

AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE  
DISCOURSES OF  
SECONDARY AGED GIRLS'  
EMOTIONS AND  
EMOTIONAL DIFFICULTIES

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

The aim of this research was to investigate how the emotions and emotional difficulties of secondary aged girls are constructed by teachers and the girls themselves, through the investigation of the discourses surrounding girls' emotions. The rationale for choosing this topic was the difference in the numbers of girls and boys referred to educational support services in the U.K. in order to access support and provision for behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. The research used ideas from social constructionism (Gergen, 2001) and feminist poststructuralism (Weedon, 1999), in order to explore how the emotions of secondary aged girls are constructed. Two research methods were used; focus groups with Year 9 girls and semi-structured interviews with their teachers. Discourse analysis was used in order to explore the discourses that were employed by the girls and their teachers when constructing the emotions and emotional difficulties of pupils. The findings suggest that the analysis of constructions of emotion and gender in schools can contribute to an understanding of gender differences in referral rates to support services. The limitations of the research findings and their relevance to the role of the educational psychologist are also considered.

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

This research investigates how the emotions and emotional difficulties of secondary aged girls are constructed by teachers and the girls themselves, through the investigation of the discourses surrounding girls' emotions. This research has been influenced by the work of feminist researchers in psychology and education. For feminists the use of the 'objective', anonymous voice in research accounts mystifies the writer and hides the context and background that they bring to their work (Clare and Hamilton, 2003). In keeping with the feminist tradition that research accounts should be grounded in the personal, this introduction will acknowledge the influences that led me to this research topic.

Growing up in a traditional, patriarchal, working class community in the North East of England, I first encountered feminist ideas whilst at University in the 1980s. At this time feminist research was influenced by structural perspectives such as Marxism and by the concept of patriarchy as developed by radical feminists, and it was these ideas that I took with me when I began teaching. My teaching career allowed me to specialise in different aspects of the social sciences, including sociology and psychology and I eventually trained as an educational psychologist. My training coincided with a general concern in the U.K. and other Western countries about the 'underachievement' of boys in public examinations (Skelton and Francis, 2003). This discourse accentuated gender differences while ignoring the influence of factors such as social class and ethnicity in achievement and led to resources being targeted at 'failing' boys.

In my current role as an educational psychologist working in a Local Authority support service, the referrals for boys who are identified as having difficulties in the category of behaviour, emotional and social difficulties outnumber referrals for girls by four to one. Research into behaviour, emotional and social difficulties has tended to focus upon pupils with behavioural difficulties in school and has therefore often ignored the experiences of girls (Lloyd, 2005a) and research that focuses upon the emotional needs of girls in schools is sparse. Therefore the rationale for choosing this topic was the difference in the numbers of girls and boys referred to educational support services in the U.K. in order to access support and provision for behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. My perception was that that this discrepancy in the allocation of resources between girls and boys was regarded as reflecting the greater needs of boys rather than as a social construction. This led to an interest in how decisions were made in schools regarding referrals to support services.

When I began studying for this qualification I had the opportunity to increase my understanding of social constructionist and feminist poststructural perspectives and became interested in how these approaches might help to explain the differential allocation of resources for pupils who are categorised as having special educational needs. I chose the area of emotional difficulties because whilst agreeing with commentators (Thomas and Loxley, 2001) that the concept of special educational needs as a whole is socially constructed, it is in the area of behavioural, emotional and social difficulties where categorisation is the most subjective and emotive.

This research therefore draws upon social constructionism (Gergen, 2001) and feminist poststructuralism (Weedon, 1999; Baxter, 2002) in order to explore how the

emotional needs of girls are constructed in a secondary school. The research aimed to provide a voice to the girls in the school through the use of focus groups with groups of Year 9 girls and also involved interviews with their teachers. The talk gathered from these methods was then analysed using discourse analysis, in order to explore the discourses that were employed by the girls and their teachers when discussing the emotional needs of the pupils in the school.

The findings support research conducted mainly by feminists which suggests that discourses of gender tend to focus upon differences between men and women rather than similarities (Kimball, 1995; Lott, 1997). The results also support researchers who have suggested that one of these constructions of difference is that of the emotional woman and the unemotional man (Lupton, 1998). In seeking to understand the gender difference in referral rates to support services, this research supports the arguments made by researchers such as Lloyd (2005b) who suggest that schools tend to prioritise boys' needs over girls due to the disruptive behaviour boys are more likely to exhibit in the classroom. The discourses employed by the teachers suggest that this disruptive behaviour is more likely to be constructed as indicating a special educational need than non-disruptive behaviour, such as withdrawing from learning or missing lessons.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Introduction**

The aim of this research was to investigate how the emotions and emotional difficulties of secondary aged girls are constructed by teachers and the girls themselves, through the investigation of the discourses surrounding girls' emotions. The rationale for choosing this topic was the difference in the numbers of girls and boys referred to educational support services in the U.K. in order to access support and provision for behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (Cruddas and Haddock, 2005). In my role as an educational psychologist working in a Local Authority support service within the West Midlands, the referrals for boys who are identified as having behavioural, emotional and social difficulties outnumber referrals for girls by four to one.

Traditional psychological approaches have utilised medical or behavioural models to locate the causes of behavioural, emotional and social difficulties either within the pupil or the school environment (Thomas and Loxley, 2001). A common element of both of these approaches is that they are "gender blind" and thus they usually ignore gendered constructions of behaviour of pupils or assume that they are based in biology. In contrast to these approaches, I was interested in exploring the contribution of more recent developments in the conceptualisation of gender developed from social constructionism. The social constructionist approach represents a radical shift from the concerns of traditional psychology by suggesting that apparently individual attributes are actually cultural and social creations (Gergen, 2001). Central to this theory is a view of language not simply as a means to transmit information but as constitutive, playing a role in how we construct and understand the

world and thus gender differences are conceptualized as socially produced rather than innate.

A further development in the understanding of gender differences is provided by feminist poststructural accounts (Butler, 1990; Weedon, 1999). Feminist poststructuralism represents a radical shift from other accounts of gender difference through the complete rejection of the concept of gender as embodied. The application of poststructural approaches within feminism is controversial as the rejection of the “grand narratives” associated with Enlightenment includes rejecting the issues of “equality” and “rights” that have been central to the feminist project (Skelton and Francis, 2009). However feminist poststructuralist accounts offer new and challenging ways to understand gender and for this reason they have been utilised by researchers (Francis, 2002). This research draws primarily upon a social constructionist accounts of gender but also been influenced by discursive accounts of gender identity derived from feminist poststructuralism while recognising that there are inherent tensions between the two approaches.

The use of research from traditional psychological research represents a further tension in this research. Research in psychology is historically rooted in the positivist tradition and the construction of psychology as a “science” means that positivism and critical realism remain the dominant paradigms in psychological research. From this perspective psychological research is assumed to reflect a “real world” that is independent of the researcher. Within my role as an applied psychologist the discourses constructed within traditional psychology often become “hegemonic discourses” (Paechter, 2001) which are difficult to challenge. Both social

constructionist and feminist poststructural perspectives offer alternative ways to read traditional psychological research by regarding its findings and conclusions as one of a number of possible discourses within psychology (Gergen, 2001). Without wishing to over state the influence of psychological research, the discourses presented in research findings from traditional psychology have the potential not only to reflect but also to influence the discourses that individuals employ in discourse (Burman et al, 1996). By reading traditional psychological as discourse I aimed to both explore the discourses of adolescence, gender and emotionality found in traditional psychological research and to consider where these discourses appeared to inform the positions employed by girls and their teachers. In doing this I am suggesting that psychological research does not reflect a “real world” but that it can contribute to how people construct their identities and their constructions of the world.

This chapter sets out to provide the context for the study through a review of the relevant literature around gender, emotions and adolescence. The chapter first of all sets out the policy initiatives which provide the background to the work of educational psychologists with particular reference to the concept of behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. The chapter goes on to explore three concepts that are central to this research: gender, with particular reference to girls (Section 2.3), emotionality (Section 2.4) and adolescence, again focusing on how girls have been represented in the research literature (Section 2.5). The chapter ends by considering how the concept of emotional difficulties has been represented in psychological discourse (Section 2.6).

## **2.2 Rationale for Research and Policy Context**

Within the U.K. schools usually access additional advice and support through the special educational needs (SEN) procedures. Schools and Local Authorities follow the guidance of the Code of Practice for Special Educational Needs (DfES, 2001a) which suggests that there are not hard and fast categories of SEN but nonetheless identifies “behaviour, emotional and social development” (BESD) as one of four areas of need (DfES, 2001a). While the category employed within the Code of Practice appears to cover a range of issues, in practice the majority of referrals from schools are concerned with pupils who are disruptive in the classroom and who are mainly boys (Lloyd, 2005b). Since the publication of the Code of Practice in 2001 there has been a shift of emphasis in the discourses employed by the government from BESD to concepts such as “emotional well being” and “mental health”. The emergence of a discourse of mental illness and mental health promotion, has occurred as charities such as the Mental Health Foundation have suggested that schools have an important role to play in identifying and dealing with the mental health problems experienced by children (Gott, 2003).

Although prevalence rates for mental illness vary according to the classification and definition of mental disorders, some estimates suggest that between 10% and 33% of children may meet the criteria for a mental illness (Street, 2005). In 1999 the Mental Health Foundation published *Bright Futures* in which the authors argued that schools were important in not only the identification of mental illness in children but also in the promotion of mental health. In response, the U.K. government has increasingly focused upon how schools can promote resilience in their pupils within the wider context of the promotion of emotional well being, despite a lack of

clarity regarding resilience and its effects. Government departments have provided schools with a series of guidance and policy initiatives to support them in this process. Guidance for schools on the promotion of mental health and the early identification of mental health difficulties can be found in the DfES publication *Promoting Children's Mental Health within Early Years and School Settings*' (2001b) and the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence's (NICE) *Social and emotional wellbeing in primary education* (2008).

These initiatives are underpinned by the government's *Every Child Matters* (DFES, 2004) agenda which establishes a framework for the work of Children's Services within the U.K., including schools. *Every Child Matters* (DFES, 2004) prioritises five outcomes for children one of which 'Be Healthy' includes to 'be mentally and emotionally healthy', with the expectation that Local Authorities and schools will actively promote emotional well being. In addition to these policies the government's Excellence in Cities programme was introduced in 1999 (see <http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/sie/documents/aboutEIC.d>) and included two new initiatives which have since been promoted across all schools; learning mentors and learning support units. Learning mentors are adults who work within schools to help pupils overcome barriers to learning which can include social and emotional difficulties. Learning support units are school based units to support pupils at risk of disaffection, exclusion or who are vulnerable due to family or social issues. The government has also developed a number of initiatives aimed at promoting mental health and emotional wellbeing in schools notably through the *National Healthy Schools Standard* (DFEE, 1999) and the curriculum based *Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL)* (DCSF, 2007a).

While some Local Authorities have enthusiastically embraced the concept of emotional well being and initiatives such as SEAL have been well received in schools not all commentators regard this positively. In a review of similar approaches in Australia, Patel-Stevens et al (2007) suggest that government policy reflects a pathologising discourse where schools have come under increasing pressure to identify and remediate emotional difficulties:

“Engendering discourses of disorders, disabilities, intervention, medication, and therapy, contemporary educational spaces are witnessing unprecedented growth in this way of framing adolescents.” Patel-Stevens et al (2007) p 120.

In the U.K. influenced by the work of Furedi (2004), Ecclestone and Hayes (2008) argue that activities in education that focus upon perceived emotional problems and aim to make the curriculum more emotionally engaging result in a diminished view of pupils, who are readily perceived as vulnerable or at risk. They suggest that initiatives such as SEAL are emotionally damaging for children because this leads to a situation where teachers no longer see children as human. While Ecclestone and Hayes (2008) provide an interesting counterpoint to mainstream thinking in education their arguments are mainly rhetorical. Rather than basing their argument upon empirical evidence they rely upon descriptions of government initiatives and anecdotal evidence which is never clearly attributed or referenced.

For educational psychologists the current emphasis on mental health promotion has the potential to shift the emphasis of their work from reactive problem solving to working with schools at an organisation level to promote emotional well being. Despite this potential much of the work of educational psychologists still resides in individual referrals informed by the categories found in the SEN Code of Practice (2001a) and these referrals continue to be gendered thus allowing boys greater access to specialist provision and resources than girls. While the Code of

Practice for SEN is gender blind, making no reference to gender, Daniels et al (1995) argue that the disparity in the allocation of resources shows that in practice the process of identifying SEN is gendered and discriminatory:

“Girls are relatively rarely identified as having SEN, but in contradistinction to race, this is now being viewed as discrimination against girls. One of the reasons for this shift in emphasis is the recognition that the resources allocated to boys’ special educational needs massively outweigh those for meeting the special educational needs of girls.” Daniels et al (1995) p 205.

This gendering is particularly apparent in the provision for pupils who are identified as having BESD where the majority of these pupils are boys who are referred for their behaviour. Traditionally gender differences in behaviour have been assumed to reflect biological differences between girls and boys and there has been a lack of research which explores if the concepts of discourse found in approaches such as social constructionism and feminist poststructuralism can contribute to the understanding of how the emotions and emotional difficulties of girls are constructed in schools.

As this is an area where there has been little previous research, the aim of this study was to explore the discourses surrounding the construction of the emotions and emotional difficulties of girls using data gathered from qualitative interviews with teachers and focus groups with Year 9 girls. The questions investigated were:

- What discourses are employed by Year 9 girls when discussing emotion and emotional difficulties?
- How do these discourses contribute to the girls’ constructions of being a ‘proper girl’?
- How do these discourses contribute to the support and resources that young people are able to access in school in order to meet their emotional needs?
- What discourses are employed by teachers when talking about the emotional difficulties of their pupils, particularly girls?
- How do the discourses utilised by teachers influence the support and resources that young people are able to access in school in order to meet their emotional needs?

In order to set the context for these questions some indication is required of three key concepts that emerge for these questions; that is ‘gender’, ‘emotionality’ and ‘adolescence’.

## **2.3 Understanding Gender**

### **2.3.1 Introduction**

This section begins with a description of how gender has been conceptualized in traditional psychological theory and research. It goes on to describe how the emergence of feminism in psychology led to a critique of the biological assumptions which continue to underpin much psychological research. The concept of gender socialisation is presented as an alternative explanation for the development of gender differences and two such psychological theories are discussed. The weaknesses of these theories of gender socialisation are then discussed using insights from both social constructionism and feminist poststructuralism.

### **2.3.2 Gender and psychology**

As my research was concerned with the discourses surrounding the emotions of girls in a secondary school the concept of gender was central to understanding these discourses. Within psychology “gender” is a contested term which is used to explain differences in the behaviour of women and men in a variety of ways and is most commonly equated with biological difference. Sutherland (2004) suggests that the assumption of sex/gender difference is ubiquitous in psychological research and this is demonstrated in a review of Psychological Abstracts between 1967 and 2002, where Crawford and Unger (2003) found 50,393 articles on human sex or gender differences. By comparison there has been little interest in research that seeks to

‘discover’ similarities between women and men (Kimball, 1995). The simplistic mapping of gender onto sex differences is found in areas of psychology such as evolutionary psychology, which draws upon Darwin’s theory of evolution as a basis for understanding gender roles in modern society. According to this approach, gender roles have developed differently for men and women as a consequence of their different roles within reproduction (Daly and Wilson, 1996). Thus women are constructed as naturally nurturing and are limited in the roles that they are able to undertake in society as a consequence of their biology, while men are constructed as in competition to ensure the continuation of their genes through reproduction. These different adaptations to the challenges of reproduction are then used as an explanation for the different gendered behaviour associated with being male or female, for example the traditional gender roles of housewife and breadwinner.

These traditional psychological theories of gender have been criticised for failing to take account of the diversity of gender roles within and between cultures and for failing to explain changes in conceptions of gender and gender roles (Bussey and Bandura, 1999). The search for sex and gender differences in psychology is also controversial for many feminist researchers who have conceptualized gender as a social category rather than being biological in origin. In contrast to the biological assumptions about gender found in evolutionary psychology most feminist researchers regard gender as a social category, though the ways in which gender develops and is maintained in a society remain a matter of considerable debate.

The concept of gender has been developed through feminist research and is a complex phenomena which is so pervasive that its effects, including the differential

treatment of women and men, are often taken for granted (Crawford and Unger, 2003). Gaining an understanding of feminism is difficult as the term is contested and covers a diversity of beliefs (Ramazano lu and Holland, 2002). Wilkinson (1996) suggests that what unites feminist approaches is an assumption that women are worthy of study in their own right, rather than only in comparison to men. Within psychology, Crawford and Unger (2003) suggest that feminism emerged in the late 1960s with the realisation that most psychological knowledge about women and gender was male centred and that topics about women were absent from the psychological agenda. Since this time interest in feminism and psychology has grown and has been applied to all areas of psychology. It is now possible to study courses devoted to women and there are a number of psychological journals focusing on the psychology of women, notably, *Feminism and Psychology*. The result of this interest has been a multiplicity of feminist approaches which means that it is not possible to define a single feminist psychology. The influence of feminism in psychology has led some researchers to move away from biological explanations of the differences in the behaviour of women and men in favour of theories of gender socialisation.

### **2.3.3 Gender socialisation**

Developing an understanding of gender was one of the key themes that emerged in feminist research during the second wave of feminism in the 1970s and 1980s. At this time feminists were influenced by ideas of masculinity and femininity with their roots in the Enlightenment thinking that was built around a series of parallel dualisms, including the male-female dualism (Paechter 2001). Within structuralism these dualisms were assumed to be part of a universal social order which was discoverable through research (Jones, 1997) so feminist researchers were concerned

with how masculinity and femininity were created and maintained through social structures. This led to the development of a concept of gender as a consequence of socialisation rather than as a product of biological difference, as described in Oakley's definition:

“‘Sex’ is a word that refers to biological differences between male and female: the visible difference in genitalia, the related difference in procreative function. ‘Gender’ however is a matter of culture: it refers to the social classification into ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’.” Oakley (1985) p 16.

From this perspective, institutions such as the family and the education system were regarded as playing crucial roles in the gender socialisation of children and through these institutions children were believed to learn and internalise the appropriate gender role, becoming male or female. This approach relied upon an understanding of masculinity and femininity as dichotomous and distinct categories (Paechter, 2001) which were in some way internalised during the socialisation process.

#### **2.3.4 Psychological theories of gender socialisation**

Following the structural tradition, within psychology there are two main theories of gender socialisation, gender schema theory and Bussey and Bandura's (1999) social cognitive theory of gender development. Gender schema theory derives from cognitive psychology where researchers have suggested that within the cognitive system there are structures or 'schemas' which exist in readiness to assimilate information that is relevant to that schema (Bem, 1981). According to this theory sex-typing occurs because of a readiness to process information based upon sex differences. While researchers such as Bem (1981) do not discount the possibility that this readiness may be biological in origin, the emphasis within gender schema theory is upon the role that society plays in promoting gender differences through the

differential treatment of girls and boys (Crawford and Unger, 2003). This differential treatment leads to the development of gender schemas which help to structure experience and to regulate behaviour (Martin and Halverson, 1981). Bem (1981) explains the power of gender schemas in helping us to understand the world and in guiding our behaviour by suggesting that an individual's self-concept becomes part of their gender schema. Other psychologists are critical of the deterministic nature of gender schema theory, which they argue is not able to account for the variations in gendered behaviour that occur in different contexts (Bussey and Bandura, 1999).

Bussey and Bandura (1999) present an alternative theory of gender socialisation in their social cognitive theory of gender development, which derives from social learning theory. Social learning theory seeks to explain how people come to behave in accord with the rewards and punishments present in their environments (Hare-Mustin and Marecek, 1990). Bussey and Bandura (1999) present a multifaceted model of gender development which recognises biological potentials but emphasises the role that the social environment plays in shaping gender roles. Their theory of gender development draws upon psychological theories such as modelling to explain how children acquire gender roles and emphasises the part that adults play in shaping gendered behaviour in children. Social cognitive theory suggests that gender is shaped by the environment and is internalised by the child, while recognising that within the gender categories of "male" and "female" there are vast differences in how gender is constructed, shaped by other social factors such as socioeconomic class and ethnicity.

What Bussey and Bandura's (1999) theory helps to explain is the processes that regulate gendered behaviour thus illustrating why individuals tend to conform to

accepted gendered behaviour within a particular culture. Bussey and Bandura (1999) link these consequences to the social sanctions of disapproval that occur when an individual acts in a way that does not conform to their expected gender role:

“People pursue courses of action they believe will bring valued outcomes and refrain from those they believe will give rise to aversive outcomes.” Bussey and Bandura (1999) p 689.

Bussey and Bandura’s (1992) research has shown that even young children express disapproval of peers who are engaging in behaviour that does not conform to their gender. They argue that the consequences of approval and disapproval from peers, parents and other adults, coupled with messages from the media and other institutions leads to the self-regulation of gendered behaviour. Social cognitive theory therefore also suggests that gender roles and the behaviour that is associated with those roles are not “natural” but are learned and reinforced by the institutions in society.

### **2.3.5 Gender and social constructionism**

Both gender schema theory and social cognitive theory offer explanations for the psychological processes involved in the process of gender socialisation. They are however regarded as problematic by feminists who have been influenced by social constructionism. Social constructionism has its origins in the work of Berger and Luckman (1966) who suggest that what constitutes knowledge is not neutral or objective but is rather a product of the social situation in which that knowledge has been produced. Social constructionism is comprised of a diverse range of ideas however their common starting point is that knowledge is culturally and historically specific and this knowledge is created and sustained through language and the daily interactions between people (Burr, 1995).

“One of the central arguments within constructionist metatheory is that language is not mimetic: that is it fails to function as a picture or map of an

independent world. Rather,... language functions performatively and constitutively; it is employed by communities of interlocutors for purposes of carrying out their relationships....” Gergen (2001) p 30.

In psychology, researchers working within a social constructionist paradigm are less concerned with the search for underlying psychological attributes or differences and instead focus upon questions such as: ‘What forms of psychological discourse exist?’ ‘Who benefits from these?’ and ‘Who is silenced?’

These ideas have had a major impact within feminist theorizing about gender difference reinforcing a conceptualization of gender as socially produced rather than innate (Francis, 2000). In contrast to the earlier models of gender socialisation, social constructionism presents a different construction of the self as primarily a social construct:

“...it is not the self-contained individual who precedes culture, but the culture that establishes the basic character of psychological functioning.”  
Gergen, 2001, p 38.

When applied to an understanding of gender identity, social constructionism suggests that the binary distinction between feminine and masculine is culturally determined rather than simply reflecting the biological differences between men and women. This approach also challenges the concept of monolithic gender categories, suggesting rather that there are a number of overlapping masculinities and femininities (Francis, 2000). Social constructionists have therefore been critical of theories of gender socialisation because they draw upon the idea of masculinity and femininity as two distinct and fixed categories rather than conceptualising those categories as diverse (Dillabough, 2001). Lees (1993) further criticises the concept of socialisation because it suggests that gender roles are fixed and unchanging; the passive child is then

moulded into them. This model defines children as incomplete learners who are moulded by adults rather than as social actors in their own right (Thorne, 1993).

### **2.3.6 Gender and feminist poststructuralism**

An alternative understanding of gender has been offered by feminists who have been influenced by the emergence of poststructuralism and its potential to offer a new and radical perspective (Skelton and Francis, 2009). Poststructuralism belongs to a family of theories which were developed during the 1960s and 1970s as French philosophers became disillusioned with the grand narratives associated with structuralism, which sought to explain all of social life within a single theory (Delanty, 1997). Central to these ideas is the concept of discourse developed from the work of Foucault (1998). Discourses are patterns of language or text that describe and position people in different ways, defined by Aapola as:

“By discourses I mean systematically organized, historically varying, interrelated concepts, ideas and practices that surround particular spheres of life and positions within them. “ Aapola (1997) p 52.

Rather than conceptualizing language as a transparent medium that reflects and describes a reality, poststructuralists suggest that meaning is created through the use of language (Allard, 2004). So poststructural theory rejects all encompassing meta narratives in favour of exploring the constitutive nature of language within a historical and cultural context. Foucault suggests that while there are multiple and competing discourses, some powerful discourses become “regimes of truth” and come to represent what is regarded as “true” or “fact” (Commack and Philips, 2002). Poststructural approaches suggest that categories such as “women” and “gender” are such regimes of truth and are the products of discourses rather than being the product of socialisation, shifting the focus of research from how individuals become socialised

as female or male to how these categories are constituted in discourse (Ramazano lu and Holland, 2002). This shift places language at the centre of research, not as medium which represents the internal workings of people's minds but as the primary way in which people construct themselves and the world around them.

A key thinker who has developed a poststructural understanding of gender is Judith Butler (1990) in utilising ideas from Foucault and social constructionism to explore gender identity. Nayak and Kehily (2006) suggest that Butler's work challenges the ontological status of identity by suggesting that the self exists only in action, so although gender appears on the surface to be a stable reflection of internal sex differences, it is actually constantly created through our everyday actions:

“There is no gender identity behind the expression of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results.” Butler (1990) p 34.

Following Foucault, Butler (1990) argues that these gender ‘performances’ are maintained through discourses that regulate sexuality to produce a heterosexual norm. Thus gender identity is not a coherent or stable narrative to be known in any ultimate sense, there is not a true femininity or masculinity to be discovered rather there are everyday performances, which maintain gender categories.

Butler (2006) suggests that gender differences are a historical product that have become reified over time and so appear to be natural:

“The act that one does, the act that one performs, is, in a sense, an act that has being going on before one arrived on the scene.” Butler (2006) p 66.

This act is perpetuated by the social sanctions that punish or marginalise those individuals who fail to perform their gender within the culturally accepted norms.

Butler's (1990) work raises issues concerning the relationship between the concepts of "sex" and "gender", suggesting that the link between femininity and the female body is arbitrary. Butler's theories have influenced the work of feminists who take a poststructural stance, where gender is conceptualized as a social process, which is constituted through a number of overlapping and often contradictory discourses (Weatherall, 2002).

Poststructuralism suggests that there is no "Truth" to be discovered regarding gender differences as the meanings that are ascribed to bodies are culturally produced, plural and ever changing (Weedon, 1999). While feminist poststructuralism does not deny the existence of the material world including our biological selves, it theorises that the meanings that we ascribe to the world are produced through discourse:

"We learn who we are and how to think and behave through discursive practices." Weedon (1999) p 104.

Some of these discourses become institutionalised in social and cultural institutions such as the education system and serve to disadvantage women. These ideas are controversial and are criticised by other feminists, notably critical realists, who suggest that Butler's work does not explain how femininity came to be associated with the female body and fails to take account of women's lived experience as embodied beings (Fricker, 1994).

My research also draws upon ideas developed by feminist researchers who have employed poststructural ideas in order to analyse:

"...the ways in which speakers negotiate their identities, relationships and positions in their world according to the ways in which they are located by competing yet interwoven discourse." Baxter (2003) p 1.

For feminists such as Baxter (2002), poststructuralism offers the opportunity to understand, how as a result of contradictory and contested discourses of femininity and masculinity, girls and women are multiply positioned. Thus gender becomes a process rather than a state of being and involves a negotiation of the available discourses within a particular cultural and historical context:

“....girls become girls through their negotiation of raced, classed and sexed femininities.” Aapola et al (2005) p 3.

Taking a poststructural approach allows feminists to be critical of the fixed nature of gender stereotypes and to offer a potentially liberating construction of gender as negotiated.

## **2.4    Emotionality**

### **2.4.1   Introduction**

The concept of emotionality was central to my research which aimed to explore the discourses surrounding the construction of emotions and emotional difficulties of secondary aged girls. Within psychology the understanding of emotion mirrors that of gender as outlined in the previous section. Traditional psychology starts from the assumption that emotions are based in biology and this is still the premise of most psychological research. This approach to the study of emotion has more recently been criticised by researchers who have been influenced by social constructionism. This section therefore begins by briefly outlining the traditional psychological approach to emotionality and how this has been criticised before going on to explore the social construction of emotionality in Western cultures.

### **2.4.2 Understanding emotion**

The study of emotion is a complex topic that cuts across a number of academic disciplines including psychology, sociology, history, anthropology, neuroscience, philosophy, psychiatry and linguistics (Shields, 2002). This complexity is illustrated by considering the number of different approaches within the single discipline of psychology, where various strands of research include physiological arousal, phenomenology, appraisal theories, emotional expression and cultural variations (Strongman, 1996). This diversity of approaches makes it difficult to provide a single definition of emotion, though the following definition is useful:

“.....across diverse theories, there is some common agreement that emotion is a multi-faceted motivational system which has experiential, cognitive, physiological, and expressive components.” Brody (1997) pp 369-370.

Brody's (1997) definition highlights the need to understand emotion as having a biological component, which is mediated through our experience and through our interpretation of the world around us. Despite this complexity, traditional psychological approaches treat emotions in a similar way to personality traits, as rooted in biology, stable over time and independent of social context (Fischer, 1993).

Traditional approaches in psychology follow an essentialist tradition where emotions are seen as based in biology and therefore innate to the individual. As a consequence of this essentialism the experience of emotion is believed to be universal. Usually research investigating emotionality takes place away from the social contexts where the emotions occur and makes no reference to culture:

“...emotions have been sought in the supposedly more permanent structures of human existence – in spleens, souls, genes, human nature, and individual psychology rather than in history, culture, ideology, and temporary human purposes.” Lutz (1998) p 54.

There is a wealth of psychological research in this area which conceptualizes emotions as innate characteristics that can be measured using techniques such as self reports and rating scales (Shields, 2002).

### **2.4.3 Gender and emotion**

Traditionally psychological research has assumed that differences in emotional expression and experience between women and men are rooted in biology. These assumptions have been made where gender is treated as a stable trait-like component of identity which can be mapped onto biological sex differences (Hare-Mustin and Marecek, 1990). Hare-Mustin and Marecek (1990) comment that despite this feminist understanding of the difference between sex and gender, research in psychology rarely distinguishes between sex and gender. Thus researchers assume that emotions are internal and biological and are reflected in gender differences in behaviour and so it becomes possible to focus research on sex differences in emotion, which has been a common theme within psychological research.

Such research investigating sex/gender differences is fraught with methodological difficulties particularly when the researcher relies upon self reports of emotional experience. One example is research investigating sex differences in anxiety and depression, where studies using self-report methodologies suggest that women are more prone to these emotions than men. In a review of this research, Madden et al (2000) suggest that self reports are influenced by learned behaviours that result from cultural assumptions and gender stereotypes. It may therefore be easier for women to acknowledge emotions that are more commonly associated with femininity than it is for men, resulting in a higher level of self reports.

In a review of research that has used self reports to investigate sex differences in emotion, LaFrance and Banaji (1992) suggest that the construction of the items on a self report measure plays a part in the outcome of the research. They argue that a number of factors increase the likelihood that females will report being more emotional than males, including if the self reported emotion is public rather than private and interpersonal rather than impersonal. LaFrance and Banaji (1992) suggest that participants in studies using self report measures may be reporting their beliefs about gender expected behaviour rather than accurately reporting their own behaviour. These methodological weaknesses in the traditional approach to studying emotion originate in the assumption that biological differences between men and women translate into gender differences in behaviour, thus biology is understood to be the cause of these gender differences. This understanding of gender has been questioned by feminist researchers who reject essentialist ideas of gender difference and argue that gender differences in behaviour are related to social and cultural factors rather than biology.

