Striking Poses

AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE CONSTITUTION OF GENDERED
IDENTITY AS PROCESS, IN THE WORLDS OF AUSTRALIAN
TEENAGE GIRLS

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CHAPTER 1

CECI N'EST PAS UNE JEUNE FILLE

With good reason postmodernism has relentlessly instructed us that reality is artifice
yet, so it seems to me, not enough surprise has been expressed as to how we
nevertheless get on with living, pretending — thanks to the mimetic faculty — that
we live facts not fictions (Taussig 1993: xv).

*Aren't we beautiful! Aren't we beautiful! (Kate and her friend to the camera, while
looking at themselves in the mirror).*

Introduction: The Seriousness of Play

This thesis is concerned with identity as process and the roles that play and (self)
representation take, in its on-going constitution. René Margritte's famous depiction of a
pipe with its clever drawing together of the concepts of recorded representation and
artifice, reminds the spectator of how easily these two become blurred.[1] Michael Taussig's
words, quoted above, point further to this dynamic tension between reality and fiction in
late modernity. In turn, he drew his insights from the work of Walter Benjamin, a writer
fascinated by the work of the Dada Movement and Surrealist artists — artists such as
Margritte. Recorded image and artifice, photography and painted image, truth and falsity
— how fascinatingly they twist and intertwine!

For these reasons, I begin this thesis aptly enough with a photograph. It belongs to Kate, one
of the young women in my project, and was taken nearly three years ago at the beginning of
my fieldwork.[2] It is a photograph of herself, taken by a third party under Kate's direction.
Kate and her friend are wearing cosmetic masks and are gazing intently in a mirror at their
own reflections, at their own transformation. The photograph immediately highlighted two
important issues to me: Firstly, I was aware that these two teenagers were simultaneously
participating in and observing their own transformation into something different, something
'other', while we, the spectators, voyeuristically looked on. Secondly, the teenage girls

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[1] The close-up representational painting of a tobacco pipe is entitled *Ceci N'est Pas Une Pipe* (this is not a
pipe). The painting was used by Michel Foucault for a book of the same title to discuss the same tension
between reality and representation.
[2] See figure 1. The names used here are pseudonyms. In their documentary the girls themselves use their own
given names but, as I explain below in the main text, this is because what my participants chose to reveal in
their videos was selective — what they had decided was appropriate or important to be revealed.

seemed acutely aware of the power of the camera.[3] The photograph was taken by them or under their direction and not mine. It seemed that through their rhetorical question recorded above, and most of all, through their play, that they were demonstrating their awareness that learning to be female and 'performing' femininity is hard work.[4]

Kate comes from a home where one would perhaps assume that such 'performing' or learning was easier than for most. Her parents are highly-educated, articulate people, both university lecturers, who sought to give Kate a sense of her own personhood. She is bright, adventurous, attends a single-sex high school founded on feminist principles. The choice of school was her own, in contrast to many other students there whom she told me had had their schooling chosen for them by their parents. Even her surname, different from her parents, was deliberately selected for her at birth and taken from a pioneering female ancestor — a symbolic gesture to give Kate a sense of her own identity and opportunities in life.[5] Yet even for Kate, there are particular gender regimes (Connell 1987) which are entrenched and inscribed into the institutions of her life — ways in which she has learnt to see herself as a developing woman, not simply a developing adult. If she seems to be gazing at the mirror quizzically and reflexively, in this photograph, she was none the less adapting and playing with her image in an attempt to suit or contest the perceived hegemonic demands of her world. Because her world is constituted by not one but many intermeshing and often contradictory 'domains' or 'fields', as is most people's, her attempts are carried out through endless strategies and readjustments. I will return to the concept of 'strategy' in terms of 'play' but, at this point, a more detailed explication of two related concepts, 'field' and 'habitus', is necessary to contextualise the material that follows.

The Properties of Fields

Bourdieu argues that what has been described by a rather impoverished notion of 'society' is actually an amalgam of relatively autonomous but overlapping spheres of 'play' or 'fields'. Each field is constituted by its own values and principles and possesses two main properties. Firstly, there is a pattern of objective forces, which is like *the structure* of a game, "a relational configuration endowed with a specific gravity which it imposes on all

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[3] I am using the term 'girl' interchangeably with 'young women' to refer to the teenage participants in my fieldwork, despite my original reservations concerning its appropriateness in terms of non-sexist language. The young women themselves used the word to refer to themselves without any derogatory sense unless they used the additional attribute 'little' before it.

[4] The photograph also immediately brought to my mind the now famous photograph of Joan Crawford, by Eve Arnold and featured on the cover of Richard Dyer's *Heavenly Bodies*. As with the photo of these two adolescents, Crawford's image revealed the various layers of constituted 'reality' — that we construct and are constituted by our representations. Secondly, she too demonstrated the power of the camera. In Arnold's original collection of photographs, the accompanying information indicated that Crawford wanted the photograph to reveal the hard work entailed in being a star.

