; 'Success is something that is earned'; and 'One of the hardest parts of life is deciding whether to walk away or try harder'. These are indicative of recent government policy on character education, which was former Secretary of State for Education Nicky Morgan's flagship policy initiative. Guidance encourages schools to support students in developing character through 'the ability to remain motivated by long-term goals, to see a link between effort in the present and pay-off in the longer-term, overcoming and persevering through, and learning from, setbacks when encountered', because schools that develop character 'help drive equity and social mobility' (Department for Education, 2019a, p. 7). This sentiment summarises Brownswood's ethos.

Olivia says the things most important to her are family, education (many of the girls cite these), "how strong you are as a person", "having a good heart", and "networking – who you know I think is important. Like, that'll get you far." She also describes herself as "motivational ... I want my friends to do good". She does A Levels, like all the girls at Brownswood except Shannon, and gets frustrated with her friends doing BTECs. She recently dissociated from them because "there's no drive for them ... there's nothing to talk about". She goes on to say:

I don't look down at BTEC people, but sometimes I think, like, the people who chose to do BTEC that's fine, but the people who were forced to do it [because of their grades] ... it is quite embarrassing to go from A Levels to BTEC ... you get the majority of BTEC students showing themselves to be the typical BTEC student just messing around ... they are the rowdy ones, they are the loud bunch.

Success and aspiration guide Brownswood's ethos. Its academy chain Overstone aims to get all students to 'a university or a career of their choice'. Like all three

schools in my study, university is emphasised as the most desirable option.

Brownswood gives some attention to apprenticeships, but this is limited. University visits, including to Oxbridge, begin in Year 7. Overstone schools are held to account on student destinations, and keeping track of destinations is part of Mr Field's role. Overstone expects its schools to prepare students for its four 'enabling factors' of employability: academic attainment, access and exposure, pathways and guidance, and socially confident skills. Brownswood is also involved with the Brilliant Club and the Access Project, programmes designed to increase the number of pupils from under-represented backgrounds at selective universities. Olivia got a tutor through the Access Project and successfully applied for a law placement, involving paid internships. Brownswood also has partnerships with locally-based but multinational corporates. Although there is no uniform in sixth form, they have a 'formal business dress' policy, reflecting the careers Brownswood wants students to pursue.

At Brownswood students' educational 'successes' and 'failures' are made public. The sixth-form noticeboard displays the destinations of Year 13 leavers, listing their names and the university to which they've gone, with Russell Group universities highlighted. I don't remember seeing any that didn't go to university, which could mean there weren't any, but more likely only those who went to university are on this list. There is also a list of those in detention. Detentions seem a normal part of school life for Brownswood's students, including those with good grades; they are given out for lateness, or forgetting to sign in on arrival. Elsewhere in the school is a poster with the photos of all Year 10/11 students. They are divided into three: 'On track in nearly all your subjects', 'On track in most of your subjects', and 'On track in some of your subjects'. Olivia says some people think it's wrong to put up people's pictures

and rank them, but she thinks it's your own fault if you're at the bottom. The girls in my study are all likely to have been in the top two, though it's possible Shannon was once in the bottom group (she says she used not to do well at school).

This view of individual responsibility is also reflected in Olivia's attitude towards sexism. Most of her friends are boys, and although she says she doesn't try to impress them, she gets annoyed that other girls do:

That's where girls mess up. They come to school they know they wanna get their grades but they're just distracted? Have you even – this is so outrageous – have you even heard “if your toenails ain't painted white, I'm not gonna speak to you”? ... There's something going over Instagram like if your toenails ain't painted white I'm not chatting to you, like you're not even on my list. And that's so sad because there's a list. And then like you have to tick these certain boxes boys like ... they let them dictate their lives. And like, it's so sad because I *know* I'm a strong person, like, not big-headed or anything ... but there are some girls that are so sensitive. I feel like, I don't know how to make them strong.

Like her views about how other girls dress (p.118), Olivia blames the girls for caring what boys think and 'letting' them behave that way, seeing herself as different. But her feelings are mixed, as she also thinks some of the sexual harassment girls experience is unfair:

girls feel like crap sometimes ... [although] we'll call boys dogs and all of this basic stuff, they'll call us crazy stuff like, there's typical sket names and slags and hoes, Jbags, all of this, but like, I don't know where these rumours come from, one day you're an angel, the next day you were, like, doing sexual activities.

Olivia is interested in feminism and politics, mainly because of what she's learnt at A Level. She isn't sure what a feminist is when I ask, but thinks it means “you stand up for girls”, commenting on how “when I do online shopping now there's loads of t-

shirts that say ‘feminist’, ‘female’s the next future’”. She thinks she’s a feminist, but says “people get a lot of hate for being feminists”.

Olivia is involved in various social action projects at Brownswood. Recent government policy has encouraged schools to facilitate social action – such as by promoting NCS (Department for Education, 2017),¹⁷ incorporating social action into study programmes as work experience (Education and Skills Funding Agency, 2020), and promoting social action as one of the ‘six benchmarks’ of character education (Department for Education, 2019a). Much of Olivia’s social action has been facilitated through Brownswood, like for most of the girls and as the literature highlights (p.35). Some of Brownswood’s social action involves fundraising for causes from Grenfell Tower¹⁸ to Red Nose Day – as sports ambassador, Olivia organises Red Nose Day events – and food drives for local foodbanks, to which many of the girls donate. Olivia particularly likes sport, doing a 10k run for a sports charity outside school with Esther. This social action experience was intertwined with improving her employability, since Olivia subsequently did work experience with them.

Olivia (like both Catherine and Shannon) tutors younger students at Brownswood, coordinated by the school. Sixth formers also have Wednesday afternoons set aside for ‘Enrichment’ where they choose between football; youth theatre (Catherine and Alexa chose this); ‘Cultural Capital’, where students arrange their own activities in London, like theatre trips (Idrissa did this for a while); Sports Leaders, where young

¹⁷ Plans to mandate schools to promote NCS were originally intended as part of the ‘NCS Bill’, but these were later dropped.

¹⁸ The Grenfell Tower disaster was a fire in a tower block in Kensington in June 2017 (during my fieldwork) that killed 72 people and injured more than 70 others, most of whom were social housing tenants from racially-minoritised backgrounds. As Mr Field told me, many of the students at Brownswood lived in tower blocks like Grenfell.

people lead sports programmes (Ayo did this); an entrepreneur programme sponsored by a consultancy where groups of students are given money to invest in a business idea, donating the money they make to charity (Idrissa also did this); volunteering at a local primary school (Idrissa and Esther did this, as did Shannon, but she organised her own placement); and volunteering at a care home (Olivia chose this). At the care home students spend time with the residents, playing games, chatting, and helping them use technology. Olivia enjoyed getting to know the residents, saying she learnt patience “because they don’t listen to you”.

Like most of the girls, Olivia also did NCS, which was advertised through school. NCS aims to promote social cohesion, social mobility, and social engagement by encouraging ‘social mixing’ among young people from different backgrounds (NCS, 2020). Olivia and her friends did NCS together, partly because Claudia made sure of it – “she was calling them like, please can you get these names on the same week?” – so the social mixing element of NCS was neither appealing to Olivia nor part of her experience. Through NCS, Olivia did sports activities with elderly people, which she found “funny” – “the old grannies were swearing, like why the F are you here with footballs do I look like I wanna get up and play football?” – and a gardening project on a local housing estate. On the gardening project she experienced sexual harassment and didn’t want to go back after NCS had finished. Overall, though, Olivia was glad she did NCS and “would do it again”.

For Olivia, like most of the girls, volunteering means helping others. It involves “taking your own time out that you don’t *have* to do, but you choose to do, because you care for it”. Some of the girls share this view, with Ali, Gabriela, and Sophie also

considering volunteering to be about giving up time, and Alexa and Ayo emphasising that volunteering is about choice rather than something they are forced to do.

Olivia participates in my research because

any project that comes my way I just take it because, it's always an opportunity and if it's not helping me it's helping someone else so it would be you, and also on my UCAS application, being part of all of these things, it all adds up and describes who I am, it's not like I'm forcing myself to do this but actually I enjoy it.

5.2 Karen's story

Karen (16) is Southeast Asian, born in London. Her parents don't speak much English, so Karen often does language brokering for them and her grandparents (who live nearby). This is similar to several of the girls and among other young people from migrant families (see p.72).

Like around half the girls, Karen and her family practise a religion (they are Catholic). When she was little she went to church because she "didn't really have a choice", but since her Confirmation she goes because she wants to. She says,

I think my belief in God really helps me a lot of the time because if I'm really struggling on something or if I'm stressing, I just remain calm and tell myself that everything is going to be fine because I believe that God has something planned out for you, and I feel like He knows what He's doing, everything is good for me, in control, and I just calm down.

Other than donating money at services, church isn't a site of social action for Karen as it is for Esther or other young people (see literature, p.35). This was common for most of the other girls who are religious, whose social action beyond donating generally did not take place through their faith groups – several of the Muslim girls give Zakat through their families, for instance, but don't go to mosque because they say it's not a place girls and women go. Karen says religion and family are two of the

most important things to her, along with friends, education, and success – “success is just being generally happy with everything that I have or have achieved”.

Karen lives with her mum, who works in a nail salon, her younger sister to whom she’s especially close, and her younger brother. She doesn’t know what her dad’s job is. Karen likes where she lives, although “nothing goes on around there!” and some parts are rundown. She says, “I think I’m really honoured (laughs) to be born here ... I just feel so blessed to be born here cos, everything is nice, the education’s really good”. At home, Karen does a significant amount of care work (and as the eldest child, like most of the girls, more than her siblings): she washes up, dries and puts away the dishes, does the laundry and puts it away, sets the table, cleans the house, cleans her room daily, and takes out the rubbish.

Unlike Catherine and Gabriela, the only two girls who explicitly describe themselves as working class, Karen feels ambivalent about class, saying, “I don’t consider myself to have any class” and that it isn’t something she thinks about. Her views about class stem from what she has learnt at school: she mentions a teacher who once told her that where she lives in London is an ‘upper middle class’ area. Like some of the other girls who express views about class, Karen thinks the class system is unfair: she disagrees with another teacher who said the class system is necessary because otherwise ‘if you don’t have lower class no-one’s gonna like pick up the garbage for you.’

Karen is quiet but confident talking to me. She considers herself “critical, observing, organised, and motivated”. She says her motivation comes from her parents being immigrants. They came to the UK to give her and her siblings opportunities they

didn't have, especially in education. It means she prioritises education, and she is high-achieving like most of the girls: after a month at Park School she won an award for progress. Karen says, "I'd be disappointed if I left with a B", and wants to study at a Russell Group university to become a doctor. This aligns with Park School's focus on encouraging students to go to university. Its website describes supporting students whether they go into university, employment, or training, and the school runs its own careers programme. But university is preferred: most students go to university, it is usually listed first when teachers talk about post-school plans, and it has the biggest section of any in Park School's online materials on leaving school.

Karen joined Park School for sixth form because it had a good academic reputation and she thought the teachers at her old school "can't really control the class". Park School does not have a set of values, but is described by Mr Hutley as focused on increasing social mobility and 'raising aspirations'. Park School's focus is on academic excellence above all else and it has a strict discipline system. Students not 'on target' for good grades have to come into school early and at weekends for subject-specific 'interventions'. The relationships between students and teachers also seem more formal, and more hierarchical, than at Brownswood or Eburne.

There are strict rules about attendance, time-keeping, and behaviour. Karen likes the discipline: "You have to stay in school for the full six hours, so they make sure that you're actually doing something productive instead of just going home doing nothing. And I think that's good".

The school offers a range of 'Enrichment' activities, including photography, cooking, football, and martial arts, though neither Karen nor the other girls participate in them;

they attend the feminist group, instead, discussed below. The school also holds an annual charity week, involving fundraising through cake sales, concerts, and sports tournaments, and coordinates peer-to-peer tutoring, pairing Year 13s who are doing well with those struggling. Otherwise, there are limited social action opportunities. Students take on leadership roles connected to music and sports, but the main forum for social action is through the house system: each house supports a different charity (selected by teachers) for which students fundraise, and sixth formers are in voluntary house captain positions (Alesha is a house captain). This involves speaking at assemblies and leading fundraising activities, giving school tours, and helping at parents' evenings. Karen doesn't think this kind of social action is for her: "I think I'm too [pauses] introverted for that? I wouldn't be able to speak confidently up there without, mumbling or, stuttering". Academic attainment is prioritised over extra-curricular activity, unless that activity is linked to careers – the school allows Karen to volunteer at a hospital during the school day because she wants to study medicine.

The link between social action and employability, especially for students like Karen from marginalised backgrounds, has been a recent government concern (see p.4). It is closely connected to getting into university, with Karen volunteering at the hospital in order to put it on her UCAS form. UCAS encourages young people to use volunteering experience in applications, grouping this with work-related activities and recommending that students 'include details of jobs, placements, work experience or voluntary work' on personal statements (UCAS, 2018). UCAS also encourages young people to stand out from the crowd 'in a good way' (UCAS, 2014), accumulating 'experiences', such as social action, which will improve their prospects in an increasingly competitive market. Karen thinks social action "shows that you can

dedicate yourself to something and not get anything back so not get paid back. I think that's why it looks good on your CV or your personal statement".

Not all Karen's social action is for her UCAS form, at least not explicitly. Karen took part in DofE at her former school. Though it is marketed as improving employability (see p.4), Karen doesn't mention employability reasons when I ask why she got involved: she just wanted to "experience new things", and was selected to participate by her school, which had a limited number of places, because of her good behaviour and grades. Karen also donates old clothes to charity and money at church every week, not for employability reasons. She describes the 'warm glow' she gets from it (see literature on p.28): "it makes me feel good – but I don't think I do it for the satisfaction – it's just nice".

Other social action activities Karen has participated in include NCS. This was because a friend recommended it, she heard people made friends on it, and she had nothing else to do that summer. The residential aspect of NCS put her off leaving London for university:

I stayed in the university campus and to me it was just so dreadful! (laughs)
... Everything was really small. And then you had to cook for yourself. I would do that at home but like there weren't even that many equipment for us ...
the people that I was staying with, they were nice people but I had to do like most of the things.

Apart from the residential, Karen's NCS experience was generally positive and she enjoyed it (see literature, p.36). Although she didn't make friends as hoped, she enjoyed spending time with older people (she volunteered for Age UK) and felt NCS was a "great experience" overall. She didn't continue with the social action once NCS ended because she didn't know of any opportunities, suggesting that the

enjoyment wasn't sufficient to sustain her involvement, and that knowledge of opportunities was important (identified in the literature, p.34).

She doesn't think she'd get involved in other kinds of social action either, like helping improve her local area, unless the alternative was "sit at home and do nothing", because she isn't interested. Karen also isn't interested in politics – "I have a passion for science, so I just focus everything on that instead". But she has occasionally signed a petition, including against Brexit and against changes to GCSEs that she thought would affect her exams. She found out about the Brexit one on Twitter: "at that time everyone was talking about it ... what I do will affect the outcome, that's what I thought so like every vote matters and this was an opportunity because you're not allowed to vote if you're under 18."

To get the grades she wants Karen spends a lot of time studying, but when not studying she works part-time as a tutor, plays piano, sings, and goes swimming. She also sees her extended family most weekends. Karen doesn't have many friends and isn't allowed out much (unlike her sister, much to her annoyance) – she says her mum is "overprotective" and worries about "danger, terrorism". Though most of the girls need their mum's permission to go out with friends, Karen isn't even allowed out to buy milk without permission. She isn't allowed out with friends unless it's a special occasion, and certainly not after dark. But she is allowed out to volunteer, such as when she volunteered at a charity shop on NCS.

For two decades Park School has had a mixed sixth form (though with fewer than 40 girls). When I ask Karen if she minds being in the minority, she says it doesn't bother her: "I find it normal because I don't really pay attention to [the boys]". Although

Karen doesn't notice the boys, the school has had problems with sexism. According to Ms Heinl, girls reported being stared at in corridors, boys running up to classroom doors to look at them, comments made about how they look, and being upskirted on the stairs. This is partly why Ms Heinl thinks Sasha dropped out of school. To address this Ms Heinl set up a feminist group as one of the school's Enrichment options – an example of social action at schools (see p.22) – which meets weekly. All the girls at Park School are involved. The group initially involved discussing issues such as abusive relationships, the gender pay gap, catcalling and sexual harassment, and what feminism is. By the time Karen joined the school, however, Ms Heinl had left and the group had become a space for girls to socialise and organise events such as the school's winter ball.

Although she has feminist views, Karen doesn't call herself a feminist because other people think feminism is a bad thing and that

women are trying to make themselves more superior to men but I don't see it that way ... I do believe that everyone should have equal rights ... [Feminism] just helps everyone in the world because to this day there are people, women in the world who don't have rights and they are still inferior to men, and it's not fair.

Karen also thinks sexual harassment is the biggest challenge facing girls, saying she often hears about it on the news. She gives an example from her old school when

my teacher was showing me a programme to teach girls how to do martial arts so that they can protect themselves, but then I said that girls shouldn't *need* to feel like they should protect themselves all the time, we should just educate guys, like men, not to do that.

When I ask what volunteering means to her, Karen sees it as helping others (like most of the girls) and says, "I don't want [to] like get something back I just wanna

help people. Not because it makes me feel good”. This view is shared by several of the girls (Idrissa, Catherine, Sophie, and Shannon) who do not expect to gain anything from volunteering – such as money, for Idrissa and Sophie, or the warm glow Karen mentions.

Karen participates in my research partly because she wanted to talk about the volunteering she’s done, but also because she was applying for a social mobility programme, where she would get a mentor, an internship, help with her UCAS personal statement, and university and careers workshops. On her application she had to give an example of being in a position of responsibility; she thought participating in the research would make a good example.

5.3 Sophie’s story

Sophie (18) is White British, born in London. She lives with her mum Anne-Marie and their dogs. Sophie and her family are “absolutely not” religious. Most of her family live nearby except her dad, but she doesn’t visit him. Sophie helps at home “too much” – washing, cooking, ironing, and walking the dogs – not because Anne-Marie asks her, but because Anne-Marie works a lot. When she has time she loves reading, running, and eating out with friends.

Sophie likes her local area because there’s lots to do, it’s diverse, and it’s easy to find social action opportunities – a reason several girls give for liking living in London. Anne-Marie is less positive – “it’s just y’know for me shit-bag city”. She describes how she once saw a man fall past her window; how “we all had our houses flooded, we’ve all been set on fire and had our houses ruined ... all stood down in the cold while the fireman’s putting the flames out”. Yet there is a sense of solidarity and

community on the estate, and “that’s why I think we help people. Cos y’know you’re coming from that yourself ... we’ve been through a lot together”. Anne-Marie often complains to the council about the building, such as about the heating being turned off in summer regardless of weather, making it hard to dry clothes. The council tell her to buy an electric heater, but she can’t afford that. Anne-Marie hated the flat initially:

We wouldn’t make dogs [live] in that house mate, but I spose it’s what it is when you shut the door innit? Y’know your home’s your castle innit? Yeah we was mortified didn’t even have a window box. Let alone a balcony yeah. And it’s terrible that we still live like this in this day.

Sophie is different from her family. Describing Sophie as “very kind-hearted ... she’s a good girl”, Anne-Marie deliberately raised Sophie differently from her own upbringing:

You either go one of two ways. I think you either go and you smoke and you drink and you do your drugs ... you have a baby. Or you’re a nice kid. ... And that’s what I say to my daughter: learn from me. I never let you do what I did.

Anne-Marie compares Sophie to her neighbour’s daughter who smokes and had a baby in her teens: “it’s mad to see when I look at the two of them y’know you think you’re [the neighbour’s daughter] Jeremy Kyle, and you’re [Sophie] just like fairytale princess? And y’know it’s a shame, they was both brought up on the same landing.” Anne-Marie thinks it’s because she brought up Sophie well, not letting her play out when she was younger – not being a ‘latchkey kid’, like she was. Nonetheless, they have a good relationship, where Sophie doesn’t hide anything from her mum. Unlike some of the girls, Sophie doesn’t need permission from her mum to go anywhere, but like all of them she always has to tell her where she is and whom with.

Sophie is interested in politics, voting (Labour) for the first time in the 2017 General Election, though “I don’t feel like I know enough to be involved in conversations with people who study it”. Several of the girls share a similar view: traditional politics in the form of voting and engagement in party politics feels out of reach, partly because most are not old enough to vote, but also because many describe politics as not for people like them. Although she wouldn’t consider herself “poor”, Sophie says the Tories “are more for the people who have a lot of money”. She describes her mum as “quite narrow-minded and we have very different political views”. I hear some of this from Anne-Marie – she says when we’re talking about social action that “I wouldn’t like the thought of Sophie going into a room with a load of immigrants or whatever load of men to give out food”.

Sophie is one of only two White British girls in my study. Sophie says race is “never something that crosses my mind”, unlike the girls who are racially minoritised, many of whom mention either experiences of racism or how it feels to be in the minority in different contexts. Sophie takes a ‘colour-blind’ approach to race, saying what matters is being “a good person with good intentions”, and that racial difference doesn’t exist.

Like most of the girls, Sophie’s career plans are different from her mum’s. Where Anne-Marie ended up in a “naughty girls’ school”, Sophie studies the IB at Eburne and hopes to be the first in her family to go to university. Sophie says, “I don’t ever wanna be stuck in a dead-end job” like her mum (Anne-Marie worked at a taxi firm until recently). Anne-Marie doesn’t want Sophie to go to university outside London. But Sophie is incentivised by a charity scholarship she’ll receive if she gets good

grades and goes to university outside London. At one point Sophie wasn't planning to go to university, however. She left Eburne after GCSEs because she was "sick of exams" and schoolwork and took a hairdressing job. She worked there for a few months before returning to Eburne, because hairdressing "didn't challenge me ... I don't feel like it was very me".

Although she chose to return, Sophie is critical of the school. Eburne is a UNICEF Rights Respecting School (RRS), meaning it embeds the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child 'in daily school life and gives children the best chance to lead happy, healthy lives and to be responsible, active citizens' (UNICEF, 2019). Eburne promotes the RRS in assemblies, on posters around the school, and by teachers declaring which rights they will focus on each school year. Sophie is scathing of the RRS, saying it sounds good but is just a title (Maryam has similar views). It's possible this is partly because Sophie was bullied at school and, as Anne-Marie says, "no-one done nothing about it".

Eburne has termly RRS 'drop down' days, where sessions on subjects such as sex education are delivered instead of normal lessons. When Sophie tried to complain that these days aren't useful, teachers "just say no we have to do it". She thinks this undermines rather than reinforces children's rights: "as much as we might be a Rights Respecting School, they don't really like you to have your own opinions ... [They tell us] to be quiet and stop being rude." For Sophie, doing as you are told and being unable to challenge these rules seems at odds with a school ethos predicated on respecting children's rights. Sophie talks about Eburne's dress code as an example of how students can't challenge decisions they dislike. Sophie once wore a

halterneck dress and blazer to school but removed the blazer because it was hot.

Her teacher told her to put it back on in line with the school's dress code, but Sophie argued:

'It's a respectable length, you can't see anything through it ... What do you want me to wear?' She went 'Well it's your shoulders', I went, 'What makes shoulders a sexual part of the body because I don't see it?' I said, 'I think sexualising young people is wrong'.

Although this may not be the teacher's intention in enforcing the dress code, the sexualisation of girls through school dress codes has previously been raised in girlhoods literature (see p.69). Sophie thinks it's an example of how the headteacher "push[es] rules that make us feel like we're really young children. So I think that kind of oppresses you a little bit".

Sophie's university plans align with Eburne encouraging students into 'university or career of their choice'. However, Eburne's 'pathway to success', an illustrated map summarising a sixth former's experience, places more emphasis on university than other options. Half the 'stops' on the map are about university, from putting a volunteering experience on your personal statement to going to a Russell Group university. Apprenticeships are mentioned twice, once regarding a bursary to students achieving a 'higher-level apprenticeship' or university offer, and the other an image of a signpost with only three possible destinations: apprenticeship, Russell Group, or Oxbridge.

Sophie has an Access Project tutor, one of Eburne's many links with corporate firms. But Eburne's students are also exposed to other careers, through partnerships with a museum, a city farm, and a theatre. Many of these are related to the social action

Eburne offers, coordinated by Ms Walsh (Volunteering Manager). Eburne is unusual in having a volunteering manager. Ms Walsh doesn't think there are many; Eburne is the only school of which I am aware with this role. Ms Walsh thinks it stems from Eburne's long history of being embedded in its local community.

Ms Walsh has also sought to strengthen students' relationships with local residents, setting up intergenerational projects such as afternoon teas. Other opportunities range from anti-extremism programmes (in which Helah is involved), to anti-knife crime campaigns, fundraising to build schools abroad, and the Volunteer Police Cadets and St John Ambulance operating units from Eburne (Ali was involved in all these). Ms Walsh also coordinates DofE, though none of the girls in my study were involved. Ms Walsh often promotes social action opportunities in assemblies alongside speakers from organisations such as the local volunteering centre and NCS. In addition, Ms Walsh facilitates projects specifically for girls – from working with the local youth service to provide ASDAN¹⁹ training courses on community leadership, involving girls putting on community events; to setting up a healthy eating, exercise and self-esteem group; and running a youth club for girls to run their own projects and do activities such as nail painting and colouring. The school also celebrates International Women's Day.