#### **2.4.4 Feminist approaches to understanding gender and emotion**

My research has been influenced by social constructionist approaches to understanding both gender and emotion that call into question traditional psychological research on sex/gender differences in emotionality. In traditional psychology both emotions and gender are assumed to be based in biology and are treated as fixed, stable parts of an individual's identity. For social constructionists the concepts of both gender and emotion are conceptualised as more fluid, socially constructed and maintained through a number of overlapping and competing discourses. Feminist researchers have drawn upon social constructionism in order to

question the assumption that emotions are innate and universal, arguing that this assumption has helped to perpetuate gender stereotypes of emotion (Fischer, 1993). These criticisms stem from a tradition within Western culture where emotionality is culturally coded as feminine and rationality as masculine:

“A major binary opposition in discourses on emotion is that of the ‘emotional woman’ and the ‘unemotional man’.” Lupton (1998) p 105.

This cultural coding serves an ideological function in Western culture, as when emotion is associated with irrationality and other negative characteristics (Lutz, 1998) it contributes to the negative stereotyping of women.

Much of the psychological literature on emotion begins from the supposition that sex differences in emotion exist and are a valid area of investigation (Shields, 2002). This leads Lutz (1998) to suggest that:

“...any discourse on emotion is also, at least implicitly, a discourse on gender.” Lutz (1998) p151.

These discourses on emotion and gender form part of a broader discourse described by Sutherland (2004) as a ‘gender difference discourse’ which has a commonsense quality and affirms fundamental differences between men and women. Within the psychology of emotion, feminists have suggested that to be female has become associated with emotionality while maleness is associated with rationality and these associations lead to gendered displays of emotion. For feminists this stereotyping of male and female emotionality has acted to reinforce an ideology of male superiority and female inferiority (Fischer, 1993; Lott, 1997; Lupton, 1998; Lutz, 1998). This stereotyping has a historical basis, for example, in the work of Darwin which included a hierarchy of mental faculties with reason at the top and instinct at the bottom thus suggesting that emotionality is more primitive than rationality (Fischer, 1993).

Rationality is associated with clear decision making and choices while emotionality is seen as wild and uncontrollable, as emotions can “sweep us away” (Lutz, 1998).

These stereotypes of the emotional woman and rational man have become a part of everyday discourse in Western culture and this is reflected in research where participants believe that women are more emotional than men (Lutz, 1996; Plant et al, 2000).

The relationship between gender and emotion has been of interest to feminist researchers who have been critical of approaches to emotion that abstract it from the social context, suggesting that once social context and culture are taken into account our understanding of gender and emotion becomes more complex and gender stereotypes are revealed (Fischer, 1993; Lutz 1996; Lupton 1998; Shields, 2002).

These gender stereotypes have two dimensions: the internal experience of emotion and the external expression seen in emotional displays. Hutson-Comeaux and Kelly (2002) suggest that the differences found in the literature on gender differences in emotion are based upon ideas of appropriate emotional display rather than emotional experience. The theory of emotional display suggests that innate emotions are not simply expressed in behaviour but are subject to the rules and conventions of the culture in which the emotion is experienced (Parrott and Harré, 1996). Rather than being the spontaneous expression of a physiological state, it is only acceptable to express specific emotions in specific ways within a specific context. This approach suggests that our experience and understanding of emotion is dependent upon the social context:

“Emotions are strategic. They play roles in forms of action. And actions occur in situations. So the investigation of any emotion must be widened to include the social context in which their display and even their being felt.....is proper.” Harré (1986) p12.

The concept of gender is central to this approach because it is intrinsic to the meaning of emotion and helps to determine which rules are applied (Fischer, 1993).

The rules that determine what emotional experiences and expressions are appropriate for men and women within a given culture are learnt through the responses of others to our emotional expression:

“There exist different cultural emotion rules for men and women, and from their childhood onwards the emotional reactions of boys and girls are evaluated and reacted to in different ways.” Fischer (1993) p 310.

Research suggests that these cultural rules influence how men and women express their emotions both through actions and talk. In a study of the relationship between gender, self-concept and children’s autobiographical narrative, Buckner and Fivush (1998) found that girls provided more emotional information about their past than boys and their accounts were also more interpersonally orientated. These differences may be related to parental expectations of how girls and boys express their emotions. In a study of how parents talk to their 40 month old children, Kuebli and Fivush (1992) found that parents used a greater variety of emotional words with daughters compared to sons and were more likely to talk about sadness with girls. This suggests that the differences in the behaviour of girls and boys in schools recounted in research (Osler and Vincent, 2005) are socially constructed rather than being biological in origin.

#### **2.4.5 Gender and emotional display**

The concept of emotional display is important in seeking to understand why the behaviour of girls and boys in school may differ in response to their emotions. Kuebli and Fivush’s (1992) research suggests that, in their interactions with adults,

girls and boys are learning gender-specific templates about emotional display rules, for example that girls can reflect and talk about emotions. Brody and Hall (2004) argue that these gender stereotypes do not simply reflect gender differences but also shape reality by generating expectations about gender appropriate behaviour and the consequences of breaking display rules:

“Violating stereotypic display rules can lead to negative social consequences, such as social rejection, reduced attractiveness to the opposite sex, and even occupational discrimination.” Brody and Hall (2004) p 339.

The importance of the concept of emotional display in understanding emotion and illustrating the weakness of the model of emotion as innate and contained within the individual, is demonstrated in Brody’s (1997) discussion of research on male and female displays of anger. Anger is an emotion that is stereotypically associated with men and has typically been operationalized through the behavioural expression of anger through aggression, which is more commonly found in the behaviour of men rather than women. Brody (1997) cites numerous studies which suggest that when expressions of anger are operationalized differently to include verbal expressions of anger a different picture emerges, with some research suggesting that women verbalise more intense anger for longer periods of time than men. Brody’s (1997) research supports the theory that gender stereotypes are based upon cultural assumptions about gender differences in the acceptable display of emotions rather than differences in emotional experience.

Research into emotional display suggests that rather than being natural and innate, emotions are the products of systems of cultural belief particular to communities (Armon-Jones, 1986). This view is supported by research conducted by anthropologists looking at how other cultures understand emotion, for example Lutz’s

(1998) study of the Micronesian community of the Ifaluk. In her research Lutz draws upon social constructionism in order to develop a cultural understanding of emotion. The social constructionist approach to understanding emotion suggests that rather than simply being the “natural” manifestation of physiological impulses, emotions are determined by systems of cultural belief (Armon-Jones, 1986). Lutz argues that the use of the word “emotion” in everyday talk and research rests on a number of implicit assumptions that are usually not examined:

“As I listened to people speak the language of emotion in everyday encounters with each other on the Ifaluk atoll, it became clear to me that the concepts of emotion can more profitably be viewed as serving complex communicative, moral, and cultural purposes rather than simply as labels for internal states whose nature or essence is presumed to be universal.” Lutz (1998) p 5.

She suggests that the emphasis on emotions for the Ifaluk is on their role in maintaining cultural and social relationships, rather than representing internal states.

According to Lupton (1998) emotions are intersubjective and constituted in relationships within a particular culture:

“...emotions are phenomena that are shaped, experienced and interpreted through social and cultural processes.” Lupton (1998) p 2.

So the focus is upon emotions as constructions which are designed to perform interactional functions rather than simply reflecting the reality or biological basis of emotion (Locke, 2001). This approach is challenging because discourses about the biological nature of emotions and the differences between the sexes are so embedded within our culture that they can be difficult to recognise (Shields, 2002). Researchers such as Shields (2002) do not deny their biological reality of emotional states rather they suggest that responses to bodily feelings are not spontaneous and natural but are interpreted through the discourses in the culture in which we live. These discourses

also shape our understanding of the emotions which are associated with young people particularly during adolescence.

## **2.5 Adolescence**

### **2.5.1 Introduction**

The third key concept emerging from my research questions was the discourses surrounding the emotions and emotional difficulties of adolescent girls. The girls who took part in the research were 13 – 14 years and although there is no definitive agreement concerning the age at which adolescence commences, girls of this age would generally be categorised as experiencing early adolescence. There is a wealth of research in psychology surrounding the emotions of girls mainly due to a popular discourse that adolescence is a time of confusion and conflict (Coleman and Hendry, 1999). This section explores the psychological literature on adolescent girls using insights from poststructural feminism. This approach creates an inevitable tension between poststructural theories which deny the essentialist characteristics and psychological research which is grounded in essentialist difference created by social and biological factors. My aim is to treat the findings from more traditionally positivist research as discourses rather than “scientific fact” and to explore where the dominant discourses of adolescent girls occur in the psychological literature. Poststructural accounts have identified three dominant discourses of adolescence girls, the ‘at-risk’ girl (Harris, 2004; Aapola et al, 2005), the ‘can-do’ girl (Harris, 2004; Aapola et al, 2005) and the ‘mean’ girl (Gonick, 2004). In my research all of these discourses were apparent in talk about emotions and emotional difficulties in both the teachers talk and that of the adolescent girls.

### 2.5.2 The ‘at-risk’ girl

Aapola et al (2005) trace the origins of the ‘at-risk’ girl to Carol Gilligan’s (1993) research and Mary Pipher’s *Reviving Ophelia* (1994) which was on the bestseller list in the U.S. for many months when it was first published (Harris, 2004). Gilligan (1993) conceptualises masculinity and femininity as dichotomous and suggests that the formation of gender identity differs for girls and boys. Gilligan’s work has been influenced by psychodynamic approaches in psychology and she suggests that for boys masculinity requires a separation from the mother during early childhood, while femininity is defined by attachment to others rather than separation. Brown and Gilligan (1993) argue that the developmental milestone of adolescence is increasing separation from others including other women and this separation leads to a psychological disassociation for girls, not only from the mother and other women but also from the girl’s sense of self. They suggest that this places adolescent girls at a heightened risk of negative consequences even for girls who are doing well educationally (Brown and Gilligan, 1993).

Following Gilligan, Pipher (1994) draws upon her clinical experience as a therapist and suggests that during early adolescence the I.Q. scores of girls drop, they lose their resiliency and optimism and become more self critical. Pipher (1994) argues that during early adolescence girls realise that men have the power while women’s power comes from becoming submissive, adored objects. Pipher (1994) argues that in order to achieve this girls are forced into putting aside their “authentic selves”, splitting into true and false selves as a result of pressure to be someone they are not:

“This gap between girls’ true selves and cultural prescriptions for what is properly female creates enormous problems.” Pipher (1994) p 22.

Pipher (1994) suggests that the loss of the “authentic” self and becoming “female impersonators” leads to the development of emotional difficulties for adolescent girls. These discourses of adolescent girls as vulnerable and “at-risk” have been criticised by other researchers, for example Martin (1996) suggests that Pipher’s (1994) concept of an authentic self romanticises early childhood and ignores evidence of negative experiences such as inequality and abuse. The ideas of both Gilligan (1993) and Pipher (1994) can be criticised from a feminist poststructuralist perspective as they draw upon structural ideas of gender difference and development which suggest that femininity and masculinity are discrete categories and that the gender development of girls and boys are distinct processes.

My research has been influenced by poststructuralist accounts of adolescence which provide an alternative concept of gender not as an internalised component of an individual’s ‘self’ but as a performance that is always fluid and unfinished. From a feminist poststructuralist perspective the work of Gilligan (1993) and Pipher (1994) represents a particular discourse that contributes to the construction of the ‘at-risk’ girl rather than reflecting ‘reality’. Thus the discourse of the ‘at-risk’ girl can be identified in other forms, for example Harris (2004) suggests that there is also another type of girl contained in the ‘at-risk’ discourse, who is rendered vulnerable by her circumstances and is at risk of early school leaving, poor employment prospects and teenage pregnancy. These disadvantaged girls are often stigmatised and their “failure” is characterised as a consequence of poor personal choices rather than the result of structural disadvantage. Harris (2004) suggests that this individualization leads to strategies that are aimed at helping girls to overcome personal, psychological barriers to success rather than focusing on alleviating structural disadvantage.

### **2.5.3 The ‘can do’ girl**

While discourses of the ‘at-risk’ girl provide theories to explain the factors that might negatively affect girls during adolescence, Harris (2004) suggests that there is an alternative discourse of the ‘can-do’ girl, which is epitomised by the concept of “girl power”. This discourse presents girls as independent and successful and is found in accounts of girls’ educational success, sexual assertiveness, professional ambitions and delayed motherhood:

“The idea of girl power encapsulates the narrative of the successful new young woman who is self-inventing, ambitious and confident.” Harris (2004) p 17.

In recent years the ‘can-do’ girl discourse has been employed in the educational discourses which are concerned with “underachieving boys”. In this discourse girls are presented as academically successful due to their performance in public examinations. Osler (2006) suggests that as a consequence boys have become “hypervisible” and their performance in public examinations has been constructed as a “failing boys” discourse. Within this discourse girls are constructed as not having difficulties and their “success” is often presented as being at the expense of boys (Francis, 2000).

### **2.5.4 The ‘mean’ girl**

Gonick (2004) identifies a discourse of adolescent girls which she argues emerged in the 2000s. She describes a “mean girl” discourse, where girls are pathologised as not being able to openly express conflict and aggression, which they therefore express through the exclusion of other girls from friendship groups, name-calling and manipulation. In my research this discourse was employed by the teachers when discussing the emotional difficulties of the girls whom they taught. Gonick

(2004) identifies a number of ‘popular psychology’ books that have both drawn upon and helped to construct the discourse of the “mean girl”. One such book which is written for the parents (notably mothers) of adolescence girls is Rosalind Wiseman’s (2002) *Queen Bees and Wannabes*. Wiseman (2002) argues that friendships are the adolescent girl’s key to surviving adolescence and also their biggest threat to survival, influencing how girls will form adult relationships:

“Girls are often their own and other girls’ worst enemies, and for some the rivalry defines their adolescence. I have watched time after time as a sweet intelligent girl plots another girl’s humiliating downfall.”  
Wiseman (2002) p 20.

Wiseman (2002) is particularly concerned with social hierarchies among girls and how some girls will use their social power against other girls in order to maintain their popularity.

In an analysis of representations of girls on the media, Ringrose (2006) suggests that there has been a discursive shift from the portrayal of girls as vulnerable to the portrayal of girls as ‘mean’. Ringrose (2006) traces this shift back to psychological research which has sought to address the male bias in the study of aggression. The rise of the ‘mean girl’ discourse illustrates the continuing prevalence of ideas of gender difference as a basis for psychological research and provides an example of the ‘gender seesaw’ (Osler, 2006) where concerns move between girls and boys with the assumption that there are essentialist differences between them. So traditionally aggression has been operationalised in research as direct, overt and usually physical, leading to a stereotyping of aggression as a male phenomenon. Researchers then ‘discovered’ ‘female aggression’ by developing a definition of an alternative form of aggression that is indirect or relational (Björkquist 1994; Crick and Grotpeter 1995).

Ringrose (2008) suggests that the origins of the ‘mean’ girl discourse lie in traditional positivist psychology. She makes particular reference to the study of girls’ aggression in Finland, where Björkquist (1994) argues that traditionally aggression has been operationalized as physical harm to others and has thus failed to capture the more subtle forms of social manipulation that girls use to harm others, such as social exclusion and spreading rumours. In contrast to Ringrose’s (2008) feminist poststructuralist perspective, Björkquist (1994) explicitly draws upon essentialist ideas of sex differences by suggesting that these differences in aggressive behaviour are a consequence of women’s physical weakness rather than being a result of cultural expectations of emotional displays. Thus he argues that women are not easily able to harm others physically as their weakness makes this dangerous and so they resort to social manipulation to inflict harm.

Following Björkquist, Crick and Grotpeter (1995) suggest that girls engage in a unique form of aggression which they call relational aggression where they work to damage other girls’ friendships or to exclude them from the social group. These acts are deemed to be aggressive because there is an assumption that girls are naturally social and concerned with others, therefore these behaviours are particularly damaging to them. Research studies have shown that when girls do engage in such behaviour it is often a way of attaining and maintaining popularity (Merten 1997). Using data from a series of interviews with girls, Brown (2003) suggests that in a sexist climate, girls find it easier to take their fears and anxieties out on other girls and so derogate and judge other girls out of a fear of being derogated and judged themselves:

“Adolescence is the time when girls feel the big squeeze, between the gaze of boys and other girls’ judgements.” Brown (2003) p 136.

For Brown (2003) gossiping and teasing amongst girls serves two purposes, it establishes a consensus between girls and helps friendships to bond and also provides a way for girls to measure their own worth in comparison with others. Owens et al (2000) suggest that indirect aggression is damaging to teenage girls and due to its covert nature it often does not come to the attention of teachers, while Brown (2003) argues that in schools it becomes regarded as 'just what girls do' and is therefore not taken seriously.

Ringrose (2006) argues that the development of the 'mean girl' discourse is a direct consequence of cultural feminist approaches which have drawn upon an essentialist, sex differences model to claim that women are 'naturally' more nurturing, caring and relationship orientated than men. Ringrose (2006) suggests that this has led researchers such as Björkquist (1994) and Crick and Grotpeter (1995) to reverse male-biased research in order to find other 'natural' differences between women and men, including the female equivalent of male aggression:

"Claims of equivalency are made through claims of sex difference."  
Ringrose (2006) p 410.

So research into girls' aggression has sought to redress the gender imbalance in previous research by constructing girls as unable to express their aggression physically and so turning to more manipulative and covert behaviours to do so. Ringrose (2008) is critical of this approach to understanding aggression because it leads to a discourse where forms of 'male aggression' are constructed as the norm while forms of female aggression are constructed as deviant and a consequence of the inability of girls to express their aggression in the same way as boys:

"These approaches essentialize gender and the categories 'girl' and 'boy', with girls' aggression constructed as a universal feminine developmental problem

of expressing aggression in 'covert' and 'indirect' ways, against 'normal' masculine forms of direct and physical aggression." Ringrose (2008) p 511.

Ringrose (2006) suggests that this approach ignores complex differences between girls and also ignores the influence of sociocultural factors upon girls' behaviour.

Theories of emotional display offer an alternative sociocultural approach which suggests that emotions are regulated through the display rules that provide the norms for the expression of emotions within a culture (Matsumoto et al, 2005). From this perspective the different aggressive behaviours displayed by girls reflect these cultural display rules rather than inherent differences based upon biology. From a feminist poststructural perspective, expressions of aggression from girls and boys occur as they negotiate the meanings that are given to being a 'proper girl' or 'proper boy' through discourses such as that of the 'mean girl'. Thus girls and boys constitute their identities through the discursive positions that are available to them but in this process they also help to shape those discourses.

While feminist poststructuralists reject the concept of the essentialist gender difference even research from a more traditional positive perspective in psychology questions the validity of treating aggression as if it has distinctive gender forms. In a replication of Crick and Grotpeter's (1995) study, Tomada and Schneider (1997) found that in Italy boys displayed more overt aggression than girls but did not find that girls displayed more relational aggression than boys. Other research suggests that even in those countries where the propensity for girls to engage in indirect or relational aggression was 'discovered' there is not a simple gender difference in aggressive behaviour. In a study of reported aggression amongst students in the U.S.A., Richardson and Green (1999) found that while males reported more direct

aggression there were no gender differences in the levels of reported indirect aggression. This finding is also reflected in a meta analysis of 148 independent studies of aggression which found that while there was the same gender difference in direct aggression, the gender difference in indirect aggression was trivial:

“We conclude that the general pattern is of *similarities* rather than differences among boys’ and girls’ use of indirect aggression.” Card et al (2008) p 1204 (italics in original).

Card et al (2008) also found a high correlation between direct and indirect aggression which leads them to suggest that they may not be distinct forms of aggression.

Despite these criticisms from both feminist poststructuralist and traditional psychological research, discourses in the U.K. media utilise a ‘mean’ girl discourse when reporting accounts of bullying, as in the headline from the Times Educational Supplement, the U.K.’s leading educational newspaper: *Girls suffer lion’s share of bullying* (Bloom, 2009). The article claims that it is the ‘tight knit and relatively inflexible nature of female friendships’ that leads to girls bullying. Accounts of girls’ bullying draw explicitly upon a ‘mean girl’ discourse as exemplified by the work of Besag (2006) a Consultant Educational Psychologist, Besag (2006) utilises a range of explanations to explain gender differences in bullying, including evolutionary theory which suggests that boys’ aggression is related to establishing their place in a male hierarchy while girls are in competition to secure a mate. Besag (2006) characterises girl bullies as “little Miss Popular” and “Madam Machiavelli” thus drawing directly upon discourses of the ‘mean girl’. Besag’s (2006) work has been widely reported in the U.K. media and has contributed to the discursive shift to the ‘mean girl’ identified by Ringrose (2006). From a poststructural perspective these discourses of girls do not reflect ‘reality’ but position girls in particular ways as they negotiate their identities.

## **2.6 Psychological Discourses of “Emotional Difficulty”**

### **2.6.1 Introduction**

My research arose from a concern over the differing rates of referrals for girls and boys to support services particularly in the Special Educational Needs (SEN) category of behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (BESD). The definition of this category is contested and within psychology there are a number of discourses that draw upon different psychological paradigms in order to construct the concept of ‘emotional difficulties’ in schools. These psychological paradigms tend to utilise a positivist paradigm and so purport to describe the ‘real world’. My research has been influenced by a social constructivist perspective which suggests that the theories presented by researchers from different paradigms are psychological discourses. These discourses play a role in how the concept of emotional difficulty comes to be constructed.

This section describes the main psychological discourses of emotional difficulty by firstly exploring how emotional difficulties have been constructed in the literature on schools (Section 2.6.2). It goes on to explore the discourses that have emerged from the main paradigms in psychology; the concept of mental health/illness (Section 2.6.3) and how emotional difficulties have been constructed as a consequence of the body (2.6.4), gender role (2.6.5) and cognition (2.6.6).

### **2.6.2 The construction of emotional difficulties in schools**

Thomas and Loxley (2001) argue that it is the need to keep order in the school that leads to the creation of categories such as BESD, pupils who do not conform to the institutional rules are assumed to have “emotional difficulties”. In this way

emotional difficulties have become equated in many schools with challenging behaviour where pupils are seen as “acting out” their emotions through their difficult behaviour. The concept of “acting out” originates in psychoanalytical psychology when a patient engages in behaviour as a substitute for remembering past events (Rycroft, 1995). The term has however passed into popular discourses to explain the challenging behaviour displayed by some pupils which disrupts classrooms; these children are described as “acting out” or externalising their emotions (Ogden, 2001). Here again the gendering of need is apparent, as girls are largely invisible in the literature about behaviour in schools (Lloyd, 2005b) and this invisibility has consequences for girls in terms of their ability to access help when they need it.

In a study of girls and exclusion from school Osler et al (2002) conclude that girls are not a priority in school’s thinking about behaviour management because they are not perceived as a problem. Osler and Vincent (2003) suggest that the ways in which girls indicate that they are experiencing difficulties differs from that of boys, while boys often disrupt lessons, girls tend to be quietly self-excluding, withdrawing from learning or from school. In secondary schools girls report that they often choose to self-exclude, for example, by only attending the lessons that they like (Osler et al, 2002). Pupils who show distress by withdrawal, shyness or docility are less likely to be identified as experiencing difficulties because they are less problematic for schools (Daniels et al, 1995; Cruddas and Haddock, 2005). Lloyd (2005b) presents a more complex picture of girls’ behaviour suggesting that girls may become withdrawn but a minority can also become disruptive in school. She suggests that this can make these girls doubly deviant, as they are not conforming to the school and also engaging in behaviour that is associated with being masculine:

“‘Bad girls’ offend not only against the rules of the school or the laws of their society but also against the norms for their gender.”  
Lloyd (2005a) p 2.

Generally the research suggests that when girls and boys face difficulties in school they tend to exhibit different behaviours in order to cope with these difficulties, where boys are more likely than girls to engage in behaviour that is disruptive to the school.

### **2.6.3 Discourses of emotional difficulty and mental health**

Within psychology there is a further discourse of emotional difficulty which tends to be framed in terms of vulnerability to mental illness. This discourse is related to changing patterns in the prevalence of mental illnesses for girls and boys:

“Whereas early childhood produces more psychopathology in boys, adolescence is considered more difficult for girls and produces more psychopathology.” Martin (1996) p 11.

This is part of a wider discourse focusing on differing patterns of mental illness for women and men, which forms part of a discourse of adolescence because most diagnosed mental illnesses are thought to have their onset at this time. Research suggests that adolescent girls are more likely to self harm, attempt suicide (Coleman and Hendry, 1999), report more depressive symptoms than boys (Frydenberg, 1997; Marcotte et al, 1999) and to develop eating disorders (Bordo, 2003). While this research appears to suggest that girls are at greater risk of developing a mental illness than boys, epidemiological studies suggest that there are different patterns of mental illness between boys and girls rather than there being differences in the overall prevalence of disorders. Younger boys for example are more at risk from being identified as having “conduct disorders” and so rates of mental health problems are higher for boys until early adolescence, when girls begin to report more emotional problems (Piccinelli and Homen, 1997).

Stoppard (2000) suggests that statistics for the prevalence of mental disorders are however problematic on a number of grounds, some rely upon the numbers of people who access services and therefore may reflect the willingness to seek professional help rather than actual rates of mental illness. Other figures are drawn from epidemiological studies which take a sample of the whole population and ask for self-reports of symptoms, these studies are susceptible to the biases in self-reports outlined in Section 2.4.3. Parker et al (1995) also suggest that the diagnosis of mental illness is prone to a number of biases based upon the ethnicity, class and sex of the patient, which distort the statistics for different mental illnesses. Despite these difficulties with the social construction of statistics for mental illness, researchers continue to search for explanations for the gender differences in the patterns of mental disorders between girls and boys.

#### **2.6.4 Discourses of emotional difficulty and the body**

Within psychology there are a number of discourses that construct emotional difficulties as a consequence of biology and/or biological difference. Gendered discourses of adolescence emphasise the impact of biology upon development as a consequence of the association of adolescence with the onset of puberty. Pubertal maturation is the result of an increase in sex hormones which result in changes to physical appearance:

“The terms pubertal status or pubertal development usually refer to the level of development reached by an individual in terms of secondary sexual characteristics.” Alsaker (1996) p 249.

One result of these changes is weight gain which can have a negative impact upon the body image of girls (Striegel-Moore and Cachelin, 1999). This is particularly the case for girls who are early maturers and therefore experience physical change when they

are younger than their peers, these girls are more likely to report depressive feelings and sadness and are at greater risk of developing eating disorders than their peers (Alsaker, 1996). Basow and Rubin (1999) suggest that gender stereotypes require girls and boys to conform to conventional standards of physical attractiveness, which for girls currently means an unrealistically thin ideal body shape. Girls who mature early not only have to deal with the conflict between their changing body and this stereotype but also with gaining weight when most of their peers still have a childlike appearance (Adams and Berzonsky, 2003). In contrast to girls, boys have been found to experience the physical changes associated with adolescence more positively than girls (Nolen-Hoeksema and Girgus, 1994) possibly because the physical changes that they experience result in a body shape that is in line with gender stereotypes of an appropriate masculine body shape.

Poststructuralist approaches suggest that we need to understand the discursive meanings that are associated with physical changes, as puberty is not only a biological change but is also laden with cultural meanings which are gendered (Martin, 1996). From a feminist poststructuralist perspective the body is not only a biological entity; rather bodies are framed through discourse:

“.....this means that when girls’ bodies undergo the changes called puberty, how girls understand and react to these embodied experiences and the reactions and expectations of others already are shaped by cultural discourses around the female body.” Stoppard (2000) p 125.

The discursive meanings that are attached to bodies are not universal but are historically and culturally specific (Lee, 1997). Lee (1994) uses the example of the menarche (the onset of menstruation) to illustrate how in Western cultures this biological change is laden with cultural meanings. She suggests that girls’ experience of the menarche is secretive and shameful and represents sexual availability and

reproductive potential and thus their bodies can also be viewed as a cultural artefact governed by discourse (Lee, 1997).

In addition to the discourses surrounding puberty, researchers have drawn upon essentialist discourses in an attempt to find evidence of biological differences between women and men that can account for differences in the incidence of mental disorders. An example is found in research on depression where women are two to three times more likely to receive a diagnosis of depression than men (Nolen-Hoeksema, 2001). Biological discourses tend to focus upon the impact of hormonal changes that take place at key times in a woman's life, for example at puberty and menopause (Seeman, 1997) and although much scientific research has focused upon establishing a link between biology and depression, research findings remain inconsistent (Nolen-Hoeksema, 2001). Gender differences in the diagnosis of depression start to emerge during adolescence when girls are more likely to self-report depressive symptoms than boys. In a review of epidemiological research on rates of depression, Kessler (2003) suggests that the higher incidence of depression for women cannot be accounted for using only a biological explanation. He argues that research which attempts to link women's depression to hormones consistently fails to find significant differences between participants with depression and control groups and is unable to account for the increases in the incidences of depression in both women and men. Kessler (2003) suggests that future research needs to consider the interactions between biological and social factors in understanding the relationship between gender and depression.

### **2.6.5 Discourses of emotional difficulty and gender role**

A further position in psychology explains emotional difficulties as a consequence of socially constructed gender roles which are constructed as particularly damaging for girls. Examples of these theories are found in Hill and Lynch's (1983) gender intensification hypothesis and Frederickson and Roberts' (1997) objectification theory. In Hill and Lynch's (1983) gender intensification hypothesis, they suggest that when girls reach adolescence there is an increasing expectation, particularly from parents, that they will begin to conform to their traditional gender role. Research suggests that social expectations of gendered behaviour and appearance intensify during adolescence placing young people under pressure. Basow and Rubin (1999) argue that the increased stress for girls during adolescence is related to the expectation that they will conform to female gender role prescriptions, at the same time as they are experiencing the physical changes associated with puberty.

Martin (1996) suggests that gendered norms are tightened at adolescence and are oppressive for women:

“Cultural norms about beauty, weight, appearance and demeanour become more rigid.” Martin (1996) p 12.

Stoppard (2000) suggests that culturally shared notions of adolescent femininity underpin the discourses that are available to girls within specific contexts and provide the raw material from which adolescent girls develop their sense of self. Some researchers have suggested that these culturally prescribed gender roles may contribute to the development of mental illness for adolescent girls. For example, in the area of depression researchers have suggested that the characteristics associated with the female gender role may make girls more prone to developing depression than boys:

“In this context, girls become more prone to depression because their gender-related role is more depressogenic, whereas the masculine gender-typed characteristics, known as instrumental characteristics, act as a buffer against depressive symptoms.” Marcotte et al (1999) p 33.

Nolen-Hoeksema and Girgus (1994) suggest that there are a number of gender related characteristics for girls that increase the likelihood that they will experience depression: most importantly that women are more dependent upon others for self-worth than men, are less assertive and self confident. Marcotte et al (1999) suggest that differing rates of depression for girls and boys are related to gender role rather than biological factors.

An alternative discourse which explains emotional difficulties as a consequence of socially constructed gender roles is found in Frederickson and Roberts’ (1997) gender objectification theory. Frederickson and Roberts (1997) argue that girls and women are accultured to internalise an observer’s perspective of their physical selves. In Western societies this occurs in a culture where the social meaning associated with the female body is as an object that exists for the use and pleasure of others. Frederickson and Roberts (1997) argue that this leads to a preoccupation with appearance:

“Girls and women, according to our analysis, may to some degree come to view themselves as objects or ‘sights’ to be appreciated by others. This is a peculiar perspective on self, one that lead to a form of self–consciousness characterized by habitual monitoring of the body’s outward appearance.” Frederickson and Roberts (1997) p 180.