[5] It was also a practical decision as her parents are in a de facto relationship and believed that it should not be assumed that their daughter receive either or both of their surnames. Kate now appreciates the fortuitous choice as a matter of aesthetics — her given name "did not go well" with either of their surnames, she felt.

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the objects and agents that enter into it" (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992: 17). Simultaneously, a field is constituted as a site of conflict — a relational (not irreducible to a physical) arena where participants struggle to establish control over the specific forms of economic, cultural and symbolic capital that function within it. Such concepts of field are very different from notions of social apparatuses which Bourdieu sees as "The Trojan horse of 'pessimistic functionalism'" (102). A 'social apparatus' implies historical determinism and conspiracy, the overall metaphor being a machine that controls the people trapped within its workings. On the other hand, the term 'field' allows for the notion of agency and struggle, "the locus of relations of force — and not only of meaning — and of struggles aimed at transforming it, and therefore of endless change" (102).[6] So the notion of field involves contestation, change and agency (Bourdieu 1987a, 1990, 1992, 1993).

Bourdieu describes three general properties of fields that are particularly relevant to this thesis. Firstly, the external factors do not directly affect agents within a particular field but are mediated or refracted like a prism, through the particular logic of that field, which is itself being continually transformed. As we shall see in the forthcoming chapters, academic success, money, fashion, drugs and music had distinctly nuanced meanings, as aspects of serious play, for the different young women in my research project within their particular familial and social groupings. These finely-tuned differences occurred even when ostensibly the girls came from similar economic or ethnic backgrounds. This is because the strategies of agents engaged in any field

> depend upon their position in the field, that is, in the distribution of the specific
> capital, and on the perception that they have of the field depending on the point of
> view they take *on* the field as a view taken from a point in the field (Bourdieu 1992:
> 101, emphasis in the original).

Secondly, as a field is a space for potential and active change, perpetual struggle and competition exist *between* and *within* fields. At the same time, to the participants themselves, everyday social life usually seems ordered and structured. Bourdieu explains this partly through the concept of 'habitus'. Habitus is an embodied structuring mechanism, "neither strictly individual nor in itself fully determinate of conduct" (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992: 18). It designates "a way of being, *a habitual state* (especially of the body) and in particular, a *disposition, tendency, propensity,* or *inclination*" (Bourdieu 1977: 214, emphasis in the original). Through the internalisation of external structures, habitus responds to the various demands of each field in which the individual is engaged, within a relatively coherent and systemised pattern. This manner of behaving is a "historically constituted, institutionally grounded, and thus socially variable, generative matrix" (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992: 19).

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[6] "As a game structured in a loose and weakly formalised fashion, a field is not an *apparatus,* obeying the quasi-mechanical logic of a *discipline* capable of converting all action into mere execution" (Bourdieu 1990b: 88, cited in Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992: 102).

In these ways the notions of field and habitus cannot be understood as separate from each other but indeed are as intricately intertwined as two sides of one coin. Field is not analogous to an empty geographical place, but is always a space of play which exists as such only to the extent that players who enter into it have the emotional investment and the determination, both the propensity and the ability, to continue to pursue its goals (Bourdieu 1989). The notion of habitus in turn depends upon the structure that permits such agency. The relation between the social agent and the world is one of mutual "possession" (Bourdieu 1989: 10) or put another way, "the body is in the social world but the social world is in the body" (Bourdieu 1982a: 38). Merleau-Ponty described it similarly: "Inside and outside are solely inseparable. The world is wholly inside and I am wholly outside myself" (1962: 401).

Another property of fields that gives a sense of order is that the structure of any field is determined by the current state of the power relations among those agents and the institutions engaged in that particular struggle. The struggle itself is always about the conservation or subversion of the distribution of (specific, cultural) capital within that field. Sometimes that particular state of play has been relatively stable over a long period of time. In these cases, the nature of the capital has become naturalised — it is the way things *are*. The characteristics of that field then appear to be more stable and less arbitrary than they really are. In these situations the symbolic capital manifests itself as the legitimate and the 'authentic'. I will return to this point in later chapters, as I explore the way such legitimations of capital and notions of 'authenticity' emerged in the social practices of the young women's everyday activities.

Cultural capital is specific to particular fields because it can only really be effective in relation to a particular field, even though fields may in practice overlap. For example, in my thesis I will be discussing the notion of 'coolness', a form of symbolic capital amongst the young women in my fieldwork. There I will demonstrate how the word has differently refracted connotations according to the particular fields in which the girls are engaged.