While Sophie seems to like Ms Walsh, she also complains that she's always asked to get involved in social action and finds it hard to balance with schoolwork and jobs, despite often saying yes. Her experiences are reflected in the literature on lack of time for social action (p.33) and stress as a negative consequence of participation

¹⁹ ASDAN is an educational charity providing regulated qualifications to young people aged 11-25.

(p.42). Sophie is involved with the widest range of social action activities of any girl in my study, both in and outside school. Reflecting her love of history, Sophie is an Ambassador for the Holocaust Educational Trust, having applied for it through Eburne. She wanted to learn more about her family, since she has Jewish ancestors. As well as visiting Auschwitz, Sophie teaches students about the Holocaust (gaining ASDAN credits) and gives speeches at school. Because she loves spending time with elderly people, Sophie was also part of Eburne's heritage project, as were Maryam, Ali, and Nazreen, and helped at the school's tea and dance for local older people, some of whom she already knew – she still says hello to them in the supermarket. Her mum feels the same. Anne-Marie helps “the old girls” who go to a day centre on her estate and loves spending time with them, especially since her nan died – “she used to be me best mate”.

Sophie wants to be a teacher, which Anne-Marie thinks is why Sophie set up a club for Foundation Learning girls at Eburne. Sophie says, “I wouldn't call them special needs but, along them lines”. Sophie says they always used to talk to her and she noticed there weren't any enrichment clubs they'd go to, so she set one up especially. They did activities such as painting, arts and crafts, and nail design. It was just for the girls, she said, because she wanted to create a place for them to “offload and talk about boys”. She says she set up the group because she enjoyed it and wanted to help, not because she wanted it for the IB, though she still logged the hours. In the IB, points are awarded when students spend 150 hours on CAS activities (Creativity, Activity, and Service²⁰), which count towards their overall grade.

²⁰ Defined as ‘an unpaid and voluntary exchange that has a learning benefit for the student’ (International Baccalaureate, 2021).

The IB has been criticised for ‘valoris[ing] short-term instrumentality’ and undermining young people’s volunteer ethic (Dean, 2014a, pp. 9-10). Sophie acknowledges this criticism: unlike the other girls at Eburne, Sophie is generally uncomfortable with her social action being ‘counted’ for CAS, despite having logged 190 hours. She says “every volunteering thing I’ve done, for CAS, I’ve never done it just because it’s CAS. I’ve done it cos I wanted to do it. I had to do it, but I could’ve done anything, I just chose to do things that I liked.” For instance, she tutors younger students regularly but wasn’t going to log the hours until her teachers told her to. She doesn’t want to tell Ms Walsh about the social action she does outside school, mainly because she says she doesn’t want praise. This is also why she doesn’t tell her mum when she signs up for Race for Life to fundraise for Cancer Research (after her nan had breast cancer). She told Anne-Marie, “I don’t need you there, like I’m not going so people can cheer me on, I’m going cos it’s a good cause, like, I didn’t want everyone to be like oh look at her, that’s not what I’m there for”.

Quantifying social action has been a policy concern in recent years, with Millennium Volunteers, vInspired, and the #iwill campaign all encouraging young people to measure participation in different ways. This is the case at Eburne through the IB and through Eburne’s relationship with vInspired. One of vInspired’s major programmes was their Awards scheme, enabling young people to log volunteering hours online and in turn receive certificates to use in university and job applications (vInspired, no date). Ms Walsh says this is encouraged for students’ CVs, but that “I never know whether it’s me saying it to them or they’re asking me about it cos they’ve heard other people saying it ... there is a big pressure on them to have something on their CVs.”

Although several of the girls have or are looking for part-time jobs to improve their CVs, they are generally limited to jobs their parents will allow them to do. Sophie isn't limited in this way and doesn't work to gain experience but because she needs the money. She has two part-time jobs: at a nightclub and a shop. She doesn't enjoy either and feels like between her schoolwork and jobs she has little time for much else. Though this doesn't seem to limit her social action, she does say, "I wanna feel 18. And I just feel like all I do is work, study, and work, study. I don't have time for myself".

Soon after we meet Sophie quit the shop because she disliked her boss, who was derogatory towards women: recently when two men entered the shop her boss came over and told her to "stop spending time ogling guys and do your work", and she decided she'd had enough. Sophie believes feminism is about equality between everyone and identifies as a feminist. Like several of the girls who express concern about 'extreme' feminists, Sophie says although she's a feminist, she's "not one of them ones who just hate men and like, throw things at them like oh you do this you do that you're a pig like, I don't agree with that".

Sophie took the jobs when her mum was moved on to Universal Credit (UC). UC was introduced by the Coalition government under welfare reform, consolidating six social security benefits into one. It was designed to 'make work pay', reduce poverty, and avoid 'benefit dependency' (UK Government, 2013). Conditionalities and sanctions were introduced with UC payments reduced or withheld if claimants do not attend 'work coach' appointments or are late for them. These sanctions disproportionately and negatively affect single mothers and their children (Carey and

Bell, 2020). This was the case for Anne-Marie, who had no money for months because she was late for one appointment. It meant Sophie used her wages to make up for it, spending thousands on bills and food.

Although she likes interacting with people, Sophie's job at the club is dangerous and tiring: "People get violent, people throw drinks at you, they're long hours, you don't always get a break" and she doesn't get the same tips as her full-time colleagues, even when she works the same shifts. Sophie also feels unsafe getting home.

There's a shortcut, but she says recently there were three rapes within an hour there, so she goes the longer way round. Feeling safe in different parts of London is also something other girls talk about, such as Idrissa not feeling safe in Peckham because of violence and Ali feeling unsafe in central London because of Islamophobia.

What Sophie does enjoy about her journey to the nightclub are her conversations with Bert, a homeless man. Sophie's relationship with Bert is an example of the significance of positive relationships developed through social action (see literature, p.37). She started helping him after they met on her way to work one day: she felt that "if it was me I would want someone to help me". She usually brings food for him and his dog Lil and stops to chat. She's offered to look after Lil if Bert finds housing that doesn't let him bring her. We go to the supermarket together on her way to work one time and she buys hot food, throwing away the receipt because "he doesn't need to know how much I spent". She's also brought a slanket she no longer uses, and she'd gone to a different supermarket to buy food Lil likes. She says others ask why she spends so much on Bert, but she thinks it's up to her how she spends her

money. Anne-Marie says Bert also “costs me a bomb ... ‘come on mum, cook some food’ ... I’ve got nothing in the cupboards but I’m cooking the food for him!” This highlights the influence of parents in supporting their children’s social action (see literature, p.33).

When we get to Bert he recognises Sophie immediately. We chat and while we’re there a few people give him money. Sophie thinks people are more likely to help when they see someone else helping, but she’s critical of those who give money without stopping to talk. She’s also critical of people she thinks pretend to be homeless: there’s another man sitting outside a supermarket, whom Sophie has seen get out of a car “smelling like [he’s] had a wash and sprayed some aftershave and he looks quite smug when you give him money”.

Sophie cares a lot about animals – she and her mum love dogs – and Sophie signs and shares PETA petitions on Facebook. She gets angry that Bert can’t always sleep in the same place because drunk people torment Lil. He tells us how a rich man recently came up to him and asked to buy Lil, and when Bert refused the man punched him. Afterwards Sophie said stories like that make her want to cry.

Sophie has helped homeless people in other ways, too. She and Anne-Marie support Sophie’s cousin’s homelessness campaign by donating toiletry packages, Sophie says that besides the Foundation Learning club it’s probably her favourite thing she’s done. She doesn’t have time to do it now, but still donates regularly. Anne-Marie’s glad Sophie has spent time with homeless people: “they might look bit scary and that on the street but really they’ve just got nothing have they? They just need ... a little

bit of help". Sophie's thinking about spending a night outdoors to raise money for a homelessness charity, but the idea of sleeping on the streets scares her.

When I ask what volunteering means to her, Sophie says to "give your time and help". She says she participated in my research because "I'm helpful. ... I thought it helps you out, I 'spose I get to see an interview in action, and it's a good cause".

5.4 Reflections on the girls' stories

Olivia, Karen, and Sophie share many similarities with the wider cohort of girls in my study. In addition to all the girls being working class, many were born in London, are from racially-minoritised backgrounds, and almost all hope to be the first in their family to go to university. Many of the girls' mums are single parents and the girls are generally the eldest child. In subsequent chapters I consider how these factors influence their social action.

All the girls had participated in social action as defined by the #iwill campaign, either when they were younger or currently (see Appendix B for a table of all the girls' social action involvement). Because of young people's limited understanding of the term 'social action' (see p.18), I did not ask the girls what social action meant to them, asking instead what volunteering meant to them. They all recognised the term 'volunteering' and used it to describe the activities listed in the #iwill typology. Most defined volunteering as helping and being about giving up time, choosing to help (not being forced to), and not expecting to gain anything in return. Most were involved in a range of activities, with volunteering, followed by donating and fundraising, most common. The girls were also, but to a lesser extent, involved in

activities considered social action in the girlhoods literature: micropolitics and feminist groups.

Schools were the primary sites of the girls' participation, either facilitating programmes such as NCS or running their own schemes. At Park School these opportunities were limited and not obligatory; at Brownswood there were more options that were mandated (under the rubric of Enrichment); Eburne had the widest range of activities, with the girls having more choice over what they did but nonetheless being required to do it for the IB. The girls' social action broadly reflects their school's ethos around social action. Olivia's views about individual responsibility and self-improvement, with social action a means to achieve that, are shared by Brownswood; Karen's academic drive and career plans, linked to her hospital volunteering, mirror Park School's prioritisation of academic excellence and social mobility; Sophie's embeddedness in her local community and participation in social action in and out of school reflects the range of opportunities at Eburne. While each school may reinforce and shape these girls' views, as the remaining chapters will show, the girls' views have deeper roots in their wider experiences and circumstances.

Across the girls' stories, key themes emerge. Some support what was found in the literature in Chapter 2, particularly the antecedents of career motivations (and expected consequences for employability) and circumstances such as time, support from others, and provision of opportunities that make participation easier, as well as the role of relationships and enjoyment in shaping experiences. That these themes can be identified among the three girls suggests there are wider influences shaping

their participation beyond their individual circumstances or schools. In the next chapters, I argue that girlhoods discourses can help us to understand these influences.

5.5 Chapter conclusions

This first findings chapter addresses my first research question – ‘How do working-class girls practise social action?’. It situates the subsequent three, more analytical findings chapters in the contexts of the girls’ lives insofar as they relate to the girls’ social action. I weaved these contexts together through telling the stories of three lead participants and how they relate to the other girls involved.

Through the girls’ stories I identified three key themes in relation to the girls’ social action, each of which connects to one of the girlhoods discourses identified in Chapter 3: the link to employability (the ‘successful girl’); the rules girls have to follow and the extent of care work they do (the ‘good girl’); and the ways social action can manifest as a means of self-expression (authenticity). This chapter has therefore provided the context for Chapters 6–8. These chapters discuss the girls’ social action in relation to these discourses to highlight the wider influences on their participation and draw together the commonalities and differences among all the girls in my study.

CHAPTER 6: THE SUCCESSFUL GIRL

While Chapter 5 was concerned with introducing the individual girls at the heart of this thesis and situating them in their relevant contexts, this chapter and the following two take a more thematic approach by grouping the girls' experiences and influences according to the girlhoods discourses identified in Chapter 3.2. In these chapters, I address my second research question: 'How can a girlhoods approach help us understand working-class girls' participation in social action?' There are overlaps between the discourses, and my data therefore do not always neatly fall into one or the other. I base the decision on which discourse I think is most closely related to the data, highlighting connections to other discourses where relevant.

This chapter discusses the girls' social action in relation to the successful girl discourse, which is marked by an expectation that girls are high-achieving and ambitious. I set out the girls' views on successful futures before explaining the connections between these futures and social action. I then discuss the implications for the girls' social action.

6.1 What does a successful future look like?

For most of the girls, a successful future means going to university and getting a 'good' job. This is influenced by the girls' goals for themselves, their families, and their schools.

As almost all the girls are expected to be first-generation university students, going to university is important for their families as well as themselves. Shannon's mum is "really proud because I'll be like the first one [in my family]. So she's like oh Shannon

go go go!” Sophie’s mum has a similar view. Sophie says going will be “very different to what [my mum] does but she thinks that’s a really good thing. ... She actually wants me to go out and get a qualification you know, actually do something with myself”. Nazreen’s mum’s reasons for wanting her to go are similar, and about challenging gender norms: her mum does the care work at home (with Nazreen’s help), but Nazreen says, “my mum really motivates me and tells me you can do better, you can always do something greater like, do not conform to society’s expectations ‘you’re a woman you should be at home’”. This challenges some of the expectations about care that will be discussed in Chapter 7.

For some of the girls from first-generation immigrant families, the pressure to go to university is heightened – they feel they ought to go because they wouldn’t have had the same opportunities in their ‘home’ countries. Esther’s parents moved from West Africa, to continental Europe, to the UK because of the quality of education in the UK. Gabriela says her parents moved from Latin America to the UK because “I guess it’s kind of like every typical immigrant dream where they just wanna like get a better life”. She wants to go to university because it will help her reach her goal of setting up her own business one day, but also because “it’s like the entire family’s dream for someone to go to university, and long enough to graduate, so I wanna be the first”. Her family wants her to be a doctor or a lawyer because where they are from those are the highest paid and most stable jobs, and “they really want like a safe job for me”. Like Nazreen’s point about women and university, Gabriela also wants to be a “role model for people of my culture and my gender, to see that despite all the odds we’ll still make it.” Karen’s success is also important to the family (see p.126): “My parents weren’t born here so since I was little they told me to try your best in

everything and even if you don't succeed keep trying until you succeed, and with that I strive for the best." She feels grateful to be growing up in the UK rather than her parents' country in Southeast Asia because her parents "didn't really have much there"; she feels she shouldn't "take anything for granted and I just take every opportunity that there is". She says it is also important that she succeeds at school because "it's kind of reputation as well in the family like who can raise their child the best".

The schools also encourage the girls to go to university (see Chapter 5) and pursue particular careers. At Park School and Brownswood this is emphasised through the language of social mobility and 'raising aspirations'. Park School has a tuition programme connected to a law firm, and Mr Hutley says the benefit to students isn't from the tuition they get from lawyers, but rather from "going off to the offices, you know really nice swish offices, meeting people that've been successful, and they're getting to sort of see the habits and behaviours that they need to display in order to be successful". This is underpinned by an individualised notion of and responsibility for success: if students see how 'successful' people behave, they will internalise those behaviours and become successful themselves.

This is also reflected at Brownswood, with Overstone's enabling factors (see p.121) including 'access and exposure' – "how does the student know what they want to do or how do they paint a vision for their future if they haven't met anyone who's done an apprenticeship or been to a university or seen lots of people with different careers?", as Charlotte Cook at Overstone puts it. This is also echoed in Mr Field's job title as Head of Aspirations. He says his role is to "make sure that all of our young

people have a future where they're highly employable". The teachers' office doors have National Careers Week posters on them listing their previous jobs and the skills they developed there, making careers and employability constantly visible to the students. Mr Field says students need to be connected to "big multinational" employers because

they're gonna be the future employers of our young people and for me a lot of the things that our young people need are the things that perhaps they might ordinarily have got if they were coming from other better-connected social environments. And you know for a lot of our young people the social environment that they have grown up in doesn't have that kind of work connection into these aspirational positions.

Although class isn't mentioned here explicitly, the phrase 'better-connected social environments' is a proxy for middle-class backgrounds, and 'aspirational positions' means that Brownswood's students are encouraged to aim for jobs that are usually quite different to those of their parents, who are mostly employed in roles in the service industry, such as taxi driver or cleaner.

At Eburne, the way Ms Walsh describes aspiration is distinguished by race. She thinks the local White British community was "historically really badly treated" in the regeneration of the local area from the 1980s, resulting in a "general apathy". She acknowledges that she's making a "mass generalisation" but says that when she asks students what they want to do when they leave school, "loads of the Bengali kids will say I wanna be a doctor or lawyer, and the White kids will go 'I dunno, maybe like oh I might work in my auntie's nail bar', their sort of aspiration is just completely different".

At Brownswood, this perceived lack of aspiration is also echoed in the data Mr Field collects. He shows me a spreadsheet of students' destinations and points out how White British working-class students are Brownswood's "big under-achievement group", attributing this to the parents whom he thinks don't value education – "for our young people who've got parents who've had a poor educational experience, education is something that we do in school and that's where it stops". This isn't what I see from the only two White British girls involved in my study, Shannon and Sophie (Brownswood and Eburne respectively), both of whom want to be teachers. Both their mums are supportive of their plans and proud of them. Mr Field goes on to cite a study that found that "the biggest impact on young people's success and their future was parental interest in their future". This suggests that he thinks differences in class culture are responsible for students' achievement; he doesn't cite any structural inequalities that might contribute to this, though he does see it as the school's responsibility to compensate for this perceived lack of support at home. He says, "we *cannot* have 10% of our young people leaving and then finding themselves two terms after they leave us NEET.²¹ It can't happen. It's, it's immoral. And we have absolutely let them down if we let that happen."

Catherine thinks expectations of success are classed. She describes more affluent friends in continental Europe, where she's from, whose "parents have quite a lot of money there, so I guess they're not as worried about where they go like if they wanna be a photographer they'll be a photographer just because if there's no jobs,

²¹ NEET refers to 16–24-year-olds Not in Education, Employment, or Training. The term is widely used by policy makers but has been criticised for being too broad and for obscuring the vulnerabilities of those in precarious work (Furlong, 2006).

they're fine". Catherine thinks there is greater pressure on her and others from working-class families to focus on education because they lack the safety net that those from wealthier families have. Linked to this, Olivia doesn't think she'd fit in at Oxbridge because she'd feel different from "the other class people who go into their chosen field, like, freely because of their wealth"; she thinks becoming a barrister will be harder for her because she is poorer.

I also hear from others that those from working-class backgrounds are expected to work harder than their middle-class peers to achieve the same success. Catherine's mum, Sabine, suggests that Brownswood's concern for students' futures is pronounced because of their backgrounds, though she sees Catherine as different from other students because Sabine supports her education. Echoing Mr Field's comments above, she thinks this concern is mainly aimed at

children who have no support whatsoever and don't really know what they want to do and don't really have kind of backup and are not really good with rules, or I mean there are so many difficult set-ups that I think they need to put so much pressure on them.

This also connects to ideas about discipline and class that will be discussed in the next chapter. Alexa also says people from her area of London aren't generally considered successful, and therefore must work harder to convince others that they can succeed. She describes success as "getting out of the area. Or like working in like big companies, cos I feel like that's what people determine as success". She thinks "posh people" sometimes stereotype people like her and says, "it's like we have to change their view, like that's the challenge". While this reflects a sense of agency in that Alexa feels able to change people's opinions, it also demonstrates the individual responsibility common among many of the girls: Alexa considers herself

and others from her part of London responsible for changing perceptions of them, rather than this being the responsibility of those holding such perceptions.

This sense of individual responsibility for success is reflected in a conversation between Ayo and Olivia at Brownswood one afternoon. Standing at the sixth form noticeboard, they are discussing the list of destinations of Year 13 leavers (see p.121). Olivia tells me it's not as good as it should be – students got low grades and did not get their first-choice university places. The girls were really surprised at some: pointing out one boy who was studying Strength and Conditioning Science, Olivia said “woah, he was gonna do law”, the tone of her voice and Ayo’s reaction suggesting this was not a successful outcome. The way the girls spoke about him and many other students on the list, who hadn’t gone to the universities they expected to, revolved around whether those students had worked hard enough. I could see the pressure this list had on the girls, the concerns it raised about their own success, and the responsibility they took on for achieving it – their response was that they had better work harder to avoid this happening to them. At Park School, Mr Hutley says this pressure to do well is heightened by students’ class background. He says Park School expects more from its students than other schools would expect from “pupils from far, far more privileged backgrounds”, as evidenced by the weekend ‘interventions’ (see p.127). I return to this below (p.163) in terms of the pressures the girls face balancing social action with schoolwork.

While Park School has a more relaxed sixth-form dress code, Brownswood’s and Eburne’s both reflect the schools’ focus on encouraging students to follow a particular kind of career. Brownswood’s ‘formal business dress’ policy ‘reflect[s] our

professionalism, high aspirations and desire for excellence in all that we do', according to a sign on the noticeboard. At Eburne, students are required to wear a blazer (as Sophie's story highlights, p.135). Sophie is critical of this, arguing that "not everyone in the workplace wears a blazer like you're not setting us up for real life".

The particular kind of success promoted by the schools and the opportunities they offer are likely influenced partly by where the schools are based. Charlotte at Overstone says that Brownswood gets far more opportunities to engage with businesses than their other schools further out in London. Mr Hutley says Park School's students are "surrounded by aspirational figures and buildings and jobs and careers and it doesn't seem a million miles away". Ms Walsh has a slightly different way of describing Eburne's connections. She says that because of the school's proximity to a finance district they have lots of links with businesses such as banks, but that "it might not necessarily be an area of you know work that [students] are interested in so we're looking at other options as well so more creative and heritage-based things." Eburne's approach reflects a broader idea of a successful career than Brownswood's or Park School's.

At Brownswood, students are encouraged to select their degree course based on its employability outcomes. Head of Year 13 Mr Davies tells the sixth formers in an assembly that there are 500,000 graduates and only 320,000 graduate jobs, so they need to learn how to "play the game" by using a spreadsheet (to which the school has access) listing individual courses and their graduate employability statistics. Regardless of whether these figures are correct or the accuracy of this spreadsheet, the way Mr Davies talks about this reinforces individual students' responsibility for

their success but neglects the fact that there may be too few jobs available to them. This also means that the girls aren't encouraged to choose a course based on what they think they'll enjoy and what they want to study, and instead are encouraged to choose the course that will, in theory, maximise their employment outcomes (like Ayo, discussed next).

Alternative futures

One way the girls resist the successful girls discourse is in holding alternative views of success to those promoted by their schools. When Ayo changes her mind about studying Law and wants to study Sociology instead, she asks Mr Davies to write her a new reference, but he refuses because he thinks Law is a better degree. Perhaps he did write her a new reference in the end, but his unwillingness reflects the challenge the girls face if they hold alternative views of how their futures should look.

Whilst getting good grades, going to university, and getting the job they want are all cited as goals for the girls, some also mention having a happy family (Alesha, Catherine, Shannon, Ayo, Olivia), and others say success isn't about making lots of money or being in a 'top' job (Ali and Esther). For two girls, success is also connected to social action. Olivia wants to do charity work on issues such as human trafficking. Maryam wants to make a difference in a job that's meaningful and says, "I don't wanna live like a normal, typical life ... having a normal job, living in a normal place, doing all the normal things". However, the jobs the girls are working towards are also traditionally feminine, caring roles, as identified in the literature (p.66). Several girls plan to follow careers in teaching, nursing or medicine, as well as not-for-profit work in other countries – Latin America for Gabriela, where her family is

from, and working for the UN for Maryam. However, Maryam also recognises that racism may make it harder for her to work in certain industries. She says:

There's this woman who tutors me in Maths in Barclays and I realise I haven't seen a single Muslim woman there. I see like, maybe people of different races like Asian men, like Asian women, but I haven't come across like a Muslim woman working there yet. ... Maybe like in some workplaces like, some are like quite strict on uniform they don't allow maybe the Hijab, in France I know that they don't allow that in schools either and, I think that might be like, a barrier for when I'm older maybe getting a job.

Even Olivia, who wants to enter a traditionally male-dominated career (becoming a barrister) says it's because she wants to help others. Although she liked the idea of going into family law, she's decided not to because "I cry a lot, like I think I'm very emotional ... So I feel like, I don't know if I'll fit in there as much as I'd like to"; the implication is that being emotional (a stereotypically 'feminine' trait) is incompatible with that kind of role. Whilst I don't have comparable research on boys, this does suggest that the girls' career choices are constrained by gender norms, with Maryam's view highlighting how racism and sexism intersect to make things especially difficult for Muslim girls and women.

Although many of the girls' parents – specifically their mums – want their daughters to go to university, they don't necessarily tell them to follow a particular career path. Gabriela doesn't want to be a doctor or a lawyer; she says her mum has given up trying to persuade her and tells her to "just do what you want!". While Nazreen's mum wants her to go to university, she also

wants me to do as much as possible to have like a great life so you know all our mothers do and she supports my decision with whatever I want to be and what I want to do, which I'm really happy for cos some parents they discourage you and tell you to go this path like they force you to do that path but shel[s] just, supportive with my decision.