Frederickson and Roberts (1997) suggest that this objectification can lead to increased levels of shame about their body for women and can contribute to the development of appearance anxiety. Slater and Tiggerman (2002) tested this theory in a study of adolescent girls and found that self-objectification was linked to self-monitoring, body shame and disordered eating.

The importance of physical appearance for adolescence girls was apparent in Martin's (1996) research. She used semi-structured interviews to explore the experiences of girls and boys during adolescence. Martin (1996) found that when she asked the girls to "tell me about yourself" she found that the girls tended to talk about their bodies and found it difficult to describe other aspects of themselves. Martin (1996) suggests that:

"As a result of being 'noticed' and objectified by others, girls also come to objectify their own bodies." Martin (1996) p 40.

Crawford and Unger (2003) suggest that the increased pressure on girls to conform to a particular body image has coincided with an emphasis in the mass media on thinness as the main determinant of attractiveness. This is not to suggest that girls are simply "cultural dopes" who simply internalise cultural discourses, rather Keelan et al (1992) suggest that there are advantages for girls in focusing upon their physical appearance as children and adolescents who are rated as more physically attractive enjoy more social success.

#### **2.6.6 Discourses of emotional difficulty and cognition**

Cognitive approaches in psychology are concerned with the processes in the mind that are involved in thought. Cognitive discourses of gender differences in adolescent mental health have tended to focus upon differences in coping style. In self-report studies, girls report more stressful events than boys and also find it more difficult to recover from these events:

"Girls evaluate the same problem as more complex and individually caused. When a stressful event is over they continue to ruminate or think about it." Frydenburg (1997) p 89.

Rumination is a coping style that involves directing attention internally to negative feelings and thoughts and has been found to increase the duration of depressive experiences in adolescent girls (Broderick and Korteland, 2002). It is believed to prolong distress by interfering with strategies such as problem-solving and distraction, which can lift an individual's mood (Nolen-Hoeksema et al, 2008). While rumination is also a coping style used by some boys and men, Broderick and Korteland (2002) found that feminine-identified individuals showed a higher tendency to ruminate than masculine-identified individuals and that participants regarded rumination as an appropriate coping strategy for girls but not for boys. Hart and Thompson (1996) suggest that a ruminative coping style is linked to a feminine gender role stereotype which can help to explain the difference in the rate of reported depression for adolescent girls and boys.

In a study of adolescents who were not experiencing a depressed mood, Sethi and Nolen-Hoeksema (1997) found that girls devoted more of their thoughts to thinking about themselves and other people, while boys tended to focus on external objects such as music and sport. Broderick and Korteland (2002) suggest that such thoughts are the result of set of internalized beliefs about what constitutes appropriate gendered behaviour and conclude that:

“Such beliefs may provide a script for adolescents, who rely upon gender stereotypes in their struggles to understand the meanings of masculinity and femininity and to cope with daily challenges in ways that are consonant with the expectations for their gender.” Broderick and Korteland (2002) p 212.

Thus Broderick and Korteland (2002) suggest that cognitive styles develop in accordance to sociocultural expectations of how girls and boys will respond to particular social situations rather than being biological.

## **2.7 Summary**

The aim of this chapter has been to provide the context for my research through a review of the relevant literature around gender and emotions and setting the policy context in which educational psychologists work with particular reference to the concept of behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. It has been done by exploring three concepts that are central to this research: gender, with particular reference to girls, emotionality and adolescence, again focusing on how girls have been represented in the research literature. In doing so it has focused particularly on by feminist social constructionist and poststructural ideas while recognising that there are tensions between the two perspectives. Feminist theory has questioned the traditional psychological construction of emotion and gender as innate and biological. Both social constructionism and poststructuralism emphasise the role of language and discourse. These approaches have enabled feminist researchers to problematise behaviour which is often regarded as natural. The next chapter will go on to outline the methodology and research methods employed in this research.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

This research was designed to investigate discourses around emotions and emotional difficulties of secondary aged girls as constructed by teachers and the girls themselves. The research had a qualitative design and was undertaken using focus groups with Year 9 girls and semi-structured interviews with teachers. The data gathered through these methods was then used to undertake a discourse analysis. This chapter begins with a discussion regarding the ontological and epistemological issues that were pertinent in my research (Section 3.2) before going on to describe the research design and questions (Section 3.3). Section 3.4 describes the selection of the school from where the participants were drawn and provides contextual information about the school.

Section 3.5 identifies the two methods that were employed in this research: focus groups and semi-structured interviews. The choice of focus groups as a method, including the development of the activities used and the selection of participants are discussed in Sections 3.6 – 3.13. While the rationale for choosing semi-structured interviewing as a method and their design is discussed in Sections 3.14-3.19. The ethical implications of the use of focus groups and semi-structured interviews are discussed in Sections 3.7 and 3.15 respectively. The chapter ends with a discussion of the process of discourse analysis used in this research and how this has been written up in this thesis (Section 3.20 and 3.21).

## **3.2 Ontological and Epistemological Issues**

### **3.2.1 Introduction**

This section explores the ontological and epistemological issues that underpin this research through a comparison of two approaches in social research, described by Bryman (2001) as objectivism and constructionism (Section 3.2.2). The section goes on to describe the ontological and epistemological assumptions of the two theoretical positions that have influenced this research: social constructionism (Section 3.2.3) and feminist poststructuralism (Section 3.2.4).

### **3.2.2 Objectivism and constructionism**

Traditionally the construction of psychology as a science has led researchers to utilise the positivist methodologies developed within the natural sciences (Morgan, 1998). Although psychology has not been immune to the developing critique of positivism within social science positivist methodologies continue to dominate psychological research. The research strategy employed in this study represents a departure from traditional psychology by drawing upon ideas developed within social constructionism and feminist poststructuralism. This section explores how these approaches differ from traditional psychology research which employs a positivist methodology.

The research design in this study utilised ideas from social constructionism and feminist poststructuralism, while recognising some of the inherent tensions between these approaches. Social constructionism and feminist poststructuralism are part of a wider movement in research which developed in response to structural theories such as positivism, which is based upon the methods developed within the

natural sciences. While these two ontological positions have been given many labels they are usefully described by Bryman (2001) who identifies them as objectivism, where social phenomena are regarded as external facts and as constructionism, where the social world is conceptualized as being constantly constructed through the actions of social actors. These two contrasting positions are neatly encapsulated by Oakley:

“What for one side is a set of ‘facts’ is for the other a complex and impenetrable kaleidoscope of heavily constructed social meanings.”  
Oakley, (2000) p 25.

Objectivism is most closely associated with positivism within social science, which emerged during the Enlightenment, when science began to replace tradition and became the privileged model of investigation (Usher, 1996). Fay (1996) identifies positivism as part of realist ontology, where reality is believed to be independent of human perception and cognition. So the aim of positivist research is to uncover the “truth” about the social world. The common theme running through descriptions of the positivist approach is an assumption that the methodological procedures of natural science can be applied to the social sciences. Cohen et al (2007) suggest that positivism is associated with Comte’s (cited in Cohen et al, 2007) scientific perspective, which states that knowledge is based upon experience that can only be advanced by means of observation and experiment. This leads to epistemological claims that the only valid way to study society is through the use of the scientific method, as within positivism only knowledge derived in this way can claim validity (Delanty, 1997).

The scientific method, taken from the natural sciences, aims for objectivity, value freedom and the development of causal laws. Within positivism there is an

assumption of a constant relationship between events that allows the researcher to discover cause and effect relationships (Cohen et al, 2007). According to this view science is the study of an objectively existing reality that lies outside the discourse of scientific theory and research, with an inherent order that can be studied objectively by the researcher (Delanty, 1997). Positivists assume the existence of an objective world where the researcher is able to conduct research in order to promote the value freedom that is central to positivism. This is reflected in the idea that science can be a neutral activity, not influenced by the values and beliefs of the researcher (Delanty, 1997). The desirability and possibility of such value freedom is promoted by psychologists such as Morgan:

“Whether scientists have a political agenda or not is in the end not the issue: what matters is whether the observations made by researchers are reliable, and free from their opinions.” Morgan (1998) p 482.

This view can be contrasted with that of Mills (cited in Delanty, 1997) who suggests the political nature of positivist research is hidden by these claims of objectivity and value freedom.

Bryman’s (2001) second ontological position, constructionism, arose from a critique of positivist science and emphasizes the importance of culture and context in understanding society. The ontological position underpinning constructionism is a rejection of the assumption found in traditional positivism that reality exists to be discovered and researched. Rather constructionists argue that reality is constructed through human activity, including social research (Prawat and Floden, 1994). Constructionism has a long history in social science, with roots in a desire to understand the “Other” in anthropology (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005), and is associated with a variety of approaches including anti-positivism, interpretivism,

phenomenology and poststructuralism. Cohen et al (2007) suggest that while these approaches each have their own epistemological viewpoints they:

“.....are united by their common rejection of the belief that human behaviour is governed by general, universal laws and characterized by underlying regularities. Moreover, they would agree that the social world can only be understood from the standpoint of the individuals who are part of the ongoing action being investigated.....” Cohen et al (2007) p 19.

Constructionists believe that the difference between researching the physical world and the social world is in the interpretations and meaning that human beings give to their world (Pring, 2000).

Within constructionist approaches, the positivist ideals of objectivity and value freedom are replaced by an interest in understanding the subjective meanings that people give to their social worlds. Thus methods derived from the natural sciences are deemed inappropriate for researching the social world as they may limit the understanding that researchers can gain about that world. In contrast to positivism, the aim of constructionists is to understand the ways in which the social world is created by social actors:

“Constructionism also suggests that the categories that people employ in helping them to understand the natural and social world are in fact social products. The categories do not have built-in essences; instead, their meaning is constructed in and through interaction.” Bryman (2001) p 18.

This research has been influenced by the constructivist approach to social research particularly the “turn to language” in psychology where language is no longer understood as simply reflecting reality but is regarded as central to meaning making. The term “constructivist” as used by Bryman (2001) encompasses a range of theories which have developed in opposition to positivism. My research has been influenced by social constructionism and feminist poststructuralism.

### **3.2.3 Social constructionism**

My research also drew upon concepts developed within social constructionism in order to explore how the emotional needs of secondary aged girls are constructed. Social constructionism developed in opposition to the positivist scientific approach to knowledge that claims to be identifying transcendent truths uncontaminated by culture and history (Gergen, 2001). Social constructionism shares many of the same concerns as discursive psychology, including an understanding of knowledge as constructed and sustained by social processes (Burr, 1995). Social constructionism provides an alternative ontology to that found within traditional psychology because it offers a different perspective on the self; rather than the bounded, self contained individual, social constructionism conceptualizes the self as a cultural creation (Gergen, 2001).

Gergen (1999) traces this view of the self as socially constructed from the ideas of symbolic interaction, cultural psychology and social phenomenology, as all suggest that it is the social world that precedes the psychological self. Social constructionism emphasises the importance of language in the construction of the social world:

“Meaning is not there to be discovered, but rather is created through the language available to speak ‘truths’ into existence.” Allard (2004) p 348.

Language is conceptualized as central to identity which is negotiated through the discourses that are available within a culture, rather than being a fixed and measurable attribute (Korobov and Bamberg, 2004). Thus social constructionists are also concerned with the role of discourse in the social world:

“Cultural life largely revolves around the meaning assigned to various actions, events or objects; discourse is perhaps the critical medium through which meanings are fashioned.” Gergen (2001) p 161.

Researchers working within a social constructionist paradigm reject attempts to conduct research that is objective and value free as an unattainable ideal and instead seek to explore the discursive practices that form the social world. My research drew upon social constructionist ideas in order to consider how girls are constructed as “emotional beings” within secondary schools.

### **3.2.4 Feminist poststructuralism**

According to Bryman’s (2001) typology poststructuralism represents a constructionist approach within social research. A key element of poststructuralism is the emphasis upon the analysis of discourse in the understanding of social phenomena. The epistemological assumptions which follow from poststructuralism are the importance of relativism, meaning and discourse in understanding the social world. Weedon (1999) comments that poststructural approaches problematize the Enlightenment project of uncovering the “Truth” through scientific reasoning. For poststructuralists knowledge is not waiting to be discovered by researchers, rather all knowledge is socially constituted and is constructed through the research process. Research is not able to capture the “truth” of reality as there are multiple realities and truths; what research can offer is a partial interpretation of a social world that is complex and dynamic (Wetherell et al, 2001). The term poststructuralism is used to encompass a number of different but related approaches to social research.

My research has been influenced by feminist poststructuralist ideas of multiple and overlapping gender identities that are constantly being made and remade. My research followed the work of feminists who have attempted to combine the strengths of the poststructural perspective with the emancipatory project of feminism, despite

the contradictions between the two (Francis, 2002). The feminist project has emancipatory aims rooted in Enlightenment thinking, which are regarded by poststructuralists as repressive discourses claiming universal truths that are contradictory to poststructural ideas (Francis, 1998). Despite these contradictions, feminists have been attracted to poststructural analysis because it provides a way of understanding the ambiguities of power relations where women and girls are multiply positioned (Baxter 2002). For some feminists this has revealed new ways of researching gender that no longer rely upon grand narratives that are oppressive to some women:

“As postmodernists, we can use categories such as ‘gender’, ‘race’ and ‘class’ in social and cultural analysis but on the assumption that their meaning is historically and socially specific.” Weedon (1999) p 130.

My research drew upon a research tradition within feminism that places gender at the forefront of its investigation and utilises poststructural analyses which suggest that gender identities are not fixed but are fluid and shifting (Reay, 2001).

### **3.3 Research Design**

My research drew upon social constructionism and feminist poststructuralism to explore the discourses that construct the emotions and emotional difficulties of secondary aged girls. The research utilised a qualitative research design, in order to explore how the emotional difficulties of secondary aged girls are constructed, using discourse analysis to analyse semi-structured interviews with teachers and focus groups with Year 9 girls. The purpose of the discourse analysis was to enable the researcher to gain an understanding of a “rich plurality of voices and perspectives” (Baxter, 2002). The research focused upon the discourses employed by the girls in response to a perceived bias in educational discourses which have been dominated in

recent years by concern regarding the underachievement of boys (Skelton and Francis, 2003). In focusing on boys these discourses threaten to marginalise girls. As a researcher I wanted to provide girls with the opportunity to have their voices represented in research that was focused upon their needs. In order to avoid the research becoming more generally about gender and risk losing the focus upon girls I decided not to use focus groups with boys.

This research was influenced by what Blaikie (2000) categorises as an abductive strategy:

“..the abductive research strategy entails *ontological* assumptions that view social reality as the social construction of social actors.” Blaikie (2000) p 115 (*italics in original*).

While there is no one research design that is associated with the abductive research strategy these ontological assumptions lead to the use of methods which follow the hermeneutic tradition, where the researcher seeks to understand the meaning of the everyday language used by social actors:

“...the process used to generate social scientific accounts from social actors’ accounts; for deriving technical concepts and theories from lay concepts and interpretations of social life.” Blaikie (2000) p 114.

The abductive research strategy requires the collection of data using naturalistic methods which allow the collection of qualitative data rather than highly structured methods such as questionnaires, as it is qualitative data that provides the detail required to uncover meanings. This research followed an abductive research strategy that was informed by a feminist poststructural perspective, focusing on the constitutive nature of language through the use of discourse analysis. The processes employed in the discourse analysis are described in Section 3.20.

### 3.3.1 Research questions

As this is an area where there has been little previous research, the aim of this study was to explore the discourses surrounding the construction of the emotions and emotional difficulties of girls using data gathered from semi-structured interviews with teachers and focus groups with Year 9 girls. The questions investigated were:

- What discourses are employed by Year 9 girls when discussing emotion and emotional difficulties?
- How do these discourses contribute to the girls' constructions of being a 'proper girl'?
- How do these discourses contribute to the support and resources that young people are able to access in school in order to meet their emotional needs?
- What discourses are employed by teachers when talking about the emotional difficulties of their pupils, particularly girls?
- How do the discourses utilised by teachers influence the support and resources that young people are able to access in school in order to meet their emotional needs?

### 3.4 Selecting the School

This research used a qualitative approach to explore the discourses surrounding the emotions and emotional difficulties of secondary aged. The reasons for the choice of school were practical, as I was the school's educational psychologist I had access to a member of staff who was able to help me to secure the consent of the school's senior management team. My school contact was also invaluable in helping me to organise the practical aspects of the research, for example organising rooms for me to use. The school had the advantage that statistically its school population had a profile that was close to the average for the Local Authority as a whole, though it had slightly less pupils identified as having special educational needs (see Table 1).

Table 1: School contextual data

Contextual Data	School	Local Authority Average
Free School Meals %	17.9	16.6
Ethnic minority pupils %	30.4	30.2
Pupils with a SEN%	17.5	22.6

(Information provided the Local Authority's Data Intelligence Unit)

The school was a mixed sex school, situated in a large, multicultural metropolitan borough within the West Midlands conurbation and with a population of over 280,000 approximately 30% of whom were from black and ethnic minority backgrounds. The borough was one of the most deprived districts in the country falling within the top 20 most deprived districts on five of the six district level measures as a result in the decline in manufacturing since the 1980s (information provided by Local Authority's Data Intelligence Unit). At the time of this research the school had 1,518 pupils on roll, making it one of the two largest secondary schools in the Local Authority.

#### **3.4.1 Gaining access to the school**

Cohen et al (2007) suggest that the key aspects at the initial stage of the research process are to gain access to the institution where the research will be conducted, the need to be clear about the purpose of the research and the demands that will be made upon the research setting. The way that access is negotiated depends upon whether the research is an 'insider' who is a member of the organization or an 'outsider' (Robson, 2002). In this research I was in the position of being both an insider and outsider; I was the school's designated educational psychologist, so did undertake some work within the school setting but I was not a member of staff or employed by the school. Furthermore my work was mainly undertaken with the school's Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCo) and occasionally involved assessment with individual pupils, I was therefore not known more widely by the staff or the pupils of the school. This insider-outsider status was useful when negotiating access as I was able in the first instance to approach the SENCo in order to establish if the school's senior management team were likely to give consent to my research.

Having an existing professional relationship with a key member of the school staff meant that I had an advocate on the staff who was able to present my proposal to the senior management team, rather than a situation where I was contacting the school as an outsider. After a discussion with the SENCo in which I described the purpose and structure of my research we agreed that I would write a letter to the senior management team which the SENCo passed on to them. The letter outlined the nature of the research, the basic research design, the number of participants and the amount of time that participation would involve for them (see Appendix A). I also outlined the ethical safeguards, such as anonymity and enclosed a copy of the ethical guidelines provided by the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2004). My request was considered at senior management meeting and I was granted permission to conduct my research.

### **3.5 Research Methods**

The epistemological stance which influenced the design of this research was that described by Bryman (2001) as constructivism. There are a number of different strands to constructivism which share the assumption that knowledge is not simply part of a real world that is discovered by the researcher but rather knowledge is constructed through the research process. This research has been influenced by a postmodern epistemology where:

“Knowledge is neither inside a person nor outside in the world, but exists in the relationships between persons and world.”

Kvale and Brinkman (2009) p 53.

As this research follows ideas developed within social constructionism and feminist poststructuralism, particularly the idea that language is constitutive of the social world, it was important to use research methods that allowed the collection of

qualitative data in the form of language. The time constraints of the research did not allow me to collect naturally occurring accounts, it was therefore necessary to choose research methods which enabled me to study the language that participants used when talking about the emotional needs of girls. So this research used a qualitative approach, with data collected through the use of semi-structured interviews with teachers and focus groups with Year 9 girls who attended the school.

### **3.6 Focus Groups**

#### **3.6.1 Introduction**

Sections 3.6 – 3.13 describe the factors influencing the design of the focus groups used in this research. Section 3.7 provides a brief introduction to the use of focus groups in social research and the rationale for using them in this research. Section 3.8 goes on to describe the selection of participants for the focus groups and the nature of the sample. A discussion of the ethical issues surrounding informed consent, confidentiality and the relationship between researcher and participants is contained in Section 3.9. Sections 3.10 and 3.11 describe how the focus groups were piloted and the subsequent modifications that were made. The discussion on the use of focus groups ends on Sections 3.12 and 3.13 with reflections on the use of focus groups as a research tool and on the role of the facilitator within these groups.

### **3.7 Focus Groups in Social Research**

My research employed focus groups as a method to engage with Year 9 girls within the secondary school. Focus groups are a form of group interview with the difference being that focus groups aim to promote interaction within the group, rather than questions and answers between the interviewer and participants:

“The hallmark of focus groups is *the explicit use of the group interaction to produce data and insights that would be less accessible without the interaction found in a group.*” Morgan (1988) p12 (italics in the original).

In an outline of focus group research Morgan (1988) identifies their origins in the sociology of the 1940s and 1950s, particularly the work of Robert Merton in the USA, who used groups to examine the persuasiveness of wartime propaganda. The technique became popular with market researchers but was not utilised widely by academics. There has however been a resurgence of interest in the use of focus groups in academic research since the 1980s, as seen in the increasing number of texts that are available on their use (Morgan, 1988; Vaughan et al, 1996; Krueger, 1998; Krueger and Casey, 2000; Bloor et al, 2001).

The use of focus groups has the practical advantage of allowing the collection of a range of views more quickly than in individual interviews (Vaughan et al, 1996). Osborne and Collins (2001) suggest that compared to individual interviews the use of focus groups can increase the validity of the data collected, as the researcher can observe a relatively spontaneous interaction between participants, which is not entirely controlled by the researcher. Focus groups offer an opportunity to generate discussion on the research topic in a social context which can be viewed as a partial representation of social interactions:

“The focus group presents a more natural environment than that of the individual interview because participants are influencing and influenced by others – just as they are in life.” Krueger and Casey (2000) p 11.

The focus group also offers participants the choice of not responding to a particular issue and can therefore ensure that responses are more genuine than forced (Vaughan et al, 1996). While focus groups have some advantages over one to one interviews they also have some disadvantages for the researcher because they involve a group of

participants rather than individuals. For sensitive issues the group context can be problematic in terms of what participants may be willing to disclose in front of others and to some extent the dynamics of a group will influence how participants engage in the discussion. There may, for example be a tendency for some individuals to dominate and thus to inhibit the responses of other members of the group. While Krueger and Casey (2000) argue that the group setting is a more natural environment than the individual interview, focus groups still take place in artificial situations which are controlled by the researcher and may therefore lack the validity associated with more naturalistic ethnographic research methods.

As I was interested in studying the discourses of girls' emotions and emotional difficulties I required data that was as naturalistic as possible. I was not able to collect naturally occurring talk as this would have required a more ethnographic approach, spending long periods of time in the school collecting the data. My data collection needed to take place within the constraints of a full-time job and within the time frame of a number of study days allowed by my employer, it was therefore necessary to choose a research method that could provide me with more naturalistic talk that could be gathered within my time constraints. The advantages of focus groups over individual interviews were that they are not entirely controlled by the researcher and allow participants to interact spontaneously.

### **3.8 Selection of participants for the focus groups**

Focus groups raise distinctive issues in terms of the selection of participants and sampling, as within focus group research the aim is to collect as diverse a range of opinions as possible from a target group rather than aiming for representativeness.

The aim of such groups is to promote self disclosure and this is more likely to happen when participants have something in common and feel comfortable in the group (Krueger and Casey, 2000). This has implications for how participants are recruited for the groups:

“...researchers suggest that participants should be selected based on predetermined characteristics that provide for a more homogenous group.”  
Vaughan et al (1996) pp 61-62.

In this research the target population for the focus groups was adolescent girls attending a secondary school in the West Midlands. While recommending that adult focus groups should contain a wide age range, Krueger and Casey (2000) suggest that younger people tend to be more age conscious and this can inhibit responses. They therefore recommend that the age range for young people within a focus group should span no more than two years.

In this research I decided to target a single year group to overcome this potential difficulty and chose Year 9 girls who are aged between 13 – 14 years. A combination of factors contributed to my decision to use girls of this age. My experience working within the secondary sector suggested that this year group is often regarded as the most turbulent and difficult by teachers. As I wanted to access the discourses that the girls utilised within the school setting I needed girls who had been attending secondary school for a reasonable period of time, in this case 2½ years. A further advantage of Year 9 girls was that they were more likely to be released from lessons than older pupils who were studying for examination courses.

Once the target group had been identified the participants who were to be invited to take part in the focus groups needed to be selected. In my original planning

for this study it was my intention to run four groups with 5/6 girls in each. There is no definitive advice on the number of focus groups needed to obtain an adequate amount of data or the number of participants per group. The purpose of the focus group is to collect as wide a range of views as possible and it is difficult to determine the point at which this will occur. Kruegar and Casey (2000) suggest a “rule of thumb” of 3-4 groups with any particular type of participant, whilst other researchers suggest that the nature of the participants will influence the number of groups needed:

“The more homogeneous your groups are in terms of both background and role-based perspectives, the fewer you need.” Morgan (1988) p 42.

As this research was conducted on a relatively homogeneous group of Year 9 girls I decided to run the minimum recommended number of four focus groups with the Year 9 girls. There is also no definitive guidance on the numbers of participants within each group, with small and larger groups both having advantages and disadvantages. Morgan (1988) comments the smaller each group is the greater the contribution required from each participant while larger groups can be difficult to moderate; in general groups of 5–10 participants are recommended by researchers (Morgan, 1988; Kruegar and Casey, 2000).

I planned to run four focus groups with 5/6 girls in each and therefore needed approximately 24 girls to take part in the groups. There are a number of different sampling techniques that researchers employ in order to select participants in research. Cohen et al (2007) suggest that there are two main types of sample in educational research: probability samples and non-probability samples. A probability sample draws randomly from the population being studied and is used where the aim of research is to generalise to the wider population. Non-probability samples are used where the researcher is targeting a particular group without the intention of

generalizing the results beyond that group and is also used in small-scale research where researchers may not have the time or resources to use a probability sample (Cohen et al, 2007). This research design involved only a small number of girls from Year 9 however the purpose was to elicit a wide range of views from the focus groups I therefore decided that a random selection of girls may not provide me with girls from different social backgrounds.

An additional factor in my choice of sampling technique was that the primary aim of the research was to illuminate an aspect of school life without the intention of generalizing from the results or gaining normative data. I therefore decided that it was more useful to employ a non-probability sample, namely purposive sampling:

“Purposive sampling is a procedure by which researchers select a subject or subjects based upon predetermined criteria about the extent to which the selected subjects could contribute to the research study.”  
Vaughan et al (1996) p 58.

This approach aims for enough homogeneity in background, in terms of age and gender, to make participants willing to contribute to the group, whilst recruiting a wide enough variety of girls to ensure that I was able to access a range of attitudes (Morgan, 1988). To ensure that I was able to include a range of girls in my focus groups I asked my school contact to select girls in terms of ability groupings within the school. While ethnicity was not the focus of my research I wanted to represent the range of black and ethnic minority pupils in the school and I therefore asked my school contact to ensure that the sample contained girls from the diversity of ethnic groups in the school. My purpose was to preserve the group's homogeneity in terms of age and gender but based on the assumption that social characteristics may affect social constructions, to also ensure that I was able to obtain a sample where girls from different backgrounds were represented. As there were seven Year 9 classes I utilised

the knowledge of my contact within the school to select four girls from each class, a total of 32 girls, as some of those selected may have opted not to take part. I then met with the girls to explain the purpose of my research and to ensure informed consent, as described in Section 3.9.1.

After the meeting with the girls, letters were sent by post to their parent/carer explaining the purpose of the research and requesting permission for their daughter to take part (see Appendix B). In the event only a limited number of consent forms were returned by parent/carer. I had included a stamped addressed envelope with each letter to each parent/carer but despite this I only received enough responses to enable me to run the pilot and one focus group. My school contact however reported to me that several girls of the original 32 whom I had met to explain the purpose of research had approached her to ask to take part in the research even though they had no consent forms. I then decided to resend the letters to the parent/carer but asked my school contact to give them to the girls to take home rather than posting them. This also provided an opportunity to resend letters with girls of South Asian origin from whom I had received only one consent form, although this group was the largest ethnic minority in the school with approximately 14% of the school's pupils being part of this ethnic group. In this way I was able to gain consent from enough girls to run the pilot group and four focus groups. This process of gaining consent created a further difficulty with my sample as the girls who eventually took part in my research were self selecting. It is possible that these girls differed in significant ways from the girls who did not wish to take part and were possibly girls who were more likely to be 'pro-school'.

A total of 17 girls took part in the research, 5 in the pilot and 12 in the subsequent focus groups. In order to increase the homogeneity of the group one of the four focus groups only contained girls of South Asian origin. Following the pilot group (see Section 3.10) it was hoped that this would increase the confidence of these girls to participate. At the beginning of each group I asked the participants to complete a short anonymous questionnaire designed to identify social class and ethnicity. The ethnic breakdown of the sample was similar to that of the school as a whole as shown in Table 2. Establishing the social class background of the girls who attended the focus groups proved to be more problematic. Traditionally the income of the head of household has been used as a measure of social class, with occupation used as an indicator of income. I asked the girls to complete a questionnaire at the end of the focus groups which asked for the occupation of the head of household. The information that this provided was not however always useful in establishing social class, as several of the girls lived in single parent families. Although single parents may be more likely to be working part-time or drawing benefits, it was not possible to consider factors such as maintenance payments in order to establish income. From the information provided two of the girls had a parent who was self-employed placing them in a middle class category. Given however that the school is in a largely working class borough (described in Section 3.4) it would seem likely that the majority of the girls in the sample were from working class backgrounds.

Table 2: Ethnic breakdown of research sample

	<b>Research Sample</b>	<b>School</b>
White British	65%	67%
Ethnic Minority*	35%	30%

\* 2 Mixed White/Black Caribbean girls and 4 South Asian girls

### **3.9 Ethical Issues**

#### **3.9.1 Informed consent**

The issue of informed consent is recognised as an ethical issue in research. In research with children consent has often been obtained through parents and guardians however in recent years an emphasis on the voice of child has led to a concern within research design to ensure that where participants are children they also have the opportunity to consent to their participation. This right forms part of the ethical guidelines provided for researchers by a variety of professional organisations, for example the advice provided by the British Educational Research Association (BERA):

“Researchers must take the steps necessary to ensure that all participants in the research understand the process in which they are to be engaged, including why their participation is necessary, how it will be used and to whom it will be reported.” BERA (2004) p 6.

The need to gain informed consent does present a dilemma for researchers as the greater the knowledge that participants have concerning the nature of the research, the more their responses may be influenced by that knowledge. This has implications for the validity of the data that is collected and some researchers conducting research in secondary schools have chosen to provide the pupils with partial information to ensure that responses are not biased (Francis, 2000). In this research I decided that although it may influence the discussion within the focus groups I wanted to ensure that the young people understood the nature of the research before they agreed to take part. As the young people were aged between 13 – 14 years and in mainstream education they were in a position to give their own consent to take part in the research and consent was also sought from their parent/carer.

To ensure informed consent I met with the group of 32 girls, identified by my school contact as potential participants, to explain the nature of my research, the process that they would be agreeing to and what would happen to the data collected. In sympathy with the approach of David et al (2001) I wanted to give as much control as possible to the young people in choosing whether or not to take part in the research and for this reason I met with the girls to outline the nature of my research prior to writing to their parent/carer:

“...in approaching children through schools, we wanted as far as we were able to, to privilege their own self-selection and decision to participate in the research, rather than that given by their parents and/or teachers.” David et al (2001) p 348.