The final property of fields to be discussed here is that concept of overlapping fields mentioned above, for fields do not exist in isolation from any other aspect of social practices. Indeed while a 'field' may *seem* to be situated within a particular institution, or a geographical place, due to apparent structural or institutional homologies between a field and other social structures, yet

> The structural affinity of habituses belonging to the same class is capable of generating practices that are convergent and objectively orchestrated *outside of any collective 'intention' or consciousness, let alone 'conspiracy'*...The individual is always, whether he likes it or not, trapped...within the system of categories he owes to his upbringing and training (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992: 125-126, emphasis added).

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In other words, to use Bourdieu's analogy again, a field more closely represents the 'rules' or 'sense' of a particular game, transferable from one locus to another by the agents involved in its progress and state of play, yet simultaneously it is refracted by that transfer of geographical place. For fields have to be understood as "systems of relations that are independent of the populations which these relations define" (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992: 106). This means that undoubtedly an individual will be engaged in playing in several 'games' at the same time, although the particular position in the field will change according to their particular investment in that specific state of play. As demonstrated below, the Aboriginal girls in my fieldwork saw themselves variously as young *women* as opposed to young *men;* as young *Aboriginal* women as opposed to *Anglo-Australian* young women; as young Aboriginal *rock musicians* as opposed to Aboriginal young *women;* as Aboriginal *youth* as opposed to Aboriginal young *women.* These concepts of nuanced distinction (Bourdieu 1984) and "différance" (Derrida 1973, 1978) with their manifestation as "serious play" (Willis 1990; Handelman 1990), will become clearer in the next section and throughout the following chapters, through the ethnographic detail and analysis of my fieldwork.

Perceptions of Distinction and Différance

Through my own early experience as an (immigrant) woman, a teacher and as a mother of a teenage son and daughter, I too employed many strategies and readjustments. One of my strongest memories of my immigration and integration into Australian society, was that I was suddenly made aware of my physical difference. I was not tall, blonde and blue-eyed but rather, dark-skinned, shorter than average and had a body shape that was far more 'at home' in Central Europe. I was continually asked where I had come from, the implication being that it had to have been from somewhere else! It was a sudden lesson in seeing myself as different, as 'other', in ways that I had not before.

Twenty years later, I found I relived this sense of otherness, identifying as I do with my teenage daughter's difficulties with self image. Having brought up both my two children with a philosophy of what I believed were feminist principles and assertiveness, I noticed with concern their different levels of self-esteem as they both reached adolescence. From being a confident and very assertive child, as she grew older my daughter become insecure and obsessed with her body image and (as she saw it) her inadequate intellectual abilities. It seemed to me that she and many of her female friends struggled with a difficult balancing act. The discourse that evolved around school and in their social circles suggested a very particular, narrow way that she and her peers felt they could acceptably identify as both female and successful. She did not feel she fitted the desired *mould.* This metaphor is particularly apt as the importance of physicality, body shape and image seemed to be salient.

In her school that physicality immediately seemed to mark her as different and negatively distinctive even though her institution boasted a range of children from diverse ethnic

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backgrounds. Secondly, success at school for my daughter and her friends seemed to depend heavily on relationships both in terms of same sex friendships and boyfriend/girl friend alliances, far more than on any kind of academic progress, even though again the school regarded its university entrance success rates as laudable. Without being seen and acknowledged to be popular and at ease with one's body, it seemed one could not afford to be seen as successful intellectually. While this seemed to be so for both sexes, it seemed to be a far more acute experience for girls. I soon realised that my daughter's experience was not an isolated one. In our media-saturated society "it is women who more often than not are the 'imaged' in our culture" (Walters 1995: 22). I argue that women have a particular relationship with cultural texts and cultural icons and that the contradictory representations of women are particularly significant in the shaping and constructing of common-sense understandings of femininity. For women's bodies and lives are not only central in the most obvious visual forms of pornography but in more subtle ways too — the advertisement, the melodrama, the soap opera, the music clip.[7]

Having taught over the years in various educational institutions including one co-educational and two single-sex high schools I found the same story repeated and amplified. While boys also seemed to face problems of socialisation, the difficulties of "gender relations" (Connell 1987) seemed to have particularly long term implications for young women.[8] Admittedly, little boys are conventionally expected to portray toughness in their stance and dress and little girls are meant to demonstrate more conventional feminine traits through their gestures and behaviour as well as their appearance. However, I contend that from very young ages most girls develop a sense of being 'naturally' the object of other people's gaze, of being rather than doing, whereas boys develop a sense of 'naturally' being the subject — all this in spite of the advances of feminism and the growing awareness in individual families. If we understand this inevitability as 'normality' then, as did Connell I want to ask, "where did this 'normality' come from? How is it produced? And isn't there a little too much of it?" (Connell, 1987: 2). The problem is not so much why certain 'myths' about femininity, or even adolescence, persist and exist side by side, but as Ortner and Whitehead point out, "precisely one of understanding why certain 'realities' emerge in cultural thought in distorted forms, forms which in turn feed back and shape those realities" (1986: 10).[9]

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[7] I am not of course denying that in recent years certain representations of men have also become more objectified and subjected to the gaze. There is still, however, a qualitative and quantitative difference in the way the genders are represented and portrayed visually.