Ali's parents support her ambition to be a nurse: "They said that I should try and become whatever I want to and there's no point in forcing me otherwise I wouldn't do it to the best of my ability". Catherine's mum wants her to do "whatever makes her happy". Alexa's mum doesn't mind what Alexa does, as long as she's doing what she wants (though not "sitting around being unemployed"). Esther tells me how grateful she feels for her family's support when she moved school from Eburne to somewhere closer to home: "when I told him daddy I wanna go and leave Eburne he was like, you know I'm gonna support you through it, so I'm really like proud that I have someone, a family like that, to support me."

6.2 Achieving a successful future through social action

Nonetheless, participating in certain kinds of social action (combined with getting good grades) is generally considered by the girls, their parents, schools, UCAS, and social action providers to lead to success, linking doing social action to getting into university and getting a 'good' job.

Institutional influences

The schools encourage a link between social action and success. Ms Walsh at Eburne says, "they're brainwashed from Year 7 now to have something good to say on their CV", sometimes framing social action as useful for employability to persuade students to participate. Maryam also says Ms Walsh mainly offers volunteering opportunities to Year 12s rather than Year 13s. This is likely to be partly because they want students to focus on their academic work in Year 13, but it is also likely because students are encouraged to complete CAS hours in Year 12, when they

apply for university, so that they can put their experiences on their UCAS forms; by Year 13, any further experiences would be too late to include.

Mr Field says Brownswood's definition of success goes beyond the individual: "We're not trying to help young people to be successful purely as an individual. This is about our students being successful as a group of students who will then have a knock-on impact on the wider community and therefore there's more social impact to what they're doing." But that is not the message that comes through in how social action and success are framed at Brownswood, with its focus on individual responsibility. In addition, Mr Field says the Headteacher doesn't prioritise social action because her focus is on academic and employment success, so he and other teachers need to show how social action enhances employability if they want to improve what's on offer and avoid it being "tokenistic".

Reinforcing their focus on the importance of university, Park School encourages the students to do social action by saying it will help them get into university. Miss Heini says,

What we're very good at is showing the importance of post-education – going into university, careers, things like that, and also it's not just about your grades it's about the whole person so I think students – even the ones who are more reluctant, if they're told or if they know, doing this is gonna help you get into university ... then they'll be more willing to do it.

Furthermore, her language about 'the whole person' echoes the policy interest in character education discussed above (p.120); the idea that doing social action can develop young people's character reflects a deficit model approach in which Park School's students are considered in need of personal development. Similarly, at a Park School careers day, Head of Year 12 Mr Johnson tells the students they need to

show on their personal statements that they have “done something interesting with your life” outside their studies, like social action. I sit in on Alesha’s mentoring session that day, and her mentor suggests that her social action experience is what makes her “stand out”, reflecting the language used by DofE and UCAS on doing social action to ‘stand out from the crowd’ (see p.4, p.128). At Eburne, a poster for the local Volunteer Centre invites students to volunteer to have fun but also to improve their UCAS statements and gain experience and a reference that will help them get a job. I meet a coordinator from that Volunteer Centre at an assembly. We’re talking to a group of students and he asks what kind of volunteering they want to do. If they don’t know, he asks what job they want when they’re older, giving examples of volunteering activities as work experience for certain jobs. He suggests to one girl who wants to be a nurse that she could volunteer as a ‘meeter and greeter’ at a hospital, reinforcing the link between social action and success.

This is also the case for DofE and NCS. At Karen’s old school, DofE was a reward for students already on track to become successful, like Karen: the school had limited places on DofE, so only those who were well-behaved with good grades were invited to participate. This limits further those who achieve lower grades and whose behaviour is not considered as good as others’. Alan James, who works for NCS, says that for some participants NCS is “a way of differentiating themselves against ... a generic group of young people that they find themselves with through school for the last number of years where everyone’s getting As” (a very high-achieving ‘generic’ group).

Alan describes how the residential element of the programme is designed to foster social integration, though the beneficiaries are considered those from working-class rather than middle-class backgrounds:

That's the point of social integration, it's like when you take a kid who's not from a university background, and they stay residentially in a university in the second week and they suddenly realise y'know I'm just as good as these people, it doesn't mean we're trying to push a university route at all we're just trying to say you're not defined by just kind of the chips you've been given.

Alan also doesn't mention any benefits that the middle-class young people gain from this experience. The beneficiary is the 'kid who's not from a university background', reflected in NCS' aim to engage certain groups (see p.124). It reflects a middle-class ideal of social mobility whereby working-class young people want to be 'as good as' middle-class students, not the other way around. In addition, although Alan says they are not trying to push a university route, the NCS model, involving staying at university halls, suggests otherwise.

A strong example of how social action is connected to employability, reinforcing expectations of the successful girl, is Headstart. Maryam participates in Headstart, a programme for NCS graduates offering employment opportunities – skills workshops and a guaranteed job interview – to young people who do 16 hours of social action post-NCS. Workshops are held in what Claire Hill, who works for Headstart, describes as “plush” corporate offices that “feel professional” and are “office-based”, promoting a certain kind of career to the students. Claire says that following Headstart, “about 65% of people who attend an interview are successful. That isn't the same though actually as getting a job”. While 65% of young people have been

deemed “job ready” by an employer, only 10–20% are subsequently offered a job.²²

Claire goes on to say that the purpose of Headstart isn’t to get young people jobs, but to give them experience that will help them to get a job in future. She says that for young people who are unsuccessful in their interviews, “it doesn’t matter that they didn’t get the job actually, they’ve gone for their first interview”. But for those who need to work because they need the money, or because they want experience for their UCAS forms or CVs, it does matter. In addition, support for those who don’t get a job is not offered consistently. For example, Claire says if young people are unsuccessful in their job interview, Headstart can sometimes get them an interview with another company instead, but “it’s a little bit sort of informal, it happens when we can”.

Maryam volunteered at a library through Headstart because she needed both CAS hours and a part-time job. She did an extra hour’s volunteering than needed because it was “fun”, but stopped going because it was expensive to travel. Her parents wouldn’t let her volunteer at Peckham library (they consider the area dangerous), so she had to take two trains to get to another library costing £3 a week, and “that’s a lot for me”. She said she couldn’t claim the expenses from Headstart so she had to pay for it herself, thus paying both to volunteer and for a chance to get a job. Claire at Headstart says young people can claim expenses, but Maryam didn’t know.

Knowing to ask (and feeling able to) made a difference to other girls, too – Gabriela had already booked NCS when she found out about a discount being offered, and called up to get a refund, but would otherwise have had to pay the full fee.

²² Data on the demographics of those who get jobs is not available.

Maryam got an interview at Starbucks through Headstart and completed a two-hour work placement in the interview. Claire says personalised feedback is given to all young people interviewed because “we recognise it’s one of the really important things”, and so even if young people aren’t successful, “because they’re getting good feedback it’s still a really valuable experience”, but Maryam didn’t hear back about whether she’d even got the job, and didn’t get any feedback either. This doesn’t seem to have affected how Maryam feels about Headstart or about social action generally, and she enjoyed the experience. She does eventually get a part-time job elsewhere, though whether this experience on Headstart helped her do that is unknown. But Headstart provides an example of how, despite social action providers explicitly connecting social action and employability, they are ultimately unable to guarantee that social action will lead to a job.

The girls’ and their parents’ views on social action and success

The girls’ and their parents’ views on the link between social action and success echoes what the girls hear from schools, UCAS, and social action providers.

The language the girls use to talk about the social action they put on their CVs suggests that although they often enjoy social action, being able to say they’ve done something is more important than the experience of doing it. Gabriela did DofE because she thought it would be good for her CV. When I ask why, she says,

Well that’s something they said in the assembly to get more people to sign up. And I think that’s a really good way, cos you know as teenagers we’re always looking for something to put on our CV, cos we’re so unexperienced ... I think that’s one of the main reasons I really did Duke of Edinburgh ... same with NCS.

She recognises that the link to employability is part of DofE's marketing approach to 'get more people to sign up', but she nonetheless buys into it. Likewise, Esther chose to become a school ambassador at her new school, representing the school at parents' evenings and open days. She chose this because it's fun but also because "we have a really big responsibility and I feel like that's really gonna be good on my UCAS". Esther's dad is happy for her to do social action activities outside school because she tells him it's good for her CV and UCAS form, and he lets her do anything that's good for her future. Catherine's mum also says the social action Catherine does is a "good way of having something to add to your CV and also in a less dry way add to your experience growing up".

Alesha considers getting a part-time job or volunteering at a charity shop to "fill up my other experiences" and "develop myself as a person ... so [I] have a lot more to talk about" on her CV and UCAS form. She also thinks the school created the house captain positions so that students can put it on their personal statements. To study medicine, Alesha says, "you need grades and then you need the kinda experience side. So now I'm focusing more on my grades cos I kinda have most of the experience". The language of 'filling up' UCAS forms is echoed in the way Nazreen describes how she "collects" social action activities for her UCAS form.

Karen volunteers at a hospital because the universities to which she wants to apply say, "it would be really good if you ... did volunteering somewhere for certain amount of time, probably a minimum of six months ... it will probably get you into a better university". Ali's parents let her do St John Ambulance because it is connected to nursing. Social action is therefore considered a form of work experience. Indeed,

both Shannon and her mum use the term ‘work experience’ interchangeably with volunteering to describe her volunteering at a primary school, experience that forms the basis of her UCAS personal statement to study primary education.

However, not all the girls see this link between social action and success. Idrissa didn’t do NCS, saying that although NCS tells young people that “it looks good on your CV that you’ve done it”, she doesn’t think that’s true:

If you ask half the people that have done NCS right now “okay what did you gain out of NCS?”, they wouldn’t be telling you none of these things so, it didn’t feel like it was worth my money and my time. I could’ve been doing other things ... I haven’t heard of anyone saying NCS has helped me out in this way so what was the point?

She doesn’t see the point of a programme like NCS unless it can help her in future.

Balancing schoolwork and social action

At Brownswood, some girls talk about how the amount of schoolwork they get prevents them from doing social action. Olivia has become less sociable in Year 13 to focus on her schoolwork (see p.119). This is because she knew someone in the year above who did that and did well, so Olivia tries to be like her. Olivia’s mum Claudia says it’s difficult for Olivia to do much after school because academic ‘interventions’ mean she isn’t home until late. Claudia says Olivia is often up until midnight studying, something I also hear from Ayo, who finds the workload and the expectations of her “stressful”. Ayo says, “school is just taking over all my time”, and that she works until midnight on school nights and often all weekend, sometimes having to “pull all-nighters” to get her homework done.

Catherine's mum Sabine thinks the pressure Brownswood puts on students is "crazy". Catherine studies every Saturday 9am–2pm, sometimes Sundays too.

Sabine tells me about a parents' event once where the school told them to

please make sure she is here at 8.20 and then they have extra hours every day and then when they come home they have to study for another two and a half hours with five minute breaks after dah dah dah, and then please make sure they sleep eight hours as well and I was like (laughs) how's that even possible? ... I think it's a lot of pressure.

Catherine says that at Brownswood "too much emphasis is put on education and because like [the school] always say you have to get good grades and go to the best unis and then from the best unis you'll get the best jobs, but like, I think they kind of ignore life?" She says that "I still have a life (laughs) to some extent, but it's just so tiring and when you're 16, 17, 18, I feel like people always say that's the time of your life and I'm like I'm still waiting, I'm like, exams? Is that what you're talking about?"

Alexa also talks about how, because of A Levels, "I don't have a life!". At Park School, Alesha says it's difficult to find time for much else other than studying, and "it's a very boring life you live if you have exams!"

Alexa, Ayo and Ali say one downside of volunteering is that it can compromise the time that can be spent on schoolwork. Gabriela didn't carry on with the volunteering she started for NCS or DofE because she had too much schoolwork. Idrissa stopped volunteering at the local primary school when exams started, and says if she had less schoolwork she'd have free weekends and could volunteer somewhere. Olivia stopped volunteering for the sports charity because of "so much exams and stress". Catherine agrees that the amount of studying makes it difficult to do social action: "I would like to do more than I can at the moment just, there's no time and even if there

was time, there's just no brain space (laughs) like when I have free time I need to sleep or just do something different." This reflects how social action is connected to success and school – for Catherine, social action is not different enough to schoolwork to make it an appealing use of her free time.

Alesha used to volunteer at a care home but doesn't any more because "I just have so much schoolwork it's unbelievable". At her old school she only had to be in if she had lessons; at Park School, because students must be in all the time, she couldn't carry on with the care home volunteering: "[Park] School doesn't really make that possible cos of my timetable". The rules can be bent, however, as Karen's hospital volunteering shows (p.128) – Mr Hutley lets Karen leave school to volunteer at a hospital in a study period because it is connected to her plans to study medicine, despite the school rules stating students must be in school the whole day. When I ask whether students can leave school to volunteer, he says they can by prior arrangement, but only gives the example of those volunteering at hospitals who are applying for medicine.

At Brownswood, Ayo says schoolwork "prohibits you from doing anything to do with volunteering", and yet she says the school expects her to manage both. She cites Model UN, a school programme where students role play as national ambassadors to debate global issues. This wouldn't be considered social action according to either the policy and practice or the girlhoods conceptualisation, but Ayo puts it in the same category as volunteering. She says she and Olivia were asked by Mr Davies to take part in Model UN even though Year 13 students don't generally have to do enrichment, but she has so much schoolwork that she doesn't know how she can

manage it. Ayo says, “it’s just adding unnecessary pressure, there’s already enough pressure”. She’s told the teachers she doesn’t want to do it but they say she has to, and that “you kind of have a choice. Yeah. But the teachers influence your decision.” When I ask what she thinks the purpose of Model UN is, she says, “the teacher’s saying that it’s good to write on our personal statement so I think that’s the purpose.” This highlights the difficulties of time pressures and the idea that activities like social action are another thing the girls must fit into their already pressured lives. Even where there appears to be a choice about getting involved, that choice is constrained because not participating is considered a risk to the girls’ futures.

6.3 Social action as hope labour

Expectations of social action within the successful girl discourse result in what Holdsworth calls the ‘cult of experience’, in which ‘the point is to have done things, to record them and to accumulate these experiences’ (Holdsworth, 2017, p. 298), as many of the girls’ views on the social action promoted by their schools demonstrates. While such experiences might be framed as optional, most young people ‘do not have a choice about taking up an internship, acquiring work experience or undertaking volunteering activities – if they do not, then their futures are even more uncertain’ (Holdsworth, 2017, p. 299).

The girls hope that their academic success, and certain social action experiences, will help get them to university and in turn get a job. However, this cannot be guaranteed, as Maryam’s Headstart example demonstrates. I argue that this makes the girls’ participation in these activities ‘hope labour’ (Taylor-Collins, 2019). Hope labour is ‘un- or under-compensated work carried out in the present, often for

experience or exposure, in the hope that future employment opportunities may follow' (Kuehn and Corrigan, 2013). The concept has been applied to online media production, as in Kuehn and Corrigan's original study, and to volunteering programmes for job seekers (Allan, 2019), but not previously to girls' (or other young people's) social action. In making this argument I also add to literature on the anticipated consequences of social action (p.40), showing how certain outcomes may be hoped for but are not necessarily possible.

There are positive and negative implications of social action as hope labour. It creates space for involvement in certain types of social action that otherwise might not be possible, and fosters girls' sense of agency over their futures. But it also creates anxiety and pressure in the context of uncertain futures and constrains the girls' involvement in other kinds of social action. These implications are discussed below.

Enabling some forms of participation but constraining others

Much of the girls' participation is facilitated by the schools because it is considered important for future success. Space to do social action is created in different ways – on the timetable (Brownswood's 'Enrichment'), as part of school governance (the house captain roles at Park School), and embedded into the curriculum and being generally encouraged (as part of the IB and through Ms Walsh's role at Eburne). Most of the girls' time is spent at school, and there are limitations on their time outside school (with their schoolwork as well as their care work, discussed in the next chapter). Without the schools creating this space, the girls may miss out on the positive aspects of these activities (see literature on pp.36-37 and the girls' stories

from Chapter 5), such as enjoyment. All the girls are entitled to participate, and for girls whose parents have strict rules about when, where and with whom they spend time (such as Karen's, and discussed further in the next chapter), their parents' views that participation leads to success provides them with a degree of freedom and enables their participation in activities that would otherwise be inaccessible. This reinforces the argument that school-based social action can mitigate inequalities in access to social action opportunities (see p.3).

However, only a narrow range of activity is encouraged in the service of the successful girl. These activities would be described as formal volunteering (see p.7). The girls are encouraged to put these activities on CVs and UCAS forms and they are included in the #iwill campaign's typology (p.15). They include volunteering on NCS and DofE and in Brownswood's 'Enrichment' activities. These activities are privileged above other kinds of participation (explored in Chapters 7 and 8). The girls are not discouraged from being involved in other activities, but these are not actively encouraged. The social action associated with hope labour can be quantified in terms of the hours spent on it or the amount of money raised, and it is concerned with optics – how the experience 'looks' on a CV or UCAS form, rather than the difference made (see p.139 on quantification as a policy concern). It can also put off those who don't believe in this link to success, as Idrissa's reasons for not doing NCS highlight (p.163). Social action undertaken as hope labour comes to be seen not as something the girls choose to do but as something they must do to become successful. This adds to the pressures girls already experience and the anxiety they feel as a result. It leaves little time for social action that is not considered useful for the girls' future success.

Hope and anxiety

Hope is a strategy for dealing with uncertainty and can foster a sense of agency, enabling individuals to act in challenging situations (Cook, 2018, pp. 111-112). Hope labour, similarly, 'functions as a viable coping strategy for navigating the uncertainties of the contemporary labour economy' (Kuehn and Corrigan, 2013, p. 10). The girls' hope that they will achieve a successful future gives them a generally positive outlook. This is not necessarily a 'cruel' optimism, whereby 'something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing' (Berlant, 2011, p. 1). It goes beyond the scope of this thesis to explore whether the girls' ambitions (the 'good life') will in fact materialise as the 'bad life' (Berlant, 2011, p. 27). Rather, their optimism provides the girls with a sense of control despite uncertainty (since they do not know for certain what the future holds), and therefore fosters agency in believing that their futures are not predetermined by the inequalities they experience. This is reinforced by the schools, ingrained even on the walls at Brownswood (see p.119). This hope is also felt by the girls' teachers and parents, who want the girls' futures to be better than those of previous generations. This hope counters any sense of hopelessness they might otherwise feel. Hope can therefore be seen 'as a necessary step toward emancipation. It is a fundamental resource for imagining and continually pursuing a better, albeit uncertain, life' (Kuehn and Corrigan, 2013, p. 17).

However, hope is not always experienced positively and does not always equate to optimism (Eagleton, 2015). Rather, hope is inextricably bound to anxiety and fear (Cook, 2018, p. 111). Ahmed (2010, p. 183) describes how 'in having hope we become anxious, because hope involves wanting something that might or might not happen. Hope is about desiring the "might," which is only "might" if it keeps open the

possibility of the “might not.” While the girls’ ambitions and optimism are felt positively, because ‘such optimism against the odds allows the imagination of a better future in which things can be different ... it is also consistent with the neoliberal discourse which asserts that ambitious self-improvement will be rewarded in a meritocratic system’ (Baker, 2010, p. 6). Harris (2004a, p. 5) describes how the conditions of late modernity and

the requirement of individuals to now ‘make themselves’ in order to survive and perhaps even flourish have demonstrated considerable anxiety about the future of youth, who are imagined as the inheritors of this somewhat frightening world ... Young people ... must try to forge their futures by mastering the anxieties, uncertainties and insecurities conjured up by unpredictable times.

Sometimes, the girls recognise the wider structural inequalities facing them, such as Maryam’s point about the lack of Muslim women working at Barclay’s. But in general, the girls feel in control of and therefore responsible for their futures. It makes them anxious that they won’t achieve the future they want (and that others want for them). As Kuehn and Corrigan (2013, p. 18) argue, ‘the failure to realize a return on one’s investment can be explained away as an individual’s lack of talent or hard work, or by simply not playing the hope labor game smartly enough or for long enough’. This anxiety could manifest in mental health difficulties, as Ikonen (2019) found among young Finnish women. Indeed, the girls say that the pressure created by expectations of success can be overwhelming. They worry about having enough time to do schoolwork, social action, and part-time jobs, and worry what will happen if they ‘fail’. These worries are compounded by expectations, related to the girls’ race and class, about how their futures should look and what success would mean to their families. Yet they often feel unable to say ‘no’ when asked to participate in the kind of

social action associated with hope labour. This connects to the docility of the good girl, discussed in the next chapter. It also echoes girls' feelings of guilt identified in the literature (p.30). This anxiety results in the curbing of their leisure time and their relationships, with some girls becoming less sociable to concentrate on achieving a successful future.

6.4 Chapter conclusions

The successful girl discourse is concerned with girls' futures. This discourse is pertinent to the girls in my study because they are on the precipice of change: at this age they are focused on what happens after they finish school, preparing themselves for successful futures by focusing on schoolwork and participating in social action.

Although the link between participation and employability is well covered in the literature (p.29, p.41), there is little specifically on girls' experiences; nor has the connection to wider expectations of girls been made, and nor does it consider the ways that gender, race, and class intersect to shape expectations and create additional pressures. I have therefore added to understandings of the link between employability and social action. Though some of the girls resist normative ideas of success and the pathway prescribed to them, many of the girls engage with them. Many see the kind of social action in the service of the successful girl as something they must do, rather than something they choose to do, and their free time is often compromised to fit everything in, causing stress.

Yet there is no guarantee that volunteering leads to employment (Kamerade and Ellis Paine, 2014), and nor is there certainty that high grades or social action experience will lead to success; this is what makes it 'hope labour'. These girls are likely to

experience the university admissions system and job market differently because of inequalities associated with sexism, classism, and racism (see p.64). If they do not achieve success they are likely to blame themselves, as the conversation between Ayo and Olivia highlights (p.152), rather than any structural inequalities that make life more difficult for them. Because a successful future is not guaranteed, participation in certain kinds of social action becomes an experience that working-class girls accumulate in the form of hope labour, while their futures are ever more precarious.

While the successful girl discourse permeates many of the girls' views, their parents', and those of youth social action providers, it predominantly stems from how social action is promoted in the education system (see p.3, p.35, p.123). This means it is the kind of social action promoted or facilitated by schools most associated with a particular kind of successful future. Other forms of social action not promoted by the schools are more likely to be connected to the good girl discourse or with authenticity, as the following two chapters show.

CHAPTER 7: THE GOOD GIRL

Alongside expectations to be successful, girls are also expected to be good. In this chapter, I explore different types of good girl behaviour among the girls in my study according to the key themes identified in the literature of being docile and being caring (Chapter 3.2). These are presented in separate sections but the two are connected, as I will show.

7.1 Docility

Docility means following rules and doing as you are told (p.67). Among the girls in my study, expectations to be docile come from their home environments and schools. These expectations shape the social action available to and experienced by the girls.

Expectations to be docile

Home

Most of the girls' parents set rules to which the girls adhere. Because most need permission from their mums to go out (see p.130), they are limited to spending time in places and with people their mums consider safe and appropriate. This means most girls spend a lot of time at home.

Several girls talk about how the rules are different for them because they are girls. Amira needs permission to go anywhere in the evenings, even the gym: her mum worries about her and is very protective, she says, because she is the only girl in the family. Ali isn't allowed to apply for a waitressing job because she's a girl and isn't allowed out in the evenings. Alexa says her brother spends more time outside the

home than her. She says her mum's expectations of her and her brother are different, but she also internalises the idea that girls need protecting:

Because he's a boy it's different ... No one wants to admit it's different but it is. Cos like with boys they can kind of fend for themselves to an extent, whereas girls that might not be exactly the case and you kind of have to be more careful and worry about them more.

Gabriela says being a girl means she feels "confined" to the home. Her ability to be herself is suppressed by her family's expectations of girls: "I'm like the type of person that likes to go out, but I've been raised to be an inside person." When she was younger her (male) cousins could go out and play. She wanted to join in, but as a girl

I wasn't allowed to, so I felt like it sort of like hid a bit of my identity, cos I wasn't able to act upon it. Just really unfair cos you know they had so much fun and I watched them have fun and then I was just inside reading and writing cos that's the only thing I could do.

This connects to authenticity, discussed in the next chapter. Gabriela was also expected to do what her uncle, as head of the family, told her to do, even if she didn't want to. The alternative was that her family would "give you the silent treatment or just like discipline you like ground you ... cos they have that control over like women and it's really sad". Now she's older, Gabriela has learnt to deal with this. Though she must always be home by dark, she bends the rules by saying she's visiting a gallery for her Art A Level, but while she's out visiting places that aren't allowed, browsing shops and street art. Gabriela also says that sometimes "I'll just like lash out – not lash out but just be quite confrontational with like my uncle and my auntie and my mum and whoever, like I just need my time to myself." But doing so is difficult and runs counter to good girl expectations of docility.