I also prepared a handout which provided a structure for my explanation and which they were able to take away to remind them of the points that I had covered (see Appendix C). The girls were also informed that I would be writing to ask for permission from their parent/carer thus hopefully providing them with an opportunity to discuss their participation before written consent was provided.

While this approach was designed to empower the young people in the decision whether or not to agree to take part in the research, the process raised some issues regarding the nature of informed consent when working with young people in a school environment. The initial meeting with 32 girls took place in a school classroom. What was apparent from the outset was that in attempting to attribute a role to me the girls acted as though I was member of the teaching staff and they fell into the role of a class that needed to be managed. This was inadvertently reinforced when I positioned myself at the front of the classroom and used the kind of handout that are often used as teaching aids within secondary schools. Although I wanted to act in a different role to that of a teacher I was unable to talk to the young people

without spending some time asking for quiet and waiting for attention and so felt forced into the teacher role that the young people had attributed to me.

As a consequence of the classroom dynamics which were being played out in the initial meeting not all of the girls paid attention to what I was explaining and some chose not to take the handout with them. This raised issues concerning how far the consent which was obtained was “informed” and suggested that I needed to take an approach which regarded consent as a process rather than a single event (Dockett and Perry, 2007). To achieve this I began each focus group by outlining the nature of the research again, emphasised the right of the young people to leave at any time during the process and made copies of my handout available for the participants. At the end of the research the participants were sent a letter thanking them for their involvement and were told that I would be reporting my findings back to the school staff at a later date.

### **3.9.2 Confidentiality**

The ethical guidelines provided by BERA state that:

“The confidential and anonymous treatment of participants’ data is considered the norm for the conduct of research. Researchers must recognise the participants’ entitlement to privacy and must accord them their rights to confidentiality and anonymity, unless they or their guardians or responsible others, specifically and willingly waive that right.” BERA (2004) p 8.

In this research the focus groups were recorded using a digital recorder in order to preserve the detail of the discussion and to enable the data collected to be analyzed using discourse analysis. Participants were made aware that this would happen and were informed that the recording would only be heard by me and the person transcribing the groups. As I eventually decided to complete the transcription myself I

was the only person to listen to the recordings. They were also informed that the recordings and transcripts would be destroyed upon completion of the thesis.

Participants were told that individual contributions would not be identified in the thesis. While this covered the main guidance from BERA (2004), using focus groups creates a particular set of ethical difficulties as the research is conducted with a group rather than individuals. Participants were therefore asked to be aware that I was not able to guarantee confidentiality, as participants could choose to talk about what was said in the group with people who had not been involved in the research. This was to ensure that participants did not disclose information that they may not wish to be known outside the group:

“Unlike interviewees, focus group participants cannot be given an absolute guarantee that confidences shared in the group will be respected; the temptation to ‘gossip’ maybe strong if participants are part of the same social network.” Kitzinger and Barbour (1999) p 17.

Bloor et al (2001) warn of the danger of over-disclosure where participants disclose issues and experiences that are inappropriate in a group setting. They recommend planning how to deal with over-disclosure by heading off the discussion where possible, responding briefly, moving the discussion on and making sure that the issue is picked up with the individual after the group.

### **3.9.3 Researcher and participant relationship**

Conducting research with young people and children raises particular ethical issues concerning the unequal relationship between the researcher and the participants. This is particularly the case in a school context where an adult may be perceived as an authority figure (Einarsdóttir, 2007). This may make it more difficult for young people to withhold their consent or to withdraw from the research. Dockett and Perry (2007) suggest that when conducting research with young people it is

necessary to make sure they have more than one opportunity to withdraw from the research and I tried to ensure this by reiterating to the girls who took part that they were free to leave if they chose to. There was no suggestion during the focus groups that any of the girls felt uncomfortable or did not want to participate; in fact two of the girls from the first group came to see me to ask if they could come along to the second group. It would seem likely however that this was a consequence of what Hey (1997) calls the “complicated trade-offs” in research where young people in a school setting might agree to participate in order to miss a lesson or to attend a group with a friend.

A further ethical concern which is particularly salient when conducting research with young people is the unequal benefit that researcher and participants may get from the research, as expressed by Hey:

“Despite seeking to establish non-exploitative field relations I was never able to evade the fact that as a white woman with a middle class education not only was I generally more powerful than most of the girls but my agenda was in part to appropriate parts of their lives for my own use.” Hey (1997) p 49.

In this research I was aware that although I intended to report back to the school staff, as the research had not been commissioned by them they could choose to disregard any recommendations. So I was in the position of asking the girls who took part in the research to engage in an activity from which I would benefit but which may make no difference to their own lives. This was an ethical dilemma which I was not able to overcome in this research.

### **3.10 Piloting the Focus Groups**

An initial focus group was conducted in order to pilot the structure of the session and substantial changes were made to the type of questions used for the

following sessions. While the basic format then remained the same each group taught me more about the conditions that were most likely to generate discussion amongst the girls and minor amendments were made to the groups as they progressed. Seven girls were invited to attend the pilot group, two were absent from school on the day of the pilot, so the first group contained five girls.

The literature on focus groups suggests that groups should have a format where the opening questions ask for general information becoming more specific as the group proceeds. There are also a number of question formats that can be utilised in order to stimulate discussion. When developing the questions for the pilot group I tried to avoid activities that were similar to classroom activities, as I thought that anything the girls associated with lessons could close down discussion. As Bloor et al (2001) comment there is no such thing as a neutral venue and the danger of conducting the groups within the school was that the girls would view it as simply another lesson. I wanted to avoid asking leading questions that might prompt the participants to talk about gender issues. The focus groups were designed to collect data in order to answer the following research questions:

- What discourses are employed by Year 9 girls when discussing emotion and emotional difficulties?
- How do these discourses contribute to the girls' constructions of being a 'proper girl'?
- How do these discourses contribute to the support and resources that young people are able to access in school in order to meet their emotional needs?

As the aim of the research was to explore the discourses of emotion and emotional needs in the girls' talk I needed to keep the discussion within the focus groups as naturalistic as possible while making the topic accessible for Year 9 girls. I therefore decided to begin with broad questions which were designed to elicit discussion in the

general area of emotions and then more specifically about the girls' experiences in school. With these concerns in mind I developed the following questions from those used in a study conducted by Lupton (1998) designed to investigate participants' experience and understanding of emotion, while adding some questions that specifically asked about the girls' experiences in school:

- What do you think emotion is?
- Can you name some emotions?
- Where do you think that emotions come from?
- Do different types of people have different emotions?
- What sorts of emotional problems do you think that pupils in this school might have?
- Do different types of pupils have different emotional problems?
- What do you think that the teachers would say are the kinds of emotional problems that pupils have?
- If you needed help with an emotional problem who would you be most likely to go to?
- What kind of support is available in school?
- In an ideal school what kind of support would be available?

Although examples of previous research with adolescents had suggested that this type of questioning format was appropriate (Pötsönen and Kontula, 1999), from the beginning of the session it was apparent that the girls, although co-operative, were finding it difficult to respond to the questions, none of which generated a discussion between the girls. As a result I spent the session prompting and asking additional questions making the session more like an adult led question and answer session rather than a focus group. It was apparent that the questions were too general for the participants to engage with and as a result I asked supplementary questions which were much more direct.

It was evident that the participants had found the session as difficult as I had and at the end of the session I asked them what they thought would have helped. They made reference to the ice breaker where I had asked them to write down some answers to simple questions for us to discuss, e.g. *what is your favourite food?* There was a general feeling in the group that this kind of activity may have been helpful in order to support the discussion. The participants also commented upon the use of the digital recorder used to record the session and how this made them more nervous. A further factor that became apparent in the pilot group was the presence of what Mitchell (1999) refers to as a “high status” girl. In Mitchell’s (1999) use of focus groups she found that high-status girls who were popular and confident were more likely to contribute to the group than girls who identified themselves in individual interviews as low-status. In the pilot group two of the girls were almost silent and only offered one or two responses to the whole discussion while one girl tended to dominate the group. I noted that the other girls tended to defer to this girl, waiting for her to provide the first response to a question. It seemed possible that different status between the girls had inhibited the discussion.

It was also possible that the ethnic mix of the group may have affected the girls’ ability to contribute. The group was comprised of 3 White girls, 1 girl of mixed White/African Caribbean heritage and 1 girl from a South Asian background. During the discussion the South Asian girl only made one contribution and I was unsure if she felt able to participate. As Vaughan et al (1996) suggest that a more homogenous group is most likely to generate discussion I decided that one of my focus groups should contain only South Asian girls, to ensure that they felt confident to participate.

The interactions in the pilot group demonstrate how the composition of the group influences interaction:

“...issues of sampling and selection are likely to prove crucial in relation to the form and quality of interaction in a focus group...” Parker and Tritter (2006) p 27.

In Mitchell’s (1999) research she suggested that follow-up interviews with individual girls can be useful for exploring the perspectives of low-status girls who do not feel able to contribute fully to a group discussion. The time constraints on my own research did not allow me to consider additional interviews to supplement the focus groups, mainly due to the additional time it would take to transcribe them; I therefore decided to make modifications to the size of the focus groups.

### **3.11 Modifying the Focus Groups**

To overcome the difficulties with the pilot focus group I made a number of alterations to the research design. As the initial group had been dominated by one girl and the quietest members of the group said very little, I decided to use a smaller number of participants for each group. My aim was to ensure that all of the participants had the opportunity to contribute to the discussion. I therefore decided to use groups of three girls rather than five. In the subsequent groups this enabled all of the girls to contribute to the discussion. The second change that I made was to modify the questions that I asked, making them more task orientated and similar to the ice breaker that the girls in the pilot group had found more accessible. I developed two tasks to facilitate the discussion (see Appendix D). The first was a categorisation exercise using a number of common emotion words, e.g. angry, afraid, happy. I asked the girls to categorise the words according to if they felt the emotion was most likely to be experienced by ‘girls’, ‘boys’ or ‘both’. The words were shared out amongst the

girls and they were asked to place the word in the appropriate category and explain their reasons for their choice. We then discussed if the other girls agreed or disagreed with the choices and their reasons for this. This approach was developed from research in the area of emotions where participants have been given pictures of emotional states and asked to describe the emotion (Ekman and Friesan, 1998). As my research was concerned with the role of language in constructing emotions the task was altered to focus upon words rather than pictures.

The second task was a ranking exercise where the girls were given a series of statements about gender and emotions. Some statements contained a stereotypical statement, e.g. “Girls cry more than boys”, while other were counter stereotypical, e.g. “Girls get into fights more than boys”. The content of the statements was drawn from the literature on gender and emotion which suggests that any discussion about emotion is inevitably gendered (Fischer, 1993; Locke, 2001). The girls were asked as a group to rank the statements according to how far they agreed with them and we then discussed the order. The use of such exercises is common with focus groups (Bloor et al, 2001) as they are designed to generate group discussion rather than individual responses.

The design of these tasks differed significantly from the original questions that I had designed for the focus groups. The original questions were designed to be gender neutral in the hope that the participants would spontaneously offer accounts of gender difference. The pilot however suggested that these questions were too obscure for the participants who struggled to provide any response to the questions. I therefore devised two activities that specifically referred to gender in order to elicit discussion

that was relevant to my research. The danger in taking this approach is that participants could have been led by the design of the activities to talk about gender differences. In order to minimise this occurring both activities provided opportunities for the participants to respond in a counter stereotypical way. In the sorting activity participants were able to indicate that they felt an emotion was experienced by 'both' girls and boys and in the focus groups about half of the emotion words were categorised as such. What the analysis discussed in Section 4 showed however was that the discourses of sameness that the girls employed overlapped significantly with discourses of difference. In the ranking activity the girls were presented with equal numbers of gender stereotypical and counter stereotypical statements. This was again designed to provide them with the opportunity to reject gender stereotypes in their discussion.

### **3.12 Reflections on the Focus Groups**

As Bloor et al (2001) comment, the success of a focus group relies upon the dynamics between the individuals with the group. In the focus groups the girls were assigned to the groups as they returned their consent forms, apart from one group where the participants were selected on the basis of their ethnicity (South Asian girls). Morgan (1988) suggests that a focus group containing people who are strangers is desirable because groups of friends will rely upon taken for granted assumptions that may not always be apparent to the researcher. However this was not my experience in the groups as it was noticeable that the discussion was more detailed in the second group. This appeared to be due to the fact that the girls knew each other and they were often talking about shared experiences. In this group the girls were more likely to

provide detailed examples from their own experiences and the group members elaborated upon each other's responses.

### **3.13 Reflections on the Facilitator Role**

Morgan (1998) suggests that the role that the facilitator takes falls along a continuum from non-directive, where the participants are given minimal guidance by the facilitator to high involvement, when the researcher intervenes to ensure that the discussion follows the agenda set by the researcher. The choice of approach is pragmatic and stems mainly from the purpose of the research; an exploratory study may benefit from a broad wide ranging discussion with little direction, while a study requiring answers to specific questions will need to be more tightly controlled. In this research in the role of facilitator, I had a high degree of involvement to ensure that the discussion remained on the research topic:

“There is literally no place for a researcher to hide within a focus group: language, values, feelings and ability to interact with respondents soon become apparent.....” Wilson (1997) p 222.

While this ensured that the participants covered the areas of interest to this research, the danger is that the discussion is more influenced by the biases of the facilitator who adjusts the discussion by cutting off what they regard as unproductive discussion:

In a discussion of the impact of context when running focus groups with young people Green and Hart (1999) suggest that running these groups in a school setting has an impact on how the group functions. They found that compared to a youth club setting participants in a school setting were more likely to expect the adult to manage the discussion and to keep order:

“In schools, facilitators were clearly situated as ‘honorary teachers’ (in some cases addressed as ‘Miss’), whose role was clearly to ‘manage’ the discussion,

and children were adept at persuading each other to treat them in that way....”  
Green and Hart (1999) p 29.

In the focus groups the girls seemed to regard it as my role to lead the discussion in the same way that a teacher would and this led to me taking a much more active role in the discussion than I had planned, asking clarifying questions to elicit more information. The groups seemed to relate to me partly as a ‘teacher figure’ as in Green and Hart’s (1999) research; they referred to me as ‘Miss’. However they were openly critical of some of their teachers which suggested that they did not regard me as a member of the school staff.

### **3.14 The Teacher Interviews**

#### **3.14.1 Introduction**

Sections 3.15 – 3.19 describe the factors influencing the design of the interviews used in this research. Section 3.15 discusses the choice of semi-structured interviews as a research tool and Section 3.16 described the development of the interview questions. The selection of the participants who took part in the interviews is described in Section 3.17 and the ethical issues surrounded their participation are discussed in Sections 3.18. The discussion on the use of semi-structured interviews ends in Sections 3.19 with reflections on their use in this research.

### **3.15 Semi-structured interviews**

The research used semi-structured interviews with teachers in the school in order to elicit the discourses they employed when talking about the emotional difficulties of their pupils. It was also intended to analyse the data collected from the teacher interviews using discourse analysis and, as such, the use of focus groups with the teachers would have been desirable. There were, however, a number of practical

difficulties in finding a suitable time for the teachers to meet as a group. For the teachers to meet together the groups would have needed to take place at the end of the school day, as the school's lunch time was only 30 minutes long. As the school was on two sites approximately half a mile apart, some of the teachers would have needed to travel between the sites to attend a group at the end of the school day.

Instead, semi-structured interviews were employed in order to elicit the teachers' constructions of the emotional needs of their pupils. The interview technique used in this research was particularly influenced by Holstein and Gubrium's (1995) "active interview". Holstein and Gubrium (1995) take a social constructionist perspective to the interviewing process suggesting that rather than an interviewer simply extracting information from a respondent, both interviewer and respondent in an interview are involved in meaning-making:

"...all interviews are reality constructing, meaning-making occasions..."  
Holstein and Gubrium (1995) p 4.

Holstein and Gubrium (1995) reject the idea that respondents enter the interview process with preformed knowledge that can be accessed by carefully constructed questions. Instead they suggest that knowledge is always in the making and from this perspective all aspects of the interaction between the interview and respondent will shape the discussion. These aspects include the interview questions, the identity of the participants, the social context and the incidental talk at the beginning of the process. In keeping with a social constructionist approach Holstein and Gubrium (1995) reject the idea of the researcher having a rigid interview schedule, instead arguing for a flexible approach to questioning:

"New questions and discussion items are added or combined as the interview unfolds, according to the organization and diversity of meanings being conveyed." Holstein and Gubrium (1995) p 56.

This approach is compatible with the discursive interviewing process described by Potter and Wetherell (1987) who suggest that the interviewer is not simply a speaking questionnaire but is an active participant in the meaning-making that takes place in the interview.

### **3.16 The Interview Questions**

The interviews with the teacher were designed to provide data in order to answer the following questions:

- What discourses are employed by teachers when talking about the emotional difficulties of their pupils, particularly girls?
- How do the discourses utilised by teachers influence the support and resources that young people are able to access in school in order to meet their emotional needs?

As the intention was to analyse the data using discourse analysis the main aim of the interview questions was to provide prompts for the teacher to talk about their pupils and to ensure that their talk was relevant to the topic of the research. Potter and Wetherell (1995) suggest that the art of interviewing in a discourse study is:

“...keeping to the schedule enough to ensure that the topic is dealt with by each participant, but at the same time letting the conversation flow and following up interesting lines of talk as they happen.” Potter and Wetherell (1995) p 84.

To achieve this I devised a list of question to use in the interviews, however in keeping with the active interview described by Holstein and Gubrium (1995) each interview also involved many secondary and supplementary questions that arose from the teacher accounts.

The questions that formed the basis of the interview were designed to begin with a broad, introductory rapport building question, move on to general questions

about pupils' emotional difficulties before asking the teacher more specifically about the girls that they taught (Kvale and Brinkman, 2009). Table 3 shows how the interview questions were devised within this general, introductory and specific framework.

Table 3: Types of interview question (adapted from Kvale and Brinkman, 2009)

Question Type	Questions from Interview Schedule
General	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can you tell me about your experience working in schools?</li> </ul>
Introductory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What kinds of emotional difficulties do the young people that you work with have?</li> <li>• Do pupils come to talk to you about their emotional difficulties?</li> <li>• How would you notice that a pupil might be experiencing an emotional difficulty? What might they be doing? How would you handle this?</li> <li>• When might you consider referring a pupil on and where to?</li> <li>• What is your understanding of Special Educational Needs? When might you decide that an emotional difficulty is a SEN?</li> </ul>
Specific	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In your experience what kinds of emotional difficulties do girls have?</li> <li>• Can you give me an example of when you helped a girl who was experiencing an emotional difficulty?</li> <li>• How do girls show that they are experiencing an emotional difficulty? Is this different from boys?</li> <li>• Have you ever referred a girl on?</li> <li>• Where would a girl go for help if she needed it? How are their needs met in school?</li> </ul>

The questions needed to provide me with detailed, qualitative data in order to make use of discourse analysis. They were therefore designed to be as open as possible to allow a free response. Where questions allowed a closed response participants were prompted to provide more detail by the use of supplementary questions, e.g. asking for an example to illustrate a point.

### **3.17 Selection of Participants for the Interviews**

The target population for the interviews was all of the teachers and support staff who were working in the school where the research was conducted. As the research had not been commissioned by the school I was uncertain if the staff would regard it as a worthwhile area for research or feel that they wished to contribute. I therefore decided to select a sample of staff by asking for volunteers to take part in the interviews using opportunity sampling, i.e. a sample that is conveniently available (Burns, 2000).

The school used an electronic “notice board” to bring information to the attention of the staff. I provided some information which covered the topic and rationale for my research, what I was asking the staff to volunteer for and my ethical safeguards, e.g. confidentiality (see Appendix E). This information was then posted onto the electronic notice board by my school contact and circulated to all staff. The response rate from this was low with only three members of staff volunteering to take part in the interviews. Of these two were interviewed while the third interview was unfortunately cancelled due to the school receiving an inspection visit during the period of my data collection.

As I began the interviews I was able to recruit three further teachers through the use of snowball sampling which occurs where participants identify other people who the researcher may want to include in their study (Cohen et al, 2007). Although snowball sampling is more commonly associated with research where it is not possible to identify a sampling frame, in my research it occurred when in the course of the interviews the respondents volunteered suggestions regarding other members of staff who they felt would be able to contribute to my research. These suggestions were made mainly on the basis of other teachers' roles within the school, where they were involved working with the pupils who were experiencing difficulties. In total I conducted five semi-structured interviews with school staff who had a range of roles within the school:

- A class teacher
- A learning mentor working in the school's Learning Support Unit
- A Head of Department
- An Assistant Head teacher
- A Deputy Head teacher

All of the teachers include in the sample were white, four were female and one male. The nature of the sampling techniques and the small sample size precludes any attempt to generalise from the sample however this research was a small scale project with the aim of describing an aspect of the social world rather than making generalisations. As the research aimed to collect in-depth data it would have been desirable to interview a greater number of staff in order to increase the richness and validity of the research however this was not practical given the time constraints of the research.

### **3.18 Ethical Issues**

#### **3.18.1 Informed consent**

The ethical guidelines provided by BERA (2004) suggest that researchers need to ensure that participants have a full understanding of the nature of the research in which they are taking part. This does however pose a difficulty for researchers in that any information provided concerning the nature of the research may bias participants' responses. When attempting to recruit my teacher participants I assembled some background information concerning the nature of the research and what participation would involve. This information included the nature of the data to be collected, confidentiality and how I planned to write up the data from the interviews with reference to the ethical guidelines provided by BERA (2004). All of the teachers had access to this information through the school's electronic notice board however the low level of teachers volunteering through this route suggested that most of the teachers had not read the information. To ensure that the teachers were fully informed about the nature of my research I made the appointments to meet with the teacher using email and I took this opportunity to resend the information about the research, including offering them the opportunity to withdraw if they no longer felt that they wanted to take part. At the beginning of each interview I briefly outlined the research topic, rationale and ethical issues to ensure that the participants had the opportunity to ask any questions or to withdraw from the research. When the data had been analysed I prepared a short report for the school highlighting the main findings of the research with some recommendations. A copy of this report was also sent to the teachers who took part in the research.

### **3.18.2 Confidentiality**

In this research the teacher interviews were recorded using a digital recorder in order to preserve the detail of the discussion and to enable the data collected to be analyzed using discourse analysis. Participants were made aware that this would happen and were informed that the recording would only be heard by me as I would be transcribing the interviews. They were also informed that the recordings and transcriptions would be destroyed upon completion of the thesis. Participants were informed that they would not be able to be identified however there were particular issues of confidentiality raised by the teacher interviews because of the small sample size and the use of semi-structured interviews. Each member of staff who was interviewed had a different role within the school and three of the respondents had roles that were unique. There was therefore a danger that any comments that they made in relation to their role would allow them to be identified. This raised ethical issues concerning how to present the teacher interviews while ensuring that the participants could not be identified.

To ensure confidentiality I needed to ensure that any comments about a respondent's role that would enable identification needed to be edited from their responses. Such a process of editing could potentially affect the validity of the reported data as it could influence the meaning of a participant's response. To guard against this I was careful to only remove the specific information that related to the teacher's role, for example the subject that they taught in the school or their job title. A further complicating factor in ensuring the confidentiality of the teachers who took part in the research was that only one of the respondents was a male teacher. This had

implications when writing up the research in referring to the respondents in a gender neutral way to ensure that this teacher could not be identified.

### **3.19 Reflections on the Teacher Interviews**

Oakley (1981) comments upon the gap between textbook accounts of interviewing and her own experiences of interviewing women particularly the times when women asked her questions regarding her own experiences. This was also apparent in my research with the teachers, who tended to ask me two types of questions: those concerning what the girls who had taken part in the focus groups had said and those concerning my own role as the school's educational psychologist. In response to the questions regarding the focus groups I was able to provide general responses that were unlikely to influence the teacher accounts. The questions about my role as an educational psychologist were more intriguing as the rationale for my research was the lack of referrals made to support services for girls. The teachers' questions indicated that they did not have an understanding of the work of an educational psychologist which is potentially a barrier to making appropriate referrals and thus provided me with some additional and unexpected information.

### **3.20 Analysing the Data**

#### **3.20.1 Introduction**

This section begins by discussing a number of different approaches to discourse analysis that can be employed in social research (Section 3.20.2). It goes on to describe the transcription conventions that were used in order to prepare the data both the focus groups and the interviews for analysis (3.20.3). The process used in the

data analysis is then explained in Sections 3.20.4 (focus groups) and 3.20.5 (interviews).

### **3.20.2 Models of discourse analysis**

“Discourse analysis is probably best described as the study of talk and texts. It is a set of methods and theories for investigating language in use and language in social contexts.” Wetherell et al (2001) pi.

Discourse analysis refers to a set of techniques which study spoken language and texts. These techniques all start from the assumption that language is constitutive and the aim is to discover how meaning is constructed in discourse. As social constructionism has created an interest in language as a social activity the technique of discourse analysis has developed across a range of academic disciplines including linguistics, psychology and sociology, creating a field of research rather than a single practice (Taylor, 2001). The result is the development of a number of approaches to the study of discourse that differ in the kinds of questions they seek to answer and in the type of analysis that this entails. For an approach such as conversational analysis the focus is upon the text and how talk is organized including the fine detail of pauses, errors and false starts, with the aim of investigating how talk is produced (Wooffitt, 2001). A different set of aims can be found within Critical Discourse Analysis, an approach that takes an explicit stance positioning discourse analysis as a means to understand and expose social inequality (van Dijk, 2003). Here the analyst is concerned primarily with the operation of power in society and the aim of the research is to bring about change. Foucauldian discourse analysis is also an approach that is concerned with power but with a focus on how knowledge is produced and is thus sometimes referred to as a historical method (Carabine, 2001).

The approach to discourse analysis which influenced the design of this research is found in feminist approaches to poststructural discourse analysis, which have explored how gender is produced and sustained through patterns of talk:

“Feminist discursive psychology is post-structuralist in the sense that it investigates language as a complex and dynamic system that produces meaning about social categories such as gender.” Weatherall (2002) p 7.

From this perspective how we understand gender is culturally and historically specific rather than reflecting essential biological differences between women, as identities are not fixed but are produced and negotiated through social interaction (Weatherall, 2002). For Baxter (2003) a feminist poststructural position suggests that power is not a monolithic possession owned by men at the expense of women. She suggests that people are multiply positioned within discourse and are, at times, powerful or powerless. Baxter (2003) suggests however that gender discourses often position girls and women in positions of relative powerlessness and my research has been influenced by her suggestion that feminist poststructuralism can create a space for female voices that may not otherwise be heard (Baxter, 2003). In exploring how the emotional needs of girls were constructed in a secondary school my research enabled Year 9 girls a voice, through the use of focus groups.

### **3.20.3 Discourse analysis: transcriptions**

The first stage in the analysis was the transcription of the focus groups and interviews from the audio recordings. Due to the time consuming nature of transcribing I had initially intended to have the recordings transcribed for me. However after listening to the recordings of the focus groups I decided that it would be difficult for someone who had not been present to distinguish between the speakers, so I decided to transcribe the recordings myself. Although this decision was

made for practical reasons I quickly realised that the transcription process had become the first stage my data analysis. Transcribing the data provided a way to listen to the recordings in detail and I was able to begin to identify themes as I was transcribing. For this reason I also decided to transcribe the recordings of the teacher interviews.

There were a number of decisions that were made concerning the nature of the transcription; the first was to transcribe the recordings in their entirety rather than only those parts which were initially identified as useful to the analysis. Having access to the complete transcriptions enriched my analysis as it enabled me, as I identified themes in the data, to return to the full transcriptions and to find other examples that were linked to a particular theme. The second decision was how to present the information from the transcriptions in my thesis. O'Connell and Kowal (1995) suggest that decisions concerning the transcription of data need to be linked to the research questions and the purpose of the research. Although the Jeffersonian system which derives from conversational analysis is often quoted as the most standardised method of transcription (Lovering, 1995; Potter and Wetherell, 1995), the detail involved in transcribing pauses and intonations is not only time consuming but also affects the readability of the text.

Potter and Wetherell (1987) suggest that decisions about transcription involve consideration of what information is required and at what level the analysis will proceed:

“.....for many sorts of research questions, the fine details of timing and intonation are not crucial, and indeed they can interfere with the readability of the transcript....” Potter and Wetherell (1987) p 166.

It was not the intention in my research to conduct a detailed conversational analysis which may have required the detailed annotation provided by the Jeffersonian approach to transcription. Therefore, following the advice provided by O’Connell and Kowal (1995) the transcription followed the principle of parsimony where only notations that affected the meaning of the text were used. So the transcriptions identified the speaker and included pauses and standard punctuation but did not involve an elaborate coding system. The transcription conventions that I used can be seen in Table 4 and extracts from my transcriptions can be found in Appendix F (focus groups) and Appendix G (interviews).

Table 4: Transcription Conventions

..	Short pause
....	Longer pause
()	To indicate utterances other than speech, e.g. (laughs)

I decided to use letters to indicate the speakers, i.e. A, B, C. I chose this approach rather than providing pseudonyms to preserve anonymity due to the number of participants. There is a danger however of dehumanising participants by taking this approach which was not my intention.

### **3.20.4 Focus Groups: data analysis**

The first stage in the analysis of the transcriptions from the focus groups was to look for patterns and recurring themes in the data (Taylor, 2001; Sutherland 2004). In order to achieve this, the transcripts needed to be coded into categories that could then be analysed in greater detail (Potter and Wetherell, 1987). This process was aided by the fact that I had transcribed the audio recordings myself which helped me to become familiar with the data and I had listened to the recording several times during the process of transcription and proof-reading. I was able to identify six

possible categories which I then used as a framework for making sense of the data.

Those categories were:

- That boys and girls emotions were the same
- That the emotions of boys and girls were different
- That boys and girls display their emotions differently
- That emotions are linked to biological factors
- That girls' emotions relate to competition with other girls
- That emotions are linked to social control

Using these categories to read through the transcripts and to find supporting examples, suggested that there was sufficient evidence to support a premise that the first four categories were meaningful but not the fifth or sixth. Upon further reading of the transcripts I decided that the discussion of girls' appearance was linked to a broader discourse which was about competition between girls and that there was little evidence of a broader discourse of social control. Further readings of the transcriptions enabled me to identify an additional discourse that related to girls' relationships with others, giving me the following six themes:

- That boys' and girls' emotions were the same
- That the emotions of boys and girls were different
- That boys and girls display their emotions differently
- That emotions are linked to biological factors
- Girls' emotions are linked to their feelings about their appearance
- Discourses that related to girls' relationships with others

Once I had identified the themes I used photocopies of the transcripts, colour coded by focus group, to cut and paste examples which illustrated the discourses in the girls' talk. I was then able to use these examples to support my discussion in Sections 4 and 5.

What was apparent from this process was the complexity of the discourses that the girls were utilising in their talk, for example discourses about the sameness or differences between the emotions of boys and girls often overlapped and merged into one another. Sutherland (2004) refers to this as intertextuality where different discourses within a text are semantically linked because discourses have no clear boundaries. Sutherland (2004) argues that the process of analysis helps the researcher to identify possible discourses but where boundaries are drawn differ depending upon the aims of the research and the values of the researcher:

“Discourse identification and naming of discourses from an interpretative, critical perspective are thus not neutral activities, but rather say something about the “namer” as well as the discourses.” Sutherland (2004) p 47.

As the process of discourse identification is interpretative and not neutral I used examples to illustrate the discourses when writing up my findings (Potter and Wetherell, 1987). Given the subjective nature of this approach it is likely that a different researcher would have identified different themes in the data and this possibility is discussed in Section 6.12.2.