[8] In an article in a quality Australian newspaper, Margaret Le Roy explored "Why women will always hate their bodies" (1993). It is through the body that gender is primarily constructed by others ie how one perceives that one is observed by others; it defines one's femininity and masculinity. But even from early childhood the 'common sense' way in which boys are discussed is through their behaviour, what they *do*. For little girls the discussion primarily focuses on how they *look*.

[9] It is through the body that girls accept, challenge and experiment with their future roles and statuses as women. It can be seen in the adoption of physical stance, the development of a particular style, the particular 'look' one struggles to acquire. This can also be seen in the forms of ritual which incorporate image, body movement and dance. In its extreme form, it is manifested in the phenomena of eating disorders which can be read as the ultimate attempt to gain control of one's life through the self-destructive control of one's body. See also Smith 1988 and Skeggs 1997 on related issues of gender and representation.

In this thesis, the everyday lived experiences of ten teenage girls are explored *through their own eyes*, in an attempt to understand *their* 'realities', *their* perceptions of their worlds as *they* articulate, or fail to articulate them.[10] The girls were directly involved in telling their own stories on video, selecting, framing, filming and editing the footage themselves. Thus the process examined the way the girls chose to interpret, negotiate and challenge their perceptions and explored their developing sense of self, as well as their relationships with the various social institutions in which they were engaged. The ways in which the girls acknowledged their social and cultural constraints were clearly demonstrated through the perceptual frames and boundaries they adopted in the task of videoing their worlds. Not everything in their world, it seemed, was for public viewing; not everything was selected for recording in the first place. I argue that the selection, the filming and the editing processes highlighted their struggles to represent themselves in ways that cohered with their already established social and cultural frameworks. On the surface such attempts at representation, such as Kate's, seemed like 'just play' but under closer scrutiny we can see specific strategies, "the human seriousness of play" (Levi-Strauss 1966; Goffman 1970; Turner 1982; Handelman 1990) providing insights into the way gendered subjectivity is negotiated and performed. Femininity itself, as an integral part of a wider identity, is simultaneously interrogated and constituted through enactment.

Play as Strategy

Such play is closely tied to identity and notions of self, and is a means of dealing with uncertainty. Contemporary concepts of play are intermeshed with notions of the unreal, the invalid, the false, and so play is often conceived of as 'light', 'trivial' 'free' activity in contrast to notions of 'heavy', 'obligatory', 'necessary' 'work'.[11] Yet, before industrialisation, while there was a distinction between the sacred and profane, work itself was not separated from leisure and had, in all its senses, elements of 'play' (Handelman 1990). In Western cultural traditions, play has become trivialised through rationalist understandings of the world; as we began to believe more rigidly in certainty and in fixed and maintainable (symbolic) boundaries. Play in this perspective has come to be synonymous with leisure; it has come to mean the freedom from institutional obligations and also the freedom to transcend structural constraints, to play with ideas, with fantasies, and with social relationships (Turner 1982). Yet late modernity has awakened greater possibilities for play because those former boundaries are now perceived as less solid and fixed.

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[10] What a complex notion 'everyday lives' has come to be (Elias 1978; De Certeau 1988; Drotner 1994)! Here I use the term to describe the way individuals perceive and engage in their worlds. It is a perception of the world rather than just a sphere of existence. Drotner summarises it thus: 'Everyday life is a means to create some certainty in a world of ambivalence' (1994: 352).

[11] For the etymologies of 'play' and 'work' and some of their current applications see Webster's Dictionary, The Oxford Dictionary or the Macquarie Dictionary. Also, for a concise and extremely accessible overview of the development of the concept of play see Turner 1982: 33-35.

Here, then, I am arguing for a concept of embodied play as strategy, one that equates with pleasure but not with triviality. I am utilising the concept of 'strategy' in a very particular way, not to indicate any clear intentionality or 'resistance' to hegemonic forces but rather to indicate attempts to work within perceived or internalised structural constraints, used "to designate the objectively orientated lines of action which social agents continually construct in and through practice" (Bourdieu 1992: 129). From this perspective, play involves uncertainty, something that can be threatening and disturbing, which makes it a very powerful medium indeed.[12] It has "the potential to meddle with, to disturb...Subversive, it can rock the foundations of a given phenomenal reality by making their presumptions uncertain and unpredictable" (Handelman 1990: 70). There is close affinity between play and terror, which also underlies Taussig's concept of Mimesis, explicated below in the main text. Eugene Fink argues that, "Play can contain within itself not only the clear apollonian moment of free self-determination but also the dark dionysian moment of panic self-abandon" (1968: 25, cited in Handelman 1990: 767). It is precisely because play *is* so powerful and unsettling that it requires licence, a freedom to be able to state or imply that 'this is play', 'this is not real' (Bateson 1972; Handelman 1990).[13]