Inequalities associated with gender also work in conjunction with age to limit what the girls can do. Ayo says that as the eldest her parents expect more from her than from her brothers and sisters – she’s expected always to “do the right thing”, whereas they aren’t. Although Karen isn’t allowed out much, her sister is. Karen thinks this is partly because Karen is the eldest, and therefore “looked out for” more, but also because her sister is more outgoing and therefore considered able to “take more care of herself”. The vulnerability assumed of Karen, another aspect of the good girl, is not assumed of her sister. This may be connected to the rebelliousness Karen attributes to her sister regarding the (lack of) care work her sister does compared to her, discussed below. The exception is if Karen’s reason for going out is connected to work or volunteering: “if I say I’m going out with my friends [my mum’s] suspicious for some reason but if I say I’m going to work or volunteering she doesn’t mind cos like I show her the email and I show her everything and she knows where I’m going.” The rules her mum sets can be loosened if they restrict future success (see p.168) but she is still governed by what her mum allows.

School

All schools require students to do as they are told, and the schools in my study are no exception. This often manifests through discipline, and the discipline that Park School expects is classed. When I ask Mr Hutley to expand on Park School’s commitment to social mobility, he describes how

We expect a very significant amount from our pupils, so a lot of it just comes back to what we expect them to be able to do, how we expect them to behave, the type of work we expect them to do, the standards we expect them to meet and the way we challenge them when they don’t ... We expect a lot more than you know a lot of schools would expect from pupils from far, far more privileged backgrounds.

His point is that working-class students must work harder than their middle-class peers, and that doing as they are told is central to that. However, the docility Mr Hutley praises in Park School's students is criticised by Ms Jones at Brownswood. She emphasises perceived cultural differences between the working classes and middle classes in relation to docility. She sees class differences as unrelated to money and instead about how parents raise their children:

I think it's a class thing and I think it's about cultural capital and sense of entitlement and I think even though my parents never had any money they taught me to demand things from people, and you know not demand but ask and you will receive. This culture here is not ask. Don't ask, don't open your mouth, just do what you're told.

She implies that Brownswood's students do as they are told because of a culture of docility among the working classes, like the points Mr Field makes about parental influence on White British working-class students' (under-)achievement (see p.150). This, Ms Jones thinks, means they lack the drive of middle-class students:

Students in state schools, companies throw so many things at them but I think that's the problem, there's so much thrown at them they don't have to find anything? ... They're just literally compelled to go along with it, you know they find themselves on a minibus and they're, 'whatever', and because they haven't fought for that opportunity, because they haven't found it themselves, because they haven't struggled to get the opportunity, because they haven't really done any work to get it there's just a total kind of apathy.

She thinks that in doing as they are told, Brownswood's students do not think for themselves. She admits it is partly the school's responsibility to teach them the 'value' of opportunities on offer – like work experience and social action – and dispel some of this apathy, but considering it apathy is indicative of class stereotypes. It is

also reflective of Brownswood's general ethos in promoting hard work, resilience, and struggle (see p.119).

But the girls often feel they must do what teachers ask or tell them to, compounded by class inequalities. Ayo is regularly told to help at school by her teacher, Miss Richmond, such as by collecting registers. Ayo says Miss Richmond only goes to Ayo and certain others – “the same people every time ... cos we just do it”. Even though she doesn't want to, and finds some tasks difficult, Ayo always helps because otherwise “opportunities won't come your way, and I think she chooses who has bursaries? ... So make yourself seem attractive in her eyes and you get a bursary, maybe.” These bursaries are from Overstone and for university. Several girls (including Ayo) worry about how they'll afford university, and access to money in exchange for doing as she is told, at least as Ayo perceives it, may be especially important to her for this reason.

Expectations of girls' docility at Eburne are racialised and gendered. Ms Walsh was initially asked to work with girls when she started at Eburne because “there was this notion that girls didn't engage with things which I don't think is true at all”. But she thinks it also came from concerns that the Bengali girls' parents “wouldn't let them do stuff after school or in the evenings that were not girls-only”. As such the school took a targeted approach to these girls, providing female-only spaces that parents would allow. However, Ms Walsh's attitude towards Bengali girls also reinforces damaging racial stereotypes that position Asian girls as docile. She compares the “naughty pain-in-the-arse White girls” whom she has to cajole into social action to the “really good and well-behaved” Bengali girls who sign up for everything. I

struggled to recruit White British girls to my study, which doesn't surprise either Ms Walsh or Mr Field at Brownswood. Both think White British students are generally disengaged, interested only in "what's in it for me?"; at Eburne, Ms Walsh sees Sophie as the exception.

Docility and social action

The expectations of girls to be docile have implications for their social action, both in and out of school.

School-based social action

Maryam thinks Eburne exploits students' docility through social action, citing an example of volunteering to look after younger students on a school trip to Lille. Sixth formers were told they could count it as CAS Service hours and go shopping – a "win-win situation", Maryam says. But she had to pay £50 for travel, was responsible for more students than expected, and was left with the students for hours without support from teachers. Maryam said, "at one point I had like about 30 kids in a shopping centre and they were swearing at the security guard because he was doing standard procedures checking everybody's bags as they come in". She said they were "really good kids" in the end, but the lack of teacher support and the weight of responsibility meant that by the end of the day Maryam was "really fed up ... a few of us were actually in tears and then, [the teachers] just brushed it off they said we'll talk about the kids on Monday", but they never did. The school relied on Maryam and other sixth formers doing as they were told. They did not allow them to challenge what Maryam felt was unjust treatment, creating a stressful situation.

Students at Park School are also limited in their ability to challenge what they are told. Mr Hutley says students aren't given a say in the culture of the school, limiting opportunities for social action. Though the school has a house captain system which should give students some influence, they have limited power, as Alesha's house captain experience below demonstrates. Mr Hutley compares Park School favourably with the "leafy suburb middle-class school" he used to work at, where "you get [students] signing petitions of all kinds and sit in protests and, you know in my opinion that was to the detriment of the school because they felt like they had far too significant a say in the direction of the school." Protests and petitions are available to these middle-class students but not to the predominantly working-class students at Park School, who instead are expected to be docile. This suggests that expectations of docility are classed and that the social action available to working-class students conforms to, rather than challenges, the status quo.

While social action may be framed as optional, it is often not. At Park School and Brownswood girls said teachers "told" them to donate to certain charities on own-clothes days. Since others are likely to notice those who don't wear their own clothes or pay their pound, this participation is not optional. Similarly, Mr Hutley describes the tutoring programme at Park School:

It's voluntary to a degree – I'll go and ask people I need some help with this person, will you be a mentor, and very few people tend to say no, I mean probably because they just realise that it's the right thing to do but I think perhaps they just almost feel like they (laughs) perhaps had to do it as well ... We could probably get more out of it in that regard realistically, probably make – almost a mandatory part of being at the school, the pupils know they're getting a good deal on the whole here so we could probably extort more out of them if we wanted to really!

Mr Hutley acknowledges that although students are asked to be mentors, they don't really have a choice because it is a teacher asking. This resonates with Alesha's experience of being house captain. She says her teacher (Mr Jameson) generally dictates house captains' activities:

Mr Jameson will have so many aspirations on what you could do ... 'I want you to do this, that', but it's just like everything gets cut halfway. He wanted us to create a school video that got cut halfway, a podcast, he was gonna do something about us getting too much homework ... we don't really get to finish anything by the end of the year cos everyone's just so busy and then exams come in and no-one just has time to be honest.

Aside from the fact that too much schoolwork prevents the house captains from addressing the problem of too much schoolwork, Alesha suggests these ideas are what Mr Jameson wants, not necessarily what the house captains want. Alesha also says the school "made us" (the house captains) help at parents' evenings because they "needed helpers and they knew we were nice people to offer". The school plays on the assumption that those doing social action are 'nice' and therefore likely to help. It reflects points made by Mr Hutley who says he thinks students who participate in social action are likely to be good at time management, show initiative, hardworking, motivated, considerate, and to do well at school, connecting being successful with being good.

In the example above, Alesha blurs the distinction between offering to help and having to help. Another time, she describes some charity fundraising she did as house captain that Mr Jameson "just told me I have to do". It was for Water Aid, a charity she says the teachers chose. Possibly because of this lack of choice, she is less enthusiastic about it than about some of the other social action she's chosen, rather than been told, to do. For example, she chose to volunteer at a care home and

said how interesting she found the residents' lives, how she enjoyed talking to them, and how it taught her patience. By comparison, although the fundraising at school wasn't a negative experience, she did have to give up her lunchtimes, and describes it only as "quite fun ... it was fine!"

At Brownswood, Idrissa talks about how students "had to" fundraise for another student's operation overseas, but she couldn't remember how much they raised or what happened to him. Mr Field is critical of this kind of activity:

There doesn't seem to be lots of wrap around, and I think you know, one-off donations where you're not really looking into what Red Nose Day do with that money, what Comic Relief do with it is [a] little bit vacuous from my point of view. You know Grenfell Tower, great we've raised the money ... are we keeping it in the headlines in school as to what's happening? ... Especially given that some of these pupils live in blocks that are clad.

Mr Field criticises social action where students are expected to be docile – told to donate without critical engagement with the cause, even when that cause is personal to them. He places responsibility on the school to do better at making these connections, but feels his influence over this is limited unless he can show a link to employability (see p.157).

Being expected to be docile can be challenging. At Eburne Sophie often says yes when Ms Walsh asks her to do social action, though "sometimes she catches me at really bad moments and I'm like oh, stop! Stop asking!"; sometimes she hides from her. But generally "she always asks me cos it's always things I'm interested in" and "everyone knows I'm reliable. If I say I'll do it I'll do it". Sophie may also be asked because she is one of the few White British girls Ms Walsh mentions being engaged in social action, and may therefore help Ms Walsh to feel that she is reaching a

diverse range of students – a concern Ms Walsh expresses in interview. Sophie describes how, “When you volunteer once everyone expects you to do it again and if you don’t, they can get quite funny, like well you did it the first time why don’t you wanna do it now?” But Sophie’s financial circumstances (see p.140) make it difficult for her to say yes every time, even if she wants to:

I’ve been volunteering for something else one day and then the weekend after the same thing was running and I was working, I was asked and I was like I’m not gonna be here I’m at work and then it’s like oh but you done such a great job last time that it’d really help me out, and I’m like, but I have a job. I try and juggle it like, equally as best I can but there are gonna be times where I will need to work, so if I need to work there’s nothing I can do about it and people like yeah but voluntary work is work and I’m like yeah but it’s not paid work like voluntary work isn’t paying like my phonebill and what not.

The choice to do social action is constrained by her financial circumstances, complicated by the fact that doing social action creates the expectation that she’ll do it again in future.

Social action outside school

Docility also operates in social action contexts outside school. This is partly about where girls are allowed to spend time by parents. Mr Field at Brownswood says some female students “are not allowed out on their own and they’re sort of 15, 16. So how the hell would you do some volunteering at that point if you’re expected to literally come straight back from school and then you don’t go out?” At Eburne, Ali’s experience reflects this. Although she is allowed to do Volunteer Police Cadets (VPC), which takes place at school, her parents didn’t let her go on a VPC residential because there were boys. Ali says, “I wanted to go and experience that but I couldn’t, I was being held back.”

The way docility limits the girls' participation is also evident when the girls are told to support a cause rather than being able to choose it, as the school examples above show (p.179). This can lead to a lack of personal investment in social action, reflected in some of the girls' NCS experiences. Karen's group didn't get to choose which charity they supported (Age UK was chosen for them) but "there are other causes that I'd be more interested in", like working with children or in healthcare. Maryam volunteered at a wetlands on NCS but didn't continue after NCS finished because she wasn't that interested in it.

Esther's experience volunteering for the Secretariat at church shows how docility operates in a faith-based social action context. Esther and her team count everyone at church, prepare the Powerpoint for the service, keep the noticeboard updated, and keep track of everybody's birthdays. While Esther asked to volunteer in this role, it stems from a sense of religious duty, and sometimes "there are people that say no, but like, it's the work of God so you have to do it." Similar to some of the social action at schools, social action is framed as optional but in reality is not, though for different reasons.

Olivia provides another example of how docility operates in social action contexts outside school. When she was packing up to leave her NCS social action placement on the housing estate, one of the men leading the project came over:

I didn't expect him to pull out his phone, and be like, okay you done a really good job, drop your number, so I took the phone, and I just put in some random numbers (smiling) because we was like, in the corner in the dark, in a warehouse bit where we was doing all the painting, the graffiti, and then obviously I'm in the corner so I'm not gonna say no and then he grabs me cos he was touching a lot of us, he must have touched my hand and rubbed my hand and was like ah your skin colour's really nice, so I was like okay

thanks so I just, kinda tended more to the girls like, I didn't wanna be by myself, and then he'd hold my hand, like, I did not give him permission or anything, he was like just saying your han-, your watch is nice, and then he'd put his hand round some girl's ear, and be like your hair's nice and that so it was just really uncomfortable. ... After we left, I told the girls and I told the teacher so we start speedwalking to the bus stop then all of a sudden, we don't notice cos we were getting lost, the guy just come, you know that feeling when he's coming after you, so he was walking the same direction speedwalking towards us, I was like oh my gosh to the mentor like we need to go quickly, went to the bus stop we finally reached it and he was right behind us, and he grabbed me and one of the other girls he was like, are you sure this is your number? I'm like, yep, and he was like, oh, but it doesn't work, I was like, probably my phone's off I don't know, and he's like I'll check when I'm in, and then I was like, yep, but that's my number, and then quickly got on a bus. Really it was so weird and I'm never going back there again.

This example shows how girls are expected to do as they are told. Olivia is coerced to respond positively to (unwanted) attention and keeps herself safe by giving the appearance of docility with a fake phone number. This social action experience is shaped by power relations of racism and sexism. Through her skin colour Olivia's body becomes subject to violence (her word, below) over which she has limited control. She accepts feeling uncomfortable as the only way to keep safe, and in doing so performs 'good girl' behaviour: appearing to do what's she's told; thanking him for his comments; and reporting it to her NCS mentor. She is made to feel vulnerable by this man in a place that she didn't expect to feel vulnerable, saying that she knew the estate had a bad reputation – "it's known for all that stuff" – but because NCS was there she thought it would be different. She also recognises sexual harassment as a shared experience through comments such as 'you know when' and in referring to other girls' similar experiences.

Whilst she says she'll never go back, it hasn't changed her views on social action: "I don't think anything makes me feel any different about charity work or volunteering.

Because at the end of the day, the purpose is to help others, and, I don't think like, violence or any of that will put me off." By behaving as the good girl, Olivia retains some control over the experience and doesn't let it affect what she thinks about social action in general, which she generally enjoys.

Implications of docility for the girls' social action

Expectations that the girls are docile affects the social action they do. These girls are mostly expected to spend time at home when not at school, a finding echoed in the girlhood studies literature (Harris, 2004a, p. 97). Despite examples of the girls bending the rules (like Gabriela's 'art gallery' visits, p.174), they otherwise generally do as they are told. This means certain activities – including more visible forms of action, like protest – are not easily available to most of these girls. It echoes findings from the girlhood studies literature on defining social action (p.20), reinforcing the idea that we should rethink girls' social action to reflect what is possible for girls.

These limitations mean most of the girls' social action either takes place at school or is facilitated by school (such as NCS). In Chapter 5 I gave examples of the different rules the schools set – on behaviour, attendance, dress code, and when and what kind of social action opportunities are available – and how the schools expect the girls to adhere to those rules. As this chapter has shown, there is little freedom for the girls to challenge rules with which they disagree. The social action promoted and supported by these schools is in the service of the successful girl, like volunteering at a care home, with more disruptive activity that challenges school rules – such as the sit-ins Mr Hutley talks about (p.179), or Sophie's complaint about the school dress code (p.135) – being discouraged.

Docility is also experienced as a lack of choice about the social action the girls do when it takes place through an organisation like school, social action programmes, or church. Sometimes this manifests as limited options that give the appearance of choice – such as which enrichment programme the girls choose at Brownswood – but at all three schools at least some social action is mandatory. As Chapter 6 showed, these girls have little choice about participating in some kinds of social action given its perceived implications for their futures. Moreover, while the policy and practice definition of youth social action includes ‘compulsory’ activities (see p.17), these girls think volunteering should be a choice, not something they are forced to do (see p.143). The lack of choice over much of their social action does not necessarily result in negative experiences, but it disconnects the activity from ideas about social action as a form of self-expression (see literature, p.39). It also relates to findings on the effects of ageism in social action that can make young people feel they are not in control (p.37). This has implications for the girls’ likelihood of carrying on with social action in future, and for their belief in their ability to challenge inequalities they experience and care about – a point I will expand on in the next chapter.

Expectations of the girls to be docile are gendered, classed, and racialised: parents’ different expectations of girls compared to boys; teachers’ attitudes towards working-class students and docility; and views about White girls versus those who are racially minoritised, with Ms Walsh’s view about Bengali girls (p.177) also reinforcing damaging racial stereotypes positioning Asian girls as docile (see literature, p.70). This limits the girls’ social action and creates additional pressure that can be difficult to manage, especially when balanced with expectations to be successful and caring.

As highlighted briefly above (p.67), docile bodies can be ‘subjected, used, transformed and improved’ (Foucault, 1995, p. 136). Thus far I have focused on the first two, regarding the rules to which the girls are subjected and expectations to follow them. In Chapter 8 I return to the latter two, exploring themes of transformation and improvement. I consider how the girls express themselves in ways that challenge the expectations of docility discussed here, such as through the assertiveness and ‘loudness’ described in the literature (p.68). This prompts us to consider docility in relation to power and resistance, as I do in Chapter 9. First, in the second section of this chapter, I discuss the implications of the docility expected of the girls at home, and how this manifests as care work.

7.2 Care

Above I discussed how the rules that families set mean girls spend a lot of time at home. In this section I explore how this relates to expectations that girls are caring and that they do care work. I then discuss the girls’ care work and how it is gendered, racialised, and classed. Finally, I outline the importance of valuing care work and propose that we see girls’ care work as social action.

Being caring, doing care work

In being expected to be at home, the girls are also expected to be caring. This manifests in the care work that many of the girls are asked or told to do. As Chapter 5 highlights (p.118, p.126, p.132), the girls do a significant amount of care work. Those from global South immigrant families, many of whom are the eldest daughter, have particular responsibilities. Karen, Ali, Gabriela, and Alesha are language brokers for family or family friends. This involves translating letters, dealing with utility

companies, attending parents' evenings (which Karen has done since primary school), and attending medical appointments. Some girls don't have strong feelings about this – it is just something they do – and it can be a source of pride for them. Alesha says language brokering is her responsibility because her brothers don't speak "our language". Ali describes it as a positive learning experience: she's happy to make phonecalls for her dad, such as for the internet and car insurance, since "I feel like it's helped me a lot because I understand more. Before I never knew anything about like those type of things". For others, language brokering is harder. Karen does language brokering a lot because, as the eldest, she says she knows more, but she finds it difficult because she isn't fluent in her parents' language.

The girls' care work is gendered, reflecting expectations that girls (not boys) should be caring. At weekends, Alesha needs to do chores before going to the library to study, and if she wants to see friends she has to "do a bit of cleaning for my mum she'll be happy with me she'll be like yeah come you can go". Alesha's brothers (she is one of a triplet) don't help simply because "they're all boys". Idrissa's brothers are allowed out while she is at home helping her mum: "It's annoying because they make most of the mess! (laughs) but they don't wanna help with the mess". When Olivia visits her Grandma (see p.118), her brother comes too but spends the whole time watching YouTube. For several of those who are the eldest girl with brothers, it isn't that the boys in their family aren't asked to help – Alesha's mum "tries to make them" do chores – but that the boys often refuse. Alesha feels that "if [my mum] asks me like it's rude, I can't say no and I have to do it". Alexa thinks that "I should do more" but "if my mum asks me to do something I will", whereas her brother doesn't help much. This connects to the docility discussed above.

While some girls say their mum asks them to help, Karen says that although that was true when she was younger, now whenever she sees something in the house that needs cleaning she just does it. Like the different rules for her sister, discussed above, it may be age intersecting with gender that means she is more likely to be expected to help. Karen's siblings don't help much, but whereas her brother simply "doesn't do much", her sister is "a rebel! She doesn't really do much, and she refuses and she argues back with my parents". This suggests Karen's sister defies expectations in not helping, but that her brother's response is as expected.

Like Alexa, Idrissa, and Karen, who say it annoys them or isn't fair that their siblings do less than them, Alesha also recognises the gendered stereotypes involved: "Maybe like the whole stereotypical the woman's meant to clean, the man's meant to do the – but yeah but they don't even work so I don't know why, can't really use much of an excuse." And yet despite feeling that the differences are unjust, Alesha both accepts and reinforces them:

There's actually nothing you can do about it, it's just the way it is, and it's like, at the end of the day, it's for my benefit like I'm probably gonna need to clean my own house am I not? So might as well get the practice while I can. ... girls are just better at cleaning anyway cos I've just seen it with my brothers it's like, we're born on the same day how's it that I can clean but you guys just clean really tragically like they just can't even hold a broomstick.

This is despite Ms Heinl at Park School describing Alesha as "very independent and strong-willed ... she's got this idea that women should be able to do whatever they want". I also get this impression when interviewing Alesha. She says, "I'm not the type of person that cares about what other people think of me", and feels frustrated with gender norms that create certain expectations of girls. However, she also feels

there is nothing she can do about it because it is “biological”. She tries to challenge stereotypes – “I wouldn’t really act girly at all, I’d rather act more boyish ... I can’t get emotional about things” – but says, “it’s like okay you’re stereotyping me anyway so I might as well just fit the criteria”. Although “at the end of the day it’s like I’m my own person, stereotype isn’t gonna tell me what I can or cannot do”, she admits “if I get too loud I’ll be like okay I’m a girl, can’t get loud like this, small things like oh I’m a girl I can’t do this I can’t do that”. Even in the same sentence there are contradictions between Alesha wanting to be herself and challenge gender stereotypes, but also feeling that she should modify her behaviour to meet the stereotype. Her use of ‘act’ also highlights the performative nature of identity, with Alesha feeling she needs to perform certain roles in front of others. This connects to the docility expected of the good girl, echoing expectations discussed in the literature that the good girl is also quiet (p.70).

This is similar to Esther’s views on what is expected of her as a Christian girl. She thinks there’s a lot of sexism in society – “there’s still people that believe that girls belong in the house, like to clean and to cook” – and doesn’t agree with her church that women can’t be pastors. She says, “I feel like they can do a better job than even some male pastors that are out there. And they don’t only deserve to be the pastor’s wife, I feel like, there should be a pastor’s husband”. In response, Esther often does things just to prove people wrong. “When someone says to me that I can’t do certain things cos I’m a girl, I’m like, but why? Like, I don’t like football, but sometimes I play football to see what people say about me actually being a girl that actually plays football.”

And yet despite feeling annoyed by these expectations,

I like staying at home but I don't really like cleaning and all of that, but I will do it cos that's basically what most girls do, innit? But I feel like people still believe that girls should stay at home and do that whilst boys work, and I don't believe in that. I feel like girls deserve to work as well and earn our own money, cos, like with me when I'm older I don't wanna be relying on my husband to do everything.

As much as Alesha and Esther dislike such expectations, they nonetheless plan to meet them. The role of religion in shaping these expectations is not explicit in the girls' examples, but Esther's example of female pastors suggests that some expectations stem from religious practice that assigns certain (leadership) roles to men and certain (caring) roles to women. This is reinforced by what Esther says about how she sometimes "help[s] the women look after their kids" during services, and Esther's dad John inviting me to church with them where he'd make me jollof for lunch, swiftly correcting himself to say his wife would make it instead.

While Shannon also helps her mum at home with "whatever she needs", some of her care work is done not because she feels she should, nor because she is asked.

Shannon spends most of her spare time caring for her "little cousin" Poppy, a family friend's three-year-old. Rather than being asked to look after Poppy, "it's like mainly me always saying to [Poppy's parents] like can I have her, instead of them going 'oh can you look after her?'" But occasionally obviously that does happen when they've got other ties but, yeah majority it's me initiating it." Sometimes Shannon and Poppy spend time with Shannon's friend who cares for her little brother; Shannon calls them "the little mummy group". Shannon engages with gender stereotypes positioning women as caregivers, but rather than being critical of this (like some of the other girls), she embraces it. Compared to her friends, she says "I'm the more

motherly one to them ... the mature one ... [because] I'm always with [Poppy] I've always gotta be like the more responsible one because I'm like the mum when I'm with her". Caring for Poppy has also led Shannon to volunteer at the primary school and pursue a career in teaching: "I didn't really know what I wanted to do, and then I felt like obviously I got quite a close bond with like kids, and I really enjoy watching them like grow sorta thing". This is not about helping her mum (or Poppy's parents), it is not something she's asked to do, and it is not a burden. Instead, the care work is part of who she is and is connected both to the successful girl and to authenticity, discussed in the next chapter.