### **3.20.5 Interviews: data analysis**

The first stage in the analysis of the teacher interviews began during the process of transcription. It was apparent when listening to the recordings that there were some discourses employed by the teachers that were the same as those that I had identified in the focus group transcripts. These discourses were:

- That boys’ and girls’ emotions were the same
- That the emotions of boys and girls were different
- That emotions are linked to biological factors
- Discourses that related to girls’ relationships with others

After identifying these discourses I reread the transcripts of the teacher interviews in order to look for other themes in the teachers' talk. In this process a further discourse of how the teachers constructed the category of "special educational needs" was identified. I also identified themes in the teacher interviews that enabled me to answer my other two research questions:

- How do the discourses of emotion employed teachers, when talking about their pupils, contribute to the social construction of gender?
- How do the discourses utilised by teachers influence the support and resources that young people are able to access in school in order to meet their emotional needs?

As with the focus groups I used photocopies of the interview transcripts, colour coded by participant, and this enabled me to cut and paste the relevant sections from the interviews in order to provide examples to illustrate and support my analysis. Once again this selection of evidence was subjective and unique to this researcher; the implications of this are discussed in Section 6.12.2.

### **3.21 Writing up the Research**

In traditional psychological research the research findings are reported in a separate section followed by a section discussing these findings. However Banister et al (1994) suggest that with qualitative data it may sometimes be appropriate to combine the analysis and discussion together. In this research I decided to combine the discussion in the results section (see Sections 4 and 5) as it was impossible to separate the themes in the data from the broader discourses that they related to. The results and discussion from the focus groups are contained in Section 4 and those from the teacher interviews are in Section 5.

## **4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION: PART 1**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This research employed the use of focus groups with Year 9 girls in a U.K. secondary school. The aim of the groups was to facilitate discussion between the girls in order to elicit discourses surrounding their emotions and emotional difficulties. I developed two tasks to facilitate the discussion (see Section 3.11), using emotion words and statements about the behaviour of girls and boys. The focus groups activities were designed to collect data in order to answer the following research questions:

- What discourses are employed by Year 9 girls when discussing emotion and emotional difficulties?
- How do these discourses contribute to the girls' constructions of being a 'proper girl'?
- How do these discourses contribute to the support and resources that young people are able to access in school in order to meet their emotional needs?

This chapter begins in Section 4.2 with an overview of the six discourses identified in the girls' talk. Each discourse is then discussed in turn, so Section 4.3 discusses discourses of sameness and difference and the complex interaction between these two discourses. Section 4.4 discusses discourses of emotional display focusing particularly on the discourses surrounding the displays of aggression and crying that were salient in the girls' talk. Section 4.5 discusses discourses of the body which are embedded in constructions of biological difference and Section 4.6 is concerned with discourses of appearance. Section 4.7 explores the complex discourses of girls' relationships with others including other girls, family and school staff. The chapter ends by considering how these discourses contribute to how girls construct themselves as "proper" girls.

#### **4.2 What discourses are employed by girls when discussing emotions and emotional difficulties?**

In the analysis of the focus group transcripts six categories emerged from the girls' talk:

- That girls' and boys' emotions were the same
- That the emotions of boys and girls were different
- That girls and boys display their emotions differently
- That emotions are linked to the body and biological factors
- Girls' emotions are linked to their feelings about their appearance
- Discourses that related to girls' relationships with others

Although ethnicity was not the focus of this research, the groups were organised to include girls from the different ethnic groups represented in the school's population and one of the groups contained only girls of South Asian origin. The analysis of data from this group did not indicate any different categories or unique themes and for this reason the data is presented without specifying ethnicity. The issues arising from this decision are discussed further in Section 6.12.

#### **4.3 Discourses of Sameness and Difference**

In an overview of research exploring gender discourses, Sutherland (2004) suggests that a "gender differences discourse" is the most frequently invoked discourse. This discourse has a commonsense quality because there is a widespread assumption that gender differences are innate and biological rather than socially constructed. Shields (2002) describes this as a "bedrock belief" because it is so deeply embedded within the dominant culture that it can only be surfaced by closely examining how emotion is represented in language and other social practices. Feminist poststructuralism suggests that discourses are complex and can be

contradictory and overlapping. Following a social constructionist and feminist poststructural approach, the aim in my research was therefore not to identify whether a discourse of sameness or difference provided the best explanation of gendered behaviour amongst adolescent girls but instead to explore how these discourses were utilised in the girls' talk. As feminist poststructuralism suggests that language is constitutive, my aim was to explore how the discourses of sameness and difference were employed by the girls to construct their identities as "proper" girls (Skelton and Francis, 2009).

In order to explore these ideas the first activity within the focus group was designed to elicit discussion about sameness and difference by asking the girls to decide if emotions (in the form of single words) were more likely to be experienced by boys, girls or both. Approximately half of the emotion words were categorised as being experienced by both girls and boys. In every group the remaining emotion words were more likely to be attributed to girls than boys supporting the theory that within discourse, emotionality is associated with women rather than with men (Lutz, 1996; Lupton, 1998). Where the girls did classify emotions as being most commonly experienced by boys these were also concordant with gender stereotypes, as the only emotion words that the girls attributed solely to boys were "angry" and "aggressive". This discourse of difference was the most common of the discourses identified in my research though closer examination suggested that how the girls talked about difference was complex and that the concepts of difference and sameness often appeared within the same discourse, for example where girls and boys were described as feeling the same emotions but expressing them in different ways.

#### 4.3.1 Discourses of difference

Some of the discourse constructed difference between girls and boys by describing them as experiencing different emotions:

- A: its like if you...if you worry about ...say like you was going on the X Factor you'd be worried about what they were going to say to you, and then boys would be like I'm confident... boys are more confident about things than girls...you'll find....
- B: ...and boys like making a fool of themselves half the time
- A: yeah..like if you asked a boy out and you was worried about it and they went no..if a boy asked a girl out and they said no you'd be like, oh I'm only joking ...
- C: yeah
- ME: yeah, right...so boys are more confident...what about things to do with your school work and stuff, do girls get more anxious about that or boys?
- A: yeah
- C: yeah, girls want to study more
- B: yeah, like the girls want to do well and the boys they ain't really bothered
- (Focus Group 2)

In this extract the girls were discussing the word “anxious” which they had identified as an emotion associated with girls rather than boys. This association occurs here because the girls are linking the emotion word to confidence and they suggest that boys are more confident than girls. In the extract girls are presented as more likely to be worried than boys, both about public performance and the more private aspect of asking another person out. However discourses are not logical or consistent and the discourses that an individual draws upon can be contradictory (Baxter, 2003). While this extract suggests a simplistic discourse of emotional difference between girls and boys in other aspects of the discussion a more complex discourse of difference emerged, where difference and sameness were intertwined. Sutherland (2004)

suggests that intratextuality is a feature of discourse where within a single text several semantically related discourses can occur.

#### **4.3.2 Discourses of sameness and difference**

##### **Emotional intensity: “being upset”**

In the girls’ discussion intratextuality was apparent when both difference and sameness were apparent within the same discourse. In the following extract there is a discourse of sameness in the emotion as it is described as being experienced by both girls and boys, while the discourse of difference is expressed in terms of the intensity of how the emotion is experienced. Emotions that have been stereotypically associated with women, such as anxiety and being upset, were those which the girls constructed as being experienced more intensely by girls:

- ME: ...right, OK, that’s interesting so you think...do you think then girls have more problems than boys?
- A: yeah
- B: yeah
- ME: so what kinds of problems do girls have that boys don’t?
- A: .....like what happened in relationships and stuff and then they just like emotionally keep crying and crying and then don’t move on for god knows how long
- ME: and how would a boy react...if he had a relationship that ended or...
- A: he’s probably like be upset for a day or so....
- B: ...for a day or so and then say, I don’t really care
- A: and move on to another girl
- (Focus Group 4)

In this extract the discourse of difference relates not to girls and boys experiencing different emotions as both are described as feeling “upset”. Rather the difference that is constructed between girls and boys is in the intensity of “being upset”, which is constructed in terms of how long the emotion affects the girls compared to the boys.

Girls are described as “being upset” for a longer period than boys, who are constructed as being able to “move on” more quickly than the girls. This discourse relates more widely to a belief that women are more emotional than men (Lutz, 1998). As emotionality is associated with irrationality and a lack of control, for many feminists this discourse contributes to female oppression by reinforcing an ideology of female inferiority (Fischer, 1993; Lott, 1997; Lupton, 1998). The construction of girls as “*crying and crying and don’t move on for god knows how long*” relates to discourses within cognitive psychology which suggest that girls are more likely to have a ruminative coping style than boys, where girls are more likely to direct their attention internally towards thoughts and feelings rather than externally to the environment (Adams and Berzonsky, 2003). Here the construction of boys is that they are orientated to the external environment because their response to a relationship ending is to move on to another girl rather than to ruminate upon their feelings.

Within psychological discourse it is suggested that the consequences for girls of having a ruminative coping style are negative, as this coping style has been found to increase the duration of depressive experiences in adolescent girls (Broderick and Korteland, 2002). The girls’ talk suggested a similar construction of the consequences of not being able to move on which they construe as a “*problem*”. The extract suggests that this “problem” is constructed as the consequence of the intensity of experienced emotion which is related to negative consequences for the girls compared to the boys who are only going to be “*upset for a day or so*”. The implication in this discourse is that emotions are potentially dangerous particularly when they are experienced intensely. Lutz (1998) suggests that within Western culture emotion is associated with the irrational and is perceived as dangerous with the potential to be

uncontrollable. This danger is implied in the following extract which also relates to “being upset”; here the consequence for girls of being upset is described in terms of self harm:

- A:     alright...because won't really, boys won't really self harm themselves..yeah..I think
- B:     its mainly girls because yeah erm..thingy..they like say they if they broke up with their boyfriend they think that it's the end of the world..like go and like go and do something really bad cause they feel sorry for themselves
- ME:    okay right..and do you think that boys ever self harm?
- B:     no...

(Focus Group 1)

Here the girls' talk reflects the potential danger of the emotions which can lead to negative consequences, in this case self-harm. The girls' talk can be related to the “at-risk” discourse identified by Harris (2004) as one of two dominant discourses about adolescent girls in Western cultures. In this discourse girls are portrayed as vulnerable and the extracts above suggest that this vulnerability stems from their susceptibility to experience emotions intensely.

#### **4.3.3 Discourses of sameness and difference** **Emotional intensity: anger and aggression**

Similar ideas about the danger of intense emotions also occurred when the girls were talking about emotions that they believed that boys were more likely to experience than girls. This talk also formed part of a discourse of difference because it occurred when girls were discussing the emotions that, during the classification exercise, they ascribed only to boys. Only two emotions were identified by the girls as being experienced solely by boys: anger and aggression, both of which are more commonly associated with masculinity:

ME: Yes, do you want to say what the first card is and then er.....  
 A: er aggressive  
 ME: Okay so do you want to decide where X you think it goes....  
 A: erm.. boys  
 ME: right OK..do you want to explain to the girls why you think its boys  
 A: boys lose their temper easily, girls can calm down, it a good thing that  
 is  
 ME: do the other girls agree with that, where would you put it X?  
 B: boys  
 (Focus Group 1)

Here the girls suggest that boys experience aggression more intensely than girls and that this has negative consequences for the boys.

In both of these examples when girls are talking about the intensity of emotions, such as aggression for boys and being upset for girls, the intensity of the emotion is constructed as having negative consequences for both sexes. The following extract returns to the theme of boys' aggression:

A: the teachers are more scared of boys cause they're more aggressive and they're more likely to lash out cause there's kids in this school that would hit a teacher  
 B: I mean with us girls we argue with teachers but we think what's going to happen to us if we hit the teacher or whatever  
 A: yeah  
 B: if we'd be aggressive to the teacher and we think about it and then we don't do it we just do what we're told  
 A: we think is there any point if we do it like do we get excluded for like five days so that's like next week so there's like no point  
 (Focus Group 2)

In this extract the girls construct the teachers as potentially vulnerable to male violence. Francis (2000) has described how boys use their physicality in secondary school classrooms in order to construct their masculinity; in this extract this

physicality extends to aggressive behaviour. While researchers such as Francis (2000) have suggested that this dominance of classrooms favours boys as it results in greater teacher attention, the girls' discourse constructs themselves more positively than the construction of the boys, as they suggest that girls are able to control their aggression and this is presented as a positive, compared to boys who "*lose their temper easily*". Here the ability of girls to think through the consequences of behaving aggressively in school and to control their emotions, constructs them favourably as this gives them the ability to reflect upon a situation and make choices that avoid negative consequences.

These extracts link to discourses of emotional control. In research with adult participants conducted by Lupton (1998) she found that there were contradictory discourses relating to the need to be able control emotions in some situations and to be able to express them in others. In my research the girls' discourse suggested that emotional control for them was related to the intensity of the emotion that was being described. While their discussion about being upset suggested that this emotion was difficult to control, "*they just keep crying and crying and don't move on for god knows how long*", their discussion about aggression suggested that this was an emotion that they experienced but were able to control. Lupton's (1998) research suggested that some elements of the contradictory and conflicting nature of discourses of emotional control and expression were due to the context in which the emotion was described. This was also apparent in the talk employed by the girls; the word "*even*" in the following comment from Focus Group 1 implies that the expression of emotion may not be acceptable in a public context: "*they'll go blurting and crying **even** in school*".

#### 4.3.4 Discourses of sameness and difference: social context

The importance of social context was apparent in the girls' talk; the following two extracts are from two different focus groups and both involve a discussion of the word "embarrassed". The first extract is a discourse of difference that is linked to a discourse of the body as the girls consider embarrassment and relate this to the physical changes that occur during adolescence. Here girls are constructed as concerned about their appearance in relation to some of the biological changes that occur during puberty, while boys are constructed as being unconcerned, "not caring" about the same issues:

- ME: so they might be embarrassed..that's things about their appearance...
- A: yeah, their appearance, yeah their boobs n stuff...
- ME: so it's like bodies changing they might be embarrassed about that...what about boys then do you think that boys get embarrassed....
- A: not so...
- B: not really, not as much cause they're more.....stronger..well not, not maybe not well..they more er..they're more like they don't care about a lot of things....

(Focus Group 2)

In the second extract the girls talk about embarrassment in the context of public space and performance rather than about their physical appearance. This change of context influenced how the girls constructed embarrassment:

- ME: yeah, so you think he was embarrassed and do girls get embarrassed at all?
- A: I don't think they do no, like me, I don't care if I go out in my jamas to be fair I'll go to a shop in my jamas ...I ain't bothered
- ME: yeah , what about you B?
- B: erm...I don't get embarrassed at all ....no I did drama, I've done drama for 6 years at HOG and I wasn't even nervous or embarrassed on the stage

ME: right so you were quite confident to get up there?

B: yeah

(Focus Group 4)

The importance of social context has been highlighted by psychologists who take a social constructionist approach to the study of emotion. Feminists such as Lupton (1998) have argued for the central role of language and discourse in the construction of the self. From this perspective the self becomes fluid and contextual thus accounting for contradictions in the ways in which individuals choose to describe themselves within discourse.

#### **4.3.5 Discourses of sameness and difference: gender differences in emotional experience**

A further complexity in the gender differences discourse can be seen where discourses of sameness and difference overlapped, for example when girls and boys were described as experiencing the same emotions but for different reasons. Here social constructions of femininity and masculinity were important in how the girls described the origins of the emotion:

ME: yeah, OK. Do you want to choose another one. You've got cheerful and you think that boys and girls are both cheerful, why do you think that?

A: because erm..boys are always cheerful about football and girls are always cheerful about make-up and that

ME: so they're cheerful but cheerful about different things

A: yeah,

ME: what do you think, cheerful?

A: yeah, cause girls are cheerful about everything, like they're like excited.....and boys are cheerful when they get hyper and stuff

ME: so they both can be cheerful....

(Focus Group 3)

In this extract, discussing the word “cheerful”, while both girls and boys were described as experiencing this emotion, the emotion was described as occurring in response to gender stereotypical contexts; so girls are described as being cheerful about make-up while boys are cheerful about sport. In a discussion concerning the emotion “excited” girls also drew upon gender specific explanations, where girls were described as being excited about boys while boys were described as being excited about “*cars and football and like boys stuff*” (Focus Group 4). Eccles et al (1999) suggest that as girls and boys enter adolescence they begin to hold more gender stereotypical views of their abilities and interests. This extract therefore constructs a discourse of gender difference that relates to wider discourses of appropriate feminine and masculine behaviour and what it means to be a “proper” girl in Western societies.

#### **4.3.6 Discourses of Sameness**

While much of the discourse of sameness and difference revealed complex overlapping discourse some emotions were constructed as the same for boys and girls, as in this discussion of the word “sad”:

- ME: so there's some things that everyone feels sad about.....
- A: say like...if one of your family members had an accident you'd all be sad wouldn't you whether you were a boy or a girl you'd be sad anyway obviously ..its different things that make you sad
- (Focus Group 2)

This extract suggests that in response to some life events and social contexts the construction of emotion is not defined by gender but is the same for girls and boys.

#### **4.4 Discourses of Emotional Display**

Researchers who have been influenced by social constructionism have been concerned with the concept of emotional display. Emotional display refers to the social rules which influence how emotions are displayed within a particular culture, for example how acceptable it is for people to cry in public (Parrott and Harré, 1996). In Western cultures these rules are governed by gender and are therefore different for women and men (Fischer, 1993). The rules that govern emotional display are so pervasive that researchers such as Hutson-Comeaux and Kelly (2002) have suggested that self-reports of emotions tend to reflect participants' understanding of display rules in preference to emotional experience. Fischer (1993) suggests that there are different cultural rules regarding the expression of emotion for men and women which children learn through the reactions of others to displays of emotion. As the display rules that are acceptable for women and men differ, so female and male participants provide differing accounts of their emotional experience. The concept of emotional display was apparent in the girls' discussion with particular reference to two forms of emotional display; aggression and crying. These two forms of display were gendered according to the dominant gender stereotypes found in Western culture, with crying being associated with girls and aggression with boys.

##### **4.4.1 Discourses of emotional display: aggression**

While more of the emotions discussed in the focus groups were attributed to girls than to boys, all of the groups suggested that anger and aggression were the two emotions that were most likely to be experienced by boys. Their discussion of these emotions however revealed a more complex construction which was linked to ideas of emotional display. Anger and aggression were associated with the emotional display

of physical fighting which was described as an almost exclusively male display of emotion:

ME: yeah, OK, good, so you've got another one there A.....OK so we've got aggressive and we've got boys. Can you tell me why you've put aggressive with boys?

A: erm...like cause girls don't tend not to fight and everything and then boys like get aggressive if anything's happened .....you know what I mean

ME: how do you know that boys are aggressive, what do they do when they are aggressive?

A: like if like you've upset them they tend to like shout at you, throw things

ME: physical stuff

A: punch ya, kick ya

B: yeah

C: yeah

ME: yeah, ah ha, Ok what do you think C, do you think that boys are more aggressive than girls?

C: yeah because girls are like tend to be like frightened of boys if they're shoutin' at you, yeah and so they don't fight, they just get slapped by the boy

(Focus Group 3)

Here aggression is being described as a display of emotion rather than a difference in emotional experience, as there were differences in the constructions of girls and their display of aggression. While boys were described as physically fighting girls' emotional display of aggression was usually described as verbal:

ME: girls are really.....do girls ever get into fights?

A: sometimes

ME: sometimes but not very often

A: no.....

B: boys like have more fights and girls just stand there they play their mouth.....but they don't have a fight

ME: right...that's a nice expression....they play their mouth?

B: yeah, yeah, they do

ME: what does that mean?  
 B: they like...if someone says something to them they've got to have the last word  
 ME: yeah..  
 A: so they don't stop arguing but they don't fight..  
 (Focus Group 2)

These two extracts support Brody's (1997) findings that emotional displays of anger differ for women and men, while men tend to physically act out their anger through aggression women are more likely verbalise their anger. This discourse also related to a discourse of sameness and difference as the same emotion is being described but the display of that emotion is different for girls and boys.

Although the physical display of aggression was constructed as something that the boys did there was one exception in the girls' talk, where a girl described how she had been involved in a physical fight with another girl:

A: I've had a fight at school  
 ME: a physical fight?  
 A: yeah  
 B: With who?  
 A: \*\*\*\*\*  
 B: oh aye, yeah I remember that  
 A: do you remember she was pulling my hair?  
 B: this year?  
 A: she was pulling my hair and I was whacking her, I was....  
 B: .....everyone was just jumping on.....  
 ME: but that would be quite ....that wouldn't happen very often?  
 A: no  
 B: it was like a one off  
 A: yeah  
 (Focus Group 4)

This extract suggests that discourses of emotional display do not always conform to gender stereotypes of appropriate behaviour for boys and girls in school. Thorne (1993) has suggested that children may engage in “border crossing” when they engage in behaviour that is not associated with their gender. This can however have negative consequences if teachers perceive pupils as deviant and therefore a “problem” (Adams, 1997). Lloyd (2005b) has suggested that girls who engage in rule-breaking behaviour that is constructed as masculine can be seen as doubly deviant as they are offending against their gender as well as breaking the school rules.

#### **4.4.2 Discourses of emotional display: crying**

When discussing the emotional display of crying some girls said that they were able to cry in any context “*I don’t care where I am*” (Focus Group 3) and “*I’ve cried quite a lot in public*” (Focus Group 4). Girls’ emotional display of crying could be over seemingly trivial things, for example one girl described crying when out with a mixed group of peers because she had broken a nail: “*I cry and then I have a big tantrum on the golf course and all the boys are like oh my God its only a nail and I’ll be like its important*”( Focus Group 2). Francis (2000) describes how the girls that she observed constructed their femininity in the classroom through chatting and being concerned about their appearance in contrast to the boys. In this extract the girl is constructing herself as a “proper” girl through a concern over appearance and she also constructs herself as different from the boys, by suggesting that they do not understand this concern. This comment supports Martin’s (1996) research which suggests that during adolescence appearance becomes more important for girls.

When discussing crying the girls suggested that there were clear differences in how this emotion was displayed by themselves and the boys: “...*like girls cry and boys hide it in most of the time*” (Focus Group 2). The girls constructed the boys as unable to display that they were upset by crying because they “*bottle everything up*” (Focus Group 1). Several of the girls in the focus groups commented that they had never seen a boy cry and when girls had it was usually a younger brother. In contrast to the discussion where emotional control was constructed as desirable, here the suggestion is that containing and controlling some emotions has negative connotations. These contradictory discourses were also apparent in Lupton’s (1998) research with adults which suggests that discourses of emotional control are complex and vary according to context and the emotions being discussed.

The girls’ discussion suggested that the reason that the boys did not display their emotion through crying was a result of the social consequences if they did so: “*they don’t want to look stupid*” (Focus Group 1); “*they think that people are going to say something if they show emotions*” (Focus Group 4). These extracts relate to dominant discourses of femininity and masculinity where particular emotions come to be associated with women and men. These discourses constrain and shape the behaviour of girls and boys in school and in wider society because they establish the display rules associated with different emotions for each gender. The girls’ talk shows that they are aware of the social consequences for boys who transgress these rules in terms of losing social status with their peer group (Francis, 2000) and in the comments, teasing and bullying that may occur in order to re-establish the appropriate gender categories (Davies, 2006).

#### **4.5 Discourses of the Body**

Discourses of the body assume that gender differences in emotion stem from the biological differences between men and women rather than being socially constructed. This kind of essentialist discourse is found in areas of psychology such as evolutionary psychology (Daly and Wilson, 1996) where social behaviour is seen as rooted in biological differences. Within feminism there has been considerable debate concerning how far theories of emotion indicate that gender differences between women and men are based in biology (Weedon, 1999). Most feminists have disputed the belief that gender differences in emotion are biological, arguing that differences between men and women are socially constructed and perpetuate differences in power between men and women (Lott, 1997). For these feminists the implication is that given the same social conditions women and men would behave similarly (Kimball, 1995). Feminists have argued that discourses of emotion that are based on biological difference have disadvantaged women by constructing men as rational and women as emotional, where emotionality is regarded as more primitive than rationality (Fischer, 1993). So these discourses have contributed to a construction of women as irrational and governed by their emotions, in a culture where uncontrolled emotions are constructed as dangerous (Lutz, 1998).

Discourses of the body are particularly powerful for young people experiencing adolescence, as this is a time when biological changes are culturally significant in the transition to adulthood. Adolescence is a time when young people are constructed as being at the mercy of their hormones which reduces their ability to control their emotions, leaving them susceptible to mood swings and unpredictable behaviour. However social constructionists have suggested that puberty is not only

about biological changes, it is also loaded with cultural meanings about the social construction of gender (Martin, 1996). In the focus group discussions the girls utilised a discourse of the body that constructed the emotions of girls as being influenced by menstruation and hormones:

- ME: yeah, Ok this is an interesting one isn't it? Girls have lots of mood swings, why have you put that close to the top?
- A: because girls can be erm... jealous, angry and emotionally crying
- B: I think that when you are due on your period mood swings are like really bad cause I'm like really, really bad
- ME: right
- B: I mean I'm like...
- A: you shout at your parents for no reason
- B: I'm like, my mum said something and that's when I get emotional a lot when I'm due on
- (Focus Group 3)

In this extract emotions are constructed as irrational and driven by biology rather than social forces, as in the comment “*you shout at your parents for no reason*”. In contrast to earlier discourses which suggested that girls are more able to control emotions such as anger and aggression than boys, there was a sense in this discourse of the uncontrollability of emotions that were driven by biological factors:

- A: because I suppose it's true for every girl because as we've said before their hormones keep changing they feel happy one day and the next day they're like really emotional and just can't help but cry
- (Focus Group 4)

This extract links to the idea that the behaviour of adolescents is driven by their hormones, a discourse which is strongly represented in popular culture (Lesko, 2001; Moje, 2002).

The girls' talk constructed girls emotions as more closely linked to their biology than those of boys due to girls' experiences of menstruation, for example one

girl commented “*girls have problems like their periods, they always get stressed*” (Focus Group 4). Lee’s (1994) research on the menarche suggests that in Western society the onset of menstruation is secretive, emotionally laden and shameful. In this research girls spoke spontaneously about menstruation but constructed it in negative terms:

A: it’s gonna sound stupid now but periods and stuff, we always have pains and boys don’t have to deal with that

B: I was gonna say that

ME: yeah, so that causes more problems for girls?

A: and the hormones you’re always changing

ME: do you think that boys are affected by their hormones?

A: not as much as girls

(Focus Group 4)

In this extract menstruation is linked directly to physical discomfort and a distinction is drawn between the girls and boys as a result of this biological difference. Moje (2002) suggests that a “raging hormones” discourse constructs adolescents as at the mercy of their biology. In this discussion the girls contrast their own experience with the boys, suggesting that girls are much more likely to be affected by their hormones. The comment “*you’re always changing*” implies unpredictability about the girls’ biological state which makes it difficult to control.

#### **4.6 Discourses of Appearance**

Martin (1996) suggests that puberty is not a neutral biological change but is loaded with cultural assumptions which are related to traditional gender roles. She suggests that adolescent girls become more aware of cultural norms regarding their size and appearance. Frederickson and Roberts’ (1997) gender objectification theory suggests that during adolescence girls come to view themselves and their bodies as

objects that are there for the pleasure of others. They suggest that this process of objectification leads to girls and women becoming preoccupied with how they look and to behaviours that include self-monitoring and checking their appearance. There was some evidence of these discourses in the girls' talk; in this extract the girls were discussing the emotion of 'anxiety':

- ME: do you know what it means to be anxious?....when you worry a lot about things.....
- A: girls
- ME: why do you think girls?
- A: because about their clothes and everything they think that people with say something about them....if their hair is okay and everything
- ME: yeah..and do boys get anxious at all?
- A: not much
- (Focus Group 1)

In this extract the emotion of anxiety is attributed to girls and is directly related to concerns regarding clothes and hair.

In all of the focus groups the girls made some reference to anxiety or embarrassment about their appearance, mainly their hair or clothes. Other girls commented on their changing physical appearance when talking about embarrassment:

- ME: ...so they might be embarrassed ....that's things about their appearance?
- A: yeah, their appearance, yeah their boobs n stuff
- (Focus Group 1)

The girl comments "*they think that people will say something about them*" which implies that a girl's appearance is something that may be being monitored by others and will be commented on if it is not judged to be acceptable. In the following comment the experience of being bullied is linked explicitly to appearance:

A: ....if like you're bullied girls might think that they're ugly, like people don't want them to be alive and they might try and kill themselves  
(Focus Group 3)

This comment suggests that if a girl is bullied she might construct this as a consequence of her appearance and that the cost could be extreme.

The implication in the girls' talk about their appearance is that for girls it is not acceptable to be "ugly" or unattractive and that this devalues a girl as a person. This talk constructed girls as being judged by others on the basis of their appearance and so they emphasised the need for their appearance to be correct. The girls talked about their physical appearance in the context of emotional words such as "anxiety" and "embarrassment" suggesting that this monitoring of their appearance occurred in response to the social pressure to appear to be feminine and a "proper" girl. The girls' talk suggested that to be a "proper" girl was to be concerned about factors such as hair and clothes.

## **4.7 Discourses of Relationships with Others**

### **4.7.1 Social support from friends and family**

Sun and Stewart (2007) suggest that gender stereotypes of femininity and masculinity lead to a construction of femininity where women are believed to be more social and relationally orientated than men, who are believed to be more individually orientated. As a result of these discourses, they suggest that during adolescence girls and boys begin to conform to these gender stereotypes and therefore for girls the use of social support increases at this time. In the focus group discussions where the girls named people who they could talk to about their feelings they usually named other girls or women, mainly friends and mothers. Only one of the girls named a male

friend who she might talk to. In the following extract friends are identified as an important source of support for girls:

- ME: .. you'd talk to friends....and what if you had a problem at home would you talk to friends in school about that?
- A: yeah
- B: I have done....
- A: ..best friends but not...
- B: .....I've spoken to my best friend about my family problems
- A: ...best friends, but not friends as friends
- B: just my two closest friends
- ME: so when you say closest and best, are they the people that you would trust?
- B: yeah
- A: yeah, who wouldn't tell anyone
- ME: ...who wouldn't tell anyone else?
- A: and I've known them for longer as well, I've known them since nursery
- ME: so you would look for them to....and would other, would those kinds of friends come to you as well if they had problems?
- A: yeah
- B: yeah
- A: we've always had each other so we trust each other
- (Focus Group 2)

The construction of femininity in Western cultures encourages girls to form close personal relationships and the use of social support during adolescence has been linked to girls' resilience compared to boys (Frydenberg, 1997; Sun and Stewart, 2007).

The focus group discussions constructed girls as drawing upon social support mainly from close friends and mothers. Constructions about who to talk to were dependent upon what the problem was:

- ME: that's great...OK so let's just talk a little bit about some of the ones you've got at the top ....right at the top you've got.. when girls are

upset they're most likely to talk to a friend ...so has that been your experience , is that what you would do?

A: yeah ..cause its like, you can trust your friends ...you can trust your friends with it...its like you wouldn't really go up to your Mum and say oh this, this and this has happened but you could like talk to your friends about it

B: say if it was like something rude you couldn't talk to your Mum

A: no

(Focus Group 2)

Here the girls suggest that trust is a factor in who they would choose to talk to and friends may be more trustworthy than mothers particularly when the issue is “*something rude*”, possibly where girls may feel embarrassed to talk to an adult. There was also a suggestion that girls may to talk to friends unless the problem remained unresolved, in which case some girls said that they would then talk to their mothers:

A: I mean...say a boy tried to put his hand up your skirt or something, I wouldn't tell my Mum, I'd tell my friend first and if I thought that it was important enough I'd tell my Mum...