The Power of Play and Mimesis

Anthropological research has given concepts of play considerable space. Play in this work is usually understood as a process that forms as well as reflects an individual's emotional and cognitive development within the context of their society. Schwartsman (1978) outlined the various ways that play has been utilised as a concept in anthropological research, notably in developmental and cross-cultural studies (Schwartsman 1978: 329-330. See also Benedict 1935; Mead 1928). In more recent work, while still following on from Huizinga's (1955) classic study, play has been explored as part of ritual and performance.[14] Elsewhere Schechner (1985: 110) reminds us that the psychologist Winnicott (1971: 177-193) utilised notions of play that parallel the ideas of Van Gennep, Turner and Bateson. All of these theorists in different ways recognise that transitional phenomena take place through play. The child, and later the adult, recognise certain situations and events as 'not me...not not me'. During the process of this recognition, however, a blurring occurs, the "dance goes into the body" (Schechner 1985: 110).

In my own research, however, drawing inspiration and insights from Handelman (1990), Bourdieu (1977, 1992, 1993) and Taussig (1993), I am using the concept of play to describe a particular process of representation: strategies that incorporate, reflect on and depict the

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[12] See Handelman, (1977, 1990) for fuller explanation of the paradoxical implications of play that I cannot do justice to here in this limited space.
[13] "The profundity of the play medium lies with its uncertain changeability and in its capacities for commentary" (Handelman, 1990: 70).
[14] For example, see Turner 1974, 1982, 1986; Bateson 1972, 1982, 1988; Handelman 1976, 1977, 1990; Handelman & Kapferer 1972; Schechner 1988, 1993; Sutton-Smith 1981; Fine 1987; Shostak 1990.

individual everyday experiences and perspectives of growing up female in Adelaide, South Australia, in the mid 1990s. I am fascinated by the creative power of representation and play, and particularly concerned with the place that self-conscious representation, reflexivity or posing played in the search for and portrayal of (self) identity for the teenage girls in my project, and how their own representations become 'fact' for them. The form of such searching can be deceptively light, seemingly a playing with roles and images, but in late twentieth century post-industrial society — especially as young people experience it — it can be an earnest endeavour, a 'putting on' of several different hats, a 'striking of poses', a matter of serious "work, even desperate work in their play" (Willis 1990: 2). The introduction of the camera in my fieldwork offered this symbolic space to play (Schechner 1993), to experiment, but simultaneously, as I shall detail throughout the following chapters, it highlighted the difficulties and constraints the girls experienced in the world of everyday life in their search for different strategies to 'strike poses'.

Participants as 'film makers'?

There were ten 'key' participants in my fieldwork — that is, ten young women who were directly involved with telling their stories on video. They came from different areas of Adelaide, from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds and from different familial situations and expectations. While they could by no means represent the diversity of adolescent young women, as I detail below, each person engaged in the same kind of strategies, comparable processes and ways in which they 're-presented' themselves through play both on and off the camera, and constituted their sense of realities. For example there were many ethnic groups that were not represented in my small diverse group of participants. However, I was looking at *process* and discovered that all the young women in my research engaged in the same processes, the same 'strategies' of play.

Each individual struggled to constitute a vitally important sense of uniqueness and difference while simultaneously grounding her perceptions within her already established social milieu. Conformity continually jostled with distinction, involvement with distanciation. Each girl needs to be seen not as a free floating individual but one who in her own perception is at the centre of her own social network. It is this crucial nexus, this relationship between the elusive 'real me' she strives to realise through play and the experience of being embedded within a web of social and cultural understandings and constraints which is being explored in this thesis.

The key participants were Sara, Fran, Kate, Hilary, Janine, Grace, Mary, Pat, Diane and Claire (not their real names) their ages ranging from 13-16 years at the beginning of the fieldwork period. Of these ten, six were from Anglo-Celtic backgrounds. Janine identified as *Nunga*, South Australian Aboriginal; Mary was from Papua New Guinea; Fran had an Indian background and Sara was born in Nepal. Only Kate, whom we met at the beginning

of this chapter, came from what 'traditionally' would be described as a highly-educated middle-class home. The others came from homes where the education levels and class positions were not nearly so clear cut. The definition of what constituted a 'family' for these girls revealed a complexity that is belied by the relative simplicity of government census forms. Four of the homes consisted of single parent families although there were frequently several adults living in the same household. Two of the girls were officially under the care of the State, residing in foster homes. Another two were living with one biological parent and a step-parent, some with additional siblings, who came and went at different times, from blended families. Two others were living with both biological parents. At the beginning of the fieldwork one girl was living independently but later another teenager moved out of home and into a house with several other friends. Even over the period of the fieldwork several household situations changed — exacerbated by unemployment or changes in relationships, reflecting the frequent fluidity of social relatedness in many of the girls' lives.