How relationships with their mums shapes the girls' care work

The girls also help at home because their mum or both parents work or their mum is the primary caregiver. For those living with both parents, the girls' dads are generally not at home as much as their mums because they are out at work, and the home is considered their mum's domain. Being good for these girls is bound up with a desire to take pressure off their mums, with helping at home often described as "helping my mum" regardless of whether their mums are single parents or not. Alesha says her care work is "gonna make my mum happy". Maryam describes how after having her younger siblings, "my mum like struggled a lot so like it was important that I helped her", even leaving school early to collect her brothers and "make my mum's life easier". Nazreen tries to do as much as possible because "I really want my mum to be at this age be resting, I just don't wanna see her always working like I wanna take up the responsibility now. Cos I just don't wanna see her struggling any more". Gabriela finds it stressful looking after her baby brother but says "obviously I still do it cos, have to help out my mum".

For several girls, their care work either echoes their mum's or is done with them. This stems partly from a desire to care for others because they enjoy it, evident in how both Sophie and her mum Anne-Marie feel about elderly people (see p.138) and in Olivia's mum Claudia's view that "I love spending time with [elderly people], and that's why Olivia enjoys spending time with them". It comes across in the time Alexa and her mum Lynette spend with Fran, an elderly lady they met while visiting Alexa's nan in hospital and continued to visit after her nan was discharged. Alexa loves visiting Fran because "I always wanted to kind of talk to an old person about their life"; meeting Fran was the "highlight" of her month. Shannon and her mum Angela both used to care for their elderly neighbour, Edith. Angela had a spare key to check on her and help around the house, even being the emergency contact when Edith fell and broke her hip at 4am, and Shannon and her brother visited to chat and make tea. Angela helped because "she was my next-door neighbour and a lovely lady" and says Shannon and her brother "didn't think it was a burden, they done it cos they like enjoyed it and they wanted to."

But care work can also stem from a sense of responsibility the girls and their mums feel towards others. Shannon and Angela partly felt that they should help because Edith's son lived further away and didn't visit often. He also put Angela's number down as the emergency contact without checking with her first:

No-one else had my phone number to give sort of thing so he went oh it must have been social services or the hospital or something I was like well yeah but how did they get it? But I wouldn't not have done it for her, you know what I mean?

Lynette goes shopping for a friend's mum because she's hurt her back and nobody else has a car. Whenever Alexa's nan is in hospital, Lynette also helps feed other

elderly patients if there aren't enough nurses. She does these things because, she says, she's a good person and she'd want someone to do the same for her. This responsibility is also evident in the way Anne-Marie took in Sophie's baby niece after her brother died and the mother – "this girl that was no good" – left the baby with her. Anne-Marie initially gave up work to care for her and says "it's not been very easy but we y'know all pull through innit? Family's what you got. ... You help others don't you that's how we brought up, you don't look down on someone unless you help them out." Sophie never mentions her cousin to me, but Anne-Marie says helping is "a family thing, yeah me mum thinks like that as well", with Sophie also being "very kind-hearted".

Unlike the other girls, Catherine's mum tells her not to do chores: "She's like for the rest of your life you're gonna be doing all these things like (laughs) enjoy your life while you can!" This may be because Catherine lives only with her mum, but it isn't the case for Sophie, who is in the same position but does lots of chores.

Nonetheless, Catherine sometimes does chores anyway because her mum works long hours and Catherine wants to relieve her of the burden. Care work can therefore be something the girls not only are asked to do, but can feel they ought, and sometimes want, to do. This is not because the act of care work itself is always something they enjoy (Shannon's care for Poppy excluded), but because of what it does for their mums.

Significance of the girls' care work

Girls and women are more likely to undertake care work than boys and men, and caring is considered a natural behaviour for girls (see p.71). This is reflected in some

of the girls' views on the gendered nature of caring. Since their care work is considered 'natural', and takes place outside the labour market (Glenn, 1992, p. 1), it can go unremarked. This is especially the case for care work carried out by girls 'whose status as children can make their labor even more hidden than that of their mothers' (Shaw, 2020, p. 2). Shaw (2020, p. 4) draws on Tadiar's concept of 'living labour' to explain this invisibility, arguing that care work involves 'maintaining life in its most invisible, yet fundamental senses ... the fact that living labor is consumed almost immediately in the process of its making means that it is hard to see and value'. This is important because girls spend a lot of time on care work, and it has cultural, economic, and emotional significance.

The girls' care work is influenced by their mums, many of whom are responsible for caring for wider family, family friends, or neighbours. This reinforces arguments that this work is often found in working-class communities, with Williams (2003) finding that informal volunteering (see p.7) is more likely in deprived than in affluent neighbourhoods, and a culture of informal, mutual support historically found among women in working-class communities (Taylor, 2005). There is comparatively little research on how this is also carried out by daughters, or on the experiences of daughters in these communities, which my findings highlight. This care work is racialised as well as gendered, demonstrated in the language brokering many of the girls do.

The girls' care work is also important economically and is both classed and racialised. In many cases it enables the girls' mums to work outside the home, especially those in single-parent families or whose dads work abroad in their "home"

countries. Women most likely to work in 'low-skilled jobs' (including caring, leisure and service occupations) are more likely to be racially minoritised (Office for National Statistics, 2014, p. 14); most of these girls' mums work as cleaners, carers, and in nail salons. This is what Shaw (2020, p. 3) describes as a 'global care chain' whereby domestic care work in the global North is often undertaken by migrant women for those outside the family, meaning their daughters do the care work in their own homes.

The girls' care work is also important emotionally because it is often about caring for their mums: it is done to relieve the girls' mums from the burden of doing it all themselves. This has positive implications for the girls in feeling able to help their mums and alleviate pressure on them, but it is also problematic because it reinforces the idea that care work is the responsibility of girls and women, not boys and men. Balancing this with expectations of the successful girl creates stress for the girls and can leave them with limited time to relax or for leisure. That these girls hope to go to university and into 'successful' careers in future, but still expect to be doing this care work for their own families, links to ideas about the post-feminist myth of women's ability to 'have it all' (Aveling, 2002).

Care work as social action

Definitions of social action that exclude helping family or friends, like the #iwill campaign's (p.15), fail to recognise the importance of girls' care work and undermine the importance of relationships in shaping how these girls help others. Relationships are central to the antecedents of care work because the girls generally do it to help their mums. The activities their care work involves, including language brokering,

would be 'counted' as social action were they not undertaken for family and friends. Those involved in language brokering did not mention it when asked about either their volunteering or helping at home. It was only raised when I asked directly about whether they speak other languages at home, and if so, whether they did any translating and interpreting. This supports the argument that language brokering is often seen as 'normal' by immigrant families but in global North conceptualisations of childhood is considered "non-normative" in that it diverges from mainstream, Western, middle-class notions of what children should be allowed or expected to do' (Orellana and Phoenix, 2017, p. 184). Language brokering is just something they do, considered neither care work in the literature (Bauer, 2016, p. 26) nor social action in policy and practice.

Feminists have long argued for care work to be more highly valued (see literature, p.72). I build on this argument by calling for a revaluing of girls' care work specifically and propose that girls' care work for family be considered social action. This is not about the formal care work carried out by young carers, on which there is already a strong body of literature, but rather about the more informal helping at home that occupies much of these girls' time. The exclusion of activities to help friends or relatives in the policy and practice definition of youth social action, and the exclusion of activity to help family in definitions of informal volunteering, creates an arbitrary division that is not necessarily felt by these girls. Shannon's description of her family friend's daughter as her 'cousin' highlights the blurriness of this distinction.

As Lee and Pacini-Ketchabaw (2011, p. 116) argue, 'if norms of volunteer activities and school involvement were to change to be more inclusive of immigrant girls who

provide sibling care, perhaps their work would be more visible and more highly valued.’ Sarre and Tarling (2010, p. 295) make a similar point: ‘the common definition of volunteering as activities aimed at benefiting non-family members ignores children’s relative confinement, and means that many of children’s activities in the service of others (were they to be measured) would not count as volunteering.’ Care work for friends and family should be considered social action because it is an important part of girls’ lives, it makes a significant contribution to society, and it mirrors behaviours that are otherwise ‘counted’. I return to this in Chapter 9 in offering a revised definition of social action that recognises the work performed by working-class girls.

7.3 Chapter conclusions

The girls’ docility and care work are connected to expectations of the ‘good girl’. Girls are expected to follow rules about how and where they spend time, set by families and schools. The rules set by the girls’ families relate to expectations that the good girl is vulnerable and therefore in need of protection, meaning the girls spend most of their time at home. This can limit the social action available to them, and others’ expectations of them to be docile can make experiences of social action uncomfortable. The girls are also expected to do as they are told by their parents, teachers, and in some social action contexts. Sometimes this is framed as an ask, but the girls do not often feel they have a choice over it.

At home, the girls are expected to be caring and to express this through care work. Families are influential over how much and what the girls do. Some girls are told to do this care work, while others are asked. Either way, gender stereotypes affect

expectations that girls should do this care work. Care work is often 'pathologised' and considered a burden (Lee and Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2011, p. 112). To an extent, this was the case for these girls, creating stress for those balancing schoolwork, care work, and other kinds of social action required in the pursuit of success. This shows the difficulty of achieving expectations of both the good girl and the successful girl. But care work is not only a burden. As Skeggs (2002, p. 41) argues, although care work constrains women's lives this does not mean it cannot be experienced positively. This positive experience of care work manifests through the emotional significance the girls attach to how it helps their mums. This is an important antecedent of the social action these girls perform connected to the good girl discourse.

Care can also be considered in terms of caring about an issue (see literature, p.73). This relates to the ways girls challenge expectations to be docile, which has implications for how we conceptualise girls' social action. This is discussed further in the next (and final) findings chapter on authenticity.

CHAPTER 8: THE AUTHENTIC GIRL

In this last findings chapter I explore the girls' feelings about authenticity, or 'being yourself', and the implications for their social action. Girls' social action can include challenging stereotypes and expectations as a form of resistance (see literature, p.19). I show how the girls find being themselves difficult, especially those who are racially minoritised, how feeling (in)authentic can both enable and constrain their social action, and what this means for how we should conceptualise social action.

8.1 The search for authenticity

Though the girls do not use the term 'authentic', many think it is important to 'be yourself'. This means both expressing their views and not trying to be someone else. Olivia describes herself as a "strong person" who doesn't care what others think. She says it's important to "know who you are and let people know who you are, not just stand there at the side". I ask Idrissa what's important to her, and the first thing she says is "being an honest person ... you just have to be yourself. ... What's the point if you're trying to be like Claire for example, but your name is Annabel?" She says her peers tend to look the same, do the same things, think the same way – what she says is called "image gang". But she also says, "I can't even say I haven't fallen into that trap before". Alexa has a similar view: "A lot of people in this generation are like the same? So I just try to be a bit different from that." Being different – and expressing that difference – is considered by Alexa and Idrissa as a mark of authenticity. Like Olivia, they are also critical of those they think put on an act. Shannon agrees, describing herself as "common as hell!" compared with family who act "posh", viewing them as inauthentic: "I just don't like it when they talk like people

with a plum in their mouth cos I'm thinking (laughs) you come from the same blood line, don't act like you're better than me!" Shannon's comment also highlights her views about class mobility: she thinks class is something you are born into, with attempts to move between classes an "act" and therefore inauthentic.

These ideas about authenticity and class can also be seen in the girls' views on being at home. While being at home is bound up in expectations of the good girl, as the previous chapter showed, most girls nonetheless say home is one of their favourite places because they feel comfortable there and can be themselves. Gabriela describes how "when you go home you don't really have to worry about other people". This partly explains why most of the girls plan to live at home when they go to university, though for many financial constraints are also significant – even before submitting her UCAS form, Shannon had worked out the exact costs of commuting to university. Catherine doesn't want to go to Cambridge because "my life will be the uni. Whereas here I feel like I'll just kind of go to uni, and live my life, like separately. Which is kind of why I'd prefer to stay here". Maintaining authenticity is an important part of this and helps balance expectations of the good girl, in being at home, the successful girl, in going to university, and being themselves. For those who want to leave London, concerns about fitting in at university relate to how different it is from home. Sophie doesn't want to study at Reading because "I don't feel like I'd be very comfortable ... it'll be far too different from home for me". She is also worried about class differences:

I've applied [to] three Russell Groups, quite – not snooty, but a lot of the students who go there are quite well off and probably going to be slightly better educated than I am. And, I don't wanna go into a lecture and not know what's going on ... I might be in a little bit too much like over my head and I

don't know how I feel about that and there's not really anyone in my family I can go, can you help me? Cos none of them like been to uni.

Catherine and Olivia share similar concerns about Oxbridge. Catherine also can't see herself there because she's heard that state and private school students don't mix.

Olivia says, "I don't know if I'd fit in" because

my surroundings here is so different to the other class people. Like the people who go into their chosen field, like, freely because of their wealth, and I feel like their interests don't match my interests like, hobbies and socially. Like they won't have the same banter, or like the same background so it's hard to see myself there.

Ms Jones (Brownswood) says these class differences also put the girls off some extra-curricular activities. She organised a theatre trip for students but "most girls particularly are reticent to take up opportunities, they don't want it, they don't want to step outside of their world ... [that's] a different world, it's a middle-class world". To address this, Mr Field teaches the students to

adapt yourself to the environment that you are currently in, rather than expecting the environment to adapt to you. That's a big challenge for some of our young people, they don't see why they should change for anybody cos it's a badge of their identity, but actually if they're gonna get on well in the world they have to realise that they have to play the game.

'Getting on well' means being socially mobile and becoming middle class. He gives an example of how the school tries to change how students speak:

'Basically', 'I'm not gonna lie', 'I swear that', and that whole kinda language that just belies a certain immaturity in approach, that potentially, if we don't focus on it with them ... they then go into an interview situation and they just don't come across well compared to their peers who might be coming from an environment where they've had that more formal – and sometimes you get some pushback, 'allow it, what's wrong with my language?' But it's like well there's nothing wrong with it in the right setting.

The 'right' setting is classed: he means when students are around friends and family, not in an education or workplace setting, which he expects to be a more middle-class environment. He compares himself to them, saying when "I go back home to [where his parents live] there are things I slip into ... there's a recognition of the time and place that I would use it and where I wouldn't", and implying that he too had working-class roots but has learnt how to behave in middle-class ways. Mr Field's concern with the students behaving in the 'right' ways reflect his views on the relative values of working-class and middle-class cultures, but they stem from a desire to help Brownswood's students be socially mobile so they can have 'successful' futures.

However, this means the girls are expected (and expect) to have different futures to their families' lives. Mr Hutley (Park School) uses the language of social mobility to describe how students are

very often facing an uphill battle based upon their own social background, and the circumstances they've grown up in, and we want to try and equip them with the opportunity to you know be better than the generation before them ... just like you know any good parent wants to I s'pose.

For Olivia, having a better life than her mum is about "upgrading" herself, and is a good thing (see p.119). This is also evident in Ayo's and Shannon's experiences of self-transformation, in keeping with good girl and successful girl behaviour. When Ayo moved to Brownswood she "changed entirely" from "one of those kinda girls that were loud and would try and cause trouble, and I didn't wanna be that kind of person any more". Instead she wanted to be successful, like others in her family, so she became quiet and reserved, and started doing more social action. Shannon, too, transformed herself into someone that could be successful, partly through the primary school volunteering. Before GCSEs Brownswood almost excluded her

because she was “naughty” with poor attendance. When her Grandad died, to whom she was close, she decided to “turn it around” to “make him proud”. For all three, their families prompted this self-transformation – Olivia was inspired by her mum; Ayo by her wider family; Shannon by her Grandad.

However, this can make the girls feel distanced from their families. It produces a sense of alienation that can complicate their relationships. Ayo doesn’t see her extended family because “They kind of like find it hard to like understand ... they didn’t do A Levels and stuff they like, all dropped out. So they don’t like, know how stressful it is.” Sophie describes her family as “just not like me” because they didn’t go to university. Her mum, Anne-Marie, says the differences between them are reflected even in how they speak – “I talk like this and she speaks nice ... she says to me ‘you sound really common’, ‘no it’s Cockney that’s how I talk’ ... She talks it at me and I just look at her ... it just goes over my head but it sounds fantastic”. A key marker of Sophie’s success will be how different her life looks to her mum’s. Anne-Marie says Sophie will say, “‘I ain’t gonna be like you’. Good! I don’t want you to be y’know? Do good things, get good job. Be in a nice home. Not one of these old shit ones.”

Gender makes it especially difficult for the girls to be themselves because of expectations about how they should look, across racial backgrounds. Ali describes how, especially on social media, there is “this unrealistic image that girls are supposed to have a body shape that is impossible, but I think a lot of girls feel like they have to look like that or they won’t fit into society or make friends.” She finds this frustrating because “it’s mainly like men who have created this image of how

we're supposed to look that is impossible to like be like." When I ask what she thinks can be done, she suggests more education at school "where they tell us that it's okay like to be who we are". Maryam also thinks there is "a lot of pressure on girls to look a certain way, to act a certain way"; she's experienced pressure based on her weight. She also thinks girls worry more than boys about "being accepted and having to fit in ... being good enough". Sophie also thinks the biggest pressures girls face are "to look a certain way, to behave in a certain way, probably to think in a certain way". Ayo feels this pressure, and says it is a result of patriarchal norms, and that boys don't have the same problem because "females are policed by males ... whatever a male says a female will do". Olivia has similar views but thinks girls are partly to blame (see p.122).

Authenticity is particularly important to some girls who are racially minoritised. Karen says, "people do discriminate [against] others and they don't see them for who they are but for their race or skin colour or religion". She says she's experienced this, but "I didn't let that get to me, like, I don't know I just didn't care what they said because I know who I am and I just don't really let that affect me in any way". Esther challenges racism because "that's how I am, I don't like people talking down to me, and thinking I can't do something, when really and truly I know I can". Her mum is her role model – she's "a very opinionated person like me. If she has something to say she'll say it, and I think I've got that from her".

Feeling unable to be yourself and uncomfortable in certain spaces is something Alesha feels acutely as a Muslim in Britain. "I guess you feel more comfortable with

the place where the culture's the same. I mean here we have a British culture so you can't always feel comfortable". This means her friends are mainly Muslims, too:

If like you're from a different religious background, cos, this is just a White dominated country like it's just for White people to be honest, so, it's like you're seen as different and then you kind of have to form like a circle with the people that are like the same as you.

Ali also describes how it is difficult to be a British female Muslim:

I feel like there's like two sides of me, because I'm British but I'm also a Muslim. There's like some things that I want to do but I'm stopped from doing because of my religion, for example like following some fashion trends, I can't do that because the clothes might be like revealing or like too short or something like that, so sometimes I feel like my two sides conflict with each other and it's sometimes hard to live like that.

When I ask if there is a way things could be easier for her, she says, after a pause, "If I picked one side and lived that way ... [but] I don't think it's possible because I am British, I was born here, I'm part of this society but also I wanna follow my religion as well." After three terror attacks claimed by Islamic State in the UK in 2017, she felt victimised as a Muslim in central London.

Gabriela feels similarly about her "mixed" identity, but for different reasons. She says it "puts you in a place where you're not really sure like what you really are, cos you're heavily influenced by the Latin culture, but then again, the British culture's what you're surrounded with constantly." Gabriela finds it especially hard to be herself in Britain because of how she is treated:

it's just really challenging cos people don't really like it if people speak other languages around them, so, when I'm like outside sometimes when I'm chatting with my mum people sometimes like (imitates sideways glance) ... they can't really accept the fact that there are people of different cultures.

Gabriela also finds the patriarchal norms, which she sees as inherent in Latin and British cultures, difficult. Whenever she tries to challenge these norms she is shunned by her family – either not being spoken to or being silenced. Because of her age, gender, and race, she says it's difficult to

see everything happening around you, like you see this inequality and you have no power cos like you're a girl, you're a little child, people wouldn't take you seriously. And even if you did speak out and everything they'll just say oh you're a know-it-all or you're a big mouth or, some sort of like term to degrade you and make you feel a bit bad.

Gabriela describes trying to broach these issues with her auntie once, but her auntie thought Gabriela was “attacking her way of life”, and called her a know-it-all. Gabriela says such experiences “kinda take away confidence in being able to speak to other women, and it's just small things like that that really get to you and eventually like you just don't have the confidence to speak to anyone.” So, Gabriela now keeps those opinions to herself. She also feels that one of the hardest things about Latin culture is

to kind of be okay with that and like understand that it's how people grew up and they can't really change it? But also trying to adapt, knowing that you don't act disrespectful but you also like don't kind of stand down and just y'know do whatever they tell you to do?

Gabriela's ability to be herself is important to her but is also difficult because it challenges her family's views and norms about how Latin American girls should behave.

The girls' views on the importance of being themselves and the challenges they experience in trying to do so are compounded by the pressures of the successful girl and the good girl discourses; being themselves can clash with being successful and with being good. This has implications for the social action they do, discussed next.

8.2 Feeling (in)authentic: enabling and constraining social action

That it is not always easy for the girls to be themselves affects their social action, which is easier when the girls feel comfortable being themselves, and harder when they feel uncomfortable.

One way the girls can be themselves through social action is by expressing their views and speaking out about issues that are important to them. This connects to the alternative kind of care *about* an issue discussed above (p.73). This is harder for some and in certain spaces. Organising a petition against Mr Field changing the layout of Brownswood's sixth-form study room is an example of how Alexa expresses herself through social action. This was possible because she feels comfortable doing petitions: she's "strong on petitions", having helped her mum with one when she was little: "something did get done. And that kind of made me think okay well petitions are effective". Although Mr Field rejected the petition and kept the layout, this didn't make Alexa feel petitions are ineffective. Her earlier experiences had made her feel capable of effecting change and showed Alexa a means of expressing herself, despite pressure related to the good girl to be docile.

Alexa's experience of NCS contrasts with this. Her group supported a women's refuge through fundraising, and domestic violence is "a subject that I feel strongly on, like no-one talks about it, but I know people who have been through it". But she didn't feel able to talk about it with a girl in the NCS group who was experiencing domestic violence, and didn't continue volunteering at the refuge after NCS finished because "I didn't know like what else I could do?". Although Alexa cares about

domestic violence, the social action experience offered by NCS did not help her understand it better, nor to see how she could help survivors. It did not offer Alexa space to express her views beyond a superficial engagement with the cause. This could be because she didn't have the positive influence of her mum (like she did on the petition), because it was a one-off – not something she had learnt about or engaged with over time – or because she couldn't see how what she was doing could help. These latter two are about how NCS is designed and the limited opportunities it provides to help participants understand and challenge the inequalities at the root of causes. It shows that even when there is an opportunity for Alexa to take action on a cause she cares about – and this is not the case for many girls when they do NCS, who aren't always interested in the cause – she is let down by the limited opportunities the programme offers to help her take further action.

Maryam expresses her views and her religious identity through some of her faith-based social action, which takes place at home. During Ramadan she and her family donate Sadaqat to causes abroad through a TV show (a bit like Children in Need, she says), aligning with her views about which causes deserve charity:

I personally don't really give charity to like, UK British charities because like I think that the British government – and maybe like cos there's a lot more volunteering here, there's a lot of help here, and so I give money abroad more to places where like governments are corrupt and they don't have like the volunteers and like the support that they maybe need.

This is despite donating to Children in Need at school, even though she hates watching it. This connects to the docility expected of the good girl, where the schools select the cause. Unlike the Ramadan show, where presenters “talk about their own stories, so like they go off to like build schools, they do active like charity work which

I think is quite inspiring”, she feels that in Children in Need there is an inauthenticity to the presenters and to how people give:

When people stand there and tell you to like, pay in and call in, but they’re just like presenting for the night, I’ve always seen it as like you should be doing more apart from just like presenting it ... Or that the fact that people think of Children in Need like on that one day, like apart from that it’s completely irrelevant, like pay like money on that day it’ll mean something then and then you’ll feel good about yourself.

While Maryam feels able to express these views at home, because she is a Muslim girl it can be difficult for her to express her views through social action in other contexts. Maryam and her mum are both afraid of Islamophobia, but Maryam says “I don’t think there’s much you can do. Well, apart from try and educate people which is what I try and do like on social media (laughs) me and my friend used to get into a lot of fights trying to like educate people ... arguments with older men!”. She laughs about it but admits that it scared her, because these men often had a lot of followers who then started trolling her. She says that it made her more articulate because she had to construct clear, sophisticated arguments, but ultimately “there’s just too many of them”, so she gave up.

Similarly, she finds it difficult not having support from others when expressing her views, mentioning a girl at school who was “closed minded” about Islam and saying things that Maryam found offensive, so Maryam challenged her. But Maryam was annoyed that “there was a lot of Muslims hearing it and they didn’t really say anything. They don’t speak up and me and my friend we were just like why do you just let her say these things like, speak up against it”. For Maryam, being Muslim is an expression of who she is, with defending Islam an extension of that. While online social action was an opportunity for Maryam to express herself, the pressure of

racism and possibly also sexism – she spoke only of men trolling her – made it too difficult to continue. The way she speaks about both experiences suggests Maryam would have felt more comfortable expressing her views if she had more support from others.

Ali makes a similar point about how others make her feel when she expresses her views. In an essay for the IB, Ali describes wearing the headscarf as both “a visual representative of my beliefs and identity” and a fashion statement. She writes that

some conformists who follow the book word-for-word would say that I am wrong to say that I use the headscarf to some degree as an accessory because it should be to guard my modesty and act as a barrier to protect my beauty from men ...[but] the rules that I am expected to follow, I am going against them and nothing is restricting me from expressing myself and using the headscarf for fashion.