B: yeah

A: ..like if it was like after two days and it kept playing on your mind, then you'd tell your Mum...

C: I'd talk to a friend who knew the people who were actually doing the thing, that were actually picking on me and then they could talk to them, if that didn't work then I'd tell my sister or my Mum

(Focus Group 4)

A common construction across the focus group discussions when the girls were talking about the social support that they drew upon was the issue of trust. In the above extracts the girls identify their close friends as the most trustworthy and for many girls their mothers and other female relatives, e.g. sisters, were named as people they were able to trust with their problems.

#### 4.7.2 Social support from teachers and school staff

When the girls were talking about teachers and school staff a different picture emerged, where much of the girls' talk constructed their teachers as untrustworthy. This construction was linked to issues about the confidentiality of the information that the girls might disclose to their teachers, some girls said that their teachers could not be trusted because they were described as likely to disclose what they had been told to other people:

ME: You'd rather not. What do the other two...do you two agree with that or not?

A: well I would and I wouldn't .. like if it was to a teacher I wouldn't say nothing to a teacher cause they'd like go and tell their mates and everything and drink coffee and everything...

(Focus Group 2)

Another girl commented that she would not tell a teacher a problem because "*the teacher'll go off and tell someone.*" (Focus Group 1). While these girls said that they would never approach a member of staff to discuss their problems, for others the issue of trusting school staff was dependent upon the individual teacher:

ME .....you cause then they'll know you a bit better and I suppose from what you're saying there as well, you're sort of saying that you would go to the teacher you would felt most comfortable with

A: yeah

B: yeah, most trust...

ME: and again that word trust comes up what would you have to trust about the teacher if you...

A: like don't say anything to other....

C: they can't speak to other staff about your problems and how you're feeling because you've gone to them in confidence

(Focus Group 4)

Some of the girls distinguished between teachers in terms of their sex, suggesting that female teachers were more likely to be sympathetic to girls than male teachers:

*“because they’ve been through what we’re going through now.”* (Focus Group 4).

Some girls also made the distinction between their teachers and other members of the school community. Learning Mentors were introduced into U.K. schools as a result of the Excellence in Cities programme to work with young people in a variety of ways, using behavioural, pastoral and educational approaches. The girls’ school had employed learning mentors but at the time that this research was conducted a restructuring of support staff had brought a change of role. The learning mentors had become pastoral support staff whose role was to support the Head of Year; this had led to a move away from a supportive/counselling role to a more disciplinary role. Despite this change many of the girls made positive comments about their past experiences with learning mentors, one girl described them as *“they’re like a teacher but like they’re more...erm..I mean they’re more like listening, a listening person”* (Focus Group 2). Some girls constructed the learning mentors as being more trustworthy than the teaching staff because part of their role was to maintain confidentiality:

A: its true...like if its like a learning mentor and something and they can’t say anything to anyone..without your permission..so I’m told  
(Focus Group 1)

#### **4.7.3 Social support and the “mean girl” discourse**

When the girls in the focus groups talked about their friendships they named other girls as the people that they were most likely to turn to for social support. Discourses of girls’ friendships are complex, as in Frydenberg’s (1997) suggestion

that girls are socialised into using social support from other girls in order to help them to resolve their problems but these close interpersonal relationships between girls can be problematic. In this research discussions surrounding the emotion of jealousy were linked to a discourse of competition between girls. Gonick (2004) has referred to this as a “mean girl” discourse where girls are constructed as being unable to openly express their aggression and thus turn to social manipulation to harm others. The “mean” girl discourse has suggested that when girls are “mean” towards one another this is often a by-product of competition and conflict, particularly when girls are seeking to acquire status through being perceived as “popular” (Merten, 1997). The girls’ discussion showed an awareness of these social hierarchies and the conflict that they could create between girls which was often constructed as “bullying”. The following extract was a discussion of the emotion word “afraid” where the speaker is comparing boys and girls. Here she describes girls as being afraid of girls who construct themselves as high status or “queen bees”:

A: ...like if a girl is like, if you’ve got a girl that’s bullying you  
whatever...people think that they’re queen bees or  
whatever...er...they like, they feel intimidated by them and afraid, but  
boys just like yeah, sort it out, yeah...they ain’t bothered, they act  
more hard....

(Focus Group 2)

Here the speaker implies that bullying and intimidation by one girl to another is more difficult for girls to deal with than boys who are able to “*sort it out*” and don’t display their fear in the way that girls might.

One girl described an incident she had experienced with another girl who had spread rumours about her around the school:

A: I heard one rumour that went around and it was just because like me and me mate was having a mess around in class with this note...then these two boys went in my pocket and got it out and showed it round the whole school and then...they showed this one girl and this one girl ripped it off 'em and showed everyone in the school...then she was making her own story up of it and then they was all coming back to me and asking me....

(Focus Group 2)

This girl goes on to describe the emotional impact of this situation which was for her to miss school and how upon her return she and a friend then “*made the situation worse*” by deciding to retaliate against the girl who had been spreading rumours:

A: ...yes, cause...we was like we'll see how she likes it, cause like I was missing days off cause I couldn't stand coming to school and then like I come back the one day and then I'd had enough of it, and you'll do anything when you are angry and then me and B rite all over the lockers and tables 'XX is a sex addict'.....

(Focus Group 2)

The result of this action was a physical altercation between the two girls (grabbing and hair pulling) something that all of the focus groups agreed was extremely rare. The use of graffiti to publically humiliate the girls' antagonist brought the dispute to the attention of the teaching staff, who then intervened to discipline the girls.

In another group the girls' talk was about the reasons that they felt for the conflict between some girls. Here one of the girls describes how popularity could lead to jealousy from other girls:

A: because girls get jealous of other girls....a lot like proper loads because erm...like if a girl's more popular than another girl the other girl will get jealous and they'll probably show feelings like if they're friends with them like...you'll

ME: yeah

A: .....like fall out with her  
(Focus Group 3)

The “mean girl” discourse constructs girls as vying for popularity in order to attract the interest of high status boys (Merten, 1997). In this extract the girls describe how an argument happened between girls over a boy and how some girls may seek to control the behaviour of other girls by restricting their access to certain boys:

ME: Ok then A do you want?  
A: er girls get jealous a lot I think  
ME: right OK, why girls, go on A  
A: because they’re just really petty and...they get really jealous of other girls and if they have something that they want  
B: and they get jealous over whether ...like, certain girls talking to some boys and then...over boys they have like silly arguments and things like that  
C: I’ve had that happen  
A: me too  
C: I was like talking to this boy and like he’s got a girl mate and then I was talking to him and then she got jealous and then she like made us two stop talking  
(Focus Group 4)

Other girls also constructed conflict between girls as being about boys: “*if they’ve got the same boyfriend and they’re fighting over him*” or “*if they both like the same boy*”. The girls’ talk constructs close interpersonal relationships between girls as complex involving both social support and as a source of emotional distress.

#### **4.8 How do these discourses contribute to the girls’ constructions of being a ‘proper girl’?**

Social constructionist approaches to understanding gender suggest that while gender differences appear to be natural and rooted in biological difference they are actually the product of discursive practices within a given sociohistoric and cultural

context. While gender may appear to be fixed and based upon difference and opposition between girls and boys, feminist poststructuralist approaches suggest that gender is an active and ongoing process, always in the making (Thorne, 1993; Reay, 2006). This approach involves a move away from a construction of femininity and masculinity as distinct and dichotomous, to a construction of gender as dynamic, overlapping and fluid, constantly being made and remade in everyday actions and discourse (Francis, 2000).

While traditional psychology has focused upon how girls and boys acquire a gender identity in childhood (Bem, 1981; Bussey and Bandura, 1999) feminist poststructuralism suggests that rather than being an internalised attribute, gender identity is an everyday performance guided by the discourses that are available in a specific time and place (Butler, 1990). As discourses are multiple and overlapping there is some scope for agency as individuals negotiate the available discourses. However the choice of gender performance is not unlimited and is also constrained by an individual's sex, ethnicity and socio economic status (Aapola et al, 2005). Examining discourses of gender enables us to uncover the gender stereotypes that influence behaviour (Fischer, 1993, Lutz 1996, Lupton 1998, Shields, 2002).

One such stereotype is that of emotionality which feminist researchers have suggested is associated with femininity, while rationality is associated with masculinity (Lutz, 1998). This stereotype forms part of a gender differences discourse that Sutherland (2004) suggests supports a construction of gender differences as natural. In this research the examination of the discourses employed by adolescent girls to talk about emotions suggests that discourses of emotions provide a way for

girls to construct themselves as different from boys and thus to construct themselves as “proper” girls.

The discourses that the girls employed to talk about emotions were centred upon an idea of gender difference where girls were described as more emotional than boys both in regard to their experience of emotion and in its display. Girls described themselves in contrast to boys and described themselves as experiencing more emotions. To a large extent boys appeared as relatively emotionless in the girls’ talk, in response to my question “*Do boys get anxious at all?*” one girl replied “*not much*”, another said that boys “*don’t care about a lot of things*”. So the girls’ talk suggests that to be emotional is to be a girl and to be unemotional is to be a boy, supporting the idea that discourses of femininity are associated with emotionality (Lutz 1998).

When the girls described the boys as experiencing emotions, these emotions were those that are stereotypically associated with maleness, namely anger and aggression. The girls talked about these emotions in relation to physical acts of aggression displayed mainly by boys. These discourses suggest that femininity does not exist in isolation but is defined in relation to masculinity, so the girls were using their talk about boys’ emotional difference to establish their own femininity and status as “proper” girls. A similar pattern emerged when girls talked about emotional display, where the discourses employed constructed public displays of crying as more acceptable for girls than boys. Several girls described how they had cried in public while also suggesting that this behaviour was not acceptable for boys due to the negative reactions of peers. Davies (2006) describes how children engage in teasing and naming calling in order to maintain gender categories when other children

transgress them, providing a powerful source of emotional control. The girls' talk suggested that this category maintenance work (Davies, 2006) is employed to keep boys' behaviour within the acceptable bounds of masculinity. Where boys were constructed as being able to display emotion this was again associated with the 'masculine' emotions of anger and aggression which were demonstrated through the display of physical fighting.

In the focus groups, girls not only constructed themselves as "proper" girls through descriptions of emotionality but also by drawing upon discourses of the body. Their experiences of emotions were linked to biological events such as their menstrual cycle and hormonal fluctuations which once again was contrasted with boys' experiences. The girls' talk suggested that to be a "proper" girl is to be at the mercy of uncontrollable biological forces which govern behaviour. However discourses are complex and often contradictory (Baxter, 2002) so these discourses of the body existed alongside discourses of emotional control, in the context of the 'masculine' emotions of anger and aggression. It was during descriptions of anger and aggression that boys were more likely to be constructed as unable to control their emotions. This suggests that the girls' discourses of emotional control were linked to their constructions of gender appropriate behaviour. Behaviour that they associated with being feminine was often constructed as being biological in origin and uncontrollable for girls, who were described as being able to control masculine associated behaviour.

The girls' discourses of the body were also related to appearance when there was a suggestion that physically visible pubertal changes were embarrassing for girls. This concern linked with a wider discourse where the girls described the importance

of their appearance and the potential embarrassment that could be caused if their appearance was judged to be substandard by others. Researchers have suggested that appearance is central to the construction of femininity and that the pressure to conform to gender stereotypes of appearance intensifies during adolescence (Hill and Lynch, 1983; Martin, 1996; Slater and Tiggerman, 2002).

#### **4.9 Summary**

This chapter has explored the six discourses of emotions and emotional difficulties which were contained in the girls' talk before going on to consider how these discourses relate to the girls' constructions of themselves as "proper" girls. The following chapter discusses the discourses from the teachers talk beginning with those that were also present in the discourse employed by the girls.

## **5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION: PART 2**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This research employed the use of semi-structured interviews to elicit the discourses employed by secondary school teachers when talking about the emotional needs of the girls whom they teach. The interviews were designed to collect data in order to answer the following research questions:

- What discourses are employed by teachers when talking about the emotional difficulties of their pupils, particularly girls?
- How do the discourses utilised by teachers influence the support and resources that young people are able to access in school in order to meet their emotional needs?

This chapter begins in Section 5.2 with an overview of the discourses that were found in both the teachers' and girls' talk. Sections 5.3 – 5.5 go on to explore these discourses by focusing on sameness and difference, discourses of the body and discourses concerned with relationships with others. Section 5.6 considers how the discourses contained in the teachers' talk help to explain the gendered allocation of support and resources in school in the area of emotional need. While Section 5.7 discusses how the relationship between discourses of emotional difficulties and those of special educational needs contributes to the unequal allocation of resources.

### **5.2 What discourses are used by teachers when talking about the emotional difficulties of their pupils, particularly girls?**

In the focus groups with the Year 9 girls, six often interrelated discourses could be identified when they talked about emotions. Four of these discourses were also apparent in the teacher interviews:

- That girls' and boys' emotions were the same
- That the emotions of girls and boys were different
- That emotions are linked to the body and biological factors

- Discourses that related to girls' relationships with others

### **5.3 Discourses of Sameness and Difference**

Discourses of sameness and difference between the emotions of boys and girls were found throughout the girls' discussions in the focus groups and were also apparent in the teacher interviews. When the teachers were asked if there were any differences in the emotional difficulties experienced by girls and boys the most common response was to suggest that there was no difference, as in these comments from two of the interviewees:

Teacher A: ... I don't see any difference to be honest  
(Interview 1)

Teacher E: I think that they're pretty much the same  
(Interview 5)

While the teachers began by asserting that there was little difference between the emotional difficulties of girls and boys, they then went on to describe differences and there was evidence of the construction of difference throughout the interviews. In the girls' talk there was a complex relationship between the discourse of sameness and difference, where the two were sometimes presented as distinct but often were overlapping; dependent both upon the emotion being discussed and the social context. In the teachers' talk there was a much greater emphasis upon a discourse of difference between girls and boys, rather than a discourse of sameness. This focus upon difference was predominant in the teachers' accounts, there was little overlap or intertextuality with discourses of sameness and the teachers were often able to describe in detail the differences that they described in the behaviours of girls and boys in the classroom.

Francis (2000) has suggested that pupil behaviour in the secondary school classroom delineates their gender, where girls are expected to be quiet and conforming and boys are expected to be boisterous and tend to dominate. This difference was reflected in the teachers' descriptions where boys were described as disruptive while girls were either constructed as compliant and quiet, or when their behaviour was perceived as problematic they were described as "moody" or sitting and chatting during the lesson. These differences were particularly apparent when the teachers were asked how they would recognise if a pupil that they were teaching was experiencing emotional difficulties:

Teacher B: I think that girls tend to go quiet and boys sometimes, not all the time, can be attention seeking, that can often be the case if there's something....

(Interview 2)

Teacher E: .....you don't seem to get that same sort of aggressive culture with the girls ...the girls that want to disrupt won't necessarily go around causing trouble, they'll lack a bit of ummph, they'll sit and chat with their mates and do their hair and their nails rather than go out of their way to be an absolute pain in the bum in the lesson or whatever....they'll just sit there and natter and not cause huge trouble other than the fact that they're not doing what they should be doing they won't actively cause a bit scene and a big show like lads.

ME: Do you think that's why they survive?

Teacher E: I think that it probably is ....the lads are more...they're not as interested in just sitting there nattering they want something to do so at least if they kick off with a teacher its something to do.

(Interview 5)

These extracts support the finding from the research conducted by Francis (2000) as they suggest that the teachers' expectations of their pupils' behaviour are gendered.

There was a strong connection in the teachers' talk between behaviour and emotions, where pupil behaviour was constructed as a means of expressing emotions.

In the following extract although the teacher was asked a general question about the emotional difficulties they related this to a “behavioural problem”:

ME: So what kinds of emotional difficulties do the young people have that you work with?

Teacher C: What do you mean by emotional difficulties?

ME: ...erm...emotional things that might be getting in the way of their learning ...

Teacher C: ...erm.....I'm not sure I can always distinguish ...between...when children have ...I'm not sure that I always identify that if they have a behavioural problem ...it's because of an emotional....does that make sense?

(Interview 3)

When asked to elaborate on the kind of behaviours being referred to, the teacher distinguished between the kinds of behaviours that they identified with girls and with boys:

ME: That does make sense, yeah...so when you talk about those behaviours what kind of behaviours are you talking about?

Teacher C: .....attention seeking behaviour ...er...children who are off task...disturb others...talk when the teacher's talking....erm...overreact...

ME: ...so its those, yeah ...and would you say from your experience that you would see those in both boys and girls or more typically in one or the other?

Teacher C: ....more boys...

ME: ...more boys, and do you ever see girls with those kinds of behaviours?

Teacher C: Actually I don't think that's right, I don't think that its .....I think...boys are more likely probably in the ones that I see...to have....the off-task, laddish behaviour, you know, touching others, throwing stuff, you know the low key stuff, whereas I think...girls....its more...falling out with people, particularly year 8, falling out with people ...big upsets, tears, you know very hormonal stuff really...

(Interview 3)

Lloyd (2000b) has suggested that as a result of these differences in the behaviours of girls and boys, girls are largely overlooked in the literature regarding behaviour in

schools as they are not constructed as having behavioural problems in the way that boys are. Researchers have suggested that while teachers are dealing with disruptive behaviours pupils who maybe experiencing difficulties but are withdrawn are more likely to be overlooked by teachers (Osler and Vincent, 2003) and this influences the pupils for whom schools access additional support (Daniels et al, 1995).

The above extracts offer some support to the idea of girls being more likely to be overlooked by teachers (Osler and Vincent, 2003), as the teacher immediately links emotional difficulties with pupils who are displaying challenging behaviour and these are boys. The teacher does not consider the behaviour of the girls until prompted to do so. In this way the behaviour of boys is constructed by the teacher as the “acting out” of their internal emotional states and as the girls do not exhibit the same behaviours their emotional states are assumed to be different. The teacher’s comments suggest that when considering pupil behaviour it is the experience of teaching boys that is salient to teachers and the behaviour of girls is of secondary importance. At the end of the extract the teacher’s comment that the behaviour she describes for the girls is *very hormonal stuff really* is indicative of a discourse that drew upon biological differences which was apparent throughout the teacher interviews.

#### **5.4 Discourses of the body**

Within psychology and popular culture, emotions have been linked to essentialist ideas of biological differences between women and men where both emotions and gender identity are treated as stable internal traits possessed by individuals (Fischer, 1993). As Lutz (1998) comments, differences in the behaviour of men and women has been attributed to a variety of biological causes while social and

contextual factors have largely been ignored. These biological assumptions are particularly important in understanding the behaviour of teenagers because within popular culture adolescence is characterised as a period of biological upheaval, when young people are regarded as being at the mercy of their hormones (Lesko, 2001; Moje, 2002). The teacher interviews suggested that within schools this discourse is gendered, many of the teachers utilised a discourse of the body to explain their pupils' behaviour in relation to their emotional needs and this discourse referred almost exclusively to the girls.

In the above extract when the teacher refers to the girls' emotional display of crying she uses an example of hormones and so draws upon a discourse of the body to explain this display:

Teacher C: girls....its more...falling out with people, particularly year 8, falling out with people ...big upsets, tears, you know very hormonal stuff really...  
(Interview 3)

One of the teachers constructed the behaviour of the girls' as *normal teenage angst stuff*, describing this in terms of being moody and unpredictable:

Teacher D: ...for me here at this school its just normal teenage angst stuff, you know, frustration, not able to deal with their emotions in a rational way erm... but nothing major.....

ME: So that kind of teenage angst would you say that you see that in boys and girls? Or more one that the other or....?

Teacher D: Do you know what, that's interesting, I find it with the girls, I find the boys to be immature and silly and they have silly little jokes and interesting, I see them walking around, I just caught these boys out in the corridor the other day screaming at each other, boys...so I was like what are you doing? But the girls it's definitely they'll come in one day and they are in a mood and they'll be in a mood with everybody, with me, with the whole class.

(Interview 4)

Aapola (1995) suggests that these simplistic biological explanations are often used to describe complex psycho-social problems and can thus disadvantage young people. In the description above the behaviour of girls is normalised as a natural consequence of puberty and is therefore not constructed as ‘problem’ behaviour.

The teacher also suggests that teenagers *are not able to deal with their emotions in a rational way* implying a difference with adults who are therefore constructed as having greater control of their emotions than adolescents. Lutz (1998) has suggested that in Western cultures emotionality is associated with the irrational and uncontrolled emotions are constructed as potentially dangerous. Feminists have argued that the irrationality of emotions is associated with women rather than men and has thus contributed to the negative stereotyping of women (Fischer, 1993; Lott, 1997; Lupton, 1998; Lutz, 1998). When asked if the inability to control emotions in a rational way occurred in both girls and boys, the teacher identifies the girls as the pupils that she believes lack the ability to deal with their emotions rationally, which is concordant with wider cultural discourses that link femininity with irrationality and emotionality (Lutz, 1998).

Despite this link between femininity and emotionality, this teacher went on to suggest that the types of pupil behaviour which were more likely to result in a reaction from school staff were the more physically aggressive behaviours of the boys, rather than a girl displaying emotions in an overt way by crying:

Teacher D: ...whereas the boys don't and then it comes out in other forms so misbehaviour in the classroom or aggressive behaviour towards people in authority or out on the playground or I dunno and so they don't get it out and don't work it through or maybe its because in the end because they hold it in it turns to physical aggression then people will address that before some girl crying...

(Interview 4)

This difference in response from teachers can be partly attributed to the need to keep order within a school and classroom context where some behaviours demand the teachers' attention. However the discourse is underpinned by the idea that apparent behavioural differences between women and men reflect essential biological differences and this idea has been problematised by feminist researchers who have questioned the focus in traditional psychological research on differences between women and men rather than on similarities (Lott, 1997).

An alternative discourse has been constructed by researchers who have suggested that differences in behaviour in response to emotions are influenced by cultural display rules which determine the appropriate response to an emotion in context. Brody's (1997) research has shown how these display rules are gendered resulting in different behaviours from men and women in response to such emotions as anger. In the focus groups when the Year 9 girls talked about boys they often made reference to ideas of emotional display, for example by suggesting that boys were not able to show some of the emotions that they experienced out of fear of being teased. These ideas were not apparent in the teacher interviews where the teachers' constructions were related to essentialist differences between girls and boys rather than differences in emotional display.

## **5.5 Discourses of Relationships with Others**

Three broad discourses have been identified in the literature regarding girls: the 'at-risk' girl (Harris, 2004), the 'can-do' girl (Harris, 2004) and the 'mean girl' (Gonick, 2004). When the teachers were talking about girls' relationships with their peers and with staff they drew upon two of these discourses: a 'mean girl' discourse

when talking about girls in conflict with other girls and a ‘can-do’ girl discourse when describing how girls were able to use positive relationships to provide them with social support.

### 5.5.1 Relationships between girls and the ‘mean girl’

According to Gonick (2004) the ‘mean girl’ discourses emerged in the 2000s in popular psychology books such as Wiseman’s (2002) *Queen Bees and Wannabes*. Within this discourse girls are pathologised as not being able to express conflict and aggression openly, thus resorting to social manipulation to harm others (Gonick, 2004). This behaviour is contrasted with that of boys whose overt aggression is constructed as the norm while female covert aggression is constructed as deviant (Ringrose, 2008). The construction of the ‘mean girl’ was apparent in the teacher interviews, as illustrated in the following extract:

Teacher D: ....well I think that girls don’t tend to handle their emotions as well as the boys ...the boys are not as mature as the girls either or they’re not as advanced, I don’t know they can stay calmer for a lot longer they don’t get worked up so quickly and easily as the girls do, and it doesn’t affect them, but I think that’s a lot to do with, you know you’ve got your groups of girls and the bullying with girls is emotional bullying... and so the girls have a lot more to deal with in terms of that I think whereas with the boys its not emotional bullying its just physical stuff, and I think that it’s a lot easier to deal with the physical than it is to deal with that sort of mental and emotional stuff and that’s a lot of what the girls come running to you about... so they are emotionally more needy because of the way that they interact with each other and the way they create a hierarchy amongst each other.

(Interview 4)

In this extract the teacher contrasts the girls’ behaviour with that of the boys describing the girls’ behaviour as *emotional bullying* while the boys are described as engaging in *physical stuff*. Within a ‘mean girl’ discourse emotional bullying is constructed as the way in which girls create hierarchies and maintain their own place

in the power structure (Merten, 1997). Here the teacher draws upon a biological and developmental discourse by suggesting that the differing behaviour of girls and boys relates to the immaturity of the boys compared to the more mature girls. Surprisingly, this maturity is associated with the girls becoming more emotionally *worked up* than the boys who are described as *calmer for a lot longer* than the girls, rather than maturity being associated with greater emotional control. This discourse does not support Allard's (2004) research which suggests that teachers were more likely to describe girls as mature and in control of their behaviour than boys.

The teacher also contributes to a common construction in the teachers' interviews, that the physical manifestation of their emotions by the boys was easier to deal with than the girls' behaviour because the girls' 'mean girl' behaviour was constructed as on-going rather than a single instance:

Teacher A: ...we do get bad girls but we seem to get a lot more bad boys, but the bad girls are worse than the bad boys.

ME: Right.... In what way are they worse?

Teacher A: A boy will have a fight and then it's done, a girl will have a fight and the hate campaign and the bitchiness will go on, they don't let it go....

(Interview 1)

Teacher E: ...this might seem a bit awful but girls can't seem to leave things alone, like lads'll have a blooming dust-up and then the next day they'll be playing footy together and what not where the girls go on at each other for months and months and months sometimes, to the point where it does get out of order really erm...lads, you don't seem to get that same kind of problem with the lads, its flash in the pan and it's a quick flare-up and they're best mates again but the girls and then they seem to drag other people in with them and its their little crowd against that little crowd and she looked at me funny ....

ME: What is it about girls, why are girls doing that and boys not?

Teacher E: I think if we knew the answers to that we'd be rich, wouldn't we? I don't know girls seem to be different to lads it could be something to do with the genes and how we're all made....

(Interview 5)

In the first extract the teacher draws upon the ‘mean girl’ discourse to suggest that ‘bad’ girls are *worse than the bad boys* because they engage in ‘*bitchiness*’ and are not able to *let things go*. In the second extract the teacher suggests that the girls are a bigger problem than the boys because their behaviour goes on for *months and months and months* while boys are able to deal with incidents by having a *dust-up* and then returning to being friends.

This problematisation of girls’ behaviour occurs in a Local Authority context where boys are four times as likely as girls to be identified as having emotional, social and behavioural problems. Although this is acknowledged by Teacher A, there is a suggestion in both of these accounts that the behaviour of girls is more problematic for the teachers to deal with than that of boys. Ringrose (2008) has suggested that the ‘mean girl’ discourse has constructed direct aggression as masculine and the norm while indirect aggression is constructed as feminine and deviant. The above extracts illustrate this construction, with a sense that boys’ aggression is cathartic and that it does not interfere in the longer term with their social relationships. In contrast the girls’ behaviour is constructed as not only persistent but as having the potential to get *out of order* and therefore needing to be dealt with by staff. When asked to explain this difference between the behaviour of girls and boys Teacher E again draws upon a biology suggesting that it is *something to do with the genes and how we’re all made*.

There is a sense in the teachers’ drawing upon the ‘mean girl’ discourse that the behaviour of girls is trivialised, it is irritating to teachers because it is not easily resolved and needs to be dealt with when it gets *out of order*. The naturalisation of this behaviour through the use of biological discourses supports Brown’s (2003)

suggestion that in schools this behaviour is regarded as “just what girls do” and is often not taken seriously despite research which has suggested that social exclusion from friendship groups is harmful to girls (Stanley and Arora, 1998). The teacher accounts of girls’ behaviour once again draw upon a discourse of difference; there were no accounts of boys engaging in form of indirect aggression despite evidence that gender differences in indirect aggression are trivial (Card et al, 2008).

### **5.5.2 Relationships between girls and the ‘can-do’ girl**

Baxter (2002) suggests that discourses of femininity are complex, contradictory and overlapping and in the teacher interviews the positive aspects of girls’ social relationships formed part of the discourse of the ‘can-do’ girl. Harris (2004) suggests that the ‘can-do’ girl is found in constructions of girls as independent and successful and is found in accounts of girls’ educational success, sexual assertiveness, professional ambitions and delayed motherhood. The ‘can-do’ girl has appeared extensively in educational research in recent years which has focused upon the success of girls in public examinations. This success has led to a discourse where girls are not seen as having problems compared to boys who have become ‘hyper visible’ (Osler, 2006).

The discourse of girls’ academic achievement and boys’ failure has been criticised by many researchers who suggest that differences in achievement vary according to which girls and boys are compared, as gender intersects with socio-economic status and ethnicity in patterns of achievement (Francis, 2000). Despite these criticisms, the discourse of boys’ underachievement and the ‘can-do’ girl continues to influence government policy and the guidance provided to schools, for

example the 2007 DCSF publication *Confident, capable and creative. Supporting boys' achievements*. In the teacher interviews there was a complex discourse that linked boys' underachievement to their 'challenging' behaviour and emotional needs, in contrast girls were constructed as achieving and therefore having less difficulty than the boys:

Teacher D: ....see the girls who are having all these issues and problems and running to you with issues about things, they're not girls who struggle academically they are just normal girls and they can get along whereas a lot of the boys who have problems, social problems or problems within the classroom their academic levels are quite low ....the girls just seem to manage better in the end...

(Interview 4)

In this extract the teacher suggests that the girls' higher academic attainment acts as a protective factor which allows the girls to *get along* compared to the boys who are struggling academically. Even though these girls are described by the teacher as *having all these issues and problems* they are still described as managing *better in the end*.

The 'can-do' girl discourse appears in the psychological literature on resilience. Here girls are presented as having more successful coping strategies than the boys because they have closer social networks which provide support (Frydenberg, 1997), compared to boys who have larger and less closely knit friendship groups. These differences in friendship patterns have been attributed to gender stereotypes which encourage girls to be more social and relationship orientated (Sun and Stewart, 2007). This construction of girls as being able to draw upon social support was apparent throughout the teacher interviews. This social support included friends but also to talking to teachers about their problems. The women teachers who were interviewed were most likely to provide examples of girls with whom they had

developed close and trusting relationships and they often spoke of these girls with affection:

Teacher D: ...especially the girls because I got quite close to the girls and they would actually just sit here and talk about what's been going on or once again I could tell if they weren't happy and I just say to them what's going on? And they'd say oh I fight with her or I split up with him and that sort of stuff....

(Interview 4)

ME: If a girl is having difficulty in school where are they likely to go for help?

Teacher A: They usually confide in their friends and either they will come to me or go to their form teacher.....some form teachers are very, very good and the kids know that they can talk to them and the form teacher will deal with this if they can.....

(Interview 1)

So in the teacher interviews both aspects of the 'can-do' girl discourse were apparent; that girls were in some way protected by their academic attainment compared to boys and that girls were more effective at drawing upon social support than boys.

In the focus group discussions there was a mixed response from the girls when they were asked if they preferred to talk to a teacher who was male or female. Most of the girls said that they preferred to talk to a woman if they had difficulties, though some of the girls said that it depended upon the individual teacher and their relationship with them. In the teacher interviews the female teachers were most likely to suggest that the girls felt more comfortable talking to a woman rather than a man:

Teacher B: ...I'll often get kids come to just have a talk and other female members of staff will get there and we will always, there may be some member of staff who are uncomfortable but the vast majority will just find time to talk to girls and lads don't do that you see.