In all cases, the participants' friendship groups, acquaintances and household members constituted other networks which directly and indirectly informed the study, adding an essential depth and richness. For example, Mary's friendship network was extremely wide as she spent a great deal of her day in the city itself. Her cohorts were often young people who spent most of their time on the streets, their activities involving alcohol and drug abuse, theft and property damage. Several had been in the juvenile detention centre before I met them or were arrested during the time of my fieldwork. Mary herself was arrested for robbery with violence during this time. Another participant spent a great deal of her spare time involved with *Cirkidz*, a Youth Arts organisation originally formed to teach circus skills to disadvantaged young people in Adelaide. Her social life completely centred on the young people she knew through the circus school and their friends. Thus, through her and through her video, I met and developed friendships with another group of diverse young men and women.

The centrality of these familial and social contexts to the way the participants viewed and negotiated their sense of personal gendered identity within their wider cultural milieu, that is the influence of their familial and social networks on the quality and effectiveness of their play, is the key theoretical framework of this thesis. It was the very specific ethnographic methodology itself, the incorporation of the camera within the wider participant-observation process, which both allowed access to this 'core context' and, through the videos, demonstrated its significance as the research developed. The girls' completed films were thus a foreground to a much wider complex background, two interconnected parts of one whole. From out of every experience of the world there emerges a particular clarifying, interpretative framing perspective, the foreground that rises out of the chaotic background of everyday 'sticky' existence (Wagner 1975). Similarly, my participants placed specific conceptual frames around their own understandings of their own lives in their self-conscious reflexivity, and in their attempts to make their videos. It

was an interpretative perspective from which emerged differences and plurality of attitude and behaviour.

The resultant insights, highlighting the particular and the local, emphasise the inappropriateness of talking about 'youth culture' or even 'teenage girl culture' as though it were uniform and global. In a similar way, Bourdieu points out the inappropriateness of assuming homogeneity across what are in fact facets of different social fields. In terms of the category of youth and youth subcultures he argues "that age is a biological datum, socially manipulated and manipulable; and that merely talking about 'the young' as a social unit, a constituted group, with common interests, relating these interests to a biologically defined age, is in itself an obvious manipulation" (Bourdieu 1984a, republished in English in 1993: 95).

This unusual methodology of incorporating a deliberately self-reflexive camera within participant observation and other fieldwork strategies, allowed me to move beyond the traditional ways that young people, and particularly female adolescents, within their various cultural contexts have been previously studied. Rather than assuming similarity that is based on class, ethnicity or gender or focussing on what has been termed a particular 'youth subculture', I have explored difference and related that difference to the way identity itself, refracted through gender and ethnicity, is reflected upon and constituted. It is the concealed, the differences within what, at first sight, seem to be socially or symbolically-bounded groups, that should demand our attention. It was essential to examine what it means for young people from different cultural backgrounds to grow up in the same society and to explore what this means from their own perspectives. Such an analysis requires contextualisation by a simultaneous examination of the material living experiences that the young people face — including the effects of class, gender, ethnicity and by an equally rigorous reflexive concern with the research process itself — for the researcher too is a historically-constituted subject. Then such an exploration can reveal the taken-for-granted constraints and values, that which cannot be said, as well as the more obvious concerns and issues that are talked about and challenged. The result is a dialectic, an understanding of "the double reality of the social world" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 11).

> The resulting social praxeology weaves together a 'structuralist' and a 'constructivist' approach. First, we push aside mundane representations to construct the objective structures (spaces of positions), the distribution of socially efficient resources that define the external constraints bearing on interactions and representations. Second, we introduce the immediate, lived experience of agents in order to explicate the categories of perception and appreciation (dispositions) that structure their action from inside (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992: 11, original emphasis).

Bourdieu and Wacquant stress that the two moments of analysis are not equal, for greater weighting must be accorded to the material conditions over the agents' subjective perceptions of them as "the viewpoints of agents will vary systematically with the point they

occupy in objective social space" (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992: 11. See also Bourdieu 1984, 1989). Such a task of analysis requires a move away from the usual methodologies as well as calling for more complex theoretical frameworks.[15]

Youth Culture: theoretical perspectives revisited

The study of identity development in adolescence and young people has frequently been an aspect of a wider inquiry into cultural patterns and behaviours in many academic fields, including anthropology, education, cultural studies and psychology. The field of study has been so wide and multi-disciplinary that I will not attempt to carry out a comprehensive review of all the literature.[16] Undoubtedly, as a consequence of this diverse academic lineage, the object of inquiry, 'Young People', has been approached from a wide variety of theoretical perspectives and methodologies. The groups under study themselves have been drawn from different locations and institutions such as the school, places of work, the family, the courts, the street. These target groups also reflect a variety of socio-economic backgrounds, and class, ethnic and 'race' backgrounds, so it is hardly surprising that often quite different, even conflicting, conclusions are reached about similar groups of young people under study. In spite of, or perhaps because of, this wide-ranging interest and diversity, 'Youth Studies' in its own right has emerged as a discipline only relatively recently (White 1993).