Challenging rules by resisting expectations and being herself is difficult because she risks attracting criticism, but she does it nonetheless.

Sophie’s experiences of expressing herself by speaking out are easier than Maryam’s and Ali’s. At work (at the corner shop) Sophie once helped an elderly lady home with her shopping because it “upsets me, it winds me up” that she would otherwise struggle alone, and although told not to by her boss, she did it anyway (and didn’t lose her job). A similar moment occurred when she worked at the hairdressers. Because she feels strongly about animal rights, when a client came in wearing a Canada Goose coat she refused to put it in the cupboard, even though that was her job:

I went ‘I’m not touching that’. He was like ‘what do you mean?’ I was like ‘you know like five coyotes have been slaughtered for your one coat? ... my morals won’t let me touch that so I’m not gonna touch it’. And my boss

couldn't say anything cos I felt very strongly, she was just like 'if that's how you feel don't touch that coat'. So I opened the cupboard, he put it in, then I shut the cupboard.

Another time, Sophie hit a man on the street: "He slapped his dog ... so I slapped him back and he said, 'what you doing?' I was like, 'you don't like being hit your dog don't like being hit, simple.'" He apologised, and she's not seen him hit his dog since. Expressing herself may be easier for Sophie than for Maryam or Ali because the causes Sophie supports – helping elderly people, supporting animal rights – are considered more socially 'acceptable' than Maryam's campaigning against Islamophobia or Ali's reasons for wearing the headscarf. It is also less risky for Sophie to express her views because Sophie is White, while Maryam is Black and Ali is Asian.

Eburne also supports Sophie to express herself through some of the social action it offers in a way that isn't necessarily available to racially-minoritised girls. During my fieldwork, Eburne students established a pop-up museum on the history of the school and the local community. At the launch, the Headteacher talked about the school's founder and how Eburne's students gained a sense of identity through the project. But this particular identity is not necessarily shared by all Eburne's students, given the founder's links to colonialism. Sophie says she was part of the project because she loves history and her family has lived in the area for generations. Although there were racially-minoritised students involved too, this social action enables Sophie to express herself in a way that might not be possible for those from different backgrounds. This is evident in the way Alesha and Ali talk about being a Muslim girl in Britain.

Shannon also finds it easier to be herself. Her care work, volunteering, and plans to become a teacher are an expression of self, and Brownswood supported her through special arrangement by allowing her to volunteer at the primary school when she didn't have lessons. Shannon's being herself does not challenge expectations because it meets expectations of White femininity. Just as it is easier for Sophie to express herself than it is for Maryam and Ali, so is it easier for Shannon. The expectation of girls to be good and successful align here to mean that Shannon is supported to be herself in various contexts – at home, when she's out with friends, at school, in a social action context – and therefore she does not experience barriers like those girls who are racially minoritised.

Religious identity also affects how comfortable the girls feel being themselves in different environments. Like Maryam, this is about feeling in the minority and not being supported by others. Esther feels comfortable at church because others from her "home country" are there, and most of Esther's social action has been church-based: being on the church secretariat, fundraising for church or religious causes, and once leading part of the church service. When I go to church with Esther, I sit in on a Bible study youth class led by an Elder. They are reading a passage about what Christians are allowed to do, and one boy comments that if there were a similar debate today it would be about the issues young people face. Another described how being a Christian youth today goes against what's popular, and several others agreed. Esther and some of the girls said they find this hard and that other people don't understand. Afterwards, Esther elaborates that it can be difficult having such a strong religious identity around friends who aren't the same denomination, or even Christian. As she's got older and her friends outside church started socialising or

having parties, “it’s just really hard to balance social life with church life. There’s a lot of pressure on us”.

This also comes across in the way that gaining experience for her UCAS form (in the service of the successful girl) can clash with practising her religion. The ambassador role Esther takes at her new school (see p.162) clashes with church – it requires her to help at an open day one weekend, and since “if we don’t do that day we can’t do [the role] at all”, she has to miss church. It’s a special youth programme that day and so “I’ll feel really sad not going cos like, it will be nice to see everyone, and ... when you do go to these youth stuff there’s a lot of music, and I feel like that’s what brings me closer to God”.

These examples show how important but also how difficult authenticity can be. This may be why most of Esther’s social action has been church-based, because it is an expression of who she is and where she feels most comfortable. Just as volunteering at church is possible for Esther because she can be herself there, feeling uncomfortable elsewhere influenced her decision not to do other kinds of social action, such as NCS. NCS involves sharing a room with others on the residential, which put Esther off. She says she wouldn’t like not knowing anyone or having to share a room with strangers: “It’s not me”.

Feeling uncomfortable can also lead to the girls quitting social action as well as not getting involved in the first place. Ali quit Volunteer Police Cadets (VPC) because others made her feel she didn’t fit in and wasn’t being herself. In our first interview Ali says she quit VPC because “it wasn’t my thing” – particularly the “physical parts to it like we had to go camping and stay there and do like rock climbing and like

improving our physical abilities”. But in a later interview, she says she actually quit “because people thought like whenever I would mention to someone that I’m a Police Cadet they’ll be like ‘wow, you like you’re so small and you’re a girl why would you wanna be a Police Cadet?’” Although for a while she was defiant – “so what if I’m small, I wanna try something get new experiences” – eventually “I started believing that I wouldn’t make a good like Police Cadet so I should just quit.” She heard about St John Ambulance Cadets in an assembly soon after and signed up for that instead because “it’s helping me gain skills that would be useful to me when I become a nurse” and because “I fit in more” than at VPC.

This wasn’t only about her gender – other girls “much taller than me” stayed in the VPC – but was others’ reactions to her gender and body that made her feel uncomfortable. She asserts control over the situation by removing herself from it, but it negatively affects how she feels about herself. Thus norms around gender and body shape make it difficult for Ali to imagine herself as a police officer but easier for her to see herself as a nurse, reinforcing stereotypes around traditionally feminine, caring roles (see p.154). This in turn influences her social action, changing how she thinks of herself to feel more authentic and therefore fit in better, because she lacks support from others.

Some social action programmes in which the girls are involved claim to be designed to help young people ‘be themselves’. Charlotte Cook at Overstone says the enrichment (including social action) Overstone schools do is designed to “build [young people’s] sense of self”. Claire Hill at Headstart says they bring together young people from different backgrounds on social action projects to “make you

question you know who you are and who someone else is". Alan James at NCS says NCS is about challenging young people's definitions of themselves and others. But he also says it encourages participants to "think beyond their experiences" when it comes to the social action element. He says, "often their first thing they want to do for example would be, 'oh we wanna change people's perceptions of what young people are like' ... they wanna do social action which challenges other people to, sort of like them more". He says this is particularly the case for young people who "are blamed for more things, so I think young Black kids are more likely to talk about that, or, White working-class boys, sometimes that they see themselves as things are a bit unfair to them, often rightly so".

Yet Alan says NCS discourages young people from taking action on this because it reflects an "insular way of looking at things". This could just be Alan's experience, but the social action young people do on NCS is usually determined for them, or at least their choices are limited (see p.182). Alan says that although they don't want to offer social action projects where there is no flexibility – "dig this garden, do this campaign, paint this room this colour ... that wouldn't work for us" – there is a limit to how far social action projects can be determined by young people themselves, since they only have a few days allocated to it. It suggests that young people may want to take action expressing who they are, but are discouraged from doing so (if they get a choice in the first place). NCS could be a way for girls like Maryam and Ali to get the support they are missing from peers when they do social action, but it does not currently provide the opportunity for this.

Other kinds of social action do offer this opportunity, however. Park School's feminist group (see p.131) was designed to encourage the girls to feel comfortable and express themselves. It was established by Ms Heinl after hearing that the boys were sexually harassing the girls: Sasha described feeling "treated like a piece of meat". When Ms Heinl reported it, the school surveyed the girls and found that the problem was endemic. The school's response was to establish the feminist group, and while Ms Heinl felt that "obviously the problem was not with the girls, the problem was with the boys", she also wanted to create a space where the girls could feel safe and could talk about issues like those uncovered in the survey. She set up the group as an enrichment option to "get [the girls] feeling like they had a say in what was happening around the school" – not something that happens otherwise at Park School, as Mr Hutley's comment above indicates (p.179). Feminist groups can be considered a form of social action (see p.22); indeed, the group was the only social action-related enrichment option at Park School. It was a space to discuss abusive relationships, the gender pay gap, catcalling and sexual harassment, and what feminism is. The group also discussed intersectionality, attending a debate on it at Cambridge University. The debate made a strong impression on Sasha and Alesha, both of whom brought it up without prompting, with Sasha saying she felt that "this is just like, blowing my mind. Like, I thought like feminism was like one straight line, it's really not", and Alesha, though she says she didn't understand fully, saying she hadn't previously considered that feminism could be anything other than "just a movement to just get equality for women" – that there might be "feminism for White, feminism for Black, feminism for disabled".

Ms Heinl shared the resources she created for the group with other teachers and hoped eventually to work with the whole school, including the boys, but she left at the end of that school year before she could do so. Her multiple attempts to encourage boys to attend the group, by asking tutors to invite their forms and making announcements in assembly, were met with derision from the boys – “as soon as I stood up I knew that we weren’t getting anyone ... it was the smirks, it was the exchanged looks”. Alesha says boys don’t want to attend because they think it’s a space where girls say “men are trash”. Eventually Ms Heinl invited three boys in her form whom she thought would be open to coming, and they went to a session on domestic abuse, which Ms Heinl said was “really great because, they had a lot to say, and I think the girls appreciated them being there as well to kinda get their views heard”. Their presence also gave Ms Heinl the opportunity to discuss negative stereotypes around masculinity. But the general reaction of the boys and the fact that the group was only ever optional for them (whereas the girls were all automatically signed up) suggests that addressing sexism was predominantly considered the girls’ (and the female teacher’s) responsibility.

Once Ms Heinl left Park School, the feminist group lost its original, activist purpose. Sasha had already left school halfway through Year 12, which Ms Heinl suspects was because she was still subject to sexual harassment. Alesha stopped going after Ms Heinl left. Gabriela – who feels strongly about feminism (see p.206) – was new to the school that year and hadn’t been around when Ms Heinl ran it. She says the group functioned as a “support group” to which boys were not invited – “cos this is a boys’ school so it allows the girls to come together and you know stick together” through activities like going out for breakfast, making bubble tea, playing basketball, and

organising a winter ball. While Gabriela's comments suggest that the group helped the girls feel supported, it no longer offered any opportunity for social action. This shows the importance of institutional support for this kind of social action and as such how fragile these spaces can be, especially in hostile environments. As Alesha's comments about sexism at the school six months after Ms Heintz left indicate – "You're surrounded by males, a lot of them are just very sexist" – the loss of the group's feminist content meant it may not have made Park School a more comfortable place for the girls to be, as originally intended.

Thus far this chapter has shown the importance of authenticity to these girls, and how feeling authentic can enable social action, where feeling inauthentic constrains it. At the same time, social action can enable feelings of authenticity when it takes place in a supportive environment. In the final section, I show how this contributes to what I identify as a discourse of the authentic girl, and the relevance to the girls' social action.

8.3 The authentic girl discourse: self-transformation and self-expression through social action

In Chapter 3.2 I described the importance of authenticity to girlhoods and considered whether a discourse of the authentic girl could be identified, just as the successful girl and the good girl operate as recognised girlhoods discourses.

Identifying the authentic girl discourse

My findings point to a discourse of the authentic girl. It shapes how the girls see themselves and others and is taken up by the girls through their feelings about 'being themselves'. Two, cross-cutting points are particularly pertinent to how this discourse

influences the girls' social action, shaped by gender, class, and race. These points relate to the successful girl and the good girl, building on Chapters 6 and 7. The first is that the self requires work, and social action can be a means of doing that work – a 'technology of the self' (Foucault, 1988). This work is directed at self-improvement in the service of the successful girl. Though not the same as hope labour (see p.166), the way it materialises is closely connected. Such social action aims to make a different self that meets expectations of success and is bound up in the problematic, individualised notions of 'choice' related to the successful girl (see literature, p.66).

But not all the girls' social action is about meeting expectations. For some, authenticity means expressing yourself even when that self-expression challenges expectations. This is the second component of the authentic girl, connected to the docility expected of the good girl. It offers a more positive concept of authenticity whereby the girls express agency and challenge the more repressive power relations inherent in the successful and good girl discourses. By 'agency', I mean what Ringrose calls 'micro ruptures to dominant and normative discourses' (Ringrose, 2012, p. 62). I explore such 'micro ruptures' in the form of speaking out, or micropolitics (borrowing Budgeon's [2001] term – see p.21), as self-expression. When speaking out challenges expectations of girls it is an example of how the girls create and express resistant identities. I argue that both micropolitics and resistant identities should be recognised as social action.

Social action as a technology of the self

Connected to the discussion in Chapter 6.3 about young people's responsibilities for their futures is the idea that young people are required to 'make themselves'. Kelly

characterises this as ‘self as enterprise’, whereby the individual ‘has to be *made up* – encouraged, incited, directed, educated, trained ... as the active, autonomous, responsible entrepreneur of her or his own DIY project of the self’ (Kelly, 2017, p. 67). This is particularly the case for girls, construed as ‘self-making, resilient, and flexible’, because of the ‘new possibilities for young women’ afforded by changes to women’s role in the economy and the ways neoliberal ideologies ‘dovetail with some broad feminist notions about opportunities for young women’ (Harris, 2004, p. 5). The means by which the self is made are what Foucault termed ‘technologies of the self’: techniques that

permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality.
(Foucault, 1988, p. 19)

This connects to ideas in the literature that self-transformation can be an outcome of participation (see p.39), and to arguments that volunteering is a technology of the self when performed as a means of self-improvement (Dean, 2020; Judge, 2017; Yap, Byrne and Davidson, 2010). Social action in the service of the successful girl – as hope labour – is an example of a technology of the self. All the girls are engaged in a process of self-making in the pursuit of future success, and social action is part of this.

For some, such as Olivia, Ayo, and Shannon, this self-making involves self-transformation. My findings chime with those of Skourtes’ (2015, p. 107) study with working-class girls: she identified a ‘recurring claim that they are now different and better than before. Everyone had a redemptive tale to tell and had supplanted what

was thought of as a fallen past with an imagined new self that they were attempting to be'. As Skourtes also found, this process can entail a loss. For the girls in my study, a successful future is often different from their parents' lives. The 'hidden injuries' (Sennett and Cobb, 1972) of social mobility (see p.77) are evident in some of the girls' stories of self-making, affecting their relationships. But, as in Skourtes' study, many of the girls in my study have found ways to manage the potential losses associated with their self-making – such as planning to live at home rather than move out for university. Here a demonstration of agency among the girls can be identified, though one constrained by expectations of the good girl, since continuing to live at home enables them to continue performing the role of the good girl as much as it enables them to feel authentic. This chimes with research cited above (p.64) identifying the class- and gender-based inequalities underlying working-class girls' decisions to live at home for university (Evans, 2009).

Micropolitics and resistant identities

Agency can also be identified in how the girls express themselves: the second aspect of the authentic girl discourse. 'Being yourself' can be difficult because of norms and expectations about accepted ways of being, and girls struggle with this (see p.75). When expressing themselves challenges dominant expectations of girlhoods, this is what Budgeon (2001) calls practising a 'resistant identity'. Budgeon (2001, p. 20) argues that 'many of the choices that young women negotiate in daily life involve a struggle to assert a self-definition that runs counter to the ways in which they are positioned by competing discourses'. She views resistant identities as a form of micropolitics (see p.21). This complements Guignon's definition of authenticity as feeling able to express oneself through voicing opinions about issues

or taking action on them (Guignon, 2004, p. 84). In this way many of the girls in my study express authenticity, and this can counter expectations of docility.

I consider the practice of micropolitics and resistant identities as social action, just as there have been calls to recognise ‘everyday activism’ and ‘everyday feminism’. Hill Collins (2000, p. 203) calls for a revaluation of everyday activities as activism, citing how a Black mother who ‘on a daily basis contests school policies harmful to her children may be more an “activist” than the most highly educated Black feminist who, while she can manipulate feminist, nationalist, postmodern, and other ideologies, produces no tangible political changes in anyone’s life but her own.’ Similarly, ‘everyday feminism’ challenges gender inequality through actions such as ‘drawing attention to sexism in everyday encounters, making feminist statements with fashion and consumer choices, [and] using social media to raise awareness for feminist issues’ (Schuster, 2017, pp. 648-649).

For the girls in my study, their self-expression takes the form of everyday actions like ‘speaking my mind’ (Archer, Halsall and Hollingworth, 2007) – actions identified in the girlhoods literature that are less visible and less spectacular than traditional campaigning and protests (see p.21). These are not activities associated with either the good girl or the successful girl and indeed can explicitly contradict expectations to be docile, as Archer, Halsall and Hollingworth (2007) found. They are not actions that contribute to the running of the household and the economy as care work does, nor actions that the girls put on UCAS forms or CVs. There are limited opportunities for the girls to express themselves through programmes such as NCS, for instance, reinforcing findings from the literature on the limitations of social action that doesn’t

challenge inequalities (see p.43). But micropolitics are not equally as easily practised for all girls, nor always experienced as positive: it is easier for the White British girls in my study to express themselves than it is for the racially-minoritised girls (see p.211).

These examples highlight the tensions between being authentic and being good, as research on girls' digital social action finds (Ringrose, Keller and Mendes, 2019, p. 167). Olivia provides perhaps the strongest example of the challenges some girls face in negotiating competing discourses. In her experience of racist sexual harassment on NCS (p.183) we are reminded of this quotation from Ahmed (2017, p. 26):

Being girl is a way of being taught what it is to have a body: you are being told; you will receive my advances; you are object; thing, nothing. To become girl is to learn to expect such advances, to modify your behavior in accordance; to become girl as becoming wary of being in public space; becoming wary of being at all. Indeed, if you do not modify your behavior in accordance, if you are not careful and cautious, you can be made responsible for the violence directed toward you.

Olivia's modification of her behaviour is an enactment of the docility of the good girl, yet it contrasts sharply with Olivia's view of herself as 'strong', her assessment of other girls as 'weak', and her opinion that girls' dress can 'mislead men to behave a certain way with you' (p.122). Olivia's ability to assert herself is constrained by expectations of the good girl, so that the authentic expression she cultivates in some contexts of her life – those in which she feels more comfortable, like school – proves inaccessible in other contexts. These experiences show not only how performing a resistant identity is constrained by the intersections of racism and sexism, but also the challenges of negotiating competing discourses.

8.4 Chapter conclusions

This chapter shows how important it is to these girls to be themselves, but also how difficult that is, especially those who are racially minoritised. In being made to feel uncomfortable about being themselves by others, through racism, classism, and sexism, they want to express themselves authentically but often feel unable to do so. The authentic girl discourse is of similar importance to the girls' lives and their social action as the successful girl and the good girl, but whereas those discourses are reinforced by schools and families, this is not the case for the authentic girl discourse, which mainly stems from the girls themselves.

Girls' social action sometimes reinforces and sometimes resists all three discourses. Some social action is directly motivated by issues about which the girls care, but this contrasts with expectations in the successful and good girl discourses that encourage the girls to do the social action they are told to do, with limited choice. This highlights how expectations associated with these discourses can be antagonistic and that it can be difficult for the girls to achieve all three – especially those who are racially minoritised.

As discussed above (p.57), discourses are important in a discussion of power. We can see girlhoods discourses operating as 'relations of power that are regulative and work to govern subjectivities, with particular implications for young femininities' (Ringrose, 2012, p. 10). To understand how these power relations work through these discourses and those implications, in my penultimate chapter I return to the domains of power framework introduced in Chapter 3.

CHAPTER 9: HOW POWER AND INEQUALITIES SHAPE WORKING-CLASS GIRLS' SOCIAL ACTION

This thesis is based on the premise that working-class girls' lives and their social action are shaped by inequalities. Earlier chapters show how the girls in my study experience inequalities related to sexism, classism, and racism in the antecedents, experiences, and consequences of their participation. These manifest in how certain social action opportunities are framed and the limitations of what social action can do for them; what kind of social action is expected of them and by whom; and in their ability to transform and to express themselves through social action. These inequalities operate through discourses especially relevant to girls' social action – of the successful girl, the good girl, and the authentic girl. An intersectional girlhoods approach shows that understanding how power operates is fundamental to understanding these inequalities, because inequalities are reproduced by unequal power relations. Drawing on findings from across Chapters 5-8, the domains of power framework (Hill Collins, 2000) can show how this works. Here I apply this framework to my findings in response to my third research question: 'How do power and inequalities shape working-class girls' participation in social action?' As well as reproducing inequalities there is space for resistance within each domain (Hill Collins, 2000). I also show how this approach relates to the literature discussed in earlier chapters.

Four separate domains of power can be identified, but they overlap (Hill Collins and Bilge, 2016, p. 27). Points made in relation to the interpersonal domain, for instance, are also connected to the structural domain. I group the points made in this chapter into one domain or another based on Hill Collins' explanations of each domain, but in

reality there is no 'neat' way of doing this – a reflection, too, of the complexity of intersectionality and of individual lives.

9.1 Interpersonal domain of power

The interpersonal domain is about how power operates in the way people relate to and treat one another and in how we perform our individual identities. The girls' relationships with their mums are particularly important in shaping the antecedents of the girls' social action in the form of care work, since the desire to help their mums drives much of that work. It is also an example of the power that the girls' mums exercise over them, particularly since for many it is not an option for the girls to say no to their mums when asked to help. As they get older and see the pressures on their mums, this translates into a responsibility to help without being asked. This is connected to the structural domain of power because it is shaped by how the state and the labour market operate. The types of work in which these girls' mums are employed – influenced by how racism, sexism, and classism make some forms of employment more or less accessible – are overwhelmingly low-paid and in industries that require unsociable hours (p.195). This gives them less time to care for the girls' siblings and likely makes paid childcare unaffordable even if it were preferred (and it may not be). For girls from immigrant families, the type of care work they do is also shaped by the inequalities their families experience. In London, English is not the main language for 22.1% of people (Office for National Statistics, 2013). Language brokering is made necessary by the inaccessibility of society to those who don't speak English as a first language.

The girls' care work is also connected to power relations in that for most of the girls, gender norms – reinforced by their families – limit where they spend time to either home or school. This includes what the girls are and are not allowed to do, such as Karen being allowed out to volunteer but not to buy milk (p.130). The girls, however, can stretch their family's rules to negotiate more freedom for themselves, with social action positioned as necessary for future success by the girls themselves in persuading their parents to let them do certain activities, like Ali doing St John Ambulance because she wants to be a nurse (p.162). It also includes the conditions they need to meet to be allowed to spend their time in certain ways, such as Alesha needing to do chores before she can study at the weekend (p.188). Furthermore, it includes the rules which govern how the family operates, connected to the disciplinary domain, which are gendered, racialised, and classed: this means it is the girls (not their brothers) who take responsibility for the care work that keeps the household running and enables their parents, usually their mums, to undertake paid employment.

This results in the girls doing a significant amount of care work at home. The time spent on care work makes it more difficult for the girls to balance finding time to relax or see friends with the other expectations of them associated with the successful girl – to have a part-time job, do well at school, and do the kinds of social action that are recognised as valuable by schools, universities, and employers and promoted through the #iwill campaign and youth social action programmes. In general, this doesn't mean the girls are unable to find time for these other kinds of social action, because their schools generally create space for it. But it does mean that the girls' 'downtime' is curtailed, and that they feel anxiety and pressure about meeting all

these expectations and about the consequences of their participation in terms of how what they do now will affect their futures. This provides greater insight into how lack of time can be a barrier to working-class girls' involvement in social action and reinforces ideas about how time is unequally distributed (see literature, p.33).

Power relations affect this anxiety. The girls' relationships with their teachers, based on unequal power relations between them, mean that several girls feel unable to say no when they are asked to do social action by a teacher, as the teachers acknowledge and sometimes manipulate (such as Mr Hutley asking students to tutor, p.179). Sometimes this social action is stressful and difficult, such as Maryam's volunteering on the school trip to Lille (p.178). Even when it is enjoyable, it can still create pressure that is in tension with the other demands on the girls' time and expectations of them, causing anxiety. This is shaped by inequalities that mean many of these girls must work harder to become successful than their White, middle-class peers might (p.64, p.171) – something acknowledged by the schools, which aim to make it possible for all girls to achieve the same kind of success. It also means that the social action these girls are asked to do by those in positions of authority, though often presented as a choice, is in fact not optional.

In the interpersonal domain, power is also present in how the girls are treated when they do social action. Olivia feels unable to challenge the racist sexual harassment she experiences on NCS because the perpetrator is in a position of responsibility and because she feels unsafe; she doesn't go back (p.183). Ali quit Volunteer Police Cadets because she didn't meet others' expectations of who should be a police officer (p.214). Relationships with others thus shape the girls' experiences of social

action, but the girls are still able to assert some agency by taking themselves out of difficult situations. This shows how social action spaces are not exempt from the unequal power relations that affect these girls' wider lives.