(Interview 2)

ME: And do think that girls prefer talking to a woman?

Teacher D: Yeah, yeah, definitely, they will come seeking, in fact even if their Head of House is not here ....even if they are not part of

that House and they need to talk to a woman they will seek out one of the other Heads or an assistant head who might be a woman, they will go looking for them and even though they're not part of that house.

(Interview 4)

The teachers drew upon a discourse of gender difference when comparing this behaviour with that of the boys who they described as much less likely to confide in a teacher if they had a difficulty:

Teacher B: .....I don't think that I've ever had a boy come to me....  
(Interview 2)

ME: .....and what about the boys would they....

Teacher D: ....see the boys are less likely to go and talk to somebody, from what I can tell, certainly when I'm sitting with my friends at lunchtime who are all Heads of Houses or pastoral heads it's the girls that come racing in every 5 minutes, I don't think that the boys open up as easily but I think if they were to ....I don't know...I'd guess a male but I don't know I think some of them need that, at this age when they don't really know how to open up that they need a woman to coax it out of them so quite possibly.....

(Interview 4)

The suggestion in the above extract is that boys may need to be coaxed into talking to a teacher because *they don't really know how to open up* suggests that the ability to be able to draw upon social support from peers and teachers is desirable and a positive way to deal with emotions. What is also interesting in this account is that the interviewee draws upon more general stereotypes of men and women by suggesting that boys *need a woman to coax it out of them*, thus implying that a male teacher may not have the requisite skills to do this.

## **5.6 How do the discourses utilised by teachers influence the support and resources that young people are able to access in school, in order to meet their emotional needs?**

This research was prompted by the low numbers of girls who are referred to school support services through the special educational needs procedures (Cruddas

and Haddock, 2005). In the local context in which I work the disparity between the numbers of girls and boys who are referred is particularly apparent in the area of behavioural, emotional and social difficulties, where the referrals for boys outnumber those for girls by a ratio of four to one. This disparity raises concerns about equality of access to resources and provision and how girls' needs are being met within schools when external agencies are not involved. The low levels of referrals for girls might suggest a lack of recognition that girls may experience emotional difficulties despite a discourse described by Harris (2004) as that of the 'at-risk' girl.

The teacher interviews in my research suggest that within this school there was a broader discourse of the 'at-risk' pupil who could be a girl or boy, while girls were constructed of being at risk of underage sexual activity and self-harm. These discourses suggested that within the school there was a level of awareness of the emotional difficulties of pupils that did not account for the low referral rates for girls. Discussion with the manager of the school's Learning Support Unit, where pupils were referred by staff if they were felt to be experiencing difficulties, suggested that these referrals were almost equally divided between girls and boys, indicating that staff were identifying the needs of girls but this was not translating into referrals to external support services. The interviews with the teachers suggested that it was constructions of the concept of special educational needs within the school that was contributing to the disparity in referrals between girls and boys.

### **5.61 The 'at-risk' pupil**

The discourse of the 'at-risk' girl is identified by Harris (2004) in both the academic work of feminists such as Gilligan (1993) and in the popular psychology of

*Reviving Ophelia* (Pipher, 1994). In this discourse adolescent girls are portrayed as at risk of losing their 'authentic selves' as the pressure to separate from their mothers and to conform to a conventional feminine role increases during adolescence. The 'at-risk' girl also appears in discourses of mental health where being an adolescent girl is associated with self harm, attempted suicide (Coleman and Hendry, 1999), depressive symptoms (Frydenberg, 1997; Marcotte et al, 1999) and eating disorders (Bordo, 2003). The differences in the reported and diagnosed mental health of adolescent girls and boys have been attributed to a variety of causes including hormonal differences (Seeman, 1997), cognitive style (Broderick and Korteland, 2002) and the restrictions of assuming a female gender identity (Hill and Lynch 1983; Frederickson and Roberts 1997).

In the teacher interviews there was a discourse of the 'at-risk pupil', for which the teachers provided examples of both girls and boys. In contrast to the discourses based in biology that the teachers employed when they were talking about differences in behaviour, here the causes of the pupils' difficulties were associated with family circumstances such as having a parent with an addiction, being in the care of grandparents as a result of parental imprisonment or addiction and having an illness or bereavement within the family:

Teacher A: Where do you start...they have every emotional difficulties that any adult has I mean there's a lot of young children that don't live in a conventional family that's single parent families, we've got so many here who live with grandparents and then you've got the age divide you will be in at 9 o'clock.....because of the generation thing ...a lot of problems are because they love Nan but they can't live Nan's way.... A lot of kids don't see parents, we've got a lot of kids whose parents have drug problems, in prison, alcohol problems....

(Interview 1)

Teacher B: Often if Mum's taken into hospital you can see that's an issue or something, divorce or marriage break up....  
(Interview 2)

Teacher C: ....there's a girl that I've got in Year 9 for example, she came to my lesson yesterday and she was quite miserable and.....I found out I think about October time ...cause I was a bit annoyed that she was coming in and she was you know, and she was missing a lot of lessons and then the LSA said well you know her Mum's in prison ...and I suppose once you realise that then you are almost into the role of compensating in some way ...and so we've tried...when she's been in which hasn't been a lot ....to really nurture her along and she has improved...  
(Interview 3)

Teacher E: I can think of one particular girl at the moment who er...doesn't want to go home at night, Mum's a heroin addict, she lives with Nan who had legal custody, Mum's just come out of prison erm..Mum's got a new boyfriend doesn't really want the girl around on the scene...allegations that Nan beats her and she doesn't want to go home, she's living at her boyfriend's at the moment who is two or three years older than her ...erm...she's taken overdoses ended up in hospital, doesn't want to go home...  
(Interview 5)

Harris (2004) has suggested that one aspect of the 'at-risk' discourses concerns girls who are vulnerable to leaving school early and of teenage pregnancy. She suggests that this discourse tends to describe these outcomes in terms of poor personal choices rather than structural disadvantage. However as the extracts above illustrate this was not apparent in the teachers' discourse where family circumstances were described as disadvantaging young people. The young people were constructed as victims of their circumstances and with no suggestion that they were responsible for these circumstances.

Although most of the 'at risk' discourse that the teachers drew upon applied to their pupils regardless of gender there were two issues that were identified by the one

of the interviewees where girls were described as being particularly ‘at risk’ compared to the boys: engaging in underage sex and self-harm:

Teacher A: I honestly don’t know, I mean I’ve done two nurses’ referrals this week, both girls, one was underage sex and for self harming, that’d be a girl’s thing more self-harming....I’ve never had a boy that done it, I know that boys do, do it .....

ME: ....but you’ve never come across it here....?

Teacher A: .....no, it’s always girls

(Interview 1)

Teacher A: I suppose that they think that they are in love more than boys do, you know that kind of emotional problem and feel pressure to have sex, the boys want to the girls don’t.

(Interview 1)

Here the teacher’s description of girls as ‘at risk’ from *the pressure to have sex* and engaging in underage sex forms part of a discourse of femininity which helps to regulate the behaviour of girls (Stoppard, 2000). The teacher’s comment that *the boys want to but the girls don’t* reflects discourses of sexual identity that Allen (2003) argues are so deeply embedded in Western culture that they have become normative, where the male is constructed as active while the female is constructed as passive. These discourses position young women as sexually vulnerable and as “acted upon” rather than “acting”. So in the teacher’s comments the sexuality and sexual activity of the girls is constructed as an emotional problem. The teacher’s concern surrounding the sexual activity of girls is also linked to a long standing discourse that constructs teenage pregnancy as a social problem (Murcott, 1980). Thus an adolescent girl who engages in sexual activity is not only constructed as a victim but is also at risk of becoming a social problem through teenage motherhood.

The second factor which the teacher identifies as placing girls at greater risk than boys is the risk of deliberate self harm. While researchers have suggested that overall rates of mental illness are similar for boys and girls there are well documented differences in the prevalence of certain disorders (Piccinelli and Homen, 1997) and in self-report studies girls report significantly higher rates of self harm than boys (Ross and Heath, 2002). The reasons for these differences in the prevalence of mental disorders remains a matter of controversy with some researchers suggesting that methodologies using self-reports are flawed and are influenced by participants providing socially acceptable responses which are influenced by gender stereotypes (LaFrance and Banaji 1992; Madden et al, 2000).

## **5.7 Discourses of Special Educational Needs**

There are a number of external agencies which schools can access in order to support their work with pupils in the area of emotional difficulties, including services provided through the National Health Service, such as Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services and school nurses and those provided through Children's Services, such as Educational Psychology Services and Behaviour Support Services. The configuration of these services varies between different Local Authorities. In the area where the school in this study was situated, the educational psychologists are located in a broader multi-professional service whose primary purpose is to support the work of schools with those pupils who are identified as having special educational needs. Schools and Local Authorities follow the guidance of the Code of Practice for Special Educational Needs (SEN) (DfES, 2001a) which identifies a number of categories of SEN covering learning, physical and medical needs and emotional and behavioural

difficulties. The system of SEN enables schools to access additional advice, support and provision in order to meet the needs of their pupils.

One motivation for the identification of pupils with SEN within schools is that this can lead to the allocation of resources to the school in order to meet the additional needs of their pupils. Traditionally educational psychologists have played a role as gatekeepers to these resources (Norwich, 2000). Schools bring more boys to the attention of external agencies using the SEN procedures creating a discriminatory situation which enables boys to access more resources and provision than girls (Daniels et al, 1995). While the discourse of SEN contained within government policy is complex and covers a range of needs in this research the teacher's constructions of SEN were focused upon difficulties with learning:

ME: As a teacher what would be your understanding of what special educational needs are?

Teacher C: .....its easy to say its ....its just because ...they're the weakest isn't it? That's the easy answer but its not ...erm....it can...it can be anything I mean I had a very, very bright boy who I hope will get a B grade at G.C.S.E. ...erm...and he had issues with handwriting and the barriers used to go up when he had to write a lot but because he was in a small group he was never an issue....erm...you see I'm talking about boys again aren't I...there's another boy....another bright boy....and again its handwriting, he could talk the hind legs off a donkey and he know everything but his work, well you'd think that he's never done anything...cause he just won't work ....but then there are others....that you know...that they need more support than the average child and I suppose that really is special needs for whatever reason.

(Interview C)

In the following extract the teacher suggests that special educational needs may be related to both learning and behaviour and distinguishes between the two by suggesting that learning needs are long term, while emotional needs are short term and can be resolved:

Teacher B: Now you're making think, I've always had in my mind that the typical child with special educational needs couldn't read, write and had some difficulties with understanding and the emotional ones were the ones who suffered from bereavement, split families and those kinds of issues but when you think about it they are all special educational needs aren't they I suppose in my mind...I hope that I don't regret this...that the special needs with reading writing etc were long term and the emotional issues are short term, I think that that would be my difference whereas the reading, writing, would be having those people working with them for years whereas with emotional if you're doing your job properly they'd with you for....I don't know, may be I'm wrong but that's in my mind how I think..

(Interview 2)

Where the teachers did talk about special educational needs that would be categorised as behavioural, emotional and social difficulties, they described the types of behavioural difficulties that are more commonly associated with boys:

Teacher D: .....erm.....thinking hard about this one....if you look at special education it's the kids with behavioural difficulties and that's all down to emotions erm...I mean I just see special education as just being .....when they can't operate within the mainstream classroom

(Interview 4)

Teacher B: It's kind of saying, what's the difference between behavioural needs and emotional needs? Because I'm just thinking of boys that we will have referred on with ADHD who've got real problems and that is long-term,

(Interview 2)

These discourses of special educational needs provide some indication of why girls are less likely to be referred to support services whose remit is to help schools to meet the needs of pupils with SEN.

The extracts suggest that it is academic difficulties with learning that teachers construct as constituting 'special educational needs'. Where behaviour is identified as indicating a special educational need it is the "acting out" behaviours associated with boys that teachers construct as SEN. The behaviours that researchers suggest may

indicate emotional difficulties for girls such as becoming withdrawn or skipping school (Lloyd 2000a; Osler and Vincent, 2003) did not form part of the teachers' discourses of special educational needs in this research.

## **5.8 Summary**

This chapter has explored the discourses of girls emotional difficulties contained in the teacher interviews. In contrast to the discourses contained in the girls' talk which were complicated and overlapping, the discourses in the teachers' talk were more grounded in constructions of gender differences based in biology. Paechter (1998) suggests that there are certain hegemonic discourses which are more difficult to resist. The discourses which drew upon essentialist ideas of gender differences based upon biology in the teacher interviews provided the most clear examples of such discourses. The final chapter goes on to summarise the findings from this research and to explore the strengths and limitations of the research design.

## **6. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS**

### **6.1 Overview of this Section**

This chapter begins in Sections 6.2 – 6.7 by drawing together the main findings from the research. Section 6.8 considers how these findings contribute to an understanding of the gendered allocation of resources to pupils. Section 6.9 outlines the recommendations from the research that were made to the school and Section 6.10 considers the relevance of the research for the work of educational psychologists. Section 6.11 and 6.12 discuss the strengths and limitations of the research design and Section 6.13 considers future research. The chapter ends with my personal reflections on this research and the research process in Section 6.14.

### **6.2 Summary of Research Findings**

The aim of this research was to investigate how the emotions and emotional difficulties of secondary aged girls are constructed by teachers and the girls themselves, through the investigation of the discourses surrounding girls' emotions. The rationale for choosing this topic was the difference in the numbers of girls and boys referred to educational support services in the U.K. in order to access support and provision for behavioural and emotional difficulties. In the Local Authority where I am employed as an educational psychologist, the referrals for boys who are identified as having difficulties in the category of behavioural, emotional and social difficulties, outnumber referrals for girls by four to one. I was interested in how far the constructions of gender and emotion might help to illuminate some of the factors that contribute to this discrepancy in referrals. My research suggests that while the school where the research took place was identifying the emotional needs of their pupils, there were a number of discursive factors that were contributing to the

discrepancy in referral rates between girls and boys. My findings support research conducted mainly by feminists which suggests that discourses of gender tend to focus upon differences rather than similarities between women and men (Kimball, 1995; Lott, 1997). My research also supports researchers who have suggested that one of these constructions of difference is that of the emotional woman and the unemotional man (Lupton, 1998).

### **6.3 Gender Differences**

The first factor that was apparent in my research was the assumption of gender difference as dichotomous in both the discourses employed by teachers and Year 9 girls. Bem (1991) has suggested that two of the lenses of gender are firstly, that culture is organized around the principle of gender difference and secondly, that these differences are thought to be biological in origin. Both of these assumptions are apparent in the discourses reported in my research. In both the discourses employed by the Year 9 girls and their teachers a gender differences discourse (Sutherland, 2004) was apparent where girls were not described in isolation but rather in comparison to boys. This discourse reflects the Enlightenment thinking that the social world is built around a series of parallel dualisms including the male-female dualism (Paechter 2001). A contrasting perspective is provided by feminist poststructural accounts of gender which suggest that gender identity is diverse and fluid (Francis, 2000; Reay, 2001). This conceptualisation of gender did not appear in the discourses identified in my research which drew mainly upon an essentialist construction of gender difference based upon biological differences between girls and boys.

This finding may however have been influenced by the research design that I employed. The data collection tools (the focus group activities and the interview questions) were designed to allow the participants the freedom to talk about gender similarities or differences. However the information provided to ensure informed consent made it clear that my research was investigating the emotional needs of girls which may have led the participants to focus upon gender difference as this is what they assumed that I was interested in. As discussed in Sections 3.9.1 and 3.18.1, the need to gain informed consent does present a dilemma for researchers as the greater knowledge that participants have concerning the nature of the research, the more their responses may be influenced by that knowledge

The theme of biological difference was apparent in both the discourses employed by the teachers and the Year 9 girls. This theme was stronger in the teacher accounts than those of the girls, to the extent that it could be consider a “hegemonic” discourse (Paechter, 1998). For Paechter (1998) such discourses are powerful, unquestioned and difficult to resist. Feminists suggest that the school is an important site for the construction of gender identity (Thorne, 1993; Baxter, 2003) and Francis (2000) has suggested that pupils delineate their identity as female or male through engaging in different types of behaviour in the school. Thus in a context where the hegemonic discourses employed by teachers are those of biological difference it might be expected that the girls in the school would also employ the same discourses when talking about themselves. What was interesting in this research was that although the Year 9 girls did employ a discourse of the body based in biology, their accounts of gender difference were much more complex than those employed by the

teachers, showing overlap and intertextuality between discourses of the body and discourses of emotional display and social context.

Although biological concepts was apparent in both the discourses employed by the teachers and those of the girls it was were much stronger in the teachers' discourses. Feminists researchers have suggested that discourses of gender are complex and contradictory (Wetherall, 2002) and that girls and women are multiply positioned within these discourses (Baxter, 2002). Adams (1997) suggests that this diversity of gender discourses enables women to resist some gender discourses and to take up different identity positions. There is some evidence in this research to support these ideas. Although the girls were in a context where the hegemonic discourse employed by their teachers explained gender differences in behaviour as resulting from biological difference, the girls themselves drew upon a much wider range of discourses to explain these differences. This suggests that resistance to dominant discourses is possible, though the existence of discourses of the body within the girls' accounts supports the comment from Aapola et al (2005) that such resistance is not limitless.

The teachers' accounts were securely grounded in a construction of biological difference which was employed to explain the different behaviours displayed by their pupils. In contrast the discourses employed by the girls were much more likely to take account of social context (Lutz, 1996) and the idea of emotional display (Hutson-Comeaux and Kelly, 2002) to account for these differences. So the girls' discourses included accounts of how the same emotion might vary according to context and how behaviour, particularly that of boys, was influenced by the expectations of others

especially the peer group. The girls' discourse suggested that the influence of the peer group is particularly strong in maintaining gender categories through fear of teasing and ridicule (Davies, 2006). Unlike the teachers, the girls also gave some accounts of engaging in behaviour that would not be considered as gender appropriate, for example engaging in physical altercations. The discourses employed by the girls provided some support for accounts of gendered behaviour in schools which suggest that it is possible to engage in what Thorne (1993) describes as border crossing, i.e. transgressing gender appropriate behaviour.

#### **6.4 Gender and Emotion**

As in other accounts of gender and emotion there was a strong theme in my findings linking gender and emotion, supporting Lutz's (1998) contention that any discourse upon emotion is a discourse on gender. The assumption that emotions are innate and biological in origin leads to gender stereotypes of the "emotional woman" and the "unemotional man" (Lupton, 1998). The discourses employed by the girls were more complex than those employed by the teachers and contained some awareness that the expression of emotion can be strategic (Harré, 1986) but for the most part the discourses attributed emotions in a gender stereotypical way. This is exemplified in the first exercise that the girls undertook where the only emotions that were attributed to boys, in all of the groups, were "anger" and "aggression". Apart from these emotions the girls' discourses constructed the boys as almost emotionless compared to girls. This research therefore provides support for those feminist researchers who have argued that in Western cultures emotionality is associated with femininity (Fischer, 1993; Lutz, 1998; Shields, 2002) and being a "proper" girl.

## 6.5 The ‘mean girl’ and the ‘at-risk girl’

The findings from the teacher interviews support Ringrose’s (2006) argument that culturally there has been a discursive shift from the portrayal of adolescent girls as vulnerable to the portrayal of these girls as mean. While the teachers had a discourse of the “at-risk pupil” who was made vulnerable by their family circumstances on the whole this was not gender specific. There were two areas where girls were perceived as more “at-risk” than boys, from self harm and from sexual behaviour. A much stronger discourse that the teachers’ employed to explain the behaviour of girls that they found challenging in school was that of the “mean girl”. Here teachers described the difficulties that they encountered dealing with girls when they became involved in disputes with other girls. In contrast the challenging behaviour of boys was not only constructed as easier to deal with but was described in ways that suggested that a short physical altercation was cathartic for boys. The dominance of the “mean girl” discourse in a U.K. secondary school is interesting because the books that have popularised this discourse, e.g. Wiseman (2002), are mainly from the U.S.A. and have not been widely available in the U.K. However these popular psychology texts have influenced the portrayal of adolescent girls in the more widely accessible mediums of television and film. Indeed Wiseman’s (2002) book formed the basis for the film *Mean Girls* (2004) which portrayed girls engaging in indirect aggression in order to establish their popularity.

The prominence of the “mean girl” discourse potentially has negative consequences for both girls and boys. For girls it can lead to the trivialising of their behaviour which comes to be regarded as “just what girls do” (Brown, 2003) despite evidence that exclusion from social groups can have negative effects for girls (Owens

et al, 2000). The potential negative consequences for boys stem from the tendency to see gendered behaviour as dichotomous and rooted in biology. The teachers made a clear gender distinction between the behaviours that they associated with emotional difficulties; boys engaged in physical aggression and girls engaged in relational aggression. The literature on the kind of relational aggression found in the “mean girl” discourse suggests that this type of aggression is equally common amongst girls and boys and often overlaps with more overt forms of aggression (Richardson and Green, 1999; Card et al, 2008). The gendered constructions of behaviour employed by the teacher in my research suggested that teachers may be unaware of or recognise when boys are engaging in behaviours associated with relational aggression. As this type of behaviour is more easily hidden than overt aggression (Owen et al, 2000) such a lack of awareness could disadvantage boys.

## **6.6 Gender Constructions of Pupil Behaviour**

The findings from this research support the arguments from researchers such as Lloyd (2005a) who suggest that schools tend to prioritise the needs of boys over those of girls due the disruptive behaviour boys are more likely to exhibit in the classroom. Francis (2000) suggests that differences in behaviour are socially constructed and are one of the ways in which girls and boys delineate their gender in secondary schools. In contrast, the teacher constructions of behaviour in my research were grounded in biological and essentialist explanations. The teachers therefore did not construct different behaviours as ways of expressing the same emotion. For some of the teachers there was also a strong link between an emotional difficulty and disruptive classroom behaviour. As girls are much less likely to be disruptive in the classroom (Osler et al, 2002) my research suggests that these gendered discourses of

behaviour do contribute to the low referral rates for girls to support services and therefore to the unequal allocation of resources between girls and boys.

## **6.7 Discourses of Special Educational Needs**

The concept of “special educational needs” (SEN) in the U.K. is socially constructed (Thomas and Loxley, 2001), through the discourses employed in government policy such as the Code of Practice for Special Educational Needs (2001a) and through the everyday discourses that teachers employ when talking about their pupils. The government guidance provided in the Code of Practice (2001a) establishes several categories of special educational need including that of emotional, social and behavioural difficulties. What was apparent in the discourses in my research was that the teachers’ constructions of special educational needs were mostly related to those pupils who were struggling academically and who were mainly boys. This discourse also contained explanations for the challenging behaviour that the teachers associated with some of the boys that they taught. This behaviour was constructed as a consequence of the boys’ inability to cope with the curriculum, so challenging behaviour and low attainment was constructed as indicating that a pupil had special educational needs.

In contrast when the teachers were discussing the girls they drew upon a “can-do girl” discourse that was related to differences in the academic attainments of girls and boys. Here girls were constructed as coping better than the boys academically and were therefore less likely to be constructed as having a special educational need. My research suggests that these constructions of special education needs contained in the teachers’ discourses contribute to the gender differences in referral rates to support

services. The teachers' discourses suggest that the category of "behavioural, emotional and social difficulties" is constructed in terms of the disruptive and challenging behaviour in classrooms that is much more commonly exhibited by boys, who are therefore much more likely to be referred to external agencies for additional help and support.

## **6.8 Access to Support in Schools**

In addition to the allocation of resources for pupils who were identified as having special educational needs I was also interested in how the emotional difficulties of girls were being met more broadly within the school. The information provided by the school suggested that roughly equal numbers of girls and boys in the school were being referred to the school's Learning Support Unit for additional help. In the focus groups many of the girls recounted positive experiences of support from the school's learning mentors. This suggests that the school staff were identifying when their pupils were experiencing difficulties but gender discrepancies emerged at the point when external agencies became involved. This discrepancy was in part due to the gendered construction of behaviour (described in Section 6.6) and special educational needs (described in Section 6.7). An unexpected finding from the research came from the questions that the teachers asked me during the interviews about my role as an educational psychologist. These questions suggested that the teachers had little understanding of my role and what kinds of pupils I might work with in the school. My research therefore suggests that a further contributing factor to the referral rates to support services is a lack of understanding of the range support those services may be able offer.

## **6.9 Recommendations from the Research**

My research was conducted in a single setting with the aim of illuminating some of the discourses surrounding the emotional needs of girls but without the intention of generalising the findings to other settings. Thus the recommendations that are made here are specific to the school in which the research took place. However the implications for pupils of the discourse of gender difference that is outlined above suggest that all teachers may need opportunities to explore their understanding of gender difference and how this impacts upon their practice.

My research suggests that the following recommendations would help the school to meet the emotional needs of girls more effectively:

- Pupils should have access to a confidential mentoring service which allows self-referral as well as referral from a member of staff.
- That the teachers would benefit from training to raise their awareness of how gender influences behaviour and how this is related to emotion.
- The school staff would benefit from having an increased understanding of the role of Local Authority support services and the support that they offer. This could be achieved as part of the induction process for new staff. The support services should also support the school in raising staff awareness of their role.

## **6.10 Relevance to the Role of the Educational Psychologist**

The results of this research support the continued importance of a continuing focus the concept of “equal opportunities” for educational psychologists. This is emphasised in the British Psychological Society’s *Quality Standards for Educational Psychology Services* (DECP, 2006) which recommends that all Services should have “procedures for ensuring equality of opportunity for members of the Service and its clients” (p2). This research provides support for this standard by exploring some of the factors that contribute to the gendering of referrals to educational psychology

services, which constitutes a threat to the promotion of equal opportunities. While educational psychologists retain a role as gatekeepers to resources it is important that they are aware of the gendered patterns of referrals that play a role in which pupils are able to access additional provision and resources.

The use of discourse analysis in this research contributes to an understanding of how referrals to support services become gendered despite attempts by educational psychology services to develop “objective” criteria for referrals, which are often based upon test scores and checklists. This research suggests that the discourses employed by teachers influences which pupils are constructed as having special educational needs and that these discourses are gendered. Thus if educational psychologists are going to promote equal opportunities they need to look beyond the traditionally used criteria for referrals and interrogate the underlying reasons for inequalities in referral rates.

This research indicates the utility of discourse analysis to inform the practice of educational psychologists. The results show that the study of how language is used can contribute to our understanding of gender differences in referral rates. The use of qualitative approaches such as discourse analysis also allows the researcher to gather the detailed views of participants. This contributes to the ability of educational psychologists to elicit the “pupil voice” which is apparent in this research in the complexity of the discourses elicited from the girls who took part in the focus groups.

### **6.11 Strengths of the Research Design**

This research was designed to investigate the discourses in the talk used by secondary aged girls and their teachers in order to construct girls’ emotions and

emotional needs. The research was influenced by social constructionist and feminist poststructural ideas which suggest that rather than simply reflecting reality language is constitutive and therefore the data gathered from these methods was evaluated using discourse analysis. The research design was influenced by an ontological position that Bryman (2001) categorises as constructivism. This position suggests that reality is constructed through human activity and its epistemological stance is that rather than knowledge existing and waiting to be discovered by the researcher, knowledge is constructed in the process of the research. In keeping with this tradition the aim of this research was to illuminate a particular aspect of social life rather than to draw broad conclusions that could be generalised to other settings. A strength of this research design was that it did enable me to collect relevant data in order to provide some answers to my research questions and to gain an insight into the discourses that constructed the emotional needs of secondary aged girls. The initial rationale for the research was the different rates of referrals for girls and boys to the support service in which I worked and the results did provide evidence of some of the factors that were contributing to this discrepancy.

#### **6.12 Limitations of the Research Design: threats to validity**

The issue of validity in research refers to the integrity of the conclusions that are drawn from a piece of research (Bryman, 2001). Issues of validity are concerned with how far a piece of research has achieved its aims and provided relevant data on a topic. Within a traditional positivist paradigm threats to validity occur where research is judged to be biased either in the construction of the research methods or in the data collection process. The positivist paradigm suggests that social research is concerned with gathering knowledge that is already in existence and waiting to be collected by

the researcher. The epistemological stance taken in my research was opposed to this view of knowledge as pre-existing and objective. My research was influenced by a social constructionist conceptualisation of knowledge which suggests that knowledge is constructed through the research process itself. Rather than a researcher simply extracting information from a respondent, both researcher and participants are involved in meaning-making during the research process (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995). This stance suggests that the individual characteristics of the researcher and the participants will play a part in the construction of the data that is “collected” in the research. The social constructionist perspective suggests that it is not possible to strive for objectivity as the research process is always subjective. While this epistemological stance calls into question traditional positivist evaluations of the validity of research, it is still useful to have some ways of establishing the integrity of research findings and this has led researchers to develop alternative conceptions of validity. Cohen et al (2007) identify 18 forms of validity and suggest that research needs to be judged by those that are relevant to the paradigm of the research. Three forms of validity relevant to qualitative research are considered here: content validity, construct validity and ecological validity.

#### **6.12.1 Content validity**

Content validity refers to the need for the research to comprehensively cover the domain that it purports to cover. In this research the nature of the sampling procedures constituted a threat to the content validity of the research. The sampling techniques used to select the pupils and teachers were non-purposive. This could lead to a bias in the research as the sample was unlikely to be representative and this was particularly a problem with the teacher interviews as only five members of staff were

interviewed. To guard against such bias participants would need to be selected using purposive sampling techniques, which are more likely to result in a representative sample.

A further threat to the content validity was the decision to include year 9 girls in the research and to exclude boys. This decision was made as the research topic was designed specifically in response to a perceived bias in educational discourses which have been dominated in recent years by the concern regarding the underachievement of boys which threatens to marginalise girls (Skelton and Francis, 2003). This issue was a particular concern in my own role as an educational psychologist as the majority of requests for support in schools are made in relation to concerns regarding boys. In taking this decision this research can be criticised for contributing the “gender seesaw” where concerns move between girls and boys while ignoring any interconnectedness between the two (Osler, 2006). The decision to focus only on girls could also be taken to imply that gender can be directly mapped onto biological sex. It was not the intention to imply that this is always the case however it was assumed that discourses of gendered behaviour tend to be rooted in assumptions of biological difference. Thus the gender categories of “feminine” and “masculine” were most likely to be equated by participants with the biological categories of “female” and “male”.

#### **6.12.2 Construct validity**

Construct validity refers to how far the constructs in the research design allow the researcher to collect data that is relevant to the topic being studied. In this research the constructs were the discourses that were drawn from the literature on gender and

emotions and then utilised in the discourse analysis. This research met some of the requirements for construct validity by drawing upon a wide range of literature in order to identify the discourses that were relevant to the research questions.

A further aspect of construct validity is how far the research instruments enabled the collection of relevant data without influencing the responses of participants. In my research two kinds of research instruments were devised; the focus group activities and the questions for the interviews with teachers. In both cases these research tools had face validity as they enabled the collection of relevant data that enabled me to answer my research questions; however there were also limitations in the design of these tools.