Yet across all of these research projects two main theoretical perspectives can be traced, and these rely on certain assumptions. These are firstly, those frameworks that are based on subcultural theory associated originally with the Centre for Contemporary Cultural studies in Birmingham (C.C.C.S.). The second approach is based on the work of Foucault and post-structuralism rather than Marx. With the further development of cultural studies and the inflection of feminist research and psychoanalytic theory, this latter perspective has moved into the realm of media production, representation and consumption, particularly concerning television, film and music. A brief look at these main perspectives is warranted in order to underscore the significantly different insights informed by intensive ethnography and anthropological frameworks, which this study offers the field.

Youth Culture and Subcultural Theory

Studies on young people started to emerge in the 1950s and, as is still true today, were mainly carried out by sociologists rather than anthropologists (Wulff 1995). Most of the

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[15] In order to explore all facets of such a quest I found I had to blur disciplinary boundaries, drawing upon insights and perspectives from Anthropology, Cultural Studies, Feminism, Psychology and Film Studies.
[16] In fact such a task is badly needed as there has been no such all-encompassing review of research on youth culture to date. See Helena Wulff (ed) 1995 for at least a partial account of research carried out in languages other than English.

earlier anthropological research that did focus on young people, such as Margaret Mead's 1928 *Coming of Age in Samoa,* was conducted under the topics of kinship and family. These, along with other early work such as Victor Turner's studies on *rites de passage* (1967) in *The Forest of Symbols* and Jules Henry's (1965) anthropology of youth, *Culture Against Man,* stressed the process by which young people became socialised and incorporated into their future adult roles. There was little attempt to look closely at young people as cultural agents and cultural producers in their own right. They were seen as incomplete, 'on their way' to adulthood.

The term 'subculture' was first used by Talbott-Parsons (1942/1964) to denote a specific age/sex defined 'world' and it wasn't long before this term was deemed an important analytical concept to talk about the distinctiveness and separateness of youth culture and its relatedness to consumer capitalism (Coleman 1961; Wulff & Amit-Talai, 1995; Regev 1998). The concept of 'subculture', particularly when combined with beliefs about 'class' structure, became a useful tool underlying the many studies in the 60s and 70s emerging out of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies. These studies focussed mainly on white working-class males and were conceived in a sophisticated Marxist framework underpinned by semiology (see for example, Hall and Jefferson 1976; Hebdige 1979; McRobbie & Garber 1976).

Young people were seen as attempting to resist the class constraints of their everyday worlds through spectacular style and symbolism — often in ways that were ultimately self-defeating.[17] As Helen Wulff (1995) points out in her review of these earlier studies, while they were greatly influential, they were very much projects of their time and place, not only inspired by Marxist paradigms but reacting to sociological positivism and the perceived need to address social ills through applied research. In the words of Stuart Hall, the founding director of the C.C.C.S., "popular culture matters" because it is:

> one of the sites where this struggle for and against a culture of the powerful is engaged.
> It is the arena of consent and resistance. It is partly where hegemony arises, and where
> it is secured. It is not a sphere where socialism — a socialist culture already fully
> formed — might be simply 'expressed'. But it is one of the places where socialism
> might be constituted (cited in MacCabe 1986: 160 and in McEachern 1998: 252).

Despite Paul Willis's successful use of ethnography (1977), for the most part the early C.C.C.S. scholars were suspicious of participant-observation and other anthropological methods, arguing that they failed to adequately identify class and power. In contrast to the way ethnography, as utilised in anthropological projects, frequently reveals the irrelevance

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[17] For example, Paul Willis's (1977) ground-breaking *Learning to Labour* was one such study which demonstrated the way the young men learnt to highly value manual labour and associated life styles as particular cultural expressions of masculinity. This in turn led them to reject any other forms of occupation or education which could have substantially improved their lives materially and offered them different sorts of future life choices.

of the theoretical frameworks once it is applied to the field (the focus of anthropological inquiry being frequently changed once the researcher is faced with the living social facts of his or her subjects), 'ethnography', as defined by the frameworks of the Centre, was narrowed down to focus on class and subculture. Secondly, in these studies, the empirical basis of the research tended to be for a short duration of time and, in many ways was 'predetermined' in terms of outcome. This in turn meant that from the beginning, the research tended to concentrate on the more dramatic, easily identified youth cultures and notions of deviance. Because the young people under scrutiny were popularly perceived to be anti-social and connected to underprivileged, working-class, usually unemployed youth, the value and appropriateness of the studies seemed self-evident. The research in many ways was 'circular' — inevitably 'demonstrating' what it set out to prove.