The girls also assert agency by practising resistant identities (see p.222). Hill Collins and Bilge (2020, pp. 173-174) describe how creating their own identities is 'an important task for disenfranchised young people who consistently have to create meaningful identities in response to stereotypes that are imposed from above'. The resistant identities the girls create enable them to challenge such stereotypes, especially stereotypes of docility associated with the good girl. Through participating in social action that enables the girls to be themselves, they can challenge the racism, sexism, and classism they experience and expectations others have of them. But resistant identities are easier for the White British working-class girls than for the racially-minoritised girls in my study. Thus Sophie continues to challenge others on animal rights issues without experiencing the repercussions that Maryam does when she challenges others on Islamophobia (p.209). Unequal power relations associated with racism and sexism affect the social action these girls feel able to practise.

The relationships described in this section are embedded in the various contexts of these girls' lives. Schools are key institutions through which these relationships operate, with youth social action programmes – mostly facilitated through schools – also important. In the next section, I discuss how inequalities run through these institutions to shape the girls' social action.

9.2 Structural and disciplinary domains of power

The structural domain is about the role of institutions and how these can discriminate against particular groups. The disciplinary domain is about how these institutions are run. Because of this connection I bring both domains together in this section.

Schools

Most of the girls' social action takes place through schools, as is the case for most young people (p.3, p.35). Schools, like the societies in which they are situated, are gendered, classed, and racialised environments (Rashid, 2016; Reay, 2017). It is therefore unsurprising that the social action taking place through them is also subject to these inequalities. This challenges the rhetoric around schools making social action more accessible (see p.3) by showing how though they may address inequalities in some ways (such as through providing access) they can simultaneously reinforce inequalities in other ways. Schools exercise power over the girls' social action in three main ways: by filling and managing most of the girls' time, including 'free' time; by setting up or brokering certain types of social action activities; and by framing social action in relation to the girls' futures. This means much of the girls' participation depends on what their school makes possible.

Each school in my study takes a different approach to social action (see Chapter 5). At Brownswood, social action is limited to fundraising opportunities and, for Year 12, a small number of 'Enrichment' activities on Wednesday afternoons, geared towards improving the students' UCAS forms. At Park School, there are fewer social action opportunities and these are mainly linked to academic attainment (through tutoring) and school governance (the house captain roles); the social action promoted through

the feminist group offers something different, but isn't long-lasting. Eburne's investment in a volunteering manager with a youth work background provides the widest range of social action opportunities of all three schools, aimed at more than just boosting students' CVs, yet social action is still mandated through the curriculum for sixth formers taking the IB, and there is limited scope for the girls to express their views. But despite these differences, there are commonalities across the schools. Below, I argue that these stem from how government policy translates in the school context and from girlhoods discourses that reinforce ideals of girls as good and successful and make it difficult for girls to be themselves.

The girls are generally encouraged to be docile rather than express their own opinions, which I argue should be considered social action (see Chapter 8.3). Foucault argues that docility is managed through discipline, which can be organised through 'enclosure' (1995, p. 141), such as a school environment. The girls' social action is subject to a similar level of discipline as the rest of their time at school. This is evident in students not having a say in how Park School is run (p.179), the RRS Award at Eburne being more about student discipline than freedom (p.135), and in Alexa's petition about Brownswood's study room being ignored (p.208). Discipline also operates in the way schools are organised, which can affect the girls' social action. Foucault (1995, p. 149) identifies the timetable as a means of organising discipline. The girls' social action at all three schools is timetabled, with rules set about when and where social action takes place. This is also evident in the fact that much of this social action has a defined end point, and in the value placed on quantifying participation in hours or days.

The girls can negotiate some of these rules, such as Shannon at Brownswood arranging her own social action at the primary school (p.124, p.213), and Karen asking to volunteer at the hospital in school hours, despite the school rules stating otherwise (p.128). However, these experiences are limited to activities designed to help the girls in future, gearing their participation towards social action that is associated with future success. Karen's and Shannon's examples are career-related; given how strict Park School is, and the limited social action activities available at Brownswood, social action not thought to serve the girls' future careers would likely not be permitted. This is because, in Foucault's terms, such social action is considered a correct use of the girls' time, and 'in the correct use of the body, which makes possible a correct use of time, nothing must remain idle or useless' (1995, p. 152).

Sometimes the school's management of social action enables the girls to participate when they wouldn't otherwise have been allowed because of their parents' rules, as the girls' activities at Eburne were designed to do (p.177). Schools can thus play a liberating role in providing the girls with experiences they might not otherwise have had. The schools help make social action accessible by encouraging the girls to consider participating in the first place, and in overcoming some of the practical barriers to involvement identified in the literature such as time, networks, and opportunities (p.32). In many cases this social action has been enjoyable and enabled them to gain potentially useful skills. However, most of the girls' participation through school is mandatory in some way (see p.186). This highlights the unequal power relations that exist between the girls and their teachers and schools and which can underlie 'being asked' to do social action, identified in the literature as positive

and as one of the key drivers for participation (p.33). While being asked might make it more likely that girls participate, who is doing the asking, who is being asked, and the potential implications of saying 'no', can create anxiety and exacerbate existing inequalities. It also has implications for the way girls feel about the social action, and means the activities are often done for the sake of doing them or because they are told to, not necessarily because the girls care deeply about the people or cause they are supporting.

This kind of social action also does not provide the girls with a critical understanding of the structural inequalities that lie behind the causes they support, reinforcing similar findings in the literature (see p.43). This is evident in how Brownswood's students helped fundraise for Grenfell Tower survivors but were not given the opportunity to engage with critical debates the fire prompted about racism and classism in the UK's social housing system – issues that affect the girls themselves, many of whom live in social housing (p.181). The girls care about racism, classism, and sexism, but the social action they do at school does not provide them with an opportunity to challenge these issues. When they do speak up, like Sophie does about the school dress code sexualising girls (p.135), they are not listened to, even at a school predicated on respecting children's rights (like Eburne). Not only do schools fail to challenge inequalities when they ignore girls' views about issues like this, but in their failure to address them they legitimate and reinforce these inequalities. The exception is Park School's feminist group (p.217), but it nonetheless made the girls, not the boys, responsible for challenging sexism at the school, and – being dependent on support from one teacher – it lacked sustainability.

The way schools offer and manage social action can also deny inequalities in wider society in their attempts to create a level playing field in the school context, which operates within a meritocratic framework. Brownswood's values, grounded in neoliberal ideas of individual responsibility and self-improvement (p.119) through hard work and social action, are part of a wider discourse of meritocracy promoted by government. This is echoed in Theresa May's 'great meritocracy' speech of 2016, and the figure she evokes of the 'ordinary working[-]class' citizen who works, pays taxes, raises a family, helps their communities, and doesn't complain (9 September 2016). It is also evident in the emphasis on character education in which character development is considered key to social mobility (p.119). However, the myth of meritocracy and the problems with this focus on individual responsibility are exposed by the power inequalities at play for these girls at school and once they leave. These problems are not the result of the girls (or their parents) limiting their own 'aspiration', but rather reflect the discrimination faced in the education system and labour market (p.64, p.171).

Some of the teachers/school staff in my study, on the other hand, suggest that these differences stem from how working-class parents bring up their children (see p.148, p.176), reflecting ideas about the 'poverty of aspiration' that have circulated since New Labour (Jowell, 2005). These ideas suggest that those from working-class backgrounds lack the aspiration to be socially mobile, making them less likely to 'succeed' than the middle classes. Moreover, the success that is promoted is a middle-class kind of success. As Reay (2020, p. 406) writes,

Now every child has to 'reach the sky' or 'aim for the stars'. It is no longer acceptable to want to work in a shop, be a building labourer or a care

worker. These are jobs you take on the way to fulfilling your dreams. ... The pernicious symbolic violence of social mobility is that the working classes are only classified as of value if they adopt middle class dispositions of neoliberal competitive individualism.

Participation in certain kinds of social action is positioned as a strategy to combat this poverty of aspiration and to achieve social mobility; what makes it hope labour is that it is not a guarantee of success, given that the playing field is, in reality, uneven. This rhetoric places responsibility on the individual for limiting their own success rather than with any structural factors that may affect them. It is also used to justify why working-class girls are expected to work harder to achieve success than their middle-class counterparts, and why certain working-class girls are perceived as being more in need of 'support' than others. This is evident in Park School expecting its students to work harder than a school with middle-class students (p.179) and Brownswood's cultural capital programme engaging students in traditionally White, middle-class practices (p.123).

This reflects wider arguments about the rhetoric of discipline at schools with predominantly working-class, racially-minoritised students, as Catherine's mum Sabine comments on at Eburne (p.151). Park School prioritises academic attainment and discipline, informing what kind of social action is supported (p.127). It subscribes to the idea that 'structure liberates' (Kulz, 2017) – that working-class students must be disciplined if they are to achieve (White, middle-class) success. This is linked to the docility expected of the 'good girl'. As Reay (2020, p. 409) finds among students at an academy school, 'these young people are being indoctrinated into the belief that they can transform their own lives if they are self-disciplined enough, obey all the rules, and strive long hours every day.' Thus social action becomes another way in

which girls are taught to transform their lives. This is an example of what Hill Collins (2017, p. 35) describes as a 'power-evasive framework that emphasizes changing the person rather than the institution', a point explicitly reflected in Mr Field's work to change students' ways of speaking and behaving (p.202).

Moreover, I argue that the way some of the teachers talk about class differences is code for race and class. This has been identified in previous research in London schools. Kulz (2014, pp. 691-692) argues that teachers find it easier to discuss class than race, with classism more 'acceptable' than racism: as such, 'acceptable class denigration becomes the back door by which race can be brought into the room without needing to announce its arrival'. All the teachers involved in my research are White, working in schools with very high proportions of racially-minoritised students (see Table 5). Their language around young people from 'privileged backgrounds' or with 'better-connected social environments' gives the appearance of being about class but masks the Whiteness inherent in ideals of middle-classness. This obscures the experiences of racially-minoritised girls, making the inequalities they face less visible.

Nonetheless, the schools are themselves constrained by a context in which they are held accountable for students' future success. Schools are judged (by government, by parents) on the destinations of students; ensuring students achieve certain results is therefore likely to be prioritised over supporting them to challenge unequal power relations through social action. For the gatekeepers at each school, their own experiences and views of social action are more sympathetic to the less instrumental outcomes of social action. Mr Field, a volunteer in his spare time, laments

Brownswood's "tokenistic" approach to social action (p.157); Mr Hutley, who recently ran the marathon for charity, thinks Park School doesn't offer a good enough range of social action opportunities (p.128); Ms Walsh wants to provide girls with a variety of experiences through social action, despite feeling she has to connect social action with employability to suit Eburne's approach (pp.136-139). Power relations operating on a level above – though mediated through – these staff members' relationships with the students constrain the kind of social action promoted and the ways they support it.

Youth social action programmes

Power is also present in how youth social action providers market and construct opportunities, making it more or less comfortable for some to participate than others. Some known practical barriers have been addressed by providers, such as running culturally-sensitive programmes – the Jewish Lads and Girls Brigade works with the Duke of Edinburgh's Award to run Kosher DofE programmes, for instance, and NCS runs female-only groups for those who don't feel comfortable being part of a mixed group or whose parents won't allow them to participate otherwise. These weren't available across all programmes, though, as Ali found when she was not allowed to go on the St John Ambulance residential; there was no other option for Ali to participate (p.162).

That the costs of participating in social action can be prohibitive for those from working-class backgrounds is also well-documented in the literature (p.32), but my findings show that even where these costs appear to be mitigated, this is not always done equitably: Maryam would have continued volunteering if she'd known (and felt

able to ask) that she could claim back travel expenses on Headstart; Gabriela got NCS at a reduced fee only because she asked (p.160). Measures in place to make it more affordable for working-class girls to participate can reinforce inequalities if they aren't implemented equitably and rely on girls knowing about and feeling able to ask for support.

Certain spaces can be more or less comfortable for certain groups, as other research shows (p.40). For some of the girls this extends to parts of London considered unsafe by the girls and their parents – like Peckham, an area that has undergone significant gentrification in the past decade²³ but to which some of the racially-minoritised girls consider too dangerous to go (like Idrissa, p.141), or aren't allowed, like Maryam (p.160). Social action programmes interact with class background and with rules families set about what their daughters can do, making it easier for some to participate than others. This also highlights the 'hidden geographies of fear' (Percy-Smith and Matthews, 2001) that can characterise urban spaces for racially-minoritised girls and shows how power relations operating on a geographical level can also reproduce inequalities associated with race, gender, and class; again, social action is not exempt from these wider inequalities shaping working-class girls' daily lives.

Power also operates in the language providers use to describe their programmes and what young people can gain from participating. The language around how these programmes can affect young people's futures, used to describe programmes such

²³ See for example 'Gentrification distorting Peckham', BBC News, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/uk-england-london-24229352>.

as NCS and Duke of Edinburgh's Award (p.4), reproduces expectations of the successful girl. This suggests young people's futures need changing and places responsibility on individual young people to change them. It is also evident in NCS's 'social mixing' (p.3), designed to benefit working-class, not middle-class young people (p.159). Power inequalities are evident here in the deficit model approach this implies: the working-class girls in my study are considered in need of improvement, unlike their middle-class peers, privileging middle-class ideals. Hill Collins and Bilge (2020, p. 194) discuss this approach as 'training the youth who trail behind to catch up with the children who achieve ... [in the belief that] assimilating seemingly failing youth into existing social hierarchies will eventually produce educational equity'. This in turn is likely to be influenced by the way that government funding is targeted at programmes that can show a link to employability outcomes (p.4). It is therefore unsurprising that youth social action providers market their programmes in this way, particularly given the recent decade of austerity that exacerbated existing inequalities and disproportionately impacted young people, including by reducing funding for youth services (Lupton *et al.*, 2015; YMCA, 2020).

However, the girls are not always marginalised whatever their situation. It goes beyond the scope of my study to compare these girls' experiences with those of girls in other parts of the UK, but London provides a source of privilege in terms of increased educational attainment in the past 15 years – the 'London effect' (Greaves, MacMillan and Sibieta, 2014) – and in the social action opportunities available. The range of opportunities is likely greater than it would be for girls growing up in rural areas, which the girls themselves recognise, with several citing it as an explanation for why they like living in London (p.132).

9.3 Cultural domain of power

The cultural domain of power is about ideology and norms. These norms can be identified in girlhoods discourses, discussed later in this section, but are also related to religion.

For those who practise a religion, faith groups can provide social action opportunities and faith can influence their reasons for wanting to participate, as previous studies have found (p.35). Some of the Muslim girls give Zakat with their families (p.125), and most of Esther's participation is through church (p.213). But power relations affect how faith groups are organised and the social action offered through them. As with schools, faith groups sometimes require girls to participate in activities at certain times and to certain ends. Esther is happy to be on the Secretariat at church, but also acknowledges that it would be hard to decline (p.183). Some of these expectations are also gendered and can contribute to the girls' feelings about what they are capable of now and in future, such as women not being allowed to be pastors in Esther's church (p.190). Several of the Muslim girls say they do not spend time at the mosque but that it is somewhere their brothers and fathers go (p.125); mosque does not provide opportunities for these girls to participate in social action.

While faith groups can reinforce gender stereotypes, however, they can also be a site of resistance against racism (Gunaratnum, 2011c, p. 15) and enable the expression of collective identity. One reason Esther feels welcome at church is because others from her 'home country' are there (p.213). For some of the Muslim girls, their identification with their faith and the social action they do in practising their faith also operates on the basis of collective identity politics (through Zakat), but in a

way that is less about the physical space of being present at mosque and more about Muslim communities elsewhere, such as Maryam's Sadaqat donations (p.209).

Ideas and norms about social action also shape the girls' participation. This includes ideas that social action is normal, that it is a good thing, that young people doing social action are the prime beneficiaries, and that young people ought to participate so that they can contribute to society and become good citizens in future (p.17).

These ideas are inherent in the way that social action has been co-opted by the state – such as in creating NCS and supporting the #iwill campaign – positioning young people as in need of cultivation and encouraging social action that reinforces rather than challenges the status quo.

One of the #iwill campaign's goals is that social action becomes 'the norm'. While the most recent survey data show that only 57% of young people participated in the last year (Ipsos MORI, 2019), it is already the norm for the girls in my study. All 51 girls who completed my initial questionnaire had participated in social action at some point in their lives. While there could be a correlation between those who say yes to research like mine and those who do social action, I argue that social action has become so normal – not least because at these schools it is mandated – that identifying non-participants is impossible. This is a common finding across other studies that aimed to find non-volunteers (Brodie *et al.*, 2011). Whether social action remains 'normal' for these girls once they leave school is beyond the scope of this thesis, but research suggests university, where many of the girls headed, is also a key site of participation (Brewis, Russell and Holdsworth, 2010; Holdsworth and Brewis, 2014).

Norms about social action also include defining what 'counts', as the #iwill campaign has (p.14). This inscribes value on some types of social action but not others. The girls' participation in social action that is not counted – such as care work and micropolitics – therefore goes unrecognised because it does not hold value for their UCAS forms or CVs, despite making important contributions to society. In Chapter 10.3 I return to this point, making the case for redefining what counts as social action in a way that is more inclusive of working-class, especially racially-minoritised, girls' experiences.

These ideas and norms about the girls' social action are also buttressed by expectations of girlhoods that shape the girls' participation by influencing the social action they do, why they do it, and what they gain from it. Ideas about the good girl influence the girls' care work because care work is considered an inherently feminine activity (p.194) and because expectations of docility can undermine the girls' ability to express themselves and practise resistant identities, as seen in the way some girls accept and internalise these gender differences and ascribed roles. Ideas about the successful girl direct the girls' participation in certain kinds of social action in the service of a future that is presented as within reach but is likely to be difficult to achieve because of the inequalities the girls face. Moreover, since social action appears to be 'normal', it is difficult to see how participation can help these girls to 'stand out', as they are told to do in UCAS applications (p.128). These norms are also evident in how the girls think about their futures, especially in relation to hope labour, though some resist these norms and disconnect their social action from potential future success. In the authentic girl discourse, social action can be a way of achieving the successful girl when it is used as a technology of the self.

But it can also be a way for the girls to express who they are. Sometimes these expressions of self are driven by the girls themselves, such as Maryam's defence of Islam on Twitter (p.210), and other times spaces are created by others to make that possible, such as Park School's feminist group (p.217). The group is an example of what Hill Collins and Bilge (2020, p. 170) describe as identity politics becoming a tool for resisting oppression. While the girls are not generally involved in traditional politics (p.134), their expressions of self, whether or not they position themselves as part of a collective, help them resist oppression. It highlights the argument made by Foucault (1990, p. 101), cited above (p.57) about how discourse can operate as a 'starting point' for resistance – in this case, against expectations of girls to be good and successful.

9.4 Chapter conclusions

Discussing my findings through the domains of power framework shows how inequality shapes working-class girls' participation. Power relations reproduce inequalities not along single axes – of gender or race or class – but in multiplying, mutually-influencing ways. The girls' social action is not separate to but entangled within those power relations, and participation can both reinforce and resist these inequalities.

These girls' lives are influenced by how sexism, racism, and classism intersect. This influences why and how they are asked to participate and by whom, how the girls respond to those asks, and their relationships with those they help and those they participate alongside. Families, schools and social action programmes affect how the girls spend time, including their access to social action opportunities, how their

participation is managed, what they feel about their participation, and what they (expect to) gain from it. Dominant ideas and norms about social action from policy and practice (including its definition) interact with expectations about being good and successful that can shape the participation of working-class, especially racially-minoritised girls. Such expectations can be difficult for the girls to meet. This can cause tension and anxiety, and adds to existing pressures girls face. Expressing authenticity through social action is a way for these dominant ideas to be challenged, though the desire to feel authentic can intensify the already immense pressures the girls face.

In the next and final chapter, I draw these points together to make recommendations for researchers, policy makers, and practitioners aiming to address inequalities in participation.

CHAPTER 10: CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

I began this thesis aiming to explore working-class girls' participation in social action and understand how the inequalities they experience in their daily lives – particularly related to the intersection of gender, class, and race – shape that participation.

In exploring definitions of social action I found tensions between that used in policy and practice and the girlhoods studies conceptualisation. I combined these two concepts in reviewing the literature and found varying levels of participation among different groups of young people. I uncovered themes on why young people participate, including enablers such as networks, relationships, and provision of opportunities; class-related barriers (including lack of time and costs); and the prevalence of career motivations. I also identified factors shaping the experience of participation, including enjoyment, relationships, emotional engagement, and opportunity for self-expression. Consequences included continued participation and skills development, despite a blurred link between skills and employability; risk of burnout; and how social action can reinforce as well as challenge inequalities.

This literature tends to focus either on young people in general or on certain groups according to gender or class or race. Few studies explore how these categories intersect to produce particular experiences, with limited literature on working-class girls' participation, especially those who are racially minoritised. I addressed this gap by taking an intersectional girlhoods approach to understanding these girls' participation and considering that participation in the context of their everyday lives. This meant viewing categories of gender, class, and race as socially constructed and intersecting, and exploring the power relations surrounding their associated 'isms'

and how these marginalise or privilege in certain contexts. Investigating these power relations in the context of working-class girls' lives also involves understanding how girlhood is thought about, talked about, and practised, and how this shapes expectations about how girls are supposed to be. I introduced discourses of girlhoods especially relevant to social action – the good girl and the successful girl – as well as ideas about authenticity that emerged during my fieldwork as being important to the girls. An intersectional girlhoods approach has its basis in feminist epistemologies, which informed my research design.

Before summarising my findings, I want to highlight three limitations to my research that ought to be considered, related to conducting fieldwork through schools, access to participants, and the extent to which these findings may apply to other girls in other contexts.

10.1 Limitations

First, in recruiting through schools my research excludes girls outside mainstream education in alternative settings (such as Pupil Referral Units) or not in education, employment or training ('NEET'). It also excludes those who are in mainstream education but truant. Such girls are particularly marginalised, and research to understand their social action would shed further light on the inequalities explored here. This also means my research is weighted heavily towards participation coordinated by schools. Although I attempted to identify a range of spaces in which girls participate, particularly through the mapping method used in interviews, the starting point for my fieldwork was in schools and in the end, my research was concentrated there. This was also partly because few girls were involved in social

action outside school when my fieldwork was conducted. Where the girls did social action with an external organisation, I was generally unable to negotiate access. I therefore had more data on the influence of schools on the girls' participation than on other influences.

I was fortunate that school staff were supportive of my research, allowing me to conduct observations at the schools and interview them. However, there are limitations associated with conducting fieldwork in a school environment. Interviews with the girls generally took place in an empty classroom or study area. Sometimes, the location was chosen by the gatekeeper. This meant one instance where the interview (Alesha's first) took place in an empty staffroom. Although Alesha seemed as comfortable here as she was in her second interview (in an empty classroom), at one point a teacher walked through the staffroom and Alesha stopped talking, appearing embarrassed to be overheard. This is indicative of research in a dynamic environment over which I had little control, and is partly the nature of doing research in a school context.

Nonetheless, schools are important sites of participation, especially for those from working-class backgrounds (see p.3, p.35, p.123). A different starting point and approach to recruitment, such as through a youth social action provider, could have provided a different sample but could also have meant recruiting girls involved in a more limited range of social action activities, and made it more difficult to identify girls from working-class backgrounds.

Second, I was unable to speak to all the girls' parents. Though they gave permission for their daughters to be involved, several parents did not want to be interviewed.

Being able to interview more parents could have provided me with a richer understanding of the girls' lives and how their families shape their participation, enabling me to triangulate what I had discussed with the girls and witnessed during observations. That those parents I spoke to were more likely to speak fluent English meant that those whose views are least often heard are also least represented in my thesis. However, overall I found that the parents' interviews were less insightful than those with the girls. This may be because I spent time building up relationships with the girls and did not invest similarly with their parents. Their interviews also felt more formal than those with the girls. Had I chosen a different approach to my fieldwork, such as recruiting through community or religious groups, this may have been different.

Spending time with the girls and at the schools over several months gave me the opportunity to see how participation changed over time – Park School's feminist group being an important example – rather than how it looked at a single point in time. Even then, however, an ethnographic approach will still only be able to capture a certain period or moment of time, because the timings of interviews and observations can shape what is considered important at that point and how it is experienced or remembered. As Stacey (1988, p. 26) reminds us, ethnography can only ever be partial (see p.85); what I have learnt from the girls is still only a partial perspective, situated in a particular time and space.

Finally, it can be argued that my qualitative approach involving a small number of girls in London means I am unable to make generalisations about whether these findings would apply to other working-class girls. Except for Sasha, whose future on

leaving Park School was unknown as she dropped out of the study early on, all the girls worked hard at school and wanted to do well, with plans to go into either an apprenticeship or to university. These girls may therefore not be 'typical' of working-class girls in the UK. In addition, I have already noted the potential differences in opportunities available to these girls compared to those living outside London (see p.240). However, generalisation is not the purpose of qualitative research, which instead aims to provide in-depth understanding and make 'transferability' possible (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). I hope that in providing a detailed account of my approach I can enable other researchers to assess how far my analysis and conclusions 'ring true' in other contexts (Ellis, 2005b).