For the focus groups there were two activities; an exercise that involved categorising emotion words and a ranking exercise. The exercise categorising emotion words was problematic because of the number of available words in English. Researchers have estimated that there are between 500 – 2000 words that represent emotional states (DiGiuseppe and Tafrate, 2007), it was therefore necessary to select a small number of these words for the activity. The selection of these words was based upon words that were in common use and were judged by myself to be within the vocabulary of Year 9 pupils. Problems with this selection of words were that the choice of words may have been biased and also may not have reflected the types of words in common usage amongst the participants. A further difficulty was the inclusion of the word “aggression” as an emotion which I included in an attempt to increase the number of words that are more stereotypically associated with boys than with girls. However aggression can be regarded as describing behaviour rather than as

an emotion word. The validity of the choice of words for this activity could have been improved by asking a panel of Year 9 pupils, who would not take part in the research, to list emotion words and the most common words from this list could have been included in the activity. A similar method could have been used to develop the statements that were used in the ranking exercise. These statements were drawn from the literature on gender and emotion and again their validity would have been increased if a group of Year 9 pupils had been involved in their development.

For the practical reasons outlined in Section 3.13 I decided that the use of focus groups was not appropriate to elicit the teachers' discourses. My research suggested that there were differences in the discourses employed by the girls and those employed by their teachers. It is possible that these differences were the result of using two different research methods with the two sets of participants. The research design could therefore be improved by the use of focus groups with the teacher which would have allowed discourses to emerge through the interaction between the teachers rather than solely with the interviewer.

The interviews with the teachers followed the model of the active interview developed by Holstein and Gubrium (1995) where the interviewer does not simply extract information from the interviewee. Instead the interview is seen as the mechanism where knowledge is co-constructed between the participants. This approach to interviewing follows a poststructural epistemology but raises questions regarding interviewer bias which may have affected the validity of my research.

A further threat to the construct validity in the research was in the analysis of the data, as the identification of themes in the discourse was only carried out by one researcher. It is possible therefore that another researcher looking at the same set of data could have identified a different set of themes. Ideally the research design should have provided the opportunity for a second researcher to analyse some of the data in order to establish if the themes that were identified by the two researchers were the same. Unfortunately in this research this was not possible as I did not have access to a second researcher who was familiar enough with the themes to undertake this task. This highlights one disadvantage of working as a lone researcher rather than as part of a team or community of researchers.

### **6.12.3 Ecological validity**

Ecological validity refers to how accurately a piece of research reflects the realities of the social situation being studied and is often regarded as a strength of qualitative research. This was achieved in this research by providing an opportunity for Year 9 girls and their teachers to talk with relative freedom about the research topic. However the artificial nature of the focus groups and interviews constitutes a threat to the ecological validity of the research. Much of the research conducted into gender and education (Thorne, 1993; Hey, 1997; Francis, 2000) has been ethnographic, where the researcher has spent long periods of time observing and recording naturally occurring events. The use of ethnography in my research would have allowed me to observe how discourses are constructed and utilised in naturally occurring interactions within the school between pupils and teachers. The use of such a methodology was not practical in this research due to time constraints; however the

ecological validity of this research could be improved using an ethnographic methodology.

### **6.13 Future Research**

The findings from this research have contributed to an understanding of the gender difference in referrals made by schools to support services. Other factors such as the emphasis on behaviour rather than emotional need within the special educational needs system and the pressure on teachers to be able to manage “challenging behaviour” in their classrooms also influence referral rates. What my research was able to highlight was the role of discourse in these processes through the gendered construction of behaviour in schools, the importance of difference in the construction of girls and boys and discourses of special educational needs.

While my research does illuminate how an understanding of discourses can help us to understand some of the factors that contribute to gendered patterns in referral rates, the findings are limited because the research was conducted in a single setting and its findings may not be relevant to other settings. Although replication of qualitative research is difficult, future research could seek to investigate if similar discourses occur in other educational settings. My research is further limited because the pupil participants were all Year 9 girls, so the research findings are also specific in terms of age and gender. Future research could explore constructions of gender across a broader age range and could also include constructions of masculinity. My research did include pupils from a range of ethnic backgrounds and suggested that there were not distinct differences in the discourses employed by girls from different ethnic groups. However it is possible that the small numbers of girls involved in the research

may not have allowed me to sample a wide enough range of views from girls of different backgrounds in order to elicit such differences. It is also likely that my own social characteristics as a white, middle-class woman influenced the construction of the discourses in the focus groups. Future research could explore how discourses of emotional need are influenced by social characteristics other than gender, for example ethnicity and social class.

This research sought to investigate how the emotional needs of girls were constructed in a secondary school because of the low levels of referrals made to support services. An alternative approach would be to consider the discourses that construct boys' emotional needs in order to understand why they are more likely to be referred than girls.

The research suggested that the construction of behaviour in schools is gendered and based upon biological discourses of sex differences. Future research could investigate the implications of these constructions for young people in schools who do not conform to culturally accepted gender stereotypes of behaviour.

#### **6.14 Personal Learning and Reflections**

This research allowed me to further develop my understanding of the concept of gender and how it relates to the position of girls and women in U.K. I decided to take a particular position based upon social constructionist and poststructural approaches which have developed within feminism and psychology, to inform my understanding. I chose to do this because I found that these approaches provided me with a more compelling account of gender difference than the concepts of gender

socialisation found in more traditional psychological approaches. I was particularly drawn to the idea that the concepts of “femininity” and “masculinity” are not distinct, homogenous categories but are more fluid and overlapping, as this fitted with my own experience. Taking a stance influenced by both social constructionism and feminist poststructuralism presented me with some difficulties while reviewing the psychological literature for my research, as most psychological research is still grounded in a more traditional positivist epistemology. It was challenging to read and interpret this research with a different understanding that was based within the idea of plural and competing discourses rather than scientific fact.

The application of social constructionist and poststructural ideas and remain marginal within research carried out by educational psychologists, with some notable exceptions (Billington, 2000). The experience gained from my research suggests that the ideas developed within these approaches can contribute to an understanding of the practice of educational psychology I would also however retain a belief that decisions concerning epistemology are also linked to research questions and so social constructionist and poststructural approaches will not always be the most effective to answer all questions, for example where data may need to be collected to measure trends in referral rates.

**APPENDIX A:  
Letter to School**

To:  
Assistant Head Teacher

1<sup>st</sup> November 2007

Dear,

I am an educational psychologist working for X. I have been the educational psychologist for the School X for the past 6 years. I am currently studying for my Doctorate in Educational Psychology at Birmingham University and I am interested in research in the area of the emotional needs of girls. I am hoping that you will agree to my request to undertake this research at School X.

My initial interest in this area developed from the low numbers of girls who are identified as experiencing emotional or behavioural difficulties who are referred to X Support Service. This is a trend that is reflected nationally. I am interested in researching how the emotional needs of girls are constructed in a secondary school setting using interviews with pupils and staff. The details of my research plan are attached.

My intention is to provide a of research report for the school to support you in meeting the emotional needs of your female pupils. I would also be happy to provide further support and advice on ways to implement the findings.

I hope that you feel that your school would benefit from this research and would like to discuss my research plan you can contact me by telephone or through X who I usually work with in the school.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Julia Howe

**APPENDIX B:**  
**Letter to Parent/Carer**

14<sup>th</sup> January 2008

Dear ,

I am an Educational Psychologist working for .....I am studying at Birmingham University for my doctorate in educational psychology and I am planning to do my research at X.

I wish to research the emotional needs of secondary age girls and how they are met in schools. To do this I am going to run a number of focus groups and I am hoping that you will agree to ..... taking part.

What this will mean in practice is your daughter taking part in one focus group discussion which will last approximately one hour. It will take place in a PSHE lesson. The discussion will be taped but will only be heard by myself and a secretary at Birmingham University who will type up the discussions for me. All recordings will be deleted when the research is written up. No pupils will be named in the research and it will not be possible to identify what individual girls have said.

I hope that you will give your consent to your daughter taking part in the research. I would be grateful if you could complete the attached slip and return it in the enclosed envelope.

If you have any further queries you can contact me on ..... or speak to ..... at X.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Julia Howe  
Educational Psychologist

Please complete and return in the enclosed envelope.

I would / would not\* like my daughter ..... to take part in the research

Signed:\_\_\_\_\_

Date:\_\_\_\_\_

\*Please delete as appropriate

**APPENDIX C:**  
**Information for focus group participants**

Who am I?

My name is Julia Howe. I am an educational psychologist. I help schools when pupils have difficulties, for example with their work or behaviour.

What am I doing?

I am studying and need to do some research as part of my course. When schools ask me to help them they usually want help with boys. I would like to know what is happening for girls, especially how schools meet their emotional needs.

How will I do this?

I would like to meet with groups of girls to talk about how you feel about your emotional needs and school. For each group I will meet with 6 – 8 girls and I will have some questions for you to talk about. We will meet for about 1 hour during one of your PSHE lessons.

I will need to record the groups but the only people who will hear the recording are me and a secretary who will type up the discussion. We will not be able to tell who is talking. When I've finished the research the recording will be destroyed.

How were you chosen?

I asked Mrs X to find me some girls who could take part in my groups. We chose 4 girls from each class. We wanted a mixture of girls to give as many different ideas as possible.

What happens now?

I want to make sure that you are happy to take part in the research. After today I will write to your parent/guardian to ask for their permission for you to take part in the research. You might want to talk to them about taking part. If your parent/guardian says "yes" you will be invited to come along to a group. You will be asked if you want to take part before we start. You can also leave the group at any time to go back to your lesson.

## **APPENDIX D:**

### **Materials used in the Focus Groups**

#### Activity 1:

In this activity the emotion words were printed on individual cards which were shared out by the researcher between the girls. The girls were asked to decide if each word related more to boys, girls or both and were asked to place the cards in the appropriate circle (see page 189). The circles were presented on individual sheets of A4 paper. The girls took turns to place each word and the group discussed each decision in turn.

#### The emotions words from the sorting activity

Angry

Sad

Happy

Afraid

Frightened

Embarrassed

Anxious

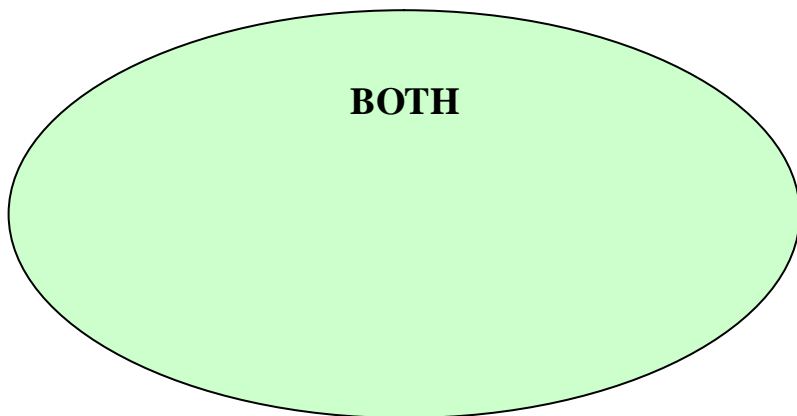
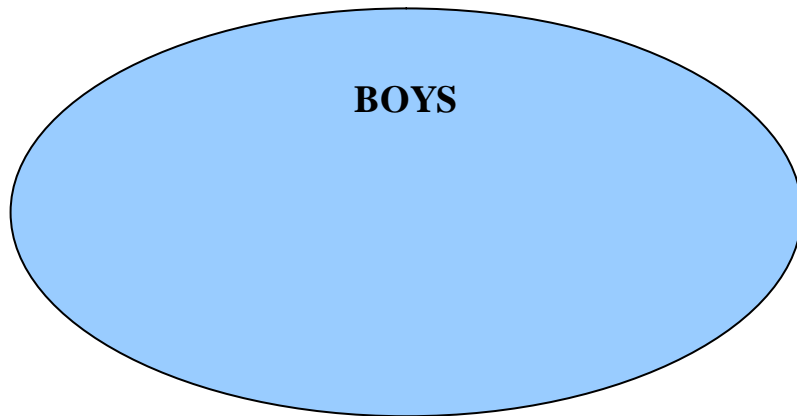
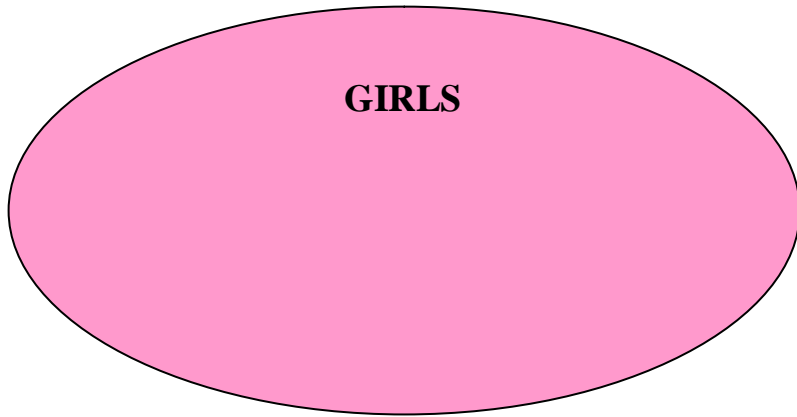
Lonely

Aggressive

Cheerful

Excited

Jealous



## Activity 2

In this activity the group were given nine statements individually printed on card. They were asked to rank the statements in the order that they agreed with them, placing the statement that they most agreed with at the top. When the group had completed the task their choice of ranking was discussed.

### Statements from the ranking exercise

When girls are upset they cry

Most people who self-harm are girls

When girls are upset they are most likely to talk to a friend

Girls find it hard to talk about their feelings

Teachers think that girls don't have problems

Girls have lots of mood swings

There's no-where to go for help if a girl has a problem

Girls get into lots of fights in school

Teachers make sure that girls have time to talk about their feelings

## **APPENDIX E**

### **Information for the interviewees**

I am an educational psychologist working for X. I have been the educational psychologist for School X for the past 6 years. I am currently studying for my Doctorate in Educational Psychology at Birmingham University and my research is about how secondary schools meet the emotional needs of girls.

My initial interest in this area developed from the low numbers of girls who are identified as experiencing emotional or behavioural difficulties and are referred to X Support Service. This is a trend that is reflected nationally. I am interested in researching how the emotional needs of girls are constructed in a secondary school setting using interviews with pupils and staff.

During the first stage of my research I have conducted a number of group interviews with girls from Year 9 at School X in order to explore their ideas about their emotional needs. I would now like to conduct some interviews with members of staff to obtain their views. It is my intention to carry out the interviews over the summer term.

What you would be agreeing to:

- A 1:1 interview lasting approximately (and no longer than) 1 hour
- You will have the right to end the interview at any time
- The interview will be recorded but only I will hear it
- All recordings will be deleted once my dissertation has been submitted and passed
- No individuals will be identified in the research

What happens next:

- If you would like to take part in the research please could you send your name to X who will forward this to me with your school e-mail address or you can contact me directly at the e-mail address below
- I will contact you by e-mail to arrange a suitable time for the interview. This could be during your non-contact time or at the end of the school day, to suit you

If you would like to know more before agreeing to take part you can contact by telephone on .....or by e-mail on .....

Thank you for taking the time to consider my request,

Julia Howe

**APPENDIX F:**  
**Extract from Focus Group Transcript**

Me: So we are going to start off.....this is about you, your ideas there's no right or wrong answers and you might not all agree and that's fine because there aren't any right or wrong answers. So the first thing I've got here I've got three circles with girls, boys or both on them and then I've got some cards that have got different emotions written on them so I've got afraid, aggressive, angry, frightened, anxious...what I'm going to do is I'm going to just give you some of the cards and then we need to take turns deciding whether we think the emotion is one that girls are most likely to experience, boys would be or you think both would. You'll get the hang of it as we go through. I think that there's probably about four of these each.....

A: Ok excited, boys do get excited about things

(Laughter)

Me: who'd like to go first...what would you like.....

A: I've got all both except for that one

Me: okay, do you want to pick one of those then and say.....

A: I reckon that one's probably girls cause they get embarrassed about loads of things

Me: right..OK..you're going to put embarrassed with girls lets see what the others ...do the other girls agree that girls are more likely to be embarrassed

B: girls get more embarrassed than boys don't they

C: yeah

Me: so what kind of things do girls get embarrassed about?

B: getting a split in their trousers

A: yeah

C: that happened to A

A: that's happened to me

Me: so they might be embarrassed..that's things about their clothes...

A: yeah, their clothes

Me: what about boys then do you think that boys get embarrassed....

C: not so...

B: not really, not as much cause they're more.....stronger..well not, not maybe not strong..they more er..like they don't care about a lot of things....

A: yeah

Me: do you think girls care?

A: yeah

C: umh definitely they care more about their appearance than boys who just like come as you are

A: like if we was to drop like we'd be embarrassed like..if boys were to drop they'd just do it again and again

Me: Yes

A: they don't care ..they just laugh.'n' laugh and

Me: OK that's lovely..do you want to pick one of yours and see where you think it goes

B: aggressive, boys

Me: boys, okay, tell me why you think boys are more aggressive?

B: they have more fights than girls

C: even though girls are more bitchy 'n' stuff

A: yes

B: they sort it out by talking and they...they just fight it out

M: right ...Ok so girls are more likely...when you say that girls are more likely to be bitchy do you mean they're more likely to have an argument....

C: they're verbal....they're more verbal than just using your hands, they sort it out but if it turns into an argument

Me: whereas boys tend to fight?

C: Yeah

Me: do you see boys here fighting?

C: Yeah

A: Yeah, loads

Me: do the girls ever fight?

A: they do but its just like.....

C: there's like a ....what's it called?

A: if there's a fight going on the playground you normally see all the boys running and there are the girls just walking to it

Me: right

A: the boys just run to it

C: the girls do have fights but its more like verbal .....and the odd slap

B: yeah

Me: yeah OK...

A: I been there....

Me: What you've had a fight?

A: I've had a fight at school

Me: a physical fight?

A: yeah

B: With who?

A: \*\*\*\*\*

B: oh aye, yeah I remember that

A: do you remember she was pulling my hair

B: this year?

A: she was pulling my hair and I was whacking her, I was.....

B: .....everyone was just jumping on.....

Me: but that would be quite ....that wouldn't happen very often?

A: no

B: it was like a one off

A: yeah

C: I normally just argue

Me: do you want to pick one of yours

C: jealous, girls

Me: why do you think girls are more jealous?

C: cause ..they're jealous of other things ..like girls might have...

A: say if like one girls had .....

B: say like a girls come to school and she had her haircut at the weekend girls u'd be like oh bitch she's got the same haircut ...you get the jealousy .or if somebody like is jealous

A: say like if A ad the phone like that I wanted for ages I'd be pretty jealous cause she's got it before me

Me: Ok..yeah.and why is that with girls and not boys..do you think boys are less bothered about those things?

A: yeah

C: yeah

B: they're more ..they're less bothered than girls

A: girls are like.....each other like if you've got the same phone as each other somebodies you just say like you're just like why have you got my phone for..boys are just like oh god

C: yeah they ain't bothered am they?

A: no, about a lot of things

C: cause these two boys have got the same phone but they're happy about it

Me: whereas girls wouldn't be?

C: yeah

A: but I wouldn't mind if it was somebody I didn't like

Me: ...that's how you fell...do you feel that you are in competition with some of the other girls...having things 'n'

C: I'm not one of them girls....

A: no

Me: but there are girls who are?

A: there are girls..alot of girls that are

C: yeah

Me: OK...erm... do you want to pick another one of yours?

A: afraid ...girls

Me: and why do you think....

A: cause boys don't get afraid a lot

C: not really...

A: its like when.....

B: we..we..like if a girls is like if you've got a girls that s bullying you ...people think that they're .....or whatever...er..they like, they feel intimidated and afraid but boys just like yeah sort it out yeah ..they ain't bothered , they actually aren't

Me: do you think that they still are afraid, do you think that they.....

B: boys, like they just like hide it but like...

Me: so they don't show it?

B: they don't show it

C: like girls cry and boys hide it in ...most of the time

A: the only time you hear a boy scream is when a bee's following them ...they scream like a bitch

Me: what happened today when the lightening went..

A: oh it was me A and our friend \*\*\*\*\* and the lightening went off, the thunder went off and me and my friend \*\*\*\*\* screamed

C: and then the boys were like its thundering you know wicked and we were like its not wicked

Me: so there was quite a difference there.....

A: like if we get wet we get annoyed

C: cause our hair goes messy

B: \*\*\*\*\* hair went really bad..she just had to scrunch it all

Me: OK, do you want to pick another of yours and say what you think

B: .....both

Me: why do you think both for lonely

B: because ...like you see...I don't even know what it means....

A: you're alone.....

B: when you're a loner?

Me: yeah

B: both you can be .....it doesn't matter who you are loads of people can be lonely

Me: you don't think.....

A: It's her trying to be smart..

Me: so you think that its to do with the person not whether they are a boy or a girl?

B: .no..that one ain't

Me: OK, that's fine ..yeah..do you want to do another one?

C: er...cheerful, both

Me: OK, why both

C: cause people can be happy

Me: er..yeah...does anyone disagree?..... Well do you want to do the happy one then?

A: both

Me: Both

A: You can be happy about a lot of things can't you?

Me: OK, so you don't think that there's difference over whether boys or girls are happy?

A: no

B: no...er like.. if girls have their hair cut you'd be happy about it but boys would be oh crap I've had my hair cut and they'd try to cover it

Me: what kinds of things do you think makes boys happy?

B: like football

A: yeah when their team wins

C: it's like today the boys in my form was all going like six nil, six nil

A: what was that all about

C: cause of football

A: Was I in form today?

C: no..yeah you was cause Mr \*\*\*\*\* had a go at you

A: oh yeah

Me: OK do you want to pick another of yours?

B: sad..both

Me: both and again what...do you think that boys and girls get sad about the same things?

B: same and different

Me: What...can you explain what you mean by that?

B : say like...if one of your family member had an accident you'd all be sad wouldn't you whether you were a boy or a girl you'd be sad anyway obviously ..its different things that make you sad

A: well like me if I chip a nail

C: yeah

A: I cry and then I have a big tantrum on the golf course and all the boys are like oh my God its only a nail and I'll be like its important

C: yeah

**APPENDIX G:**  
**Extract from Interview Transcript**

- ME: okay, yeah, so what kinds of emotional difficulties have some of the young people have who you've worked with?
- A: yeah, umm, erm....kids, student I worked with in X erm they came from...very needy families, you know single parent families or families where there wasn't really a parent around...the two girls I know specifically down there, they lived with their grandparents ...I know one or both of these two girls their parent or guardian was dependent on some sort of substance either alcohol or drugs and some sort of substance and erm.. they were both very insecure, very angry sort of students....and who also abused alcohol and drugs and they were 14, year 10, that was particularly girls and obviously at the special needs unit these were kids with Downs Syndrome erm autism and physical...MS and other physical disabilities and erm...so I mean, erm....in terms of emotions, it was very hard to connect with them emotionally and what their emotions were but then I'm guessing that they couldn't really connect with it which was a lot of the reason why that a lot of the kids, especially the Down Syndrome kids ...interestingly enough you know how they always seem quite loving they were the ones that were very angry as well and very er....quite, would stir up a lot of trouble and erm...could be quite nasty too, which I, before I went to the school I'd never had that sort of conception that they could be like that but that happened as well and I think that was vying for attention and some sort of security and attention, I guess but it was an eye opener....Here in terms of emotional difficulties...after having worked with some of the children I did in X, it was interesting coming into the classroom here and kids playing up....because most of the kids from this school come from....in my knowledge...just nice normal, professional backgrounds or nice working class backgrounds and I used to say to them you know, why are you playing up? What's the point of doing that? You know I've met kids with some real, who've come from some really awful home situations and yes they do play up because they struggle with dealing with all that anger and frustration so why are you doing it? And they can't really answer that actually.....but erm...for me here at this school its just normal teenage angst stuff, you know, frustration, not able to deal with their emotions in a rational way erm... but nothing major, you know for instance what I came across in Essex...
- ME: so that kind of teenage angst would you say that you see that in boys and girls? Or more one than the other or....?
- A: do you know what, that's interesting, I find it with the girls, I find the boys to be immature and silly and they have silly little jokes and interesting, I see them walking around, I just caught these boys out in the corridor the other day screaming at each other, boys...so I was like what are you doing? But the girls its definitely they'll come in one day and they are in a mood and they'll be in a mood with everybody, with me, with the whole class, often until I confront or say what's going on with you today, what's the problem? Oh we just had a

fight with such and such, you know, so its very much relationship issues, I suppose with their peers and erm umm....but definitely the girls.

ME: ....and the boys don't seem to have the same.....

A: no I don't see it, although I heard some boys arguing today and I gathered that there'd been some sort of disagreement in the playground and they'd brought it into the classroom but generally no, it's the girls and the girls sniping at each other and....

ME: and so do pupils ever come to talk to you about emotional problems?

A: ....I, no, the young, no I don't think so, actually the older ones my Year 11s they would, I have this group Yr 11 group who I had, literally for 3 years so I used to see a lot of their arguing, crying, getting upset and all the rest of it...and I would say that girls in that group definitely did because, because I knew them so well especially coming into Yr 11 that I could approach them and say what's going on here? And they'd open up quite readily I think looking back on some of the groups, my Yr 9s where I see a lot of ..you know...rubbish going on, angst, you know just silly little fighting stuff ...no, cause I don't have the same sort of relationship with them erm....when I taught Yr 7 down here last year, they would come to you but of course it was silly little stuff, she said this, she said that and de,de, de but nothing really....and crying and you know....but nothing where they are actually dealing with some, I don't know some massive problem

ME: Are you a form tutor?

A: I was yes, a Yr 11 group, er....I've had since Yr 9, yr 10, 11, they've now gone ....yes they would actually, I've got to admit the girls, especially the girls because I got quite close to the girls and they would actually just sit here and talk about what's been going on or once again I could tell if they weren't happy and I just say to them what's going on? And they'd say oh I fight with her or I split up with him and that sort of stuff....but there was one boy and it was really through his mother that I found out that he'd gotten into...he'd been arrested for something and his mother had said to me that this is what happened and he's now on anger management and he would come in early in the mornings actually by himself and sit down and I'd be how did the anger management go? ...and he'd chat away about that quite readily but I noticed that when I was with the kids if I was to actually single...not actually ask about it in front of the group but if I was to say Can you stay behind? He'd be more reluctant to actually stop, he used to just on his own accord come in by himself....and I guess that's with all of them, they just kind of hang around for a bit after class or at the end of the day and then you know that there's...for me, that's how they used to approach me, then I'd know that there was something a bit more going on...

ME: ....when you say....well you've given me an example there that they might hang around obviously wanting a chance to talk to you but you said that you could just tell that there was something wrong ...what else would tell you....?

- A: Just a change in their sort of general persona, for instance there was one girls, very bright, bubbly, everyday would walk in Hi Miss, How are you? Lovely and I just, she was one that had a few health issues as well and a few sort of social and emotional things and she just wouldn't do it....and you just see the changes in their personalities or there was another girl who I was very close to who always sat here in Yr 11 and she's always be chatting away and the day I knew she wasn't was when she'd get very short with me and I would have to bring her into line and just little changes in their personality and the way they would relate to me I guess
- ME: so its that..... it's the changes that you notice?
- A: yeah, yeah
- ME: and what about if a pupil did come to talk to you about something, at what point would you think that you need to...
- A: ....take it further...?
- ME: ...take it further...yeah....
- A: ..erm...to be honest the sorts of things that they did come to talk to me about ...ah, hold on, down in X, everytime someone came to talk to you about something in XX to do with their family background, you had to refer that on erm...because they were obviously in XX for a reason they all had educational psychologists, or a psychologist ....here I've never really, their issues or their problem wasn't, or it was to do with a friend or a boyfriend or how they were feeling towards their homework I've never really dealt with a student...I had a particularly nice form group and I had top sets and whether or not that makes a difference I don't know but I never dealt with kids with major, things that were really serious that had to be referred on, in terms of child protection or anything like that erm...but then it's a matter of just sitting back and just judging what the situation is and none of the problems they came to me with erm...was something where I thought that they are in some sort of danger here ...although in Y, this girl in Y in the special, in the learning support centre who I used to have to go and er..teach on a one on one basis and erm..she...she was a cutter and she was actually Yr 9, or was she Yr 10, one of the two anyway and erm...we used to have to take her everywhere ...she used to sit there and tell you about how much she hated her life, hated her family, hated her parents but once again we had to document all of that because of her erm, erm, illness, you know whatever was going on with her but she used to cut at school as well, we were never really sure how she, I suppose she was always able to get some sort of blade and we used to take her to the toilets and she would actually tell you from the other side of the cubicle that I'm cutting now, she would actually say oh look I'm cutting and she'd be bleeding and she's actually hand over the blade and we actually had to instruct her, she had to clean up all of the blood by herself and she's quite happily go away and do it but she was very disturbed

ME: so she had a lot of needs

A: yeah

ME: what about, while you haven't had a pupil here who you did think needed additional help, I don't mean necessarily in terms of child protection but just in terms of I think that they need someone to talk to, I think that they need something that's a bit beyond what I can give them...I mean how would you have gone about that?

A: I think if something like that had come ..erm had come my way I would have actively encouraged them to speak to their Head of House, because I know that a lot of the Heads of House are women, so especially the girls and, and they're very good and they're very experienced well the three of ..well a couple of them are women and their seconds and erm they're very good and they're very experienced and erm yeah I would have sent them that way to be honest.....

ME: and do think that girls prefer talking to a woman?

A: yeah, yeah, definitely, they will come seeking, in fact even if there Head of House is not here ....even if they are not part of that House and they need to talk to a woman they will seek out one of the other Heads or assistant head who might be a woman, they will go looking for them and even though they're not part of that house

ME: and what about the boys would they....

A: see the boys are less likely to go and talk to somebody, from what I can tell, certainly when I'm sitting with my friends at lunchtime who are all Heads of Houses or pastoral heads it's the girls that come racing in every 5 minutes, I don't think that the boys open up as easily but I think if they were to ....I don't know...I'd guess a male but I don't know I think some of them need that, at this age when they don't really know how to open up that they need a woman to coax it out of them so quite possibly.....

ME: ...a boy might talk to a female if they were to talk?

A: yeah

ME: so if the girls, this is a difficult question, I'm just looking for an opinion....if the girls are more likely to come and talk and the boys are less likely to, it that because the girls are more emotionally needy or because the boys find it harder to talk?

A: it could be a combination of both, I think that boys find it harder to talk or to express themselves emotionally and that girls are more emotionally needy as well I think that girls don't tend to handle their emotions as well as the boys ...the boys are not as mature as the girls either or they're not as advanced, I don't know they can stay calmer for a lot longer they don't get worked up so

quickly and easily as the girls do and it doesn't affect them, but I think that's a lot to do with, you know you've got your groups of girls and the bullying with girls is emotional bullying and so the girls have a lot more to deal with in terms of that I think whereas with the boys its not emotional bullying its just physical stuff and I think that it's a lot easier to deal with the physical than it is to deal with that sort of mental and emotional stuff and that's a lot of what the girls come running to you about so they are emotionally more needy because of the way that they interact with each other and the way they create a hierarchy amongst each other

ME: so they're erm....dealing with different things to the boys, different issues...

ME: yeah, so what about if the boys do find it difficult to talk ...I still then wonder why educational psychologists don't really get girls referred to them, you know they tend to get the boys

A: do you think its because the girls do go to somebody and they do sit down and talk it through with whoever, with pastoral people erm..and maybe get it out...whereas the boys don't and then it comes out in other forms so misbehaviour in the classroom or aggressive behaviour towards people in authority or out on the playground or I dunno and so they don't get it out and don't work it through or maybe its because in the end because they hold it in it turns to physical aggression then people will address that before some girl crying

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