> Thus ethnography too was radically and irredeemably tied to Left politics, one which worked culturally within class and out of a notion of dominant culture. It was the relationship between what was seen as dominant (capitalist) culture and subcultures which generated the whole. Subcultures were of necessity seen as non-dominant, to some extent resistant and therefore working class (McEachern 1998: 254).

Over the past 20 years the initial quite rigid theoretical and analytical paradigms have been extensively critiqued from both within and from outside the traditions of the Centre, in Sociology and in Cultural Studies. Many writers from the Centre, and most notably Dick Hebdige, were seen as romanticising the very concept of 'subcultures', especially through the notion of resistance. McRobbie (1980) recognised this trait as a tendency for some academics to seek new ways "to carry the banner of this counter-hegemonic resistance" (Tait 1993: 2). A later study by Richard Jenkins (1983) has argued for a need to see youth cultures more heterogenerically with less emphasis on deviance. In her more recent work, McRobbie (1991) has argued for the need for more thorough, more rigorous ethnography. Similarly Lave et al (1992) pointed out that the Birmingham school did not make sufficient connection between subjectivities and the social structure in which their 'informants' and indeed they themselves as researchers, were embedded (Wulff 1995).

Youth Culture and Post Structuralism

The second related way that youth has been studied, in many ways attempting to address some of the short-comings noted above, was to draw more heavily on the insights of Foucault rather than Marx. These studies began to deconstruct earlier notions of power and dominance, looking more closely at discursive rather than material constraints. Quite early on there was a feminist critique by McRobbie and others concerning the way women were rendered 'invisible' and 'mute' in the earlier studies of youth cultures. They commented on the way the girls were (mis)represented in the literature, asking if in fact the young women were really absent from the subcultures or just from the descriptions of them; the male

researchers were accused of unconsciously colluding with the institutionalised sexism of their subjects. Factors such as ethnicity and 'race' were also deemed to be all but overlooked in these British studies which tended to see all issues in terms of class (McRobbie 1980). Hebdige was acknowledged for having talked about 'race' but then his omission of gender was therefore seen as particularly culpable. Closer to home, an academic debate has emerged between researchers concerned with young people, about the relevance in the 1990s of subcultural theory. Gordon Tait has called on fellow researchers to recognise "the continuing pervasive influence of subcultural theory in their own work" (1992: 1). He argues that attention to the work of Michel Foucault necessitates a re-evaluation of the Marxist paradigm underlying subcultural theory and the need to replace it with a different model and a more complex understanding of power and dominance. He asserts the very notions of childhood and youth are constructs, "artefacts of a network of government strategies" (1). Howard Sercombe (1992) responded by arguing that the answer is not to reject the sometimes totalising visions of the C.C.C.S. but to utilise both the insights of Marx and Foucault as "the two approaches are by no means antithetical to each other and have been converging for sometime...The problem is that from perspectives that understand the processes of power, there is not enough work done and especially not enough theory generated" (10). My thesis, as I demonstrate below and in the following chapters, seeks to address some of Sercombe's criticisms, simultaneously exploring the girls' own perspectives of their worlds while also revealing 'the processes of power' relationships in which they are entrenched.

It was the feminist theorists who in many ways first adapted the Neo-Marxist/subcultural theory by using a more Foucaudian/post structuralist approach in its application to youth cultures and understanding of power. The result was a greater awareness of the complexities of "the cultural framework within which individuals find a sense of themselves" (Macdonald 1981: 163). As Cultural Studies developed away from the Birmingham Centre and was transported overseas to America, Europe and Australia this search for "individuals find(ing) a sense of themselves" was translated into new conceptions of culture, power, domination and the role of the media itself. The concept of subcultures started to be replaced by notions of 'the everyday' and subjectivities (McEachern 1998). The concepts of class and dominant/resistant ideology didn't really disappear, however, and were often quite unproblematically incorporated into newer forms of research, new conceptions of subjectivity, especially when the research subjects were seen primarily in terms of media audience.[18]

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[18] There is a wealth of studies that have focused on (young) women, cultural texts and the media, many of them insightful and interesting but mostly I argue lacking in ethnographic detail and ultimately retaining too great an emphasis on the concept of 'text'. See for example Ang 1985; Nava 1992; Roman & Christian-Smith 1988; Spiegle & Mann (eds) 1992; Lewis 1990, 1992; McRobbie 1991, 1994.