10.2 Revisiting the research questions

Before discussing the implications of my research, I first summarise the findings under each of my research questions.

1. How do working-class girls practise social action?

An intersectional girlhoods approach involving broadly ethnographic, feminist research meant situating the girls' participation in the contexts of their lives: their (religious) beliefs and values, home lives, relationships, sites of participation in social action, schools, and wider policy and practice on youth social action. Chapter 5 weaved these contexts together by telling the stories of the girls in my study through detailed biographies of three of them: Olivia (Brownswood), Karen (Park School), and Sophie (Eburne). All the girls practise the kind of social action outlined in the policy and practice definition (p.14), mostly volunteering but also donating and fundraising. Most of this is practised through schools. I also identified key themes related to the

girls' participation – notably, career motivations, care work, and self-expression – each shaped by inequalities the girls experience in their daily lives.

2. How can an intersectional girlhoods approach help us understand working-class girls' participation in social action?

I identified three discourses especially relevant to girls' social action – the successful girl, the good girl, and the authentic girl. An intersectional girlhoods approach enhances our understanding of working-class girls' social action because it sheds light on how inequalities that shape their participation operate through girlhoods discourses.

The girls expect and are expected by others to become successful by working hard, doing social action, getting into university, and getting a 'good' job, though some resist the link between social action and success. The social action they do in the service of the successful girl can be considered 'hope labour' because these promises of success are not guaranteed. This concept has not previously been applied to youth social action; this thesis thus contributes to literature on the anticipated consequences of social action (p.40) and its connection to employability, as well as to wider literature on the precarity of youth employment.

As part of the good girl discourse, expectations about the good girl as docile shape the girls' social action. The girls are expected to do as they are told by teachers and parents and this extends to much of their social action. This means the girls spending most of their time at home, where they are expected to be caring through doing care work. Those from immigrant families have additional responsibilities in the form of language brokering. Care work is often a way for the girls to care for their mums. I

argued that this care work should be seen as social action. Finally, the girls value authenticity (defined as ‘being yourself’) but find it hard to achieve, and feeling (in)authentic both enables and constrains their social action. I identified an ‘authentic girl’ discourse that shapes how the girls see themselves, with two components relevant to social action and to the successful girl and the good girl – social action as self-transformation and social action as self-expression.

3. How do power and inequalities shape working-class girls’ participation in social action?

A research design and analysis informed by intersectionality encouraged me to see that inequalities shape working-class girls’ participation in social action by reproducing unequal power relations. Applying the domains of power framework (Hill Collins, 2000), I showed how this happens through the girls’ relationships with others such as family and teachers (interpersonal), institutions such as schools and social action providers (structural) and the way these institutions are run (disciplinary), and ideologies and norms related to girls and to social action (cultural). This meant gaining an understanding not just of the kind of social action in which the girls are involved, nor only the antecedents, experiences, and anticipated consequences of that social action explored in Chapter 2.2, but also the way that social action features in their lives and how other people and institutions influence this.

In responding to my three questions, I presented a detailed analysis of the social action of an often-overlooked group – working-class, mainly racially-minoritised girls – to show how these girls make significant contributions to society but how unequal power relations combine to make these contributions both challenging and undervalued. I expand on the implications of this below.

10.3 Implications for research, policy and practice

My research has implications for scholarship in the fields of girlhoods studies, intersectionality, and social action, as well as implications for schools, other organisations offering youth social action opportunities, and those coordinating the #iwill campaign now that Step Up To Serve has closed down. I set out these implications below and offer concluding reflections on what my thesis has contributed.

Bringing the fields of volunteering, intersectionality, and girlhoods into conversation through ethnography

In framing this thesis I introduced three separate bodies of literature on volunteering, intersectionality, and girlhoods. In my analysis I showed the value of an approach informed by all three. An intersectional girlhoods approach that pays attention to how power operates can deepen our understandings of working-class girls' social action. There is a great deal of research on the antecedents, experiences, and outcomes of participation, and significant attention paid in the literature and in policy and practice to the practical barriers and enablers to participation for young people experiencing inequality, but this tends to focus on single axes of inequality on the basis of class or gender or race. My approach has added to this literature by identifying previously unexplored influences on working-class girls' participation and shown that for these girls, social action is subject to the inequalities they experience in their daily lives.

I have also contributed to the field of intersectionality, 'operationalising' intersectional analysis by applying a domains of power framework to my data. To my knowledge this approach has not previously been adopted in relation to social action or

girlhoods. My work therefore provides a counterpoint to criticisms that intersectional scholarship is often grounded in theory and not practice (see p.58). Similar research focused on categories other than or as well as gender, class, and race – like sexuality and disability – could provide insight into the experiences of other groups, whether other marginalised groups or those who are privileged. In focusing on one group, this thesis has taken an approach to intersectional research that falls between the intracategorical and the intercategorical (p.53); an intercategorical approach comparing experiences across different groups could improve our understanding of inequalities in social action and how to address these for other young people.

In addition, I have also highlighted the importance of girlhoods discourses to working-class girls' social action. Seeing social action as discrete from these discourses can result in a limited understanding of girls' participation and means we fail to see how social action is subject to and sometimes complicit in the many expectations placed on girls today. The weight of these expectations to be good and successful, and the difficulty the girls have in being authentic, create anxiety and place pressure on the girls that can be difficult for them to manage, especially because meeting these expectations is complicated by the intersection of sexism, classism, and racism. Finally, though I have drawn on an established body of literature on discourses of the successful girl and the good girl, I have also identified a new authentic girl discourse among the girls in my study. Ideas about authenticity are important in girlhoods studies, and 'being real' is valued in popular culture and on social media, particularly around celebrity or influencer culture (see p.75). Further research to understand whether and how the authentic girl discourse plays out in contexts beyond social action would be valuable.

Redefining what 'counts' as social action

The definition of youth social action in current policy and practice (as volunteering, p.15) is different to how it is defined in social movements (as activism, p.18). Neither is grounded in the experiences of girls and can unintentionally exclude and therefore (further) marginalise working-class girls' experiences. By contrast, girlhood studies' conceptualisations of social action (p.19) encompass less visible forms of action such as micropolitics, but there is little research on how this is undertaken by working-class girls, nor on how inequalities shape participation in these activities.

As well as the limitations already discussed (p.17), the policy and practice definition of social action obscures the extent of working-class girls' participation. Currently, care work for family is excluded from that definition and from formal and informal definitions of volunteering. I argued that care work should be considered social action because it is an important part of these girls' lives and mirrors the kind of behaviours that are counted as social action in the #iwill typology. Recognising it as social action could make it more visible and therefore more valued. My argument presents a new contribution to debates on what counts as social action. There has long been a case made to consider both care and volunteering as forms of work (Glucksmann, 1995, 2005; Overgaard, 2019; Taylor, 2004, 2005), to consider volunteering as care (Hardill and Baines, 2011), and to view care work for neighbours and friends as informal volunteering (Dean, 2021; Williams, 2003). But these arguments are grounded in adults' (mainly, women's) experiences, not girls' experiences. As Bettis and Adams (2012, p. 2) have argued, it is insufficient simply to 'transplant' knowledge about women's experiences on to girls: we must foreground girls' experiences in understanding their lives. The idea that the care work for family

carried out by young people should be considered social action (Lee and Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2011; Sarre and Tarling, 2010) has received little attention.

This is not to say that care work should be put to use on CVs and UCAS forms, as is the case for the social action associated with the successful girl. Rather, it is about making this care work visible and recognising that it is intrinsically valuable – an argument reflected in wider debates about informal volunteering (Dean, 2021).

Making this care work visible can mean several things. As well as including care work in its social action typology, the #iwill campaign could celebrate this kind of action on social media, in blogs, and through initiatives such as the #iwill Ambassadors programme. This would help to show young people that care work is important and demonstrate its significance to organisations interested in supporting social action. At schools, making girls' care work visible means teachers acknowledging the time girls spend on care work, which in turn means recognising that they may have less time to participate in other kinds of social action. The gendered nature of care work could also be discussed in Citizenship education. These changes would help to show that working-class girls already make significant contributions to society, dispelling the deficit model rhetoric about their participation. Furthermore, since these girls are likely to become women who also undertake the majority of care work in their families, valuing girls' care work would itself encourage us to value women's care work, in turn helping to address the problem of the 'stalled gender revolution' – 'a result of the opening of social institutions that allowed women advancement within previously closed labor sectors, combined with the inability to accommodate this advancement because of inflexible cultural expectations of paid work or care' (Crossley, 2017, p. 14). In addition, more research exploring these girls' care work,

what it means to them, and what it contributes to the family and to wider society, would provide greater insight into this form of participation and help to fill a gap in the research on girls' care work, as distinct from women's care work or from the growing body of literature on young carers (young people in a formal care role).

Furthermore, the policy and practice conceptualisation of social action privileges individual action. Social action is celebrated as an individual achievement, through the counting of hours, the emphasis on 'leading' or 'organising' activities in the #iwill typology, and the overt focus on employability outcomes. But being in the minority can make it difficult for girls to express themselves and challenge inequalities.

Greater support for and recognition of collective action focusing on what groups of young people can achieve together, rather than as individuals, could help girls feel better able to effect change. For the #iwill campaign, this means reconsidering how social action is measured, with less focus on quantifying individual participation. For youth social action providers marketing their programmes, this means placing less emphasis on what individuals gain through participation and more emphasis on what working together can accomplish. For schools, this means offering more social action opportunities like Park School's feminist group, which take a collective approach. Support for such initiatives needs to come from school staff, who in turn need the support of headteachers – without buy-in from them, it can be difficult even for senior staff to facilitate activities like these effectively. However, providing space for this kind of social action does not mean mandating it. Mandated social action, while it may have helped make social action 'the norm', is a contradiction in terms, according to the girls' understandings of volunteering, and adds to the many pressures girls already face.

Furthermore, the resistant identities the girls in my study perform, and their expressions of opinions in the form of micropolitics, should also be considered social action. The girls themselves don't define these activities in this way, but they do feel strongly about issues such as gender and race inequality. Including the work they do to challenge these inequalities within the policy and practice definition would situate social action within wider research and practice on activism, from which it is currently disconnected. It would help to show how social action does not have to mean participation in the kind of public-facing campaigns one might have expected to find these girls involved in – #metoo, the school climate strikes, or Black Lives Matter – which have received significant media attention in recent years and months. Though my fieldwork mostly predated the mainstreaming of all these movements (late 2017, summer 2018, summer 2020 respectively), the fact that the girls in my study were not involved in campaigns like these highlights the less 'spectacular' (Harris, 2004a, p. 151) forms of action in which they are instead engaged, points to the exclusion of working-class, racially-minoritised girls from more mainstream, international campaigns, and reflects the docility expected of the good girl that limits where the girls spend time. Including resistant identities and micropolitics in the policy and practice definition of social action would also mean recognising the work that working-class girls do to challenge inequalities in their own and others' lives, as the final section discusses.

Tackling inequality in and through working-class girls' participation

Girls' social action has the potential to challenge inequalities, but the way it is currently facilitated by schools and social action providers working with schools does not provide the tools for working-class girls to do that. The focus is weighted towards

participation for future success, rather than how participation can address the oppressions of sexism, racism, and classism these girls experience in daily life and see around them at present. For example, my findings support existing research on how schools can be difficult places for girls to call out sexism (Ringrose, Keller and Mendes, 2019, p. 150). Yet sexual harassment is endemic in schools and colleges in England, with a recent Ofsted (2021) investigation concluding that it has become so normalised that girls often do not see the point in reporting it. This has brought the uneven power relations between girls and boys into sharp focus, even if it was no surprise to many of us. That it took this issue to be raised by girls in private schools (who set up the website Everyone's Invited²⁴) for it to receive any attention, and that the report does not acknowledge how racism intersects with sexism to place racially-minoritised girls at particular risk of sexual violence (Thiara and Roy, 2020), highlights how classism and racism affect who is and isn't listened to. While addressing such issues may be difficult for schools to balance with the need to prepare students for university and career success, examples such as Park School's feminist group suggest that it is possible. In all these kinds of initiatives, inequalities should be considered intersectionally in order to avoid the kind of identity politics that 'conflates or ignores intragroup differences' (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1241), and care should be taken to ensure that inequalities are not reinforced in the way these initiatives operate, a challenge that has been identified in studies on even avowedly intersectional social movements (Ishkanian and Peña Saavendra, 2019).

²⁴ <https://www.everyonesinvited.uk>.

Government, schools, universities and youth social action providers could do more to acknowledge and challenge these inequalities. This should involve a move away from valuing the quantity of young people's participation, reinforced by requirements to measure participation. It also means avoiding framing social action as necessary for future success, predicated as it is on success materialising. My research suggests these girls will blame themselves if they do not achieve the success they have been encouraged to aim for, and that social action will be devalued if it does not help the girls in the way they believe it will.

This is especially pertinent at a time when social action has been lauded as a panacea for the challenges faced by the 'Covid generation' – young people, like the girls in my study, whose education has been put on hold and whose employment prospects will be most affected by policies designed to manage the pandemic. In his review on volunteering and communities in the recovery, Kruger (2020) recommends (paid) social action as a way to 'alleviate the crisis facing young people by giving them a leading role in the national recovery'. The social action activities he suggests are akin to those on offer to the girls in my study through schools or social action programmes – such as volunteering at primary schools or care homes. They are not activities designed to tackle the root causes of the inequalities that have increased the attainment gap between the poorest and the wealthiest pupils during the pandemic, for instance (Weidmann *et al.*, 2021). Moreover, paying young people for their participation places young people in the service of the government, making it difficult for them to challenge structural inequalities reproduced by the state. This rhetoric also reinforces the notion that young people should be responsible for their own futures – especially when it is the actions of government in (mis)handling the

pandemic that have created these difficult conditions. Not only this, but an overt focus on the potential future value of social action neglects its capacity to enable girls' self-expression in the present.

Schools and providers that facilitate opportunities through schools have a crucial role to play in shaping the participation of working-class girls. The pandemic is likely to have severely disrupted school provision of social action, but in the recovery schools could offer space – space that was, pre-pandemic, already provided for social action activities – to participate in the kind of social action to which these girls might not otherwise have access. They could begin by supporting social action that challenges the inequalities inherent in the school environment. Encouraging and valuing forms of participation that are important to these girls – social action that enables them to express their views and challenge the inequalities around them – would go some way towards helping the girls to be themselves and enable them to resist some of the more oppressive expectations of what it means to be a girl.

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APPENDIX A: SAMPLING QUESTIONNAIRE

Consent form

You are invited to take part in a study about 'youth social action'. Youth social action is things young people do to help other people and the environment, like volunteering, campaigning and fundraising. The first part of this study is a questionnaire, which should take a few minutes to complete. You can choose whether or not you want to answer any questions. After the questionnaire, you may be contacted to take part in further research, such as interviews.

About the research

This questionnaire is part of my PhD, which is all about understanding what girls who have been on Free School Meals think about youth social action. Through this research I aim to understand what helps girls to take part in social action, and what makes it difficult for them, as well as the advantages and disadvantages of taking part in social action. Around 16 girls in total aged 16-18 will be involved in this study.

Who will see my answers and how will they be stored?

Your answers will be seen only by the researcher. The answers you give are confidential and you and anyone else involved in this study will not be named or identified in any way in my thesis or anything I publish. All the information collected will be stored on secure University of Birmingham servers or in locked filing cabinets, for a maximum of ten years after the research has finished. If you are happy, I would also like to archive the information collected, making sure it is anonymous and cannot be traced back to you. This is so that other researchers could use it to do future research.

How will the information be used?

I will use the findings from this questionnaire to invite some girls to participate in further research as part of my PhD on youth social action.

Do I have to take part?

Taking part in this study is completely voluntary, so you don't have to take part if you don't want to. While you are doing the questionnaire you can stop at any time.

Researcher contact details

If you have any questions, please contact me:

Emma Taylor-Collins

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

If you would like to talk to one of my supervisors at the University of Birmingham, please contact:

Dr Angela Ellis Paine



Informed consent

If you have read the information above and you are happy to take part in this questionnaire, please read and tick the following statements:

☐ I have read and understood the information above and I have had the opportunity to ask questions

☐ I understand that my participation is voluntary and I can stop doing the questionnaire at any time

☐ I agree to an anonymised version of my questionnaire being archived and made available for future research analysis

☐ I understand that I may be invited to take part in further research as part of this study

☐ I agree to take this questionnaire

About you

1) What is your name?

2) What is your email address?

3) What year are you in?

☐ Year 12

☐ Year 13

4) What subjects do you study?

5) Do you live in [borough name]?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Prefer not to say

6) Have you been eligible for Free School Meals in the past 6 years?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Don't know

☐ Prefer not to say

7) What is your ethnicity?

☐ White (including English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish, Irish, British, Gypsy, Irish Traveller, or any other White background)

☐ Black (including Black British, African, Caribbean and any other Black background)

☐ Asian (including Asian British, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Indian, Chinese, and any other Asian background)

☐ Mixed (including White and Black Caribbean, White and Black African, White and Asian, and any other mixed or multiple ethnic group)

☐ Other - Write In: _____

☐ Prefer not to say

☐ Don't know

Social action

8) This last section is about anything you are doing, or have done previously, to help other people or the environment. This can include things you've done online or in person. It might be things you've done with school, your local community, your place of worship, a club or group, an organisation, or with friends, family or by yourself. It doesn't include things you are paid to do, apart from days supported by your employer.

	I did this when I was younger	I have done this in the past 12 months	I am currently involved in this
Donated money or goods , e.g. giving money to a charity/cause directly either in person or online, donating clothes/ food to charity			

Fundraising or a sponsored event , e.g. a silence, walk, raffle, bake sale, car wash, including organising a fundraising event online.			
Helping improve your local area , e.g. organising litter picking/cleaning graffiti, painting murals, helping to build a farm/park/garden, helping with a road safety campaign, organising community street parties			
Campaigning for something you believe in , e.g. organising a petition, raising awareness of an issue in school, community or through social media, creating online campaigns, representing other young people, for example through school council, youth panel, youth parliament			
Tutoring, coaching or mentoring anyone , e.g. helping children in a reading programme, coaching a sports team, leading a local youth group, mentoring online, voluntary academic tutoring			
Supporting other people who aren't friends or relatives , e.g. helping an elderly neighbour with shopping, housework, visiting elderly people, offering support to others online, befriending someone with special needs and/or older people			
Giving time to help a charity or cause , e.g. volunteering, helping organise events, creating posters/leaflets/magazine/websites, collecting clothes, food etc. for			

charity, setting up or supporting a social enterprise			
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Thank you!

Thank you for taking this questionnaire. You may be contacted by the researcher about participating in further research. In the meantime, if you have any questions about this study, please get in touch:

Emma Taylor-Collins



If you would like to talk to one of my supervisors at the University of Birmingham, please contact:

Dr Angela Ellis Paine



APPENDIX B: THE GIRLS' PARTICIPATION IN SOCIAL ACTION

In this table the girls' participation is categorised according to the #iwill campaign's typology of youth social action.

Table 8: Types of social action in which participants have been involved when they were younger, in the past 12 months, and currently, according to the #iwill campaign typology

	Donate money or goods	Fundraise or a sponsored event	Help improve your local area	Campaign for something you believe in (excluding party-political campaigning)	Tutor, coach or mentor anyone	Support other people who aren't friends or relatives	Give time to help a charity or cause
<i>Alesha</i>		Sponsored walk, sleepover, charity dinner at primary school; fundraising events as a house captain at Park School					Volunteering at care home; volunteering at hospital
<i>Alexa</i>	Donating: old clothes and toys to charity; at Brownswood on non-uniform days and to foodbank; money to	Supporting a women's refuge by organising a BBQ, doing a sponsored walk, making leaflets, selling keyrings (NCS)		Creating a video for mental health awareness via BBC School Report at Brownswood; helping organise petition at school	Tutoring other students in Maths and Psychology at Brownswood; running workshops for children through Old Vic's Stage	Visiting an elderly lady in hospital with her mum	

	homeless people on the streets			to protest changing layout of sixth form study room at Brownswood	Business programme at Brownswood		
<i>Ali</i>	Donating to charity box at home (Zakat)	Helping fundraise at Eburne to build school in Nepal		Campaigning for rights of Syrian children by knocking on doors in local area and selling cupcakes; organising petition against knife crime at Eburne			Volunteering: for St John Ambulance; at a tea dance for elderly people at Eburne; at a nursery; as a Volunteer Police Cadet
<i>Amira</i>			Helping with community garden				Volunteering at charity shop
<i>Ayo</i>	Donating money: charity bucket at supermarket; Brownswood non-uniform days				Doing the Sports Leaders Award at Brownswood (Enrichment)	Giving advice to girls in Sports Leaders group; helping elderly people off the bus	Volunteering at a nursery; helping organise her primary school fair
<i>Catherine</i>	Donating: money at Brownswood non-uniform	Sponsored skip, car wash, runs; baking cakes for		Participated in BBC School Report at	Tutoring younger students in Psychology at	Helping elderly people	Performing for elderly residents at a care home

	days; clothes to charity; food/drink to homeless people directly and via church; items for poorer people	cake sale at former school		Brownswood, campaigning for mental health awareness	Brownswood; running workshops for children through Old Vic's Stage Business programme at Brownswood	when she's out	
<i>Esther</i>	Donating: money to a homeless person; food for Brownswood food drive for the elderly	Attending fundraisers for church; fundraising for Brownswood prom; sports event for local charity; sponsored run for church-related charity		Representing new school as an Ambassador; helping run mock election at Brownswood	Helping in classrooms at local primary school (Enrichment)	Helping look after the children at church; washing up after lunch at church; caring for an elderly neighbour	Member of Secretariat at church; coordinating church service; gardening at church; volunteering at local care home
<i>Gabriela</i>	Donating old clothes and books to charity		Litter picking	Raising awareness for animal charity (NCS)	Helping other students with their Spanish at former school	Helping elderly neighbour with shopping; befriending elderly people	Volunteering at a charity shop (DofE)
<i>Helah</i>				Campaigning on issue of body image as part of young leaders programme			

<i>Idrissa</i>	Donating at Brownswood: money for student to have surgery; food and toiletries for foodbank	Fundraising for Brownswood prom; baking cakes for Brownswood cake sale; fundraising for charity (Enrichment)	Gardening and litter picking at her primary school		Tutoring French at a local primary school (Enrichment)		Volunteering at local care home (Enrichment)
<i>Karen</i>	Donating: money at church; old clothes to charity	Fundraising for Age UK (NCS)		Campaigning for Age UK (NCS)	Helping other students in class at former school		Volunteering: hospital; care home (NCS); charity shop (DofE)
<i>Maryam</i>	Donating money to charity with family (Zakat)		Gardening at local wetlands (NCS)	Awareness-raising for local wetlands (NCS); educating others about Islam on Twitter; class rep at Eburne	Tutoring younger students at Eburne		Volunteering at Eburne: open evenings; organising languages day at school; tea dance for elderly people; looking after younger students on trip to Lille; sports day On NCS: organising sports for children Headstart: volunteering at library
<i>Nazreen</i>		Creating poster to advertise fair		Raising awareness for			Volunteering: nursery; care

		at former school and fundraising for it		refugee campaign in her neighbourhood			home; former school foodbank; community fair; a heritage project at Eburne; at a school for children with special educational needs; library
<i>Olivia</i>	Donating to charity (via her mum)	Sponsored run for a local sports charity; organising fundraising events at Brownswood (e.g. for Red Nose Day)	Improving a community garden (NCS)		Maths tutoring for younger students at Brownswood		Sports Ambassador at Brownswood; volunteering at local care home through Brownswood (Enrichment); volunteering with elderly people (NCS)
<i>Sasha</i>	Donating money to charity at Park School	Making and selling waffles at Park School fundraiser; sponsored run for cancer charity					Volunteering at local youth club
<i>Shannon</i>	Donating: clothes to charity shop; money to collection tub in shop; to	Sponsored football challenge at her primary school; buying poppies for Remembrance Day			Mentoring two younger 'naughty' students at Brownswood; supporting younger children	Looking after and spending time with elderly neighbour	Volunteering: at her former primary school; at church events through Rainbows, Brownies and Guides; as

Sophie	foodbank at Brownswood				at local youth centre		Rainbow and Brownie leader
	Donating: food and clothes to local homeless man and his dog; clothes to a homelessness charity; money to Eburne fundraisers	Baking cakes for charity cake sales at Eburne; sponsored run for Cancer Research		Raising awareness for PETA; Ambassador for Holocaust Education Trust to raise awareness of the Holocaust at Eburne	Tutoring students in English at Eburne	Befriending elderly neighbours; doing an elderly lady's shopping for her	Volunteering at Eburne: setting up club for Foundation Learning girls; heritage project; tea dance for elderly people; at a community day; at language day